

Beautiful and Abundant

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INTRODUCTION

Beautiful and Abundant

We are unique and brilliant creatures.

Humanity has expanded into every corner of the planet. With our extraordinary tools, we are stronger and faster than any other species. And we are improving. We are more powerful and more mobile than any previous generation. We can circumnavigate the Earth in 90 minutes. We travel to outer space and plumb the depths of the oceans. We accumulate information. We build on the knowledge of our ancestors. We record our ideas in colorful and astonishing forms.

We are the brightest, loudest, most powerful living things.

We are the most creative and potent creatures in the universe, so far as we know.

Generation after generation we have visualized—and then realized—one astonishing invention after another. Wheeled vehicles. Agriculture. Sailing ships. Automobiles. Aircraft. Smartphones. Every day entrepreneurs bring a new idea to market that supersedes a million previous good ideas. It seems that each generation can visualize some previously unimaginable goal, and reach it.

Humanity needs that entrepreneurial energy today more than ever. We face a definitively human challenge that is testing hu-

man ingenuity. We are the only species that can conceptualize its own impact on its habitat. Today we are becoming increasingly aware that the planet's capacities are limited. As our population has expanded we have also developed technologies that consume natural resources at unprecedented rates. These converging forces are damaging the natural systems on which we, and all other living things, depend. Common sense tells us our expansion can't go on forever, but no species has ever intentionally limited its own growth. No species has ever conceptualized the limits of its habitat and adjusted its behavior to live within those limits. If we are to change our course before some natural calamity forcibly curbs our expansion, the solution will be delivered by human ingenuity.

Human ingenuity gets its energy from visualization. We need to visualize a successful human future on this planet before we can create that future.

Recent global discussions of humanity's future have been preoccupied with the immediate challenges we face. The environmentalist's attention has been trained mostly on negative visualization. Conversations about the environment orbit around one prospective catastrophe or another. We don't have a positive vision for our future, but we can picture a lot of different ways in which things may go badly for us and for the planet.

This lack of a positive vision seems particularly dangerous to me because we so often realize what we visualize, and right now a lot of people are visualizing disaster.

The scale of humanity's immediate challenges is daunting, to be sure. It's difficult and counterintuitive to look past the immediate problems. Considering the scale of those problems, this discussion of positive visions might strike some people as a trivial distraction. But right now our obstacles—resource depletion, population expansion and economic malaise—effectively block our view forward. We're making very little progress against species

loss, deforestation, desertification or global warming. The human population continues to grow with astonishing speed. And when we stabilize our population, as we inevitably must, economic growth will stall.

With these big obstacles in our way, we collectively find it difficult to picture a beautiful, abundant world for our grandchildren to live in. To visualize that future, we need a new perspective. To gain that perspective we need to move forward. It's time to engage, to move forward not just *against* the phenomena damaging our habitat, but also *toward* a sustainable *and* prosperous way of life.

We need to engage the passionate human imagination, that great engine of creativity, and challenge it to go beyond its anxious contemplation of environmental disaster to envision the world we desire—vigorous, verdant and enduring. Once the human imagination visualizes a brilliant future, the human intellect can achieve what previously seemed impossible. The human imagination and the human intellect have, together, achieved countless astonishing things in the past. I believe they can do so again and again.

Human beings invented flying machines because we were entranced by the idea of flight. We didn't need to fly but we were thrilled by the prospect. We've joyfully tinkered with wheeled machines, making automobiles and motorcycles faster and more comfortable, generation after generation. We didn't need to propel ourselves around at 70 miles per hour, but once we had the idea in our head we couldn't wait to press that accelerator pedal. We assembled the Internet in a spirit of giddy discovery with a collective vision of global knowledge made ubiquitous and free. Our collective enthusiasm for fairness has, in the past 30 years, redefined civil rights in our global society.

We don't need a disaster to motivate change. A great, contagious idea or two can create all the motivation we need.

