

Watt's Happening? #119

by Don Pettit

for Peace Energy Renewable Energy Cooperative

www.peaceenergy.ca ph 250-782-3882



The Power of Pessimism

We've all heard of the power of positive thinking, but we hear a lot less about the power of negative thinking. When it comes to our fate upon this planet, it's knee-jerk pessimism that really worries me.

What is the human race according to the pessimists? (and the on-line world, not to mention general conversation, is filled to overflowing with this) Humanity is a cancer, a virus, a murderer, a killer destroying everything in its path. There can be no bright future as long as we're around, and the world would be better off without us. End of story.

Sorry, I don't buy it. It's too easy. Pessimism just gets us off the hook. This almost gleeful trashing of the human race seems to make us feel better, as if by hating ourselves and what we are doing to the planet we are somehow separate from it, allowing us to rise above it and wash our hands of it.

This reflexive negativity is not only contagious, it is, in my opinion, destructive and disempowering. NOT what we need right now. Not what we've ever needed.

Sure, there's a tonne of evidence to support global pessimism. I have a whole library of books that explain in great detail exactly the mess we have gotten ourselves into on our finite little ball of rock, and most media (both conventional and social) feed on negativity, catastrophe, problems, strife and death. Lots of pessimistic evidence there!

Some pessimism is dutiful alarm-



It's easy to be pessimistic about our future on this fragile little planet. But if the human race is a planetary cancer, we're a very new kind of cancer, one that's saying "Hey, I'm a cancer! I am killing my host! Maybe I should change." And we're changing.

ringing: shock people into action before it's too late! I fear (and the evidence supports) that instead, these well-meaning folks are numbing people to sleep. Catastrophe fatigue is real and rampant.

A PERSONAL STORY

For the first twenty years of my life as an environmental activist, I was driven by a sense of impending doom. Certainly pessimism can be a motivator to action: I wrote letters, started grassroots environmental groups, organized picket lines and media events. Overall, I believe my efforts were beneficial, and there continues to be a huge and essential role for protest and alarm sounding.

But I slowly but surely burned out. Too much negativity, too much sadness, too much frustration. Bummer.

So about 20 years ago I flipped 180 degrees. Instead of putting my energy into tearing down what I saw as bad and destructive, I would put my energy into building up the world I wanted to see instead.

Rather than piling up evidence of our imminent doom, I began to collect evidence of progress, information about

positive alternatives, and how some of our greatest thinkers (much brighter than me!) were seeing a way through our troubles and how we actually COULD build a better world.

From this viewpoint, our problems are all opportunities. We actually KNOW WHAT TO

Sure,
there's evil,
corruption,
conspiracy
and hatred in
the world.
So what?

DO, and we are waking up and beginning to do it! Global poverty and hunger are in rapid decline, while levels of global education are rapidly rising. These combined will stabilize population over the next few decades and then cause it to fall.

We have figured out how to

control the worst of acid rain and ozone depletion. We're waking up to problems of biodiversity and climate change and beginning to take real action on a global scale.

And my favourite – we know how to make clean energy on a cost-effective and massive scale by using the renewable powers of nature, the infinite powers of sun and wind, from the heat of the earth and the tidal pull of the moon. Driven by both economics and necessity, our civilization is in its biggest, fastest and healthiest energy transition ever.

No, we are not inherently evil. We are not committing pre-mediated planetary murder. We are not intentionally melting the polar ice caps. We have stumbled, half asleep, into a bad situation that we don't want, that we're not prepared for and poorly equipped to handle. But we are beginning to handle it.

Sure, there's evil, corruption, conspiracy and hatred in the world. There always has been and there always will be. So what? We're going to build a better world anyway. . . and we've already begun.

