new research based on the few remaining hunter-gatherer societies examines how humans have lived for at least ninety percent of their existence, until agriculture was invented around 10,000 years ago.

The findings conclude that these societies are largely peaceful, implying that war is a relatively recent concept and not, as some academics had previously suggested, an integral part of the human condition that has driven human evolution since pre-history.

Douglas Fry and Patrik Söderberg at Åbo Akademi University in Vasa, Finland, report in the July 19 issue of the journal Science that people living in hunter-gatherer societies today rarely engage in war. Their definition of war covered group acts of aggression against other societies over resources or political disputes, and not incidents sparked by personal motives.

They studied a record of 148 incidents of lethal aggression across 21 such societies, including the Semang of the Malay Peninsula and the !Kung of southern Africa.

The researchers found that 85 percent of cases were between people of the same society and 55 percent of incidents involved a sole perpetrator and lone victim. Furthermore, females were the perpetrators of violence for only 4 percent of the events. Almost two-thirds of the total deaths resulted from accidents, interfamilial disputes, or interpersonal motives such as fighting over women.

Most of the cases that could be defined as acts of war involved just one of the groups in the study, the Tiwi society of Australia. “These findings imply that warfare was probably not very common before the advent of agriculture, when most if not all humans lived as nomadic foragers,” cultural anthropologist Kirk Endicott of Dartmouth College, who was not part of the study, told Science magazine.

Professor Fry said that the foraging societies studied are too small to wage wars and groups seldom fight each other as membership of groups is flexible and blurred by intermarriage. “In my view the default for nomadic foragers is non-war,” he said. Also, he pointed out that there were very few instances of violence caused by scarce resources, one of the arguments often made by advocates of the warlike-humanity school of thought.

The findings point to the conclusion “that group killing is an exceptional event in human societies…” This is a profound study of an issue that is quite important for understanding our humanness.

More Information:
sciencemag.org/content/341/6143/270
Story from Positive News UK

Why Positive News?

We envision a world in which people treat each other with respect and kindness, where we consider the Earth to be our home to care for and to enjoy. And we see that this world is in the process of emerging!

Positive News is a reflection of this widespread movement and tells its powerful stories.

reporting positive change • pioneering solution-based journalism • informing and empowering...
Bacteria could prevent malaria transmission

Scientists are working to develop bacteria that could prevent malaria transmission in mosquito populations.

They are developing the mosquito line carrying a stable Wolbachia infection. "Wolbachia is a bacteria we found in Michigan State University populations and replicates in mosquitoes," said Curt Kinkel, assistant professor of microbiology and molecular genetics at Michigan State University. "We then introduced the bacteria into uninfected populations and replicated it in the mosquito populations and replicates in other species," he said.

Researchers have found that when infected with Wolbachia, mosquito populations can be protected from malaria parasites. Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes can act as a barrier against disease transmission, the researchers said. The current research is focused on developing methods to introduce Wolbachia into mosquito populations in the wild, where it can spread through entire populations.

Malaria affects 219 million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Some 40 percent of all malaria cases occur in Africa. Researchers say the Wolbachia bacteria can spread by the insects through entire mosquito populations, helping to control the spread of malaria.

Peru to Provide Free Solar Power to its 2 Million Poorest Citizens

According to Peru’s Energy and Mining Minister Jorge Merino, the program will allow 95 percent of Peru to have access to electricity by the end of 2016. The first part of the program aims to provide solar systems to 500,000 extremely poor households in areas that lack even basic access to the power grid. Speaking to the Latin America Herald Tribune, Merino said: “This program is aimed at the poorest people, those who lack access to electric lighting and still use oil lamps, spending their own resources to pay for fuels that harm their health.”

Phase one began in early July when 1,601 solar panels were installed in Contumaza, a province in the northeastern region of Caja-marca.

Source: Positive News UK
Today, cycling is part of Copenhagen’s culture. Bikes are everywhere. But there was a time when vehicle traffic clogged Denmark’s capital city’s roads. In the 1970’s Denmark faced an energy crisis, a recession, and increasing car traffic congestion. The public demanded better transportation options.

Since then, Copenhagen has done a great job of building a bike-friendly infrastructure. To date, fifty percent of all Copenhageners cycle to work or school every day and 68 percent cycle at least once a week.

To encourage more bikers, the country has created a Cycle Super Highway, the first of a network of 26 routes planned to connect commuting suburbanites to the city. The route includes amenities like air pumps, safer intersections, and every bike commuter’s dream: traffic lights timed to average cycling speed, which minimize the number of stops so riders can cruise right into the city.

Most respondents to the nation’s recent survey said they cycle because it’s more convenient and it’s faster. Now that sounds like something people around the world could appreciate!

Content from Sustainable America

The Bike Superhighways of Denmark

Indonesian forests to be returned to indigenous peoples

To the kind person who found my wallet last week and turned it in to the police,

GO HUMANS

Chimps Got Rights

The United States is one of only two nations where humans’ closest living relatives, chimpanzees, are still used as laboratory test animals. In labs across the US, chimps are exposed to diseases and experimental drugs, subjected to painful operations, and often spend their entire lives inside laboratories before being euthanized.

This may soon change. This summer, two US federal agencies announced steps that could end the use of chimpanzees for medical research.

On June 11, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced plans to list all chimpanzees, including those in captivity, as endangered. The plan would add more restrictions on experimenting on chimps by requiring a permit for almost all medical research on the animals. Permits would be granted only if the research were deemed to be for the benefit of chimpanzees.

The dual announcements follow years of campaigning by animal welfare groups such as the Humane Society of United States, the Jane Goodall Institute and the North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance. Their efforts have been backed by scientific reports that have shown that there are alternatives to invasive experiments on chimps – such as human stem cell tests, experiments on other animals, as well as human testing – that are just as useful for science.

Source: Tree Hugger

In Britain, Oxford City Council has voted on June 24 to become the first city in Europe to shun oil from controversial Canadian tar sands.

In a near-unanimous decision, the council chose to adapt its energy procurement policy to ensure the oil doesn’t enter the city’s economy. The city, famous for its university, took the lead from the US where similar declarations have been made. ‘Tar-free’ locations include Bellingham (WA), a US gateway for the tar sands, and Burlington (VT), which lies near the route of a proposed tar sands pipeline. In Vermont alone, 28 towns have made the pledge.

Reported by Kathrine Carstens for Positive News UK

Indigenous Indonesians could soon win greater control over their traditional lands, following a court ruling revoking governmental administration of forests customarily used by aboriginal groups.

The country’s constitutional court ruled in May that traditional forests should be controlled directly by rural Indonesians, rather than treated as public forests subject to industrial logging under licenses that are issued by the central government.

The ruling gives significant new land rights to a broad swathe of the Indonesian population, up to forty million of whom are from indigeneous communities.

Reported by Ben Whitford for Positive News UK

Oxford votes to be Europe’s first ‘tar-free city’

Indigenous Indonesian woman

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Reported by Ben Whitford for Positive News UK
How can we create world peace?

