

## COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES (6)

### Caring for Earth—Beyond Stewardship

In the last Chronicle we discussed the reality that we are earthlings. Once this awareness sinks in, many things begin to change. One of them is the realization we have a moral and ethical responsibility for Earth. But that responsibility must also undergo some changes in a climate changing world. This raises the question of stewardship.

Since the middle of the last century we have seen our role as stewards of Earth. It became the foundation of the environmental movement and gave us something to build upon. But in this new climate era we must move beyond stewardship.

Stewardship creates a dichotomy. We are here and Earth is “out there”. We tend to see our role as healing Earth. We fail to recognize that from time immemorial the Earth has been stewarding us. So we need to begin to see our role as **helping Earth heal itself**. But how do we do that?

Here, an analogy might be helpful.

When we go to a doctor about a problem with our bodies the doctor doesn't heal us or give us life. Our body heals itself. The doctor diagnoses the problem and provides medication, surgery or advice to remove obstacles and enable the body to heal itself. So, with the healing of Earth, the doctors are the Earth scientists who understand Earth's systems and know what healthy eco systems look like and what steps we must take to help Earth heal itself.

And of course there is also preventive care. Often the damage to Earth is the result of systems that we have put in place—an economy that sees Earth as a source of unlimited resources, an over use of fossil fuels, using the oceans as our dumping ground and so forth. So, in helping Earth heal itself we must also adopt what we might call an Earthling's Hippocratic Oath—DO NO HARM TO EARTH.

But it is not just the earth scientists. There are many of us lay people that are not scientist and often don't really understand what the scientists are talking about. (I have my hand up.) Just as in the case of medical services, there is a need for support workers at the community level: interpreters—folks who can translate technical information into plain language; system thinkers, who can bring to the task an awareness of how changes will affect other systems; community organizers who can recruit people and motivate them to help with the work; system triage workers assisting scientists who can distinguish between healthy systems, harmful systems and suggest

alternatives; educators, politicians, business and union leaders, First Nations, churches, and so forth. Since climate change will affect everyone and everything it is hard to find someone who doesn't have a role.

Our role in helping Earth heal itself is not new to some people. They have known this all along. It relates to their understanding that Earth is living and they are part of that life. They have a vested interest because they realize that Earth is their Greater Self. We can't have healthy people on a sick planet. The task begins with a strong sense of relationship and commitment to change.

The keys then are relationship and healing.

Some years ago I saw a video interview of a young Guardian Watchman. He was patrolling the waters around the Great Bear rainforest in Northern British Columbia with its famous White Spirit Bears. The interviewer asked him why he was doing this work. I was expecting him to say that he was protecting the land claim treaty of his band, or because he was an environmentalist, or simply because he needed a job. But he said, "I am protecting this land because we have made a promise to the land and the bears." That is what I mean by relationship.

In the mid-1990's I was facilitating a planning workshop with the Decho leaders in Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie River in Western Arctic. They have a resource rich land and corporations were attempting to invade their land and gobble up their resources. They had to begin negotiating their land claim treaty which would confer legal ownership and enable them to protect and manage their land. During the workshop there was an extended and difficult conversation about land-management. During the break one of the leaders came up to me and said, "Mike, we are having a difficult time with this land management thing. In our culture, we don't manage the land. The land manages us." That is what I mean by working with Earth to heal itself.

This concept of working with the land so it can heal itself has been around for centuries. And today it is needed more than ever.