The Global Coolers - part two of the story

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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But still the global-heating life-style basically went on. After some reductions in personal emissions, many people felt stuck and did not know what more to do. Stating in May, some people, typically youth, took the plunge and renounced school and jobs permanently, to start working the land in collectives to grow local food or to restore nature by daylighting creeks. The hope was that a radical shift in life-style, if widely adopted, could save the climate, in part by undermining the corporate paradigm of endless growth and consumerism.

Some who joined these informal collectives and budding communities were handy with skills such as gardening, bike repair and bike-cart assembly from scrap materials. For those without special skills, volunteering for child-care, cooking, mending clothes, or creating barter fairs, came easy. Skill-sharing workshops became popular, in part because people realized that almost all the shoes, for example, purchased today were from China. Cobblers in the U.S. were almost extinct.

Called by some critics "subversive of the economy and of public morality," these Global Cooling collectives were sometimes targeted as havens for the homeless and the "lazy" and "criminals." But the fledgling communities were able to strengthen and enjoy enough support to proliferate. Society's oft-used control mechanism of appealing to the fear others -- the divide-and-conquer ploy to keep people isolated as consumers and workers -- was having trouble. Conventional ways and the old status-quo itself were eroding. Also, the closeness around campfires, with music and spoken word performance -- not to mention discussion of more actions to take for protecting the Earth and her climate -- were keeping people together and attracting others.

Some parts of the country saw this phenomenon more than others. Sadly, some Global Cooler camps out in the open were raided, with resulting violence. Agents de provocateur and vigilantes contributed to some fights that brought the police, but these were the exception. Part of the government had the goal to try to round up the Global Cooler leaders, but this proved futile because there didn't seem to be any clear leaders -- or, the average participant was a leader. Plus, plenty of Global Cooler supporters were/are in civil service and even in police forces.

Acts of sabotage or ecotage became more than sporadic in many cities, and this had gotten some of the Feds trying to get some control over or affect the Global Cooler insurgency. Local municipalities and state governments that had major funding from the Department of Homeland Security naturally wanted to spend that money and perhaps build their bureaucratic empires.

Soon, however, other parts of the massive DHS as well as the military were hurriedly preparing to cope with what looked to be dangerous shortages of fuel and food, due to production strains on oil-exporting nations. It was good timing that demand for energy was starting to fall off like never before, due to our efforts and rising fear over global heating. We had softened the effect of a sudden oil-supply cut-off and oil-market insanity. However, the food supply was already in trouble, because of destructive weather and climate change as well as high energy prices. Hunger is rapidly getting more common. The trucks are still coming into the supermarkets, and no one is messing with those vehicles or many of those parking lots.

It was not long before allegations of "green terrorism" were being circulated in whatever media or government office that could get on that bandwagon. Grand juries were convened, and subpoenas were being served. No one knew who the legendary Sub Assistant Gaia was, but she was probably of interest due to so many communiques attributed to her (some of which I did not make). Numerous arrests were made of people who were accused, informed on, or caught, based on destruction of pavement and harm to vehicles, but there was not one person or animal harmed that I know of by an attack involving any of the Global Cooling actions -- except some honest accidents involving sledgehammers hitting toes. Some motorists alleged brutality by Global Coolers and bicycle riders grouped in "Critical Mass," but there was no major violence.

I decided to leave my job and my home at the end of the semester and hit the road, or the rails –- hopping freights or AMTRAK -- to help meet the growing need for organizing and encouragement of people ready for action. However, pressure seemed to be on to find and apprehend Sub Assistant Gaia, so I created a cover story. I reminded people of my intention to go live in Japan for one year to teach English as a second language, to earn some needed money and to practice my painting.

I also had my eye on Buckeye. Soon I was hanging out with him in one of the tree-sits for a few days at U.C. Berkeley. Only he knew my name as Julia, and he reminisced about another tree-sitter he knew named Julia. I could not stay long, and getting arrested was always a threat at the tree-sit village -- one had to be quick in evading security guards and state police. The East Coast beckoned to me; Global Coolers there wanted me to visit.

