

Watt's Happening? #188

by Don Pettit

for Peace Energy Renewable Energy Cooperative

www.peaceenergy.ca ph 250-782-3882



FINDING HOPE in tough times



Hope breeds action, and only action can conquer despair.

These are tough times. From global pandemic and widespread economic collapse to the rising threat of climate change and environmental destruction, anxiety around the world is at an all time high, and for good reasons.

Many of us are aware of the problems, we're concerned and worried, but feel that the problems are just too huge and me, well, I'm just too small (and busy getting the kids to school and paying the bills!) to really make a difference. It's just all too much. It's hopeless.

The result? A fatalistic cynicism, a growing sense of doom, despair and more anxiety.

It would seem that it is hope that we need, but where do we find it, and what IS hope anyway?

HOPE DEFINED

The Oxford English dictionary makes it sound pretty simple: "hope: noun – a feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen."

In reality, it's a bit more complicated than that – there are types of hope. Let's start with the worst kind, toxic hope.

Toxic hope, or toxic positivity, is a mindless type of hope. I hear it all the time.

"Oh, don't worry, everything will turn out just fine. The pandemic will magically disappear and turn out to be nothing much anyway. Just wait, you'll see!"

"The climate may be changing, but there's no way we could be causing it. The climate is always

changing. The earth can take care of itself. We don't have to do anything. It will all work out!"

That's lazy hope, idle hope, do nothing hope, leave it up to everybody else hope. Stupid. Toxic.

CRITICAL HOPE

It is, however, possible to "hope well" by practicing "critical hope." With critical hope we recognize the problems as huge and extremely difficult to solve, we recognize that all our efforts may be in vain, but we go ahead and work to solve them anyway. This is "applied hope" or action-based hope. I also call it "smart hope."

Smart hope recognizes that of course I am small and darn near powerless, but that I am not alone. Our global civilization is responding to it's problems, evolving and adapting, and many, many, many very smart people are also practicing smart hope, coming together, taking action and changing things for the better.

Smart hope says that I can be part of something large and important, something more important than myself and my own small wants and needs, something of historic and global importance. Alone, I am powerless, but together we really CAN change the world.

That's smart, and around the world today that's what's actually happening.

WHERE HOPE DIES

Avoid conventional news media. "The news" is one hundred percent negative, perhaps by design, certainly by tradition. Knowing about all the really bad stuff that happens every day may serve a purpose, preparing us

for the worst, warning us, but beyond that it is entirely toxic because it so completely ignores anything positive.

The fact is, the world must be overall positive, cooperative, and non-violent, or we would have destroyed ourselves long ago. Personally, I limit my news intake to no more than one half hour per day.

Avoid social media, which has rapidly become more like anti-social media. For connecting with people and building relationships, it's fantastic. For real, factual information untainted by locked-in opinion, it's pretty well useless.

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WHERE HOPE LIVES

To help balance media negativity, check out the *Solutions Journalism Network*, a curated database of rigorous reporting with over 10,000 stories from 1,300 news outlets in 174 countries. It's all factual stories about the good stuff that smart, creative folks are doing all around the world to solve our most pressing problems.

Personally, I find hope in the people around me. I find hope in my job, working for Peace Energy Renewable Energy Cooperative, and the wonderful people I work with there.

I take heart in our some 570 members of like-minded people who are putting their money where their mouths are, installing solar on their roofs, buying electric vehicles, building super-efficient and beautiful buildings, growing tasty organic food without chemicals, building community and experimenting with simpler and less consumptive lifestyles.

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