Much of what we do relates to our cultural and scientific practices. I believe that however you believe that we came to be here, whether God moved his hand, or two atoms came to crash, we believe that it all started somewhere. There was a start, a point of initiation. I call that beginning the luminous light of beginning. If the one point is true, then we all have a common ancestor, creation itself. So we’re all family. This includes not just humans but everything. I believe that the key to world peace is to change the story we tell ourselves.

Have you been successful in conveying this message?

Very successful. Everyone seems to take the story home – from Kazakhstan [World Forum of Spiritual Culture], to the US Commission on Civil Rights, to the gathering of 100 million [Kumbh Mela] in India.

Can you give a specific example?

Last year, in Jordan I participated in a series of peace discussions between Arabs and Jews. Those from Israel, Syria and other Arab countries all would sit separately and talk about what they didn’t like about each other. I thought, somebody has to get close to these people, so I joined the Palestinians to befriend them. I asked “What would you like peace to look like?”. They said that, for example, they’d like their wife to feel safe when out in the streets. I thought, somebody has to get close to these people, so I joined the Palestinians to befriend them. I asked “What would you like peace to look like?”. They said that, for example, they’d like their wife to feel safe when out in the streets. I asked the same of the other groups and got similar responses.

I proposed a small mixed group to get together and talk. I got them to play music together on a roof of this hotel. The leader of PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization] ended up dancing with the Zionist leader. Arabs invited the Jews to celebrate Shabbat and witnessed the event noting certain cultural similarities in the ritual. They were then ready to talk about how to end the transgenerational conflict.

Is this how you envision creating peace?

Yes, if you’re going to bring peace, instead of talking about the conflict, talk about what people desire. Ask what they want for themselves. Your worst enemy is your biggest ally when you realize that you want the same things in life and together work on them.

I know for sure that I’m just a regular person. People think you can only accomplish big things if there’s something special about you. We all have the same power and I’d like to see more regular people show up.

What advice could you give someone wanting to get involved in making the world better?

The trick is in what you choose to imagine. If you think big, big things will happen and when you think small, small things will happen. I believe for sure that peace is possible and that any problem can be resolved.

If you want to make change, you have to begin with a concept. The world we live in is whole and complete and nothing is outside of it because it all originates from one central point or moment. If that is true, then our imagination is a part of creation, and it follows that if we can imagine something, than it has to be possible. Not only does it have to be possible, but all the tools to make it so are right in front of us.

I suggest 3 steps: Imagine what you want the outcome to be and stretch your imagination to make it a reality. Look for the tools right in front of you to bring forth what you imagined. Lastly, pick these tools and create action.

The solution to any problem is always in front of you.

Patrick McCollum
describes himself as just a regular guy. He’s also an effective mover and shaker for world peace, social justice and pluralism. This Wiccan minister brings a unique message of planetary consciousness on a global level that speaks of the sacredness of our connection with divinity and with each other. Ilonka Wloch talks to Patrick about his inspiring vision.

"Until women have equality worldwide, we can never achieve world peace or planetary sustainability."

On September 18, Rev. Patrick McCollum in partnership with Children of the Earth, escorted a large group of international youth refugees to the United Nations to participate in the International Day of Peace.

In your youth, you had a near death experience where you claim to have been in the presence of God. Was that encounter a direct motivation for your activism?

Yes.

For a couple of different reasons: when one hears that voice it becomes difficult to deny what that voice wants you to do. For me, it gave me my spark, my touchstone. Whenever I think that the challenge before me is too big, I connect with that touchstone.

The other thing is, during that experience I came to realize that life is fragile and could end at any moment. Every day I’d like to live in a way that if this is my last day, it was worth giving up my life for it.

What is your VISION for the world?

I believe that when we all come to a place where we accept our commonality, and we treat one another in accordance with the sacredness that we all came from God or source, then we’ll come to a place where everyone is happy. We all have the power to do something. It just requires stepping forward and starting. It’s like being at the foot of a trail where rather than wishing to be already on top, we actually start walking.

More information:

www.patrickmccollum.org
In September People Pushed Back on Syria—and Won

by Sarah van Gelder

In Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other cases, the people protested and got war anyway. Why—at least, so far—has the story played out differently with Syria?

This September, the United States stood at the brink of yet another war. President Obama was announcing plans to order US military strikes on Syria, with consequences that no one could predict.

Then things shifted. In an extraordinarily short time, the people petitioned, called their representatives in Congress, held rallies, and used social media to demand a nonviolent approach to the crisis. The march toward war slowed.

During his address to the nation, President Obama said his administration would work with close allies, and with Russia and Syria, toward a diplomatic solution: pushing a resolution through the UN Security Council requiring the Syrian government to give up its chemical weapons. He also said the US will give UN weapons inspectors a chance to report their findings.

If these diplomatic efforts to disarm Syria’s chemical weapons are successful, historians may look back at this as a moment when the people finally got the peace they demanded.

How did we step back from the brink?

On August 29, the British Parliament rejected a motion to authorize an assault on Syria, and Prime Minister David Cameron accepted the vote—even though he was not required to do so by law. The leading member of Parliament from the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, said he’d acted “for the people of Britain,” who “want us to learn the lessons of Iraq.”

In the United States, MoveOn.org, which usually supports President Obama, launched a campaign asking him to seek an alternative to military strikes in Syria. “We have seen the rushed march to war before,” Anna Gal- land, executive director of MoveOn.org civil action, said in a statement. “We cannot allow it again. Congress, and the nation, should not be forced into a binary debate over strikes or nothing.”

Other groups joined in, such as VoteVets.org, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, and US Action. Meanwhile, Rep. Scott Rigell of Virginia and House Majority Leader John Boehner, both Republicans, circulated letters requesting that Congress be consulted prior to any military strikes. 116 house members—both Republicans and Democrats—signed on.

And Obama listened. It’s hard to say if he agreed to consult Congress prior to attacking because he felt the pressure, because he was getting cold feet about going to war, or because the War Powers Resolution—a federal law passed after the end of the Vietnam War— requires congressional approval for beginning a war. On August 31, he announced he would turn to the US Congress for authorization of military strikes. To many ordinary Americans, it felt like a racing freight train had suddenly been brought to a halt. The pause gave the public a chance to weigh in, and they showed up in force. Members of Congress reported an avalanche of calls and emails from constituents, almost all opposing military involvement. Even though, many have questioned the usefulness of contacting members of Congress in recent years, as Washington, D.C., has become something of a corporate controlled bubble.

While Congress was debating and fielding calls from constituents, military strikes were on hold. Then, Secretary of State John Kerry opened the door to diplomacy, saying that if Syria were to dispose of its chemical weapons, military action could be averted. That idea was quickly embraced by Russia and Syria. The agreement that’s being hashed out may turn out to be the breakthrough potentially catastrophic military incursion.

This is clearly what the American people and the people of the world are saying they want, and, for once, they seem to be getting it.
Hungry for Cigarette Butts
The most fun sculpture educates and generates money for charity

by Abby Cunningham

San Rafael CA - A late-summer breeze feathered its way through downtown San Rafael as locals meandered on Fourth Street in search of dinner, drinks and maybe a good movie. A woman paused for a moment of quiet reflection, and took a long drag off her cigarette. But instead of snuffing out the butt with the toe of her high-heeled shoe, she walked over to a seven-foot sculpture and stuffed it into the bull’s eye. “Every little bit helps, and I try to do my part,” she said.

