



The New Richmond Reader



Issue 7

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Your Literary News from the Heart of the Karoo

Happy New Year and Welcome Back to 2013!

Welcome back and a Happy 2013!

After a really fantastic BoekBedonnerd V we found ourselves racing towards the end of the year and bang already at the end of the first month.

For those of you who didn't make it to the dorp, you really missed as Ed Sullivan would have said..."a really great shew...". Darryl had a superb line-up from Deon Meyer, Judge Chris Nicholson, Mike Nicol to David Kramer (who did a song and dance routine which had the rafters humming...as well as the couple dozen kids from the "other side" in rapturous glee), and Ashwin Desai and Andre Pretorius. The town will never be the same. I think that is a fair comment that after 5 years, the Booktown Richmond spin-offs are beginning to be felt across the entire spectrum of Richmond society; not in any grand way but in subtle improvements and enhanced awareness of being associated with the Booktown phenomenon.



The Richmond Community Centre, financed and organised by local as well as American sponsors, and the library to which BTR contributes are making modest inroads into the life of local children. We are always in need of sponsorship: books, paper, and writing instruments, and any other support you may be able to offer.

The next shew from BTR will be the JM Coetzee and Nobel Laureates Festival May 23 to 26th, 2013. We will have an early programme out in the next short while. But...Old Darryl has done it

again...pulling off a coup to keep the Athol Fugard Festival alive and kicking in the Karoo by offering a home, for the time being still in the Karoo, in Richmond on the Thursday of the JMC, namely May 23, 2013. To keep Nieu Bethesda in the mix we are planning a 4x4 off road trip from Richmond to NB leaving at a reasonable hour on the Sunday. If you are in Richmond in your Jag, don't worry we will have a place for you in one of the vehicles.

Once again the issue of Shell looking to start exploration for gas in the Karoo has raised its ugly head. The lines are being drawn as several groups are getting prepared to prevent, through the courts of law, this disaster before it starts. We believe that where fracking is already taking place, regulate and monitor it to the finest degree. What is happening to the environment in the United States in the states which have huge fracking operations is just about as damaging as a nuclear device going off. Where fracking has not as yet taken place: don't even start!! The Shells of this world couldn't care a damn about our Karoo, country or her people. See their track records in Africa and just imagine that mess here as you drive through the Karoo!

This 7th Issue of the Reader has a couple very good little ditties, one from my cousin Ann in Vancouver and also from regular contributors Robin Whales and Keith Britz.

All the very best for 2013 from all in Booktown Richmond!!

Peter C. Baker

Cat Nap

(By Ann Antignano)

Archie Benson picked up a smooth round stone, took careful aim and sent it on a true course to its target. Mister Snooze, a dignified tuxedo tomcat, yowled in surprise and disappeared through a gap in the lilac hedge.

“That’ll teach you to sleep under my roses, you...you....”

“Now, now, Archie. Why do you so hate that cat? He doesn’t do your precious roses any harm.” Claudia, Archie’s long-suffering wife, put her hand on his arm. “Besides, poor Dorothy loves Mister Snooze. He’s the only company she has since Chet passed away.”

“If she loves him so much, why don’t she keep him home?” He selected another stone from a ceramic bowl on the porch rail and rolled it between his fingers. “I’ve got my rights, too, you know.”

Claudia didn’t answer. Since Archie’s retirement he had become harder and harder to live with. With too much time on his hands and too little to do, he followed her around as she did her chores and criticized everything she did.

When she went out on errands he insisted on going along. He commented on every purchase she made, grumbled about the prices and, when they got home, directed her as she put the groceries away. Finally, to save her own sanity, she suggested he take up a hobby.

“Hobby? What for?”

“Well, they say you stay healthier if you have some sort of interest.”

“You believe everything you read, don’t you? I’ve worked hard all my life. Now I want to relax.” He picked up the remote and turned on the news. “Hobby! What will she think of next! ”

But when the last of the snow finally melted, Archie drew up plans , took inventory of his gardening supplies and dug up new beds. A tour of every nursery in town yielded a fine selection of hybrid roses which he planted in a carefully researched mixture of peat moss and bone meal.

The process occupied him all spring but by early summer he had only the routine jobs like watering, weeding and checking for aphids to keep him occupied. Again he had time on his hands. Now he could focus on the neighbour’s cat who loved to take his late morning nap in the loose soil under the roses in Archie’s back yard.

“Finish up your sandwich and never mind the cat, dear,” Claudia urged, trying to hurry lunch along so that she could escape the house for the afternoon.

“That’s easy for you to say. You didn’t almost break your neck tripping over that lousy animal. I did. I tell you, I won’t be held responsible for what I do if old Dorothy don’t keep her cat away from me.”

Archie drained his coffee cup and banged it on the table. Without another word he stomped down the porch stairs and went over to inspect Barbara Bush, his favourite rose, for damage.

“I’m really worried about Archie,” Claudia confided to Dorothy over a slice of blueberry pie topped with ice cream, the specialty at Andre’s café. “He is obsessed with those roses. That’s all he ever thinks about: his pet roses and how to keep Mister Snooze away from them.”

