Off the sidelines and in the game: peak oil preparedness

Contributed by David Kost
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When we embarked on this journey six years ago, I never would have believed how difficult it has been to network with people considering the amount of resources we have to work with. We have tried for the last five years to work with people in our community, well over 100 and the list is growing.

When we talk to people about peak oil/peak resources, climate and ecosystems collapsing, collapse of the financial system and our infrastructure, we find people think we're nuts.
Some are aware of these things, but they're not concerned because they think they won't be around to see it happen. Others know it but just won't do anything and are too lazy, and then there are those who are in it for the money (capitalism with a smile).

It is strange to me if I was to preach hatred and bigotry I would be a valuable commodity and have people flocking to my doorstep. However, offering people a chance to live self sufficiently, responsibly, peacefully in a sustainable manner is more difficult to accomplish. The latter requires hard, physical work -- something most people don't know how to do.

Even though we expected this to be our last move, now after retirement at ages 52 and 50, we are once again thinking the unimaginable, relocating. We know that with our skills and dedication we would be a welcomed addition to someone who is trying to accomplish what we have failed to do. We must begin to build avenues to connect people with certain skills and assets; trying to educate people is not enough. Like the documentary Power of Community states, what happened in Cuba in the '90s was not so much technological change as it was human. Sharing responsibilities and costs will be very important in our future, as well as utilizing our resources wisely.

We have not been farmers all of our lives; we are somewhat new to this. Our lives have been nothing like the stereotypical American way. We were married at the ages of 21 and 19, not out of necessity, just young and in love. We had our two daughters five years later, and our roles have been reversed most of the time. I was "Mister Mom." We lived on one meager income because childcare in this country is deplorable. It was our responsibility and no one else's to raise our children.

While at home I grew some of our food, did fundraising for kids activities and field trips at school, volunteered in the classrooms as well as coaching boys and girls basketball and girls soccer. Because of living on one income, I learned to barter with men 25-30 years my senior in Rogue River, Oregon where we lived at the time. One example: I roofed and painted my friend's house and he and I built a 20' by 24' recreation room from start to finish. No money changed hands, just good times and friendship.

Up until six years ago, most of my life I was what one would consider a "Jock." I loved sports, mostly hockey, football and basketball. I knew all of the stats and trades, I watched for over 40 years of how championships were won. I saw many types of styles and philosophies of play come and go. They were always in the context that you are only as strong as your weakest link. The teams' success depended on each individual player giving his or her maximum effort, and no one player regardless of how great can win by him/herself.

After 911 something changed in me and I gave up my addition to sports. In the past seven years I have read hundreds of books by authors such as Vandana Shiva, David Korten, Arundhati Roy, Kevin Phillips, Michael Rupert, Eckhart Tolle, George Monbiot, James Lovelock, Richard Heinberg, Matthew Simmons, James Howard Kunstler, Wendell Barry, Barbara Kingsolver, Howard Zinn, Daniel Quinn and Kurt Vonnegut.

I realize now that we were lied to. As George Carlin said, they call it the American Dream because you have to be asleep to believe it. All this and more caused me to take direct action.

We downsized to one car, paid off our mortgage, turned off the "idiot box," installed an indoor clothes dryer (made by a local artisan that works with iron), and our garden that started out for fun and food became much more of a purpose and a way of life. We have hauled in tons of manure and organic compost to build up the soil creating a working system based on raised beds, crop rotation and cover cropping. We now have fifty 4' x 26' raised beds and a 10' x 15' greenhouse allowing us to do starts and grow more than enough food for three or four families, plus rows of berries as well as fruit trees. Currently we grow and process 60% of our food.

We knew all along that we would never be able to learn everything that was needed as well as do all the work ourselves.

That’s why we have tried to partner up or find other like-minded people to begin together the hard work ahead of us.

I remember Richard Heinberg saying that some figured there was 1% of the population who was woken up and they had hoped to wake up to 5%. He also stated that we needed 50 million farmers for the long slog ahead.

I feel blessed that my wife of 31 years and I are on the same page. We had always planned to work together after her retirement knowing that we needed to have some income. We enjoy being around each other. We believe that in this day and age when people are losing their homes, in debt, bankrupt and pensions disappearing, we can and should be able to find partners that are hard working, in good health and have some valuable skills/resources that would help us become a complete team together. There is so much to learn and adjust to, as climate change alone is already affecting the way we grow food in Oregon.

Last year at this time, I processed well over 500 lbs of tomatoes, drying and canning. As I sit and write on this Labor Day, I have not canned one quart of tomatoes -- not many in the area to be found. This is one of the main staples in our diet.

We would like to have partners living on the property that can help make this work into a functioning way of living, saving resources and growing food for five or six families. We would also like to incorporate livestock, and renewable energy. But attracting willing partners has been most difficult, to the point that we despair and might move away. Neither of us wants to leave what we have built thus far, but if we can't find others who can help, then maybe it's time for a different arena with some new players who wants this team.

As life as we know it begins to collapse, we need a prototype system that can be easily duplicated to show others how to grow, process and store food. People will begin to act irrationally when they or their families have little to no food, so I would like to give them a choice on how to feed themselves without the violence.

In all of my years of watching and playing sports, I have never felt the sheer joy and fulfillment that I do while working in the garden. Watching a butterfly as it lands on me or feeling a hummingbird zing past my ear. The great wins I chalk up now in the CHAMPIONSHIP column are at the end of fall when cupboards are jammed to capacity, standing room only with filled canning jars, the garage walls draped with garlic and onions, and the freezer stuffed full with berries and nuts. What a SWEET VICTORY! It is time for us all to give up our additions, and live the life we were meant to live.

I have no illusions about saving the world. I would just like to be able to have a chance of living in peace and sharing before Mother Nature kicks our ass.

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Ideas to ponder
Connecting people that have different assets:

1) Resumé Bank of people's assets, skills, knowledge and ideas.

2) Such as:

- Land, money, water, resources

With people that don't have this but have technical knowledge

- Such as:

Knowledge on farming, solar, sustainable building

3) People moving from one area of the country/state

- Such as:

A person moving from metropolitan area wanting to relocate to an area that's more sustainable, trading work for his or her stay.

4) Sharing tools/resources

5) Sharing skills such as:

- Preserving of food, cooking, sewing, repairs (home), survival skills

Investment

1) Such as:

- Someone with money that they would like to get out of the stock market/retirement funds and invest in local businesses, someone starting a business, solar energy, alternative energy and farming and manufacturing.

2) People with money who want to set up old style mercantile involving
local farms and artisans for manufactured goods, clothing, etc.

3) Advising people on how best to utilize their land/resources.

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