

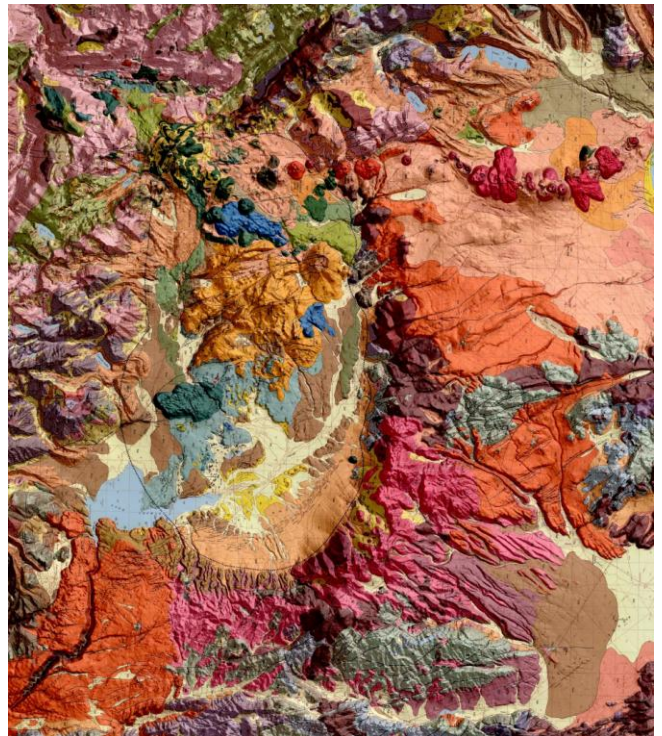
CALDERA

eBook 13 | [Best Interviews from PlanetShifter.com Magazine](#) | 2012 – 2013 | Willi Paul

Why are myths and stories so important to you?

Ironically, myths and stories are important because we have so few that have any value or integrity for today's issues. I say that classic myths are burnt-out and Hollywood's "big screens" are hopelessly redundant in themes and soap operatic in message. Game Boys and shoot-'em-ups are all the rage at home, but there are no valuable myths in the depiction of white soldiers shooting up Arabs or undergrads doing beer bongs! What spurs me to write my own new myths are the ethics and principles of permaculture. But this so-called new "soil design science" is down on the idea of a spiritual / culture kit, and desperately needs visionary and sustainable partners to widen and realize a "community-garden future" without electricity, gasoline and nation-sponsored war.

AN INTERVIEW WITH 'NEW MYTHOLOGIST' WILLI PAUL by Sharon Blackie, Editor, earthlinesreview.org



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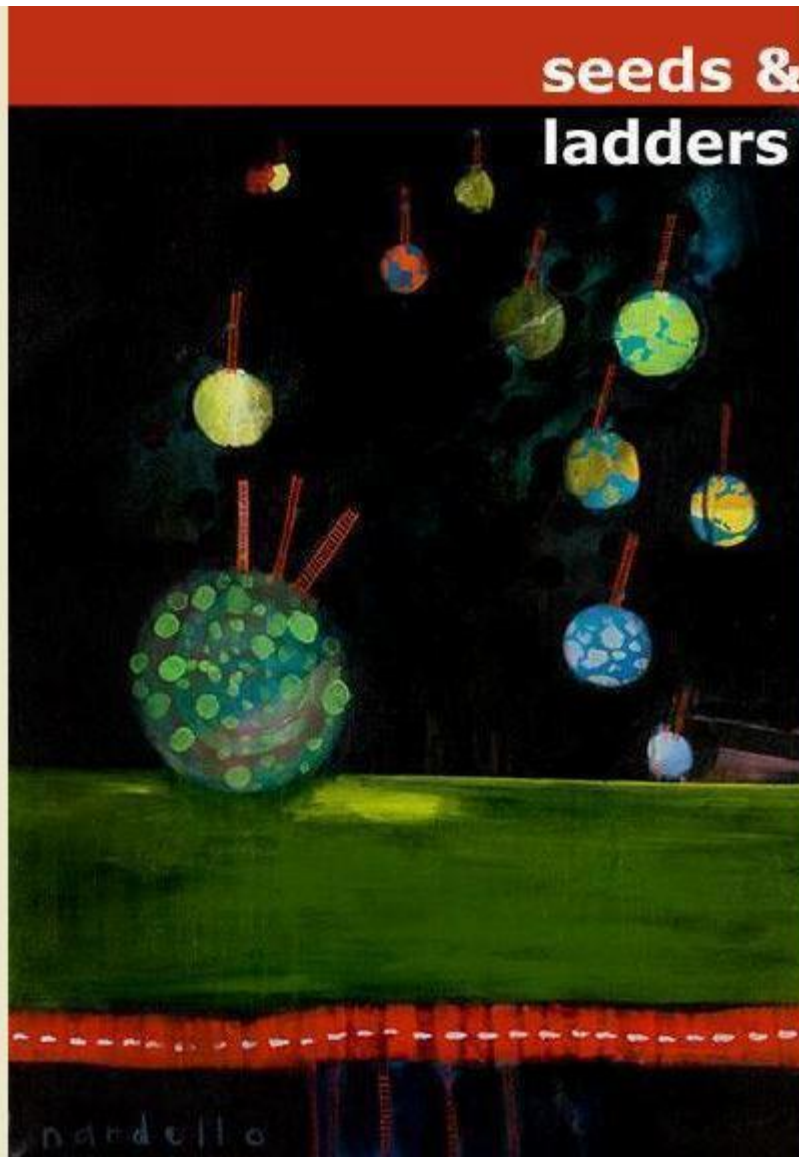
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Seeds & Ladders. A Conversation with Permaculture Designer Jenny Pell, Pacific Northwest. By Willi Paul, Permaculture Exchange

Two Updates from Ms. Pell -

< I > May Hedgerows Workshop

Our partner educational non-profit, **The Manav Foundation**, is hosting a three-day workshop on hedgerows. We will explore concepts of soil preparation, plant selection, planting techniques, irrigation, and ways to reduce maintenance, with ample time for understanding budgets, phase planning, and time-lines. Each day will include classroom theory, design, and easy-to-replicate hands-on projects.

Instructors: Jude Hobbs & Jenny Pell

Dates: May 18th to May 20th

To register, visit: <http://www.manav.org/courses/>

< I I > Community by Design, LLC is a new venture dedicated to exploring alternate models of small-scale agriculture. On ~58 acres within 15 miles of Portland, we are crafting an experiment in small-scale farming, land ownership, land stewardship, economics, and community. We believe that by reducing the financial burdens of land ownership and by sharing resources, young farmers will be able to earn a living and create an abundance that will benefit the greater community.

We now have a total of 156 chickens, 12 geese, 2 donkeys and 2 goats on the farm. The animals are a welcome addition and make the whole place more lively (and, in the case of the geese and roosters, much noisier!). The blueberries are starting to flower and we already have 20+ bee-hives on the site. The blackberries are, of course, starting to make a strong comeback so hand-weeding in the blueberry rows is in full swing.

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A big thank you to [Carrie Nardello](#) (my favorite SF painter!) for permission to adapt her work entitled: "Spheres."

Interview with Jenny by Willi

Willi: Tell me how you view permaculture and slow money. Do you have a sense of how those integrate in your life? Do you have examples of how that integrates?

Jenny: Yes. One of the projects I'm working on right now is actually a slow money project of sorts. It's a [project outside of Portland](#) where we recently bought a sixty acre farm that is transitioning to organic, that is definitely in the slow money category. It's a project designed to support small local farms, initially functioning as a farm incubator. We are trying to attract a series of farmers - maybe six full time farm businesses that would have their own entrepreneurial business with their own client base, marketing, etc, but also sharing extensive resources, leasing land from this property, but not having to buy the land.

So we're looking for long term lease farmers on the site.

Willi: Nice

Jenny: And the idea is that we're going to be leasing the land at market rate so that it will be low lease rates. We're trying to level the playing field for farmers so that they don't have a burdensome mortgage at the same time that they are trying to start a small farming business, which is really hard to do.

The return on the investment is not cash, but rather successful small organic / biodynamic farms, building topsoil, and building capacity for local farm entrepreneurs. The land and the infrastructure, the buildings, all the things that are going in are essentially charitable donations to the project.

We'll be screening candidate farmers starting this spring and summer and unlike other farm incubator projects where they want you to come in for three or four years and then you are more or less launched out of the nest at that point, we are really hoping to attract people that want to stay long term.

Willi: Is this the LLC project on your website?

Jenny: Yes, this is the Community By Design Project.

Willi: Oh, cool. Cuz' you promise a fresh approach to the charter. Can you tell us anything more about that? A charter is a legal document correct?

Jenny: Yes. We are looking at how legal, financial, and social contracts serve and don't serve us from a permaculture point of view. Considering the ethics of "care for people and returning the surplus", how do we write contracts and how do we agree on things that actually support those ethics and are much more transparent contracts.

Willi: Oh, okay.

On this project, some farmers will be residents, and others will live nearby and commute to the farm. For the farmers residents living on site, we need a governance structure set up so that we can manage the residential area and be good neighbors. In addition, for all the farmers, there needs to be protocols for sharing equipment and tools that are really straightforward.

The farmers will belong to a Cooperative - each farming business will be one member, and gets one vote. We're buying the equipment up front as a one-time charitable donation to the project, and after that the management and care of all the equipment will under the purview of the Co-op. Everything from tractors, to the woodshop, greenhouses, road maintenance, fencing, etc. will

be managed by the co-op. We are developing systems that allow us to easily keep track of equipment usage so we can simply bill monthly according to hours used on the equipment, space used in the buildings (walk-in cooler, barns) in order that equipment is kept in good shape, blades get sharpened, fences repaired, etc. By forming the co-op we're trying to take out some of the redundancies in equipment that can be very expensive for farmers.

Willi: Right.

Jenny: On the community side we're looking at a governance structure that allows us to make decisions in really healthy ways that also allows us to remain peers and good neighbors, but also get the necessary work done, and embed excellent conflict resolution strategies, etc. We're moving beyond the consensus model, into something that is a little more streamlined, a little more action oriented than process oriented.

Willi: Okay cool, and what is that called? Is it something new or something old that you're bringing back?

Jenny: It's not that new. It's called Dynamic Governance, or Sociocracy, and it originated in Holland in the 1940's, where it was originally designed for an electronics company that wanted to experiment with a more engaged workforce, having more access to the various tiers of management and manufacturing, with the goals of creating a superior product, very satisfied customers, a committed and hardworking workforce, low worker attrition, etc. The underlying concept is governance by "consent" rather than by consensus.

Willi: Got it.

Jenny: In Dynamic Governance people are divided into groups called "Krings". That word in Dutch has two meanings - one is a "circle" and the other is an "arena", a place where people have equal voice, and where things happen get done. And I think the best equivalent in English is probably "spheres of influence."

Within these "spheres of influence" there really shouldn't be anyone in your group that isn't directly involved in that process or that activity. It really minimizes conflict within the group right away.

So let's just make it up. Let's say you were in the kitchen group and I was in the carpentry group; why would you be sitting in on our meeting and offering ideas / actions and vice versa? Of course it's much more involved than this simplistic model – for example there's a double linking process that makes sure that all groups have a link and a voice and access to each other.

Within your group you have a lot of autonomy, a lot of decision making authority to move your projects forward as a group with a lot less meddling. And you don't have to get consensus from the entire group, you're getting consent from within your group.

Dynamic Governance is a series of protocols, akin to Robert's Rules, in the sense that it opens the meeting, you check in, you review the minutes from the previous meeting, etc. When an item is being discussed and actions decided each person in the group is asked if they have a "paramount objection", which is categorically different than consensus, whereby everyone has to agree. You can say "Well, I'm not that crazy about it but I can consent to this, let's try it for two months, see how it goes, and then I want to revisit it."

There's obviously a whole lot more to dynamic governance than that, but that's a very rough introduction. There are lots of resources online, including its history, what kinds of groups are using it with success, and explanations of the underlying tenets of cybernetics, or "the art of steering". It's designed to empower people to take responsibility within their own spheres of influence, accomplish goals without having to bog down the entire group, have clear agreements, and move the entire organization forward successfully.

I don't know if that makes sense.

Willi: Oh yea, it does.

Willi: Tell me if you think that the permaculture convergences, or those meetings, can help lead us to a new form of governance.

Jenny: I think governance is so particular to culture, and that it's trying to bring a successful community process into play. Many of us are working very hard on "social permaculture", on how we can communicate well, get things done, enjoy the process (and not

end up in a tedious process), and not have animosity resulting from a governance process that end up feeling like a waste of time. In the social permaculture world, many people are experimenting with lots of different modalities, and I find dynamic governance to be very promising, and so I'm investing time learning more about how it can work, how to facilitate, and how it can dovetail with the permaculture ethics and human guilds.

Willi: Okay. You've been to convergence cultures in the North West right?

Jenny: Yes, I often attend, sometimes get to be a speaker, and sometimes lead a workshop. Last year I was a speaker at the Convergence in Oregon.

Willi: Okay, can you see the actual convergences and that organization of those yearly meetings as an alternative to some of these other forms that you're saying?

Jenny: Yes, the convergence isn't necessarily about governance. Someone might offer a workshop on governance but the convergence is a way for us as a bioregion of permaculture folks to get together and network and hang out and have a lot of fun together, and also anyone can offer a workshop on anything. It's a way for us to see what everybody else is up to. The keynote speakers are usually showcasing new projects, are expanding into new areas, and have something exciting to share with a bigger audience. I'm not involved in the organization of the convergences, so I don't really know what their process is.

Willi: Gotcha. So I did partake in the North West convergence last year and had a great time and did present as well.

Jenny: It's a lot of fun. We had four or five hundred people last year. The year before we had about four hundred, and the year before that it was closer to a hundred and fifty. What we're finding is that the permaculture movement in our bio-region is growing very quickly, as well as across the US and internationally. We are seeing a critical mass where our ranks are swelling very quickly, and particularly amongst a lot of young people. We work hard to accommodate more and more people so that they can get exposure and get networked.

Willi: Jenny how do you define your bioregion?

Jenny: I would say Cascadia - west of the Cascade Mountains, from southern British Columbia, down through Washington, Oregon, and Northern California.

Willi: Okay, thanks, that's what I thought. Tell us about Occupy and how it may be having an impact on your personal or professional life.

Jenny: I'm not involved in Occupy at all so I can't speak to that. I think what they are expressing is critical, relevant, and I'm behind them 100%. I don't know how it's impacting me personally or my work personally. I just know that I'm really busy, so clearly permaculture is a growing interest where I am.

Willi: Okay, very interesting. Well, how can you grow the permaculture economy within the current sagging one? Do you see any challenges in there?

Jenny: Many challenges but a stunning amount of opportunities as well. Looking at the ethical structure (or lack of ethics in these structures) of the myriad contracts we negotiate, whether social contracts, legal contracts, and financial contracts; I think we all agree that most of these contract are failing us at a fundamental level.

It moves us to really look at the decentralization of our various systems. One of the things I really love about permaculture is that it supports vibrant, healthy, resilient, decentralized groups. Whether you're in an urban city where you see lots of those decentralized zones or whether you're in a rural setting, it doesn't really matter, that pattern scales all up and down at all kinds of levels.

And so how do we in our neighborhoods, move off grids of all kinds. Water is a good example - fifteen years ago it was illegal to catch water off your own roof. How do we push our legislatures to change laws so that we can have access to localized systems? How much water would a neighborhood need, how can we have many cisterns of different sizes, what water-saving strategies can we use, etc.

Urban farming is another great example. In 2010 Seattle declared the Year of Urban Agriculture and they passed laws to facilitate access to urban food – they expanded household chickens from 3 to 8, they opened up all the parking strips to grow food, it is now legal to sell things you grow on your property (produce, plants, seeds), and this year passed a new Cottage Food Law so you can sell specific things made in your non-commercial home kitchen.

To support a thriving local economy we have to look at how we spend our dollars and use our economic contracts with people in a way that's building capital of all kinds – financial capital, social capital, topsoil capital, and so on. A large part of building the local economy and creating small cottage industries is also building skills within our communities. And if you're paying cash, it will circulate enormously throughout your local economy much more than a credit card or a debit card at a store.

Toby Hemenway talks about urban food zones: zone one is what you grow in your garden, zone two might be what you can get from your neighborhood; and if your neighborhood is participating then it can probably be a lot. It could be eggs, and it could be somebody that makes something else from fruit, and as skill sets build and our horticultural pallet expands so our neighborhoods will have quite a lot to offer. Zone three would be what you get from your farmers market, where you have a relationship with the person who grows your food. Zone four would be co-op, and again the smaller, the more local and dedicated your co-op is, the better off you are. And finally zone five of food would be when you have to go to big box stores.

If you can prioritize spending within your community and actively supporting local businesses you will notice new webs of relationships emerging, which include interesting specialties, depth of skills in your neighborhood, friendships, and a more resilient form of commerce.

Willi: Right; So, Jenny or you pro or anti capitalism or neither? Or how does that work for you? How does that work in transition?

Jenny: I really stay away from absolute terms like that, and I would say that I am really pro economics, and going to the root of that word that comes from the household, the "oikos". What does it really mean? We all need to support ourselves, our families, and come back to choosing to support our neighborhood commerce as well. Richness in our lives comes from so much more than money – so to me commerce is a rich tapestry of a gift economy, barter, sliding-scale, and charging full-price. I want to look at our economics in a really healthy way. I need to make a livelihood, I need to earn money, and how do I do that in a way that serves my ethics. Again going back to the principles and ethics of what I do for a living. I'm a designer and a consultant. I charge consultants rates, and I offer a sliding scale that can include barter. I try to scale it according to who my client is, and then I endeavor to spend my money in a really ethical way.

I participate as much as I can in an alternative economy, and pay cash whenever possible. I go to the Barter Fair, I've never had a credit card, and so far have managed to avoid debt. I find that being in servitude too much to the dollar is just not a very fun way to live a life. I've lived on very little money almost all my life, and have had an extremely, extremely rich life, and that's because I have kind of an attitude of abundance, and I know how to live inexpensively.

Willi: Very nice. Let's switch the vibe here. Can you tell me how you're helping create new symbols and songs and myths for the new age? How you're doing that?

Jenny: If I had endless founts of money I would hire people to write poetry and songs in honor of all of these things. Artists have the unique skill of translating what may take me pages and pages of text into a metaphor that people can really grasp – and it's the metaphor that we are hard-wired to remember – the story rather than the explanation. Reconnecting to those deeper patterns, experiencing the artist's vision and interpretation, and allowing those ideas and concepts to resonate within you.

I have a small child, and I raised him from an infant to be an extremely pattern literate, and to understand the deeper cycles of life – and at age 5 he is confident and clear of how that is reflected in himself and the cosmos. The pattern of a brain cell is the same pattern of the universe, the movement of your blood is like that of water on the planet, etc. I think it's a very personal thing, and I find that Permaculture in the Arts is an emerging part of our culture, and look forward very much to watching and participating in that new/old story coming to the fore.

Willi: Nice.

Jenny: As someone who has the great opportunity to speak to diverse audiences I try to infuse my language with those symbols and those metaphors in an artistic way, so that people have a deeper connection to the narrative.

Willi: Right on.

Jenny: It's what they remember, and so you have to pepper your educational opportunities with all kinds of really rich storytelling.

One of the lectures I've been working on for several years is called "Once Upon a Peak Time," and it's walking people through 5 or 6 generations post-peak. I ask my audience to imagine you're sitting around the campfire 200 years from now telling the "epic story of Peak", and how your tribe survived and thrived, and what did your ancestors did at that critical juncture of human-kind. People get really emotional when they realize they are the ancestors, and they have to examine what they are (or are not) doing to move through this Peak Moment. I think every tribe's story is going to be different - from Seattle or Israel, London to Uganda. It's going to be a different story and of course what you choose to do now will greatly impact the future of your descendants.

Willi: Can you give me another metaphor besides the tribe that you do when you use it?

Jenny: Another metaphor that I use a lot is one of abundance and how can you expect the table to be full and abundant if you don't bring something to the table? People in our culture have a bad habit of filling up at the table where someone else planted, harvested, and cooked the food, eating more than their fill, and then walking away without doing the dishes! You need to bring something to the table, and I don't really care what it is, it just needs to be something! You could be a knitter, you could be a cobbler, you could be a seamstress, you could care for children, you could tell stories, you could play music. It doesn't really matter what it is because there's no judgment or standard for what it means. You just have to bring something to the table that's valuable so that you have a place in your community, and that the community needs you, and that you need the community back. I think a lot of folks get distracted by wanting to be self-sufficient, but really I think that's getting off track, that community is more about organic interdependence. You have skills and I have skills and I'm really good at something and you're really good at something, and that it's the intricacies of interdependence that allows us to need each other and to rely on each other and allows us to creatively problem solve.

When I have a potluck I write "Please bring something local and organic" otherwise, people will just go to the store and buy something pre-packaged. Not quite the same. I'm not asking everyone to slave all day cooking, just to have a deeper connection to the food at some level!

Willi: Terrific. I'll ask just one more if you have time? I'd like to know how you see the traditional artisans and artisan skills and projects; how can we make those folks more competitive?

Jenny: That's an excellent question and I'll see if I can address it more as a permaculture answer.

So I personally would rather have one beautifully made, hand knitted sweater rather than thirty from a big-box store. Then you value of that product, maybe know where it came from, perhaps understand its provenance, or its origins / source, then it has some meaning. I would personally rather have a little of something high quality than a lot of something that's junk. And to help and respect and honor the work those goes into things and pay the real price for things. The main reason that things are so cheap these days is that fossil fuels are so cheap. When gas is at ten dollars a gallon it will be different. I encourage people to make choices to support local artisans to allow those people who have those skills to really become valuable members of our community. So it's just a relearning, a reconnecting to the value of things.

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Jenny Pell Bio -

Jenny is a permaculture designer, consultant, and teacher based in Seattle, WA. Jenny specializes in edible landscapes, urban permaculture, and creating "living genetic banks" of useful and valuable plant materials on projects large and small. Recent designs include a 7-acre permaculture food forest on public lands in Seattle, a two-acre demonstration garden at Evergreen State College, and a collaborative project integrating permaculture on a 60-acre organic farm outside of Portland, OR. She has a small urban farm in Seattle where she experiments with mixed annual and perennial hedgerows.

Connections –

Jenny Pell

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<http://www.permaculturenow.com>

<http://www.communitybydesignllc.org/the-project/>



Justice Begins with Seeds Conference - Interview with Presenter Katherine Zavala , IDEX. Presented by the biosafetyalliance.org. May 18 – 19, 2012, SF. By Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine.

The purpose of the upcoming Justice Begins with Seeds conference is to grow the food sovereignty movement by advancing learning and building coalitions between the GMO counter-movement in the US, and other movements thriving to develop sustainable food systems, alleviate climate change through soil practices, defend the rights of indigenous communities, reduce social inequalities and encourage citizen democracy against corporatocracy.

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Interview with Katherine by Willi

As a symbol, what does a handful of GMO seeds mean to you?

GMO seeds represent a threat to securing a sustainable food source for future generations.

Are food aid orgs bringing GMO food / seed to underfed areas in the world?

Right now the Gates Foundation has been promoting an initiative called AGRA – Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa. AGRA promotes expensive, subsidized fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid seeds, a concept that is not economically or environmentally sustainable. It puts the private sector in charge of the seed supply and replaces public and local seed systems. In addition, the Green Revolution reduces resilience and creates a high level of dependency on subsidies and credit, putting small scale farmers at high risk.* (Source: Food Sovereignty Systems: Feeding the World, Regenerating Ecosystems, Rebuilding Local Economies and Cooling the Planet – all at the same time – November 2011)

As has been mentioned in many sources of information the Gates Foundation has embraced genetic engineering technologies for its ventures into Africa. The development of GMOs has not reflected the needs of consumers, smallholder farmers, or the environment but has explicitly been along lines to maximize profits of multinational corporations (such as Monsanto, which holds the patents on

over three-quarters of the GMO seeds currently being planted) and reflects the view of the world of the technocratic elements of society - the engineers, businesspeople, and bureaucrats. GMOs embody power differentials in our society.

Do you feel that issues of food security are understood by the first world?

Living in San Francisco, a progressive city where the urban sustainable agriculture movement is strengthening, it's easy to have a bias perspective on this question. But in general, if you look at the heavy subsidies that the First World governments are providing to farmers to ensure that massive monoculture conventional type of farming is being practiced to the point where corn is overproduced and given as feed for animals, there is a lack of understanding of what food security means for most of the world's population.

Does IDEX promote permaculture as a localization strategy? If so, how?

International Development Exchange (IDEX) identifies, evaluates, and grows the best ideas from local leaders and organizations to alleviate poverty and injustice around the world. IDEX supports community-led solutions that are making a huge difference for people living in extreme poverty. The initiatives come from people who want to create change for themselves. We provide the financial support.

Local leaders and community members do the rest. The work of our grantees typically integrate two or more of our core themes:

- Women's Empowerment
- Building local economies
- Caring for the environment

For many of the communities IDEX supports, land, water, and seeds are central to their survival, livelihoods and health.

Permaculture is part of the agroecological practices our partner organizations value and promote to secure sustainability of their community livelihoods.

Together with these themes, our partners and grantees work in ways that honor the rights of women, indigenous communities and other minorities, reflect economic, social, cultural, and political realities, and create solutions that have commitment from the grassroots.

Please tell us what the key principles are in sustainable agriculture?

Thanks to the learnings of our South African partners: Biowatch and Surplus People's Project based in Durban and Cape Town respectively, they've shared with us the core principles of agroecology, which is the model for sustainable agriculture. All the following text comes from a three-day agroecology conference workshop organized by Surplus People's Project, African Center for Biosafety and the Right to Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign.

Agroecology (AE) came about with the convergence of two scientific disciplines: agronomy (the study of soil management and crop production) and ecology (the study of the relationships between organisms and the environment). As a science, AE is the application of ecological science to the study, design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems.

As a set of agricultural practices, AE seeks ways to enhance agricultural systems by mimicking natural processes, thus creating beneficial biological interactions and synergies between the components of the agro-ecosystem. It provides the most favorable soil conditions for plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and by raising soil biotic activity.

Agroecology has the following core principles - it:

- Recycles nutrients and energy on the farm, rather than introducing external inputs;
- Integrates crops and livestock, because the one supports the other;
- Diversifies species and genetic resources in agro-ecosystems over time and space;
- Does not depend on a single crop;
- Does not use pesticides and fertilizers;

- Focuses on interactions and productivity across the agricultural system (every element, including soil, forest and livestock), rather than focusing on individual species; and
- Is highly knowledge-intensive, based on techniques that are developed from farmers' knowledge and experimentation rather than delivered from the top down.

Agroecology as a basis for change - It is a counter movement to enable small-scale farmers and farm workers/ farm dwellers to take control of their natural resources and manage their environment in a sustainable way. It is viewed as an emancipatory political project based on social and economic justice, and rooted in ecologically sound practice.

Agroecology is not a one-size-fits-all approach – geographical and cultural diversity is important. Agroecology should be linked to broader social, political, cultural and economic transformation.

It would logical that the rich agri-business companies would have the most resources to assist NPOs? Are GMO's being forced upon people in need?

Five giant corporations (Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer, Dow) dominate the US\$4.5 billion (2004 figures) global market for GE seed with income coming from seed sales and the technology fees farmers have to pay for using patented seeds. They are selling only two types of GE crops: herbicide resistant crops that allows the farmers to spray more herbicide; and crops that behave like insecticides.

Worldwide the US grows the most genetically engineered crops with an estimated 54.6 million hectares of GE crops produced in 2006. Argentina comes second with 18 million hectares, followed by Canada, Brazil, China, Paraguay, India and South Africa in eighth place.

According to a Biowatch report, the South Africa government is still handing out GM maize to unsuspecting communities as “free” seed. “YieldGuard” GM maize has been handed out to communities with no explanation of what GM maize is, how it should be planted, what the environmental and health risks are, or that the GM maize can contaminate their traditional maize varieties. Fortunately, as a result of a recent farmer exchange, the Pongola community is aware of GMOs and they've said a loud “give it back” to the free maize seed!

How are poverty and issues of food security connected? Can you give us some examples?

In Africa, GMOs are marketed as a solution to poverty and food security and an opportunity African farmer should not miss. Since IDEX has been partnering with community-based organizations in South Africa for several years, we are familiar about the contextual situation in regards to GM crops. South Africa is the one of 7 developing countries worldwide, which are growing GM crops for commercial purposes, and I believe the only country in Africa producing a GE crop as part of the staple food of its population – GE white maize. South Africa imports and exports GM maize as animal feed.

South Africa now devotes an estimated 300,000 hectares to growing GE white and yellow maize, soybean and cotton. About 80% of the cotton grown in South Africa is GE. Field trials have been conducted on potatoes, wheat, canola, sugarcane, apple, eucalyptus, strawberry, sugar beet, tomato and sweet potato to identify GE varieties for commercial production.

South African agriculture mirrors the high levels of inequality in the country. There is large-scale industrialized commercial farming sector and a small-scale, labor intensive, low input sector where farming is often one of a number of livelihood strategies for poor rural households.

Commercial agriculture produces most of the food for the country and makes an important contribution to export earnings. Small-scale agriculture is largely confined to the former apartheid homelands. These areas remain home to a third of South Africa's population and 70% of the poor. Most small-scale farming contributes to the survival of poor rural households with any surplus sold on local markets to meet cash needs.

Most of the usage of GE crops is mainly in the commercial sector. Commercial farmers are accustomed to buying seeds and other inputs. Most small-scale farmers save seed from the harvest for planting.

In South Africa, the uptake of GE crops amongst small-scale farmers have been limited to schemes (government packages) where farmers receive a package of inputs and support and loans from the Land Bank. Even though industry reports have indicated an increase of yields of up to 220 per cent for small-scale GE cotton and maize farmers in South Africa, the farmers risk getting trapped in debt cycles if their crops fail and they are not able to repay loans and buy seed again.

South Africa has never developed a policy on Genetically Engineered crops, nor included the public in decision-making about GE activities in the country. The National Department of Agriculture is responsible for both promoting and regulating GMOs and biosafety, while the Department of Health is responsible for labeling legislation and monitoring health impacts. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the lead agent for biosafety and biodiversity has been silenced by other more influential government departments and has almost no say over the impact of GMOs on the environment.

South Africa does have a GMO Act 15 of 1997, which is supposed to regulate the production and release of GMOs in the country and should address biosafety concerns. Regulations passed in 1999 cover permits, risk assessment, registration of facilities, public notification of a proposed trial or general release of GMOs, accidents, waste management and appeals.

The GMO Act contains a number of flaws. It does not make adequate provisions for risk assessments, it imposes liability for environmental and other damage on the end user (farmer or consumer) rather than the provider, and it does not allow for proper public input or oversight in permit granting procedures.

The Act is essentially a mechanism to fast-track permits for field trials, commercial releases and the import and export of GE crops.

There still hasn't been one environmental impact assessment (EIA) done for any proposed GMO release in South Africa.