“I’m so sorry, Claudia,” Dorothy replied. “I’ve tried to keep Snooze in my yard, even planted several rose bushes especially for him, but he just likes Archie’s better, I guess.”

“Yes, cats are like that.” Claudia wiped her lips delicately with the corner of her napkin. “Well, I don’t know how much longer I can take Archie and his fussing. Now he’s setting traps. Says he’s going to round up every cat in the neighbourhood and take them to the pound.”

“Traps? My word.”

“I know. I’m afraid someone will get hurt. He has strung fishing line all over the place. You can’t see it at all. I don’t dare go off the back porch any more.”

Dorothy sighed. “Poor you.” She reached over and patted her old friend’s hand. “And poor Mister Snooze, too. I think I’d die if anything happened to him.”

The two women sat for a moment, silently considering how a little fish line could have such an impact on their lives. Dorothy’s chin trembled slightly. Claudia’s jaw tightened.

“Can I warm up your coffee, ladies?” Andre appeared with an urn of fresh coffee.

“Oh! No...no, we’re ... we’re fine. Could we have the check, please?” Claudia reached for her handbag. “I’ll take care of it.” She offered a thin little smile as she slid a generous tip under her saucer.

“You don’t have to do that, Claudia. We always split the bill.”

“This time the treat’s on me.” She snapped her purse shut. “What are friends for?”

The sun was high in the sky as Mister Snooze appeared through the gap in the lilac hedge. He stretched luxuriously, sauntered over to his favourite spot and rolled in the warm, dry soil.

Up on the porch Claudia refilled Dorothy’s glass of lemonade. “I still can’t believe what happened. I found him lying – dead – right where Mister Snooze is now. Broke Barbara Bush straight off when he fell.” Claudia sighed. “He must have forgotten he put that line across the top porch stair. Poor Archie.”

“Yes. Poor Archie.” Dorothy reached for a sugar cookie. “I hope you were careful when you removed all the fishing lines in the yard. Are you sure you got them all?”

“Oh, yes. Archie was so organized. He made a diagram of where he set all his traps. Funny, though....”

“Funny?”

“He forgot to include the very last one...the one that tripped him up.” A gentle smile teased the corners of her mouth.

“Yes, funny.” Dorothy dusted a crumb from her white linen skirt and gazed wistfully down at the beautiful rose garden.

Mister Snooze, his toilette complete, curled up, tucked his nose under his tail and went to sleep.

About the Author

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Ann Antignano lives in the beautiful Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. She was born in a small village outside Montréal and is of United Empire Loyalist descent.

A former school teacher she likes to explore human nature through short story fiction. Her memoirs provide the opportunity to reflect on her life and leave some hints into the workings of her heart and mind. For Ann a blank sheet of paper is not a challenge; it's an invitation.



Wonderful Copenhagen

(By Keith Cornelis-Britz)

It had been an anxious flight from Berne and I didn't look forward to our landing in Copenhagen. Let me explain. We checked through customs at Berne International and went down an escalator into what seemed like an endless tunnel. We got onto a moving walkway keeping an eye on the colour code to our terminal. We got off where our colour ended and walked to the escalator which would take us to ground level. I still remarked that this was the first escalator we had come across in Europe that didn't work. At the top the nightmare began.

We found ourselves in a glass rotunda. Outside the snow lay thick on the ground, only the runway was free of snow. I became aware of machine-guns that seemed to hover above the ground and only later did I realise that they were being held by soldiers in their white snow combat uniforms. But my immediate concern was the armed policeman who took me to a cubicle, of which there were many, and who commenced a thorough body search. Just this action was enough to terrorize me. I came from a country where the secret police had a car parked down the street from where I lived simply because I had attended a notorious gay party in Parktown and had as a childhood friend someone who was a political correspondent for the Rand Daily Mail. South Africa.

After stripping down to just my shirt, socks and underpants and being prodded and felt all over I was told to get dressed. My friend was already seated and waiting for me. I was thoroughly rattled. He just laughed at me and reminded me that seven aircraft had just been blown up in the Middle East and the Swiss were being careful.

The seatbelt lights came on and we began our descent into Copenhagen when an irrational fear gripped me. We landed and taxied up to the terminal and disembarked and nothing. No machine guns, no policemen anywhere to be seen. My relief was palpable. And as I stepped onto the tarmac I had the strangest feeling. I felt I had come home. It was the same feeling you have when you come over du Toitskloof Pass and get your first view of Table Mountain on a clear day. A feeling so intense that your eyes fill with tears. My legs felt wobbly. I held onto the hand rail at the bottom of the aircraft steps until my knees stabilized. I began walking towards the entrance to the building, just blindly following the passengers with me. My friend was way ahead of me. Yet that strong feeling of 'home coming' wouldn't pass. Then I was at passport control and customs.

