

# ECONEWS

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Promoting the Vision of a Sustainable Vancouver Island

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## INVENTING THE FUTURE

Back in 1970, Alvin and Heidi Toffler wrote a best-selling book called *Future Shock*. They predicted all sorts of change, including the Internet, and forecast that people would be overwhelmed by the speed of change.

Did it happen? I think not. Most people embraced the changes from birth control pills to i-Pads with excitement and pleasure.

If they were writing today, they might write a book titled *Future Fear*. People read about global warming, the wipe-out of the world's fish stocks, the collapse of the honey-bees, the population explosion, the possible collapse of the global economy, and they feel afraid, thinking "Stop the future - I want to get off!"

This is understandable, but not wise. Alarm is good if it leads to a positive response. Fear is not, since it shuts down positive thinking. Future neuroscience may find that fear and negative attitudes send chemical messages to the brain that switch off activity in the areas associated with creativity and rational decision-making.

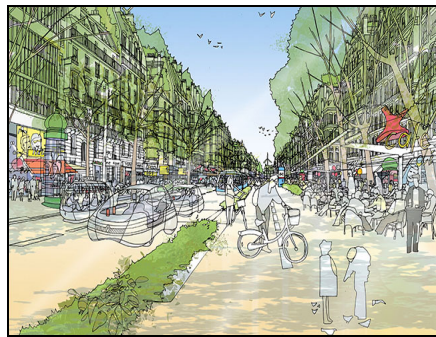
We are deeply programmed to live in the present. For most of our history there was little change from one century to the next. Once we are relatively comfortable, we like things to stay the same, to return to the same good hunting grounds year after year.

We, however, are living through a period of change more rapid than any civilization has ever known. Change brings uncertainty, and uncertainty makes huge opportunities possible. It's all in the mind, and how we frame the unfolding future.

To simplify extremely, there are two possible mind-frames we can adopt.

The first, *Business as Usual*, leads to environmental, financial and then civilizational collapse. If we do not change the way we are living, this is what we'll get. The gloom and doom and all the talk about the collapse or descent of civilization will be justified.

The second, *The Great Transition*, sees humanity in the midst of a rapid evolution from nationalism to shared humanity, from war to peace, from the exploitation to the restoration of nature, from unregulated free trade to co-regulated fair trade, from predatory to ethical financial practices, from fossil fuels to renewable energy, from kings and dictators to participatory democracy, from "our-God-is-best" religions to spirituality inspired by the wonder of the Universe.



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Future Boulevards of Paris

How do we make this future happen? We invent it. We pull it out of our imagination. We retrofit the present in the image of our dreams.

That's what the founders of the labour movement did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That's what the suffragettes did, and what Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement did.

When Mahatma Gandhi wanted to win independence for India in the face of Britain's far superior weaponry, he invented the use of non-violence as a successful means of struggle that is now used by people all over the world.

When Mohammed Yunus wanted to bring progress to impoverished villagers in Bangladesh, he invented the Grameen bank and microlending that is now in use on every continent.

When Wangari Matthai wanted to restore the ecological vitality of Kenya's villages, she invented the Green Belt movement. She has just

passed away, leaving so many people filled with gratitude for her life.

When 19-year-old Eden Full, a Princeton University mechanical engineering student from Calgary, wanted to improve the yield from a solar panel, she invented a device made from metal and bamboo that tracks the Sun without an electric motor, boosting solar output by 40% for a cost of \$10, compared to \$600 for a normal solar tracker. See <http://s.tt/13hyA>

When Japanese engineers wanted to improve the design of a wind turbine, they invented a way to harvest almost three times more energy by placing a lens around the blades, creating a vortex that sucks the wind into it. See [cryptogon.com/?p=24566](http://cryptogon.com/?p=24566)

These last two stories are only a few weeks old. A three-fold increase in a wind turbine's yield is *enormous*. It will require the reworking of energy scenarios all over the world. But that's not my point. My point is that innovations like these are happening every week. When we set our mind-frames to positive, we can see these changes, and use them to encourage our choice of mindset that a Great Transition is possible - and that we can be part of it, like 19-year old Eden Full.

We can redesign our cities. We can re-invent Canada's democracy to make it proportional. We can re-invent Wall Street. We can re-invent capitalism itself, so that it builds natural, community and human wealth, not just financial wealth. There will always be stiff and well-funded opposition to overcome, but that has always been so, due to our conservative nature.

Alan Kay, who first conceived the personal laptop computer, once said "The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

A time of crisis is a time of change. If we embrace a positive mind-frame we can use the crisis to invent the future and achieve incredible things.

- Guy Dauncey