

Finding the Illusive Hidden Mountain

while living is its shadow.

Don Chisholm.

A talk delivered to the Unitarian Congregation April 21, 1996.

When I was about 25, I had a brief experience with the Unitarian Church.

While driving with radio accompaniment one day, I heard someone say: "The Unitarian Church is for people getting into or getting out of religion."

Since I was struggling with a personal exorcism of Catholicism, I felt classified squarely in the latter category – and I felt that I could use a little help. I attended the Ottawa Sparks Street church a few times, and indeed, I found the freedom and openness of expressed thought to be a tremendous eye opener, compared to the mental turbine designed to embalm the catholic mind. I probably would have attended more often, but having had 28 different mailing addresses since 1955, my roots in any community never grew too deep.

My subject, The Illusive Hidden Mountain consists of many things. It is quite tall, and on this Earth Day it casts an ominous shadow on all of us individual Gaian creatures including bacteria, bugs, bird, beasts and young Betty Lou or Billy next door. The omnipotent intensity of the mountain is so great that one sphere of its influence causes the extinction of many of our fellow species. Some elders of the natural science communities suggest that even *homo sapiens* is high on the list of endangered species. Another sphere of influence causes increased *angst* among people of 'the developed' nations, such as us in Canada because we witness an expanding cleavage between rich and poor, between the employed, the unemployed and the unemployable; and those of us lucky enough to hold jobs notice that our leisure time is less than it used to be.

The mountain is human made. It consists of human activity and parts of our cherished inherited cultures. I refer to the mountain as illusive because most people simply cannot bear to look at it directly to assess the personal implications which may be noticed if they

did. Here is a little poem written by psychologist Daniel Goleman in reference to our inability to face up to certain types of threatening problems when the threat appears immense; when to deal with it appears to be beyond our capability:

*"The range of what we think and do
is limited by what we fail to notice
And because we fail to notice
that we fail to notice
there is little we can do
to change
until we notice
how failing to notice
shapes our thoughts and deeds"*

A Comparison:

Living in the shadow of the mountain might be compared to an individual living within an abusive relationship, where an individual may slowly grow to accept the abuse – it becomes a part of their personal 'scene' – and the abused might even lie and cheat to protect the abuser, and eventually deny to themselves and to the world that they endure an unusual and unhealthy relationship.

The Toronto Star recently ran a six-day series on abuse. People who have never lived within an abusive or an addiction affected relationship may wonder why the abused does not simply 'get out' or do something about it at the first sign. But individuals are reluctant to make a paradigm change – to start anew and break the bonds of the past. They cling to hope that they can fix their abuser, even as they too begin to adopt a form of insanity within the relationship.

We humans are now an abused society. This idea was expounded by Al Gore, Vice President of the US, in his book *Earth In The Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, in which he states that we have become a dysfunctional society because we live with the abuser/addictive side of our culture. Sure, we sometimes chat about some of the abuse we receive, but we just accept it – because, what else could we do? While

The combined issues seem insurmountable. But who will attack the heart of the matter? People like David Suzuki point out some of our ecological folly, while the Green Movement attacks symptoms here and there. In 1988 a commission of the United Nations looked at the human dilemma, recognised the symptoms – and instead of dealing with them, they invented the oxymoron "sustainable development", which has become an ecological buzzword for business as usual. Chisholm

living in the darkening shadow we have grown used to and accept forced change which makes a paradox of our once shining image of justice and it mocks individual rights. As the shadow of the mountain grows we adopt its dictate: We have grown used to the new reality that our abuser demands that we buy sun-screen to protect us from UV rays in the summer.

- We have grown used to the fact that most of Toronto's beaches are closed because of industrial and human pollution.
- We have grown used to the fact that there is a growing number of destitute among us.
- We have grown used to the news that the old age pension fund might not be available when today's middle aged and younger reach retirement age.
- We have grown used to the fact that 60% of Southern Ontario's wells fail to meet potability standards, and that occasionally bacteria run rampant in some community's drinking water supply.
- We read and ignore when scientists tell us that the world's oil reserves will become impractical to extract in about 30 years.
- We have grown used to the good news that many products and services are now provided cheaply and efficiently through the use of automated processes – and to the corresponding bad news that those human individuals who used to provide those process and services are now unemployed, shoulder to shoulder with recently unemployed fishermen.
- We hear that the world's human population, now almost 6 billion, will double in another 25 or 35 years. And no one seems to question if this is inevitable or desirable.
- And we have grown used to hearing in world news, where various human groups will engage in war and atrocities to protect the culture which they have been born into.