That night I sat in the window seat of our hotel room and again I had this strange feeling of familiarity. I tried to shrug it off, tried to persuade myself that it was a result of the tensions of the day, hoped to put it down to the 'Berne' experience but deep down I knew it wasn't so.

The next morning we took a city bus tour to orientate ourselves. Again I experienced a sense of déjà-vu, of knowing what we were going to see before we got there. My friend just thought that I was being a smart Alec. So I said nothing more until we were driving along the coast with the North Sea cold and grey beside us and I said that we were coming to the Little Mermaid. I remember saying look now. And there she was, black, fragile, spray-shiny, a wisp of a thing sitting on her rock. I began to feel disconnected from

reality. A feeling which increased as we walked around the city and down their famous ströjet revelling in the freedom of walking down a street free of motor vehicles.

We enjoyed the sculptural copies of the world's most famous statues – a gift from the Carlsberg Breweries as we discovered on our tour of their factory the following day. Then again we took to the streets of Copenhagen and we walked past the palace. I was instantly drawn towards it, but discovered that palace tours were only during the summer months. I was more disappointed than I should have been so we visited the National Art Gallery. We made a point of doing this in each city we visited. I sat down on a bench in one of the halls simply to rest as all the walking had tired me. In front of me was a large painting. It was of a nobleman posing with an older woman and in the background, very much like a Vermeer, there were servants. The waxed and curled moustache, the pointy goatee and the fleur-de-lis on the drapes suggested that he was a French nobleman.

As I looked at the richly coloured painting my eye kept being drawn to a young woman in the background. She appeared to be sewing. I had a strong sense of knowing her. I looked at her gazing soulfully at the nobleman her needle poised in mid stitch. The feeling of recognition became so strong that I got up and walked to the opposite side of the room and tried to take in some of the other paintings on that wall, but my eye was constantly drawn to that picture and especially to the seamstress. I left the room in a mild state of confused worry because it was as if there was a memory hovering just beyond my recall. Before we left I took my friend and we looked at the picture again. I pointed out the seamstress. He shrugged his shoulders and said I was being silly. The next day, our last, I slipped back into the National Gallery, while my companion was exploring

the sex shops, to see the painting for one last time. The feeling I had the previous day was even stronger and as I walked out to meet my friend for lunch I felt I needed to get away from Copenhagen. It was really messing with my head.

We got to the airport the next morning to find that due to heavy snowfalls the airport had been closed down for the past 24 hours and that they were hoping to resume flights out of Copenhagen during the course of the day. The concourse was crawling with people waiting for flights – some were disgruntled, others angry while the rest settled down to wait. We found a corner and sat on the floor to wait.

I must have dozed off; because I had the distinct feeling I was in a horse drawn carriage. There were four other ladies with me. I was busy repairing a tear in a pale lilac evening dress. I was feeling frustrated because the jolting of the carriage made it very difficult to control the size of my stitches and I often had to re-insert the needle to get it just right. The elderly woman sitting across from me swore. She was cleaning some gold buttons on a military uniform and her cleaning cloth had touched the fabric and left a mark. I looked up. Our eyes met and in them I read pity and disdain. I felt like putting my tongue out her because I was feeling smug, triumphant and very much loved.

Next I was aware that the carriage had stopped. I no longer had the dress on my lap. We got out, rushed to the baggage carriage behind us and began supervising the offloading of the luggage. Then I heard a man's voice. I turned and there stood the nobleman in the painting. He smiled at me. The shock of recognition woke me.

I sat there with my heart pounding. Soon after the re-allocation of passengers on flights began and later we boarded for Paris. I wanted to share my

experience in the airport with my friend but decided not to. He had shown decided impatience with what he called my fancifulness, needless to say I was happy to put Copenhagen behind me. Paris. I loved the many movies I had seen which were made in Paris – *Gigi*, *American in Paris* and all the Alain Delon movies. I really looked forward to being there and seeing everything for myself. But, from the moment we came into contact with the Parisians my happy anticipation turned into dislike. Their refusal to respond in English was annoying but I soon discovered that if I approached them in Afrikaans they were more than happy to compromise and speak English. So communication became easier.

The snow in Paris had turned to slush and we walked and walked. It is hard to give anyone an idea of the vast distances between places of interest in Paris. Soon our shoes were wet through and as we were close to the Louvre we went in, primarily to thaw out and hoped our shoes would dry a bit. We spent hours there roaming the vast caverns that served as galleries. The walls were crammed with canvasses with barely visible space between them – so many that only the most hardened art connoisseurs could appreciate them. They ranged in size from ginormous to postcard size.

In a room, which appeared to be devoted to the French Royal family my jaded eye fell on one of the smaller pictures and out of sheer orneriness I walked over to it. A shock of recognition rattled my spine. I caught my breath. The picture was of the nobleman in Copenhagen. When my hands stopped shaking I looked up the picture's number in the guidebook – Count Justin de Ville-neuve, Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the Court of Denmark. I fled the room, found their restaurant and had a cup coffee and waited for my friend – we had agreed to meet there. While I waited I kept seeing the picture of the woman

before me and that of the man. What connection between us could there possibly be? Why was I so disturbed by those two paintings? What did the dream at the airport be? Finally what could it all mean? By the time he arrived I was in control again. I said nothing as we continued our tour of Paris.