When the "natural" disasters of May hit Florida and elsewhere (an island nation was abandoned after a tropical storm in

the South Pacific), depression set upon the majority of anyone paying attention. It was made worse, with cynicism added, because the government and the United Nations were trying to downplay the real state of affairs. It was already known that the IPCC had omitted some significant factors in warming, which accounted for climate change outpacing the models.

The people's spirits were so down-hearted that some shopping addicts went nuts buying more than they could keep in their homes. Other consumers felt so lost that their absence from the stores was starting to hurt the Consumer Confidence Index. The White House was worried. The Federal Reserve was issuing warnings. Newscasters engaged in ever more "infotainment" to keep people in the mood for the lure of the commercials urging purchase of new cars. Talk shows on the radio, and blogs, were jammed with outraged or scared people, but almost all expressed support for the Global Coolers. Soon many of these scared people were part of the Global Coolers themselves.

Some of us did more than others about the crisis and threat to life posed by a hundred years of petroleum-induced "growth." We were growing in number, at least ten times what we had been just months before. Thank Goddess it was a peaceful protest movement, although some cars were damaged. Some cars just died on the spot from the exhaust pipe blockage, and other cars shot the potatoes out with a bang –- never failing to amuse the kids and call attention to polluting motorists. Car owners increasingly took the potato insertions and the less-frequent ignition key seizures as warnings, for the stakes were getting higher. The planetary threat of climate change was keeping pace with the mounting fears of the populace and the dire predictions from scientists.

So there was a multitude of creative expressions by people who wanted to do more, or do something different to tip the scales toward sustainability. One of the most imposing methods of raising awareness with an aspect of intimidation was the Community Counselor Posses. That's not what they called themselves; "Posse" was a nickname. The Community Counselors for the Planet (CCP) posses went door to door to ask householders what they were doing to cut energy usage and fight global heating.

No matter what the reply was, more recommendations were given. A promise (or threat, as some took it) was made that the posse would return in a few days to check on progress to slash energy use. The pitch included that a local survey was being done and the results would be reviewed by one of the new Neighborhood Councils, a new phenomenon. The last part of the CCP counseling session was to ask for one or more global-heating devices, to take out of circulation by recycling or salvaging scrap.

Some folks invited the posse on in, gave them refreshments, and pumped them for the latest information on depaving and fruit tree planting. But if a posse knocked on a door and the property owner was not cooperative, the meeting at the door was not easy to dismiss. "Ma'am, see our bike-trailers there? We'll take any of your global-heating electric power tools, CD players, computers, and plastic waste, off your hands right now and go recycle it. And we sure appreciate tips. Whadya say?" A good many people did not want to answer the door, because the wrong spirit was met with, "Can we come in and inspect? If you want us to come back later instead, we will. We're just your good neighbors."

The message to "Take action already!" was getting out there. Concern over haywire weather and crop failure was mounting. For some sensitive souls there was near hysteria about what was going to happen with sea level rise, droughts, storms, tropical diseases moving north, and more. Isn't everybody a sensitive soul?

My routine on this adventure was quite varied. At a huge concert in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, I helped Jordy and Francine get onstage to thrill the crowd, and many went off to an adjacent residential district to "play potatoes" -- the spuds were handed out at the concert. Similar actions happened at the Coliseum in Los Angeles, at SafeCo field in Seattle, at Wrigly Field in Chicago, and at Washington DC's Redskin Stadium. Someone representing the Global Coolers would take the stage between acts to briefly exhort the crowd. The response was instantaneously electric with passion from audiences. Awareness was also heightened by the generation of energy for the sound system via pedal power hook-ups, pioneered by Humboldt activists in the 1990s.

We didn't have to settle for free outdoor venues; philanthropy for Global Cooler activity was flowing freely, as global heating overtook issues such as competing fundable projects involving other social justice causes. Any nonprofit group could get funds for bulk purchase of potatoes (for immediate use or planting), bike carts and depaving tools. The arts were finally well subsidized, but mainly for climate-relevant works.

