



Bill McKibben's

# BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness

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## eaarth: Making a life on a tough new planet

Reviewed by Angela Manno  
15th Street (N.Y.) Friends Meeting

**A**FTER first learning about Bill McKibben's new book *Eaarth*, I avoided picking it up for aesthetic reasons. The Earth I know doesn't need another "a," thank you. The Earth I know is an integral, living system, maintaining its homeostasis to provide the maximum conditions for life to exist and flourish. The Earth I carry in my heart turns serenely on her axis in the blackness of space, as it journeys reliably around the sun, broadcasting her beauty in blue and white into the vast Universe.

And that is precisely McKibben's point: that Earth that we "know" is a memory. The one we actually live in is fast becoming unrecognizable through the loss of familiar features that we all associate with it: white ice caps, beloved species that evolved alongside humans, flowing rivers. The changes are so dramatic that the author has given this planet we live on another name.

Personally I don't think even this altered Earth needs a new name; to my mind she's an old lady, her systems failing due to a wild and profligate youth, or perhaps to torture, inflicted by the latest species she spawned—humans. As she continues to decline, we're going to have to accept that she's going to look and feel more and more like her sister Venus.

*Eaarth* begins with an unflinching look at current reality. The reader is immediately doused with cold statistics chronicling the radical changes rapidly occurring in Earth's processes and composition—from floods in McKibben's hometown in Vermont to droughts, soaring temperatures, desertification, deforestation, dislocation of populations, crop failures, species extinctions, and infectious diseases that are all on the rise around the globe. You'll find it all there in hundreds of examples, citations, and footnotes.

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"No one is going to refreeze the Arctic for us, or restore the pH of the oceans." What's more, the rise of the carbon content in the atmosphere—already 40 points above 350 ppm (which NASA's James Hansen and a growing number of climatologists consider the safe upper limit of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere)—has

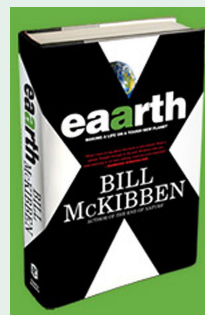
brought an end to the conditions that nursed our civilization into being (with the pre-industrial level being approximately 270 ppm). To

make matters worse, bringing it back down, let alone stopping it from increasing, given our continued burning of fossil fuels, is unlikely.

Not only is it unlikely because of our orgiastic patterns of consumption, but because oil executives

*Eaarth, next page >>*

### *Eaarth* is on please-read list for QEW's Annual Meeting



**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, Dick Grossman, the new Steering Committee clerk, suggested that we'd act together more effectively if more of us were, literally, "on the same page." Following his recommendation, the Continuing Counsel has selected Bill McKibben's latest book

*Eaarth* as recommended reading

for all QEW members. *Eaarth* should be particularly helpful in fostering a common understanding and unity of spirit at the upcoming QEW Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas, where the theme will be Earth activism, with a specific focus on water.

Copies of *Eaarth* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2010) are available through major bookstores and on-line book distributors.

>> *Eaarth*, from page 1

have decided where the future of Earth lies; Exxon Mobil has projected that solar, wind, and biofuels will account for a mere 2 percent of the world's energy supply by 2030, "while oil, gas and coal will represent 80 percent of the pie." Its CEO explains: "For the foreseeable future, and in my horizon—that is to the middle of the century—the world will continue to rely dominantly on hydrocarbons to fuel its economy." (my italics). This illustrates just what kind of control these companies have exerted and what kind of control over the fate of Earth they expect as a matter of course.

**W**HY the intransigence, you may ask, in the face of such an alarming prognosis and potential opportunity for profit? Because, McKibben explains, of one thing: sunk costs. Quoting journalist Paul Roberts, "the existing fossil fuel infrastructure, from power plants and supertankers to oil furnaces and SUVs is worth at least \$10 trillion and scheduled to operate anywhere from ten to fifty more years before its capital costs can be paid off. If we shut it down early, merely to save the planet, someone will have to eat the cost. Given such 'serious asset inertia,' no owner or investor in a power plant is likely to accept the writedown without a 'nasty political fight.'" That fight, he observes, already occurred decades ago, and we lost; the Clean Air Act would have required coal fired plants to install expensive scrubbers to prevent mercury and sulfur going into the air—but didn't.

For me, the most tragic of all is knowing unequivocally that we could have averted the disaster that now befalls us.

Forty years ago, as some of us remember, environmental consciousness had taken shape in the public awareness as pictures of the Earth from space were broadcast back to us; as if looking in a mirror, we saw ourselves as the tiny, fragile island of life adrift in the cosmos, incontestably finite, giving us the realization that there were quite simply limits to growth.

In the late 1970's, in fact, McKibben tells us, a majority of Americans were actually opposed to continued economic growth. We had a president who had invited *Small is Beautiful* author E.F. Schumacher to the White House. A landmark publication of the day, *Limits to Growth*, proclaimed that there existed an urgent and unprecedented opportunity "to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability" in which "the basic needs of each person on earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realize his or her individual potential."

***The failure to take the other fork in the road is, in Thomas Berry's words, a moral failing.***

Such a missed opportunity has had irreversible, cosmic consequences. The failure to take the other fork in the road is, in Thomas Berry's words, a moral failing. It is, in my own estimation, a result of sin.