Cigarette Eater Meter, was commissioned by San Rafael Clean and created by artists Ventana Amico and Enrique Goldberg. Its goal: to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of the 10,000 cigarette butts that land on San Rafael streets every three to four days.

The metallic sculpture looks something like a giant weighing scale you might find at an amusement park. It is colorfully painted with pictures that show how cigarette butts travel from sidewalk to drain to water systems. Pull-up panels ask thought-provoking questions and give surprising answers.

The sculpture works sort of like a parking meter, except that money comes out and goes to charity. For every butt deposited into the meter, two cents are given to a local charity — St. Vincent de Paul Society. When the dial reaches 100,000 a matching grant will kick in another $2,000.

Smoking in the streets has been glamorized for decades, particularly in Hollywood films, as a kind of free-spirited gesture of American independence. Today we know that smoking is bad for us, but most of us don’t know how harmful cigarette butts are to wildlife and the environment.

What starts out as grimy street litter eventually finds its way into storm drains, creeks and the nearby San Francisco Bay. Cigarette filters are made of a plastic called cellulose acetate that doesn’t biodegrade. Birds and fish eat them and eventually starve to death because their stomachs are full of plastic. To make matters worse, unfiltered cigarette butts have the toxicity to kill half of the fish in a one-liter container of water, according to a recent study by San Diego State University.

Fortunately though, the City of San Rafael doesn’t sit idly by while all those cigarette butts wash down the drain. Last year, San Rafael Clean, a partnership between various city organizations, as well as local businesses and residents, started a program called “Bounty for Butts.”

Diners at the St. Vincent de Paul Society dining room were invited to participate in a “buy-back” program where they received one dollar for every ounce of collected cigarette litter. The program was enormously successful. In the first two weeks alone, participants cleared about 90,000 cigarette butts from the streets while generating much-needed income.

In addition to the clean-up, organizers at San Rafael Clean decided to amp up education, to stop litter at its source.

The Cigarette Eater Meter stands as a shining example of how one city engages its residents in a creative way to solve a collective problem. And although some of the Golden State’s non-smokers would like to blame those who do, the fact remains that loose cigarette butts are everyone’s business, and everyone can do something to help. If you see a loose butt, pop it in the trash. Or better yet, bring a Cigarette Eater Meter to your city. If you want to help Earth, the time is now and the place is right beneath your feet.

More Information:
Carla.koop@cityofsanrafaelflor Tel. 415-485-3071

Tell me what you think
Connecting with people about climate change the easy way

by Nancy Faulstich

Watsonville, CA - On the last weekend in August, I organized a listening project focusing on climate change. Incorporated what I know about listening and caring about people into this project. I believe we made an impact on hundreds, if not thousands, of people and began connections with many that we will went to charity.

One of my friends was a little skeptical. And, as she watched me talk with people she became more and more intrigued by what I was doing. These actions, which could include talking to others about what they know, were entered into a raffle. Some people signed up to be on our mailing list.

Meaningful connections
Many people thanked us profusely for being there. We connected with some who were already involved, some who knew a little bit, and those who didn’t know much at all.

Here are some conversations which stood out.

An elder from Guanajuato, Mexico who knew a great deal about the changing weather patterns shared his knowledge passionately. I encouraged him to talk to his family and friends about these issues.

A Chicano environmental law student told us about protecting people’s rights and needs. A teenager who is exploring shifting to a vegan diet expressed her frustration about environmental concern being called a “hippie” thing by her friends.

An elder said she had decided to stop worrying about ‘all of these kinds of things.’ I listened to her and agreed that just worrying wouldn’t help anyone and she concentrated on having a good, enjoyable interaction with her.

A 30-something-year-old Chicano said he is starting to grow some of his food, plans to build a wind turbine and develop solar power for his house. He is also considering getting chickens, right in downtown Watsonville.

Several people, who stayed engaged in conversation despite disagreement, ended up leaving with a slightly changed attitude.

Children told me about their favorite animals or colored on paper while I talked with their folks.

I am grateful to my friends who left inspired, with ideas for new actions. I believe we offered people hope as we helped them look at serious issues.
25 years ago, an isolated Colombian tribe emerged to share a warning about humanity's future, portrayed in a film about them that had a far-reaching global impact. Now the tribe has surfaced again to give us a powerful new message.

Shibulata is a Kogi Mama: an enlightened leader of one of the world's last, lost tribes. In 2008, he and other members of the 18,000 Kogi people living in the remote Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains of Colombia, came out of centuries of fiercely defended isolation — for only the second time in their existence.

They refer to themselves as the 'elder brothers' of humanity, the guardians of the Earth, and wanted to send us, their 'younger brothers' a message. That message is captured in Aluna — a ground-breaking documentary premiering at Raindance Film Festival in London this September: But the story begins much earlier.

The first encounter

In 1998, Alan Freire, a filmmaker for the BBC, was in Colombia tracking down a lost city, deep in the jungle, when he learned of a nearby tribe who had existed in almost complete isolation for at least the last 500 years. In fact, the Kogi are thought to be the only civilization to have survived culturally intact since the time of the Incas and Aztecs. They have no wheel, no written word, no language any outsider can speak, but possess a wealth of indigenous knowledge lost from the modern world entirely.

Alan sent a message: Did they have anything to say to the outside world? Six months later a response came back: "Come to our village, we are waiting."

Entering Kogi lands is no easy feat. Surrounded on all sides by almost impassable jungle and the terrors of armed guerrillas, tomb robbers and cocaine traffickers, the Kogi have remained isolated precisely because it is almost impossible to reach them.

When Alan finally arrived at the prescribed place — a small mountain village of circular thatched homes and terraced farmlands — he was placed before a council of Kogi Mamas. "I felt completely transparent to them," he says, "as if they knew my thoughts just by looking at me." He told them how a camera works, the Mamas deliberated, and by the morning he had a commission.

That film, From the Heart of the World: the Elder Brother's Warning, was released in 1990. In it, the Kogi warn humanity that we are damaging the Earth, and dramatically predict the end of the world if we do not change our ways. The film became one of the most profound documentaries ever made about an indigenous people. And the Kogi, satisfied that their message was delivered, returned to their mountain and asked never to be contacted again. But we did not listen.

Another attempt

In 2008 Alan received a message, asking him to return to the Kogi village. They wanted to know why their warning wasn't heeded, why we kept damaging the Earth. They wanted to try to communicate again with us, but this time — realizing that we understand more with our eyes than our ears — they promised to show us the evidence behind their message and take us on a journey that would alter our very understanding of reality itself.

The resulting film is a beautiful, poignant, revelatory look at one of the world's last uncorrupted indigenous civilizations. But what makes the film so special is that it isn't a documentary about the Kogi; it's a documentary by the Kogi about us.

We follow Mama Shibulata, his daughter Francesca, and other Kogi Mamas from his and neighboring tribes as they physically lay a nearly 250 mile line of golden thread between important ecological sites near their mountain home — the tallest coastal peak in the world, filled with layers of distinct climatic ecosystems and recognized, because of that, as a microcosm for the planet as a whole.