I was exhilarated to appear at some of these events. I had to get in and get out, especially when I was referred to as "Sub Assistant Gaia." Once I was spirited away in a bike cart with a tarp over me. I had to be hidden and taken to a safe spot to elude police and informers who were trying to storm the back-stage security area of the stadium. Crackdowns on potato players were sometimes bloody, with occasionally some harsh sentences or fines in court. So concert goers waited until they got home to go out and practice "Earth Night" (the new Earth Day), as the popular new eco-songs of the day rang in their ears.

New Age followers were ever more convinced that there would be a cosmic event right up ahead in 2012 to change everything. While this seemed intriguing and quite possible, most of us felt we could not wait for the Universe or the two-party system or god's will: we had to take matters into our own hands and not be so philosophical or patient about our

fate. It was and is our world -- "and we want it now!" (The Doors)

Some felt the fight-or-flight adrenaline for action along the lines of "Let's destroy what destroys us." But there was so much peaceful work to do, including burning off our high physical energy by roaming the streets and applying our passions, and restoring suburban wastelands to useful, natural habitat -- that destroying anything was unnecessary. Confrontations with polluters were on the increase, but were so overblown in being publicized that it was obvious propaganda against the Global Coolers. Die-hard maxi-polluters were on the defensive and had to start appearing much more responsible toward our common air, land and water. They could not be seen with a lot of plastic bags without getting a nasty look from the average person.

Pressure to end the military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan became overwhelming, especially given the basis for the invasions and occupations: petroleum, so instrumental in jacking up the planet's fever. The tanks, planes and materials were known to more and more people to be guzzlers of petroleum and causes of global heating. So it was a happy result that the Iraq war was finally brought to an end, by massive demonstrations that brought business-as-usual to a standstill for days on end in Washington DC and Wall Street.

A countertrend was created by our success, as the economy started to become unstable from energy-curtailment and people dropping out of the rat race, either voluntarily or through losing jobs and home foreclosures. The job of the dedicated Global Coolers had to expand swiftly toward supporting the needs of more people suffering as casualties of what looked like the end of economic growth. Corporations seemed unable to cash in on the new trends of depaving and anti-car Earth medicine (as many called Global Cooling).

From "Japan" I learned I was wanted -- as Julia -- by the Grand Jury for questioning. I ignored this, but knew I had to keep a low profile or bide my time. Fortunately, the movement was too out of control for the "polluter rights" types in government and industry to stop us. So the arrests and the contempt citations did not dent the movement's progress.

The Black Bloc of the anarchistic protest crowd materialized here and there, laying waste to selected targets of pollution, but this was more of a sideshow compared to the more out-in-the open actions. Rage was apparent and understandable, but there was no sense in pushing so hard that one risked a violent backlash. So the potatoes and depaving continued, with more kinds of civil disobedience added all the time.

Windows of shops that sold global warming devices, such as electronics, or sold food brought from another continent, were defaced with stickers and spray-painted messages. The slogans included "Cool It!" and "Shut down the melting!" that made business-as-usual harder to maintain, because as soon as the stickers and spray-paint were removed, the slogans would be applied again the next day or night. Then the glass-shattering began. It did not, however, gain in popularity. In fact, it made people reflect and try to make some decisions calmly as a collective or community. The consensus was that there was no turning back, and that we could move in the right direction with deliberate, wise action that did not let up.

Meanwhile, the nation's growing financial crisis was already taking a big toll on the economy. Oil prices had broken way past $100 per barrel, and geopolitical pressures aggravated the threat of armed conflict in several spots around the world. Nuclear weapons' availability had begun to make people aware that their use would devastate the climate further, so disarmament activity was on the rise.

As long as a semblance of status-quo living (particularly in the U.S.) was still going on, and climate chaos was seen as the worst threat above all, climate-protection actions were escalated on a massive scale. Any pleas or resistance to the contrary were met with accusations of their being "ecocidal." There was no need for desperate measures such as shooting people or laying down in the road, so the campaign to unplug the global-heating machinery was ratcheted up and up and conducted in such a way to not heedlessly disrupt lives and risk all-out opposition.