Every major human realization was assembled from the discoveries of lots of different people, each pursuing an individual vision and building on each other's work. Our collective visions are always constructed from a bunch of individual visions. Our achievements are shared achievements.

The biggest and most successful component in my business is the magazine *Mother Earth News*. Since 1970 the principal source of energy at *Mother Earth News* has been the contagious idea – organic gardening ideas, homemade renewable energy ideas, ideas for homesteading and natural health and self-reliance. The magazine has prospered because these ideas have kindled millions of imaginations and engaged them in a spirit of mutual exploration. With our readers we have explored many, many different optimistic visions for humanity's future on earth. That's our passion, and our business.

I hope this book will stimulate your imagination. I wrote it, in part, to stimulate my own and to give myself a framework for ongoing invention in my own life. Our collective vision will be synthesized from billions of individual minds engaged in imaginative aspiration and intellectual problem-solving.

To get the conversation started, I'm going to suggest some steps that may help direct our imaginations and our intellects down the right paths.

STEP ONE: IDEALIZE THE DESTINATION. (DON'T BE REALISTIC!)

The Olympic downhill skier prepares for her race with an exercise in visualization. Eyes closed, hands clenched around imaginary poles, the athlete traces every contour and turn in her mind. Finally, she visualizes her triumphant finish, a world record and a

gold medal celebration.

During the race her conscious attention is trained down the mountain on the gates ahead. Her reflexes are taking care of the present obstacles. She has visualized the run dozens of times. Her mind is trained on future challenges two or three gates down the course and, ultimately, on victory.

High achievers in every realm of endeavor engage in some version of positive visualization. World-class athletes, successful entrepreneurs and groundbreaking inventors don't reach those pinnacles by imagining realistic outcomes. The Olympic skier knows there are dozens of talented people in the race. Even if she's highly ranked, victory is unlikely. She plans for victory anyway. The entrepreneur knows hundreds of companies are competing with him for capital and customers. Still, he visualizes his company's eventual market dominance and writes that accomplishment into the business plan. Investors aren't looking to fund average companies planning for marginal success. They are looking for visionaries with victory in mind. Savvy investors know that unless the entrepreneur plans for great things, great things will not be achieved. Maybe the gold medal is unlikely. But if the athlete isn't aiming for a gold medal, then it's nearly certain that her destiny will not include a turn on the winner's podium.

This is not a book about my own idealized vision for humanity's future. This book is about the process of forming and nourishing a collective vision. Yes, I have my own idealized vision as I suspect most people do. My vision is informed by all my quirks, my unique social conditioning and my prejudices—just as every person's vision is a product of their unique background and biological makeup. The world we will realize in subsequent generations will be an unpredictable aggregate of myriad individual visions and real-world circumstances.

If you're curious about the beautiful and abundant world I,

as an individual, visualize in our future and you're not patient enough—or charmed enough—to read this book through to the end, you can skip forward to the Epilogue where I lay it out.

Humanity has the technological and intellectual capacities to preserve for our great-grandchildren a world teeming with life and human prosperity. Why would we plan for anything less?

STEP TWO: ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHALLENGES

My wife and I love watching our land flourish. Raising livestock in a natural way on our little piece of native prairie has enmeshed us in a web of relationships with the millions of living things that share our property. With careful management, keeping the livestock on pasture, we have seen the soil improve each year as the animals help stimulate the natural processes that make the native prairie one of the most productive biological systems on earth. Previous owners cut hay and hauled the nutrients and energy off the land. Since we began grazing it, the land has become much more fertile. A pasture that four cows grazed off in five weeks a few years ago has this summer carried 15 full-grown animals for four months and the forage is still excellent, probably good for another four to six weeks.

“Watching grass grow” metaphorically defines boredom for a lot of people but if you're a rancher and that grass supplies your sustenance, watching grass grow gets a lot more interesting.

And watching it die—destroyed by overgrazing—can be devastating.

The main thing a rancher manages is population.