As we follow their journey, we encounter dried up river estuaries, polluted beaches, and disappearing forests — a landscape utterly devastated by industry. But the Kogi are not just highlighting the damage; they've done, they're trying to show us the delicate connections between the natural world: how what happens in one place has a consequence on what happens in another. The Kogi want to show us that the golden thread is real.

"One of the most striking bits of the film," Alan says, "is the way they talk about how rivers function — they are absolutely adamant that the source of the river is affected by what you do at the estuary. That's not the way we look at it — we don't have that information, but that view is now beginning to be accepted by many river scientists."

The Kogi have a profound ecological knowledge and this is tested to throughout the film by conservationists, environmental scientists and even one, astounded astronaut. Nonetheless, there are occasions when their warning appears to be based in something more closely resembling belief, than hard fact. That they can divine the future by reading bubbles from water is something most viewers will find hard to accept.

However, to let our different systems of knowledge and communication dilute their message would be to miss the larger point. For woven between the symbolism of their language, another, more profound message is embedded. The Kogi don't want to just show us how we're damaging the planet, they want to change the way we think about the planet entirely. They want to show us Aluna.

Shibulata, like all Mamas, spent his entire youth mastering a unique form of concentrated thought that the Kogi believe contains the key to understanding the future of our world. They refer to themselves as Aluna: a ground-breaking documentary premiering at Raindance Film Festival in London this September: But the story begins much earlier.

Mama Shibulata and his tribe have now returned to their mountain. And despite all the challenges humanity faces, they still have hope. "You do not need to abandon your lives," they tell us at the end of the film. "Perhaps, instead, at least to begin with, what we need to do is change the way we understand the Earth: from a collection of disparate habitats to a complex of interdependent systems, from an inanimate object to a living, intelligent entity. Perhaps then we, the younger siblings, will finally grow up.

Aluna will soon be available for viewing in the US. For more information visit: www.alunathemovie.com.

Story from Positive News UK.
The Greatest Christmas Truce
Score one for humanity!

The words drifted across the frozen battlefield: “Stille Nacht. Heilige Nacht. Alles Schlaft, einsam wacht.” To the ears of the British troops peering over their trench, the lyrics may have been unfamiliar but the haunting ‘Silent Night’ tune was unmistakable. After the last note a lone German infantryman appeared holding a small tree glowing with light. “Merry Christmas. We not shoot, you not shoot.” Just after dawn on a bitingly cold Christmas Day in 1914, ninety nine years ago, one of the most extraordinary incidents of the Great War was about to unfold.

Weary men climbed hesitantly at first out of trenches and stumbled into no man’s land. They shook hands, sang carols, lit each other’s cigarettes, swapped tunic buttons and addresses and, most famously, played football, kicking around empty bully-beef cans and using their caps or steel helmets as goalposts. The unauthorized Christmas truce spread across much of the 500-mile Western Front where more than a million men were encamped.

Kazoo’s D.I.Y. Corner

With the winter holidays approaching, it’s a good time to think about gifts that you can make for the people you love. A simple salve can be made in bulk quantity for the cost of buying just one small container of it at your local store. Here’s one of my favorite recipes, I call it: Kazoo’s Salve-All.

You can use it to nourish skin and hair, and even for conditioning leather and wood.

What you need:

- a tall glass jar
- oils - for this recipe we’ll use: one part shea butter, one part grapeseed oil, two parts coconut oil, but you can use just about any plant-based oil
- up to one part beeswax (optional for stiffer salve)
- 20 drops soothing essential oil
- 20 drops vitamin E (optional)
- clean saucepan
- several small jars with lids (one for each gift)

1. Place oils in a tall glass jar. Place jar in saucepan.
2. Fill saucepan with water halfway up the jar.
3. Turn stove to medium heat allowing the oils to melt together. If adding beeswax, do so now. Beeswax will make your salve stiffer and less likely to melt on hot days, but is not ideal for use on face as it can clog pores.
4. Once all oils have melted remove from heat. Do not let them stay on for longer than is necessary. This can burn the oils and break down nutrients.
5. Now is a good time to add your essential oils and vitamin E.
6. Pour the liquid salve into your gift jars and let cool without the lids.
7. You can cover once the salve has solidified, this may take up to 24 hours.

Salve-All!
Connect with Your Family across the Table ... and the Political Divide

Is it possible to gracefully navigate the potential minefield of political discussions at family gatherings? Suspending judgment, looking for common ground, and speaking from the heart can help.

After all, these are people you love.

by Joan Blades

Two years ago LivingRoomConversations.org was launched with the goal of "revitalizing the art of conversation among people with diverse views" and to remind our fellow humans of the power and beauty of civil discourse. Living Room Conversations have been co-hosted by conservative/progressive host teams on energy, money in politics, the role of government, immigration, and gay marriage.

The responses to the conversations have been encouraging and even inspiring.

"Participating in the Living Room Conversation brought me back to my boyhood when my family sat around the dinner table debating the topics of the day from both liberal and conservative perspectives.

"The Conversation captured what I find to be missing from modern media and modern political narratives: a sense that what we share as Americans is far deeper and more important than what divides us, a sense that we still have a chance to reach across partisan divides to identify both the core of our disagreements and the kernel of realistic compromises."

This year the media is asking us, "How do families deal with their political differences over holiday dinners?"

My first response is: A family dinner party may not be the best place for a challenging conversation. Also, the simple guidelines for Living Room Conversations may not be sufficient for families.

Many families have histories that are challenging. We all know family members that presume permission to break certain social restraints and social restraints is a core part of what makes their discussions work. They always know first and foremost that they love each other.

You know better than anyone who in your family might appreciate and be open to a meaningful conversation that includes politics. Why not look for common ground? The media spend more than enough time on our differences. And don't forget, there are many people who care deeply about our country grieving and worrying about what the future holds. Listening, caring, and healing the divisions in our communities and families is a worthy goal.

"Why not just look for common ground?"

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If you do decide to engage in a substantial conversation—or are roped in—remember that you aren't likely to change someone's mind, but you just might open them up to seeing another point of view, have the pleasure of gaining a broader perspective for yourself, and reaffirm the understanding that our core values are much more aligned than the media leaves us believing. And don't forget the love.

More Information:
www.livingroomconversations.org
www.positivenewsus.org

"Unlikely birthday bash"

For my friend Chloe’s birthday, a few of us gifted chocolate chip cookies all over downtown Berkeley. The biggest surprise was that we were given back more than we gave! I haven’t seen something this inspiring for a while, a man said, as he pulled out his wallet and gifted Chloe some buckels! Another amazing gift book was a lady who hopped a “happy birthday” song at a prime spot on Shattuck Ave. to which we all danced.

More than the gifts, it felt like we were connecting with our local community. If we keep doing this, I can imagine the day when we walk down the street and looking at people in the eyes with recognition and smiles rather than the pavement with Probuchs.

I know what I want to do on my next birthday!