There has been no public policy process to determine the use of GE in South Africa and decision-making has been characterized by a lack of transparency and denial of access to information, as it was witnessed in the High Court case between Biowatch South Africa, Monsanto and the Department of Agriculture.

Biowatch is a small South African non-governmental organization campaigning in the public interest for sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, biosafety and farmers' rights. For many years it has been opposing the rapid spread of genetically modified (GM) crops in South African agriculture. It has always argued that there are health and environmental risks resulting from this technology, and that it diminishes food security and food sovereignty.

In 2000, the state had consistently refused to provide Biowatch with requested official information about the planting of GM crops in South Africa. As a result, Biowatch was forced to take legal action to exercise its constitutional right to this information.

This litigation brought in the public interest by Biowatch to compel the Department of Agriculture to provide access to information held by it, relating to permits for the introduction of genetically modified food and crops in South Africa, was held in court in May 2004.

Biowatch originally instituted the action – relying on its constitutional right of access to information – against the Registrar Genetic Resources, Executive Council for Genetically Modified Organisms and the Minister Agriculture (all high-level entities). Monsanto intervened in the court case, on the basis that it needs to protect its commercial confidentiality. The parties were later joined by Stonevilled Pedigreed Seed Company and Delta and Pine Land, both distributors of Monsanto's GE seed.

This is a classic case of where huge multinational interests are protected by the government, at the expense of transparency, democracy and social justice. Not only are these corporations unaccountable, but the government in the courts is now acting to protect their interests.

This case was conducted on the basis for Africa and its people to have the right to make an informed choice about what they grow and eat and not be subjected to inappropriate political pressure to compromise their food security.

In 2009 Constitutional Court Justice Albie Sachs handed down judgment in the Biowatch case, calling the case "a matter of great interest to the legal profession, the general public, and bodies concerned with public interest litigation." Justice Sachs set aside the

costs order awarded against Biowatch in favor of Monsanto and further awarded legal costs in the High Court hearings in favor of Biowatch and against the state. The bench of eleven judges was unanimous in its decision.

The judgment in the Constitutional Court was the culmination of a nine-year legal battle. The case has important implications for South African justice. It means that organizations acting in the public interest will be able to litigate to gain their rights without necessarily expecting the "chilling effect" of costs orders against them. This bodes well for public confidence in the South African legal system.

"This verdict is a victory for Biowatch but also sets an important precedent for all those promoting the public interest", has said Rose Williams, Biowatch's director. "Biowatch activities can now continue without the threat of Monsanto putting an end to them. We wish to thank the many hundreds of individuals and organizations who have supported us during the course of the case, as well as the Legal Resources Centre for representing us so ably."

Katherine's Bio –

A native of Peru, Katherine has been with the IDEX team since 2005 specializing in partnership development, participatory grantmaking and social justice philanthropy. Katherine travels regularly to Guatemala, Mexico and South Africa as part of IDEX site visits and selection of new grantees. Katherine is passionate about bridging global learnings from IDEX Partners with local US-based organizations and supports spaces for exchanges of experiences and information. Katherine's most illuminating experience was volunteering with an indigenous women-led organization in Guatemala for 5 months, supporting their economic development and training programs. Katherine earned a Master's in International Relations from San Francisco State University in 2005.

Connections –

Katherine Zavala, Program Manager
Grassroots Alliances
[International Development Exchange \(IDEX\)](#)
Katherinez at idex.org



Justice Begins with Seeds Conference - Interview #2 with GMO Educator & Presenter Pamm Larry, labelmos.org. Presented by biosafetyalliance.org. May 18 – 19, SF. By Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine.

The purpose of the upcoming conference is to grow the food sovereignty movement by advancing learning and building coalitions between the GMO counter-movement in the US, and other movements thriving to develop sustainable food systems, alleviate climate change through soil practices, defend the rights of indigenous communities, reduce social inequalities and encourage citizen democracy against corporatocracy.

Please see Justice Begins with Seeds Conference Interview #1 with Presenter Katherine Zavala, IDEX. By Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine.

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From labelmos.org -

The Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods Are Unclear

Unlike the strict safety evaluations required for the approval of new drugs, the safety of genetically engineered foods for human consumption is not adequately tested. There have been NO long-term studies conducted on the safety of genetically engineered foods on humans. The issue of GM food safety was first discussed at a meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and biotech representatives in 1990. The "substantial equivalence" concept was proposed in early 1996. The adoption of the concept of substantial equivalence allowed permission to market and sell new foods without any safety or toxicology tests as long as they were not too different in chemical composition to foods already on the market. [See [FDA GRAS proposal](#)] To decide if a modified product is substantially equivalent, the product is tested by the manufacturer for unexpected changes in a limited set of variables such as toxins, nutrients or allergens that are known to be present in the unmodified food. If these tests show no significant difference between the modified and unmodified products, then no further food safety testing is required.

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Interview with Pamm by Willi

What are some of the short-term and long-term effects of eating GMO foods?

We don't know as there have been NO long term human studies on these foods. Animal studies indicate problems, AND both sides do not recognize the respective science of the other side. This is why we want them labeled: to not be part of a long term experiment without our consent.

What is the EPA and FDA track record on GMOs?

They deregulate them with fervor and are ramping-up deregulations even more, despite outcries from the public, organizations and businesses around the country. They listen to industry and not to the people who want GMOs labeled. Over 90% routinely poll in favor of labeling. In terms of protecting organic or non-GMO farmers: they protect the AGBIO industry, not those whose livelihoods depend on food produced from seeds instead of a laboratory.

Tell us about the forces that are fighting to not label GMO foods?

They are the chemical companies that produce the genetically engineered seeds and all the chemicals that the farmer has to buy to use them. They are the large monoculture agribusiness companies who are shoving out small farmers and poisoning us, the soil and our planet. They are the huge grocery stores who are afraid folks will not want to buy GMO foods (and they are often on the boards of directors of the other companies mentioned above.) It is all the forces out there that fight food sovereignty of the people so they can make a profit while ruining the world.

Where is the CA Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act now? What are the next steps?

We handed in almost a million signatures to the state on May 2. We are now building our alliances and endorsements to show all Californians that this is broad based and we will not back down, like every legislative effort has.

Is there a home test to detect GMOs?

Not that I know of.

What about GMO, pets and their food?

We had to focus on ONE thing that could get a crack in the door. That is labeling of the foods on the US market in processed foods and that were genetically engineered themselves. To include all sorts of other things would have made this far more difficult to get voted in. Once this is voted in, I believe legislation will be much easier to get through...and that form of law making is far less expensive and difficult than an initiative.

Is Labelgmo.org doing independent tests on the food?

Not yet.

Can you estimate how many non-GMO foods that are on the shelf at WholeFoods? Rainbow Grocery in SF? At the Grand Ave Weekend Farmers Market?

WholeFoods? Actually I went looking for them awhile back and it wasn't all that easy to find them. Although not all of Whole foods wants labels, some in that chain are very conscious and try to do the right thing. They are transitioning to the Non-GMO Project verified label soon. I am not familiar with Rainbow Grocery. I have never seen soy, cottonseed oil, sugar beets, canola oil, field corn, Hawaiian papaya at any Farmer's Markets. The only crops before that could have been transgenics (which are what this law addresses) are zucchini and crookneck squash. This year, transgenic sweet corn will be on the market. So, in terms of Farmer's Markets- this law basically doesn't even apply to them much (except for the three crops mentioned). Short answer for farmer's markets = 3 are GMO so the rest aren't.

Do organic food producers want to disclose their GMO content?

I don't know as I'm not an organic food producer, but my guess would be no.

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Pamm's Bio –

Pamm Larry is a mother, a grandmother, a former midwife and farmer. She has lived in Chico, California for 34 years, has always been interested in real, healthy food. She has recently become a food advocate and is passionately committed to consumer's rights and is the Original Instigator for the initiative and Northern California Director for Label GMOs.org

Connections –

Pamm Larry

labelgmos.org

plarry at labelgmos.org



Eden Entrepreneurs



AppleSeed Permaculture's New Land Managers Program. Interview with Dyami Nason-Regan and Ethan Roland by Willi Paul, Permaculture Exchange

Are you interested in finding a piece of land to steward, manage, farm on and grow with for the next 1-10 years? Would you like to start an agricultural enterprise or educational farm without the challenges of purchasing land? Appleseed Permaculture is glad to announce our new project, [AppleSeed Land Managers](#).

Essentially, we build symbiotic relationships that put people on the land and generate multiple forms of capital for everyone involved. Land managers will receive compensation for their services, and land owners will achieve returns on their investments in financial, material, living, social, or cultural forms of capital. We are building this match-making service to meet the parallel unmet needs we've encountered among our design clients, our students, and our colleagues in the permaculture and organic farming communities. We invite you to be among the first people who try a new approach to meeting property management and development needs by engaging in the AppleSeed Land Managers process.

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Interview with Dyami and Ethan by Willi

You say that your AppleSeed Land Managers program is “Beyond Property Management.” Explain?

Land Managers was born out of our observation of the social and cultural systems in which we live. We run a thriving permaculture design, consulting and install firm and find that many of our clients face the same challenge: They don't have enough time, energy or financial capital to manifest fully functioning permaculture systems. Our clients do often have living capital in the form of land but lack the intellectual, experiential and temporal capital necessary for its regeneration. At the same time, organic farmers, permaculture designers and eco-social entrepreneurs are struggling to get access to land to grow food, their own experience, and their businesses.

AppleSeed Land Managers is a perfect solution for both parties. It functionally interconnects land and people to offer opportunities for multi-capital exchange and development. Traditional property management is one-sided, and often focuses on fossil-fuel-consuming "aesthetics", or at best functional maintenance. Land Managers offers a completely different paradigm: Land owners and land managers collaborate with each other to regenerate their local ecosystems and communities.

AppleSeed Land Managers don't just "manage land". They build multiple forms of capital by creating right livelihoods based on integrated permaculture design strategies. For example, two positions we're currently looking to fill are a Farmer and Farm Educator at a private boys school. The Farmer will develop a diversified organic farm that provides 100% of the fruits, vegetables and nuts for the school and sell value-added niche crops to the local market. The Farm Educator will teach hundreds of students how to understand their ecosystem, integrate water and animals into the landscape and grow their own food. Both positions are full-time salaried positions with benefits. It's a win-win-win for the land managers, the school and the environment.

What lessons have you learned to date as you “match land owners with land managers?”

This is a brand new program so the learning has just begun. One thing that we're clear on is that we will only work with Land Managers and Land Owners who have committed to ongoing personal development and clear communication. We've also learned that although there are other programs working in the same realm as we are (Farm link, some land trusts, etc.), our interviews with potential land managers indicate they are not yet particularly enticing or effective.

Is this a capitalist program?

We envision a world of abundance, where earth-connected bioregional democracies empower all peoples to thrive and evolve to their fullest potential.

And, we recognize that our current oppressive financial-capital-based system makes this difficult to achieve.

We believe that we're in a time of rapid and radical change where resilient strategies are required to navigate the transitions – AppleSeed Land Managers is an excellent example of one such strategy.

It functions well in the current world by providing opportunities for:

- Entrepreneurial training
- Financial capital flows & right livelihood
- Productive use of un-used land

While simultaneously preparing both Land Managers and Land Owners for a world of abundance by:

- Developing thriving permaculture landscapes
- Re-skilling forgetful hands and re-membering ourselves as co-creative participants in the ecosystem
- Facilitating a transition to a multi-capital economy based on living capital

What alternative economic policies and programs do you partake in?

Through work with the Financial Permaculture Institute, AppleSeed Permaculture co-developed the 8 Forms of Capital to expand and transform the current economic paradigm towards permaculture. This lens supports us to understand our professional and personal interactions as exchanges not commonly valued though our current economic system. We're even pioneering non-financial-capital legal agreements with our clients using the model.

We are eco-social investors, investing financial, intellectual, experiential and temporal capital into viable enterprises around the world. Recent projects we've invested in include Sapsquatch Maple Syrup, Gaia University International, the Carbon Farming Course and the Apios Institute. We're also deeply supportive of our nascent local complementary currency, the [Hudson Valley Current](#).

How is the AppleSeed Land Managers program an example of whole-systems thinking?

See our response to the first question.

Having worked in corp. sustainability, civil land engineering and other ecology-related endeavors myself, can you explain how you might use tools from these "precursor fields" with the advantages in regenerative design?

We build integrated project teams including firms from the professional design and corporate worlds. Our recent work with the [Regenesi Group](#) has helped us to understand the value of deep collaboration in quickly multiplying regenerative strategies. Rather than attempting to push forward as a lone wolf, we're getting much further by humbly co-learning with the excellent and open-minded folks in from many different professions.

What is working well at Gaia University these days? What could be improved?

[Gaia University](#) just hosted its first online orientation with participants from all over the world (including embattled places like Syria) bringing the brilliant integrative tool-box of Gaia University to folks who otherwise might not be able to attend. Gaia University is also launching an upgraded Permaculture Diploma program providing opportunities for right livelihood and ongoing education after the Permaculture Design Course.

Gaia University multiplies its impact with every new person that engages – What would improve Gaia U right now is more people committing to build their eco-social design capacities by signing up for one of the programs!

How would you explain "carbon farming" to a 7 year old?

Many of the things people do every day harm the environment. For example, driving cars or buying food from the grocery stores and turning on the lights in a house all release pollution into the sky. Carbon farming takes harmful pollution out of the air and puts it into the soil, where the plants can eat it and grow healthy delicious food for us to eat.

Please visit [permaculture exchange](#) and tell me what you see?

A great idea under development; excellent alignment with AppleSeed Land Managers. Can we open a Northeast USA mirror?

Do you think that ecosystems exist more in our minds than on our lands?

Are these two things separate?

What is sacred to you?

All the beautiful ones, and all the ugly ones, and all the bright-eyed ones, and all the exhausted ones, that sing their song as best they can in the middle of this crazy world. We bless them all as equally sacred, while grieving the misfortunes and atrocities that humans have chosen and humbly creating small offerings of great beauty as each sun rises and sets.

For those of us striving to visit, what characterizes Eden? Tell us about the symbols and mythology of your Eden?

Ripe persimmons and pawpaw ice cream. A swim in a stream-fed pond in June in the foothills of the mountains. The melody and harmony of our family singing to greet the day.

Our symbols are the sun, the moon, the rain, the seeds... Our Eden is not far from where we stand now. A mass shift in values and practices will allow for Eden to manifest right here on our earth.

Not long ago we traveled to Ireland, seeking our ancestral soil and the seeds that grew in it. Our ancestors, the best of them and the worst of them, the Jews and the Catholics, the Greeks and the Romanians and the English and the Belarussians, the musicians and the cigar-rollers and the rubber factory machinists and the pickle-making-grocery-store-owners and the lawyers and the fisherman, grew and loved and lived and died right through the thick brambly mess of the development of the so-called “western” so-called “culture” that even now paves over forests and exterminates whole languages and squashes the songs of indigenous peoples wherever they struggle to survive on the planet.

Our ancestors lived at the same time Dersu Uzala trapped sable over the Sihote-Alin, and at the same time Kristen Lavransdatter defied the laws of sin and sanctity in the name of love and truth, and at the same time hummingbird boy tried to sing the dismembered pieces of his lover’s body back together, which also happened to be the same time a Warranowankong man carved a beautiful face into the trunk of a sycamore tree down the stream from our house, the legacy of which lives today in the Dutch name for the native offering, “Mombaccus”. **From these myth-strings, and 20,000 more, we weave our Eden.**

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Bios –

Dyami Nason-Regan is a co-owner and lead designer at AppleSeed Permaculture LLC, where she guides the master planning process for regenerative developments and edible landscapes in the Delaware, Hudson, and Housatonic river valleys. In the spring and fall Dyami manages all installation projects at AppleSeed, transforming degraded and underused lawns, farms, and forests into food-producing gardens of Eden. She holds an MS in Eco-Social Design from Gaia University, and a BS in nature-based mentoring from Empire State College. Her foundation as a permaculture designer developed through 7 years of nature awareness education in the lineage of Tom Brown Jr., Jon Young, and the global cultural mentoring community. She continues to support the work of Wild Earth and the Vermont Wilderness School, leading the teen outdoor immersion for the annual Art of Mentoring program in Vermont. At home, Dyami manages her family’s small scale livestock and excels as a kitchen alchemist – boldly transforming the local, seasonal, and wild foods into delicious and holistic meals. She models earth-care through self-care, remaining well-rested, well-fed, and joyful through all of her work and professional achievements. Overall, Dyami is a passionate regenerative designer who supports the people around her to build deep relationships with their local communities and ecosystems.

Ethan Roland is an international expert on sustainable agriculture and permaculture design based in the Hudson River Valley. He studies and practices permaculture in all corners of the world, from the wild apple forests of Kazakhstan to the tropical monsoon ecosystems of Thailand. Ethan builds resilience for local and global communities through his design firm AppleSeed Permaculture LLC, organizes the Carbon Farming Course, and is redesigning the field of higher education through Gaia University - The University for World Changers. Along with seats on the board of the Apios Institute for Regenerative Perennial Agriculture and the Mindful Living Initiative, he holds an M.S. in Eco-Social Design and blogs his research on financial permaculture, ecosystem investing, and carbon farming at appleseedpermaculture.com’s blog.

Connections –

Dyami Nason-Regan and Ethan Roland
design at appleseedpermaculture.com
<http://appleseedpermaculture.com>



A Regenerative Ag Incubator for Veterans – Interview with Deston Denniston, Vets Cafe Program (Pac NW) by Willi Paul, permaculture exchange

“As Soldiers become Civilian Veterans, any permanent and/or treatable injuries or illnesses are classified by indelicate bureaucratic processes by the Armed Services medical staff, reinterpreted by VA doctors into their own bureaucratic forms, and then often returned to the soldier come vet with no recognizance of the veterans understanding of the diagnosis, let alone long term care and treatment priorities they face. PTSD or TBI account for a staggering 25% of all veterans claiming disability. Vets typically suffer one or the other severely, though seldom both concurrently and severely.”

Disabled Veteran's Challenges in Transition toward Higher Education by Deston Denniston

“The centerpiece of the Vets Cafe Program will be the creation of a functional farm, modeled after the finest regionally and climate appropriate examples of mixed perennial and animal production. As the name suggests, the program will host seasonal themed fund-raising feasts, “Vets Cafes”, as celebration of all things farm, from pasture to plate. In addition to CSA and Direct Marketing, accents of business operations that create regional draw in the manner of retreat and education centers will quietly promote the real Mission of the program, which is to provide veterans with skills in conservation, agriculture, forestry, ecology and business which will employ them in the creation of food security, resource conservation and ecological restoration.”

RFP: Seeking Washington State Host Site for Veterans Entrepreneurial Training & Studies in Conservation, Agriculture, Forestry and Ecology by Deston Denniston

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Interview with Deston by Willi

Why is college a “foreign environment” for Vets?

People, like plants, are inclined to certain niches. Plant branches and roots, just like peoples habits, can be "pruned" or otherwise encouraged to fit a shape. Just fitting in a space isn't the same as having a niche though. Some plants- and people- prune well. The training that vets go through, even if we never see combat, changes our shape forever. That doesn't mean that we all fit into a career military niche- if that was the case there would be a lot more re-enlistment and no forced service extensions. Being suited to a niche is different than being pruned to fit in a place. The 'pruning' of military service is extensive and, just like with plants, some

can take it hard as it comes- grapes, or comfrey- and some don't take to it well at all- I'm thinking of a marjoram I nearly lost after cutting it back; the existing growth nearly died and it was 3 years before it grew more than a few leaves.

After a traumatic injury, a huge amount of the body's and the mind's energy and resources get tied up in the recovery process. It can be months before a trauma survivor can absorb new and unfamiliar information- I mean have it stick and stay, to 'learn'. If the survivor doesn't have adequate supports, things become foreign to that individual; school, counsel, friends, family. This is alienation. Obviously this doesn't happen to every vet. But we should be aware that it happens too often. As an educator I need tools in my kit, skills with my words and hands and openness in my heart to see and check in and be present with those at risk of alienation.

When a soldier who has been wounded by a roadside bomb, or watched a buddy die, or a person who has lived in intense danger for 3 or 5 years, is dropped into a seat next to a person 10 years younger and who has no shared context with the vet save for being in a 120 chair ENG101 classroom, it's awkward. Some vets get annoyed. Some vets feel left behind, like his or her youth was lost. Others decide it's too late in their career for college, drop out and re-up for another brain jarring enlistment... It's very difficult to make new social connections when one is carrying stories that will never be resolved, living with pain and scars that prevent normal, comfortable movement, and having memories of people where there are none now. Not knowing whether that young person next to them is indifferent, upset by the history the vet carries, or is supportive.... It's a lot of noise to check in over. Between training and trauma, vets are at a high risk of alienation and drop out in today's colleges.

That's why vets groups are taking off. College can challenge vets in unique ways that are not common to their non-vet classmates. I have [a paper on that linked here](#). Because of these challenges many vets are becoming proactive about connecting. I have vet pals I go talk conservation and ecology with on a regular basis. We run chainsaws, explore conservation projects, check-out trees. We check in. It's not therapy, and shouldn't need to be. And that's why veterans clubs are springing up at campuses around the country. People take care of their people. That's one of the Permaculture Ethics, right?

You make it seem that all vets are automatically troubled – even ill. Your response?

That's not my intent. Not all vets go to combat, not all are injured. I didn't go to combat, I was injured in a training accident. Many soldiers operate in support functions far from engagement. Most of the combat vets, unless you catch them in a rough spot, you'd never know they were affected. However, it's important to understand that as many as 1 in 4 vets returning from OEF/OIF have suffered TBI, traumatic brain injury, and that as many as half of those go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. 50% or more have ratable PTSD as a result of service related trauma- being shot, watching people be shot, and other horrible experiences. That's straight from the National Council of Disability's 2009 report on the DOD/VA's response to wounded service personnel. They've been to war. Hell on Earth.

So perhaps half, even up to 70% of the vets returning from combat operations are scarred, emotionally, cognitively and/or physically when they return. Yet only 20% of them start out knowing they were traumatized at all, as many 'sucked it up' and 'drove on' when duty rallied them, and they went without proper care. It's also important to understand the trauma associated with witnessing violence, or gruesome accidents, has only recently been understood to be disabling. So not every vet is scarred this way, but many who are will face challenges without a record of the injury or incident that led to the challenges they face, much less an understanding of how to face that challenge. That is something educators need to get a handle on if they want to be successful with this population of students. It's the question of the decade for educators, permaculture teachers included.

Do you think that Vets should have their own college in order to treat their wounds and nurture them?

Not at all. Permaculturists know that many plants do better in a Guild. The same goes for any person. VETS_CAFE is short for "Veterans Entrepreneurial Training and Studies in Conservation, Agriculture, Forestry and Ecology". The program focuses these studies through a core that allows vets to build a network of peers within their existing collegiate environment and mentors from the community so that they may feel support vital to success. As they draw on this support, and become available to offer support to others they will also be transitioning into their new civilian context, becoming mentor and employers. Vets who have come through and are now valuable members of our communities are important role models for returning vets. It gives them direction and hope as they face their challenges.

And we have such fine veteran mentors right here in our Permaculture cadre who are great examples of how to grow through this challenge. Permaculturists who are not vets also powerfully demonstrate the 'care for the people' ethic, and will understand that

this is an opportunity for a wonderful difference to be made in the quality of life for not just the vets, but the communities they will grow to serve. We'll have a functional farm, and one that facilitates transition from the military to a career in these fields. But it will be a farm, not as an institution, or non-profit. It will be a place for vets to gather and share work, picnics, etc., and it will be designed by the vets towards their visions and goals using permaculture's design principles, methods.

How can vets integrate into “normal college life?”

I recall an art class I took years ago. I was really struggling with the idea of an assignment being interpretive. This is also when I was still very close to the head wound, just 2-3 years after it. I thought “How could a task list be interpretive- either the work is done or its not!”- so the open ended nature of an interpretive assignment really confused me. My teacher, Dr. Vivian Varney was a old timer who I'm sure had worked with more than one shell shocked student (and a few hard-asses) in her tenure at Centralia College, and she was- is to this day- a quick intellectual whip. She told me “theory without practice is no practice at all”, and that this assignment was to practice putting paint on 2 or more canvases a day, and to qualify and quantify the affect of the brush size stiffness, pressure, and angle and paint viscosity and thickness on those canvases. No worry about what I painted, it could be lines or shapes or figures or buildings, as long as I qualify and quantify the application of media. I could understand that. I now had clear objectives, goals.

Many vets I speak to who don't have a team feel lost, not because they can't think for themselves, but because without the team it's hard to track a mission's success. It's hard to relax and just be groovy when the mission is out of focus; It can feel dangerous, make a person anxious, edgy. It can also be a tense but friendly competition- striving to give better support, supplies and resources than was standard just last month. Always striving for improvement. Knowing that my goals were clear and that the team- my arts class- would be able to use this stuff I was learning and that we would share the techniques we played with and together produce better and more interesting visual arts- this motivated me.

Having teachers who understood that was priceless in keeping me in school.

Why is the agriculture sector a wise place for Vets to study?

Before I say why it's wise, I'll say why its business savvy. There are perennial polycrop systems pulling down \$60, \$70, \$80K (USD) an acre. Ohio State University is pushing the trend to \$90k annually. These are intensive 1-2 acre projects, and in this kind of polycrop horticulture that's about all one person can manage. A vet with a home loan can afford 1-2 acres in the Peri-urban edges, and go to work; 20k is a good first year, but each year as trees come on line and the systems gains complexity, 10-15% or more produce comes on line. The property can pay itself off in 5-7 years, and then kids education and retirement funding- and occupation- happen right from the lot. So that's the savvy.

As for wisdom, I'm at risk of being misinterpreted if I speak of Ag without some disclaimers here. First, using the word permaculture in colleges and in reference to academic study is only just now being taken seriously in the USA. Agriculture has been a subject of academic study for 150 or more years, at least since the 1862 Morrill Act created the Land Grant University System. Many permaculturists and a wide cast of peers from other professions now understand that 'Agriculture' is in many ways party to the global destabilization of arable soils, causing erosion, desertification, and other mass wasting. Permaculture, as opposed to Ag, actually uses existing ecological and biological integrity to create solutions, rather than throwing technology and fossil fuels at it, which is the pattern of 'problem solving' agriculture has offered for 15 decades, if not 15 millennia.

Few things are wiser than placing the design tools of permaculture in the hands of vets who will shovel ditches by hand for 10 hours a day in any weather. This is how the first wadi type bioswales I ever encountered were built- by the Civilian Conservation Corps. In the SW there are desert oases which are now often mistaken for natural landforms; in fact they were dug by Spanish American War Veterans who entered the corps in the early 1930's; about 25,000 vets were among the first signons for this amazing model of mutual aid. Many state and federal parks are graced with stone and timber work displayed proudly to this day. Those were the transition camps for many vets, where they took their discipline and applied it to learning skills that could serve them in civil employment, whether construction, engineering, or forestry, and where they did good for their communities by working on these projects and themselves.

The CCC didn't teach the holistic design approach we have in Permaculture- in the end, the wadis and natural building and so on that those vets demonstrated such skill in building were the result of following excellent technical plans with excellent materials and methods, but without the greater sense of integrated design found in the permaculture method. Permaculture design has holistic

breadth, and it's time to put that knowledge in the same hands as are motivated to team work that shovel line. Give these folks honest work and in 70 years they will be as well known and respected as the CCC. And they might turn around the trend of farm land losses in this country at the time when we need it more than ever.

In terms of the Vets Cafe, what challenges do you see when you make a “functional farm?”

By functional I mean it will be financially sound, with operations driven income. A lot of projects where vets or people with physical disabilities are trained in some capacity are largely driven by grants and foundation funds. This model is inadequate for training vets to farm; they have to see a farm that makes ends meet in a manner that informs their career. It would be faithless to operate the farm on grants while telling the vets we were teaching them for profit entrepreneurial career skills.

I suspect all our challenges will be quite similar to anyone else who starts a farm. Working the soils into shape suitable for food foresting, keeping animal/pasture production ratios balanced, marketing, running fences, getting guilds dialed in, attracting a solid customer base. Those are expected program challenges- bringing a cadre through a program which gives them these skills is my challenge. The rest I trust to being present, and have faith.

How do you propose to shift the Cafe participants from a war mythos to a farming mythos?

I don't. I only intend to give them tools that may help them examine the stories they tell and that they listen to, and see what happens. My understanding of permaculture design suggests that self organizing communities, rather than a designer mandated ones, are more resilient and productive. I trust that. I feel that if this freedom is allowed, the myths will come of their own accord. And I'm not sure that farming mythos are the way to go- perhaps gardening is more my style. Jung ruminated that Myth is to culture what dream is to individual; I can't make myself dream a certain thing a certain way. Dreams just come through me. They are me sitting apart from me, looking in and suggesting from a distance that things may or may not understand- or even need. But I trust that if I live my values, that the myths that come will reflect the sense of freedom intrinsic in living those values.

What program sponsors and funding do you have currently?

We're currently having discussions with two non profits, a land trust, a state agency, and an LLC; so far nothing is hard set, we're doing the dance. One of the potential partners, a non-profit business planning outfit for people with disabilities, calls it “the flirtation stage”; it's very early in the talks, just a few months. We have a long way to go before we are all on the same page, but I think we have had a first go round that is very promising.

We have begun looking at land lease options with PCC Farmland Trust (PCC). I suspect that the site location will inform much in the way of who our partners are and how we will collaborate when this all comes together; I'm putting a sizable chunk of my own money up for infrastructure and looking for the right partners to capitalize up to another @\$450K in lease and infrastructure options. I have enough to start a small bit with a few pigs, paddock them through some swale building and pond gleying, establish a few acres of trees, etc.. It would be nice to go large, eventually, but that's a beauty of the permaculture method: if one understands scales of design, one can make do in a very small parcel. I can only manage 1-2 acres of fully optimized acreage; We'll need an army of vets to run the 40 acres we will likely lease.

PCC has land close to the Orting Soldiers home, which had its own operational farm for 50 years, from the 1880's to 1934. We may step up to provide the vets at the modern Soldiers Home a chance to spend time on our farm working with newly returned vets, and to put fresh, local produce on the plates at the home if all goes well. From there, Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) is right around the corner and we may set up CSA sales to soldiers. The opportunities seem quite promising for such moves at this point; JBLM has a strong commitment to sustainable land use and health oriented supports for soldiers. Who knows how many may explore the proverbial swords to plowshares shift, but we'd have to find other things to make than plows as I'm a no-till advocate myself.

You speak about “when college counselors make assumptions,” about Vets. What are you talking about here?

See [the piece](#) I wrote about challenges vets face in institutions of higher learning that discusses this objectively. I'd like to offer a personal story to show where that article came from.

In the 23 years since I received an in-service head injury we've learned so much about the brain. It was known that I had a closed wound head injury (now called a traumatic brain injury, or TBI), but the doctors at the time (1989) didn't understand the long term symptomatology the same way they do today. I was observed for a couple of hours to a day after being knocked unconscious – I don't know how long or what by, it's not recorded in the "official" record. My memory of it is weak at best. The record contains one note stating "head injury with no sequel".