The roots of today's climate change denial can be traced to this era when the voices opposed to limiting growth began to get louder and finally prevailed when Ronald Reagan took office. From then on, the perilous trend of deregulation and the repudiation of the idea of limits to growth were lifted up. Exxon alone has succeeded, through an "elaborate disinformation campaign, to sow doubt about climate change. Forty-four percent of Americans now believe global warming comes from 'long-term planetary trends,'" says a 2009 Rasmussen report. It seems that elaborate disinformation offensive has managed to score points

across the ocean as well. A May 2010 *New York Times* article reveals that only 26 percent of Britons believe that "climate change is happening and is now established as largely manmade," down from

41 percent in November 2009. Plus, "a poll conducted for the German magazine *Der Spiegel* found that 42 percent of Germans feared global warming, down from 62 percent four years earlier."

The refusal to recognize limits to growth resonates right up until this very moment in the words of Larry Summers, President Obama's chief economic advisor: "There are no limits to the carrying capacity of the earth that are likely to bind any time in the foreseeable future. There isn't a risk to apocalypse due to global warming or anything else. The idea that we should put limits on growth because of some natural limit is a profound error."

Rhetoric and ignorance vs physics and chemistry.

"It's true that we've lost the fight," writes McKibben, "insofar as our goal is to preserve the world we were born into...." "It's time to think with special clarity about the future."

What does the creator of 350.org and author of *The End of Nature* have in mind?

In his preface, he writes: "Obama can help, but only to the degree he is willing to embrace reality, to understand that we live on the world we live on, not the one we might wish for. This is the essence of maturity. Facing what is. 'Maturity is not the opposite of hope,' he tells us, 'it's what makes hope possible.'"

It's like the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous—realizing that the conditions of the planet and the way we live our lives have become unmanageable.

The second half of the book is about what we will need in order to live in this radically altered world. As the previous climate underwrote civilization and the

abundance of petrochemicals underwrote our present, technology-heavy civilization (which includes medical science, most forms of transportation, and information technology, to name a few features), our charge will be to establish a new civilization.

What kind of civilization can we strive to create? Moreover, what kind of civilization are we left to create? Thomas Berry called this new era, which is in fact a geological period, the “Ecological” or “Ecozoic” age. He coined the term to indicate that it would follow the Cenezoic period of the last 65 million years that is coming to a close because of human activity. The essence of this period, he says, will be characterized by “moving modern industrial civilization from its present devastating influence on Earth to a more benign mode of presence.” Though McKibben does not mention Thomas Berry in his book, I felt the presence of Berry’s thought becoming realized.

To create a new civilization, we will first of all need the maturity to abandon our adolescent romance with growth, and we will need to alter our lifestyles, “to choose instead,” writes McKibben, “to manage our descent. That we might aim for a relatively graceful decline.” To do the latter, we will need some basic principles to live by.

McKibben then goes on to fill his pages with both these principles illustrated with examples of these principles already being enacted in myriad ways in food production, community development, currency, small-scale alternative energy and more.

**Here are some of those principles of the new Earth contrasted with those from the old world we will need to jettison:**

<b><i>Eaarth</i></b>	<b><i>Earth</i></b>
<b><i>Small</i></b>	<b><i>Big</i></b>
<b><i>Maintain</i></b>	<b><i>Grow</i></b>
<b><i>Renewable energy</i></b>	<b><i>Fossil fuels/nuclear</i></b>
<b><i>Local</i></b>	<b><i>Centralized</i></b>
<b><i>Micropower</i></b>	<b><i>Massive powerworks</i></b>
<b><i>Community</i></b>	<b><i>Individualism</i></b>
<b><i>Restraint</i></b>	<b><i>Self-indulgence</i></b>
<b><i>Slow</i></b>	<b><i>Fast</i></b>

McKibben hopes that the Internet might survive into the new world to nourish the human desire for variety, stimulation, and exploration as we settle down into our new, less mobile lifestyles. Let’s hope so.

But that’s not all, folks. . . We must also get the

carbon content of the atmosphere back or under 350 ppm. We are not absolved from the political process. We cannot simply drop out and decentralize without changing what happens in government, for only some things can be achieved at the macro level. The only way to do this, says McKibben, is to make gasoline and electricity more expensive, spurring a new wave of investments in clean energy. “But that can happen only if prices rise enough to take some existing piece of hardware out of service. Everyone has to keep voting for politicians who will raise the price of gasoline high enough to cause most of us to park our cars and take the bus. For that to happen, we’d need to build a

movement more powerful than the energy industry, powerful enough to raise the price of coal to the point where energy companies will simply swallow the investments and start shutting down the plants.

Now there’s a goal worthy of our efforts. It’s

nothing less than heroic. And as Thomas Berry pointed out, we live in heroic times.

**W**E can take heart, because if humans have the capacity to alter the planet in such fundamental ways for the worse, perhaps we can for the better as well. What we witness as we read through the pages of *Eaarth* is the innate creativity at the foundation of the universe, even in the midst of massive destruction.

In the end, this new, decentralized, micropowered civilization has the potential of the immense power of the Amazon of the “old” Earth:

“The Amazon managed to move water much farther in and from the oceans than the rain would normally fall. The first swath of jungle gets wet, and then transpires the moisture through its leaves, forming new clouds that produce new rainfall farther west—all in all, a series of six pulses that move the ocean’s bounty all the way to the Andes. The energy involved is prodigious—the equivalent of 4 million more atomic bombs’ worth a day.”