—Reishi O
Egyptian women request equality with graffiti

by Fajr Soliman and Angie Balata

In Egypt, street art, which has become incredibly popular since the revolution, is created mostly by men. However, women are now starting to join in, notably via the group Women on Walls (WOW), which has recently launched a nationwide graffiti campaign to educate Egyptians about the difficulties and aspirations of the country's female population.

In December 2012, when the collective was launched, it only had twenty artists. Now there are 60, including about a dozen women. For these women, making their mark on public space is crucial: more than 80 percent of Egyptian women have been sexually harassed in the street, according to the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights. Women on Walls refused to be intimidated and quickly grew to 60 artists, with a dozen of them being women.

A large portion of the collective's work features women, including some well-known cultural and political figures, and aims to spark a discussion on the role of women in Egyptian society. This project is the brainchild of Egyptian women’s rights activist Angie Bagela and Swedish journalist Mia Grondahl. As a result of observing Egyptian graffiti artists, Mia wrote the book “Graffiti Revolution”. Later, she introduced the artists she met to each other, and created the project “Women on Walls.”

According to Angie, what drew many women artists to utilizing graffiti as a medium was its accessibility. “Passersby in the street can stop and talk with the artists; they don’t need to go to a closed space like a museum or an art gallery to see the piece,” she explains. “Everyone who sees it receives the same message — even those who don’t necessarily want to receive it.”

The group’s main objective is to empower women in Egypt to improve their lives, rather than to look up to someone else for change. Their strategy: “Decorating public space, all the while respecting it and making it aesthetically pleasing, is the best way to get people’s attention and, in time, gain their admiration,” says Angie.

More Information: womenonwalls.com

Story from France 24

Positive News Fall 2013

Trash Music That Inspires

by Jack Berry

We are a band of five high schoolers from Sarasota, FL who try to encourage recycling, reuse and giving back to the community. We do this by playing classic hits from the 60’s and 70’s on homemade musical instruments. We’ve performed at community fundraisers, charity events and by “busking” on the street. It’s all about the music, but also about helping others, raising awareness about not throwing everything away, and staying out of trouble by doing something positive. We’ve even been able to raise more than $4,000 for charities through the sale of our CD.

More Information: thegarbagemen.com

The Peace Rose is a program that helps little kids work out their problems so they can all be friends and play together and don’t fight. We teach...
New leaders for a new generation

How a bunch of young activists in Colorado have the big power company run for cover

by Cat Johnson

Have you heard this bit of awesomeness? New Era Colorado, an organization of young activists, is going head to head with a big, corrupt power corporation and making incredible strides to create a clean, publicly owned power company for Boulder, Colorado. In doing so, they are showing how other cities can do the same.

As you can imagine, the power company is not happy. It’s using every trick in the corporate sabotage bag, but the support being shown for New Era is staggering.

The organization recently created an Indiegogo campaign to raise money to support the project. With 13 days to go, they have blown their original goal of $40,000 out of the water. At the time of publishing, they’ve raised $171,597 with more money coming in by the minute.

Voter registration. Over the past few years, New Era Colorado has registered a whopping 30,000 young people to vote across the state.

More Information:
neweracolorado.org
Tel. 720.565.9317
Story from Shareable.net

The Peace Rose

nare how they create happiness in their school

by Sarah Deacon

The Peace Rose is a tool used in Montessori schools to help children resolve conflicts peacefully. It is used like a talking stick to allow students to take turns speaking and listening. It has a calming effect, and children learn to communicate their feelings and come up with solutions.

Three years ago, I introduced the Peace Rose to our local elementary school. In this public school setting, each teacher K-3 has a rose in a vase in their classroom, as well as a poster with steps for using the rose.

Each day, two sixth-grade students are on the playground during the younger children’s recess time to help facilitate problems. The program has worked successfully for three years. The younger students say there are fewer problems and they aspire to help others when they reach sixth grade.

I hope to see it spread to other schools!

~Saro Deacon

More Information:
sardeacon@yahoo.com

5 Dangerous Things You Should Let Your Kid Do

by Caspar Walsh

Do you find yourself in a state of low-level panic when you see a child with a box of matches, a knife or your car keys clenched in their little fist? Why? As a child I used to leap across London’s labyrinthine roofs and set fire to things that were hard to put out.

Truth is, I survived and thrived on the daily danger I put myself in. There’s something tangible in my personality as a ‘grown up’ that is irrevocably connected to the risks I took back then – and the successes I have experienced since. I would want the same for my child, boy or girl.

Controlling fire is a way of learning the power of one of our most fundamental elements. Playing with tools is a way of extending the self into the world. Our brains are built for throwing things, namely spears. If you don’t use these fundamental parts of who you are, your mind and indeed your spirit, diminish. This is the premise of Gever Tulley’s brief but utterly enlightening talk, which is more of a call to arm your children than warn you of the never-ending perils of play.

It’s fair to say we live in a world gone crazy for health and safety, and the price paid is a generation of far less adventurous children more interested in jumping from buildings on a PlayStation screen than the treetops of their local forest.

Gever puts forward the case simply and succinctly: we need to stop obsessively protecting children from learning about the world through potentially dangerous play and exploration. Maybe if we watch how they evolve naturally, playing wild in the world, we can learn to let them survive and thrive and maybe take a few more risks ourselves; and embark on the kind of adventure that makes life worth living.

To watch Gever Tulley’s inspiring talk: “5 Dangerous Things You Should Let Your Kid Do” visit: TED.com

www.positivenewsus.org
Anti-nuclear activists were jubilant at the June 7 announcement by Southern California Edison to permanently close its San Onofre Generating Station in San Clemente, California. The nuclear station, situated within fifty miles of over 8.7 million people, sits between Los Angeles and San Diego on a Pacific beach only 13 feet above high tide, and like Fukushina, near multiple earthquake faults in a tsunami zone.

The plant had been forced to shut down in January of last year because of a radiation leak caused by faulty new steam generators that operated for less than two years before eroding beyond repair. Despite the severe problems, Southern California Edison intended to restart the ailing reactors until the surprising June 7 announcement.

Gary Hendrick, of San Clemente Greens, a leader in the efforts by local residents to close the reactors, said the closure news was as emotional a moment as the birth of his two children. “The joy and the relief is comparable to something that big in my life, to know that 8 million people will be safe now from this supposed restart. It’s incredible to think what was at stake and how incredibly important today is, not just for San Onofre, but for Diablo Canyon and other nuclear power plants around the world that have this old technology.”

And Shaun Burnie, of Friends of the Earth adds: “It has great national implications and is a real strong message that this nation does not need nuclear power.”

US Senator Barbara Boxer said she was “greatly relieved that the San Onofre nuclear plant will be closed permanently... This nuclear plant had a defective redesign and could no longer operate as intended.”

San Onofre is one of five nuclear reactor stations closed this year from — as energy expert Amory Lovins puts it, “an overdose of market forces,” despite nuclear industry ‘renaissance’ hopes.

Now activists will focus on the issue of the tons of radioactive waste still stored at San Onofre and on the push to close the remaining California nuclear plant at Diablo Canyon. One down and one to go!