Conscientious ranchers maintain intricate, attentive relationships with their habitats. Temperature, precipitation, sunshine and many other variables affect our pastures. Properly husbanded,

the prairie is perpetually productive. Natural prairie can survive extended periods of drought, floods, snow cover and sub-zero temperatures. But its health can be destroyed by a few weeks of acute overpopulation. Overgrazing devastates grasslands in ways that can take decades to repair, even with expert human intervention. In arid regions overgrazed grasslands become deserts.

Every natural system is vulnerable. Every habitat has limits. Balanced ecosystems evolve over millions of years. When ecosystems fall out of their natural balance the consequences for their dependents are profound.

The global human population has doubled during my lifetime. Our habitat is either in serious trouble now, or it will be, probably soon. Our powerful technology aggravates the damage caused by our expansion. Technology makes us more potent, but it has magnified our impact on the planet. We mine carbon from the earth and deposit it in our atmosphere. We concentrate toxins and release them into the air and water. We cut down forests and despoil the oceans. We can debate the symptoms but we can't reasonably deny that our habitat is limited and our expansion is testing its capacity. Eventually we must manage our impact, our consumption and our population.

It's not going to be simple. No living thing has ever recognized the limits of its habitat and consciously chosen to curb its own expansion. In fact only one species in the universe, so far as we know, is capable of conceptualizing its own impact on its habitat. That's us. We would be the first ever to consciously limit ourselves. So it's a little hard to imagine.

But sooner or later we must stabilize our population. Then we're going to have to design an economy that creates prosperity without a perpetually expanding human population.

The global economy is built on population growth. In 2009 global economic output shrunk by about half a percentage point.¹

Global financial markets read that as a catastrophe and world trade volumes shrank by more than 11 percent. What would happen if we had 1 percent fewer customers and 1 percent fewer workers every year for a few years in a row?

The scale and complexity of this economic dilemma are intimidating. Evidence of habitat damage is alarming, and that evidence is visible everywhere. Resource depletion, population expansion and economic vulnerability are enormous obstacles and they form a barrier that effectively blocks our view of the future. Even if we dream up a beautiful and abundant vision for our future, can we see the path from where we are today to that future past these big obstacles?

How do you see past an obstacle? You have to climb over it or travel around it. Either way, you have to move. You need to begin climbing to gain a prospect. But how do we pick a direction? For that we need some criteria to direct our first few steps.

STEP THREE: DEFINE CRITERIA (DON'T BE PRACTICAL!)

The Religious Society of Friends, known popularly as “Quakers,” has practiced pacifism and economic simplicity for 350 years. Quakers have traditionally tried to avoid dogma, which they believe would alienate them from other faiths. They want to connect with other people, spiritually, and so they express their beliefs in the humblest manner and the most general vocabulary possible.

Instead of a creed, the Quakers rely on “queries,” questions that shape their daily behavior without blocking out people who don't share all their beliefs. Quaker queries include things like, “Is your home clean enough that you feel comfortable offering hospitality to anyone who might stop by?” “Do you strive to be

truthful at all times?” Or, “Do you seek employment consistent with your beliefs and in service to society?”²² The answers to these queries shape the Quaker vision of a spiritual way of life. The individual Quaker’s answer to any particular query is almost never an unqualified “yes,” because the questions describe goals to be strived for. The Quaker queries chart a path toward an ideal.

I’m offering four very simple, very general queries as criteria that I hope will help you shape your own personal enterprises and lead you toward a new perspective on our future as a species. Imagine using these criteria to guide your plans for your yard, your Sunday-school class, your farm, your neighborhood or your business. Imagine the ways in which the criteria might shape your efforts. Imagine the ways in which those efforts might change the outcomes.

If we ask the right questions, they could guide us down a new path so that we arrive at a better place, a place from where we can hopefully see the path to a better future.

The queries:

Is It Beautiful?
Does It Create Abundance?
Is It Fair?
Is It Contagious?

IS IT BEAUTIFUL?

Beauty should be a primary ingredient of every human endeavor.