For about two or three years in a row, a United Nations committee has selected Canada as the most desirable country in the world in which to live.

We are now awakening to the understanding that this affluence, enjoyed by the middle and old aged group was based on two precepts. One has been, and still is, that we have individual and corporate rights to sell off the commons, nature's gift, our non-renewable resources, to the highest bidder.

Secondly, we have seen fit to make a credit card purchase for 'today's' comfort – generating a tremendous national debt which we bequeath to the young – to pay our luxury debt, and to pay it within a world of diminished resources.

In our dysfunctional state, we fail to notice that we have been abusive to the future well being of our children. To notice that might make us ashamed and alarmed, so we deny individual responsibility allowing us to feel just and righteous – good parents all living within our God-given culture, just as our parents did.

The combined issues seem insurmountable. But who will attack the heart of the matter? People like David Suzuki point out some of our ecological folly, while the Green Movement attacks symptoms here and there. In 1988 a commission of the United Nations looked at the human dilemma, recognised the symptoms – and instead of dealing with them, they invented the oxymoron "sustainable development", which has become an ecological buzzword for business as usual. And we continue to vote for political parties, one much like the other, as they attack symptoms of a failing economic structure using remedies, many of which caused the problem in the first place. In any dynamic system, which is what Gaia is – to attempt to cure an anomaly by amplifying the cause brings about positive feedback, which leads to system runaway.

The inhibiting characteristics of our human nature are well know. Another quote from psychologist Daniel Goleman: 'There is an almost gravitational pull toward putting out of mind unpleasant facts. And our collective ability to face painful facts is no greater than our personal one. We tune out, we turn away, we avoid. Finally we forget, and forget we have forgotten. A lacuna hides the harsh truth.'

An addict who reaches bottom begins to understand the helplessness, hopelessness of his/her problem. s/he may reach out for a higher power for help to change familiar destructive ways and to enter a new pattern of behaviour. Help from that higher power can be sought through god, or by summoning the inner spiritual human strength which can be released when personal survival is consciously recognised as being at stake. During this process understanding friends help a lot but the transformation is an individual's personal journey.

Psychologist B.F. Skinner coined the phrase, 'conscious evolution' in the context of which we are speaking. He states that conscious evolution is the only type of evolution available to human kind, and without it, the human predicament will only get worse. When reaching conscious evolution, an individual is prepared to enter another paradigm, recognise the new reality and adopt a changed lifestyle to fit that new reality. This is a process we all must allow ourselves to go through.

Enough of the gloom and doom talk. We have dissected the mountain and looked at some of its components. Now let's talk about a project of the GPC called 'Future by Design', wherein we hope to start a movement. We call it the Earth Movement, and we hope that our Earth moving project will become powerful enough to move mountains, so that we

can someday live in the sunlight of a sustainable society. How proud our children would be of their elders if we could leave them a sustainable world.

But before getting to our project, I would like you to relax and get in a mood to re-invent the future. Perhaps relax is not quite the right term.

It may be more like 'to remain cool under fire'. While I appreciate that most of you may not be ready for 'conscious evolution', I ask of you to pretend that all of the points made above can only get worse without significant change in our concept of governance and of human rights. Try it on in fantasy. Take on the perspective that you and your family are on a large airliner with all of your personal belongings, the aeroplane is over the ocean and the flight engineer has advised the pilot that:

- There is a fuel leak, number one engine has quit;
- Number two is running at 50% power and should be shut down;
- There might be enough fuel to reach land if all excess baggage, safety equipment galley carts and food were thrown overboard; The pilot asks you, the passengers, to give up your belongings.