The inhabitants of Eaarth must be like those millions of tiny leaves. We are numerous and there is tremendous power in numbers, in commitment, in love. We must not be stopped by the enormity or unlikelihood of the project. It is sufficient to know that the goal is good and it is what we desire. We could not live in peace with our vibrant, fecund Mother Earth. Perhaps we can live in peace with our sick and ailing, old Mother Eaarth. ♦



# QEWMini-Grants help enhance relationship with Earth

**THIS IS THE SECOND YEAR** for QEW of giving Mini-Grants to Quaker organizations such as meetings, churches and schools that want to enhance their relationship to the earth through environmental projects. This year we gave matching grants of \$250 to each of the following:

1. **Illinois Yearly Meeting**—to install a green roof for part of the meetinghouse
2. **Gwynedd (Pa.) Monthly Meeting**—to purchase an Energy Star refrigerator
3. **Newton, Iowa, Monthly Meeting**—to provide drip-irrigation for the garden and native plants for landscaping.
4. **Ithaca (N.Y.) Monthly Meeting**—to install low- flow toilets.
5. **Olney Friends School, Barnesville, Ohio**—to fund a symposium on envisioning the future and energy conservation. (More on this project below.)
6. **Dover (N.H.) Monthly Meeting**— to purchase an Energy Star refrigerator
7. **Richmond (Ind.) Friends School**— for a school garden and a worm-composting system
8. **Casa de los Amigos Guest House & Mexico City Friends Meeting**—to buy compact fluorescent light bulbs and low-flow toilets for the guest house, and initiate a bike-lending program,
9. **Homewood Meeting, Baltimore, Md.**—to purchase and install solar panels for the meetinghouse.

**In 2010** we helped **Olney Friends School**, which sits on 350 acres in the Appalachian foothills of rural southeastern Ohio, to embark on a process of re-imagining the school's future. The board has felt called to widen

the school's mission to be of greater service in two areas: 1) finding new models for sustainable independent schools, including Friends K-12

schools; and 2) helping to create a new green economy in Appalachia. They hope this project will inspire other such efforts. The school will host a "summit gathering" in October 2010 to which the public is invited to assist in the discernment process. Perhaps other organizations will find inspiration for similar efforts.



**Students envision school's future**

**In 2009** we awarded a grant to **Scattergood Friends School** for a group of students in their sustainability class to study the ecology of the upper Mississippi River.

Five Scattergood students and two adults spent two months of the project. The first month was spent on campus doing initial research, gaining skills for their trip, and forming questions to guide their field research. Each student picked a topic that inter-



**One of several school presentations**

ested them, which included: renewable energy in Minnesota, the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi river fish, phenology (the study of plant and animal cycles), and useful & edible plants along the Mississippi river.

The second month was spent on the river, starting at the headwaters in Lake Itasca, and traveling 500 miles south by canoe to St. Paul. Goals included: building community along the river banks and within the group; celebrating each other, the river and the planet; conducting research on water quality and watershed issues along the river; educating themselves and others about the connections between the river, energy and agriculture; and fund-raising for non-profit organizations working on energy and agricultural issues. The group took daily nitrate samples from the river (an indication of fertilizer run off) and documented the amount of wildlife they could see from the canoes and camp sites.

During this time the group gave classes and presentations at three schools, two churches and a Friends Meeting; had informal gatherings with Friends and others along the way; and ended with a River Rally and concert at Friends school in Minnesota. You can find photos, student reports and more at: <<http://www.paddlefortheplanet.net/>>

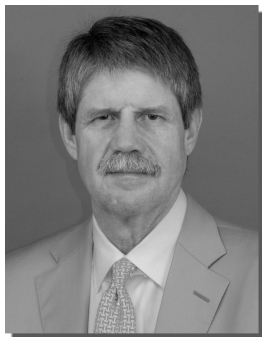
**WE HAVE** funding for one more mini-grant this year, and although our official deadline has passed we will consider applications. If your meeting or Quaker group is interested, you can find the application form at: <<http://quakerearthcare.org/AboutQEW/QEWProjects/QEWMiniGrants/Minigrantapplic.pdf>>. For more information, contact Ruth Hamilton, <[Ruth@ArtsCanHeal.com](mailto:Ruth@ArtsCanHeal.com)>. ❖

# QEW Annual Meeting & Gathering

## Houston, Texas, October 28–November 1, 2010

### Speakers

**Jim Blackburn.** As an attorney for more than 30 years, Jim has devoted his career to environmental law and planning. Blackburn is also a Professor in the Practice of Environmental Law at Rice University, teaching courses in sustainable development and environmental law. His current case load includes litigation over the future of the Whooping Crane on the Texas Coast and opposition



to permits needed to enable uranium mining in Goliad County. Jim is a co-founder of Houston Wilderness, the Matagorda Bay Foundation, and the Galveston Bay Foundation. He was the recipient of a Barbara C. Jordan Community Advocate Award, an award from the National Wildlife Federation, and the Bob Eckhardt Lifetime Achievement Award for coastal preservation efforts. In 2004, Texas A & M Press published his manuscript titled *The Book of Texas Bays*, which focuses upon the environmental health of Texas bays and discusses various facts and issues.