We had a light lunch at a sidewalk café and then walked on to the Place de la Concorde. At first I didn't want to walk into the square but reason overtook feelings. We were halfway across the square when we heard a band approaching from the other end. Soon they were in view. They were dressed in the mode of the French Revolution and wearing the tri-corner hats. I can't remember what they were playing but what I do remember was the rolling of the drums. I can still hear them 40 years later. That inexorable beat as they marched towards us, getting louder and louder as they came. A fear and loathing overcame me. A horror settled on me, so intense that it brought tears to my eyes while my heart pounded and I wanted to run. But I stood there transfixed. As the band drew level with us and the drums rose to a crescendo I could not help myself but I screamed. The band stopped playing. The crowd that had gathered looked at me and my friend melted into the crowd blushing with embarrassment. I moved away on shaky legs.

That experience killed what little joy there had been in Paris for me. I caught up with my friend and we walked along silently. Later that afternoon we found ourselves at the Sacré-Coeur Cathedral. I wanted to go in but he grumpily said that he would wait for me. I climbed the steps up to the front door and went inside.

An evening mass was in progress, so I slipped into one of back pews. Immediately a sense of calm surrounded me. The events in Copenhagen and now in Paris seemed to slide away.

Peace. A deep healing peace settled on me. Serenity enfolded me like a heavenly blanket. There were tears of joy in my eyes and as I gazed around there was that old feeling of familiarity again, only this time it didn't unsettle me.

After the service I left and found my friend and we headed back to our pension. On the way we walked into Montmartre and decided to have supper there. There are so many street caf  s and every time my friend wanted to go into one I hesitated and suggested we see what else there was. We came to a small p  tisserie and without thinking I sat down at a table outside it. A woman came out, a small child on her hip, and spoke to us in English. We ordered, but the evening was turning cold and she suggested that we move inside. We went in and again I was assailed by that feeling of home coming. While her husband prepared our meal she came over to talk. I mentioned that I noticed that there was a plaque outside declaring the building a national monument.

"It has been in my husband's family for centuries." She said.

"You're English aren't you? How come you married a Frenchman?"

"When I finished at the Polytechnic in London I decided I wanted to learn about French cuisine. So I came to Paris. I lived not far from here and met Jean-Louis here."

"If it has been in the family for so long there must be quite a story to tell." I ventured, hoping to hear some of the history.

"If you like I will ask Jean-Louis to tell you himself. He speaks excellent English."

We finished our supper and were sipping our wine when Jean-Louis came through and we

introduced ourselves.

"Marion tells me you are interested in the history of the shop."

"Yes," I said, "There is something very familiar about the place." My companion rolled his eyes heavenwards.

He said he was going to close up the shop and would we like to join them upstairs for another glass of wine.

As I sat down I saw it. A tiny miniature of Justin de Villeneuve, the man in the painting.

Suddenly I was in the Place de la Concorde, the guillotine stood tall. A mass of people thronged around it. The drums rolled and from the far side the tumbril rolled into the square its wooden wheels jolting over the cobbles. Standing in front facing the guillotine was Justin. I pushed and cursed my way through the crowd to the foot of the guillotine. The tumbril stopped. He saw me, smiled at me, and then was pushed off the tumbril among the other prisoners. How he landed up in front of me I don't know. He stopped. Gently rubbed my swelling belly, sighed and then smiled and put something in my hand. Again I pushed through the crowd, tears flowing. I didn't want to see. Then as the crowd thinned I was compelled to turn back. He was next. He caught my eye, blew me a kiss and knelt down. The drums rolled. The blade fell. I screamed and screamed. I felt a hand on my arm, pulling me away. Through my tears I recognised Jean-Louis the baker.

"Justin! He put it in my hand," I chokingly said through the tears as I opened them and stared at the miniature.

"Mon Dieu, but how did you know?" A white

“Mon Dieu, but how did you know?” A white face Jean-Louis asked. The rest of the evening we spent comparing what I had experienced and the story that had been handed down through the generations. There was very little to add except that Jean-Louis, the baker, took in Le Comte de Villeneuve (whose family had been the pâtisserie patron for generations) after his mother was beheaded. Helga, the Danish seamstress lived on under the protection of Jean-Louis and finally married him and the current Jean-Louis’ great great great grandmother was Helga.

Was this as a result of travel fatigue? Or was it just a fanciful brain overwrought? To this day sometimes I wonder if I was taken back into a previous life.

I leave it to you.

End of Story

(By Robin Whales)

It was coming together for Patrick Butcher. Seven completed, and he was giggling at the hostility from Croexer's Sporters, who spoke in shouts, at Jones's intense twitching, Ngema's blank stare, Naidu's dribbling and Jenkins's cracking high-pitched falsetto.

