

## CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 12

### Downsizing and Reframing in the Anthropocene.

This past spring my wife Arlene and I decided to downsize and find a better place to live. There were a number of reasons for this decision but a major one came from our efforts to help some elderly friends. Most of them needed walkers to get around. We are elders ourselves. Our former house with its stairs was not “walker friendly” so it was time to make the move.

As most of you reading this chronicle know, moving from one house to another is done in two stages that somehow blend together. First you have to decide why you need to downsize and get rid of a lot of stuff you will no longer need. Then you have to reframe—develop a mental model of a new dwelling that will meet your needs. When you finally find a house and move in, you inevitably downsize again—getting rid of some more of the stuff you thought you needed but which doesn’t fit into the new place.

I thought of this experience as I was writing this chronicle on climate change. (Yes, I know. Everything I think about these days is about climate change.) But let me share another experience that describes the challenge at the community level.

A few years ago I decided to get serious about climate change. I was inspired by many things but mostly I remembered the words of Gandalf to Frodo when Frodo was having a bad time. Gandalf said, “Frodo the only decision we have to make is what to do with the time that is given to us.”

When I figured out what I was capable of doing with whatever time is left for me, I decided to work on climate change. Specifically I saw the need to help people downsize—shed themselves of some of the systems that are causing the problems and develop mindsets that would help them deal with the future. So I began to explore the climate change realities in our Comox Valley community.

Over the past three or four years I have been attending gatherings of community leaders in an effort to learn how to promote an interest in climate change. These leaders are dedicated people working for, or volunteering in, a variety of community organizations and projects. I’m sure that all of them believe in humanly induced climate change.

I think most of the folks in these sessions were taking personal action such as reducing, reusing and recycling. But when I raised climate change as a critical issue at these sessions there was little interest in a further discussion. What people don’t see is the need for all of us to reframe on an intellectual, psychological and emotional level—to help us downsize and go deeper into our relationship with Earth.

So why is it that informed people who acknowledge the warnings from the scientific community find climate change so difficult to deal with? I think it is because of a lack of experience.

Many of us have had the experience of downsizing our possessions and reframing to move to another dwelling. But we have had no real experience in knowing how to live in the transition from the Cenozoic world to a very different Anthropocene world. Reframing for this reality is of a whole new order of magnitude.

Without experience we tend to do what we usually do—fall back on our economic, political and legal systems to guide us. To a large extent these are the systems that are causing the problems. Our neoliberal economies demand an almost unlimited access to Earth's resources and the right for corporations to make continual profits. Most of our elected representatives are closely allied to corporate leaders who often support their parties financially. And our legal systems, rather than protecting Earth are designed to limit the amount of damage we can do to Earth.

So what can we do? Since we and other species are dependent upon Earth for our continued existence, there is only one thing we can do. We must downsize and reframe our relationship with Earth. And we must do it now.

(The recent [U.N. report on climate change](#) indicates that we must take definite steps to downsize our systems over the next dozen years—by the time today's three year olds are entering high school. If we refuse to do this the scientists tell us that by 2040 it will be too late.)

We must realize that we are earthlings. We have had and still have an ancient relationship with Earth that reaches down below our human cultures to the cellular level. So even though we lack experience for dealing with current changes in our world, our ancestors have always had to adjust to change. It is in our genes.

There was that first day when a school of our fish ancestors landed, walked up onto the beach, took a look around and said to one another, "Wow! This place is really something different!"

Mike Bell, Comox Valley Climate Change Network.