Months later I had a complete degenerative psychotic episode. The doctors had no peer reviewed record that informed their work about the long term affects of concussive injury to the head and spine. They may not have had access to my record- I certainly haven't had any success in getting portions of it. What is of record is that my numb feet were diagnosed as tarsal tunnel and my erratic behavior was diagnosed with a psychological disorder- bipolar syndrome- and treated according to their best knowledge at the time. The specific treatment I was given, phenothiazine medications, are now contraindicated for TBI by all associated professions. It failed miserably, hospitalizing me for 3 months, as they didn't understand what was really happening. It was traumatic to say the least, but that's forgivable: they didn't understand the interactions. I was adrift in uncharted waters. The VA now understands TBI well enough to redress what happened, yet haven't despite the evidence compiled on my behalf by their own medical staff; that's dissolution; it breaks with their mission and policy. Vets wrestle with this every day, and it is regrettable.

In 2004 I was reviewing my military medical record for a claim update with a doctor, and he asked me if, while I was in the service, I had ever had trouble sleeping, or waking up, or if I had ever visited the doctor for cold or flu like symptoms without congestion or fever- just runny nose and headaches, wet waxy ears, and excess saliva. I showed him the medical reports- I was treated for a flu a few weeks after my head injury, and the doctor noted it was a post nasal drip, no congestion, no fever, no infection. I also had several insomniac episodes and earaches without infection during that time. He told me he it was probable that I suffered a moderate to severe head injury.

My counselors, who did not regard my doctors updates, told me I would not be able to complete undergrad studies without support for Bipolar Disorder, that a Masters Degree was right out and they counseled that the VA should not support it. Despite this I earned an MSA from Washington State, graduating Magna Cum Laude.

Recently a piece of corroborating evidence arrived- I have optical nerve scarring consistent with frontal lobe head injuries. I won't go blind, but it interferes with vision. To this day I have numb feet, but only last year was it diagnosed by VA clinicians as a degenerative neuropathology resultant from an impact and not tarsal tunnel, a bone deformity. My chiropractor knew that a decade ago. Despite all this, 23 years later, my VA medical benefits claim is still in appeal, my VA counselors insist I have BP and my medical team all hold their hands up and say "Hey, it's not our fault they don't listen." The VA Pharmacy won't fill out my VA Doctors prescriptions for vitamin supplements, omega 3's, B complex, D, etc. which are known to benefit neuropathological injury and disease. But I can get opiates for the pain for free from the VA. I won't take the opiates, but one VA counselor told me to take the opiates and sell them so I could buy supplements. So this is VA Health care, and colleges need to be aware that their students' success is jeopardized by this leviathan inflexible process.

Tens of thousands of vets are in waiting cues averaging 3-5 years to attain disability benefits. School counselors often assume the VA is taking care of these folks, when the fact is that the VA is underfunded and understaffed, and under pressure to cut costs like all other federal departments. Veterans are the end cycle victims. And the vets may rarely tell school counselors about the troubles with the VA- from our perspective it often only muddies the waters and draws out the frustrating processes. This needs to be resolved before attrition will decrease.

Assumptions that college counselors- and professors- make are often well grounded in best knowledge of the time; we can't fault history for what it clearly did not know. Counselors and Teachers who say to a student "You have these issues so will be treated this way" are suspect at best and inadequate to the task. The ones who say to a student, and vets in particular "I can see some of the structure here isn't working for you, how can we work together towards your success?"- Those are the teachers and counselors that I developed respect and fondness for and that other students will want to emulate. I know I strive to do this. A good counselor doesn't see a diagnosis or a troubled student, but a chance to expand their ability to connect, respectfully, as I am useful, one heart and mind at a time.

This is the kind of college counselor training I hope will become more prevalent as OEF/OIF vets return, and it's central to our Vets Cafe program. As tens of thousands of vets survive traumatic injuries which may be poorly recorded or even not at all present on the vets record, its time to stop treating disabilities and start serving people. The most dehumanizing thing a doctor can do is treat a

person like an illness while ignoring or even obstructing the person seeking wellness who is in front of them. Vets files, more than just about any other sort of medical records, contain bad information that leads to inaccurate or even wildly incorrect assumptions, and the way to avoid this is to connect with a person, vet or otherwise, as a human who has needs, challenges and gifts – it's a great equalizer, since we all fit that description.

How can permaculture break the cycle of the Vet drop-out? Does this start at the soil itself?

Nationally Veteran drop-out rates are 2-3 times higher than rates of their non-military peers. There are 2.5 million unemployed vets. Some colleges have reported 70% drop out rates among vets. Much of this is likely a result of the undiagnosed and untreated TBI and PTSD issues I mentioned before. Veteran support groups go a long way to mitigating this. Just getting these folks together for weekend ball games and pizza has a huge positive impact; from there they self organize. By this point it's not just training, its survival; as vets talk with other trusted members of their peer group about their experiences in college, they get support, and direction. They realize they are not alone.

Let's take a look what the turnover of the "don't ask don't tell" policy illuminates about vets. The homosexual and the heterosexual standing side by side in a mission are mission oriented. So even if there are feelings of awkwardness in that side by side mission oriented experience, when you penalize one group because of their self identity, both will suffer in their ability to achieve the mission. And that means less chance for either to get home safely. It seems to me that straight soldiers I know supported gay soldiers with resolve, and wanted them to be comfortable and able to perform their jobs without fear, because doing otherwise jeopardized the mission. It took a long time to affect that change, because the military is not democratic. Still, this change appeared to me to be soldier driven, and command resisted over reasons I can't understand. I was in the service before 'Don't Ask Don't Tell', and this mutualism did not exist at all. It's hard for a tail to wag the dog, but this time it did. I feel it's a great and proud moment- if 20+ years later than needed.

This points to something really wonderful I think. As we look at these vets who are dis-integrating as they enter academic pursuits, we can say that it is likely that this occurs when vets are not in a guild- which is what it is to not have a team- and when they are not grounded firmly by a mission. So the roots have to be established before the plant or the person can thrive, and the thriving is best done in a companion planting where mutual aid occurs between members. And these soldiers are understanding that functional assembly is not about a monocropped perspective, but a diverse and culturally rich mutualism. This seems exactly like permaculture to me.

One of my permaculture teachers, Skeeter Pilarski, once noted that I was kind of like a plant that could stand the harshest soils and climate, but like that plant I had to have some wicked defense mechanisms that made it hard to get close to me -plants in that environment don't depend on density, but ferocity, to avoid being eaten. I started planting lots of gooseberry after that. Despite its thorns and ability to manage in marginal soils, it is known for the sweetness of its fruit and the uniqueness of its foliage. So I built a guild with the gooseberries, using Siberian pea vines, marjoram, garlic, garden giant mushrooms, yarrow, mullein, marjoram, sage. A gooseberry can do OK in pretty messed up soil. But it doesn't have live in messed up soil. And given the chance, and some good ground, vets will organize into functional guilds- not necessarily vet exclusive ones, though a primary function of the Vets Cafe is veteran's mutual aid. And in attaining that, veterans and their communities will do all do better.

Are there many vets that now distance themselves from their war-making country and from other vets? Is there a built-in resistance to celebrate this killing ethic?

Most veterans didn't sign up with a desire to go to war. They signed up because they came from families or communities where there was limited security, what we call 'limits to upward mobility' though that's a misnomer, as "upward mobility" is a way to ignore broken cultural patterns that leading to a desire for escape. Our society is full of misleading memes on the sources and use of wealth, and that is just as true in the green sustainable job markets as it is in MonsantoLand and the Cocapopolapse. It's like Salvador Disney, a trusted name in eugenics, painted this something "green" so it must be "sustainable". So these memes are tired. Prevailing cultural support for joining the Service is based on misguided notions of improving one's personal and familial circumstance, not an urge to kill or celebration of death.

I don't know any vets who celebrate a killing ethic. It is my considered observation that this kind of perspective about veterans is one that is groomed by sensationalist media coverage on one hand and lack of connection to veteran communities on the other; Neither

of these items, however, can be faulted against PlanetShifter Willi Paul, who dogged me for 6 months about giving this interview. Thank you for your persistence and dedication to a greater good. I get your message, Willi. In Service. Thank you.

Memorial and Veterans Day are marked with sorrow and honoring. These are memorials, they are time to reflect. The fly overs made by antique aircraft are highly symbolic gestures, and are not celebrations. They are acknowledgements of what has been lost, and a reckoning of what we actually gained for our loss, which many times was not what we had hoped or wanted. The fly overs are a remembrance for some of the salvation combat vets felt as they were airlifted from firefights or saved just in time by bombardiers who took out sappers or advancing enemy lines. It's not a celebration of the death of those on the other sides of the line, but reckoning that the cost of going was great, and the cost of not going is unknown. Acknowledging it makes it less likely to happen again, and forgetting it happened makes it more likely.

Until they were drafted, Vietnam did not exist in the US classroom or televisions. These drafted kids hadn't even heard of Vietnam in 1963 and '64, nor would they understand that large monkeys, and perhaps orangutan and mystical looking deer lived there and they wrote home of cavemen like rock-apes and unicorns. It was a very different time. They were less knowledgeable about the world in many ways than a 10 year old today, who has heard of Vietnam, may know where it is on a map, and that it has a very delicious and unique cuisine. They might even know that there are no unicorns in Vietnam. It was a very different world in 1966.

These men and women, at the time barely more than kids, were drafted, for almost none of them wanted to go to Vietnam. They were plucked before they were ripe, and yet had all expectation it was the right thing to do, straight from the farm, or conservatory, or physics lab, and sent to Hell. They were wounded despite not wanting to be there, had to kill people they had no personal beef with, and they returned after that horrible experience to harassment and neglect. Yet without Vietnam vets, those who shunned them would never have had the pleasure of sitting down to a bowl of vegetarian Pho or amazing Lemongrass soup. The work we do with bamboo and aquaculture would be much less advanced.

Vietnam Veterans, who were spat on, rebuked en mass after being drafted, had every right as a group of peers to say "fuck all" to government and society. The draft was basically a conscription, practically a kidnapping. They were made to go to war, and then crapped on when they returned. Why we ended up with so few Rambo style vigilantes, but instead got a series of increasing less relevant movies is something sociologists should be asking. It's very interesting that so much more ill could have come of Vietnam and did not.

The fairly stable international relations we have now with SE Asia are largely the work of concerned and compassionate vets. Those protesting the war and spitting on vets had less to do with reparations and healing relations made in the wake of political and trade driven invasion agendas that usurped a rational strategic and national defense action. The solid peacemaking work done in the 80's and 90's was done by veterans like Danaan Parry, a US Coast Guard pilot who started PeaceTrees Vietnam, and went to work removing thousands of mines from the Vietnamese countryside while planting trees to stabilize soil and provide food, textiles and habitat.

Vietnam Vets have turned out en mass to support today's returning soldiers even while they question the methods and even the legitimacy of the wars which our current administration is slowly but at long last drawing down. My hat is off to these guys, especially the ones who look into the dark and remain alighted- were getting support from Vietnam Vets with practices of loving kindness meditation, conservation education backgrounds, permaculture advocates, community pea patch coordinators, off grid lifestyle enthusiasts and so on. And I'm proud of the 500 leather clad bikers who ride to the Capitol of the State of Washington a few times a year, joining Toys for Tots in the winter and on Memorial Day coming in for the Thunder Run. Their unswerving devotion to service in on behalf of today's returning Veterans is not something they owe anyone. It's a straight up gift economy. They are still showing up, despite every right to say "fuck it" and giving more and better than they got. That's generosity. And so the Older vets step in to care for these new vets. They make sure to not let a "fuck off" attitude become a habit, and then a problem. So the new growth is sheltered and nurtured by the old growth. Its succession planning. It's what the Vets Cafe project is about at the core as well.

You asked " **Are there many vets that now distance themselves from their war-making country and from other vets?** " The safest place to be when facing violence is close to it. Holding it tenderly. A step back and that fist has room to move and strike you, a step further and there's room for a gun, further than that, artillery, and further than that its missiles and atom bombs. There is no safety in distancing oneself from such impulses to conflict. We must stay close. When we are face to face, eye to eye, we may disagree, but disagreeing civilly is a better hell than killing each other and the planet besides. So vets learn to stay close. We write our senators,

we organize, we advocate for health-care and education supports for vets and dependents, constantly support reason and diplomacy. If we fail in that more will perish. And we mourn the loss of lives- all of us for our peers and many, I among them, mourn all those who died, combatant or civilian, regardless of nation or belief. A warrior is not bellicose and does not celebrate death. I also mourn the wasted soils; this hit me hard when I look at footage of combat zones, the frightening loss of ecosystems integrity. To me, personally, these are also relevant sorrows.

Are there groups with similar illnesses like the Vets? What other groups have given you insight into the Veterans condition and challenges?

I don't know if I would refer to it as illness, but I think I understand you. I grew up near the Chehalis Tribal Lands, in SW Washington and spent many summers there with friends from the tribe. Most people are at least vaguely aware of the cultural and class divides between First Peoples Tribes and contemporary (non-tribal) culture. As a social group, the Chehalis are a bit unique, and in many ways not representative of national tribal norms, but then, no tribe can be formed against other tribes: they are all sovereign peoples, with hundreds of different languages, customs, identities.

When these diverse peoples were intentionally set upon with small pox, tuberculosis, and cavalry units, some survivors saw 80-90% of their tribal populations die. Old men, women and children had to go to reservation, fight or run, regardless of the context of their culture- some were warrior-hunter tribes, like the Sioux of the Dakotas, and so challenged the US cavalry often and sometimes quite effectively. Some were agrarian gatherers, like the Kalapuya of Oregon's Willamette valley. They were often rounded up, shipped to lousy reservations where a rock-flea would starve but tuberculosis had an edge. The wounding of these sovereign people's social order and cultural being is one that continued, and in many ways continues to this day. Witnesses to genocide, the cultural fragmentation of forced relocation, the constant state of alert and danger, not to forget racial slurs, employment and collegiate prejudice, all of which lead to PTSD that became intergenerational by extension of familial and cultural dysfunction... this was done by the same Army I served with. The longer I am a veteran the more complex it becomes, and the more I am aware that my choices of service, mission and team are important if I am to experience a sense of integrity in my work.

So coming to know some of the history of my friends with the Chehalis tribe, I also came into contact with the story of how they became cousins to the Kalama, a Hawaiian native family, through marriages in the Nisqually Tribe. I learned about the high amount of prejudice that was shown towards Native Americans and Pacific Islanders by the US Military Command during Korea, Vietnam, and even later. These tribal members were drafted, told they would be national heroes, restoring tribal honor and so on. Then they were given the most horrifying missions... Their tribal status seems to have been leveraged by white commanders who figured that if these tribal boys died, it was somehow better than a white boy from the burbs. I suspect that African Americans had the same kind of job placement 'opportunities' in Vietnam. Its one of the things that we got but didn't plan for, a thing that we 'won' in the Civil War, and didn't want, and are still trying to redress 150 years later.

So I learned a lot, not only about how to cook salmon, and the history of peoples I had not known, but deeper stuff, about how despite all this potential for being broken, a family can live, even thrive, and have a healthy and wonderful and loving home. Quite a few of these local tribal and Hawaiian vets are as stout and rock firm as humans come. Coming from a home that was not that way, and knowing that they did also, it has been a profound experience to watch and learn and be nourished by their patience, forgivingness, and unconditional love. My uncles and aunties made constant the choice to care for what they could while they could, whether their children, their homes, their gardens, and so on, because it was the best way to face the challenges- to make important choices with a deep counsel of check in and -not always sweet, and quite often difficult- expressions of love. Permaculture is practical. Larry Korn pointed out to me that Bill Mollison didn't mention Love once in the Designer's Manual. Don't rely on one element for all needed functions is discussed. Words to the wise. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these things, Willi, it's been a pleasure.

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Deston's Bio -

Deston has lived and worked on several small family farms on the west coast and WOOFed in Australia. Serving small farm projects as Principal of Abundance Consulting for 12 years, he earned his Master's Degree in Agriculture from Washington State University('07), and a BA/BS in Ecological Science and Design from The Evergreen State College('96). He took his PDC in 2003 with Brock Doleman and Penny Livingston, and his Permaculture Teacher's Training in 2004 with Jude Hobbs and Tom Ward. He served in

the US Army from '88-'90. He is currently working with partnering groups to develop the Vets Cafe educational program for Veterans interested in Conservation, Agriculture, Forestry and Ecology. To support or inquire about how to get involved in the Vets Cafe, please contact him by email.

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Transition Man. Interview with John Steere, Environmental Alchemist / Planner by Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine

“The 37’ goodwill wind mill swirls, scoops and directs concentrated dirty air from the East Bay Tribal zone into the interconnected bowels of Che-Lou’s Air Purification Machine. Grey water circulates and filters the air, powered by the battery house. Che-Lou cleans the unfiltered residue from wing #5 to make printing ink for the community paper. At the base of wing #6 the so-called gold soil dumps out of the system at the rate of 2 cups per day. A super compost and a highly prized eco-alchemic stew by the gardeners around him, Che-Lou forms bricks of this material for the local barter fairies and coop groceries in Berkeley and SF. He also makes extra barter by charging folks batteries through a special station in the corner of the compound. Here “sustainability” is secured only with a high barb-wire fence and a slow electrical drip. Sacred... just a memory.”

Source: New Myth #8: Che-Lou’s Black Bricks & the First Supper, by Willi

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Interview with John by Willi

How does your self-described label of “bio-regional being” juxtapose with so many calls for localization?

I see the ideas behind bioregionalism and localization as convergent rather than juxtaposing. Perhaps the label is a bit glib; what I meant here was really about being “bio-regionally oriented.” It comes from seeing oneself first as a citizen of a place, and a citizen of a locality or a nation second. It’s about putting the qualities and nature of a place ahead of considering our abstract allegiances, which always get us in trouble, since they divide people around competing ideas and ideals of cultural identity. Learning to become a citizen of a place is the crux of the philosophical parent of deep ecology, i.e., “bio-regionalism.” This philosophy has informed my motivation and outlook, thanks to the work of Peter Berg and Planet Drum that I began to read when I moved to Northern California in 1983. Being bioregionally oriented, an ecological citizen, encourages you to attend to attuning with your “life place” which is not one place really but occurs in connected, concentric circles -- with ones immediate home (dwelling) being the first ring, with ones greater home in a physical community or neighborhood being the next, and finally with the bio-region with all its natural and climatic particulars.

These are the contexts of place and I would say the ground(ing) of our personal and collective identity. Of course, our society remains ever more ego-logically driven rather than ecologically oriented, but even so it’s clear that many people are craving a deeper sense of connection with where they live and a more sustainable and authentic economy, with localization and the food justice and slow food movements being outgrowths.

Localization in relation to creating an economic system that is more locally-based and driven is to me a way of manifesting a bio-regional vision, in which people try to incline their lives, what they eat and how they work with the intent to reduce their impact and to cultivate a more ecological understanding of relationships, webs and patterns throughout their lives.

That’s the essence of being bioregional, to take initiatives on personal and on cooperative levels to orient your actions in a place-affirming and immediate way. This principle has been translated for me over the course of the past 25 years into a host of initiatives in park and commons making, neighborhood cultivation, urban creek restoration, community and personal gardening, and visioning a green city. It is human to have a yearning to belong to something greater; applying that principle and a sense of belonging to place is one of the most natural and enduring ways to experience it.

Define alchemy in your context more fully.

I resonate with and ascribe to your way of regarding environmental alchemy as a kind of transformational and transmutative process, which allows people to experience a more profound sense of “biophilia”, after EO Wilson’s philosophy regarding having a deep love of and kinship to life in its many forms and species. Alchemy, regardless of the context it’s placed in, has at its root ever been about the transmutation of the dross physical, symbolized by lead, into the spiritual, as inferred by gold. The threshold between them is a leap not so much of faith but of perception. It seems to me that alchemy is what occurs at this threshold: that is, of going from seeing the world linearly and analytically to holding it synergistically and holistically; and of consciously turning away from competing ego-centric positions, and toward more collaborative, eco-centric understandings; and of regarding commonalities and paths of including and integrating as more essential than making distinctions and divisions between people; and of focusing more on connecting than isolating; of cultivating vibrant, community-based life rather than a commodity-framed perspective that transforms every relationship into a transaction or an extortion.

What’s on the other side of this threshold therefore is the contradiction to our commercial cultural dictates and the remedy for its abuses to our individual and collective psyches. For me, environmental alchemy is the process by which any one can reconnect with the roots of human nature, which is really nature itself in all its complexity; expressed through weather, and geography, natural history, encounters with plants and animals (including pets), and the way we can translate and express these primal/primary relationships through song, crafts, arts, poetry and myth. This connotes your adage that “Alchemy is Transmutation is Action & Communication.”

I have grounded my practice of environmental planning in environmental alchemy in the sense that I believe that we need nature or a form of it woven into our urban fabric and into our lives for our cities and ourselves to be healthy. And much of my work has been in service of this understanding, which draws from my affinity for eco-psychology and appreciation for urban ecology and countering the effects of “nature deficit disorder” in children and adults, a la Richard Louv (and his seminal work, Last Child in the Woods:

Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder). It has thus informed both my professional and community work – e.g., in helping plan the path of the Bay Trail 400 miles around the San Francisco Bay. The attitudes has also served me in guiding the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture from its formative stage to becoming a formal and formidable collaboration for incentive based habitat conservation and restoration around the SF Bay Estuary.

It has also informed me in helping to create a neighborhood, Halcyon, through co-leading the grass-roots based planning, design and implementation of a park in its center – built out of a parking lot, a park the neighborhood built called Halcyon Commons, along with co-planning/planting more than a 100 street trees in the neighborhood, and the co-organizing of regular social gatherings around the Halcyon neighborhood and work parties in the park to maintain it. The transformation of a parking lot into a park, was all about alchemy and how this transformation of a place also forged a neighborhood with a strong sense of place and community.

Do you think that “placemaking” can be a positive force in a mythologists toolkit?

“Placemaking” is a kind of deep environmental planning, landscape architecture and/or urban design; placemaking is what is achieved when any of them are practiced as intuitive crafts or arts, as all of them were in their vernacular forms in pre-literate, tribal societies. I have been primarily concerned with maintaining or creating a spirit place or genius loci. The making of Halcyon Commons in the middle of a wide street called Halcyon Court through participatory design and effort over a four-year planning period is a prime example how a spirit of place can be created over time and with consistent intention to bring nature back into the city (and nearby from one of the busiest intersections of Ashby and Telegraph Avenues).

This effort of unpaving paradise and bringing back a bit of nature was connoted in the words of commemorative T-shirt given out to park makers when the park was dedicated, which read “planting a park and growing community.” Which is basically true, since the Halcyon Neighborhood, which didn’t exist two decades ago is a vital and cohesive one today; the Halcyon Neighborhood Association is among the most respected such associations in the city; it is also one of the most active and constructive in Berkeley, as we focus on making common projects and good will and neighborliness. So the making of Halcyon Commons is really a creation story, which has taken almost two decades to unfold, about the creation of a sense of place in a corner of Berkeley, and with it a neighborhood and the constellation of positive qualities that goes with a safe and solid one.

Another form of alchemical placemaking I’ve helped to lead was in urban grassroots creek restoration that I was an early exponent of it the late 80’s through the mid-90’s, where I started and coordinated a group called East Bay Citizens for Creek Restoration. We not only conducted creek restoration and revegetation projects in Berkeley and Oakland and El Cerrito in partnership between community groups and city officials but also held bi-annual “Creek Weeks” to educate people about the importance of creeks to the community and encouraged and “commissioned” art installations to celebrate “creek consciousness” and care. I also created some of the art myself, i.e. creek banners with riparian animals painted on them atop bamboo poles planted in rows to symbolically mark and celebrate the course of underground and culverted creeks. So I definitely identify with placemaking as a form of myth-making, its’ telling the new story of a renewed relationship with the planet as Thomas Berry so eloquently describes in his influential opus, Dream of the Earth.

What was your role at the Cave Concert? Please see my interview with promoter / shaman [Alan Tower](#).

Alan has become a very close friend of mine; I met him almost two decades ago, many years before he started Green Music Network (GMN). He founded GMN in 2001; it was originally called Octave Alliance and I became the first member of its board and have subsequently stayed on to help with its transition into its new incarnation, Samavesha), but that’s another story.

My first role with GMN’s signature event, the Cave Concert, was to establish a working partnership between GMN and the National Park Service through Golden Gate National Recreation Area’s supervisor, Brian O’Neill, whom I knew. I also led other co-sponsorship and partnership initiatives to support the Cave Concert, provide insurance coverage and broaden its promotional outreach for potential audiences. I frequently brainstormed with Alan about the sonic-influences on the psyche of natural resonances/scales as were played in the cave, which was actually a military munitions tunnel from early in the prior century, and that covered at one end with a tarp. It had a mural painted on it that I helped to paint. On a more practical note, I was the always ticket collector at the concert itself which was always a unique acoustic instrument and voice adventure into the transformative power of music in an acoustically perfected space.

How do Occupy, permaculture and Transition inform your environmental planning, if at all?

Of the three movements, I would say that permaculture is the one that has influenced my work as an environmental planner most, simply because it has been around and evolving for longer than I've been a planner; I began reading the work of Bill Mollison, permaculture's founder, a couple years before I became an environmental planner and it definitely influenced my orientation to the field its emphasis on ecology as a foundation for the design of agriculture and community. Occupy and Transition-town are movements that I believe in and subscribe to philosophically, but as they are relatively new and somewhat derivative, they have not influenced me as much as green design and sustainable planning. In these cases as with permaculture, I have been informed by their adherence to ecological principles applied to the planning of residential and community spaces, from the use of nested systems and plantings, with their attendant multiple functions and benefits.

Can you describe the tensions and outputs in your career and the synergies between art and science?

Probably the main tension in my career, as I suspect it is for many environmental planners, has been in reconciling the expectations of clients for greater emphasis on human uses and increased development with the value of protecting or restoring environmental qualities and/or habitats as part of any given project. It's always a balancing act between the scale of urbanization or development and the natural environment that remains. And in my work, I have generally regarded that natural environment as an active, living presence that calls for human engagement. So for example, when I was the Resource Management Planner for the Contra Costa Water District, charged with implementing the environmental commitments of the district toward the 18,000-acre plus watershed around the Los Vaqueros Reservoir, I saw this an opportunity to create partnerships between the District and non-profit and institutional organizations.

So in managing the preparation of a resource management plan to govern the uses and restoration/mitigation of the landscape around the reservoir, I focused on not only integrating and overlaying different resource topics – biology, hydrology, recreation, cultural resources, grazing and fire management, to create a more holistic management plan, but I also emphasized the integration of partnerships with school environmental education programs and with environmental organizations like the Sierra Club, the California Native Plants Society for the restoration of plant communities and creeks and in developing interpretive programs.

As for the synergies of art and science, the science is in the findings one receives from a robust investigation of the character of places and habitats, their species composition, their energy inputs (water, sun, slope), etc. The art is in weaving these factors with human imagination and creating a theatre for participation

Are humans, community building and parks more important to you than the animals and plants there? How do you foster a holistic balance for all life?

I can't say that humans and parks are more important to me than what draws me to parks in the animal and plant beings also present in them. In my mind both sets of relationships are intertwined and are what make for a re-connective, holistic open space experience.

Please define ecology and sustainability in the context of the South Berkeley - Santa Fe Right of Way vision. What are the dominant patterns there?

I have been working under the auspices of Berkeley Partners for Parks, an organization that I helped to found) with members of the community and Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative (Beebo Turman) for over six years in creating a dynamic program of public open space – a linear commons out of the Santa Fe Right of Way (ROW) that has been in the City of Berkeley's hands since 1977 but has been behind cyclone fencing this whole time. The ROW is an unmaintained and weedy space, hemmed in by housing in South Berkeley, one that has need for more active open space and community gardening, so the idea of a garden greenway or linear urban farm has been surfacing in this period. So the ecology of the space is really a human ecology to sustain the community and the space through a set of community gardens connected by a greenway that itself will connect up to the existing 6 mile Ohlone Greenway to its immediate north, enabling this greenway to go from South Berkeley to Richmond. This is a good and green future for t, but one needs patience and a generational view to get there...

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John Steere - Bio

John Steere is a 30-year Berkeley resident, environmental activator, and environmental and sustainable planning consultant. He has for over two decades been creating and supporting partnership-oriented community/arts/environmental causes. His outlook informs his career as an Environmental Planner (of environmental plans, resource management plans, trail and open space, and recreation studies) and his avocation as an environmental “alchemist” to foster collaborative “placemaking” – as a means to creatively cultivate community through several mediums: 1) park making and stewardship, 2) urban creek restoration, and 3) supporting community sustainability projects.

He sees himself as a bio-regional being and works to cultivate this awareness in others.

Toward these ends, he’s been working for the past 6 years co-leading the community-based visioning and implementation process to establish a “garden greenway” along the South Berkeley Santa Fe Right of Way. This has involved winning a few grants including two from the UC Chancellor’s Partnership Grant program, one for a “mobile mural project that depicts the community based vision for the right of way (ROW), and most recently another for establishing a “Bioremediation Garden and education program along two blocks of the ROW for uptake of arsenic.

He is also the cofounder and current president of Berkeley Partners for Parks, a non-profit established in 1993 as a fiscal and technical support umbrella for local parks, paths and creek groups) and he has facilitated the creation of two parks in Berkeley including Halcyon Commons and Presentation Park.

He also founded and led East Bay Citizens for Creek Restoration (1987 to 1994) and was a founding board member of Livable Berkeley, a smart growth NGO). He’s a founding board member of both the Green Music Network and Samavesha, non profits which promote the synergisms of art in nature, sponsor nature-based art and music events, including the annual “Cave Concert” in the Marin Headlands and the “Art in Nature” Festival in Redwood Regional Park.

Finally, he’s the co-chair and founder of his local neighborhood and its governing association, the Halcyon Neighborhood Association – which does neighborhood tree plantings, cleanups, park care, and potlucks. He led the community-based planning effort to design and build “Halcyon Commons,” the City of Berkeley’s first neighborhood planned and implemented park. He has helped establish 3 parks/open space areas including the California Shakespeare theater in Orinda, Presentation Park and Halcyon Commons in Berkeley. He speaks widely at conferences on green planning and has organized and led many tours and interpretive rides, among them the annual “Hidden Gems of Berkeley” tour.

Connections -

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Futurist - Christian Shearer

Crowdfunding for Permaculture Now! Article / Interview with Christian Shearer of WeTheTrees.com by Willi Paul, [permaculture exchange](http://permacultureexchange)

“The collaborative effort that is WeTheTrees came about when a group of active permaculturalists realized that the permaculture community could really use a unique way to raise money. Basically every permaculture person we knew had a few projects on the back burner just waiting for the right time to turn up the heat, including ourselves! Our team of permaculture designers are the small set of entrepreneurs that dreamed, visioned, designed, launched, and are now using the WeTheTrees platform. Each of them is trained in permaculture, and took this project on as a collaborative effort to give back to the permaculture community. The entire process incorporated the permaculture principles and the platform currently serves multiple functions for each of them. The project was developed as an eco-social business, keeping the triple bottom line in mind. Each member of the team has committed to using his share of profits exclusively for permaculture related activities.”