I personally believe that little scenario is not an exaggeration of the human predicament and I think most other GPC members would agree. We are not alone in these thoughts. For example here are the words of a flight engineer of Spaceship Earth – Columbia University geochemist Wallace Broecker – speaking to a USA Senate Committee hearing four years ago: "The inhabitants of planet Earth are quietly conducting a gigantic environmental experiment. So vast and so sweeping will be the impact of this experiment that, were it brought before any responsible council for approval, it would be firmly rejected as having potentially dangerous consequences. Yet, the experiment goes on with no significant interference from any jurisdiction or nation." Also noted in yesterday's Toronto Star (April 20/96) was an article about runaway species extinction in which a UN spokesperson questions the likelihood of human survival. It was not on page one, but a small piece inside. Remember – we tune out, we turn away, we avoid. Finally we forget, and forget we have forgotten. A lacuna hides the harsh truth.

Before going on, some brief definitions are in order.

Gaia:

From Greek mythology, Gaia was the name of the Goddess of the Earth. This lovely name was used by scientists James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis to identify what they hypothesized as one big system of life on Earth. It is seen to be a system in that, like a moving car or a human being, energy is what makes

everything happen. Cars use gasoline, humans use food and Gaia uses the radiant energy of sunshine.

Gaia consists of all of the interacting intermingling biological creatures and the mineral elements from which they come and shall return. Clouds, soil, carbon dioxide, water, bacteria, iron, oxygen all are a part of Gaia, and energy from sunshine brings us to life – like temporary puppets on the universal stage.

The hypothesis holds that the first spark of life occurred on a barren planet with a CO₂ atmosphere, about 4 billion years ago. This spark of life was a uni-cellular life-form with the unique property of self replication and an additional feature – the new having minor variations from the parent.

The feature of variations enabled these cyanobacteria to adapt to their changing carbon dioxide environment. They grew in numbers and in various shapes and sizes and new species emerged. These were our first ancestors.

From here the Gaia hypothesis blends theories of thermodynamics, entropy, chaos and Darwinism. Combined, they describe how our humble but prolific ancestors polluted the world with oxygen enabling today's air breathing creatures like birds and us to emerge. Individual species are unique – birds fly, fish swim and humans have reason. Individual *Homo Sapiens*, nice people like you and me, are minuscule components of the overall Gaian system, but growth in our numbers and activity combined to become the enemy that we pretend isn't there – the ominous illusive mountain.

Human Activity (HA) .

HA is all the things we do. At one time HA was picking berries, killing a wildebeest or bird, or gathering biodegradable materials to bring comfort to a cave, perhaps to provide firewood. But today, we use nature's stored fossil fuel energy to assist us in almost everything we do. Energy from fossil fuels has, in effect, become our slave – **but**, like a nasty trick from Pandora's box, we have become a slave to its use. In modern society berry picking and downing a wildebeest has transformed into a multitude of million dollar industries with plows, tractors, harvesters, corporations and stock market options and war machines. Instead of gathering firewood and hemp, we harvest the forests of a continent, or we convert the grassland prairies to cultivated farmland, and we pump oil, dig coal, pipe gas, build dams and atomic reactors to feed our ever increasing need for/addiction to our energy slave – our new master. To feed our Western style enterprises we consume, on a per capita basis, the energy equivalent of 100 slaves at hard toil 24 hours a day. And now our well-being, our social structure is totally dependent on it.

Does any one here remember the chaos which occurred in 1972 when the Persian Gulf oil cartel created an energy scarcity? I do, and it was frightening.

Airline schedules were erratic because of their own fuel problems and because many passengers could not get to or from the airports. US President Nixon ordered that freeway speed limits be reduced to 50 miles per hour.

But that blip in energy flow is mostly forgotten now. We note that as the laws of physics dictate, a touch of chaos appeared when energy flow was disrupted – and modern society fell a little ill. But this was only a human created shortage. Today over 80% of the energy which drives HA and makes modern society function is derived from diminishing fossil fuel reserves.

What do you suppose it would be like if we really ran out of oil, or gas, or coal? I would not wish to be alive when that happens, but unfortunately, computer projections of current trends indicate that my children may observe this phenomenon. I'd prefer to not think about it – but it's time that we all think about it.

Human Population (almost 6 billion today) and Human Carrying Capacity (CC) (?)

Probably everyone here knows that human population growth and especially the rate of population growth has been rapidly increasing for about 200 years. Carrying Capacity (CC) is ability of an area to sustain a population without degradation of the area or the environment.