California Celebrates Closure of Dangerous San Onofre Nuclear Power Generators

SoCal Edison resolved to permanently decommission the two remaining faulty reactor units

by Mary Bath Brangan

Activists and organizers for nuke-free Southern California celebrate outside of the San Onofre nuclear power plant’s gate

More Information: Sanonofresafety.org

Sri Lestari travels by motorcycle to empower people with disabilities

Traveling by modified motorcycle Sri Lestari rides around Indonesia giving disabled people new hope.

Sri doesn’t let her inability to walk diminish her passion. For example, in May this social worker for Wheels for Humanity drove for more than 750 miles from Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, to Ubud, on the island of Bali on a campaign to empower disabled people.

Her life’s mission is to prove that being disabled still means freedom, and it starts with the very thing that first injured her: a motorcycle.

When she was 23, a motorcycle accident left her paralyzed from the chest down. She fell into a deep depression spending the next 10 years in her home in Klaten, in Central Java, embroidering to help her family and rarely going outside. She was beginning to accept she might never walk again, but that there were things she could do to improve her wellbeing.

Things changed in 2006, when Sri decided to undertake volunteer work making Braille books for the visually impaired. “On that very first day volunteering I heard about a motorbike I could drive while sitting in my chair,” says Sri of the moment her world began to brighten.

Within a few years — and with a lot of help from Caritas and other sponsors — Sri had her own modified motorcycle and discovered there was life after her accident.

“I was again independent and doing useful work,” says Sri, who is now a social worker in Yogyakarta with Wheels for Humanity Indonesia, an organization that supplies wheelchairs to people living with paraplegia, spina bifida, cerebral palsy and other circumstances preventing people from walking.

“So many people in need don’t have wheelchairs, so they are kept at home. Wheels for Humanity has given out 5000 wheelchairs in Indonesia already. The numbers supplied by the government are just not enough, and the government gives adult-sized chairs to children, which leads to scoliosis of the spine,” explains Sri who, during her extraordinary trek from Jakarta to Bali, met with disability organizations, field workers and former prisoners to share how others can also live life without limits.

Sri is a fierce advocate for those living with disabilities. “I hope my experience can spread all around the world [the message] that disabled people really need accessible transportation.” She reasons that even though the government of Indonesia offers vocational training to the disabled community in how to bake cakes, sew, or make handicrafts, in an effort to help them earn a living, this type of assistance is meaningless, she says, if people have no transportation to leave their villages to sell their products.

Henry Prabanginrum, the deputy director of United Cerebral Palsy in Yogyakarta, says that Sri inspires her clients and shows them that independence can be a reality, despite their disabilities.

“I think I am a good example. So many parents will see the positive things from me — that even if they have children with a disability, they have a brighter purpose, that hopefully their children can be like me,” Sri says. “They can be free and independent!”
Richmond Grows a Seed-Lending Library

The working-class and often under-served city of Richmond, CA, has sprouted a lending library where you can “check out” vegetable seeds for free

by Katherine Russell

Since May 2010, Richmond Grows Seed Lending Library—the sixth such “flowering” of a growing global movement—allows its borrowers to choose free seeds from beans to tomatoes, even the more challenging-to-grow pepper plant. The catch? Instead of fines or produce, members are encouraged to return seeds from their own first-harvest crops to replenish and pay forward the organic stockpile for future borrowers.

In a world facing the rapidly encroaching mutated and modified seeds by the likes of GMO giant Monsanto, the purpose of Richmond Grows and its sister seed-lending libraries is to act as a repository for heirloom and organic seeds while modeling sustainability for local communities.

Seed libraries also support the flourishing of homgrown libraries that can be replicated anywhere, by anyone. For some of these offshoot seed libraries, the focus is on specific regional varieties, while others branch off into seed or crop swaps, community service skill building or other sustainability goals.

As Rebecca Newburn, co-founder and coordinator of Richmond Grows, points out, “We create community. We provide food access for people who may not have access to healthy food without us. Our work dovetails with all the great things happening out there in the social justice and biodiversity movements.”

Since Richmond Grows operates out of the Richmond Public Library, the seed library benefits from the resources of its landlord. “The public library has also bought every book I’ve recommended for classes, so people can check out books about their classes and follow up on special interests,” Rebecca notes.

The seed library lends out more than lima beans and peas to Richmond Grows’ biggest bumper crop. “It has been such an honor and a pleasure to get more involved with the community through all of our classes and all the things we do, and working with our 100 percent volunteer staff and educators,” Rebecca says.

In fact, she’s seen significant community growth in the three brief years since Richmond Grows sprouted. “We now have a lot of people using the seed library. It’s nice to know that people are able to grow their own food. We have Crop Swap on Mondays and Tuesdays—people are bringing produce, some of which they got from the library seeds; they share recipes and crops and friendships,” Rebecca recounts.

Remarkably for such a young project, many of the founders’ original goals for Richmond Grows have already been met. They also dreamed of creating an international movement, and now 170 seed lending libraries have opened in 35 states and 10 countries. They wanted to create an online resource to empower people worldwide to build their own seed libraries, and Rebecca says that they’ve met that goal as well.

“When we provide resources, we’re creating this huge network where any new library can plug in. You don’t have to reinvent the wheel for every new library. I’m a middle school teacher and my kids setup their own seed library just using the Richmond Grows online website instruction.” She also adds, “The seed library has value now. The importance of biodiversity is huge.”

What the seed-lending library ultimately offers borrowers—beyond the goals of sustenance and community—is a protected cache of increasingly precious heirloom and organic seeds, which through their careful tending may provide not only a biodiversity window to our future but connect us to our ancestral past.

“To preserve our genetic diversity, to reconnect us to our food and the land, to reignite the rituals of what our ancestors have done for 12,000 years—there’s a lineage and a wisdom that’s important there,” Rebecca explains. What’s also as important for her home gardeners is the opportunity, as she puts it, to “create a new story” for themselves.

Recharged Ithaca Community Harvest Spreads the Bounty

by Vanessa Wood

Ithaca Community Harvest (ICH) is a diverse group with an inspiring mission to strengthen collaborations amongst food justice and sustainability leaders and build local food sovereignty movement to serve as a model for the systems approach needed in our broader society.

Operating since 2010, ICH organizes find themselves charged with new energy as they prepare to launch a new website, engage in new community collaborations, and welcome three new hires.

ICH was born out of a need to keep the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program (FFVSP) running in Ithaca’s Beverly J. Martin (BJM) Elementary School. Developed as a pilot program by the New York Coalition for Healthy School Food with partner GreenStar Community Projects, the program had already proven itself for two years and more ideas emerged for how it could continue sustaining itself.

The Village at Ithaca, a nonprofit advocating for excellence and equity in Ithaca’s public schools, had filled one need by becoming the fiscal sponsor for the snack program. Additionally, a diverse group of people caring about the program came together to discuss its future. These included farmers, school board members, teachers, parents, and people from a variety of nonprofit organizations. From this input, Ithaca Community Harvest was born.

Additionally, ICH created a system of gleaning extra produce from farms and gardens, then storing and distributing that surplus to the BJM snack program or nearby community centers that welcomed more produce.

These outlets then join in the work of preparing local produce and sharing information about its availability. This imbues unlikely communities with the appreciation and consumption of healthy local food, and fortiﬁes relationships with a sense of teamwork.

