

# **A Vision of the Future**

## **Taking Precautionary Action Conference**

### **Carolyn Raffensperger, Time Traveler**

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We've got to take back the future from the pirates who have shot holes in the mother ship. We've got to liberate future generations from the con men who don't know the difference between tricksters and the rip-off artists. And we've got to wrest the wheel of the Titanic away from the jackals and hit-men. We've got to be like the fox, leaving many tracks. Like the fox, we are path makers and pathfinders.

We don't know if we are going to survive or cross into a future with any options or possibilities. Students have asked me "why not help destroy the planet because everybody is going to be brain damaged, there won't be a rain forest or whales or a polar bear left." And they say, "I won't be able to have children and if I can, what will the world look like when they come of age?" What is the answer – or answers – to such questions?

I suspect the answer is that we are called to build an ark for the future.

I can't tell you what the ark will look like. But I can tell you why the Titanic sank. And I can describe some of the tools we need and the resources we have before us to craft a future that is whole, beautiful and worthy of turning over to future generations.

What we can do is pick up the tools we've been given and start rounding up the animals and all our kin. Each one of you has a role in building a vessel that will be seaworthy. Each of you has a place on the team. Each of you holds a corner of the vision.

Imagine the year 2024 and the children who were conceived this week have come of age.

The great grandparents of the Gen 2024s – the Boomers -- survived the great social security debacle of 2012. This was quickly followed by the complete collapse of Dow Chemical after an Enron-like lawsuit brought by ecologically minded retirement fund investors who pointed out that Dow, Monsanto and their ilk were Ponzi schemes ripping off the commons.

As a result, the boomers had instigated a remarkable convergence with the Catholic Church, AARP, and the Millennium generation of environmentalists who created a precautionary vision of the economy. Something they called the Owl Economy that was predicated on protecting and enhancing the commonwealth and the common health. Their first commitment was to create a jobs program that guaranteed everyone meaningful work at clean jobs that benefited the local community. They believed that no retirement fund, no education fund, and no economy was truly secure unless it put health, beauty and well-being ahead of profits. The New York Stock Exchange had been replaced with The Owl Fair Trade and Security Exchange.

Central to the economic debate was water, the defining issue of the era. A parched Southwest U.S. struggled through a multi-year drought, towns emptied swimming pools, closed up golf courses and the government issued "water stamps" for the poor. Water was rationed and conserved for agricultural use in the Midwest and Central Valley of California. It turned out that water became the key factor in shifting to a largely local, organic, dry-land farm approach. Industrial agriculture, with its excessive water use and ecological illiteracy, imploded. PP advocates worked in alliance with low-income water rights groups, and watershed restoration groups. Alliances were formed to guarantee water as a human right at the local level, building a ground-up movement ("Agua por la Vida!") in the west that by 2016, was running mainly Latino

candidates on water-rights tickets. El principio de la precaución was a central plank in the platform.

Vista had created the Well-Person medical corps in all 50 states because of the collapse of the health care system. Their key charge was to prevent disease because there were so few resources for treating illness once it happened and there were no new antibiotics while new pandemics were emerging very quickly. Even though the industrial medical model had disintegrated, the Prevention Corps was able to piggyback on HCWH's model hospitals that were practicing ecological medicine. The (unknown) heroine of the prevention corps had a statue dedicated to her on the site of what had been FEMA. It was called the memorial of the Unknown Dr Precaution based on the famous Taoist parable about the three doctors. In that story, the most famous of the doctors explains he is actually the least skilled because he has to cure sick people rather than the more skilled doctors who use effective precaution so nobody in their villages ever gets sick.

The elders, especially the childless women who had suffered serious reproductive disorders and had never had their own children, adopted the world's children. This movement began with Midwest grandmother councils that galvanized the 2008 Iowa caucuses. All three political parties lead by the rising Owl Economy party, competed over who most fulfilled a theory of government known as the public trust. This stood for the proposition that the key function of government was to protect the commonwealth and common health for this and future generations.