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Interview with Christian by Willi (Article by Christian follows) -

A tool is just a tool without hands and hearts to work it, Christian. How will you get out of the permaculture clique and excite members in the broader community?

WeTheTrees is a crowdfunding platform that centers around the Permaculture community, because we feel most aligned with the strong ethics and intention found therein. The platform is not, however, limited to only permaculture certified campaigns. WeTheTrees is open to campaigns that fall into any sustainability, environmental, social, or educational category, as long as they meet the ethics of permaculture.

The key is to work the edges. It is much more effective to work on something at the edge of your system and help it to be symbiotic with your system than to wander off to another area completely. There is an edge relationship between the permaculture community and related fields (like conservation, organic agriculture, social change movements, etc.), where there are actually

overlapping elements. Our platform has an added function of connecting, exposing and educating those that may be positioned on the edge of permaculture. It may be through their use of our platform that they first recognize the deep solid base and active community of permaculture.

How does WeTheTrees compare to Kindista (<https://kindista.org/#/>) and permaculture exchange (<http://permacultureexchange.com/>)?

WeTheTrees joins Kindista and Permaculture Exchange as some of the newest and cutting edge developments in the online world of permaculture. Like both of these websites, WeTheTrees is aiming to offer a platform that can serve as a useful tool to more effectively and efficiently connect people in the permaculture community and beyond.

WeTheTrees is unique in terms of the services that are offered. WeTheTrees is the only crowdfunding site focused on permaculture related projects, giving our users the opportunity to put their ideas out there to their community, their family and their contacts to see if there is support.

I would imagine that all three sites could be used for different purposes quite effectively. Appropriate technology for the desired outcome.

What are the top issues facing permaculture today? How does WeTheTrees address them?

I would say that the slow pace of change is probably one of the biggest issues facing permaculture and the world for that matter. Many of us believe that the clock is ticking regarding the ecological impacts of mankind. If we can't start having more of a positive impact on this planet at an increasing rate, then the fear is that the CO2 ppm are going to go irreversibly high, or the web of life is going to go irreversibly thin, or the consumptive needs of an exponentially growing population will be out of reach. WeTheTrees is one small player in helping the permaculture community move toward their goals more effectively and efficiently.

We KNOW that there is enough desire in the community. We KNOW that there is enough information. We KNOW that there is enough imagination and design skills. And, we KNOW that there are enough resources available to implement those designs. The purpose of WeTheTrees is to help those with the desire and the designs connect with those with the resources, to help make their plans a reality, now.

This process serves everyone involved. The campaign creator has a design to help meet her needs and her community's needs, and the contributor has received the gift of giving, and feels connected in a meaningful way to the campaigns contributed to. And the outcome of the project itself should be positive for the planet as a whole.

Are you promoting new global economy with WeTheTrees? Are your values the same as those in traditional permaculture?

WeTheTrees is looking to connect those with the desire and the designs to those with the resources. Sometimes that means that these two groups will be on opposite sides of the planet, and sometimes they will be on opposite sides of the dinner table. In either case, needs are being met for both parties, and their lives are enriched. And of course, when the project does what it set out to do, then our planet is enriched as well.

WeTheTrees values an educated and engaged community, healthy diverse ecosystems and individuals that are physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually enriched. The company that is WeTheTrees, does business in a different way, encouraging this for our team, and we intend that the platform be used in a way that promotes these values to the global community. In that way we are fully in-line with the permaculture values and ethics that I have come to live by.

There are many folks without access to the Internet and your site? How will you pitch Crowdfunding to them?

The first ever campaign on WeTheTrees was a campaign to gift a Sun Oven to a permaculture project in Northern Thailand. I posted this campaign and feel that through this platform the project in need can be connected with contributors who are excited to give. We encourage "gifting" campaigns, where the person who is raising the funds is doing so with the expressed intention of purchasing goods or services for another person or group. Just this morning I was contacted by another man who is planning to post a campaign to raise money for a school in Nepal:

The main goals of the project are:

1. To have access to healthy, nutritious, organic food
2. To have a self-dependent and sustainable organic school garden
3. To include practical learning into the school curriculum

All together we have made a school garden design and we are now constructing a demonstration area. For the next phases and coming activities we need your financial support.

- Trees, plants, bamboo, compost and other garden materials.

For this we need \$ 300

- Teaching material for the kids to learn about organic gardening and permaculture.

For this we need \$ 500

In total we need **\$800 dollars**. With that money we can do a lot!

If we raise more than this we will invest in trees and plants for our nursery that we will donate to the community surrounding the school.

There are permaculture projects and permaculture people in (I assume) every country on the planet now. If every person utilizes the resources and tools available to them, incredible things can manifest with very little effort. WeTheTrees gives the permaculture community and beyond one more tool to make that possible.

Thanks for your time and your support Willi, and thanks for what you do on this little planet.

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“A New Fundraising Tool for the Permaculture Community,” Article by Christian Shearer -

We are excited to announce the official launch of WeTheTrees.com, a crowd funding platform aimed specifically at permaculture and the sustainability movement. This platform helps organizations and individuals around the globe gather the resources needed to meet their goals through a simple-to-use platform that allows them to easily and creatively raise funds.

The greatest limitation on many permaculture projects is access to enough capital to make their dreams a reality in a timely manner. And it is also true that there are a lot of people out there that love to give to meaningful projects and support efforts to make this world a better place. WeTheTrees was designed specifically to bridge the gap between idea / design and the resources needed to make it happen.

How does WeTheTrees work?

WeTheTrees works like this: you submit your campaign, set a fundraising goal and a deadline to reach this goal (maximum 90 days). Then you promote the campaign to your friends, family and networks, encouraging them to come check it out. People can opt to contribute to your campaign at any amount above \$5.00 and receive rewards for their contribution! We work on an all-or-nothing system. If you reach your fundraising goal by your deadline, then the contributions are debited from the contributor's accounts on that date and deposited into your account (less fees). If you don't meet (or exceed) your goal, then no money ever is collected. Use the WeTheTrees platform to fund raise for projects big and small.

With a minimum campaign amount of only \$100, WeTheTrees could be a valuable resource for fundraising at all levels - from the purchase of a scythe for harvesting wheat to the purchase of the wheat field itself!

To learn more about WeTheTrees visit the website. Be sure to visit the FAQ page, the [strategy guide](#).

How is WeTheTrees helpful to the permaculture movement?

WeTheTrees provides a multifaceted tool to every permaculturalist, and can be used very creatively to not only raise funds for a project, but also to fund raise for a course, assess the market potential of different ideas, and even to pre-sell products that will be produced with aforementioned fund raised capital, allowing the farmer or eco-social entrepreneur to feel more secure in their undertaking. WeTheTrees can also function as an excellent way for a community to collect money for cooperative endeavors.

And furthermore, WeTheTrees allows a wonderful and meaningful way for anyone to be able to contribute to positive change on this planet. Just browsing through the site can be enjoyable, seeing all the interesting projects that other folks are raising money for, and when a person sees one that really excited them, it's just a click away to become a contributor.

A few examples of how the WeTheTrees platform could be a useful tool.

1. The Traditional Fundraiser - Lets say a family wants to install solar panels on their roof to supplement their electricity needs from a renewable source. This family (let's call them the Kimbles) could post a campaign on WeTheTrees to do just that. The Kimble family posts a campaign to raise \$1800 for fifteen 100W solar panels. This will give them a big start on their grid-intertwined solar system. They set a goal for \$1800 and a campaign length of 90 days. On WeTheTrees, all campaigns must offer rewards. Because the Kimbles assume that most of their contributors are going to be friends and family, they offer what they have in abundance. It does not actually need to be related to the solar panels (as it would be difficult to give away electricity as a reward).

Their rewards could look like this:

If you contribute \$5 we will send you a personalized thank-you card.

If you contribute \$10 we will give you a quart of our canned apple sauce.

If you contribute \$25 you will receive an invite to our "Going Solar" installation party and bar-b-que.

If you contribute \$100 you will receive the invitation as well as a set of our home made artisan bees-wax candles.

If you contribute \$250 you get all of the above plus a handmade Shaker bench made by Mrs. Kimble in her wood shop.

2. Fundraise to take a course - Shu Mei has been wanting to take a PDC course for a long time, but felt that she could not because of the price of the course. Using WeTheTrees she was able to post a campaign to raise the funds to take the PDC course. She set her fundraising goal at \$1200 (\$980 for the course itself and \$220 for travel and expenses). In her description of the campaign, she explains how the PDC course will support her in moving toward what she wants in her life, and true independence on her path. She promotes the campaign by sending it out to her family and friends, and is easily able to raise the money needed to make this inspirational course a reality for her. On WeTheTrees anyone can fundraise to take any course that is related to the environment, social change, or permaculture, and there is already a list of organizations and institutions that are encouraging their students to do just that. For rewards, she may offer to do permaculture designs for people contributing over a certain amount, or give an evening presentation about what she learned during the course.

3. Pre-selling products and gathering market potential on an idea - All campaigns posted on WeTheTrees must be finite and definable; they must be clearly stated and have a clear end. A person can fundraise for "the purchase of a cargo bicycle for delivery of fresh baked organic bread" but cannot fundraise "to start a bread business". In this case, Mary Breadmaker may post a campaign on WeTheTrees that invites anyone who feels moved to contribute toward the purchase of this bike, which she will then use in her bread making business to do home deliveries. "Fresh on your doorstep in time for breakfast!" She sets her fundraising goal at \$2,500, sets her campaign length to 60 days, and offers rewards for the contribution.

If you contribute \$5 toward this campaign, you receive a coupon for one loaf of her classic sourdough.

If you contribute \$10 toward this campaign, you receive a coupon for any of her dessert breads.

If you contribute \$25 toward this campaign, you receive a coupon for four loaves of your choice.

If you contribute \$100 toward this campaign, you will receive 20 coupons and be given a special thanks in her newsletter.

Mary could post this campaign with complete uncertainty as to whether she will achieve her goals or not. She sends it out to all her contacts and invites them to check out the campaign and share it with their friends and neighbors. Because Mary lives in such a supportive community (and she makes such good bread), she exceeds her goal by \$500 and is able to purchase additional equipment on top of the bike. She already has hundreds of loaves sold and is off and running. Had she failed to meet her goal, she receives nothing, and contributions are never debited. She would have learned about the market potential in her area, and that there isn't enough interest in her community for her bread at \$5 a loaf, and saved the effort and heartbreak of starting up and failing.

4. Community cooperative action - The crowd funding tool offered by WeTheTrees is a perfect platform for building community cooperative projects and events. For example, the Clark St. Neighborhood Association has been discussing for some time the idea of putting in a playground on the empty lot on the corner. It seems that there is a fair amount of support, but it is tough to gauge whether the community will really pitch in when it comes time to pay for supplies. One of the board members of the neighborhood association volunteers to post a campaign up on WeTheTrees to raise the funds for this playground. The fundraiser is for \$25,000, enough to build a wooden play castle with rope wall as slide, put up a set of swings, and to plant an edible forest garden that is child friendly (thornless blackberries, strawberries, kale snap peas, and dwarf apples, pears and plums).

The community has pledged the hard labor, all they need is to see the money and make it happen. So the campaign is launched with a \$25,000 goal, and a sixty day campaign deadline to help everyone in the community realize this is happening, and it needs to happen now. Besides posting the news on their facebook page and writing a blog post about it, a couple of the young association members drop fliers off in every mailbox in the neighborhood letting people know about the fundraiser, and directing them to the proper URL.

The association sets rewards low, because the main reward is having a community playground in the neighborhood. \$25 contribution gets you a thank you card. \$100 donation gets you a Clark St. t-shirt, \$250 donation gets you a special mention at the opening ceremonies of the park, and a \$1000 donation gets you a brick engraved with your name (or words of your choosing) that will be laid on the path of the park.

If the community raises enough awareness and gets the word out, they should be able to raise enough for that playground, and if they don't raise enough, then they have ascertained that the community is not willing to give enough to make it happen. Maybe they can adjust their plan and help it meet the economic resources of their community.

What are the costs of using WeTheTrees?

It is totally free to post a campaign on WeTheTrees, and if you do not meet your goal, there are no fees at all. If the fundraising goal is met, the pledged contributions will be debited out of the contributors' accounts at the campaign deadline. You will receive all the money from the contributors, minus the fees of the payment processors (like Paypal and WePay) which are generally about 3-4% and a 5% WeTheTrees platform fee.

A New Model of Doing Business

WeTheTrees has been set up as an eco-social business, committed to transparency, equality and the ethics of permaculture. The company was founded and is currently run only by Permaculture Design Certified staff, and all individual earnings (to employees and managers) are committed to be used toward permaculture projects of their own. Up until the launch, almost all the work done to make WeTheTrees a reality was done as sweat equity, and the company was funded only by the members of the WeTheTrees team. A true team spirit and a desire to give something back to the permaculture community are at the heart of why WeTheTrees exists.

Open Source

WeTheTrees is running using open source software called Catarse, and then adapted and stylized to fit our unique needs. The development team at WeTheTrees feels passionately about open source movement, and is glad to be able to give back the improvements and upgrades made on this site.

The team at WeTheTrees hopes that this crowd funding platform is useful to you and your community. Please come check out the site, post a campaign for your next permaculture adventure, contribute to someone else's dream, and let others know that this resource is out there.

How can I help make WeTheTrees a success?

The platform just publicly launched on July 20th, 2012, so the greatest challenge at this point is just getting the word out. If you feel moved to help get the word out, please share this article with your friends, like us on facebook, and let your permaculture colleagues know it exists.

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Christian's Bio –

Christian Shearer is a PRI certified Permaculture Design Course teacher and the founder of the Panya Project in Northern Thailand. He is a natural builder, a food forest enthusiast, a musician, an advisory board member to [WeForest](#), a certified educator and has extensive knowledge of tropical permaculture systems. He has taught permaculture in Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and the United States and helped found [Terra-Genesis International](#), an international permaculture design consultancy firm. Christian is excited to continue contributing to the Permaculture movement and to deepen his own understanding of how to make real lasting change on this planet..

Connections –

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“Shapeshift Threshold Reverie” - Interview with Maila T. Davenport PhD, [AltarPlaces](#), Portland. By Willi Paul, [openmythsource.com](#)

“I am so pleased that people are bringing story and myth back into active culture – they have been stowed away on dusty library bookshelves for too long! We live in a world whirling in story, and most often anymore they are held in a solitary word – word as hologram, code, oral image. Who says we no longer use pictographs?”

-- Maila T. Davenport PhD

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Interview with Maila by Willi

What is the “spirit of the land?”

In the English language we do not have a word for “spirit of the land.” I think this is because our language by its nature separates and isolates phenomena. A great word for this is *iworu* that comes from the Ainu of ancient Japan. It is not really a personal noun as much as a “field” in motion, the kind of motion of a place that is the confluence of environment, mythline, and life force. Imagine a three dimensional Venn diagram where each of these features are represented and overlap; that ellipse is the new whole that is created when all these dimensions are valued and tended. This is a place’s integrated intelligence and it exists beyond the technological mind.

Can we create new myths? If yes, based on what?

Actually it operates the other way around: myths create us anew. Here we get into the meaning of myth, but this is not a game of semantics. Instead, it is the inquiry into the landscape of myth – where is myth local? We must go to that place for initiation, bring our communities there through ceremony. Ceremony is a group map really. A map does not create the place but reveals it. For example, I live in Portland, Oregon and use a street map that identifies the greenways and bikeways. Let’s say my neighbor uses a

different map that shows only motor vehicle streets and highways. Is either map “wrong?” No, they each show a different level of transportation “reality.” My green map did not suddenly make alternate routes appear magically, only shows them available; neither do eco-pathways suddenly disappear just because my neighbor uses her map.

My point is that we live in layers of reality, and the mythic realm is still very real and available. The concern that I have is when people look for new myths by drawing whatever they want on a map they have in hand, to extend my metaphor. The risk is triggering utopian myths, and George Orwell and Edward Scissorhands remind us that utopia is just another toxic, incomplete “map.”

Old myths require destruction, but not violence; they require dismemberment, but not torture. What does that look like? Dis-integration: unbinding, unfolding, unraveling, opening, releasing, a deathing of what no longer serves. A powerful community deathing ceremony is the All Soul’s Procession held annually in Tucson, AZ. Twenty thousand people of all ages, gender identification, religions, ethnicity, and cultures don fanciful calalças regalia to mourn loved ones, violent acts, environmental atrocities, and political oppression. The community grief ritual lasts for 4 hours or more into the night. At its end, all stand in the threshold between destruction and creation and witness the mysterious, unexplainable motion of re-integration – and new stories are born. Myths are local at thresholds.

Please offer a brief critique of my recent vision plan: Journey to Cascadia: Building a New Global Mythology. For 2012 Study of Myth Symposium Work Shop -

I offer the idea that we already live in a post-apocalyptic era. In the last 50 years, we have lost 3,000 cultures; they become extinct with each language we lose. We only have 3,000 left. Wade Davis, anthropologist and ethnobotanist, explains “Each language we lose is in itself and ecosystem of ideas and intuitions, a watershed of thought and an old-growth of the mind.” When a culture becomes extinct, all peoples lose viable ways to: make peace, heal others, parent, invent new things, lead, be in community, and grow food. For Tibetans, their world is coming to a violent end because the Chinese government systematic genocide. On the other side, since the 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union Mongolians have been working to re-generate their culture after decades of oppression and annihilation.

The myth-of-the-monomyth is very powerful and all encompassing. It is the egoic narcissism of our US adolescent society that only sees a threat to it. The end of the world has come already for too many and they are living through it on reservations, in ghettos, suspended in high rises in urban cities that overtook their land and way of life. I think the movie industry’s images of “post-apocalyptic world” distract from the living images of the mythic reality of being displaced and erased that surround us now.

Also, I believe the era of the Hero’s Journey monomyth is passing by. This is not to say that this archetypal pathway is unnecessary, but that at this point in US history we are in need of additional archetypal forces. Within the Hero archetype is a unilateral, progressive bias: defeat obstacles, go alone, right wrongs, and unity through oneness. Animals such as lion and cougar express this modality. In my work I am calling forth the Pilgrim archetype that can be expressed through creatures such as caribou and gray whale. Within the Pilgrim archetype there is a reciprocal, communion bias: unbind obstacles and reweave anew, interdependence of the group, build resiliency in the community, and unity is an ecosystem.

What is The Power of Place Initiative?

“We believe that places are alive. We suggest that when human beings believe that, and act in ways that respect and value what places bring, the partnership becomes a powerful force toward great good in the world.

We have established the Powers of Place Initiative to gather, organize and make visible knowledge, people, organizations and places already working in ways that demonstrate the power of the partnership and to share what they know with others.

We are a network of people with diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds brought together by the Fetzer Institute to catalyze a new field of study and practice based on the premise that right relationship between people and the places where they gather and inhabit offers the potential for transformative action toward what is needed at this moment in history.

Our work falls into three main areas of activity - research, or exploring new frontiers, resources, or providing tools, and connection, or amplifying the field. “– POPI

How do you see the permaculture community? What is holding us back?

In all honesty, I see the permaculture community caught in the monomyth of Eden. The collective myth of “ordered nature” where landscape is edible, no animal harmed, dirt as a nurturing mother, and everyone negotiating differences calmly is very un-natural actually. In the wild, plants poison, trees fall on unsuspecting rodents, earth quakes and swallows villages whole, and territories are fought for with very real sacrifice. Mythic material, like the Eden complex, is very pervasive and mercurial, that is how it is so powerful!

The whole idea of “nature” is steeped in both the edenic complex and the scientific myth of being. “Nature” is measured, observed, protected, captured, maternal, managed, surveyed, counted, tagged, and biodiversified— and somehow still does not include humans and certainly has no dynamic presence. Many have written on this and I recommend: Paul Shepherd, Max Oelschlager, Jack Turner, Charlene Spretnak, and Gary Snyder. Some of these are “classics” from a few decades past, but do not let the myth-of-progress held in fresher publication dates seduce you, pull them back off your shelves.

I think the permaculture community would benefit from what I call wildness practice. Wildness as a method follows a very different logic pattern than nature which has become quite domesticated. The Wild is nonlinear, self-organizing, unpredictable, complex, playful, surprising, unstable, self-willed and best described as blanks on a map. Importantly, it is not defined by the absence of humans, but by the relationship of those humans to the place (thank you Jack Turner). So how do we meet wildness? From our wildness: in the body, speaking story, traveling deep imagination up and out.

I give some examples in your question about “organic process.”

Can you explain what transmutation is and your experience with this force / process in Nature?

In culture, myths become threatening when they are no longer life sustaining. This can result from some part of the story being left out or forgotten, when mythic material is literalized, or when its meaning is reduced to a solitary message. As a result, communities and cultures stagnate. Notice I do not use the word/story “die” because to die is an organic motion and force in both the natural world and myth. Things that die get to compost, or merge with earth, or be digested and become a facet of a new being, or spread seed and be re-born. “Stagnation” is chronic anything: expansion, consumption, violence, progress, poverty, erosion, betrayal, and excuse-making – it is apparent the US is in a state of stagnation, yes?

Transformation is about merging and shapeshifting. In the wilderness dying is decomposition, re-incorporation, and reconstitution. This happens both when plant life withers and when prey eats predator. Everything becomes something else. In an old myth when a mouse becomes an eagle it is not a “fantasy of a simpler people” as the contemporary bias teaches. Instead it is a critical phase of transmutation. I find it fascinating in this time of the science monomyth what scholars and culture omits even when it is “documented” and thus “real” – but that is exactly how myth works.

The re-incorporation phase is the middle phase, the in-between, and is the threshold. This is where the mystery enters and somehow the life force breaks down “completely” yet is able to merge and then shapeshift into a complete other form. This is a mouse becoming an eagle. This wild and mythic motion of re-incorporation is an unbinding. A stagnate culture is bound and requires unbinding so that their myth is rewoven anew. Annual ceremonies in indigenous culture provide this critical function. The story here is not a quest, but a communion. Ceremonial placemaking is this organic process made available for any community who wants to change our world.

Can you share several permutations of what you call “organic process?”

I am fascinated by seed germination in the wild. The seed process is a metaphor for new beginnings and new ideas most people are most familiar with and so comfortable to explore as a starting place for a mythic invitation. Commonly, the seed process follows a pattern similar as follows: prepare soil, open pack of seeds, carefully press each seed the correct distance apart, cover with moist earth, return to water and fertilize; wait for sprouts. Some variations can be harvesting seeds from a friend’s garden or homemade compost to fertilize with or share the duties in community, but the overall pattern remains cogent.

We then apply this model to our human endeavors: a project at work, a hint “planted” for some new behavior we want to see from our spouse or teenager, a new idea for a community. This is the story of a seed in Eden. I have no complaints about the model and

certainly have applied it myself, but the risk is the myth-of-the-monomyth. A monomyth is more of a recipe than an organic process because there is no place for the unknown, no uncertainty, no threshold and the result is predictable sameness.

But this is not a time for more of the same; it is a time desperate for the radical otherness of ideas because our world is stagnating. Here are a few other seed models from the wide world that by their very process guarantee uncertainty and thus thresholds:

1. The Jack Pine: the cone holding the seeds catches on *fire* and then *winged-seeds* are *ejected* out onto the *wind* and carried forth; they root best where there is less than .2 inches of organic material because they will *wither* in too much shade, they need *direct sunlight* to *establish themselves*.

2. The Rosette Lichen: a grazing gastropod (snail) *devours it*, digests it, and disperses the seeds in its *feces*.

The italicized words in these methods are threshold motions and opportunities to open up, unfold, and animate an idea or a decision. Each step is provided and required – this is an organic process of transmutation – this is ceremony sourced from wildness. Setting a decision “on fire” appears across many cultures: the Plains Indian sweat lodge as part of council meetings, the Finnish sauna as part of community building, and the Japanese mushi-buro as part of medical health.

Fortunately, or not, the logistics from these traditional cultures are not required to benefit from this wildly organic seeding process – they do make great retreats though! It is possible to meet this wild teaching in our wildness: tribal imagination. This place of the margin of daily consciousness is known by many names: Dreamtime, collective unconscious, the realm of the ancestors, akashic records, world soul, spirit lands, reverie, deep imagination. This is where myth is local. I lead groups through these ceremonies, and others; more importantly I teach community members to bring these living ceremonies back to their own communities so that transformational myth work informs and reforms our world more quickly.

The idea of a threshold is intriguing. Please give us examples.

Thresholds are openings, the places in between. At the threshold the bottom drops out and the eternal has the opportunity to enter and transform. I emphasize re-storying urban areas because that is where most of the people are and it is most needed. Examples of thresholds in neighborhoods and communities: empty lots that attract nuisance crimes, a street where a violent assault occurred, places where chronic car accidents occur, a place of a sudden death; forgotten places such as abandoned buildings, and alleyways.

Do you practice geomancy?

I never had heard of geomancy before. I did Google it – do you practice it? I listen to the spirit of the land and teach others to through story, ceremony, and tribal imagination.

What is a mythologist anyway?

Great question! It depends on the kind of mythologist, just as a Scion XB and Maserati are technically both “cars” but each provides a very different experience for the driver. I specify myself as an archetypal mythologist and when people looked perplexed I add that I am a cultural psychologist. Myths are the dreams and symptoms of culture; they are active, directive, and alterable. I choose to work out of academia and in community where the mythic realm is as active as it ever has been but at a time where it is least understood. My job is to track deep stories; I read environments for signs of something that is momentarily invisible but very much present. I teach others to track as well. Another difference in kinds of mythologists is what one does with the story; I choose to have a ceremony, meet the myth where it is local, and witness what happens next.

What are some of your favorite songs, symbols and myths?

The World Tree is the symbol and myth with the most juice for me now. This fall I am opening a movement “Unleashing 10,000 World Trees” – that’s all I will say at this point – watch for it!

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About AltarPlaces –

Altar Places helps people see, appreciate and honor their role in the ongoing creation of this web, specific to the way we encounter and engage in the places around us.

We encourage individuals and groups to seek active re-engagement with the places that no longer fortify them in order to recreate, reshape and re-story the energy and power the place holds.

Through the engagement of individuals, groups and communities, we can begin to connect with this energy, celebrate its potential, and reshape the present and the future of a place.

We believe all places, from the most metropolitan to the most rural, possess inherent, transformative powers.

Our goal: To help people engage, exchange, reshape, and make way for the new story of a place, wherever and whatever that place may be.

Our belief: Through active engagement with place, people provide a new palette where the place can retell its story, and create the foundation for the restructuring and reshaping of their own stories.

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“The Mythology of Lemmings.” Interview & Article on “New Mythology” by Kari McGregor, Editor, Spirit of the Times. Presented by Willi Paul, newmythologist.com

Posted on [December 2, 2012](#) by [[open myth source](#)]

“It is clear that our old stories aren’t doing the job of instilling sustainable values and congruent practices, and that we need a new mythology that is responsive to the needs of our planetary emergency. Our new narratives need to be at once more truthful and empowering, inspiring a level of social change thus far unachieved by our era of access to information. With the application of carefully constructed cultural memes, crafted with responsibility and integrity, it may be possible to reach far more people with the internalized values and constructs of a sustainable paradigm. We need to replace the myth of humanity holding dominion over nature with the truth that we are simply a part of nature’s complex web of symbiosis.” KM

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Interview with Kari by Willi (her article follows):

Who are the storytellers of the Permaculture Age?

Good question. I may interpret this one a little differently than intended, so please feel free to re-direct me if I go off on a tangent!

For me the storytellers of the Permaculture Age are those who are weaving the socio- cultural narrative of the Permaculture era. These can be any people who choose to tell that particular story through their actions and interactions. Aside from the obvious Permaculture heroes of Bill Mollison and David Holmgren there are others who have had a profound influence due to their own interactions with the Permaculture narrative. Such proponents of a sustainable new paradigm include Richard Heinberg and the Post-Carbon Institute, or Rob Hopkins and the Transition Towns Movement. Having mentioned these heroes I think it’s important to give some attention to the everyday heroes whose names we never hear of and are never likely to. Positive change wouldn’t be possible if it weren’t for the everyday heroes who participate in such movements and initiatives – the guru alone cannot create change; they can only command and inspire it. The rest of the chapters of the story need to be told by the active participants, as we are necessarily active participants in change, not mere recipients. Those who realize this become the storytellers, and the more conscious they are of this role the more effectively they fulfill it.

Do you see yourself as a writer of new myths or a critic of these attempts? Both?

I definitely see myself predominantly as a writer of new myths. That is not to say that I don’t see the value in critiquing the attempts of others – whether positively or negatively – and I tend to only offer supportive, positive critique as I see that as a more productive use of my time regarding generating positive change. I certainly enjoy researching past attempts and extrapolating from previous efforts at new mythology creation in order to build upon them and infer likelihoods for future successes.

However, as a creative I prefer to actively participate in the construction of new narratives, new mythology. My first love was writing and I have always been fascinated by stories – particularly the real-life stories of everyday heroes and historical events. Through history and biography one can learn much of what has worked and what hasn’t worked regarding social and cultural change; and it is clear that what has been most successful in generating change – be it positive or negative – is storytelling, the narrative that gets under the skin of society and creates gentle paradigm shift whilst the populace are to a large extent unawares (besides the obvious pioneering types). If I am able to effect the most subtle of changes via the writing of new myths then I will have achieved what I

consider to be wonderful things, most unbeknownst to those who will re-tell the stories and generate changes through their own lives and actions.

Can you tell us who your new myth heroes are and why?

My new myth heroes are those who I see exemplifying the everyday person rising to the challenges we see before us. My heroes include people such as Helena Norberg Hodge of ISEC and Economics of Happiness, as she has told an alternative story about what constitutes real wealth – something that we cannot have if we only ever pursue monetary wealth. Vandana Shiva is another hero for me as she has been a huge inspiration in the grass-roots people's movement for food sovereignty, arguably the most fundamental asset for a liberated and sustainable society. I also see Derrick Jensen as a hero for his courage in telling truths that must be told regarding our level of avoidable damage to our planet, and his explanations of all social norms as narratives that can, and should be – in many cases – re-written.

My favourite myth hero, though, it has to be said, isn't a new myth hero, but an old one. For me the myth of Cassandra has always held an almost romantic, yet tragic fascination and it resonates greatly with me for what I consider to be my "Cassandra Complex". Cassandra was not a hero in old mythology as her prophecies were ignored and ridiculed, doomed as she was to envision the truth of what would come yet be believed by no one. I'm sure many heroes of our new mythology era would sympathize with this plight, and it is one that has plagued me throughout my adult life. I hope to re-write the narrative of Cassandra in a way that alerts people to the need to consider even that which they may not yet see as credible due to their own deficit in understanding.

Isn't storytelling "hopelessly" old fashioned and un-mediated? How do you measure the success of this activity?