**Stephen Klineberg**, a member of Live Oak Friends Meeting and a professor of sociology at Rice University in Houston, has conducted in-depth opinion polls in Houston and throughout Texas to collect views on environmental protection. He has sought to measure the depth of public environmental concerns; how they balance with worries over prices, slower economic growth, higher unemployment, more public spending, or more intrusive government; and how they compete with alternative public priorities, such as public safety, transportation, and education. Through interviews conducted from 1990 to 1998, Dr. Klineberg has found consistently high concern over environmental problems in Texas, and commitment to improve environmental protection, despite conflicting and competing priorities, and across racial, gender, and geographic boundaries.

**Lon Burnham** is from the Fort Worth Friends Meeting and has served in the Texas State Legislature since

### *Activist Tools for a Planet in Peril: the Case of Water*



1997. He also serves on FCNL's Policy Committee. On his website he writes, "I have devoted my life to struggling for the environment, for peace, for equality, for consumers, and to protect citizens from those that would threaten their interests."

We will meet at **Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center**, situated on 10 wooded acres with a labyrinth and three meditation gardens. It received an award from "Keep Beautiful Houston."

Throughout the weekend we will be inspired into activism by various Friends, including those who live in Texas. Our work will include letter-writing and witness. Sprinkled through the weekend

will be the business of QEW's annual meeting and worship. Every morning begins with a bird walk.

**Get registration information and forms at**

[www.quakerearthcare.org](http://www.quakerearthcare.org)

or contact QEW, 173-b N. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401, 802/658-0308; [info@quakerearthcare.org](mailto:info@quakerearthcare.org).

**Registration deadline is September 30th.**

### Youth Quake(rs) wanted at QEW!

**IF YOU ARE age 20 to 35 and have never attended a QEW Gathering, there is a fee reduction this year just for you!**

**Through the generosity of anonymous donors, you can save \$150 on the conference fee for the 2010 QEW Gathering. This year's theme of "Activist Tools for a Planet in Peril" will excite, inform, and involve you.**

**What you need to do:**

- 1. Send an application form (contact information above) no later than September 30th.**
- 2. State on the application your current age and that you are a first-time QEW attendee. Deduct the \$150 scholarship when calculating the total amount you will pay.**
- 3. Register early. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to meet other dedicated people and find a meaningful Quaker way to help save the planet!**

## In a toxic chemical stew—what can Friends do?

by Nancy Halliday  
Evanston (Ill.) Friends Meeting

**RACHEL CARSON'S** book, *Silent Spring*, was the first large-scale attempt to warn the public about toxic synthetic chemicals. Despite vigorous opposition from the chemical industry, her evidence linking bird deaths to widespread use of the insecticide DDT proved correct. The subsequent banning of DDT and the resurgence of bird populations seemed to solve the problem.

Unfortunately, the problem has barely begun. Since World War II, approximately 80,000 synthetic chemicals have been manufactured, with hundreds more added every year. Due to regulatory and political restrictions, only a small percentage has been tested for human safety. Many of these chemicals are endocrine disruptors, of which DDT is one. Endocrine disruptors work by imitating hormones, often the female hormone estrogen, thereby causing imbalance in bodily functions. Our bodies have evolved over millennia into fine-tuned, self-regulatory mechanisms, able to respond to concentrations of elements as small as one part per billion.

Synthetic chemicals have become so integrated into products of everyday use that they cannot be avoided. Traces are found in our air, our water, in soil, in clothing, furniture and construction materials, in our cooking utensils and foods, in cosmetics—literally everywhere, even at the poles of the earth. As these chemicals disseminate, they may combine to make other compounds with unpredictable reactions, creating havoc in the environment and in our bodies. We have seen the effect of DDT on birds. Today, human health may be in danger. Prostate cancer, once considered a disease of the elderly, is being found increasingly in younger and younger men. Sperm counts are significantly reduced. Medical research is beginning to link the unexplained rise of autism, attention-deficit disorder, diabetes type I, asthma, and even obesity in young children to environmental causes, not genetic predisposition.

Global warming has received much attention in recent years. Yet the earth has undergone many temperature changes in its 4.5-billion-year history, some of them drastic and far greater than predictions for the present climate shift, and life has survived. However, nothing in life has evolved to metabolize these utterly foreign, synthetic compounds. Humans are now interfering with the basic mechanisms at the very source of all life on this planet. Many scientists are

now warning that biochemical disruption is a greater cause for alarm than global climate change.

Plastic, one of the many compounds widely produced since World War II, unfortunately has physical as well as chemical properties that can be lethal to other species. Plastics do not biodegrade; plastics also float. Volumes of plastic trash have found their way into the oceans and are concentrated by currents into literally floating dumps. The most famous is the Great Pacific Gyre, reported to be at least as wide as Texas. The larger pieces are picked up by such species as albatrosses, who innocently feed them to their young, who in turn die from the accumulated indigestible materials.

Wind, waves, and sun break down the plastics into ever and ever smaller particles, entering the chain of life at different levels. Most of this trash is composed of trinkets, items non-essential for our survival, yet they are causing deaths of thousands of animals.

Every civilization has come to an end; we must realize that ours will also. What will future archaeologists find? Let us hope it is not a tell-tale layer of plastics and persistent poisons.