He noted that the Wright brothers sat together again, the Dociles had moved to the back of the classroom and loud-mouthed Sithole was silent. The Introverted were nibbling their sandwiches secretly.

Only the freak Simpson, with his pop eyes, rice-grain teeth and wisps of snow-white hair, showed no change. Deputy Principal Al Reith had informed staff that Simpson's father had recently thrown him out and Simpson was seen acting out his banishment daily to a growing hostel audience.

Patrick had seen no clear-cut pattern of deviant behaviour, no common trait, since starting his Programmed Stories Experiment with the 11Ds. But he was happy with results as he was dealing with the capricious human animal.

Three months ago he was given a weekly English class at Northern Boys High in Johannesburg. Geography was his major, but he was a short-story nut. The cunning twists and outrageous surprises made him smile for hours, sometimes laugh out loud and always marvel at the author's ability to enchant. Stories captured life in microcosm and life was, after all, millions of bits of living strung together.

Gordon Todd, the ambitious head of English,

had no time for the athletic Patrick Butcher but harnessed his passion to develop an appreciation of literature among the non-academic 11Ds. He avoided them himself to maintain his pass rate, and kept them away from mini-skirted Tessa O'Dare, daughter of a board member who demanded the best for his daughter's first teaching post. Blubber-bodied and lipped Todd showered spittle whenever he addressed her at departmental meetings.

Patrick had free rein in his choice of stories and his gritty gems with breathtaking dénouement entranced the boys. Roald Dahl's finger-chopping invited chuckles, Stuart Cloete's Bushman brought cheers with his desert revenge on the farmer, and Adam's apples bobbed when Herman Charles Bosman's leopard was shot.

As a diversion, Patrick would read nine-tenths of a story and ask the boys to write their own endings for homework. He read out the best, and the author's, at the next class.

One night as he sat dozily at his computer in his hostel room, an idea settled with butterfly gentleness on the remaining pistils of his consciousness. He blinked rapidly as a story trickled out, stirring excitement in his belly. A narrative was freely creating itself in his sub-conscious. A story-cum-experiment, himself the protagonist, manipulation of human emotions the theme. Patrick had taken Psychology II and still held a fascination for Pavlov, Oedipus, amnesia, kleptomania, obsession-compulsion, catatonia, manic-depression (sweeter sounding than bipolar) and schizophrenia (with its infinite depth).

Now, creating his own real-life story, he quivered as he captured the rivers of thought. By the early hours the elements were in place and he fell asleep smiling.

The premise: A group of boys of similar age, ability and educational standard will in a controlled situation display abnormal emotional behaviour patterns from stress/anxiety caused by repeated withholding of dénouements of fictional narratives.

A common trait would emerge but he anticipated Bell Curve variations. The left lip of the bell would see those barely touched emotionally, and the right the seriously disturbed, both sides deviating from the majority in the middle.

He had selected twelve stories, the final reading for the end of term. It would also be during his last week at Northern High for he had applied for a geography headship in Cape Town.

Patrick had to control his own emotions when the first Friday of his PSE drew near. He whooped in class, flicked lights on and off during evening study, and late at night went jogging to induce sleep.

Sitting at his desk in front of the class, he gurgled as he commenced with the story of the Mexican farmer whose letter to God when his crop is destroyed contains the shattering, yet charming, dénouement in the last few words. He stopped a line from the end and told the class they would have to wait a week. He closed the book before the ending the second week and brushed off reminders.

The third story-with-no-ending brought mild disturbance. There were movements of irritation from Croexer's sports group, Jones's eyebrows twitched, the group of docile boys

sniffed loudly, and sixty leather soles shuffled grit on the floorboards of the temporary Prefab classroom.

Was this a precursor to anger? Would it intensify in poorly disciplined boys? Patrick was not concerned about possible disruptions, confident that he had the support of Al Reith, a feared disciplinarian who hated everyone.

In the fourth week primary anger was evident and he decided to apply heavier pressure with stories of death and disaster.

The accused cattle rustler, an innocent man, sits astride his horse with a rope around his neck. His good friend has the task of slapping the horse's rump to leave him dangling from the tree, watched by his family. Patrick stopped the story as the friend raises his hand.

"Sir, please, we don't want to wait again," Jones wailed. The sports group growled at the childishness but Patrick ignored them.

Death was the expected but unread ending in the next reading and Patrick sniggered at the expressed anger when the bell rang.

The sixth week brought raw hostility. He scanned the faces and smiled as he started a grisly death-in-the-wilds mystery, and stopped, with a wistful shake of his head, four words from the end.

"We don't want any more stories," Jenkins squealed.

"That's enough from you," Patrick said. Jenkins's shrill whine alerted Gordon Todd in the adjoining room where he sometimes marked books. The board between the two Prefab rooms was damaged and holes had been covered

with packaging tape.

Todd turned an ear and noticed a piece of tape had worked loose. He peeped through, bringing into view a waste-paper basket and Patrick's chair. If he knelt he could see the underside of the table. When Patrick stood up his trousered leg was fifteen centimetres from Todd's eyes. He pondered his find.