The favored and officially sanctioned solution for global heating had been that of replacing light bulbs, appliances and cars with more efficient models. Great hope had been placed on installing expensive installations of solar panels on roofs and windmills in fields and on mountaintops. But this approach was not happening on a large enough scale, and it was obvious that the people who pursued this path were still polluting, especially with plastic and other kinds petroleum for "renewable" energy. So, getting by almost entirely without the machines, and not using the energy at all, was the Global Coolers' style and message. It seemed too late to change the whole infrastructure with technology, and the system still relied entirely on petroleum anyway. Maybe the biggest factor in the failure of the technofix was that people were not able to make the major purchases in great enough numbers due to the faltering economy.

As I mentioned, after the Florida loss, estimated at maybe 50 times the damage to New Orleans from Katrina and Rita, the support for direct action a la the Global Coolers shot way up. This seemed to occupy people's minds positively, as the cost and availability of food were starting to be intolerable to more and more people. We had to keep fighting with clear heads and with unity.

Some of us who felt some responsibility to the movement felt there was a certain maximum potential for the Global

Cooler insurrection, a saturation point. Then, or soon after, we might find the process may not bring about the desired result. Or, we had to address the food crisis successfully and help more people transition out of commute-oriented jobs. We had to expand and deepen our vision, for Earth's climate system was the real boss. Resource scarcity could not be solved with fancy technology, the way things were going. Gaia had even bigger changes in mind than those we had started to notice, and we all had better look ahead.

Our polluting ways as a society could theoretically keep on going with some decrease in greenhouse-gas emissions. But it was not going to be enough of a change in the carbon composition of the atmosphere. Four hundred and fifty parts per million of carbon dioxide in the sky was a lost ceiling. And James Hansen in late 2007 showed us the unpleasant truth that 350 ppm is the real maximum level the world must adhere to. The warnings were clear: cut emissions 90%. However, by when? 2050 would be far too late. And because of positive feedback loops, whereby the carbon dioxide and methane were being released into the atmosphere due to heating itself, and not only from humans directly, we had to cut emissions by more than 100%. That meant taking carbon out of the sky -- reversing immediately if possible the Industrial Revolution's reversal of geological/atmospheric evolution.

Massive tree-planting, more than the symbolic and disruptive depaving actions, had to happen as soon as possible world-wide. Letters to the editor and city council meetings became crammed with demands and ideas for planting more and more trees. Schemes for seeding the seas with iron in order to create algae blooms, to sequester carbon from the sky and have the dead organisms sink to the ocean floor, were publicly debated, from Congress to living rooms.

I felt there needed to be an end to one of the lynchpins of the global-heating economy: the car. As long as any kind of new cars were being built and bought and driven, we would not change things with potatoes and depaving. So, the Boycott New Cars campaign was born. It was received poorly in the corporate press and by politicians, but opposition to strong action that made sense was futile.

During this period I was supposedly in Japan in a remote mountain village. I even sent evidence (had it sent via a friend already over there) in the way of postcards and email messages to a few folks who could confirm I was in Japan.

In reality I was traveling the circuit of active schools, church meetings and concerts. I was able to do this and watch, learn, advise and participate, largely because people in the movement took care of me. My reputation easily preceded me as Sub Assistant Gaia when I was on the move, so I usually used other names. I would even quote her (myself) in order to make a point and gain cooperation.

I said often, "Buy a used car if you must. But don't feed the automotive industry and create demand. If a million would-be car buyers decide not to buy a new car, this can bring down one of the worst industries in history in a matter of weeks." I repeated this everywhere I went, and the word was being passed along. There were benefits to not having a car, including saving money and keeping economic activity in the community instead of sending the dollars away to Detroit or some car-exporting nation. It wasn't hard to get this boycott going when the cost of gasoline was already putting a crimp in new-car sales. So it became a popular dictum: Boycott New Cars. The faltering economy and the credit crunch squeezed buyers anyway, so Global Coolers only made more and more sense.