### What can Friends do?

1. Restrict use of plastics; use glass for food storage.
2. Read the following articles or books and educate yourselves on specific products to buy or avoid.
3. Insist on stricter laws for rigorous testing of chemical products and full-disclosure labeling.
4. Push for laws prohibiting the sale to other nations of chemicals banned in this country, and prohibiting importation of chemicals deemed dangerous to human health.

### Further reading

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- Doyle, Jack. 2004. *Trespass Against Us: Dow Chemical & the Toxic Industry*. Common Courage Press. Monroe, Maine.
- Grossman, Elizabeth. 2009. *Chasing Molecules: Poisonous Products, Human Health, and the Promise of Green Chemistry*. Island Press, Washington, D.C.
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Toxic stew, page 7 >>





## A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future

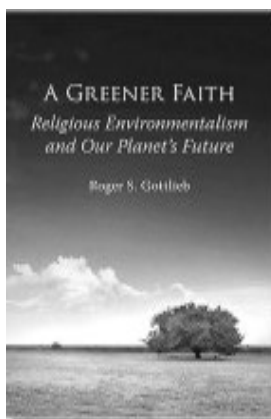
**Roger S. Gottlieb**

New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006.

### RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM

is surveyed by a longtime member of the academic American Academy of Religion. Now available in paperback, the book is balanced, authoritative and hopeful. Though it begins by focusing on the U.S., it shows people of faith at work everywhere. I would recommend it as a useful adjunct to Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest* and its website, <[www.wiserearth.org](http://www.wiserearth.org)>; Bill McKibben's recent *Eaarth*; and the Quaker-authored *Right Relationship, Big Earth Book*, and the reports of the New Economics Foundation (whose founder Andrew Simms is the only Quaker thinker mentioned in the book). For updates see the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) newsletter.

Contrary to what deniers on the right claim, Gottlieb shows that the "religion of environmentalism" is a global movement deeply rooted in many Christian traditions. He also corrects liberals' (many of them unbelievers) presumption that Christian evangelicals reject science and environmentalism. He names among many other active Christians, Reverends Sally Bingham and Brock Evans (Episcopal), Bill McKibben (Methodist), Carl Dewitt and Rich Cizik (Evangelical), Fred Small (Unitarian), Bernice Powell (United Church of Christ), Tena Willemsma (Reformed Lutheran), Father Thomas Berry and the Sisters of the Earth (Catholic); in Africa, Daniel



Marthinus of ZIRRCO and Rev. Solomon Zanaka of AZREC are active evangelicals who have made common cause with indigenous religions; we should also mention Wangara Maathai of Kenya, outspoken Philippine and Alberta bishops (all Catholic). Leading the way has been the World Council of Churches with its concern for "justice peace and integrity of creation."

He also finds spiritual wisdom in the Earthcare of other faiths: Rabbi Arthur Waskow of COEJL (Jewish), native Americans Charon Asetoya (Comanche), Lori

Goodman (Dine/Navajo), Thich Nat Hanh (Vietnamese Buddhist), Nambaryn Enkhbayar (Mongolian Buddhist) and Tzu Chi Buddhists of Taiwan, the Sarvodaya movement of Sri Lanka. They work together with Christians in the interfaith Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

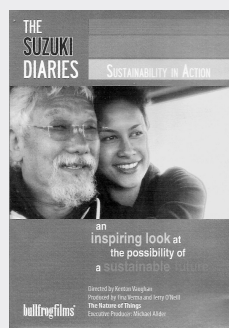
The book is organized by a series of functional questions: What is the religious perspective on the environmental crisis? What wisdom can it offer? How can it ally with, while differing from, secular liberalism? What is true "sustainability"? How does it express itself in faithful action? How is public action compatible with spiritual transformation? How can we open our heart? What are some of the different voices? And how can we work toward social justice as (and necessary to) saving creation?

—David Millar

Montreal (Quebec) Friends Meeting

- Mellowship, Dawn. 2009. *Toxic Beauty: the Hidden Chemicals in Cosmetics and How They Can Harm Us*. Gaia Thinking Books. London.
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- Shapiro, Mark. 2007. *Exposed: the Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products and What's at Stake for American Power*. Chelsea Green, White River Junction, Vermont.
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### New in QEW's Video Lending Library



**FOR 30 YEARS**, David Suzuki, geneticist and host of CBS's "The Nature of Things," has been warning about the dangers of taking nature for granted. He has urged us to change our consumer lifestyles and to put the brakes on an economic system that values unlimited growth above all.

*The Suzuki Diaries* takes a different path. It follows Suzuki and his youngest daughter, Sarika, as they travel through Europe to explore what a sustainable future might look like, to meet people who are working towards restoring the equilibrium between human needs and planetary limits, and to see if two different generations can find reason for hope.

## Quakers at 'Mother Earth' conference in Bolivia

**I**N April Bolivia held a Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. The conference was convened by Bolivian president Evo Morales, the first Indigenous president of any country, in reaction to the failure and double-dealing that took place at the December 2009 UN negotiations on climate change (COP-15) in Copenhagen.

At the December meeting, progress was deadlocked over disagreements between the business-as-usual developed countries and poorer countries that face inundation, famine, and other disasters related to climate change. On the last day a small cluster of nations was invited (*not elected*) to meet behind closed doors to work out some kind of agreement. They came up with the Copenhagen Accord, three vague pages that include no goals or deadlines, and have no binding power. At 3 a.m. the document was given to the rest of the nations, and they were asked to adopt it. There was enormous international outrage at this non-legal attempt to circumvent democratic UN procedures.