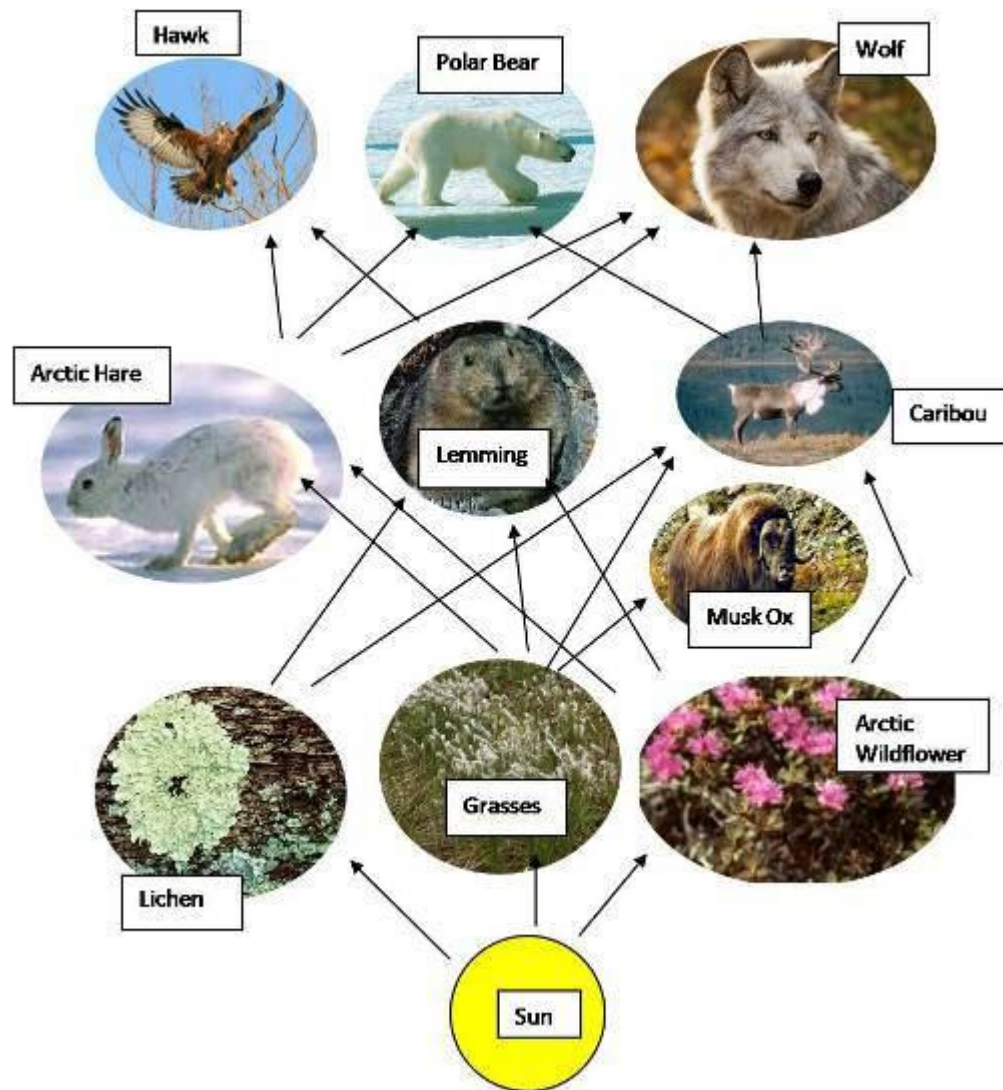
Perhaps it is old-fashioned, but certainly not "hopelessly" so! Storytelling is a practice that humans have used for millennia to communicate information and practices conducive to our survival, and we will continue to use it for millennia to come if we survive to do so. I feel that storytelling has been somewhat neglected in our information era as our culture, at least Western culture, now places a lot more faith in cold, hard scientific facts, much like the enlightenment era. Although these cold, hard, scientific facts are absolutely vital to our understanding of the world around us they generally do not resonate with many people, do not inspire behavioral change, are perhaps not sufficiently tangible to do so. Therefore I favor more the use of such information to underpin stories, much as the romantic poets of 18th Century Britain did as their response to the shortcomings of the Enlightenment era. I feel that we are now, in our rapidly developing hi-tech era, going through another Enlightenment spiral in which we need the balance of storytelling to deliver information in ways that can inspire positive behavior-change.

Ultimately storytelling is an unmediated practice and its success at present is immeasurable, at least by any practices I know of. Again, it might be a little hangover from new Enlightenment values to feel a need to measure everything in order to point to direct causative effects. I certainly feel this need myself, but am aware that interactions are far too complex and often too subtle to see with the naked eye, so to speak. History does a wonderful job of tracking change in a way that can assist us in making inferences regarding what may or may not have been effective. So, although our measuring tools are blunt the success of storytelling can be inferred as certainly greater than the delivery of cold, hard facts if we look at examples of behavior change throughout history.

Do you agree that the classic myths are no longer in play in our lives? Please explain.

No, not at all. I see the classic myths as having a profound impact on our modern lives. As I mentioned before, for me the myth of Cassandra is the myth of our present era as we are facing a planetary crisis of the magnitude never seen before in human history

and we are ignoring, ridiculing and disbelieving the wisdom of our prophets. From such myths we must take heed and work to ensure we treat them as a warning. In addition, many other classic myths are recycled and used in modern-day storytelling as they have been throughout millennia. The use of certain hero figures has always been effective, and despite cultural changes it is not difficult to update classic myths and heroes to new contexts and settings. If you think about it, we've been fed with the inspiration of classic myths to the extent that all of our modern storytelling is done from the elevated position we only have when standing on the shoulders of giants. The classics will not become irrelevant, just updated to keep pace with our ever-changing world.



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[A New Mythology](#)

by Kari McGregor, Editor, [Spirit of the Times](#)

Issue 8, 11/12

In a culture of storytelling mythology is the cornerstone. It informs and shapes our worldviews with the power to construct, change, or challenge our view of reality, gently directing the course of our civilization's development.

Humans have evolved a culture of story-telling as a way to pass information from one person to another, from one generation to another, a way of contributing to a common repository of information by which we are able to learn and develop. In this way we are a unique species – our adaptability to our environment enhanced by our ability to consciously store, transmit, and accumulate pools of knowledge.

This story-telling has enabled us to make huge advances in our social, political, economic and technological innovations, exponentially increasing the shared knowledge repository of humankind. Stories enable us to instill cultural values – most traditionally connected to our needs and that of our land base – and ensure that they are internalized from the very young to the wise elder. Telling stories is the way in which we ensure that certain behaviors are characterized as good, or heroic, while other behaviors are immediately seen as bad, or villainous – a simple way to elicit desired behaviors from our kids, our employees, our populace.

But the telling of stories is a double-edged sword. Those who craft and perpetuate the stories of our culture are in a position of both great responsibility and great power – the power to influence, even determine, the behavior of whole populations. This power is not always used for good, and the responsibility often evaded – as is the case with mass-media distributed propaganda. Examples such as the work of Ayn Rand – who crafted a suite of heroes whose job it was to rationalize the concept of self-interest as the greatest of all virtues – demonstrate how even popular fiction can be used to generate a cultural meme of profound effect, with Alan Greenspan, economist and former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, listed as one of Rand's closest followers and a key player in the sub-prime mortgage crisis that led to the Global Financial Crisis.

Recognition of internalized concepts as stories enables us to alter our detrimental and unsustainable worldviews in favor of views that are more in line with natural world realities, and thus more amenable to our sustainability. We are, it seems, both the master and the servant of our mythology, our servitude all the greater if our mastery is the lesser.

Our culture's embedded Mythology

Some of the myths of our culture are so deeply ingrained that we fail to recognize them as stories, instead assuming that our limited and filtered worldviews are simply rational and objective assessments of our reality.

At the root of our erroneous worldviews – the views that are fast-tracking us towards annihilation as a species – is the notion that humanity has dominion over nature. The origin of this concept long predates the biblical references to it, yet it is, nevertheless, a religious belief – one that has become so entrenched that even atheists who have long since cast off the mantle of religion subscribe to and repeat it as though it were absolute truth. The false and arrogant belief in our dominion over the natural world has led us down the path of destruction only an Old Testament God could incur. We fear wild nature and seek to tame it, fencing ourselves into concrete enclaves within which we foster the belief that all else is beneath us. We distrust the wisdom of Mother Nature, insisting that our own technological offerings are superior to her craft. We use the offerings of the natural world for our own selfish gain, failing to recognize the needs of other species as equal to our own – for they, too, are under our dominion. We punish the natural world for its inferiority to our perceived greatness – we tear up forests, vacuum oceans, blast the tops off mountains, create vast swathes of desert, bleed our rivers dry, and we enslave, torture, and murder animals in a daily holocaust of biblical proportions. Yet the reality is that we have no such dominion. We have the power to influence our environment, as evidenced by anthropogenic

climate change, but not to control it, as is abundantly clear from our humble submission to nature's most awe-inspiring feats of destruction.

From the story of our dominion over nature stems our concept of ownership. If we are able to dominate the natural world we are then able to own portions of it, buy and sell those portions, and generate further wealth from the production of goods from its looted resources. We tell ourselves the story that we are entitled to own regions of nature's kingdom and we compete for this perceived entitlement, destroying the very amphitheatre in which we stage our battles. The competition for ownership unleashes the atrocities of war, slavery and imperialist conquest, with the fallacy of entitlement the very concept with which our culture of empire justified the decimation of 99.6% of the American Indian population. Our sense of entitlement to own knows no bounds – the enslavement of our less entitled brothers and sisters worldwide is what facilitates our insatiable hoarding of iCrap; the rape and pillage of our life-giving biosphere is what affords us our glitzy shopping malls and highways between havens; through grabs for land and water the starvation of our fellow humans is what enables us to self-pityingly experience obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease – the maladies of our own affluence. Yet the truth is that we in the west are simply able to pay for all this. We know better the rules of the game and are born on the winning team. The reality is that we never truly own anything. Once the game is over everything goes back into the box. We can't take it with us.

Further disrupting the harmony of what could be, we demand our economies grow because such growth is both desirable and necessary – another myth generated from our sense of dominion over nature and the concept of ownership. We believe that economic growth is desirable as it will enable us to have more of the finer things in life – things our ancestors could not have imagined possible, such as fast cars, jet planes, swimming pools, designer clothes and holidays in exotic locations; we view it as necessary because it enables an acceptable standard of living for all with access to food, water, shelter, energy, healthcare and education. Far from giving the poor a leg up to attain levels of material security and genuine opportunities, economic growth simply funnels wealth to the owners of capital, making a mockery of the trickle-down fallacy while accelerating the rate of material throughput and the depletion of the fossil fuel and mineral resources that make our short-sighted dreams come true. The reality is that economic growth is only necessary for one thing – the perpetual growth of the Ponzi scheme that is money in order to provide greater wealth to the already obscenely wealthy. In our insatiable quest for wealth our worldviews have become dangerously decoupled from what we really need for survival – and none of the needs on Maslow's hierarchy pertain to luxuries of the material world that only serve to undermine our access to safety, security, meaningful relationships, and the spiritual goal of self-actualization.

The Protestant work ethic is a narrative that has propelled our society in its quest for economic growth and prosperity, and control over nature via sheer hard work. We believe that our desires only remain out of reach due to insufficient effort on our part, and that those who have what we desire have earned it through the sweat of their labor. Those who toil under slave-like conditions in mines for the production of the rare minerals from which our well-deserved iCrap is made must simply not be working quite hard enough as they lack the money to send their children to school, much less ever own an iPhone. Those who labor most hours of the clock to produce the designer finery in which we sip cocktails and self-aggrandize our own accomplishments must simply not be putting in quite enough time as they merely subsist on the meager rice their time buys, never dreaming of donning the garments they produce in abundance. Even we, the worlds wealthy, are never working quite hard enough to fuel the economic growth machine and fully realize our dominion over the earth. What needs to be challenged in this narrative is not work, but the material success-oriented ethos, the climbing of the ladder to power, and the resultant status that awards the winners of the game the moral right to a piece

of the feudal kingdom. The reality that needs to be told is that hard work by itself – i.e. without the propellant of privilege – is rewarded, in most cases worldwide, by exhaustion, and not the promised livable wage, much less the American Dream.

A culture of denial

Dancing hand in hand with our culture of mythology is our culture of denial. With the elaborate falsehoods we have woven come the need for ever more elaborate justifications. Justifications for our actions and worldviews involve further layers of narrative such as “human nature is inherently greedy, selfish and competitive”, or “this is the way it has always been”, or “nature would have made things different if it were not supposed to be this way”. When confronted with reality we deny that our worldviews are faulty, insisting that any challenge to our most sacred of beliefs must simply be wrong. Our confirmation bias serves the 40 November 2012 / Spirit of the Times Magazine maintenance of the status quo, and our trajectory toward collapse of our beloved way of life.

A move toward adopting a new mythology, a more honest set of narratives for a worldview in sync with reality is one that will not come easily. In our denial of any alternative views and ways of life we are trapped in a cycle of Cassandra-like despair, in which the wise fervently preach portent of what is to come if we do not mend our ways, and we ignore the ill-fated messengers who fail to dislodge our minds from their comfort-zone of embedded myth.

Historical precedents

We face a gargantuan task in bringing a more realistic narrative to a society founded upon a denial of reality. However, this task has been attempted before throughout the ages, and with incremental successes via media of various forms from Plato’s *The Republic* to Thomas Moore’s *Utopia* to Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Certain points in our history have sparked entire movements of trajectory-changing narrative, injecting truth into public consciousness, and the hope that another way is possible.

The First World War brought forth a wave of literature telling of truths obscured by the mainstream media mythology of the day. While the newspapers were pressing young men to enlist in the army to “fight for their country” poetry was flooding back home from the battlefield telling truths of what was. Wilfred Owen’s *Dulce Et Decorum Est* provides a bitter and vivid account of life in the trenches in the age of chemical warfare as well as an enduring critique of the popular myth – a brazenly alternative narrative to that of the ruling class. The final four lines hold a raw and bitter beauty of a truth dared told:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est

Pro patria mori

Attempts to positively influence the course of social development through narrative surged during the era of Romanticism, beginning in the mid-late 18th century in the UK – while the founding fathers were theorizing economic thought. This movement was a philosophical, political, literary, cultural, and artistic challenge to the Enlightenment movement, which was of a more intellectual bent with the purpose of reforming society through the use of reason and advance knowledge through science. The Romantics were of the view that society could not be reformed simply by the application of information and reason, but that a narrative would have to be woven – a view in line with our emergent contemporary understanding that informing society of ever more facts and figures does not have the desired effect for social change.

Fundamental to the Romantic movement was the belief in the natural goodness of human nature. It was theorized that, contrary to popular contemporary and historical belief, in a “state of nature”, humans would do good, not harm, but that civilization as we had created it provided a hindrance to our natural expression, with William Blake claiming that: “urban life and the commitment to “getting and spending,” generates a fear and distrust of the world.” The Romantics also expressed commitment to change – a dynamic rather than static way of being, spinning a narrative of a perfectible humanity, that moral as well as technical progress is possible. The Romantics’ greatest enemies were cast as the successful bourgeois, or the Philistine with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Romantic poets stressed a love of nature in their work – the controversial literature of their day – with Samuel Taylor Coleridge referring to poetry as a “... media tress between, and reconciler of nature and man”. Nature was referred to as an exemplar and source of physical beauty, as well as embodying a more metaphysical manifestation of spirit in the universe.

It was believed that the structure of society and politics had led to a culture of servitude and oppression, and that a departure from materialism and possessive ownership in favor of values more congruent with the needs of the natural world would assist in catalyzing a much-needed fresh start. Such views were heavily influenced by accounts of “new world” travelers who had had contact with First Nations’ peoples.

From the era of Romanticism emerged Coleridge and Robert Southey’s “Pantisocracy” – plans for an egalitarian community of people living a more simple life in accordance with the dictates of Mother Nature and with common ownership of all land and resources. It was believed that the creation of such an exemplar community would cement a positive narrative in people’s minds that such a way of life was not utopian, but real and possible. However, the Pantisocracy society never came to pass due to disagreements arising between its would-be founders regarding the integrity of the scheme.

It seems our society may be yearning for a new wave of Romanticism to communicate the messages that our modern-day Enlightenment of the purely intellectual is unable to convey, and to reach people in the ways that cold hard facts and figures cannot. New stories will be needed.

Telling a new set of stories

It is clear that our old stories aren’t doing the job of instilling sustainable values and congruent practices, and that we need a new mythology that is responsive to the needs of our planetary emergency. Our new narratives need to be at once more truthful and empowering, inspiring a level of social change thus far unachieved by our era of access to information. With the application of carefully constructed cultural memes, crafted with responsibility and integrity, it may be possible to reach far more people with the internalized values and constructs of a sustainable paradigm. We need to replace the myth of humanity holding dominion over nature with the truth that we are simply a part of nature’s complex web of symbiosis. An understanding of our place in the ecosystem can be facilitated by simple stories embedded in our culture from early childhood, and serve to inform our responsible custodianship of our land base.

The narrative of entitlement to ownership needs to be replaced with that of common access to all that nature provides. A new mythology needs to bear forth the truth that equity is a moral and practical imperative in any healthy and functioning society, leading to something much more akin to the African concept of Ubuntu, in which it is said that “I am because we are”.

Our doctrine of perpetual growth needs to be cast aside now that we understand the growth paradigm is faltering. A steady-state economy is one which needs to be embraced by positive narratives telling of the quality of life that can be experienced in a world post-growth, a world in which people labor fewer hours and have more quality time with loved ones, a world in which our obsession with material possessions is replaced with an embracing of rich life experience. Hand in hand with the notion of a steady-state economy comes the replacement of the work ethic myth with stories of the wondrous creativity of the human spirit in a life unrestrained by the shackles of monetary-motivated labor.

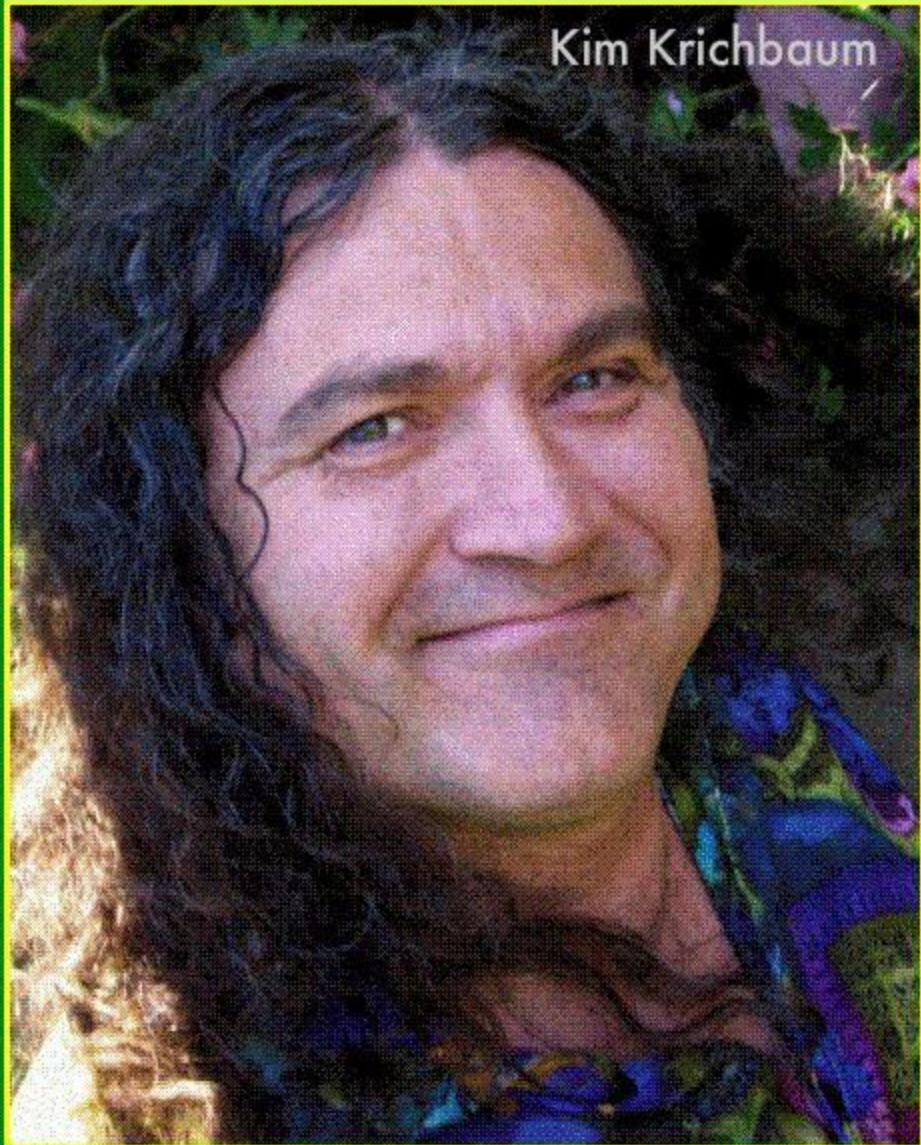
And in order to truly empower people to be the change they wish to see we need to break free of the myth of human nature as self-serving narcissists. With a new narrative informed by the findings of contemporary psychology people may seek to express the best of human nature and become the heroes of their own new mythology.

Cultivating a new heroism

The challenge now before us is to craft a new mythology in which our heroes are ordinary people like ourselves who pave the way toward a sustainable future. Instead of the high positions held by our heroes and gurus of old we must remove the pedestal and create a construct of heroism to which all can aspire and reach. Unlike Ayn Rand's self-serving heroes who benefit in parallel with the losses they inflict upon others our new narratives may feature heroes celebrated for their empathy, altruism and collaboration with their community, with our new villains being those who undermine sustainability in their failure to be mindful of the consequences of their actions. Our heroes need to reflect the journey we, ourselves, must take in becoming and creating the change we wish to see.

Whatever the form of our new heroes or the journeys they will take we must pay attention to the responsibility that we all hold – our responsibility to tell our new stories, to add to the pool of knowledge, to pave a sustainable direction for our children's future. It is we who are to be the heroic authors and narrators of our new mythology, a mythology which, when itself grown old, will be famed for its dramatic rescue of humanity from the cliff-edge on which we now stand.

Kim Krichbaum



"It's great to ask for small or quirky things, too. A button sewn on, a costume to borrow, someone to play backgammon with." KK

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Interview with Kim by Willi. Background piece on Gift Circles follows.

What is a human need? To what length have you journeyed to find answers?

There are many levels of human need. From basics like food and shelter, to interpersonal needs like intimacy, listening, appreciation, to deeper personal needs like the needs to contribute and make a difference, and the need to love. There are also more concrete things that bring us joy. Our intent is that at Gift Circles we can address this whole range of needs. In the early days of our gift circles, my offer for matchmaking had more requests than any other offer I made.

Personally I have observed my community and individual with unmet needs in the community for many years. I noticed that many people would not feel it appropriate to ask for help with huge needs like chronic pain, loneliness, overwhelm with children etc. I specifically encourage participants at Gift Circles to ask for the needs that would really make a difference in their lives. It was the desire to live in a community where those deeper needs were addressed and met that have fueled my personal motivation for creating Gift Circles.

Are gift circles spiritual? Any examples to share?

What does "spiritual" mean? Gift Circles are not a specific spiritual practice, nor are they tied to a specific spiritual belief system. Yet if part of your belief system is that "we are all one", then at Gift Circles we hold that giving to someone in our community is really giving to a part of our larger self. And we give for the sake of giving, and receive in gratitude. I see all of that as concretely spiritual. I know at Gift Circles I often feel a fullness, a connectedness from transcending the usual state of isolation and competition that is present in much of our society.

Are you supporting capitalism or pushing away from it? Where do Gift Circles integrate into the larger alt economy? Examples please.

Gift Circles are pushing away from capitalism. In our traditional economy, saving and even hoarding is encouraged. There is a story that a Native American from an Oregon tribe who practiced gifting was asked when they had a large fishing haul, why they would hold a huge party and give away the fish, rather than salt and store the fish for later. He replied, "I do store the fish, in the belly of my brother." Our philosophy, rather than save things or money we are not using, that we store it in the lives of our community members, and that is where security and prosperity come from.

Our picture in the long run, is that will be several levels of economy, some form of national or international currency for long distance exchanges, if that currency had a negative interest rate, all the better. (read the brilliant book, [Sacred Economics](#) by Charles Eisenstein for more info on negative interest economics, it's available online for gift). There will also likely be a local currency for exchanges outside our community, but in our vision, the resources that are given and received within our community will happen within personal and online gift circles. We work with [Kindista.org](#), a Eugene organization that has an online gifting database.

This coming together in a caring community process sounds like a new ritual? Your thoughts?

Gift Circles are definitely a new and evolving ritual. In some circles we have an initial go around where we share what we are grateful for that we have received, and I find that practice makes the circle feel more ritual-like. Potlucks beforehand and other ways we connect, also add to the ritual feeling of a circle. And I have the sense that there are other pieces we may add to this form over time that will add to the ritual nature.

Aren't GC really about bartering?

No, at Gift circles we have a guideline that all transactions do not have to be equal. You may give to one person and receive from another. We trust that balance will come from reputation built up over time. If you know another person gives a lot, you will feel more motivated to give to them, and conversely, if someone develops a reputation as a taker, others will be less willing to give.

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Bio - Kim Krichbaum

Kim has been exploring the question, "How do we create communities where people really get their needs met?" for much of his life. Kim has facilitated the Heart of Now awareness and communication workshop in Eugene for over 10 years and has lived in two intentional communities. For the last year Kim has been focusing on creating a real and powerful sharing economy through gift circles and workshops helping people practice the skills they need to give and receive fully.

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How Do Gift Circles Work?

Gift circles are community gatherings where each person shares what they want to give, and want to receive in their life, and then we connect to make it happen without an exchange of money. After a short introduction and check-in, we will go around the circle and give each person a chance to share what they would like to give to others. This may be time, skills, goods, info, and more. Each of us will have a piece of paper to take notes when we hear an offer we'd like to receive.

Some folks have a hard time recognizing what they can give, but we all have things to give. Think of what you love to give, what you are good at, not just at work, but with your family and friends. Think about what you have extra that you could give away. Think about what tools and goods you have that you rarely use and could loan. Think about what information you have that others would value.

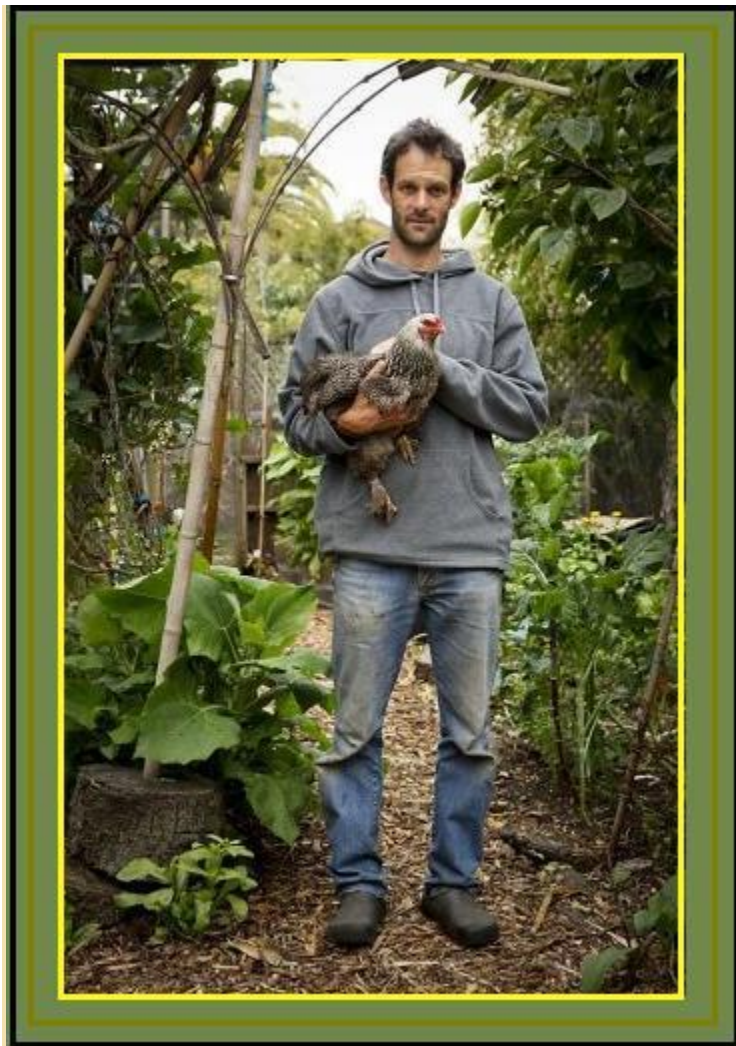
Next we go around and each person shares what they would like to receive. Again, we all take notes. Ask for things that could make a real difference in your life. There are often areas where people think they cannot ask for help, or they cannot imagine how their community could help them, and yet with almost any need, your community can help.

People have received car use, child care help, introductions to romantic partners, even help reclaiming a stolen car. If you have a need, it can be met. Ask for things that will reduce your dependence on money. Massages, food, car repair, carpentry, and more have been exchanged in gift circles

It's great to ask for small or quirky things, too. A button sewn on, a costume to borrow, someone to play backgammon with.

Next, we all go up to others with whom we would like to give and receive and set up connections to make it happen. Not every connection has to be a trade. You may give to one person and receive from another. Each time someone asks you to give them something, or you offer, we encourage you to check in with yourself, and see if this particular interaction feels right. You do not have to give something to an individual just because you were interested in giving in general. We encourage you to only say yes when it feels right, but if you do say yes to follow through. And in the rare cases when you cannot, to communicate with the person as soon as possible. We are building a community of trust. No will not damage this trust. Saying Yes and not following through, will.

We have an ethic of giving with beauty, excellence, and integrity. Treating our gifts to one another is more important than money, not less. A couple of notes – most of our exchanges do not involve money, but there are a few exceptions. When you give a gift that costs you money to give, you can ask for a pass through cost of materials, and still gift the person with your time and skills. This might be applicable with material for sewing, wood for carpentry, or mileage if you have to drive a considerable distance as part of the favor. Also, if you are a person with much more money than time, you can voluntarily give money, either in appreciation for a gift you received, or simply to a person in the circle who needs it. This is about all of us having our needs met.



Two selections from Mr. Shein's book:

The Vegetables Gardener's Guide to Permaculture.

"Change is inevitable in the garden. What works well one season may not be successful the following year. Adapting to the shifting patterns of temperature, rainfall, pest populations, and other external forces is an important skill for the permaculture gardener. Our goal is to work with Nature instead of trying to control it. As you face the challenges that come with growing edibles, keep this principle in mind. You'll soon realize that in the garden, there are no mistakes, just lessons pointing you toward better solutions." P. 35

"Seed saving is one of the best ways to practice permaculture. ...you learn to select the best crops from each year's yield, while saving money on next year's garden. Seed sharing provides opportunities to expand your plant knowledge, grow some new varieties, and meet other people with similar interests." P. 228

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Interview with Christopher by Willi

My readers would love to understand the role of story, song, symbol and myth in your community work. Have you written poems about plants and Nature rituals?