What about India and China, the new global scapegoats (when attention on the U.S. can be deflected)? We heard that the Global Cooling movement had a foothold in those countries, but maybe their reliance on oil -– in shorter and shorter supply and more and more expensive -- was going to help our cause more than protesting and undermining polluting practices. Maybe the devastating impacts of climate change and overpopulation, that were increasingly felt in China and India, were sending those countries willy-nilly toward returning to rural-based cultures.

Global Coolers were getting people to not buy products from China and India because each purchase meant another measure of coal burned. Besides, Chinese coal dust was drifting east over the Pacific Ocean to harm our West Coast. The planetary nightmare was real -- here and now.

In the U.S. and other industrial countries, it was becoming socially unacceptable and unpopular not to be participating in Global Cooling. People wanted to do at least as much as the celebrated Middle Schoolers who started it, and many were outdoing them. The list of acts of resistance in defense of Mother Earth and her climate was getting longer every day. However, overall economic developments and deprivation were manifesting themselves quickly: developments with oil supply and food were threatening to take over all discussion and concern. Could we continue to right our ship ecologically and socially before the socioeconomic tsunami of "petrocollapse" hit?

By the end of the summer, with more hurricanes giving everyone a strong message, and the disappearance of all the ice in the Arctic, we had reached a certain point: society had put the brakes on, but we were over the cliff of death already. How far over? Would everyone die, save a few people in cooler and wetter microclimates, as James Lovelock predicted?

At this writing, the whole industrialized world may be entering into unavoidable, cataclysmic oil crash and social havoc, from which we have so far been mostly spared. If I live through it I'll narrate another history of that tumult -- part two of our fall from resource gluttony and overpopulation. It appears we're all going to be looking at a total absence of much of

what were considered necessities. We're already starting to see the scaling back of what were conveniences through unlimited trade, mastery of nature, and the rest. But I must finish this story I have lived through and wanted to tell; I'll just hope to make it through the final transition.

It was time for me to disappear from the underground scene, or rather appear above ground. I "returned" from abroad and decided to keep a very low profile. I decided to rely on my successful anonymity and show up for the Grand Jury as Julia, and tough it out. I refused to answer certain questions, so I was jailed. I stayed locked up for weeks until some alleged perpetrator of some particular depaving was identified and prosecuted. I had the feeling he took the blame and punishment for me, perhaps knowing my full role. I'm not sure how much I was really suspected of, or by whom, but I was glad to get out of jail and "keep my nose clean." In other words, don't be on the leading edge -– and don't get caught.

Happily for our cause, I was not so needed anymore. And I get to enjoy participating openly in what were just a matter of months ago the most outlandish nonviolent protests and interventions. Now I can go door to door with the Community Counselor Posses, disable cars, depave, put stickers on shop windows, write letter to the editor. The street parties are fun and the daily vending right in the streets is uplifting. But I cannot yet disclose my full role or the names I used. There are too many frustrated citizens who wanted to continue to heat, and not heal, the planet in an unimpeded fashion. I was called (or rather, Sub Assistant Gaia), along with early leaders, "fascist' for denying private property owners the full and free use of their land and machines.

But we have hopefully entered a new age to experience. I'm not sure where things are going, but our whole world is changing on all levels quickly as I write this. We see famine ahead on an unprecedented scale. We may see the end of capitalistic, corporate models for organizing workers. Not only is there an active participation in changing habits, but a return to nature is being attempted on a massive scale. People are doing what they can to revere the trees near them, to plant and gather local food, use acoustic instruments and put on plays instead of use stereos and boom-boxes and DVDs. Is what we are seeing too late, as in shutting the barn door after the horse is gone?

I'm not certain, and few of us are. We're going back to Nature's Way. We're reaching safety if we can. We may not have any "jobs" tomorrow. Maybe we will crash completely, economically and ecologically, soon.

Buckeye and I wonder if having a baby is even thinkable in Earth's present condition and set of trends. We'll adopt anyway and strengthen our tribe.

No matter what happens, we all have this Earth and it has us. And most of us have been learning, suddenly, that the Earth is not oriented for us humans or for our individual purposes. That's part of what I teach my young friends the children, and they teach it to me. They are why I love my life's work -- that I hope to continue most freely and joyously.

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