Beauty is a critical component of your vision for your home, your business or anything else you care about. Why would we envision a human future without beauty? If we did, would anyone want to go there?

The Sydney Opera House resonates with its setting on the coast of eastern Australia by evoking the beauty of the Chambered Nautilus, a Pacific Ocean cephalopod whose shells are exquisitely beautiful. The opera house covers 4.5 acres with concrete, plywood and glass. It is difficult to heat and cool. Built before the idea of “green design” was conceived, it’s not energy-efficient. The building is not, explicitly, a tribute to nature. Yet it metaphorically places humankind—opera, ballet, great theater—in nature. It reminds human beings throughout the world of the beauty and vulnerability of the Pacific Ocean and Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.

The Sydney Opera House makes a compelling statement for conserving natural resources without any literal reference to conservation.

Many of the greatest achievements in conservation during the 19th and 20th centuries were motivated by beauty. The National Parks of the United States—from Acadia in Maine to Yosemite in California—were chosen for their beauty. Artists disseminated that beauty. How many of us first encountered Yosemite through the lens of the photographer Ansel Adams? Or first saw Yellowstone in the brush strokes of the painter Albert Bierstadt?

If art reflects the human mind, if beauty represents aspiration, then beauty must be a part of our vision for the future.

DOES IT CREATE ABUNDANCE?

The human sense of wellness depends on surpluses. People need to feel that they will have at least a little more than they need, and if possible most of us would like to have the potential for achieving slightly more than we desire. The possibility of the occasional jackpot stimulates the mind. Efficiency alone doesn’t complete our happiness equation. A meal may be filling if it sup-

plies the required calories but it is only abundant only if it exceeds our desires for flavor and nutrition. A feast may even require good conversation to be part of the experience if it is to be defined as a truly *abundant* feast.

The definition of abundance includes at least three variables we may be able to control.

The first and most obvious is the supply of resources. Can our society create more food? Better, cheaper housing? Faster, more efficient transportation? Efficiency is the simplest ingredient in any recipe for abundance. If a system can make more with less, then resources are more abundant—both the raw materials and the final products. Anyone who wants to create abundance must care about efficiency. Historically, civilization has created abundant resources for humanity—food, shelter and transportation—by improving efficiency through the use of new technology. When one thinks about abundance, we generally think about improved technology that gives us access to expanded resources: industrial agriculture, central heating, modern medicine, automobiles and airplanes.

The second variable under human control is the demand for resources. Individuals can live more frugally and efficiently. How much of your driving is unnecessary? How often do you take more food than you can eat? Should we think about stabilizing or decreasing the human population of the planet? We have powerful tools for controlling our demand for resources, as well as the supply of resources, and we can have an equivalent impact on either end of the equation.

The third variable is less concrete but equally profound. Human beings can control their desires.

And by controlling our desires, we can reduce the demands we place on the planet.

In his book, *Voluntary Simplicity*³, Duane Elgin explores, in

detail, the benefits of managing desires. Jesus of Nazareth, Gautama Buddha, the Prophet Muhammad, Aristotle, Plato, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Buber, Joseph Campbell, Meister Eckhart, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elise Boulding, Buckminster Fuller, Soren Kierkegaard, Lao-Tzu, Linda Breen Pierce, Charles Mingus, Pablo Picasso, Thomas Aquinas, Henry David Thoreau and Frank Lloyd Wright are all referenced in support of his argument: By managing our desires human beings can conserve natural resources, improve the human condition and enhance their enjoyment of life.

Elgin distinguishes between “ascetic simplicity,”—ritualistic deprivation—and “aesthetic simplicity,” a celebration of simple pleasures. He advocates a new aesthetic that exalts the humble: smaller houses, common clothes and self-reliance.

When my wife and I were raising our children we heard a lot of parental chatter about “quality time.” The idea was that, since we were so busy, we should spend our few hours with our children reading books and playing intellectually stimulating games. That way, we could be great parents even if we worked 50-hour weeks and exercised two hours a day.