Just what is the human CC of Earth? This is a very subjective area. We read of estimates from less than one billion to more than 20 billion. A research group from Cornell University conclude that 2 billion is likely the maximum CC, and that 1 billion could live quite comfortably in harmony with nature. This research group takes into account the rates of depletion of topsoil, energy, forests, surface water and the great underground aquifers of the world. Depletion rates of some of these life essential commodities have been accelerating since before the turn of the last century when population levels grew above one billion. Since then we have been deficit spending. In the world of economics, such spending leads to bankruptcy.

Strangely, however, an individuals perception of CC is something like a religious belief affected more by emotion and desire than by hard facts.

Gaiacide.

Gaiacide is the exponential decline of Gaia's ability to sustain life as a result of an exponential increase in human activity. Each of us participates in Gaiacide.

The Gaia Preservation Coalition.

About 1992 I first became interested in the human predicament. As I read books and gathered data I started making notes which eventually led to a manuscript now called *A 21st Century Steward's Handbook*. It is a big-picture view of the interaction of Gaia, humans, industry, and our human nature. Before getting serious about attempting to write a book, I had to be able to envision a 'way out'. The feeling that there may be a way out gave me comfort and enthusiasm. In Chapter 10 of the manuscript, called Recovery, there is a backcast, a story as written from year 2096 in which a history teacher is explaining to his class how the good people of 1996 overcame their cultural entrapment and made a paradigm shift which led the way to a sustainable civilization.

The recovery plan envisioned an organization called the Gaia Preservation Coalition which would be a focal point for people who had gone through conscious evolution, and were ready to begin the job of tearing down their mountain to bring about necessary change within their handed down cultures and values – how they were able to construct a social agenda which matched the realities of the world they lived in. They recognized that their species was in jeopardy – to do or to die, was in their hands.

After finishing the manuscript, I, along with a couple of friends, incorporated the GPC as a Federal non-profit organization. However, the envisioned miraculous changes from the recovery scenario have not occurred – not yet. We need your help.

The organization has grown to about 35 members, mostly in Toronto, but many are scattered here and there. We hold monthly or bi-monthly meetings and enjoy having the companionship of other people who understand and can talk about the 'human predicament'.

We have tried several approaches at gathering more of the public toward our understanding of Gaia and what is happening to the world, but the view of the illusive mountain is still obscure for most. We find it difficult to gather enough people in one geographic area for the critical mass of people needed to undertake major projects.

Enter the Internet. This communications medium is providing new opportunities to like-minded people all around the world to bring thoughts and ideas together. The GPC now has its own www site, and a private email mailing list. Many of our members are now Internet accessible. One of our organization's directors, Dr Dick Richardson is a biology professor at the University of Texas at Austin. One of our advisors is Dr Dave Pimentel from Cornell University who has made presentations to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in the past two years. It his team of researchers who conclude that Earth's sustainable CC is probably less than 2 billion, and the CC of USA might be 200 million, about three quarters of current population. I consider

people like Richardson and Pimentel – biologists, naturalists, geologists – to represent the flight engineers of Spaceship Earth.

A GPC Project:.

A [www](#) page can be accessed by anyone with Internet access anywhere on Earth.

.In one section of our page we have undertaken a project called Future By Design. Here is part of the preamble in our [www](#) page:

<http://www.io.org/~gaipe>

“Our long term intention is to produce a document which might be publishable, or a paper which could be presented to influential people in our society. It will be an outline of one alternate paradigm. It is based on the presumption that evolution of our culture leaves humanity on a course toward self-elimination from the Gaian scene. Also it is acknowledged that social change can occur and has occurred rapidly when appropriate seedling ideas begin to take root in a fertile atmosphere, or perhaps, when the atmosphere becomes fertile, seedling ideas may take root. This document may provide seedling ideas. As far as I know, such a document does not exist. (With due respect to the Technocracy ‘social plan’ which was tabled about 1934, and as I understand, it has not since changed.)

To get started, I will generate the initial text of the document sections in our [www](#) page. There are some on this list with eloquent writing skills and established literary track records whose skills will be needed as we near completion because our finished document demands excellence – there will be many critics.”

Future by Design.