Beyond the snack program and the gleaning project, ICH runs both a Market Box and a Healthy Dinners program, further increasing access to healthy foods in homes regardless of income.

One satisfied recipient sums it up. “I have seen the benefits and impact of the [program] … [i]t[s] made my kids familiar with more fruits and vegetables, more comfortable trying new foods, and request[ing] healthy snacks more often. As a working mother in a single parent/low-income household I have enjoyed the food, savings, and convenience of both the Market Box and Healthy Dinners.”

More Information:
www.ithacacommunityharvest.org

Students at BJM sorting mint leaves
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‘Angel’ filmed by NASA

April 2013 – In recent months, two extraordinary photographs were recorded by NASA cameras of a gigantic angel-like figure hovering near the sun. The photographs have been widely seen on YouTube and UFO websites, but NASA scientists have given no explanation for the mysterious phenomenon.

Share International magazine has been reporting on miracles for over 30 years and offers the following explanation. Editor Benjamin Creme says that while many people thought the images were UFOs, “our information is that it is an ‘angel’, or ‘deva’ as they are known in the East. The angelic or deva evolution runs parallel to that of the human and they can vary in size from tiny to colossal. This ‘angel’ was filmed moving near the sun and both photographs are of the same ‘angel’. Our information is that it is gigantic: about half the size of the Earth.”

Miracles have been occurring in increasing numbers in the last three decades. Share International connects these miracles to a bigger story: the emergence of a group of spiritual teachers at this critical time. At their head is Maitreya, the World Teacher. Expected by all religious groups under different names, he comes not as a religious leader, but as an educator in the broadest sense, for people of all faiths and those of none. Maitreya’s emergence is imminent.

www.shareinternational.info/pn

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ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN
(a guide for how to live well)

by Robert Fulghum

These are the things I learned:

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Don't hit people.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Take a nap every afternoon.
- Wash your hands before you eat.
- Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup— they all die. So do we.

Tech’s Best Feature: The Off Switch

Our brains crave connection. But sometimes disconnecting from technology is the best way to reconnect with each other, and ourselves

by Tiffany Shlain

It’s Friday evening. The smells of rosemary chicken and freshly-baked challah bread fill the house. My daughters, three and nine, sigh as I gently detach the iPads from their laps. One by one, our screens are powered down. My husband, Ken, is usually the last holdout, in his office, scrambling to send out just one last email before the sun sets. Then he unplugs too. We light the candles, and sit down to a sumptuous meal.

I'm prepared. I've printed out all the maps and phone numbers that live on my cell phone. Most people in our lives know they will not be able to text, tweet, email, Facebook, chat, or Skype with us now. If they want to reach us they can just come over. The National Day of Unplugging, Ken and I decided to institute something we had tried in fits and starts since we met: unplugging for one full day every week. What we call our “technology shabbats.”

Albert Einstein said that “time is relative to your state of motion.” With all this texting, tweeting, posting, and emailing, we’re making our minds move faster, which accelerates our perception of time. It seems there isn’t a day that goes by when I don’t end up thinking, “How did it get to be 5 p.m.?” and then, eventually overload. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has found that social networking produces a burst of oxytocin, the hormone responsible for bonding, empathy, trust, and generosity. I sometimes imagine that every post, tweet, and text is flooding the planet with oxytocin, making us more empathetic and more inclined to share and collaborate. Maybe this is why collaboration is on the rise. But the technology we’ve created also takes something away from us: being present, focused, and in the moment. Have you ever faked a need to use the restroom to check email? I have. More than once. Researchers at the National Institute on Drug Abuse have compared the sense of technological dependency—the feeling that we must be accessible and responsive at any time and in any place—to that of drugs and alcohol. That’s why, even though on sundown on Saturday, we often can’t wait to get back online, still, every week we remember the most important thing about technology: It has an off switch.

More Information:
www.sabbathmanifesto.org

Story from Greater Good,
The Science of a Meaningful Life

WELL-BEING

Wash your hands before you eat.

“Honey, it would have been rude not to have included all of us, you, me, and your BlackBerry.”

www.positivenewsus.org
Detroit Bankrupt?

Five Ways the Motor City Is Thriving

National media accounts of Detroit’s bankruptcy miss the growing industries, strong communities, and policy changes laying the foundations for the city’s recovery by Larry Gabriel

Since Detroit filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July, I’ve been reading about garbage piled up in the streets and blackout conditions with streetlights out, while the national news shows images of abandoned, dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. Based on what I’ve heard, one would think that nobody lives in Detroit but a handful of marginal folks and some gangsters busy killing each other.

But according to the 2010 census, there are still 700,000 people living in Detroit. We still eat, work, and shop like people everywhere. We get married, have babies, and die. We love, hate, laugh, cry, and hope like people everywhere. Most of us are not thugs and wish for great things.

The bottom line is that the coverage of the bankruptcy reinforces a tired old story. But the internal narrative has already changed direction. There are plenty of positive major economic stories coming out of Detroit, starting with the federally bailed-out General Motors and Chrysler auto companies emerging from bankruptcy with improved sales and record profits, and continuing with the likes of the booming Midtown as a flag-ship community of the new Detroit.

The people of Detroit are certainly not bankrupt for resources or ideas. Here are five ways that they’re helping to create a stronger Motor City.

1. The powerhouse riverfront

One of the reasons the auto industry grew up in Detroit is that the needed technical expertise and facilities were already here serving the commercial ships on the Great Lakes. Basically, gigantic liner engines were downsized to become car engines.

Detroit remains the busiest border crossing between Canada and the US, and Michigan is intent on building a bridge, called the New International Trade Crossing, to accommodate the traffic.

2. At the forefront of urban agriculture

"Keep Growing Detroit’s garden resource program supports more than 1,400 gardens, many of them organized as community projects. That’s in addition to a few dozen market gardens and numerous uncounted home gardens in yards and adjacent lots. City Council passed an Urban Agriculture Ordinance that gave the nod to the phenomenon and set some rules as to how it’s going to be done."

3. Making the city council accountable to the neighborhoods

In the past, because city council elections were held on a citywide basis, candidates had no accountability to specific neighborhoods. That way of doing things is over. In November, Detroiters will vote for their council members in seven districts for the first time in nearly a century. This makes it possible for candidates to win based on their work at the neighborhood level. It will also be much cheaper to campaign in a district rather than across the entire city.

Citizens chose the new system because they expect more direct accountability for what’s going on in their neighborhoods. And if they’re happy with the performance of their councilperson, it will now be easier to unseat him or her in the next election.

4. The Boggs factor

The James and Grace Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership is a nonprofit organization that has been creating community leaders since being organized in 1995. Its do-what-you-can-with-what-you-have ethos has empowered Detroiters living at ground zero for deindustrialization to truly reimagine their possibilities. The Boggs Center is a place where people meet to engage in problem-solving discussion and imaginative ideas—not to receive marching orders from a leader.

At 98, philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs possesses a true skill of helping others see that their power lies within themselves. After a lifetime working in leftist politics, Grace and friends have redefined revolution as personal transformation to meet the needs of where you live—be it safety, hunger, education, or artistic expression.