In our experience, quality time was a fraud. Although some family activities were clearly superior to others, what really counted, the thing that deepened our relationships, was “quantity time,” long uneventful hours in the car or on a walk or even washing up after dinner.

Consider the things you love in the world. Now consider how many of them were created from abundance. Consider whether you could appreciate them if you had no extra time, no extra money or only enough food to survive.

Abundance is not a luxury. Abundance is necessary to health and wellbeing. We need time to rest. We need a few extra vitamins and nutritious calories to stave off infection. We need quiet, re-

flective moments when we're not required to be productive.

In business, capital is the medium of abundance. Many enterprises start on a shoestring. The entrepreneur figures a way, by hook or by crook, to get up and running. For the business to thrive, however, nearly every entrepreneur eventually requires capital. Capital is "extra" money generated somewhere in the economic system and then made available for investment. Some group or individual, somewhere, must have built up enough wealth so that they are willing to risk part of it on the entrepreneur's initiative.

If no business or individual generates surpluses then there is no capital available to risk. Creativity dries up. Entrepreneurial spirit dies out. Abundance is a critical element in our economic and financial systems.

The same might be said for all human enterprises, whether they involve money or not. In contemporary society we often measure value with money, but abundance can be measured in any unit of value. We need surpluses to be creative. And we need to be creative to survive. If we have only enough arable land to support ourselves, then we can't experiment with new techniques or innovative crops. If our employers provide us with only the resources necessary to attend to today's business, then our enterprise will be blindsided by tomorrow's challenges. We need extra time, space and money to brainstorm, to innovate, to invent. Abundance is necessary.

Few achievements in the history of our species have been accomplished in the absence of abundance. Science, technology, literature and art spring only from societies in which the surpluses enable some people to live reflective, inventive lives free of the daily necessity of securing adequate food, water and shelter.

Certainly busy, hungry people have invented remarkable things out of necessity. The conversation contained in this book has, in fact, been motivated by my own sense of urgency. I believe

we need to change our perspective soon. I believe we're up against a deadline. But the time it takes to write a book, to invent a new crop, to conceive of any new piece of technology is our most precious resource, and it is symptomatic of abundance. Perhaps the recipe for innovation could be described as the combination of a sense of urgency with the resources necessary to address the problem.

If we train our ingenuity solely on efficiency, we stunt our potential. A lot of people are promoting conservation and efficiency as though they provide some kind of solution to our resource limitations. They are squandering valuable time and energy by reacting to the symptoms of habitat damage rather than addressing its root causes. In light of the growing human population, conservation is only a stopgap.

The most chilling implication of a mania for efficiency is the prospect of zero-sum societies. A zero-sum environment is one in which no new resources are available. An individual can only expand his or her resources at the expense of another individual. Zero-sum environments utilize resources very efficiently, because they are so scarce. However, since an individual can only gain if another individual loses, they also tend to reward ruthless behavior. You may have worked in a zero-sum professional environment, or known someone who has. It can be a very unpleasant experience. Countries where resources are strained approximate zero-sum environments. Because there's no practical way of increasing the society's prosperity through cooperative efforts, people turn to various forms of corruption or even violence as tactics for taking resources from their fellow citizens. It is, tragically, a logical choice.

In their purest philosophical essences both conservation and hyper-efficiency lead to the same dreary destination, a world that has maximized its human population at the expense of beauty and

creativity. We need space and capital to realize our potential as a species. We should plan for abundance.

IS IT FAIR?

Fairness is among the most subjective of standards. Its definition changes from one place to another and from one moment to the next. It's a fluid and powerful concept. The group defines fairness. It's the product of consensus.

Justice is sometimes confused with fairness. Justice is not fluid. Justice forms the foundation of legal systems. It is represented by a rigid, written code that supports the activities of our courts and prisons.

The international economic systems that make some people rich and some people poor based merely on the fact of where they were born are, in some formal sense, just. They are legal. But are they fair?