QEW is helping to grow a global network of Friends who will attend meetings and share about Earthcare concerns. We invited two Bolivian Quakers to attend the conference in their country and report back to us. They are Bernabé Yujra Ticona, administrator of the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund <<http://www.bqef.org/>>, and Ruben Hilari, a university graduate who was helped by the Fund. Below are excerpts from their reports.

—Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN

### Report on the People's World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, April 19-22, 2010

**(Bernabé)** Approximately 22,000 persons attended the conference. There were about 80 participants in my working group on Adaptation, persons from indigenous peoples, intercultural communities with their traditional clothing, and social movements from the five continents of the world. Representatives of the Bolivian army also attended wearing official uniforms.

#### Impacts of Climate Change

Climate Change poses a danger to the sustainable base of life, affecting the agricultural sector, food sovereignty, water resources, health, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Irreversible harms have been done that

affect peoples' way of life, human rights, and natural resources, affecting the entire future of new generations. These extreme and rapidly arising phenomena that are part of climate change are causing a deterioration in human security.

The impacts are much worse for indigenous peoples from rural areas, where in recent years there has been much drought, floods in various regions, and

blights that have killed crops.

There is also a lack of forage for animals as a result of water scarcity, a consequence of the thawing of ice in the mountains and of an increase in temperature in the *altiplano*. Because of the change from ancestral farming to mechanized farming, and the use of chemical fertilizers, illnesses such as malaria, dengue fever, H1N1 flu, and cancer have increased. Other illnesses are expected.

#### Adaptation Working Group

The principal thing is, God gave people the land we live in to care for and enjoy in a healthy condition, not to cause it to deteriorate. We understand adaptation as an instrument that serves to confront the impacts of climate change, in order to protect Mother Earth. We believe that making amends for natural resource degradation should be the job of the developed countries. That is why we do not accept the Copenhagen Accord's conclusion that we should be the ones to adapt. Real adaptation would be for the developed countries to change their way of life, their models of development, and their excessive consumerism. This is what the debate was about in the plenary.

The majority of those attending the Conference on Climate Change believe and say that it is not just to accept the Copenhagen Accord. They believe that the developed countries ought to assume economic responsibility and look for mechanisms of solution.

Some representatives expressed that we should seek an accord between parties through mediation, through a dialogue between developed and undeveloped countries. Other representatives of rural communities such as Chaco, which borders Paraguay, expressed their opinion that the care of Mother Earth ought to begin with education in the schools. And I argued that teaching the indigenous brother to protect the planet Earth and to care for the environment should begin outside of the schools, with the teaching



Ruben and Bernabé

Bolivia, next page >>



>> **Bolivia**, continued

of values, inculcating conservation of the biodiversity of the environment with the practice of social service. These were the points that were debated forcefully in the working group.

## Commentary by Bernabé

For me it was a new experience, to attend a world conference about climate change, taking place in the city of Cochabamba, and to be a participant in a working group. As a Bolivian Quaker, let me share my personal point of view regarding the conference.

As living beings in the land God gave us so that we could live well and enjoy nature, we have the right to a healthy life, to be respected, to maintain our integrity and identity. As beings created by a supreme being, we have the right to clean and healthy water, like a fountain for life. We have the right to clean air, integral health, to be free of contaminations from toxic refuse, and to consume wholesome agricultural products in order to enjoy good health. Also, we seek to live always in community with all, in peace, equality, justice for all, and with much love for everyone. For this reason I understand that climate debt is a matter for all of us, the rich, the poor, the blacks, the whites, the mestizos, the indigenous peoples, and the social movements. "To live well" (in Aymara, "*Suma Kamaña*") we need to join forces with all who live, to care for, and conserve Mother Earth.

Above all, education will be important in this 21<sup>st</sup> century to teach values in primary and secondary schools and universities. These centers of education need to revise their curricula to incorporate the teaching of values, especially in Bolivia, so that future generations will enjoy nature and good health, and have the best conditions of life.

## Commentary by Ruben

NGOs, government organizations, institutes, and others were present in Cochabamba. I was very deeply impressed by living during the conference with people from different places, cities, and countries. I came to know many people, environmentalists, religious persons, political people, leaders and many others. I also received a lot of information about how to care for the environment.

Very personally, I learned a great deal about a number of things of which we had been ignorant, for example that we become complicit with the

transnational corporations, the big companies that contaminate the environment, when we buy products they make. Also, the big transnational corporations were behind the failure of the meeting in Copenhagen, and they will be at the coming meeting in Cancun, Mexico, again without good intentions.