On the following Friday a convulsing twitch enveloped Jones's entire body when he cried out to Patrick that he had promised to finish the cattle rustler story. Patrick smiled as he eyed the glowing class and opened his book.

In the eighth week he could see anger and animosity. Angry eyes dart around, loathing eyes are fearless. Would anger be replaced by brooding hatred? The emotions had twinned. Which would endure?

Jones had been joined by others with twitches of their own, Naidu no longer mopped up his dribble, and Ngema's eyes were fierce. The Dociles and Introverted, like caged animals, were unable to express their hatred. They had wailed internally in anger but now there was no outlet. Patrick was confident the class was edging towards a group trait.

Was Simpson part of this bonding emotion? He showed the glimmer of a smile, a dark hole in his face, but in his pale eyes Patrick identified nothing. Did the creature have the capacity to hate? Was he left or right on the Bell? Would far-right psychosis be revealed?

Hatred in degrees is the prevailing group emotion and bonding mechanism, Patrick typed in that evening.

What he did not know was that revenge, bred

from anger, impotence and hatred, was the common trait, and there were plans afoot. Isolated group talks in the classroom, ending with laughter at imagined outcomes, eased their mental torture as Butch's class approached. Lockups, muti, force-feeding pulped books, kidnapping and hotfooting were planned. The passion and the extremes in the payoffs differed. The Bell Curve.

The ninth story led Patrick to explaining protective repression at the loss of a loved one. Was the ending to the tenth suicide? They would never know.

"I will finish the wobbly-bobbly story-wory next week," he said and danced out like a ballerina. His jocular tone set off cold hatred. The Twitchers had seizures and the Sporters banged their desks. Sithole, eyes rolling, mumbled loudly in Zulu and Naidu's desk was awash.

When Jenkins complained to Gordon Todd, he explained that the lessons were for their own good, but he made a note to bring Butcher down a peg or two.

In Patrick's classroom between periods the boys mulled around in trepidation, looking at each other for guidance.

"We must do it quickly," Croexer suddenly shouted at the Sporters. "Do you want the sod for another week?"

"How can we, hey?"

"Together we can," he screamed.

"What are you talking about?" Jones twitched.

"We're going to get Butch. Come in if you like," Croexer said, inviting an outsider in for the first

time.

“So are we. To show him. What’s your plan?”

“You first.”

Jones consulted the Twitchers.

“We’re going to dope him, take off his clothes and tie him on the desk in Miss O’Dare’s classroom.”

“How will you?”

”Moodley can get stuff and the boarders will put it in his cocoa.” Jones’s group smiled proudly.

“Ours is better,” Croexer said. “We’re going to strip him and lock him in the trophy cupboard for the whole school to see, not only Miss Panties.” He had plagiarised the stripping.

“We’re also going to give him Viagra.” The thought had just occurred to Jones.

“Viagra!” The Sporters roared with laughter.

“Brilliant, you guys.”

“Thanks.” Jones felt like one of the boys.

The Dociles announced that through a drilled hole from under the stage floor they would squirt petrol onto Butch’s shoes when he read the lesson at assembly. The rest was easy. Strike a match for a giant hot foot.

Ngema had roped in Jenkins to raise money for powerful muti, and the Introverted had stolen one of Butch’s books to pulp and force-feed him after knocking him out and tying him up. Sithole and the Wright brothers, in Sithole’s father’s truck, intended to catch him on his night

run and take him to a crocodile farm.

When Simpson stood on his desk and held up his hands they expected play-acting, but became silent when they saw the ferocious look in his eyes and his twisted black-hole smile.

“These things are stupid,” Simpson snarled in a grating whisper. “You can’t do them, can you? Hey?”

“Shut up if you haven’t got something better,” Croexer said.

“Me and Dad have a plan.”

“Your dad!” the Twitchers hissed.

“Why did he make me a boarder, hey? I told him the stories and when there were no endings he went wild and kicked me out.”

“What’s the plan?”

“Not here.” All eyes were on him and he loved it. Who would have thought that the amorphous Simpson harboured a desire for celebrity status? He played up his deformities, but his hunger for recognition was greater than all of theirs put together.

“Toady-Todd will hear through the wall when he comes,” Simpson whispered. “Meet me after school at the bike shed.”

They all turned up and settled on the grass to hear Simpson’s plan. He was overjoyed.

”We’ve worked it out,” he said. “It’s got to be death.”

“Death!” Fearful chattering broke out.

“His stories are about death so we’ll give it to

him.” He looked at the Dociles. “Setting Butch alight could kill him?”

“We didn’t want that,” they whined.

“Death is out,” Croexer said.

“All right, I’ll speak to Dad about near death.”

They decided that each group would work through the finer details of their plans and a democratic vote would decide which was best. The buoyant mood of the class surprised Patrick at the start of the eleventh story. He eyed them suspiciously. They talked, glanced his way and laughed, then muttered group to group, and laughed louder. Had they heard that he was leaving? Was this expressed hatred?