Fairness is defined in the moment. When someone feels a rule has been broken, at work or in school or on the ball field, it often precipitates a conflict. The rules are interpreted by one side, then the other. People argue. When a person appeals for fairness, on the other hand, it implies the opportunity for a negotiation. We search for a solution that restores the group's sense of fairness. That process of consensus-building decides, case by case, whether something is fair or not.

A sense of fairness is necessary for an enterprise to harness joint efforts among diverse people. North American sustainable-forestry practices, although good as far as they go, can't be fairly applied in Brazil until Brazil's timberlands are no longer needed for grazing and crops. So long as Brazilian farmers depend on deforestation for their survival we can't, in fairness, call for a halt to

deforestation in the Amazon. It's difficult for conservation organizations funded by wealthy Westerners to protect Africa's mountain gorillas if their human neighbors in central Africa perceive that the gorillas have a higher standard of living than the local villager's.

Individuals are willing to make a personal sacrifice for the greater good if, and only if, they feel that the greater good includes their group. If any influential society on any part of the globe feels that the world's power institutions are unfair, then we won't be able to effectively address our global problems. In Guatemala, a country divided by a 36-year civil war and isolated from the growing economies of surrounding countries, huge tracts of rain forest are being burned to provide new ranchland, squatters have occupied the former Maya Biosphere Reserve and drug traffickers rule much of the countryside.⁴ Habitat preservation is not a high priority in Guatemala right now, and it won't be until the Guatemalan people are safer and better fed.

As individuals, we can't be expected to do the right thing unless doing the right thing has positive implications for our individual lives or our children's lives. Bluntly, how can we expect poor people to stop cutting down trees for firewood while the affluent drive 5,000-pound automobiles dozens of miles a day just for fun?

Global fairness is, obviously, a cumbersome project. It can only be assembled from fairness exercised in billions of transactions around the world across the decades. But we can begin cultivating a sense of fairness by imposing fairness as a standard in our own homes, our churches, our schools, our towns, our governments and our businesses. We can shop for products that have been created with a sense of fairness, wherever they are manufactured. We can openly discuss the notion of fairness with our leaders, at work and in government. Maybe we can set a groundwork on which a global sense of fairness might be built.

IS IT CONTAGIOUS?

Anyone can initiate small positive changes by creating beautiful things and enterprises that foster abundance, and by focusing on fairness in their daily affairs.

To create major change, however, we need ideas that are contagious.

In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell demonstrates that, “Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.”⁵ Gladwell compares HIV and a recent fashion craze for Hush Puppies shoes. When a virus—or a shoe—catches on it can spread across the globe almost instantaneously.

Footwear might seem like a frivolous example but fashion provides us with an excellent model for the creation of contagious ideas. Fashion is an ideal technical example of how one develops a collective human vision. From year to year, human beings around the world collectively alter their vision of beauty. Millions of individuals suddenly subscribe to a new idea and implement it in their own lives, sometimes at great expense. The mavens of *haute couture* are global experts in the art of forming—and reforming—collective vision.

Our ideas, if they are to be effective, should be epidemically contagious like a new style of blue jeans or a new way of wearing classic products like Hush Puppies or Converse Chuck Taylor All-Stars.

If our concepts are beautiful and fair, if they create abundance, then they have an excellent chance of achieving contagiousness, especially if we work at making them contagious.

I used to go backpacking with a friend who drilled holes in his toothbrush handle to decrease its weight. With his goose-down

sleeping bag, dehydrated food and plastic utensils, he could tell you within an ounce exactly what his pack weighed. His obsession was entertaining, at first. The conversation was interesting for an hour or two. Then it became tedious. Another friend loved camp-fire-grilled steaks and would hit the trail with 10 or 15 pounds of beef in his backpack. Sometimes he brought fresh potatoes, too, and some whiskey. We relished the smell of cooking meat in the mountain air. He strapped an old guitar to the top of his pack.