There were also many side events at the conference, with presentations in different parts of the campus. Everyone was talking about climate change, and every presentation was about ecology or the environment

All these activities filled me with a Spirit of union and of understanding each other as people, and with a wish to live closely with Mother Earth. And In spite of the fact that many Christian Friends in my meeting think that respect for the Mother Earth is a kind of worship-idolatry, I also felt a calling to see to Earth as a human being,

as my ancestors, the Aymaras, did. For them, everything had life, not just animals, people, and plants, but even our possessions, like a book, or any tool we have in our houses. So the summit was really amazing, because many people who came to this Summit were looking for something spiritual that can connect us to Mother Earth. ♦

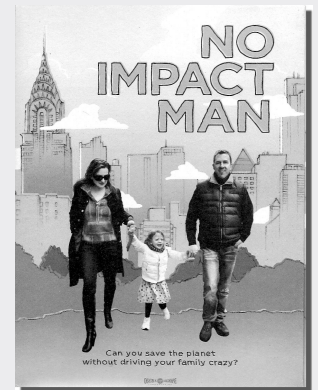


Quakers were among 22,000 who attended a People's World Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April.

## New in QEW's Video Lending Library

**COLIN BEAVAN**, a New York City writer and self-proclaimed liberal, has plans for this new book. He decides on a grand experiment to live one year with as little impact on the environment as possible. The problem is, the project requires his wife Michele—an espresso-guzzling, Prada-worshipping business writer—and their young daughter to be fully on board.

What ensues is not only an entertaining and funny look at well-intentioned environmentalism, but a touching, poignant take on the nature of contemporary marriage and what it means to pursue your dreams, even if it means driving those around you a little insane. This and other videos may be borrowed from the QEW office (*contact info p.11*).



# A 'Peak Oil' fishbowl

by Mary Gilbert

Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Mass.)

**SOMETIMES** it really is the end of the world. This is not far-fetched. If you were in Buchenwald, or died in a tsunami or earthquake, it was the end of your world. There are circumstances right now that could lead to an even more inclusive disaster.

Our whole North American way of life depends on petroleum. Without cheap oil, commercial agriculture will collapse, much transportation will be out of reach, products that we take for granted won't be on the shelves. Economies will crumble on a global scale.

Many informed Friends and others are convinced that civilization as we know it will pretty much come to an end with "Peak Oil." (See: <<http://www.truthout.org/peak-oil-and-apocalypse-then59962> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak\\_oil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak_oil)>) The phrase refers to the time when global oil production is greatest, after which, despite probable growing demand, production will decrease and costs will rise. Some major oil producing areas have already peaked, and others will do so soon.

On a Sunday in May, 2010, about 30 Friends gathered at Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Mass.) to talk about what our world will be like after Peak Oil. Our event was not to share predictions and the reasoning behind them; as a group we were already aware of

what the future will likely hold. Instead we asked how we feel about the coming crisis and how our Meeting community can help us get through the difficult times ahead.

## Our fishbowl:

We used a "fishbowl" format to shape our discussion. Five people sat on chairs in a circle, surrounded by the rest of us on benches. The five opened a dialogue. We had a way for someone on the outside to replace someone in the center, so that anyone could join the discussion at will.

Participation was rich and varied. There was little expression of hope, although there was serious intent to be faithful in working for a sustainable future. A young woman who travels among high schools teaching about climate change and Peak Oil said she means to keep on with her work, even without hope. Another Friend feels called to continue his work toward equality and justice; he sees a clear connection between this work and working directly for the environment.

Facing up to probable future disaster is a tough pill to swallow. One man expressed feeling betrayed by those in power, in terms of circumstances now and those that his daughter is likely to face in the future. Denial can interfere with a faithful and creative response, and he wonders whether his effort to protect his daughter from the reality of the problem has compromised his ability to deal with it, as well as to be helpful to others.

A woman who has been with people as they died, told us that some hold onto their denial of what's happening right to the last minute; others can reach a sense of peace and acceptance that helps them "go" well. The earth may be in a "hospice" situation, and so may much of humankind. What can we learn from this analogy?

After the session a participant wrote the following observations:

—We had an extraordinary event of truth-telling about the severe threat to the human future resulting from the collapse of our industrial society and food production, which has become so largely based on oil.

—There was truth spoken directly from the heart.

—People were brutally honest about their fears, not flinching to state how difficult the future is likely to be, including the prediction that by the end of this century there may only be about 2 billion people alive on the planet.

—This was the first time I was in a group where tears were shed publicly over the fate of the earth and its peoples. It is not insignificant that it was a young person who cried.

## Our fishbowl 'seed questions'

1. Have we really comprehended what it means when the availability of fossil fuels becomes limited? What will our Meeting community look like then?

2. What do you expect might change in how you think about the world, yourself and the Meeting when resources become scarce?

3. When do you feel touched by the urgency of the situation? Do you anticipate real local hardship? How do you feel about that possibility? Will conflict be inevitable?

4. What successes in handling big changes, that you have already experienced and can touch on again in memory, might be helpful?

5. How can what we do as a community, as distinct from what we do as individuals and families, make a difference as we begin supporting each other to prepare for "Peak Oil?"

6. How can we support each other in facing reality, without either denial about the situation's reality or "shutting down" without hope?

**Fishbowl**, next page >>

## Register at 350.org for a '10/10/10' work party

**LAST YEAR**, thanks to many of you, we built up enormous momentum for climate solutions. The global day of rallies you pulled off on October turned out to "the most widespread day of political action in the planet's history," according to CNN, with some 5,200 actions [including many Quaker events] in 181 countries.

And in Copenhagen that translated into 117 countries—most of the world's nations—supporting a tough 350 ppm CO2 target.

But it didn't translate into political victory. The biggest polluters wouldn't go along. So we still have work to do.