“You got another story-worry for us?” Croexer asked cheerfully.

“Another one, Sir,” others bawled.

Patrick was startled. He searched for an explanation. The front row was full, the Dociles were looking directly at him, the Twitchers were calmer, and Ngema was smiling. Were they taking the mickey? Giving up? Was this a continuum stage after hatred? Repression? Group denial?

In one of those moments of brilliance that come to some once in a lifetime, Patrick smiled back at them. A counter punch. A devastating twist.

“Today, I will give you all the endings,” he said. In despair, the boys looked at each other. They had no leader. Patrick could see they were lost in confusion. With a single creative stroke he had re-established narrative control. These were his boys and he loved them.

Simpson broke the silence with a ghostly demand. “We want a new story.” The class swung his way with a loud, “Yes!”

“We’ve forgotten the others.” The class echo,

“We’ve forgotten them.”

“All right,” Patrick said. “When I finish today’s I will read the endings of the previous three while they are fresh.”

From habit he stopped number eleven when the clown was hastening the major’s death from laughter. Patrick slammed the book shut and asked the class to wait while he fetched the main collection. He ran to his hostel room and searched everywhere but the book was nowhere to be found. It had been taken for testing in the pulping machine. When Patrick returned the bell rang.

“I can’t find it,” he shouted. “I promise I will give you all the endings next week.” They laughed in derision.

Under the jacarandas the class voted Simpson’s and the Sporters’s revenge plans best. Simpson’s was simple in execution, they would witness the ‘near-death accident’.

Simpson shows the small, black .25 revolver to Butch, spins the empty chambers, pulls the trigger a few times and turns the muzzle towards his forehead, then aims at Butch.

“Never point a gun,” Patrick says.

“It’s play-play.” Simpson laughs. “Hold it, Sir.

Are you frightened?”

The class jeers. While Patrick reasserts control Simpson slips in a bullet and hands the revolver to him.

“Hold it like this, Sir.” Simpson stretches out a

“Hold it like this, Sir.” Simpson stretches out a shrivelled hand and angles the barrel towards Butch’s jaw. He presses the trigger. Only Butch’s fingerprints are on the handle. A near-death accident. No jaw, no stories.

Croexer’s plan uses elements from the others. Mr Sithole’s truck waylays Butch on his night run and the team takes him to the kit room where Ngema drugs him and administers Viagra. They strip him and lock him in the glass trophy cupboard in the hall.

On the penultimate Friday they vote. Simpson’s plan is manageable, Croexer’s unwieldy. Ngema conducts the ballot. Simpson wins. He thanks Croexer for the clean fight. Croexer is dignified in defeat. Ngema reminds all to keep their lips sealed forever.

For the last Friday Patrick has worked out that he would have time to give the endings and explain his experiment. Their final reaction is what he is after.

However, his plan is thwarted when Todd asks Al Reith to list Patrick for juniors train duty to Kimberley, returning Friday afternoon. Patrick protests but Al Reith threatens interference in his promotion in Cape Town.

Todd delegates Tessa O’Dare to take Patrick’s 11Ds, explaining to her father that the confrontation would be beneficial. He wants her at the blackboard so he gives her sentences to write for the boys to correct. She will spend most of the period standing in her micro-mini, and Todd will be taking pictures with his cellphone through the hole in the wall.

The 11Ds are stunned when Miss Panties trips daintily into the Prefab. She stands behind the desk and Todd activates his video.

“I have pleasure taking Mr Butcher’s place today,” she says sweetly. “He asked me to read something but Mr Todd would prefer hard work and he’s the boss.” She smiles. “Don’t look so unhappy. I am a screaming riot of fun.”

Simpson will not be denied. He raises his hand. “Yes.” She has heard about the strange boy and is nice to him.

“Simpson, Ma’am. Can I show you my revolver?”

“Hey, watch it, Baldie,” Croezer warns and the class stirs.

“I’ve got a plan B,” Simpson says.

“Of course, you may,” Miss O’Dare says, frowning at the class.

Simpson spins the chambers and places the revolver in her hand. She takes it with a cute tilt of her head. Glowing with happiness, Simpson is about to give the class the show of their lives. “Ooh, I haven’t held a gun before.” She examines the fine workmanship and looks down the barrel. “Isn’t it beautiful?” She points it at the class. “Bang, bang. I’ll shoot you dead as door-nails, so I won’t have any work.”

Simpson reaches for it.

“No!” the class shouts.

“You think I’m mad?”

“Yes, you are,” they yell.

“Wait and see.”

He guides the muzzle of the revolver in Miss O’Dare’s hand towards his forehead, flips the

safety, and presses the trigger. The bullet explodes.

Simpson collapses at Miss O'Dare's feet with a .25 mm hole through his thin cranium. Tessa and the boys freeze. Todd's cellphone drops through as he backs away from his peephole in shock and knocks over his table and chair.

The noise breaks into Tessa's frozen mind and she runs out screaming, across the grounds and into the street, the revolver dangling from her forefinger. Al Reith charges in, gleefully inhales the gunpowder smoke and stares at Simpson's body. He orders the class out, sends for the headmaster and picks up Todd's cellphone.