For a camping companion, I preferred the steak-and-whiskey friend. He helped me appreciate nature; both the natural world and my human nature.

We environmentalists have drilled a lot of metaphorical toothbrushes over the years. Conservation invites a fundamentalist approach to sustainability. Too many environmental commandments begin “Thou shalt not...” Our negativity has prevented our ideas from catching on. Conservation, as an ethic, is not particularly contagious. So even when we’ve been right, we have not inspired action.

If we want to involve people in the process of forming a collective vision, we need a different approach.

We will not engage the great engines of human creativity with a vision of pure frugality.

We need to plan for beauty and abundance.

STEP FOUR: TAKE THE FIRST STEPS (BE REALISTIC, PRACTICAL AND OPTIMISTIC!)

How do we gain perspective? How do we gain a prospect from which we can visualize a beautiful, abundant long-term future beyond the obstacles? We need to climb.

For 40 years the magazine I publish, *Mother Earth News*, has

started millions of people down the first paths of this journey toward a beautiful and abundant human future. The magazine publishes stories about sustainability achieved mostly through the medium of self-reliance. *Mother Earth News* teaches people how to raise their own food, how to generate clean, renewable energy and how to find joy in a simple lifestyle designed to conserve natural resources. This approach has made *Mother Earth News* the most widely read, popular and profitable voice for sustainability in the world.

My own life on our little organic farm is a reflection of the *Mother Earth News* approach. My wife and I grow much of our own food. We cut our own wood to provide part of our household heat. We're not "off the grid" but we do use solar energy for electricity and hot water. We live on a healthy, pretty and copious patch of tall-grass prairie that provides sustenance for us and thousands of other species.

The farm also provides a prism through which my family and I can focus our larger aspirations for the planet. We might donate a few hours a week toward one worthy environmental cause or another, but we're happy to spend hours *a day* working in our gardens and pastures. The time we spend on our treasured little piece of the earth enriches our affection for the planet as a whole. We've focused our daily attention on these 50 acres and in the process we've reinforced a conviction that we want to help make the entire planet healthier and more beautiful. That's an exciting possibility. It's the sort of project that should ignite the passionate human imagination.

Human beings could plan and manage this planet as a beautiful, abundant garden.

Once our bodies and our imaginations are engaged, the incremental change begins. Then it gets easier and easier to envision humanity occupying this planet—this beautiful, abundant planet—

far into the future. We can climb on top of the immediate obstacles to a place where we can see the broad horizon of our destiny.

CLIMB OVER THE OBSTACLES

Most people talking about protecting the environment have trained their attention on what they perceive as looming disasters. As the evidence of habitat destruction mounts, the voices become more strident, “We have to stop living this way!”

The volume and urgency of these warnings make it more and more difficult to discuss positive outcomes. Imagining a positive vision of the future strikes the alarmed mind as a trivial distraction.

We learned a long time ago that we couldn’t attract an audience for our magazines unless we gave our readers tools they could use to improve the world personally. A backyard organic garden is the perfect symbol of positive vision and personal commitment. The gardener visualizes the short-term satisfaction of tending a lovely and productive little piece of the earth, and in the process preserves resources for humanity’s future. The gardens we describe in the pages of *Mother Earth News* make the world more productive and beautiful today, while they preserve resources and help sustain the world for the next generation. Our audiences come to us for ingenuity, creativity, inspiration and beauty: elements that enhance in their lives. We describe ways people can live more sustainably through personal initiative.

Our readers get a kick out of brewing homemade beer and wine. They generate their own power using the sun, the wind, and homegrown ingenuity. We think they make some pretty important positive contributions in the world. It’s obvious that they have a lot of fun.

In the same way that *Mother Earth News* readers have imagined, then realized, their gardens and homesteads, I believe we can imagine on a larger scale. We should picture our communal home, the planet, as we want it to be. We can visualize a global garden, as it were, that reflects human aspiration and the human aesthetic, complete with the profusion of life God put here.

We can plan a really, really big garden.