Julia Putnam, for example, was the first volunteer for Detroit Summer, a Boggs-related program. She is now a lead administrator at the Boggs Educational Center, a charter school that opened its doors on September 3.

5. Grassroots urban renewal

One of the ongoing debates in Detroit has been about whether to focus on development downtown or in the neighborhoods farther from the city’s center. Most of the major efforts to revitalize the city—the Renaissance Center, Hart Plaza, Campus Martius, Comerica Park—have been downtown. At the same time parks, recreation centers, neighborhood city halls, police stations, and other services in neighborhoods have steadily closed down.

But many Detroiters aren’t waiting for the city government anymore. Among the efforts to create change from below are the Motor City Blight Busters, which started 23 years ago when insurance agent John George got fed up with the drug dealers operating out of a nearby abandoned house. One day he started cleaning up the place. A few neighbors came out to help and a community group was born.

Since then, the Blight Busters have leveraged nearly 700,000 volunteer hours cleaning up, fixing up, establishing businesses, recycling building materials, and more. A recent ambitious project is to clear two full blocks to establish Farm City Detroit, an urban farm and community hub.

Closing thoughts

Detroit is a story in progress with many possible endings. It will be years, even decades, before the conclusion is known. If we do the right things, then it will be in the near decades.

I contend that the pieces are already in place to make Detroit a modern, socially, and economically diverse urban village sooner rather than later.

More Information:
Story from YES! Magazine
www.yesmagazine.org

Giving ca$h without any strings attached

After Mexico’s economic crisis in the mid-1990’s, Santiago Levy, a government economist, proposed getting rid of subsidies for milk, tortillas and other staples, and replacing them with a program that just gave money to the very poor, as long as they sent their children to school and took them for regular health checkups.

Cabinet ministers worried that parents might use the money to buy alcohol and cigarettes rather than milk and tortillas, and that sending cash might lead to a rise in domestic violence as families fought over what to do with the money. So Levy commissioned studies that compared spending habits between the towns that received money and similar villages that didn’t. The results were promising; researchers found that children in the cash program called Oportunidades were more likely to stay in school, families were less likely to get sick and people ate a more healthful diet. The payments would almost always go to women who ensured that the money didn’t get spent on booze or cigarettes, many of whom even invested a chunk of what they received. Today, more than six million Mexican families get cash transfers. Oportunidades has inspired dozens of countries worldwide.
New human rights training center to teach digital tactics

An international human rights training center, teaching digital skills to activists and protesters, has opened in the Italian city of Florence.

Based in a converted prison, the RFK International House of Human Rights was developed in response to the way social networks such as Twitter and Facebook were used during the Arab Spring.

It aims to help equip activists with tools allowing them to “promote democracy, human rights and justice” through technology.

The first students – expected to arrive this year – will come from countries such as Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Mexico, Pakistan and Burma. They will learn practical skills such as pixelating or blurring faces in videos, using anonymizing software or preventing website blocks.

The center has been set up by the European branch of the Robert F Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, which was created in the 1960’s to honor the memory of the assassinated senator and civil rights activist.

His daughter, Kerry Kennedy, who opened the center, said it would “bring together human rights defenders who are changing our world with digital experts who are shaping the way change happens in the 21st Century.”

“Together they have the tools to help realize Robert Kennedy’s dream of a more just and peaceful world,” she added.

The institute, which has no affiliations and is entirely neutral, is thought to be the world’s first such training center. It occupies three floors, has 12 apartments, common room, staff offices and a library in addition to training rooms.

A range of international campaigners will be invited to attend on scholarship, their identities kept hidden. Members of groups such as Witness, Human Rights Watch and Tactical Technology Collective will be providing teaching guidance.

Impact Journalism Day puts inspirational news in front of 50m readers

A new initiative in June saw newspapers around the world dedicate space to news that highlighted positive responses to global challenges

A greater number of inspiring stories made it to the media this summer, thanks to the first ever Impact Journalism Day, which saw 20 national newspapers around the world dedicate space to news about positive developments.

On Saturday June 22, papers in countries from Algeria to Canada, Brazil to Singapore – and many in between – published a range of positive stories. The stories reached more than 50 million readers.

The Impact Journalism initiative, spearheaded by news aggregation service Sparknews, was launched last year by France’s Christian de Boisredon, who also co-founded Reporters d’Espoirs (Reporters of Hope). The team provided partner papers with a package of 20 positive stories and then asked them to send their own reporters out to find the most inspiring innovations.

“The center has been set up by the European branch of the Robert F Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights.”

“We need to promote health, not just attack disease. To do that for society, it’s not enough to know what’s broken; people need to know how problems could be, or are being, fixed. Today, after four decades of declining confidence in virtually all major institutions, it’s important to provide people with credible stories that help them believe that progress is possible (at least when evidence suggests that it is!).

~ David Bornstein, a co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network.
JOKE: Q. What do you get when you cross a four-leaf clover with poison oak?  
A. A rash of good luck.
From the spring of Eternal Wisdom: “No sense being pessimistic. It wouldn’t work anyway!”

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One Man Envisions and Creates Iraq’s First National Park

The Mesopotamian marshlands in southern Iraq are known by many as the birthplace of civilization. Situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the area was once an oasis of aquatic wildlife filled with lush reed beds, water buffalo, lions, foxes and otters. It was also one of the world’s most important migratory flyways for birds.

In the mid-1990s, Saddam Hussein burned, drained and poisoned the area in retaliation for him to go back to restore the beloved marshes of his childhood. In 2003, he made the difficult choice of giving up a comfortable life in California and moved back to war-torn Iraq, with the hopes that one day his own daughters might be able to see the place he had loved as a child.

Plan of action

Once he got past the initial shock of seeing the drained marshes for the first time, Azzam took on the seemingly impossible challenge of bringing environmental protection to the forefront of a nation focused on restoring peace and rebuilding infrastructure.

In 2004, Azzam founded the nonprofit Nature Iraq and put his experience in hydraulic engineering to use, surveying the region and developing a master plan to restore the marshes. He reached out to the environment and water resource ministries to educate government officials about the environmental, social and economic benefits of restoring the marshes.

His work was not only politically challenging but dangerous as well. Security guards are a regular presence during his field work with his staff, and the possibility of kidnappings looms large. Nature Iraq’s office has been raided by armed terrorists.

Impact

Despite these hurdles, the Mesopotamian marshes are starting to flourish again. Almost half of the original area is now flooded again, and the Sumerians have begun to reestablish their lives. In what is perhaps the most telling evidence of his success elevating the importance of the environment in Iraq, this spring, the restored marshes became the country’s first national park.

While continuing the restoration work, Azzam is now striving to eliminate a new challenge to Iraq’s environment: an extensive chain of 23 dams upstream along the Turkey-Syria border which would reduce the flow of water into Iraq to a mere trickle.

Ultimately, the marshes can only be protected if there is an international agreement on water-sharing, he maintains. “The preservation of the marshes is not only Iraq’s duty; it is the world’s duty. This is the cradle of civilization. This is where agriculture started. This is where writing was invented.”

Azzam Alwash won the 2013 Goldman Environmental Prize.