Permaculture is applied ecology and remedial ecology / holistics. Mollison and Holmgren come out of an academic tradition/ white male Australian identity/ privilege so most of what's written about permaculture is non-spiritual. I teach in a hands on way and I guide my students to start learning and experimenting with permaculture principles that can work in their own gardens. I just wrote a book in an attempt to capture some of my story about my own experiences with permaculture. I have yet to attempt permaculture poetry, but I have had some students that were poets, MCs, musicians, etc... to share their art with the whole class. Once I had some friends come in and do an elaborate Joanna Macy ritual "Council of All Beings", where we had spent weeks before mediating on a spirit animal or plant (one student came up with "mulch" as their guide) and even made face masks and then did the ritual concerning what "we" were going to do about the two legged ones (humans). I think Joanna Macy's shifting of the perspective of an endangered species is pretty powerful stuff.

For folks without any access to land, is it still possible to adopt and experience permaculture?

Very much so, this is where earth care, people care and fair share intersect. Permaculture in general is not about self sufficiency, it's about mutually beneficial relationships and community self reliance. So community gardens, school gardens, back or front yard shares, roof top gardens, school gardens, homeless gardens, squat gardens are all expressions of us wanting to connect together around land and working together to create powerful change. We need to push the land reform and land redistribution angle a lot more.

My inbox is always inhabited with permaculture training ads. It seems to me that there are too many teachers and schools to support the movement. Your thoughts?

Now there are many excellent permaculture teacher trainings around, so that's an improvement. Successful courses are largely dependent on successful marketing, so there are plenty of excellent teachers and courses, but not always the marketing, so not all courses run full. And in some markets there can be too many classes targeted to the same people, but there are a lot of unreached markets, and PDCs seem to be evolving. Last summer I saw a yoga/ hike/and PDC all together in one course.

What should we understand about the various levels in permaculture practice, from the weekend back yard gardener to the hard core survivalist permaculturist? Is permaculture politically savvy?

Permaculture in general is not about self sufficiency, it's about mutually beneficial relationships and community self reliance. There are always exceptions and exceptional people that want to go it themselves. Permaculture is a broad spectrum of political orientation, but I think there is a strong thread of little "d" democracy as in participatory democracy and being engaged locally. How are you going to raise your kids? Public schools or home schools? I think we need to get some permaculture folks into local politics, but I think its generations off for larger organizing structures. Permaculture seems to me to be about community organizing and a vision and practice of a decentralized food system, housing system, energy system, and educational system. There are lots of smaller parts that make up the whole. And interesting political bedfellows we are making on the anarchist green/black/red front with ultra left (think of the Casey Neil song, "Dancing on the Ruins of Multinational Corporations, Ha Ha Ha) slant and other end with the Joel Salatin's of Polyface Farms, where he's anti-government and a right wing Christian fundamentalist that listens to Rush Limbaugh and Glen Beck to get his political worldview. But he's one of the most successful eco-farmers in the country, a capitalist but also a greenie into protecting his land. Salatin is getting his children to be a part of his successful farm team, a really good look into how sustainable something really is. I'm glad to see people get into the urban, suburban and rural homesteading movements, but for me permaculture is something much bigger than just growing your own food (fibers, medicine, homes, water supply, etc...) it is about fair share or redistributing the surpluses. From the USA, we need to remember that as a country and western civilization, collectively people from the US are a part of the wealthiest country in human history. Most of us don't have access to enough land to grow all of our own food, so we need to get to know our farmers and ranchers and build face to face community relations in our food supply chains. And some of the ideas from the early settlers really need some updating so we can integrate some of the indigenous thinking like "all my relations" and know that pioneers were on forcefully stolen land.

In a recent listserv chat with Toby Hemenway, he relayed that he cherishes his personal sense of the sacred in permaculture but must keep such things out of his teaching. Is your own garden practice – or Merritt Community College classroom – “just science” these days?

In the context of the Landscape Horticulture Department, permaculture is really way out there in terms of the hard sciences. We don't teach pesticide applications or other losing battles from research of reductionist science. We do teach the ethics and principles, which is really pro-life (earth care, people care, fairshare) in the sense of biophilia. We need to teach about the interconnectedness of ecology, of the web of life and how we need to start valuing zone five and wilderness. Like the idea of tinkerers not throwing anything out just because we don't know what it's for yet. And zone 5 is our university, the place where we get out of civilization and start to see and observe what's really going on and what's working together. Death is a part of life, so it's pretty hard to understand vegans. We are nature, we need to spend some time just being and then we can observe and connect with the nature in our surroundings and ourselves. Learning about nature awareness and tracking skills and all that is pretty much on a spiritual path. I've had guests over the past come and teach about bird song recognition, which is an opening to a whole new way to perceive the natural world.

The ethics, principles, techniques and strategies of permaculture are all based on ecology and the natural world. Nature is about sharing resources, of bounty and abundance. Scarcity comes up too as a check and balance; let's just not drive our society with it in the pilot's seat. The brilliance of the 99% movement is it is decentralized and locally empowering and challenging the idea of having a 1% in control of so many of the resources and power. The corporate media couldn't see it or understand it and just tried to ignore it before it co-opted it. There is enough to go around, we have enough food produced every year to feed everyone on the planet right now, we don't need the "green revolution" that is just chemicals and irrigation and petroleum agriculture, we need a fair share or a just food system and equitable distribution. Food actually goes to waste now before it gets to where it should. That doesn't happen in a natural ecosystem on an annual basis like our food supply chain.

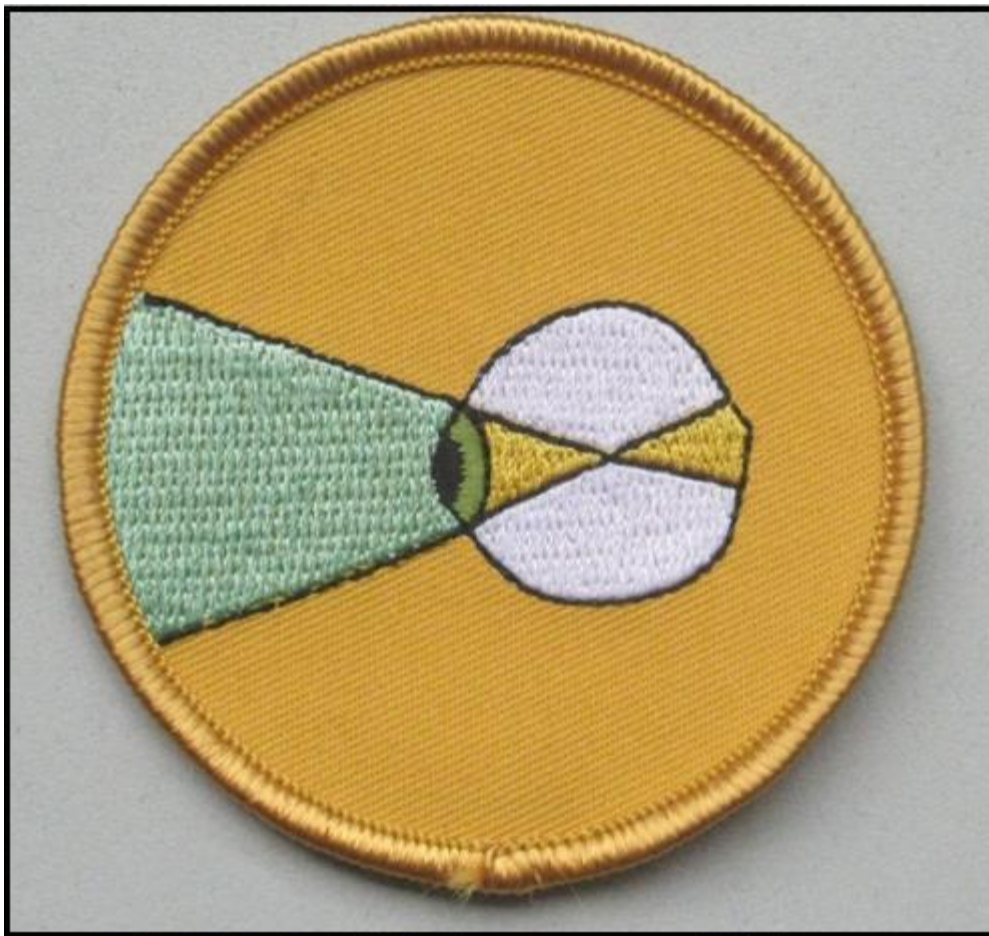
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Christopher Shein's Bio:

Christopher Shein has been a gardener in Berkeley and Oakland, California, since 1993. He has started dozens of community gardens, school gardens, market gardens, and gardens in backyards and in centers serving the homeless. He teaches permaculture at Merritt Community College where he has helped develop the award-winning student farm. Shein also owns Wildheart Gardens, a permaculture landscape business that designs and builds sustainable gardens. He graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and earned his Permaculture Design Certificate at Linnaea Farm on Cortes Island, British Columbia. He lives with his wife, Dr. Runa Basu, D.O., and their daughters, Gitanjali and Basu, in urban South Berkeley.

Contact Mr. Shein -

wildheartgardens@yahoo.com



“Urban Land Scouts Interview with Founder Katie Ries” by Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine

“The Urban Land Scouts are a group dedicated to promoting and teaching good stewardship of our immediate land. Everyone is welcome to join the Urban Land Scouts. If you would like to get started Land Scouting, raise a hand and read the pledge below out loud. Then prepare to earn your first badge. All Scouts begin with the value of OBSERVATION. After earning this badge you may earn the rest in whatever order you choose.

The Urban Land Scout Pledge

I will to the best of my ability
be a good steward of the land where I live
by cultivating native and edible plants,
promoting species diversity,
sharing the fruits of my labor and knowledge,
and propagating Urban Land Scouting in barren lands.”

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Interview with Katie by Willi

You readily acknowledge the connection to the Boy Scouts. How does ULS compare to permaculture and the Transition Movement?

The connection to the Boy (and Girl) Scouts is that the Urban Land Scouts (ULS) use the structure of scouting, specifically earning badges, to encourage and reward certain behaviors. We differ in that our sole focus is land stewardship (primarily through plant culture) and that we are open to everyone of any age. The practice of starting small in your own backyard and working outward into subsequent zones is one idea that the Land Scouts share with permaculture-- begin small and close to home and grow from there. I think gaining experience before working at a larger scale is critical. I've seen some large community gardens installed only to fail later from lack of interest or needing something basic like access to water. My understanding of the Transition Movement is that it's about working regionally or locally to find place-specific solutions. That move to work with the resources at hand, both community and material resources, is something we value as Urban Land Scouts.

I don't see a "pre-apocalypse" or climate change badge in the mix. How do you deal with the real fears of young people?

You could consider this whole project is a response to my own fears about environmental change and trying to answer the question of, “How then shall we live [when we are told we must change our ways or die]?” In response to the overwhelmingness that can come from considering that question, the core values of the Land Scouts are designed to introduce very manageable and specific actions. In that context, I think climate change is too large and complex an issue to address in only one badge or value.

I understand and am in tune with the popular interest in post-apocalyptic thinking and stories, but I think it can sometimes take us too quickly into a radicalized or moralized mindset that's not always helpful in terms of changing behavior. Or we consider these stories dystopian fantasy and not something to treat seriously. Especially in populations of people who might not have given serious thought to the issues.

When you ask about the “real fears of young people” I think you're talking about a specific (but large) subset of the population who has the educational framework to know and worry about climate change. In my limited experience working with young people, there are sometimes more immediate concerns (for example domestic safety issues) that take precedence over the abstract thinking required to address climate change or imagined post-carbon scenarios. My goal with the Urban Land Scouts is to introduce these very basic activities such as observation or knowing about plant life cycles in a positive context so that they might gain a foundation of eco-literacy, a positive experience in the outdoors or “natural” world, and a practice of reasonable habits towards stewardship and environmental sustainability. In terms of addressing the fears of those people who already know about climate change and are wondering what to do, I think the Land Scouts can only offer an introduction. It's a gateway practice to more significant actions.

ULS may not have access to land for gardens. What then?

In my experience it's a lot harder to create meaningful and positive associations with land that is not biodiverse, for example, if there are few plants besides the landscape staples of Bermuda grass, nandina, and monkey grass, but I assume UL scouts do not have access to much more than that (if that). Hopefully scouts will have access to public spaces like parks, school yards, or community gardens. In cases where accessing and tending those public spaces is not possible, we can still focus on and learn to observe what's growing and happening around us. For instance, varieties of moss growing in sidewalk cracks or how rainwater flows through a parking lot. The city has its own language and systems and we can study those in the same way we might examine an old growth forest. Depending on the access, resources, and ability of a scout group, they might work to create more biodiversity and beauty in their space. Or to acknowledge the limits of their land and to seek out other more fertile or interesting places to earn some of their badges.

Is the ULS protesting against Monsanto's and other corporation's ownership of seeds and plant DNA?

The promotion of biodiversity is a part of the Urban Land Scout pledge. Monsanto's aggressive behavior, especially towards farmers wanting to save their own seed, is maddening and deadly. I sign petitions and email my elected representatives, but I think the more radical and patient gesture is to teach as many people as possible about seed saving. I had the privilege of meeting John Coykenall, a farmer and renowned seed saver in the Southern Appalachian region when he came to address a group of land scouts and told us, "This is the future of seed saving-- it's going to be you and people with such interests." John's spent decades collecting bean varieties from all over the southeast and the Appalachians specifically and he carries with him the rich stories associated with their names and origins. These beans have names like Milk and Cider or Snow on the Mountain and their existence is a testament to stewardship, self sufficiency, and poetry. As Land Scouts, we might not necessarily practice seed saving on such a significant level, but we can start small with things like hearing these stories, collecting seeds of annual wildflowers, buying open pollinated varieties from companies committed to sustainable agriculture, or by learning and teaching about the practice of seed saving. These gestures can seem insignificant in the face of a global corporation like Monsanto, but we need to have faith that our aggregate actions matter and that they will build and grow. Further I think we need to tell the stories, you might say myths, of these heirloom varieties and the people who stewarded and saved them for generations.

What is "immediate land?" Is this related to localization?

Immediate land refers to the place where you are. Wherever you are, this is "your land" and you must be a steward of that land. This is in contrast to the idea that you would only be a steward of the land who's healthy and productivity will benefit you directly. Immediate land also refers to the specific ground on which you're standing, whether it's an urban sidewalk or permeable earth, not just the picturesque areas we might imagine when we think of "land." If we're talking about localization in the sense of place-based solutions and systems, then absolutely, a sense of one's immediate land is related to that. I'd be curious to hear your take on this. What do you think is the first step (or steps) to being able to think in terms of localization? If someone's never encountered that idea, how would you introduce it?

Have you received negative feedback on ULS? How can you improve the member experience?

I've not received much negative feedback, but I recognize some areas where the project needs work. The main issue I want to address is the lack of good means by which I can easily share the project like a workbook or PDF to be downloaded from the website. Currently the user experience is tied to my presence and charisma in that I'm the only one giving workshops or hosting groups. That's natural in terms of the project growing out of my art practice, but it limits the reach of or access to the Urban Land Scouts. I'd like to grow the project and is explanatory media to the point that any interested potential leader could email or send a letter and receive a zip file with PDFs or a stack of workbooks and get started hosting their own troop. Further I'd like the project to be financially sustainable and still accessible to anyone who wants to host it.

The second issue I hope to address is one of better tuning the project towards young middle-school age people. I designed the Land Scouts as a project to be pursued independently by autonomous adults, but I think it would be stronger and more efficient practice in groups (like the traditional scouts) and if it could be easily integrated into existing curricula. If the goal is to integrate habits of stewardship to our everyday lives, that is to create a culture of urban stewardship, we need to be practicing in a community. I once heard a talk on permaculture in which the speaker said, "The strength of a system is not determined by the number of nodes in that system, but by the number of connections between them." What a great metaphor for so many areas of our lives! I'm working on developing an Urban Land Scouts curriculum and Leader's Guide to help build those connections and hope publishing this future media will help the project grow and attract collaborators.

What is the purpose of a "gleaning tour?" Do you know of similar activities?

The Gleaning Tour was an urban walking tour in which we looked at what food was available in the commons (like sidewalks and road margins). The idea was both to increase awareness of the relative abundance we ignore (in fall in East Tennessee that meant things like apples, pears, chicory, and walnuts) and to examine the specific limits of a hyper-local (and gleaned) diet. We complimented our tour with a collaborative Google map on which we noted the edible perennials we found. You can see it [here](#). It was interesting in that the people on the tour were mostly white and well-educated, not the "poor and alien among us" specified by the Old Testament as those who would receive the gleanings of the fields. I started thinking about what else we might do, as people of privilege, and came up with the Tour de Plants, an urban bike ride in which we planted edible perennials in public areas around town like city parks, on school and university property, and so on. I don't think our plantings changed the reality of food security or scarcity in our area. Rather the tour served to couch those issues in an unlikely and somewhat playful context.

As to other similar activities, Fallen Fruit, an LA-based art group based, is doing great work leading similar foraging tours and making neighborhood fruit maps, among other things. You can see their work here: fallenfruit.org. I especially love some of the related objects they've made that incorporate the internet feedback they received on their work. It's a great example of the power of using humor and art to speak to difficult issues and to sincerely address conflict.

How can people get involved in the Urban Land Scouts?

For those not in my geographic area interested in starting a group, please email me: katie@urbanlandscouts.com. I'm specifically interested in collaborating with people to get feedback on the aforementioned media: Is it clear? Is it reasonable? Does it work well in your region?

Long term, I hope for regionally specific scout troops designing their own badges and for the project at large to expand beyond flora-based work. For example, perhaps we could approach stewardship through the lens of water and create a series of values and badges for that. Or the stewardship of social groups and bioregional communities! It's exciting to think about the possibilities of the project and what others might bring to it.

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Katie Ries Bio –

Katie is a multidisciplinary artist whose work is rooted in drawing, social engagement, and plant culture. Her project the Urban Land Scouts introduces the basics of ecoliteracy and land stewardship using the structure and ephemera of traditional scouting. Ries earned a BA from Colorado College and her MFA with a concentration in Printmaking from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She has studied printmaking as a Resident Artist at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, Poland and book arts with Ediciones Vigía in Matanzas, Cuba. She exhibits her work nationally and internationally.

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Connections -

urbanlandscouts.com

urbanlandscouts.blogspot.com

whoshareswins.com



kindista

"The Gratitude Code. Interview with [Kindista.org](https://kindista.org) Founders Nicholas Eamon Walker & Benjamin Crandall" by Willi Paul, [Planetshifter.com](https://planetshifter.com) Magazine

"Kindista is all about getting more of our needs met through sharing. The more resources you offer to your community, the more you will inspire others to offer what they have to you. Get creative! You can offer skills, tutoring, clothing, household items, food, or the temporary use of vehicles, tools, work space, or housing. Anything you have that is underutilized, or that might be useful or appreciated by someone else. If you're still not sure what to you have to share, try looking through the [requests on Kindista](#) to see what kinds of things would be useful to others in your community. Remember, posting an offer doesn't create an obligation to give anything; you can always say no when someone asks for what you've offered." (From Kindista member email)

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Is Kindista an "online community?"

Kindista is a tool for community building. While people can meet and connect for the first time on Kindista, the intention of the site is to facilitate interactions that take place offline. Many existing communities are unaware of the wealth of resources and services available within them. Kindista helps to reveal this wealth. Through sharing, new and existing communities develop deeper bonds woven with ties of gratitude.

What values are you trying to replace and why?

We are trying to encourage the values of gratitude and openness. Expressing gratitude for what we have is the most powerful antidote to the fear of not having enough. Effectively facing that fear enables us to openly and honestly see and reveal what we have and what we need. This openness enables others to see us, care for us, and feel gratitude for what we share with them. Kindista helps us to realize the wealth and connection latent in community when we shed fear and get to work on what we can do for each other and for the world.

How are you different?

At the heart of Kindista is the act of witnessing gratitude. That makes us different in two ways: witnessing and gratitude. Kindista makes it very easy to see everything that is going on near you; everything on the site is tied to location, and you can instruct the site to give you an experience tailored to whatever you consider "local." The first thing you'll see when returning to Kindista is what's

been going on nearby. We emphasize the display of gratitude people have been expressing for each other. We believe that gratitude is the best antidote to fear and one of the keys to unlocking generosity and connectedness in our communities.

We respect your privacy. All communications with the Kindista website are encrypted, and we don't embed JavaScript code from other websites like Google and Facebook that enable those companies and the government to track what you do on most of the rest of the internet.

Kindista is compatible: it works great on computers, tablets, and smartphones. It also works well with screen readers and other assistive access devices. We built a truly "open access" website without compromising on design.

Kindista has a novel technical architecture that enables us to give a highly localized experience to each person without compromising on the speed of the site. It's also quite easy for us to adjust the site and add new functionality. Part of this is the sheer magic of working with the Common Lisp programming language, and part of it comes from having an architecture based on 15 years of experience building high-performance custom software and interactive websites. We do all of our own design and development, and we place a strong emphasis on the quality of experience people have when interacting with Kindista.

Can an offer also be / include a request?

Offers and requests cannot be combined on Kindista. The intention behind this is to liberate people from the limitations of planning how they will get their needs met. When we clearly state what we have to offer and what we need it frees up our community to provide for us in ways that we could not predict or plan for.

What barter or social media sites influenced the early vision of Kindista?

Our idealistic inspiration came largely from Charles Eisenstein's book Sacred Economics, a wonderfully thoughtful and thorough look at the past, present, and future of how we cooperate as a society.

We took some visual influence from Facebook and VK and then adapted that general layout into a simpler visual framework that accommodates mobile devices, assisted access devices (screen readers, etc.), and our visions of future functionality.

Are you utilizing Transition or permaculture principles? Examples?

Yes!

Positive Visioning: Kindista is built on positive vision! We believe in a world where people experience rich and caring community and are able to focus their lives on sharing their greatest gifts in service of self, family, community, and the world as a whole.

Help People Access Good Information and Trust Them to Make Good Decisions: Kindista is all about providing information and helping people to make their own decisions. We show people the offers, the requests, and the gratitude, and encourage everyone to make their own decisions about how to share.

Inclusion and Openness: While Kindista is limited to people who are able to use any form of web browser, we do our best to make the site usable by older computers and alternative methods of access (screen readers, Braille, etc.). Nothing about Kindista requires owning a personal computer, so we think we're about as inclusive and open as we can get for a service that requires web access and literacy.

Enable Sharing and Networking: That's what we're all about!

Build Resilience: It shouldn't take a disaster for neighbors to figure out what resources and skills exist in their community. Kindista helps build strong, connected communities. We hope to continue introducing new tools that facilitate food networking, housing, and helping people figure out what skills are most needed by their community.

Inner and Outer Transition: Kindista is as much about a transition to an internal state of gratitude, openness, and trust as it is about an external transition to getting needs met through sharing. The internal and the external go hand-in-hand.

Observe and Interact: Kindista was designed based on observations of existing communities and methods of sharing (time banks and gift circles). We could see how much wealth is latent in the communities in which we participate, but the existing social tools were too time consuming to paint a complete picture--so we made Kindista!

Catch and store energy: People are able to contribute to their communities in many ways. Sometimes people are in a surplus state and sometimes people are in a state of need. Kindista captures and records the community's lifetime of gratitude for an individual that allows newcomers to see that while a person may be "needy" right now, they were generous in the past and likely to be generous again with a little bit of help.

Apply self regulation and accept feedback: The design of Kindista incorporates extensive feedback we received from an earlier beta version of the site. The current site has an interactive feedback forum that we use to drive improvements.

Design from patterns to details: The design of Kindista started with vision. From the vision, we imagined what actual activities people would conduct that would be the realization of that vision. Then we envisioned the tools necessary to conduct those activities, starting with a vision of the human experience of interacting with the tools. Once we had a complete vision of the human experience we started writing code. When the code doesn't line up with the reality of human experience, the code changes!

Integrate rather than segregate: We have worked to bring together different organizations operating in the Eugene area. Recently we welcomed members of the Emerald Valley Time Exchange to Kindista, and we're looking to be of service to other communities and organizations in our region and beyond. Because Kindista is an open source project backed by a non-profit, we hope other projects devoted to nurturing a sharing economy will join forces with us!

Use small and slow solutions: We launched quietly in Eugene last year and have been spreading gradually through word of mouth. We might admit to an occasional desire for rapid growth or to roll out a whole bunch of new features, but at heart we're dedicated to slow and steady growth that allows us to respond consciously, at a truly human pace, to the needs of our growing community.

Use and value diversity: Kindista is all about creating an alternative economy. By facilitating sharing we believe we are adding to the diversity of ways people can interact with, meet, and get to know each other. The site also encourages people to make new connections outside of their normal social circles.

Use edges and value the marginal: As the sharing economy takes hold it seems to start primarily with small sharing. Sharing small, non-essential things helps people to build confidence in sharing as a way of life, helping them to feel safer and open to bigger and more generous sharing. We've seen this in-person with gift circles, and we can see now that the majority of offers and requests on Kindista are for smaller gifts. We respect this small sharing and see it as a beautiful and essential stage of growth for the sharing economy.

Creative use and response to change: Kindista is designed to adapt. We've already made some major revisions to the site that reflect how people actually use it, and we managed to do so in a way that preserved all of the information people had already put into the site. As we've continued the development of Kindista we have put a huge amount of effort into making the "engine" adaptable. It is our ongoing pleasure to make slight and subtle changes to the site that make it a more pleasant experience for the people who use it.

You state: "We encourage you to express gratitude for anyone that has shared something meaningful." So, the site is powered by a "gratitude engine!?"

Kindista is powered by love, gratitude, sweat, tears, Common Lisp, and FreeBSD.

Is Kindista also about creating abundance?

Abundance already exists in many places. Kindista is about revealing abundance and overcoming the fears and communication challenges that prevent accessing and sharing abundance.

Is the ability to make a commitment online a big challenge?

We've surveyed a number of people who use Kindista and people almost always follow through on commitments made through the site. This may be a cultural phenomenon limited to Eugene, as other gift sharing sites have reported to us that they have very poor follow-through. We'll see what happens as the use of Kindista spreads to new areas!

* * * * *

Bios of the Founders -

Nicholas "Eamon" Walker is an American computer programmer, inventor, and community organizer. As a teenager he tracked down and provided evidence against the hacker responsible for stealing Cisco's iOS source code and numerous military and government secrets (FBI Major Case 216). His inventions in the fields of digital film and human interface technology have earned him several US patents. In over 15 years of software development, he has authored peer-to-peer file-sharing services, a digital magazine publishing platform, numerous social web applications, and most recently co-authored the Kindista social network for local sharing. He has lectured internationally about software development and the Free (Open Source) Software movement. He lives in Eugene, OR.

Benjamin Crandall is a computer programmer, social entrepreneur, community organizer, musician, and martial artist. He founded CommonGoods Network, an Oregon 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and co-authored the Kindista social network for local resource sharing. He has a decade of experience with nonprofit finance and administration and has been studying macro-economic and financial markets since 2004. He has a degree in Jazz Saxophone from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music and occasionally performs sets of his original compositions in Eugene, Oregon. He has also been studying Yang Michuan T'ai Chi Ch'uan since 2001 and teaching the martial art since 2004 in Washington, DC and in Eugene.

Visit Kindista.org



“The Invisible Pedestrian.” Interview with Natalie Burdick, [Walk SF](#) by Willi Paul, [PlanetShifter.com Magazine](#)

Pedestrian Safety Tips for Kids -

- * Talk to your kids about how to be safe while walking. Always walk on sidewalks or paths and cross at street corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
- * Teach kids to look left, right and left again when crossing the street. Remind them to make eye contact with drivers before crossing in front of them and to watch out for cars that are turning or backing up.
- * If your children need to use a cell phone, make sure they stop walking and find a safe area to talk. Teach kids to look up and pay extra attention when using headphones and to remove them when crossing the street.

* * * * *

Interview with Natalie by Willi -

Pets on or off leashes, cigarette smokers, boarders, homeless people, you and me; we are all part of the sidewalk ecosystem. How does Walk SF integrate all of these and other uses?

Walk SF is the only nonprofit that works to make walking safer in San Francisco by addressing the leading, preventable cause of pedestrian injuries and deaths: vehicle collisions. Walk SF and its members focus on securing street improvements like lower speed limits, road diets, crossing signals, countdown timers, sidewalk widening, and greening, as well as increased traffic enforcement for the most dangerous driving violations, to keep people safe when they walk.

What are the major safety issues for pedestrians in SF? Do all neighborhoods have the same concerns?

While 11% of traffic deaths nationally are to pedestrians, in San Francisco 50% of these deaths are to people walking.

In fact, over 800 pedestrians are hit by cars in San Francisco annually. Last year, the number was nearly a thousand -- which means, on average, cars hit three people a day in the city! Most tragic of all, each year 20 people die from these preventable collisions. In 2013, nine people have already died -- individuals including 17 year-old high school student Hanren Chang and retired math teacher Tania Madfes who lost their lives while walking.

The only silver lining in any of this is that over half of all pedestrian injuries and deaths occur on just 5% of San Francisco's streets. These high-injury corridors are concentrated in certain areas like the Financial District, the Tenderloin, Chinatown and along streets in neighborhoods like the Mission, Sunset and Richmond. By fixing these 44 miles of wide, fast arterial streets such as Geary, Van Ness, Sloat and sections of 4th and 6th Streets approaching the freeway, the City could cut these injuries and deaths in half.

The City recently announced a plan called the Pedestrian Strategy that could make this a reality. The plan includes measurable infrastructure improvements and increased police enforcement of traffic crimes to reduce pedestrian collisions on the city's most dangerous streets. Walk SF's members are now advocating for the funding and implementation of this plan.

Putting aside the rules of the road and the mechanics of driving a car, what makes an unsafe driver?

The leading cause of pedestrian injury and death is driving speed. In San Francisco, speed accounts for ten times the number of injuries as driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If a pedestrian is hit by a car going 40 mph or faster, their chances of dying are one in three. If the car is going 20 mph -- the odds are only one in ten.

In addition to unsafe speeds, drivers that fail to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks or make unsafe turns at intersections are the most dangerous to people walking.

What role, if any, do the new SF parklets bring to the pedestrian experience?

Parklets create much needed open, public spaces and offer aesthetic and rest benefits for pedestrians, as well as economic and social benefits for communities at large. But parklets also function as one example of a set of streetscape design elements that can calm, or slow traffic. Parklets, bulb-outs, greening on sidewalks and in medians, well-marked or raised crosswalks, and even bicycle-lanes all function to give drivers visual clues that they need to share the road with other users and drive with greater caution and reduced speed. And as evidence clearly shows, slower speeds make it safer for pedestrians.

How easy is it for pedestrians to get violators ticketed? What is involved?

In the past, pedestrians have been able to coordinate "stings" at intersections with high violation rates by working with local San Francisco Police Departments in their respective districts. Efforts that focus on school and senior zones have been the most successful targets for these increased enforcement efforts.

What are the key challenges to pedestrian safety at construction projects?

Construction projects that create barriers preventing pedestrian from gaining access to a clear path of travel (at least four feet of sidewalk or protected byway, if the sidewalk has been closed), put pedestrians at the greatest risk by forcing them to walk around the building site and into the street and car traffic.

Where did automobile drivers get the notion that pedestrians are second rate?