We plan to write three scenarios. The first scenario is called **Being There**. It is a description of what the living conditions and general presumptions might be for those people living in a sustainable society. The following is almost directly from the text in our [www](#) page, available to anyone in the world with Internet access.

Scenario One – Being There .

The principle distinctive characteristic of our species enables us to consciously plan the future, to shape our behavior and actions today so that when time brings the future to us, it may unfold as planned. Our ‘Future By Design’ scenario could never be fully reached by those of us over, say 30, because a planned acceptable human attrition down to CC would take many decades. In a way, our journey will be like a trip to a habitable planet, where those who make the long journey do so principally for the next generation, those who will carry the human spirit into tomorrow.

We acknowledge too, that the next generation may be better able to design their own living styles and form of governance, but nevertheless, we need a target today, a place to focus our vision of hope, to inspire and motivate us to begin the journey.

Tools necessary for our transition are a few common values. We suggest the twelve Gaian’s Personal Principles, which are listed in your GPC handout sheet. (*Note: Handed out at the Meeting. Ed.*)

By the year 2096 we visualize the people of our designer future to live in some of the following conditions: .

Human Procreation .

Like any vehicle, spaceship Earth has limits on human passengers. All citizens acknowledge procreation limits to be as fundamental as night and day. The regional government of each of Earth’s many bioregions determine their local CC on an annual basis by evaluating and considering several factors. Normally, each individual is granted one non-transferable procreation license. For those who wish to have another child, a lottery system will distribute as many additional licenses as the annual CC assessment allows.

Geographical Lines:.

Virtually none of the countries and borders of the late 20th century exist.

Continents are divided into “bioregions“. The American land mass from Panama north contains 20 bioregions (a guess, until further advised). To the South, there are 15 (?) bioregions.

In recognition of industry’s need for some large cities, neighboring bioregions sometimes exchange population credits for other services and considerations. Some exchanges between bioregions occur globally. But each bioregion monitors its CC and assesses its vulnerability and its dependence on other regions.

Trade and Immigration:.

Trade between bioregions is free and easy; however, energy tax makes long distance shipments impractical for many types of goods. Sail power transfers most inter-ocean freight.

Tourist travel is unrestricted to any part of the world. Bioregional immigration quotas are determined in conjunction with local CC calculations.

Each region maintains a CC buffer to accommodate more or less immigration to their territory, i.e., not all available population credits are put into the local annual lottery.

Economics:.

An outline: The total wealth of each bioregion is determined by several factors – in general, many of the same factors used to determine CC of the region. These are:.

- a) The amount of clean renewable energy which can be continuously captured and distributed.
- b) The amount of other renewable resources, such as forests.
- c) The amount of water which can be used by humans, with due consideration of the Common Good.
- d) The amount of food which can be produced, with due consideration to the Common Good.
- e) An assessment of the bioregion's capability with regard to high tech research and development.
- f) An assessment of the capability for production of durable yet recyclable goods.
- g) An assessment of the quality and quantity of human services, which include such categories as medicine, education, care of the aged, tourism and the arts.
- h) The human population within the bioregion. Basically, the fewer people, the more individual wealth, or wealth per capita.

A flourishing civilization requires a blend of all of the above factors.

There are likely others. Most of them are controllable within limits; some limits are imposed by nature, some by intelligent assessment.

Neighboring regions can exchange credits in each of the areas in question; with the bioregional governments make such decisions. For example, a bioregion which can produce large quantities of food might exchange population credits with a region which contains large industries and requires more people in its cities to enhance technological development and manufacturing efficiencies. People in the farming bioregion in return will receive the fruits of technology and industry.

There is an annual calculation of each Bioregion's Gross Wealth (BGW).

All bioregions utilize the same assessment formula. There is an annual summary of the Continental Gross Wealth (CGW), and also of Global Gross Wealth (GGW). (Excluding continents not taking part.) It is the total GGW that forms the basis of the dollar. This will be set at a convenient number depending on global human population at the time.

At each assessment of the BGW, an individual's buying power for goods and services might go up or down, depending on how well balanced was his/her bioregion's blend of wealth factors.

Individual Wealth .

As noted above, the average individual wealth will be \$100,000, although not everyone will have that much.