As a result of their work and the innovation of the Millennials, environmental agencies around the world eliminated the outmoded and cumbersome risk assessment process and had new divisions that worked with the Well-person medical corps doing health impact and cultural impact assessments. They had created an entire cabinet-level agency out of the old patent office, USDA and FDA called the Alternatives Generation, Innovation, and Assessment Agency – or A-Gaia for short. Every agency from the Office of the Budget to Immigration screened decisions for the impact on future generations. Every legislative body from the local to the national had a bloc of legislators specifically designated to legislate with the seventh generation in mind. And the courts appointed a guardian ad litem for future generations that was empowered to intervene in environmental and public health cases.

Speaking of the courts – three new judges had been appointed to the Supreme Court between 2018 and 2024. The litmus test was no longer abortion, flag-burning or school prayer. The two litmus tests were reversing the burden of proof – there were still a few old school judges that still wanted to give the benefit of the doubt to corporate profits rather than ecological sanity. But they were in the minority. The more important litmus test was how best to carry out the new 27<sup>th</sup> amendment to the US Constitution which for the first time ever granted legal rights of future generations to an unimpaired commons.

The grandmother councils were also instrumental in creating local “readiness” networks that were preparing to address climate disruption and other related local impacts of future uncertainties with real actionable methods of preparation. The PP helped to name the strategy of confronting fear-inducing uncertainty with action. The message to a public increasingly bombarded with images of climate driven disasters and desperate water shortages leading to total social break down became: Don't be scared into a victim role, apply the PP in your community. Get ready to weather the storm!

There were ongoing tensions between the Gen 24s and their great grandparents the baby boomers. The boomers still believed that the only way to a resilient and beautiful future was back to the woods and a No Tech lifestyle. But then again, they were still listening to the Grateful Dead. The recent high school graduates all had microchip jewelry, especially navel jewels that served as personal bio-monitoring devices and instantly alerted them to any biological hazard. These devices could ID the source, the manufacturer and were then used to instantly message friends, organizing protests of the manufacturer of the hazard in minutes. The Gen 24s had been

wired in from the first days of their birth. They used technology for every aspect of life, especially their environmental organizing and resistance.

And many of the Gen 2024's had been formally designated eco-refugees and given refugee tax status after the floods and tornadoes hit New York, Georgia and Oklahoma destroying them. The new universities were, increasingly virtual and moving with the eco-refugees to their new locales. The eco-refugee sanctuaries and universities became the model laboratories of truly ecological living.

Students began demanding that more university resources go into studying precautionary approaches so that there would be no more refugees. The Gen 2024s recognized that eco-refugee status could have been preventable. They also knew that their own learning disabilities and asthma were probably also preventable. Drawing attention to the issues were a few high profile militant actions by the Gen 2024's older siblings such as the total shut down of the University of Illinois' Chemical Engineering Department, and the simultaneous occupation of Berkeley's Biotech Department, University of Texas' Economics Department and MIT's Nanotech Department.

By 2012, an academic field on the PP emerged as a legitimate interdisciplinary field of study, integrating business, environmental ethics, law, and futures work. The result was the next wave of green chemistry and engineering, biomimicry, sustainable agriculture and ecological medicine.

In 2014, the first "Multiversity" opened. This new institution was the death knell for the old consumer model of education and the corporate ownership of research. The Multiversity created a new social institution integrating different models of education, with industry, community building and permaculture. Even the art department was revolutionized because they created teams of chemists and artists that eliminated toxic materials all together.

There was one further generational surprise. The Gen 2024s discovered that Boomer -- as in the generation of their great grandparents -- did not refer to the mating call of the Prairie Chicken that had been widely reestablished in the millions of acres of restored prairie across the Midwest. A group of Millennials had reclaimed the entire Heartland rescuing animals on factory farms and restoring the entire Mississippi River basin. They said that this was their heritage, their birthright.

As we stand here today, what is the heritage and birthright of the babies who are being conceived this very week. What kind of world will they inherit? Will they thank us or curse us?

It is up to us to prevent the curse and be worthy of gratitude. We can create a future together. We now step off the old path of destruction and mayhem and on to a new path of precaution and restoration. We can learn from history, and craft the paths and the arks of the future. Who has the compass? Who has the nails? Who has the blueprint? Who can sing to us as we work? I'll bring the pizza.

### Where the Sidewalk Ends

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And before the street begins,  
And there the grass grows soft and white,  
And there the sun burns crimson bright,  
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
And the dark street winds and bends.  
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow

We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know  
The place where the sidewalk ends.

Shel Silverstein