Car-bias has been culturally and institutionally ingrained over time, but it hasn't always been the case. In fact the term 'jaywalking' was re-invented as part of a PR campaign in the 1920s to shift the blame in collisions from cars to pedestrians and move popular sympathy from supporting the victims to blaming them.

Since the post-War era, roads have been designed to move large volumes of cars at high speeds. Roads have not been designed as 'complete' or 'shared' streets, and as such -- drivers have (and not surprisingly, perceive they have) primacy over pedestrians (and indeed all other users of our streets). Even the word pedestrian is a biased term that demeans the walker -- the word's Latin root "pedester" refers to foot soldiers (e.g. peons), rather than soldiers of the calvary.

But the truth is, whether one drives, takes transit, or bicycles -- every trip taken both starts and ends with walking. Walking is one of the things that defines our humanness. And, as both the most healthy and sustainable form of transportation (and arguably most economical), it certainly doesn't merit its perceived second rate status.

Bicyclists killing pedestrians: are bikers receiving the same due process under the law in SF?

In San Francisco, 20 vehicle-pedestrian deaths have occurred every year over the past decade; contrast this with the two reported bicycle-pedestrian crash fatalities that received national media coverage this past year. Over 200 lives have been lost; where is the attention in the news? In fact, while both of those bicyclists were criminally charged, a recent analysis by the Center for Investigative Reporting found that Bay Area drivers who kill pedestrians rarely met with any punishment. An incredible sixty percent of drivers that were at fault, or suspected of being at fault in pedestrian collisions, faced no criminal charges at all.

To add insult to injury, even when drivers were charged for speeding, running stop signs, or not yielding to a pedestrian's right of way, over 40 percent of those drivers did not lose their licenses, even temporarily.

So no, in San Francisco, bicyclists that kill pedestrians do not receive the same due process as drivers who have killed one hundred times as many people from the seat of their cars.

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Natalie 's Bio -

After moving to San Francisco in 2012, Natalie Burdick joined Walk San Francisco's as its Membership and Volunteer Director. She joins Walk SF after five years in marketing and development at Santa Monica's Heal the Bay, where she led the environmental nonprofit's social media, third party events and constituent management programs. Prior to her water quality advocacy experience, she spent fifteen years in product, project and channel management in the software industry.

Connections –

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Oil & Water



July 4 ~ Sept. 2, 2013

San Francisco Mime Troupe 2013 Summer Season

www.sfmt.org

“Oil and Water” : Interview with Pat Moran - Music Director, Writer, San Francisco Mime Troupe by Willi Paul PlanetShifter.com Magazine

OIL & WATER

The San Francisco Mime Troupe

July 4 thru Sept. 2, 2013

“political satire and anything but silent”

"Climate Change, pollution, water scarcity and fossil fuel dependence and issues too big to be dealt with in just one story, so this year's Mime Troupe production presents two one act musicals linked by environmental themes depicting the abusive relationships society has with our natural resources and the lengths we go to satisfy our thirsts (done in their characteristic quick-change, singing & dancing, Commedia dell'Arte political style). A poisoned rainforest river, a senator mysteriously murdered in his office, a sinister criminal conspiracy, and an oil refinery ablaze in the Bay Area – with the survival of the human race in question, the stakes could not be any higher.

All park shows are free and open to the public. Additional, ticketed indoor shows will be in Alameda, Point Arena and Redway. For a complete schedule and more information, the public may call 415-285-1717 or visit <http://www.sfmt.org>. Additional info on SFMT and community organizations is made available at information tables at each of our park shows.

In partnership with environmental activists, over the next few months SFMT will host lectures and discussions, at shows, and in their studio – 855 Treat St. (btwn. 21st & 22ndSts.) in SF 94110. (Street parking is hard to find, public transportation is encouraged.)

The purpose of these forums is to have an open discussion on environmental issues with people from around the bay area. Environment activists will speak for about 20 or 30 minutes, followed by a conversation. The dates for the forums are on Thursdays: June 27 and Aug. 22 and will be held from 7:00 – 9:00 pm in the SFMT studio, with the guest speaker starting at 7:30 pm. To attend any of the Community Forum events – RSVP: 415-285-1717 / [sfmtinsolidarity @ gmail.com](mailto:sfmtinsolidarity@gmail.com). Past speakers may also be viewed.

The guest speaker for the June 27, 2013 forum is Cecile Pineda, author of "Devil's Tango: How I learned the Fukushima Step by Step". She will be talking to the SF Mime Troupe and their friends about the nuclear industry, and about how the energy and the weaponry aspects are inextricably linked. At the same time, she'll be addressing the harms to the environment that the industry presents in terms of soil, water, and air contamination through leakage in nuclear waste sites; and permanent contamination to soils of countries where DU has been used by The US and its NATIO surrogates. Read herBlog, follow her on Twitter or LIKE her on Facebook."

– SFMT Press Release

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Interview with Pat by Willi

Is there a foundation of values that set each stage for SFMT?

Yes. First of all there has to be a sense of optimism. We believe that people can make changes in the world that will affect things in a positive way. We are a collective run organization and it is important that all members of the company have an influence over the message we are putting out in our shows. We do a lot of research before and during our writing process and feel that it is important to do more than just complain about things- we look for solutions. We stand in solidarity with oppressed people world-wide and work toward a future where resources are allocated in a fair sustainable manner and people all treated with fairness and compassion.

What kind of community would you like to build with the Troupe?

We look for a future where people are treated fairly, respected, and compensated fairly for their labor, an end to exploitation of people, and a move to a sustainable culture.

Tell me about your vision and commitment of the future? what's your part?

As an artist (writer, musician) I think that the most important role I can play is to help people believe that positive change is possible. There are other ways of doing things that are better than how we are doing them now and we can work towards them.

Do you think that sustainability is like a new religion?

I think that sustainability is a concept that was a fundamental basis of many old religions. The idea of respecting life, maintaining balance, and preserving the good things in life for future generations is both an old and new idea. It certainly is possible to use the concept of sustainability as a starting point for ethics and a source of meaning and direction in life.

How is live theater competing with electronically mediated sources?

There is definitely a movement in mainstream theater circles to incorporate technology and technology-based issues such as:

- 1) integrating multi-media technology in performances
- 2) producing shows that focus on topics such as social media, on-line identity, gaming etc..
- 3) creation of on-line supplemental material that connects to a specific theater piece
- 4) encouraging audiences to interact with a live theater piece by using Twitter, Instagram, etc...
- 5) seeking to find more effective ways to market shows through social media
- 6) presenting pieces that explore storytelling and narrative techniques seen as reflecting our changing concept of technology.

On the other side of things are those who want to use live theater as an alternate to the “modern world” and feel it is most powerful when it is about people on stage telling stories and living lives without electronic enhancement – or with traditional enhancements such as lighting and sound reinforcement.

It’s definitely harder then ever before to get people to come out to see live performance for a number of reasons- increased access to less expensive high quality entertainment in a home environment is certainly one of them. So the question becomes: “What can we give people through theater that they are unable to get from other sources?” and then I suppose it’s important to figure out if this thing that they can only get from theater is something that is important for the audience.

Who isn’t attending your shows and how do you get them to show up?

No matter what you do there are going to be people who come and people who don’t. Some of the obvious groups that don’t attend our shows would probably be- people who don’t like theater, people who don’t like to sit outside in parks, people who are very close minded in the ultra-conservative manner, etc... Those people have a good reason for not coming to our shows. For me the first question is “Are there people who would come to our shows if they knew about them?”.

The answer to this one is definitely yes. The bay area is extremely transient so even though some circles of people see the Mime Troupe as a venerable institution, the majority of people don’t know who we are or think that we do silent mime. Every year we have a number of audience members who stumble upon us by accident and are pleasantly surprised to find out what we do. We are always trying to find new ways to improve our publicity. Often the best ways are the most obvious- people bringing friends to shows, media coverage, etc.

What are the main musical and graphic symbols in oil and water?

On a very basic level we are looking at water as the fundamental fluid of life (life blood) and oil as the fundamental fluid of industrial society.

The music in this piece was not conceived in a symbolic manner- I’m sure that it could be interpreted that way, but that is not my personal process of composition or analysis so I don’t feel that I can really answer that question. From a visual aspect we did not intentionally focus on graphic symbolism while creating this piece, so this question might be better answered by an outside source.

Do you think that you are mostly preaching to the “alt choir?”

We get all asked this all the time and I think the question raises a whole bunch of issues.

Audiences tend to choose to attend things they think they will enjoy and often like to surround themselves with people who have similar views. So yes, often our audience members will generally agree with a good percentage of things we address- this would be expected. Most people who go to baseball games tend to like baseball- for example.

However, within that “alt choir” group there is a great diversity of opinions- democrats, socialists, anarchists, etc.... who disagree with one another on many issues and every year we get people who say we went to far and others who say we didn’t go far enough.

The term “preaching” might suggest that we are just spouting out dogma We try to provide information that people might not be aware of in our shows each year. No one can be an expert on everything, and we hope to educate our audience and leave them with some questions that they can follow up with after the show. and we obviously try to be entertaining as well. I have friends who disagree with the politics of some (or all) of our shows but come anyways because they have fun.

Some of feedback we get each year is from people who are working hard for change. They tell us that they look forward to our shows each year because they find them reinvigorating. We feel that this is extremely important- we all go through lots of ups and downs in life- to use the choir metaphor- just because someone joins the choir doesn’t mean that they are going to stick with it. It takes great stamina to remain active and it is our responsibility to support one another.

And of course, we’re always attract new viewers and present our point of view in a fun and fair way.

Is the Troupe building a new mythology of tales and songs and messages?

Historically the mime troupe has tended to base our style in traditional character archetypes from Italian Commedia and American Melodrama. We look to see the parallels in storytelling traditions throughout the world and also see how these concepts are reflected in popular culture. In that way we see ourselves as part of a continuum strongly based in mythology. We look at our work as part of the bigger social justice movement, as well.

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Pat Moran Bio –

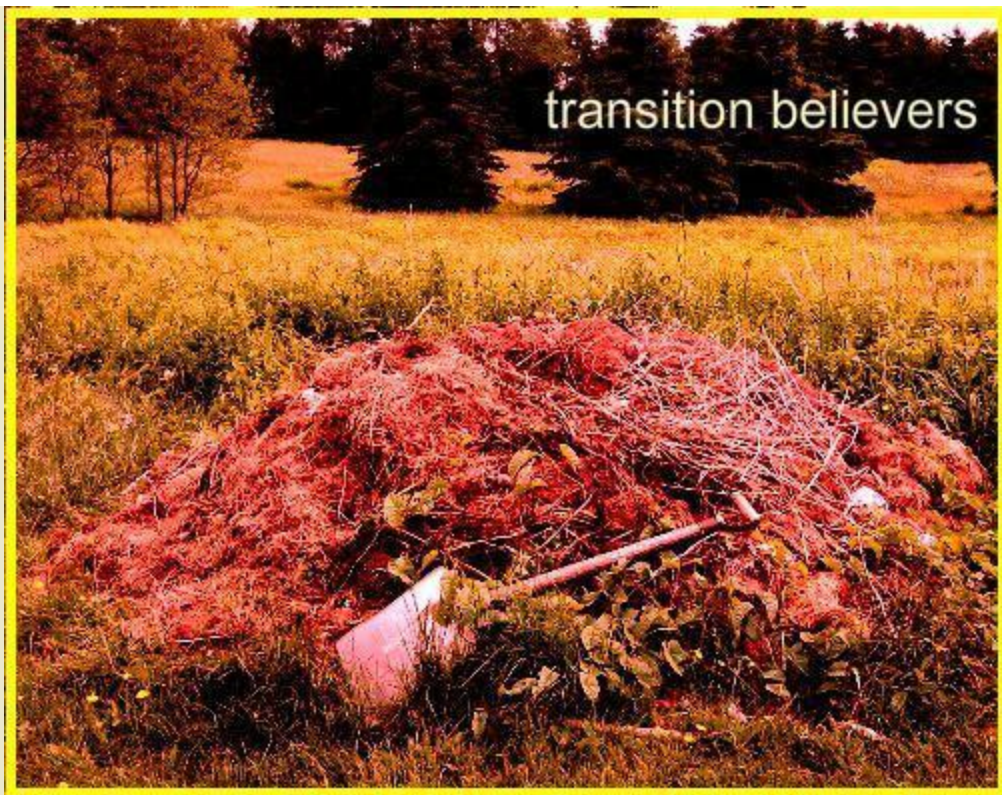
(SFMT Collective, Music Director, Writer, Composer, Lyricist, Musician) began his involvement with the Mime Troupe during 2005’s Doing Good and sometimes feels like he hasn’t left the building since. He has been an artist in residence at The University of San Francisco, The University of Miami (Ohio), and CSU Fresno. In addition to his work with theater, Pat is an active performing musician, and ASCAP member composer for film and television. He has been a lead teacher with the Mime Troupe’s Youth Theater Project and Summer Workshop and is also a private guitar instructor. Pat received a BFA in Philosophy with a Concentration in Ethics and Public Policy from Clark University, and an MFA Performer Composer degree from California Institute for the Arts.

Contact the Troupe –

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“Spiraling into Permaculture & New Mythology” - Interview with Shari Tarbet, PhD., [OSHER Institute](#) by Willi Paul, [NewMythologist.com](#)

“Connect: Use relative location: Place elements in ways that create useful relationships and time-saving connections among all parts. The number of connections among elements creates a healthy, diverse ecosystem, not the number of elements.” [Permaculture Principle #2](#)

Key Elements in the “New Mythology” ([W. Paul](#))

1. Localization – back to sustainability and community; self-sufficiency
2. Nature- Centric
3. Spiritual
4. Future-based
5. Universal themes(s) and message
6. Para-Normal in conflict or characters
7. Initiation, Journey and Hero
8. Permaculture & Transition: values and principles

* * * * *

Interview with Shari by Willi

Can a community be a Hero?

[Joseph Campbell](#) called the third stage of the Hero's Journey the Return. The hero returns from the other worldly realm of the unconscious (I think it is fair to say that it is the soul to which we journey) with a boon to give to the community. Though symbolized as an object, the boon is the knowledge hero gains of one's authentic self and how to live in the world, upon return, as that true self. The hero is then charged with the responsibility to pass this on to the people in the community. For example, in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, the hero Tayo, a psychologically wounded warrior returning to Laguna Pueblo after WWII, undertakes the Hero's Journey as a healing process not only for himself, but for the Pueblo and the world. Throughout the book, the elders of the Pueblo

periodically ask him what he has to tell them. Tayo doesn't understand what they want until he completes his journey. It is only then that he goes to the elders to share with them what he has learned.

All the Hero's Journey myths in all the cultures of the world past and present with which I am familiar show the individual taking this journey in a process Jung called Individuation. A community doesn't go on this journey, which is why I think a community is not a hero nor can it be a hero. However, I think it can be heroic when it fosters and nurtures the individuals who live within it to become their true, authentic selves. The danger is that even with the best intentions it can stagnate and, like the Empire in Star Wars, become, as Campbell termed it, mechanical. In other words, it would become a community or state that stops fostering individuals to become authentic and starts requiring that they conform to ways of being that maintains the existence of the community as an entity. We see communities in this state in modern tellings of the Hero's Journey not just in Star Wars but also in Matrix, Lord of the Rings, and A Christmas Carol, to name a few.

Can you provide evidence that classic myths are energizing the permaculture, occupy or Transition movements in 2013?

Let me just say that archaic, classic, or modern myth, all fulfill some or all of the same purposes of myth: to explain natural phenomenon; to support what a society sees as right and wrong, good and evil; to help the individual to live as an authentic self within any society or community; and/or to help us understand the mysteries of the universe that are beyond our ability to understand rationally. So, from this perspective, I do think myth is energizing these movements. Though I am not familiar with the permaculture or Transition movements, I have been involved in the occupy movement. The fact that these movements have arisen is evidence that myth energizes them for the energy is spiritual and as it moves, these movements have arisen. When movements rise up against what people consider to be unjust, corrupt we do have the hero epic in play here. The three best modern myth examples I can think of are Star Wars, Matrix, and 'V'. In all three we see a corrupt government whose rulers are old, sterile, and so divorced from the people as to even be considered alien. In all three we see a group of people that rise up in opposition to that corruption.

In Star Wars it's the Rebellion that rises up against the Empire ruled by an emperor so old as to look like death itself. His enforcer, as it were, is a Jedi who has turned to the dark side and submitted to his lord to the point there is nothing left of him but a worm-life version of himself because he has become almost entirely mechanical. Within this struggle arise a young man and his sister who both become involved in the struggle against a mechanical society. The young man, undergoing his Hero's Journey, has a final confrontation with both Darth Vader and the Emperor as his final tests to achieving his true, authentic self. In the Matrix, Neo becomes authentic within a rebellion of alien conquerors. V is hero, guide, and trickster in showing up a corrupt government and bringing about the awakening of a young woman in her heroine's journey.

The occupy movement is a rising up of people rebelling against a government corrupted by corporate greed. Just as the Empire, aliens, and British government send their police force to rid themselves of these rebels, so we saw local police sent in to defend corporations against protestors. Any of these three movements, if the myths are any guide, are successful only insofar as individuals become their own heroes and in completing their journey in this process outsmart the powers they rise against.

Who or what are some of the current alternatives to Campbell's constructs and visions? Is he still as important as ever?

Some of the current alternatives to Campbell with whom I am familiar are Freud, Jung, James Hillman, Maureen Murdock, Eckhart Tolle, and Dr. Clarissa Pinkola-Estes. Some of the what includes Maureen Murdock's Heroine's Journey, Jung's comparative process of Individuation, Hillman's exploration of the Psyche in the Underworld, his concept that the gods and goddesses have become our neuroses demanding our attention, the approach of Tolle and some Buddhists to eradicate the ego, Estes' Jungian approach to fairy tales to help women recover their authentic selves in Women Who Run With Wolves and other of her books and retreats.

Unconditionally yes, Campbell is as important today as ever. There are roundtable groups around the world that meet regularly to discuss Campbell and what he was saying. They discuss myths, fairy tales, and movies in terms of what Campbell taught. There is a foundation that houses his work and his books. Pacifica Graduate Institute houses some of his writings. In the early days of this institute, he served on its board. People continue to 'discover' Campbell and his work and are moved by it. I myself discovered Campbell when I watched the entire 6 hours of Bill Moyers interview with him right before Joe died.

The next day I went out and bought the companion book to those interviews as did, apparently, so many other people that the book store I went to had sold out of it and had to back order the title. I attribute that interview to eventually leading me to attend and get

my degree from Pacifica. I know of at least two programs, one in this country and one in Australia that use the Hero's Journey to teach boys how to become men. I am one of many teachers who use the Hero's Journey to teach literature in their high school classrooms. I teach it directly in myth classes.

What is a mythologist? Are there common goals and trainings (or just individuals and multiple agendas?)

Most strictly speaking, a mythologist is anyone who studies mythology. In this country there are only two schools where one can receive training in mythology. One is the Pacifica Graduate Institute that offers an MA/PhD in Mythological Studies, and a school in New York that offers training in the application of mythology. Outside of these two schools, any other study in mythology is subsumed, if one is lucky, in studies in world religions and/or philosophy.

As far as common goals are concerned, this reminds me of all the times I've heard the question asking what mythology is. I've heard that question answered many ways, but in every case I have found that those answers fit in Campbell's answer that there are four purposes of myth. I think the same is true for your question of common goals in the study of mythology; all the answers to the question can be contained in a few purposes. No matter how it's worded, I think people study mythology for reasons deeper than merely coming to know the stories. I think there is a desire to find meaning in one's life and in life in general.

I think there is a desire to understand on a symbolic/archetypal level the meanings in the myths. Of course there is the desire to study myth within an academic field of anthropology or archaeology, or even to study myth for its own sake. There is a desire to know and understand the peoples who told these myths to their children and to each other as well as sought out shamans, priestesses, and priests to enact the rituals that accompanied the myths. And I think there's the desire to understand and heal one's self.

Many champion the Hollywood Hero these days: Iron Man, Bat Man. There seems to be a lot of testosterone flowing there! Please read and react to [my critique of Popmythology.com](http://mycritiqueofPopmythology.com) - a blog by written by Daniel Jun Kim:

By now, you probably have noticed that I reference both modern literature and movies, though not comic books because I'm not familiar with the last. However, When I was teaching Comparative World Mythology to high school students, when we came to the unit on the Hero's Journey, I used both classic myth and modern literature as well as movies to teach Campbell's steps of that journey. Students in turn became able to relate it to other movies and comics. Boys who had always loved the Star Wars trilogy often told me they would never be able to see it the same way again. So, I agree with what you are saying in you critique. Let me begin with Star Wars. The fact is that Campbell was a consultant on the film because Lucas wanted to be sure he got all the steps, all the symbols, all the archetypes, the myth absolutely correct. From there the list grows.

The Matrix (first movie anyway), The Wizard of Oz, Willow, the Lord of the Rings (books and movies), A Christmas Carol, Alice in Wonderland, C.S. Lewis' series of the Witch, The Lion, and The Wardrobe, "V", The Pirates of the Caribbean (yes, and I can plot you all the steps of the HJ particularly in the first movie. And no, the hero is not Capt. Jack Sparrow. It's the young woman) and these are just the ones I remember off the top of my head.

In contrast, however, are the heroes you mention of the Iron Man and Batman stripe. I do not see them as the same kind of hero. They are not on a quest to find their authentic self, to move along the process of Individuation. They are the hero typical of a patriarchal culture that is not interested in the archetypal mythic Hero's Journey. They are the type of hero image that reminds us over and over again that heroism is only about might. That the evil always comes from the 'other' who is not us, and by that simple fact alone is evil.

The hero image embodied in Batman, Superman, Iron Man, etc. continually puts before us the warrior hero of not only a patriarchal culture but one that worships a thunder father god who leads in battle, to whom he is prayed to be 'on our side which is righteous', to whom the choicest spoils of war will be dedicated, who insists that soldiers go out and protect our 'way of life' from threats on all sides that will destroy us if we aren't ever vigilant and ready for war. In my opinion, this is the image of the Empire in Star Wars which uses suppression and oppression to maintain itself and is a distraction from that inner journey to authenticity. This kind of warrior hero doesn't have to be of high quality of deep development. This kind of hero only has to repeat the old orthodoxy of the empire which declares as heretic and rebel those who wish to be their authentic self. If we are attending to that heroic process of Individuation, we begin to think for ourselves and to think deeply.

We are also, according to Campbell, supported in this by supernatural aides. This, of course, is seen as very dangerous to the order of things represented in various ways in the epics of the hero on his and her journey because when individuals thinking for themselves they are no longer controllable.

Please share a few of your favorite modern day Nature-based symbols.

In no particular order, I'd have to say first, the serpent. It is the earliest symbol representing the wisdom of the Goddess. It also is the symbol for regeneration. Next, I'd say the tree. It's symbolic of the World Axis, or that which joins earth, above, and below. It is not only symbolic of family but also symbolic of the Self. Next, I'd say the moon. It symbolizes the phases of the life cycle of birth (crescent moon) life (waxing and full moon), death (waning moon), and rebirth (new moon). From archaic times we have figurines of the Goddess with the horn of an animal with 13 marks on it as a lunar year calendar. With her hand on her ample belly reminiscent of pregnancy/life, archaic peoples equated the phases of the moon with fertility and new life. For me these symbols still hold true in modern times.

How do you use alchemy?

I use alchemy symbolically. In dream work (dreams by the way as our personal myths) I look to the association of colors with the steps of the alchemical process of achieving the Philosopher's Stone as well as their association with the chakras. This can tell me where I am in a round of a journey or it will tell me if I have completed a round of my own Hero's Journey. I see the Philosopher's Stone as the symbol of the Boon of the Journey. The Heiros Gamos in Alchemy shows up in the Hero's Journey and is really important as that union, the coming together of opposites, particularly into a transformation of being from one state to a higher one.

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"We're not on our journey to save the world but to save ourselves. But in doing that you save the world. The influence of a vital person vitalizes." - Joseph Campbell

Shari's Bio - Shari earned her MA/PhD in Mythological Studies and Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute in 2012, and has presented papers on the Trickster and on the demonization process of the Sacred Feminine through words. A resident of Albuquerque, New Mexico, Shari taught in secondary education for over 30 years in the areas of literature, writing, history, and world mythology. She currently teaches topics in mythology with the OSHER Institute and reading at Dine College, and works extensively with dreams.

* * * * *

Connections –

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“Mythography & the Universal Human” : Interview with Allison Stieger, Principal at Mythic Stories (Seattle) by Willi Paul, NewMythologist.com

“Just before his death Joseph Campbell was interviewed by Bill Moyers and that interview was later turned into the documentary, “The Power of Myth.” In this interview he postulated the idea that humanity was in need of new mythologies. Ones that were not rooted in the ancient world as all our current ones are. But myth’s that would help us navigate this new and strange world we are creating.”

* * * * *

Interview with Allison by Willi

W: Can a community be a Hero?

A: I don't think the word hero is one I would use to describe a community. When I read heroic myths, particularly from the classical world, I see an individual who leaves the community behind (separation), is changed by a descent (initiation), and returns to the community with the boon (return), which can be an actual object or an idea or mental construct. It is an individual's pursuit to go on "the hero's journey". I would say that a community can exhibit traditionally "heroic" qualities, but the hero's journey requires that stage of initiation or descent.

W: Can you provide evidence that classic myths are energizing the permaculture, occupy or Transition movements in Seattle?

A: I don't know if those movements are being energized by myths, because I'm not a member of those communities, but I would argue that they are being archetypally energized. The hero is one archetype, and the heroic qualities of that archetype may be in play with these movements, but other archetypes should be considered. Such as:

Samaritan
Messiah
Martyr
Pioneer

Permaculture:

Teacher

Father

Visionary

Servant

Occupy:

Liberator

Warrior

Visionary

Avenger

Transition:

Teacher

Father

Visionary

These are only a few examples, but you see what I'm getting at. The hero is only one archetype among many.

W: Who or what are some of the current alternatives to Campbell's constructs and visions? Is he still as important as ever?

A: I think Campbell's work is definitely still resonating with people. In the years I've spent working with the Joseph Campbell Foundation (9) I've met many people who find a great deal of meaning in Campbell's work, as I do myself. However, Campbell passed more than 25 years ago now, and there is exciting work being done in the field of myth. The JCF is starting to profile the work of up and coming mythologists, which is exciting. The Myth program at Pacifica Graduate Institute is training new mythologists every year. Not all of them go on to have an impact on culture, but over the next 10 years or so I predict that some of them will become well known for bringing myth work to a wider audience.

W: What is a mythologist? Are there common goals and trainings (or just individuals and multiple agendas?)

A: A mythologist (or mythographer, as some prefer) is simply an expert on ancient myth. The study of myth can be approached from different perspectives. For example, one can approach the study of myth from a religious perspective, a depth psychological perspective, an anthropological perspective, or a literary perspective. The graduate program in myth at Pacifica has classes from all of those perspectives. It is also possible to educate oneself in myth without a degree program, much as Campbell did. He had an MA in Medieval Literature from Columbia, but he also spent several years after his formal education was completed reading world myths (he spent five years in solitary study during the Great Depression).

W: Many champion the Hollywood Hero these days: Iron Man, Bat Man. There seems to be a lot of testosterone flowing there! Please read and react to [my critique](#) of Popmythology.com - a blog by written by Daniel Jun Kim:

A: The Hollywood Hero as described here is entertaining, without a doubt, but I don't believe that this character in film can be considered mythic. There are other mythologists who would disagree with me, I'm sure. I know many screenwriters are familiar with the hero's journey, and try to touch the points of the monomyth in their screenplays, but in my opinion it takes more than a "connect the dots" approach to heroic myth to resonate with filmgoers. Both "Ironman" and "The Matrix" outwardly conform to the pattern of the hero's journey, but (again, in my opinion) only "The Matrix" can qualify as mythic filmmaking.

W: Please share a few of your favorite modern day Nature-based symbols.

A: I'm particularly interested in the symbolism of different animals. If a certain animal or insect appears to me, I'll take a moment to reflect on the symbolism of the particular animal, and treat the appearance as a spirit animal, in a sense. For example, on Saturday I was attending the wedding of a dear friend. She went through a difficult divorce about two years ago, and I was so thrilled that she has found a new happiness with her new husband. During the reception, a garter snake appeared where I was sitting, and it got me thinking about the symbolism of snakes.

Snakes are an ancient symbolic force, going back to pre-Christian goddess traditions. They are seen as symbols of renewal, which seemed so appropriate at the wedding of someone "renewing" her life with a new partner.

W: How do you use alchemy?

A: Myth is, at its core, about transformation. Alchemy is about the pursuit of transformation, and Carl Jung uses the symbolism of alchemy to describe the transformation of the individuation process. I've studied the use of alchemical symbolism as part of my education, in reading the work of Jung and Marie Louise von Franz, so I would say that alchemy has influenced my work, but it isn't a significant aspect of it, at least at the moment. This could change in the future, but for now, I'm focusing on other things.

W: Please select a new myth from my work and offer a critique?

A: I've read through about a dozen of your new myths, and I now have a better sense of what you're attempting by writing new myths. A couple of questions: What is Cascadia? Is it an imagined new country/new state in Northern California? Are your new myths an attempt to introduce a new vision for being in the world?

Reading them, it makes me think about the difference between stories and myths. From my perspective, what you've written are stories, and if they resonate deeply with the culture and community, they will become myths. Myths are the stories that survived, right? We don't know about the stories from the ancient world that didn't get told and retold. Myths speak to something deep within us.

Campbell, in his writing, mentions two different German words: "Elementargedanken", and "Völkergedanken". The first means, essentially, elementary ideas, and the second, ethnic ideas. (Here's a link to a page describing both terms).

I teach the difference between these two ideas to my Comparative Mythology students. When we look at a culture's myths, which exist to explain an elemental function of that particular culture (e.g. stories about snow for the Inuit), and which myths speak to something that is universally human?

So, my question for you is, what can your stories teach us about what it means to be universally human? Those are the myths that have meaning. "What is Cascadia? Is it an imagined new country/new state in Northern California? Are your new myths an attempt to introduce a new vision for being in the world?"

W: Yes, exactly! Please see my vision for Cascadia; my new myths are visions driven by the present global crisis.

A: So, my question for you is, what can your stories teach us about what it means to be universally human? Those are the myths that have meaning.

W: First, here are 8 elements of my new myths:

1. Localization – back to sustainability and community; self-sufficiency
2. Nature- Centric
3. Spiritual
4. Future-based
5. Universal themes(s) and message
6. Para-Normal in conflict or characters
7. Initiation, Journey and Hero
8. Permaculture & Transition: values and principles

Myth Lab is how I combine science and myth in a tool kit to create new (stories) myths. My use of the Artifact is indeed my attempt to deliver universal messages:

- A. Overcoming environmental damage from war and Capitalist greed
- B. Creating a new non-toxic agricultural system

C. Promoting a sharing economy

D. Clean water for all

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Allison's Bio -

Allison Stieger is a mythologist, writer and teacher who is passionate about myth and what it has to teach us about living a more fulfilled life. She holds a bachelors in English and Writing, and a masters in Mythological Studies in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. In 2004 she founded Mythic Stories, and since then she has been teaching workshops on myth, creativity and writing for adults. She founded the Seattle Roundtable group of the Joseph Campbell Foundation in 2004, and led the group until 2012. Allison also teaches yoga teacher trainees how to incorporate myth-inspired narrative structure into their yoga sequences, and will be leading a trip to Greece in 2014 with Sattva Yoga. She blogs on topics related to mythology at www.mythicstories.com, and is a contributing columnist for The Creativity Post, writing on the intersection between myth, creativity and innovation.