The government will hold a large reserve of dollars to provide social services.

Each bioregional social system will ensure that every person will be fed and clothed even if an individual does not or cannot work.

Monetary exchange:.

Monetary exchange in the delivery of social services (education, arts, sports, medical, etc.) will be calculated separately from monetary exchange for goods (clothes, tractors, homes, food, computers, etc.). The taxing system will be designed to enhance social services, while inhibiting excessive consumerism.

While individuals may accumulate wealth in their lifetime, death tax will ensure that most of an individual's accumulated wealth is returned to his or her community. This is one of the ways of stressing 'family within community', rather than the old fashioned 'Clan', groups of blood relatives.

Corporations:

Corporations are essential for any high tech or industrial society, and part of the wealth of the community will be held by corporations with shareholders, similar to those of the 20th century.

Governance:

Yet to be constructed are the draft details of community government, bioregional government, continental government, and world government. Some thoughts which will go into their creation: A general principle of all governments is that legislation is based on sustainability. This implies public well-being not just today but in 20 through 50 years also. To ensure sustainability, computer forecasting is used to monitor the results of anticipated changes. Three political groups are established to create the computer forecasting criteria, and the three results are presented graphically and verbally to the voters, who vote from home through their communications center, but only on significant issues.

Most governmental issues are decided by the three political parties and an appointed Arbitrator. Any party can raise an issue to the referendum level, if they so choose.

The people elect local individuals to the A, B and C parties at the community government level.

The **Community** A, B and C parties select members from within to form the A, B and C groups at the bioregional level.

The **Bioregional** A, B and C groups select members from within to form the A, B and C groups at the Continental level.

The **Continental** A, B and C groups select members from within to form the A, B and C groups at the World Government.

At each level of government, all three parties will select one leader for the Board of Arbitration, and this person will be the principal spokes-person for that government during his/her term of office.

Some Thoughts.

The world does not have a model of a sustainable technological society.

Some area has to be first to acknowledge this and to begin the process.

Perhaps it could be Australia, with the advantage of no borders, perhaps the USA and Canada. If it could begin, it is most likely to begin where there are modern communications, where women and men are equal, where freedom of speech now prevails. Since it is unlikely that all the world would follow a showcase society, we would expect casualties in some countries or continents. Other than to establish an example there may be nothing we can do to change that. The Gaian's personal Principle Five is based on the serenity prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference."

For any beginning showcase society to succeed, the people must acknowledge that their borders must temporarily close to immigration and trade – perhaps for decades until other areas reach a similar survival mind-set.

Self defense against any aggressor will be an essential for survival. This is not new; the veneer of civilization is quite thin.

So, there you have it. Perhaps the seeds of today's unrest and growing angst can become guided by visions of a future which offers chance to move toward a desirable future where the human spirit and body can thrive in a rich and balanced Gaian web of life. Our Future by Design is not an attempt to establish a

master plan – the future is much too fluid and unpredictable for that. But it is intended to offer direction. Our vision does not require any 'yet to be discovered' technology. We have the tools of communication, knowledge of human psychology and we have birth limiting capability. If we can escape our mother culture and learn to understand the difference between personal freedom and personal responsibility, we could eventually reach Carrying Capacity in a humane and civilized way.

(The following remarks were addressed particularly to the audience present at the talk. Ed):

Within your Gaia Preservation Coalition handout is a small ballot. Imagine that the next federal election is tomorrow and you had the option to vote for Liberal, Reform, or the Earth Movement party (the EM party). You know that if EM wins the election, they will immediately start the process of significant change which could set our course toward a sustainable future for humans. To not vote for EM is to vote for continued uninterrupted Gaiacide.

Would you vote EM? Within the GPC hand-out sheet is a ballot with the above question. If you would vote Yes to EM, rip off the No, and visa versa. Return the ballot and we will make a tally. On a couple of occasions, I have done mini referendums like this before, and was very encouraged by the results.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you, especially on such a prestigious day as Earth Day. Note: The vote for the EM movement was 67%. This is the same as a similar vote after a presentation at the Geography Club at the U of Windsor. At a GPC meeting with guests, a vote was held last year, and that vote was 80% in favour of EM. It all seems so simple. All we have to do is vote for survival.

NOTE:

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