

What's Your New Beginning? - Rolling with Unprecedented Change

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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At this historic time of transformation both on the Earth and of Earth herself, we humans are playing roles active and passive. Our actions and effects are to date increasingly negative in the aggregate. But there are positive actions and effects as well, unprecedented and serendipitous. Many people even say the crash is good for us.

We cannot run from climate change -- especially with diminished economic and financial capabilities. Millions more people every day are having to re-evaluate their survival strategies, thanks to sudden changes. This means people are questioning and jettisoning old assumptions. So we find the overwhelming force of change -- that dominant law of the universe -- knocking on our doors or kicking us in the teeth.

The mainstream corporate newspapers have begun to report on lifestyle change and to explore aspects of economic adjustment that are remarkably positive in tone, for the most part. [They're catching up with Culture Change's two decade-old message.] It is almost all anecdotal, necessary when the usual statistics only measure such notions of gross domestic product and unemployment -- both measures being distortions of the real picture. But signs are unmistakable for a cultural shift beyond mere financial reactions:

- The surge in interest in food production on a more and more local basis. It's clear from the White House's new kitchen garden, as the highest profile example, stretching to the other coast in northern California where home gardening (food, not smokables) is probably the most popular pursuit happening -- Arcata, my old home town. The reasons are many: health, economic, energy independence, and for climate protection.
- The huge drop off in new-car purchases means, as Peggy Noonan wrote a few days ago in the Wall Street Journal, the U.S. will become more like Cuba what with the island's aging fleet of cars. Other consumer goods U.S. consumers purchase, such as clothing, are now being bought more in used form.
- One out of every nine homes in the U.S. has been foreclosed upon. The implications of the emptying of good houses have not been examined very openly. But we can anticipate more squatting and resistance against eviction. On a large enough scale, this trend would make irrelevant the attempts by the major-property class to direct law enforcement to the elite's full satisfaction.

Despite these welcome developments -- or, as some would say, making the best of tough times until economic growth resumes (we shall see!) -- and despite trends that reflect painful adjustment to the financial collapse that hit last fall, we are collectively so far only scratching the surface of cultural change underway.

Therefore, when considering out-of-control influences on all our lives -- the biggest ones being possible climate extinction and the peaking of global oil extraction -- we must face that the pace of change in our personal lives can only accelerate. These are still easy days.

Time will tell who has fell and who's been left behind - Bob Dylan

Those who have endured such upsets as job loss, moving from a comfortable home to a more modest and crowded abode (or onto the streets) and the end of consuming at will for gratification, are discovering two sides of the same coin:

(A) The rude awakening of money's limitations and the disappearance of material security thought to be assured or at least predictable, and

(B) The liberating realization and sensation of simpler living that features less wage slavery and commuting, more time and access to family as folks have to come together to consolidate households, and cooking together rather than eating out or buying processed corporate food.

However, as petrocollapse, "natural" disasters and political unrest start to hit like tidal waves, it will have become necessary to urgently make proactive change in one's life and community. The question, then, is "What is your new beginning?"

The answer can be either the involuntary convulsing of your life, or the deliberate, planned transformation. Some of the former are:

- Panic over becoming part of the burgeoning underclass, facing hunger, cold and the raw challenges of homelessness
- Being swept up by socioeconomic turmoil such as food riots or violent revolution

• Cutting your losses, such as jettisoning material things and cherished possessions, and becoming a road gypsy

Or, if carried out in anticipation of the above,

- Finding a real community, if you're not living in one already
- Using skills that the last couple of generations of modern citizens have abandoned or never knew
- Expanding one's consciousness and depth of feeling to experience natural forces and human connection, finding more love and peace of mind
- Turning around the ecological wave of extinctions and degradation of soil, water and air. Fulfilling the promise of unprecedented tree planting to sequester carbon and to obtain fruits and nuts
- Letting go of our religious faith in technology and our assumed path of "progress" that allows for an unrelenting "march of civilization."
- An end to hypocrisy and empty talk, e.g., an SUV's bumper sticker I saw today that crowed, "Global Warming Isn't Cool."
- Taking action with like-minded kindred spirits = living life to the fullest.
- Be a part of the new ethic to halt insane expansion of the infrastructure that assumes unlimited population growth
- Take part in restoration of the environment. You'll be compensated by the community and treated as a hero. If you're physically unable, perhaps you can sing a song or paint a picture to celebrate the vitality of your tribe.

One of many news features on our changing economy and culture was a Wall Street Journal "OPINION: DECLARATIONS" op-ed on APRIL 17, 2009:

Goodbye Bland Affluence:
Get ready for authenticity chic

By Peggy Noonan

online.wsj.com

Her optimism for back-to-the-land, less-consuming living was not received well by most of the online commenters. I'm the exception, but my comment at this writing is hung up in moderator's queue for days. What may be posted:

What a refreshing essay for the times, especially considering the forum.

We are coming together as a people for the first time in way too long. There are some who won't want to join in, if material security can continue to be exaggerated as greed. However, the avant garde of simple-living folk and those who appreciate strength of immediate community are becoming the norm, especially as shopping will cease to be the option to solve everything.

Why is this inevitable? The world has reached peak oil extraction, beginning the new post-cheap-energy age and the end of growth that "unlimited" petroleum enabled. The technofix doesn't stand up as feasible, or even desirable.

If people do the right things for different reasons, that's part of the overall culture change. We've seen decades of division over environmental action, social justice, in addition to headline-producing conflicts regarding race, religion and nations.

It comes down to local community again, whence we came and increasingly forgot. We do have extra challenges with climate extinction raising its head, so hold on for the ride as you plant trees and get to know your neighbors.

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"Economic survivalists take root" by Judy Keen, USA Today, April 17(?):

usatoday.com

"Austere Times? Perfect" by Matt Richtel, New York Times, April 10, 2009:

nytimes.com

"No cash? Barter for services with 'dibits'" by Marc Ramirez, Seattle Times:

seattletimes.nwsourc.com

"How Americans Spend Now: Thrift Nation" (seven stories) Time magazine, April 19, 2009:

time.com