In fact, our slogan for 2010 is "**Get To Work.**" Get to work to start changing our communities, and get to work to make our leaders realize that they actually need to lead. But only, of course, if we act together to make it happen.

The first date to mark on your calendar: **October 10.** Working with our friends at the 10/10/10 campaign, we're going to make the

tenth day of the tenth month of the millennium's tenth year a real starting point for concrete action.

We're calling it the **10/10 Global Work Party**, and in every corner of the world we hope communities will put up solar panels, insulate homes, erect windmills, plant trees, paint bikepaths, launch or harvest local gardens. We'll make sure the world sees this huge day of effort—and we'll use it to send a simple message to our leaders: "*We're working—what about you?*"

If we can cover the roof of the school with solar panels, surely you can pass the legislation or sign the treaty that will spread our work everywhere, and confront the climate crisis in time. 10/10/10 will take a snapshot of a clean energy future—the world of 350 ppm—and show people why it's worth fighting for. It's not too early to sign up here: [www.350.org/oct10](http://www.350.org/oct10).

—Bill McKibben  
founder of 350.org



## >> Fishbowl, from page 10

### How can our Quaker faith, and our practices, be of help?

This discussion was only a beginning. We were confirmed in knowing that the right thing to do is follow our leadings toward right living and working, in relation to each other as well as to all beings and to the Earth "earth-self."

How can our Quaker faith, and our practices, be of help in facing Peak Oil and other global changes that are upon us? What can we rely on? We know that we can experience the Divine, however we may term it. We are all learning what it is to be "guided by the Spirit" and what we mean by "discernment." Our practice teaches us about community. Can these help us maintain a loving and supportive web of people who can help each other survive, or when that's not possible, end well? Through hardship we will need to keep open our deep connection with joy.

If our faith and our Quaker practice cannot be of help in hard times they may be not much more than wishful thinking. We will need to strengthen our faith, not in a God who rescues and makes all things well, but a God who is our companion in hard times. And we need to remember that God has no other hands than ours to do the work. ♦

## BeFriending Creation

**BeFriending Creation**, Vol. 23, No. 4, July–August 2010. Newsletter of **Quaker Earthcare Witness**. ISSN 1050-0332. Published bi-monthly.

We publish **BeFriending Creation** to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Submission deadlines are February 7, April 7, June 7, August 7, October 7, and December 7.

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### VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity. WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

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### Earthcare Calendar

**August 7, 2010.** Deadline for article submissions for September–October 2010 *BeFriending Creation*.

**October 28–Nov. 1, 2010.** Fall QEW Steering Committee meeting at Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center in Houston, Texas. **Registration deadline is September 30th.**



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## Hitting bottom in the Gulf—a gutsy gamble ends in a shamble

**TELEVISION** and newspapers have carried many poignant images of dying waterfowl and people whose livelihoods have been ruined by millions of gallons of crude oil that continue to poison waters and shores of Gulf of Mexico.

The term “hitting bottom” naturally comes to mind. It characterizes the petroleum industry’s desperate pursuit of oil in some of the remotest places on the planet, even miles beneath the ocean, where the risks of accidents are significantly greater. It fits some companies’ deceptive advertising campaigns, designed to persuade the public that they are environmentally responsible and concerned about a sustainable future. It fits the eerie scene of BP’s mighty deep water drilling rig collapsed onto the sea floor off the coast of Louisiana.

“Hitting bottom” also denotes the last stage of self-destructive behavior that many addicts have to go through before they finally accept the awful truth about their untenable situations. It’s fairly easy from this point to find intriguing parallels between typical addictive behavior (denial, deception, compulsiveness, etc.) and the world’s frantic drive to keep up with growing demand for diminishing supplies of oil.

It seems unfair, nevertheless, for pundits to accuse an entire population of being “addicted to oil,” as if some individuals’ physical dependence on particular substances such as heroin, nicotine, or caffeine could be applied at the societal level. Even the most “fuelish” members of modern society may be quite healthy, physically and mentally. Aren’t they simply living out the values they have been taught? Enabled by cheap and plentiful fossil fuels, aren’t they just pursuing the material dreams that social and economic institu-



tions have been promoting aggressively for the past century?

A more useful parallel might be drawn between our unsustainable oil dependency and serious *gambling* addiction. Modern society took a huge gamble with its life-support system when it

began replacing natural processes with nonrenewable fossil fuel equivalents. As early industrialists pursued their visions of a utopia of ease, luxury, and high mobility, they probably experienced the same kind of adrenaline rush that “hooked” casino patrons get as they anticipate what the next deal of the cards or roll of the dice might bring—never mind the unpaid bills.

Further, it may be more apt to think of the *industrial system* itself as having the gambling-like addiction to oil. Though on the verge of collapse, it conspires to keep us in the dark about ecological and social disturbances caused by rapid and massive releases of energy and toxic substances. Corporate-controlled mainstream news reporting similarly frames the blowout in the Gulf as just a technological failure, deflecting questions about our values and why we are using up the planet. As one news anchor quipped recently, “I’ll give up my SUV when they pry my cold, dead fingers from the steering wheel.”

Corporate influence over elections and legislative and regulatory processes also has effectively neutralized citizens’ attempts to bring the system back into balance with natural processes. But changing the system’s structure will do little by itself. We need a vision of a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Our job in QEW is to nurture and spread that vision.

—Louis Cox