Connections –

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Typical West Berkeley, CA Alley



Alley Allies Project

"Alley Allies Project" : Interview with Katie Hughes, Mill Street Community Planning, Portland, OR, by Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine

"The alleys are another game for him and the children now, like a labyrinth that lets them explore the neighborhood. But they have other uses, too. Cars still amble through to get to garages, although many have been converted to attractive accessory dwelling units, providing a new source of housing for many and income for longer-term residents. Businesses along Foster were quick to see the potential of the alleys, and now there is a busy market of construction and landscaping companies competing for jobs redeveloping the alleys in Northeast Portland. Far from the underutilized spaces they once were, alleys have become a source of pride, cohesion and community that is unique to the neighborhoods along Foster Road. They have set an example for alley communities everywhere, with projects popping up in cities throughout the country." - Tool Kit

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Interview with Katie by Willi

Please share some of the City planning level lessons that came from collaborating with your team and neighbors?

Alleys in Portland are public right-of-way spaces and are owned by the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT). As a result, we knew that we needed to build contacts at the City and involve them in the process. Due to budget cuts and limited resources at the City right now, we took a collaborative approach focused on “what can the alleys do for the city” rather than “what can the city do for alleys”. We researched the many ways that alleys can help the city and region meet their planning, economic, community, and environmental goals. Some folks have the impression that the City is very restrictive or unwilling to consider projects in the public right-of-way, but everyone we talked with at the City was very receptive to the Alley Allies project.

The biggest lesson for me throughout this process was to not be afraid to ask for help and input! We reached out to several of the agencies, including: Portland Parks & Recreation, Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, Bureau of Development Services, Bureau of Environmental Services, Bureau of Transportation and the Portland Development Commission. They were ALL happy to meet with us and many participated in a City Agency Roundtable that we hosted to get a discussion started about the potential for alley improvements in the City. We also presented our products to many of the agencies, they offered to review potential site plans, incorporate language about alleys in the Portland Comprehensive Plan and suggested potential funding opportunities. All of this came out of asking questions and opening up the conversation in a collaborative way.

Please give us your impressions and how you would start to address a change for the West Berkeley, CA alley. **See top row photo.**

This alley isn't totally unlike some of the alleys we discovered in the Foster-Powell neighborhoods here in Portland. I see pavement, graffiti, high fences, and little vegetation- very similar conditions to some of the alleys here. My first impression is that this alley is a pretty intimidating space and not a place that I would feel particularly comfortable hanging out in or walking through.

In terms of how the residents along this alley could change this space, I would refer them to our “6 D’s” framework: Discussion, Decision, Details, Dollars, Do!, and Delight. This 6 step framework is a starting point for those interested in making improvements to neglected spaces. The first and probably the most important step in the process is to start a discussion with your neighbors and fellow community members. It is so important to bring your neighbors together and talk about what you would like to do with the space. This is how you discover whether there are shared concerns and overlapping values that you could address in the space. For example, I would imagine that many folks along this alley are concerned about safety and maintenance due to the tagging. This would equate to a shared concern and value, and strategies that address this concern and value could be implemented, such as installing lighting.

Shifting a use paradigm? As a child I grew up in my alley. Snuck home, lit fireworks, rumbled with my friends and foes, and made hide-out! Is Alley Allies advocating a focus change from kids to adults / families? To a more formal, structured place?

The Alley Allies project is more about creating spaces that people in general can use, not about dictating what that use is. In general, the alleys in the focus area for our project (Foster-Powell, Mt. Scott-Arleta and Lents neighborhoods) are not being used at all. In fact, many community members consider their alley a liability rather than an asset due to crime, tagging and trash dumping. The goal of our project was to illustrate that these places could be utilized for a variety of uses that meet the needs of the community. All of the sample visualizations that we created were based upon community input that we gathered through a survey, coffee talks and a community workshop. We hope that when folks decide to implement projects like this in their community they begin with a discussion with their neighbors to find out what some common goals and interests are.

Cars are still king in your allies, right?

Not necessarily. We did an inventory of every single alley in our focus area (over 120!) and walked through each and every one. We identified three different types of alleys- car focused alleys, pedestrian focused alleys, and destination alleys. In the car focused alleys people were actually using the alley to drive through or park in their garage. There were other alleys near busy streets, parks, or schools and those appeared to be more pedestrian friendly. Lastly, there were other alleys that were completely overgrown with vegetation and not drivable. We saw these as potential destination alleys for a park or gathering space. We spent a good amount of

time in the neighborhood and in and around the alleys and actually saw very few of any modes utilizing the space (cars, bikes, and pedestrians).

Talk about pedestrian safety, lighting and wildlife habitat in the “new alley?”

Improving alleys throughout the neighborhood could create a safe, walkable alley network. By creating spaces that encourage more users, there would be more “eyes on the alley” to help discourage illicit activities. One example of improving safety is the “kid-grid” concept. A “kid-grid” is a concept utilized in Europe to create safe, low-stress and well-connected thoroughfares for young children to travel to and from home, school, and play areas. Alleys could play this role.

Like streets, parks, and backyards, a dark alley is an unsafe alley. This is true for pedestrians and cyclists passing through, but a dark alley is also more likely to be a refuge for those wanting to hide their activity. Alley lighting can provide a sense of activity at night that attracts people to the space. In general, a well maintained alley encourages positive uses and discourages negative ones.

Alleys also have huge potential as wildlife corridors. Planting native plants and trees is not only beautiful, but it also creates habitat and could even help to manage stormwater. Utilizing alleys as natural space could be a really effective way to connect wildlife habitat throughout a city.

These are only a few strategies that could be implemented in alleys. Check out the toolkit for over 35 different strategies and tips for implementing them.

Is an alley a better place for a block party than the street?

I think they have the potential to be! Alleys are unique spaces away from the hustle and bustle of a street. I can imagine a neighborhood “alley party” where people walk through and explore the different alleys. The Foster-Powell neighborhood already hosts an annual garden tour. How cool would it be if they could add an alley to the mix next year? During the coffee talks that we did with community members, people were excited about the idea of using the alley as a gathering space. Some of my favorite ideas were creating community message boards, hosting a wine night or bocci ball tournament and installing a [free little library](#).

Are folks generating and sharing new stories as a result of their alley renovations?

Definitely. My favorite part of working on this project was the community outreach. We did a great deal of outreach at community events during the beginning of the process and it was interesting to hear people share their experiences about their alleys. Unfortunately many were negative such as discovering someone dumping trash or a finding an intruder.

We also held six informal coffee talks along different alleys. We found a champion along each alley and invited everyone who lived in a one-block radius to come over and talk about their alley. It was so great to see people connect and share their stories and perspectives. One gentleman said that it was the first neighborhood event he had ever been too. He had been maintaining his alley space on his own for decades, and was really excited about the possibility to work with his neighbors.

Here’s one of my reactions: “Allies begin and end at a street; moated by property lines, power poles and garbage cans?” Is this an accurate baseline?

All cities, and sometimes even neighborhoods within a city, are slightly different. We created a diagram that illustrates a typical alley from the neighborhoods we were working with on page 8 of our toolkit.

In Portland, most all alleys have a street on either end. There are utility lines in some of the alleys, but not all. In the Foster-Powell, Mt. Scott-Arleta and Lents neighborhoods, there is not trash collection taking place in the alley. However, some businesses on the alleys have parking lots or trash collection nearby. The property line question is interesting. Alleys are public right of way and owned by the Portland Bureau of Transportation. However, similar to the city policy on sidewalks and maintenance, homeowners are required to maintain the space behind their yard, to the middle of the alley.

Are temporary uses a better fit than trying to change the alley permanently? Is a permit required?

It depends on what the neighbors along the alley would like to do. As I mentioned previously, the goal of our project was to illustrate that these places could be utilized for a variety of uses that meet a variety of needs. We hope that when folks decide to implement projects like this in their community they begin with a discussion with their neighbors to find out what some common goals and interests are. Some neighbors may want to do less intense improvements such as general maintenance, stringing up lights, planting flowers or painting their fence.

Other community members may want to apply for grants and gain funds for larger improvements such as a bike and pedestrian path, rain gardens or café seating. Our toolkit includes an extensive overview of the types of improvements you can make based upon the goals of the neighbors (i.e. if folks are interested in food security they could create a community garden or install planting beds). We also included a scale to show how difficult or expensive a strategy may be.

The permit process is dependent on the improvements. Again, our toolkit includes specific guidance for each strategy. For example, if someone wanted to put in a small garden, they would likely have to apply for an encroachment permit through the Portland Bureau of Transportation. If someone wanted to vacate the alley to create a bikeway, that would require a different process that involves getting every homeowner along the alley to sign off. We have had several conversations with PBOT and they are excited about the project and open to working with the community on these permits. From our conversations with them, encroachment permits seemed to be best way to go for “temporary” improvements, or an improvement that could be removed fairly easily if it needed to be, such as a wayfinding sign.

I imagine that every city has different policies and processes. I encourage community member to contact their local government to learn what the possibilities are in their community.

More reactions from here: Alley Allies is a “localization engine!” and a “neighborhood design incubator?” Yes? No?

Yes and yes!

Alleys definitely have the potential to encourage people to think and act local. Some examples: using local contractors, creating safe thoroughfares to local businesses, and planting gardens and orchards to encourage local food production.

We also encourage neighbors to consider the strengths within the community. Create a skills list that includes you and your neighbors. Do you have a passion for drawing or experience with design or site planning? Maybe one of you works in construction or has worked with the City on previous projects and is familiar with City policy? Perhaps one of you has a knack for organization and motivating people. Utilize your strengths; it’s likely you have a strong team to make the improvements you desire. Assign an Alley Captain and create an Alley Committee to facilitate assigning roles and responsibilities to distribute the work.

Have you considered building a structure in the alley, such as a green house or a homeless shelter, with a path alongside?

We did explore putting structures in the alley. One of our alley visualizations includes a children’s playscape and community garden. However, these types of strategies would require vacating the alley which would involve a more intense and involved permitting process. It would also require sign-off from all of the neighbors adjacent to the alley.

One of the other strategies we believe has a lot of potential is thinking about alleys as an entrance for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). An ADU is a second dwelling unit created on a lot with a house, attached house or manufactured home. You can construct an ADU on your lot with access from the alley. Besides the social and environmental benefits they may provide, ADUs have legitimate income potential. The City also is waiving system development charges for ADUs until July 16, 2016. Now is a great time to consider this option.

How are you subscribing to New Urbanism, Transition and Permaculture?

While Alley Allies doesn’t necessarily promote one strategy or approach over another, I believe alley projects definitely have the potential to incorporate principles from New Urbanism and Permaculture. New Urbanism promotes walkability and a variety housing types, which alley improvements could definitely encourage through pedestrian pathways and ADU development. Permaculture is a way of thinking about environmental design that is modeled after natural ecosystems. If the neighbors adjacent to an alley wanted to redevelop the space utilizing permaculture concepts, I personally think that would be very cool!

I can't say we discussed the Transition economy concept, so I can't comment on that.

Please tell us how your tools and values relate to my New Myths #47 & #48.

I want to reiterate that this project was entirely community driven and based upon the values and needs of the community rather than ours. The reason why I and my other teammates were so drawn to this project back in January is because it was a community based project. Our team strongly believes that when neighbors come together to discuss something positive that they all share, powerful results occur: relationships build, ownership of the community develops, and strategies form on how to make their neighborhoods a place where all residents can thrive and be healthy.

We wanted to create a forum for community members to come together and talk about their community. The toolkit is organized so people can choose strategies that fit within their goals and values.

With that being said, I don't doubt that potential alley projects could address myths #47 and #48 that discuss food forests and zones. Food forests are a very interesting concept and food security definitely came up during our conversations with residents. As I mentioned previously, we discovered there were different alley "types" and this could lend well to a zone concept. Some alleys could be better suited towards gardening, orchards and park space where others could have business activity or paved walkways.

Note: Scott Ellis contributed to this interview

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Katie's Bio -

As a result of her work with the U.S. Green Building Council and the City of Portland, Bureau of Environmental Services, Katie has extensive experience in project management, strategic planning, public outreach, and green building and infrastructure. Katie also holds a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree from Portland State University, and has developed expertise in sustainability planning, land use issues, and downtown revitalization. Katie brings planning and development perspectives from: Detroit, MI; Washington, DC; Portland, OR; Havana, Cuba; Tuscany, Italy; and Tianjin, China.

Connections -

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“Hands on Resilience : Interview with Russell Evans, Director of [Transition Lab](#)” by Willi Paul, [Planetshifter.com Magazine](#)

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Transition Lab has developed viable alternatives to the 40-hour-a-week job that enable the underemployed to get to work doing what they love. First, we connect inspired and creative young people with hosts who are willing to put their empty guest bedrooms to use so their guests can do good work in their community. At the same time, we offer students a curriculum that covers everything from growing their own food to creating affordable housing, participating effectively in our democracy, starting their own business and bringing to life their deepest calling on this planet.

Empowered with a comprehensive skill set to build a resilient future, and with the ability to meet their basic needs in just 15 hours of work a week, our graduates become “Skilled Residents.”

Think about how radical this is: If you get all your basic needs taken care of in 15 hours a week by doing things that you would do in your free time anyway--things like running a community garden or becoming a green builder--you suddenly gain the freedom to do whatever you want with the rest of your week! One Skilled Resident paid off thousands of dollars in debt in just a few months, while another has reduced his life expenses to \$50 a week and is putting his free time into starting a new business. Becoming a Skilled Resident gives you the freedom to do what you really want your life, while also making the world a better place at the same time.

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Interview with Russell by Willi

What is your definition of transition?

I have always thought of "Transition" as an organic term that refers to nature constantly adjusting and evolving to co-create a world that we can all thrive in. At Transition Lab, we are excited about the possibility of building a resilient future and part of that is trying new things out. That's where the "Lab" comes into our name- because we know that we'll have to experiment a lot if we are going to be successful.

How do you balance the spirit vs. technology mandates at the Lab?

Do I pray and interact with Spirit every day? Yep. Do I use computers? Yep. That's just part of living in this age I guess.

How is the lab marketing its programs and vision?

Being part of Transition Lab is about being a storyteller that articulates a very different vision of the future. So many people have very apocalyptic views of what lies ahead because of the combination of traumatizing news and a scarcity of visible solutions. We have had the most success marketing our vision by simply living it and sharing our experiences in every way we can- whether we are talking on the phone to a friend, or a putting together a video. We tried to use paid advertising last year which failed spectacularly because it couldn't express the heart qualities of our program. Conversely, the folks that we've been able to sit down and drink tea with have been our best participants.

Define localization and share some examples in your work that address this critical Transition theme?

I think that Localization is really about having control over our lives. Gandhi had a term "Swaraj" which meant making the choice to live justly in all aspects of your life. This includes your job, your community, and yourself. When we look at globalization, it becomes impossible to have any say or control over many of our choices because the systems that are in place were never designed to give us power. Many were even designed to take away our voice. What localization does is to focus our energy into places that really matter- where we really have a voice and opportunity to be creative and responsible people. Good food comes out of that, as do good business practices, good governance, and good communities.

Who are the enemies of fixing climate change?

The only enemy of fixing climate change is old thinking that believes we will be able to solve it through using existing economic models. It's not that I don't believe in using tools like a carbon tax that would fit into our economic system. It's rather a question of creating economic models that can support people as citizens and not just as consumers. When this happens there will be thousands of people ready to engage as global citizens to demand the changes we need to see.

Another way of saying this is that there is no shortage of people who want our government to do something about climate change. But we are limited because those folks have mortgage payments and jobs that prevent them from taking the time to participate as citizens. In addition to not having the time to participate, most folks who do have the time have never trained in what it takes to be affective citizens.

Transition Lab was created by a unique set of folks who found ways pay the bills AND to engage as citizens. One of our teachers, Jim Branscome, taught at the Highlander Folks School in the 1950's, which trained Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and many others key civil rights figures in civic engagement. More recently, Jake Hanson and Ashley Sanders have been on the forefront of the Peaceful Uprising, Occupy, and Move to Amend movements. These people have also managed to pay the bills and created prosperity in their lives.

So we have brought together models that can economically support folks to become active citizens, while also giving them training in how to be the best active citizens that they can be. As long as people show up and participate, I think we can create the kind of movement that we need.

What kind of values and experience are you looking for in Skilled Residents?

More than anything, we are looking for people who have realized that things are not going to work out if humanity maintains its current trajectory. At the same time, our students need to possess a radical self-respect that drives them to continue working for a more beautiful, just, and fun world that we know is possible. It's so easy to become apathetic, depressed, or cynical about the world.

It's much harder to have the courage to think that we have a chance- but we also know that having the courage to move forward is a lot more fun.

What zone is most important for the Transition: the home or the neighborhood?

I don't think any zone is more important than any other. From every place - whether that is the self, home, or neighborhood, we need to act in creative and compassionate ways. We also need to build the models which will support this behavior. Like nature, it's all inter-related and we are just seeking to observe and interact in the ways that best serve us and others.

Please view and react: "[Transition Visions from Parking Lots](#)" : Premiere Video, The Sharing & ReSkilling Show

I'm always inspired to see folks trying things out. I think that's the key to the future- that we don't necessarily try to do everything at once, but focus on our own communities and the solutions we see there. In a sense I think every community does what it sees best for itself. What will need to unfold organically is for communities to radically alter their approach of what they believe is possible. I think that the Transition Visions for Parking Lots is a step in that direction.

How is the lab promoting new songs, poems and myths?

The storytellers of the digital age gather around Youtube instead of the campfire. So we're making videos all the time- each time refining our narrative a little more. [Here's the latest](#). We are also sending out a monthly newsletter each month with all the fun stuff we are up to. Folks can subscribe to that here. Enjoy.

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Russell's Bio –

Russell began teaching as Program Coordinator at Intercambio in Boulder, CO. He later taught high school Spanish for 6 years and earned a Master's Degree from Naropa University in Contemplative Education. He wrote his master's thesis on Loving Kindness Meditation and how it could help relieve trauma in high-school students. This work was subsequently published in Shambhala Sun Space. He has also been recognized by various organizations including 350.org and The Huffington Post for his ideas and activism. He is the director of Transition Lab -- and when he is not teaching, gardening, or making ice cream, he spends time with his wife Heather, and their daughter Genevieve.

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“Meet Us at the Legal Café!” “Interview with Chris Tittle, Director of Organizational Resilience at [The Sustainable Economies Law Center](#)” (SELC) by Willi Paul, [PlanetShifter.com Magazine](#)

[“We want to live](#) in cities filled with a diversity of microenterprises, urban farms, community markets, transportation-sharing, cohousing communities, shared housing options, cooperative enterprises, and a wide variety of economic solutions developed at the grassroots level.”

Shareable & SELC’s **Policies for Shareable Cities** has 32 specific policy recommendations that enable communities to remove barriers to sharing and realize the full benefits of the sharing economy in food, jobs, housing, and transportation. [Click here for the PDF.](#)

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Interview with Chris by Willi

What is community, Chris?

I like to think of community as both place and process. There are communities of place – geographically bounded communities where people share a common connection to a particular area and the experience of living there; there are also communities of passion based on a shared identity or set of values that extend across physical borders but are nevertheless bounded by something shared.

It’s important that we nurture both types of communities and that we are very clear about how we use terms like “community” in this type of work. **Part of creating community resilience is extending decision-making** and autonomy so people can define their own communities by what they have, rather than what they lack. And as a dynamic process, “community” is always being created or unraveled or adapting to change. Creating tools to strengthen community as both process and place is essential for resiliency.

What is resilience? How far does this idea extend in your life?

The concept of resilience is about learning from the natural world how to adapt and respond to change. In a time of so many converging transitions – in the regenerative capacity of the Earth, in the ways we meet our individual and collective needs, in how we relate to the larger web of life around us – how can we build our collective capacity to adjust and co-evolve in response to changing conditions around us? In the social and economic context, resilience is about creating more culturally appropriate and community-determined ways of meeting our needs, and re-embedding our economies in real human relationships. It’s also about

distributing power and decision-making to the most appropriate scale so that people affected by decisions have the most say in what decisions are made.

At the personal level, I have a variety of practices that help me to stay grounded and balanced, like mindfulness meditation and Aikido. Having traveled quite a bit, living and learning from many different cultures from Japan to Nepal to Senegal to Spain, I have internalized a lot of different perspectives and cultural lenses. The capacity to continually learn, question my own assumptions about what works and what doesn't, and develop practices that increase my personal and spiritual resilience has been invaluable. At the interpersonal level, I share my living space with a group of really supportive and creative people, and together we cook for each other, grow some fruits and vegetables, and share things through some cool online tools like **couchsurfing**, **yerdle**, and our local **timebank** – sharing these various things and responsibilities makes it possible for each one of us to live a richer life than if we needed to procure everything ourselves.

And at the systemic level, my work at the Sustainable Economies Law Center, as well as other projects in the community that I'm involved in, is enabling communities to meet their own individual and collective needs with the skills, knowledge, and passions that already exist close at hand. Ultimately, resilience is as psychological and cultural as it is physical – being able to hold different stories about the world and our place in it is as important as cultivating different ways of meeting our physical needs for housing, sustenance, and health.

What tools are you using to "build SELC's internal resilience?"

As a small collectively-run organization, the health and wellbeing of each individual is in some ways a reflection of the health of the organization as a whole. So we've started an ongoing inquiry into how we as individuals can support each other and ourselves while contributing to the important work that SELC does as an organization. Part of this process is helping to create enabling structures that provide a balance of autonomy and accountability to each of us – for instance we use an organizational process called **Holacracy** that distributes decision-making throughout the organization, allows for self-organization within our different program areas, and uses overlapping circles of responsibility to keep everyone accountable to the organization as a whole. This creates clear ways to provide feedback to each other, rotate and distribute certain responsibilities throughout the organization, and keep an open and ongoing conversation going about where we are as an organization and where we'd like to go. And we just really enjoy working with each other!

Please tell us about SELC's Community Currencies program. What models and heroes are in your vision?

The community currencies movement is going through an explosion of innovation and awareness right now. The way our current economy functions, most dollars spent in a community ultimately leak out of it as they go to out-of-town corporate headquarters. And because US Dollars are mostly created through debt, they also foster certain social values such as competition, scarcity, and anonymity. Community currencies, on the other hand, can be designed so they always circulate within a community, creating a multiplier effect for the local economy and giving local people a means of exchange when dollars are absent.

Monetary resilience may be one of the most essential aspects of economic resilience in the coming years, and has the potential to re-localize our economies in very direct ways. SELC is working to identify and remove various legal barriers to communities creating their own means of exchange, and providing legal advice and research on best practices for managing and governing currency projects so they foster values such as cooperation, democratic control, and mutual aid.

I've been inspired by models from all over the world that have sprung up in response to very context-specific needs: the Swiss WIR, for example, developed during the Great Depression as a way for businesses to continue exchanging between themselves when the national money supply dramatically dried up. It has been functioning since then, and serves as a counter-balance to the normal national currency – businesses use it more when the national currency is scarce, and use it less when national currency is abundant. I've also learned from pioneering electronic local currencies like the Bristol Pound in England, where the mayor recently announced that he is taking 100% of his salary in the local currency. There are also hundreds of timebanks popping up around the world, which are mutual aid systems based on the radical idea that everyone's time is worth the same, whether you are teaching someone guitar or offering legal advice.

A really exciting project that we are collaborating on now is exploring how multiple currencies might fit together into a "monetary ecology" within a particular community. The central idea is that different currencies can be designed to meet specific needs within a community, thus creating multiple ways for meeting people's personal and collective needs.

OK, I'll bite! Tell us about the "neo-liberal market paradigm" and your current alternatives?

Neo-liberalism, as a political and economic project, is both a process of restructuring entire societies around the duopoly of “the market” and “the state,” and a singular way of viewing the world. What is important to say is that this social organizing system is surprisingly new in the world and has arisen out of very specific cultural and historical contexts – namely modern Western civilization. The “Market Society” involves a process of turning living processes and beings into abstract commodities - or as the influential political economist Karl Polanyi said back in 1944, “disembedding economic activity from community.” A commodity is something with no inherent value of its own, something which only has exchange value - meaning it has value only in a market context.

The global market, as a way of viewing the world, also has a very specific internal value system – markets prioritize and thus promote efficiency, homogenization, and competition for scarce resources over other values like resilience, diversity, and cooperation. The spread of this worldview is destroying any sense of place or autonomy in cultures that don’t historically prioritize those same values (which is most of the world beyond the industrialized West). The result has been a massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, an explosion of global poverty and social inequality, and the very rapid erosion of bio-cultural diversity around the world.

What I’d like to suggest is that something very different is simultaneously happening around the world, seemingly in small isolated ways but increasingly in solidarity and harmony with one another - **another story is unfolding right where this dominant system and story is collapsing**. New economies are taking shape in myriad ways, and are often exploring new forms of ownership or stewardship of our common wealth (such as community land trusts that hold land in communal ownership), and new interpersonal relationships based on sharing and co-producing the things we need (such as worker owned businesses where those that create the value also make the decisions). These are both radical and commonplace ideas - radical in the way that they challenge the dominant economic paradigm, yet commonplace in that they are unfolding in neighborhoods and favelas and inner-cities and farm communities around the world by normal people. Worker cooperatives, land trusts, urban agriculture, community currencies, and local investing are all re-embedding economic relationships in the larger social fabric of our communities and bioregions, re-humanizing the economy if you will.

The growth of timebanking and other online sharing platforms are part of a movement to re-create non-market spaces and ways to meet needs outside of the so-called formal economy. I’m particularly inspired by movements, many from the Global South, like La Via Campesina, the Zapatistas, the Transition Movement, and Idle No More that are both articulating and creating alternative visions of what it means to live well, to exist as part of a larger community of life. Right here in Oakland, this is taking similar forms of self-help and mutual aid, such as community-based alternatives to the police and prison system, and the growing food justice movement that is reclaiming vacant land to grow organic and culturally appropriate food for people that lack access to nutrition and economic opportunity.

Are you a supporter of “anything Occupy?”

I think one of the lasting impacts of the global Occupy movement has been a new narrative of the possibility of change. Occupy mini-communities around the world have demonstrated the power of people coming together to not just demand change, but live it and create it in real time. This has helped shatter the really disempowering narrative that “there is no alternative” to the status quo. I was living in the UK when Occupy Wall Street first emerged and quickly got involved in Occupy London, one of the more thriving Occupy camps. Since then, I’ve contributed to one example of the ongoing evolution of the original Occupy model, called Occupy the Farm here in the SF Bay Area. OTF has moved beyond just occupying physical and political space to actually meeting real local needs through the power of collective direct action - in this case re-claiming historic farmland in an urban space and creating a thriving organic farm and community space.

Please evaluate your Legal Cafe program?

The Resilient Communities Legal Cafe is a pay-it-forward legal clinic and community-building space that we’ve been running nearly every week since February in Berkeley and Oakland, and have already provided support to well over 120 organizations and individuals working for community resilience. In addition to the pay-it-forward legal assistance, we often host themed conversations and teach-ins on legal topics such as starting a worker co-op or housing co-op, legal barriers to urban farming, participating in a lending circle, or forming a community energy project.

We’ve recently expanded these “cafes” to Richmond and are still very much cultivating relationships with other organizations that can help connect us with people who could benefit from these services. We realize this can be a slow process of building trust and co-creating with communities so that what we provide is culturally relevant and truly inclusive, rather than a bunch of outsiders

coming in to “save the day.” We are pretty excited about the direction of the Legal Cafe and our vision is that they can be replicated in communities around the country by local groups wanting to meet the legal needs of the resilience movement.

Can SELC promote an alternative law practice -- given that most folks seem to be trapped in the capitalist one?

One of the areas that we are increasingly focused on is breaking down barriers to who can enter the legal profession. Currently in the US, 88 percent of lawyers are white, 70 percent are men, and 75 percent are over the age of 40 – this obviously does not reflect our society very well. Similarly, the average law school graduate leaves school with over \$100,000 in debt. This debt burden forces new lawyers to find high paying corporate jobs, which reinforces the capitalist approach to law practice. But California happens to be one of only a handful of states with an alternative path to becoming a lawyer without going to law school, commonly known as a legal apprenticeship. This part-time, experiential process is open to nearly anyone and offers practical, community-based training at nearly no cost. We are actively working to raise awareness about this path and create resources to support apprentices and mentoring attorneys, particularly in communities that have traditionally lacked access to legal education and services. Knowledge is power, so empowering more people from traditionally marginalized communities with legal knowledge could really transform who the law is practiced for and by. Four of our staff, including myself, are on the legal apprentice path and we are keeping a blog about the process at www.LikeLincoln.org.

How is SELC funded and who are your partners?

SELC has partnered with over 40 different organizations working on different aspects of community resilience and new economics – from co-hosting workshops on food justice to co-authoring our policy recommendations on shareable cities to collectively working on advocacy initiatives that remove legal barriers to urban agriculture or worker cooperatives. We also have an active and growing community of volunteer attorneys and legal professionals that work with us to run our [Resilient Communities Legal Cafe](#) and outreach to different communities that they are part of.

At the moment, we are largely funded by small progressive family foundations and individual donors. We are actively working to diversify our funding sources, both through more grassroots fundraising efforts to get more people invested in this work, and by developing creative ways to generate revenue without limiting accessibility to our work. Some examples we are exploring include membership models that extend a wider sense of ownership in our organization into the community. We also barter for things like office space, and are part of some local currencies like Bay Bucks and the Bay Area Community Exchange. If you, dear reader, are interested in supporting our work, I'd love to speak with you!

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Chris' Bio - A recent transplant to Oakland, CA, Chris is passionate about exploring life-sustaining alternatives to the neo-liberal market paradigm. In his role as Director of Organizational Resilience, he is working to build SELC's internal resilience and bring principles of social and economic justice into SELC's funding strategy. Among his many other roles, he is contributing to SELC's Community Currencies program and working directly in the community on issues such as access to land and local food sovereignty.

Chris recently completed an MA in Economics for Transition at Schumacher College, an international whole-person learning center near Totnes, UK. While in the UK, he was active in Occupy London's Energy, Equity and Environment working group, and helped guide a community exploration of Totnes' monetary ecology with Transition Town Totnes. His dissertation focused on alternatives to market-based 'development' in the context of climate change adaptation in the Global South. Chris has previously worked as an ecological educator, outdoor guide, and environmental journalist, earning his BA in Non-Western History and Poverty Studies from Washington and Lee University. His writing can be found on Shareable.net, MNN.com, and his blog at oaktreegarden.wordpress.com. He can usually be found on his bike, in his garden, in the hills, or fermenting tiny lifeforms in his kitchen.

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