Meanwhile, Patrick Butcher, on the train taking him directly to Cape Town from Kimberley, smiles as he drafts a new selection of stories. He is looking forward to introducing his brand of literature to a class of girls.

The Apology

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Think me not unkind and rude,
That I walk alone in grove and glen;
I go to the god of the wood
To fetch his word to men.

Tax not my sloth that I
Fold my arms beside the brook;
Each cloud that floated in the sky
Writes a letter in my book.

Chide me not, laborious band,
For the idle flowers I brought;
Every aster in my hand
Goes home loaded with a thought.

There was never mystery,
But 'tis figured in the flowers,
Was never secret history,
But birds tell it in the bowers.

One harvest from thy field
Homeward brought the oxen strong;
A second crop thine acres yield,
Which I gather in a song.

Shale Gas Conference March 07, 2012

(By Peter C. Baker)

Living in, or even driving through the Karoo now a days is synonymous with the controversy surrounding the exploration for and possible exploitation of shale gas reserves deep below the Karoo landscape. In order to prevent this catastrophe it is important that we all maintain a high level of awareness and knowledge of the dire hazards which may be just around the corner should fracking be permitted to take place in the Karoo. The following is a brief presentation which I made at a Shale Gas Conference March 7, 2012.

My name is Peter Baker; I am a veterinarian by profession. I am an African and South African. I have 4 children, adults living in this country and I want them all to have a healthy, happy, safe and prosperous life in this country. I want the very best for my country.

I am involved along with Ian Perrin in a website called www.fractual.co.za, which is a data collection and analysis service to anyone who wishes information on just about any matter relating to energy, whether green, black, renewables, storage and transportation modalities, legislation, and it is just about as up to date as this morning.

I wish to thank the organizers ...basically Shell, for putting together this conference. I was also at last year's gathering in Rosebank and I might like to here make a few suggestions. First and foremost we really need a broader canvas of participants if we are going to look at the future and energy, for that must be the general field with particular focus on Shale Fracking.

We really have missed the input of scenario planners, futurologists....Clem Sunter types, climatologists, meteorologists, sociologists, oceanographers, a wide range of medical people, toxicologists and epidemiologists...the whole shootin' match of science in fact. But most of all we need the legitimate representatives of the people where all this action is being proposed....the people of the Karoo!

BACK TO BACICS

We are at a cross roads on Planet Earth and the decisions we make now will affect our ability to survive in the future.

We are here today to discuss shale gas exploration and the possible exploitation of this reserve which may lie deep beneath the Karoo.

The discussion however far exceeds this issue when we look at the bigger picture.

I would like to make some comments today on a few fairly small matters and to look at how these little things have relevance to the bigger picture.

I will be pointing out a few issues raised in 2 documents published within the last few months. They are not peer reviewed articles from heavy Scientific Journals but articles from 3 senior scientists, one a veterinarian.

The 1st paper by Dr Sandra Steingraber is titled “Taking the Handle off the Fracking Pump”. Steingraber is with the Department of Environmental Studies at Ithaca College in Upper New York State and Drs Bamberger and Oswald are at Cornell and their paper is titled “Impacts of Gas Drilling on Human and Animal Health” and was also published earlier this year.

Bamberger and Oswald have studied the evidence of morbidity and mortality in conjunction with exposure to primary or secondary by-products of gas drilling operations in half a dozen US States including Texas and Pennsylvania.

They have investigated places – usually farming areas, where high volume slick water hydraulic fracturing has taken place and the effects of the accidental release or escape of some of the chemicals used in the fracking operations or from the flow backs from wells being worked.

They point out the concern of the communities in the areas where gas companies are operating and one important aspect of the debate involves the level of proof required to associate environmental change or damage with activities associated with gas drilling.

Environmental groups invoke the “Precautionary Principle”, that is “that if an action is suspected of causing harm to the environment, then in the absence of scientific consensus, the burden of proof must fall on the individual or organization taking the action”.

The oil and gas companies, O&GC's, typically shun this analysis.

Cast your mind back to the early decades of the 20th century when cigarette smoking was not just ok it was advocated. Presidents smoked, John Wayne smoked, sports stars smoked, Johnny Carson and Dean Martin smoked.....everyone smoked. Even if you did not smoke you probably inhaled enough secondary passive smoke to be considered a light smoker.

Everyone knew that people who smoked coughed a lot of phlegm, got emphysema and even lung cancer more often than other people but the tobacco industry said there were lots of people who coughed phlegm, got emphysema and lung cancer and never smoked. They said that even rats got lung cancer and we know rats don't smoke all that much.

But we all knew there was a link between the two, but could not prove it “beyond a reasonable doubt”. We had to prove that it was bad and not the tobacco companies to prove to us that it was fine to smoke.

As we all know things changed for the better since the 70's and 80's and the tobacco companies have had to move their promotional campaigns to the 3rd world and China and they are now required to inform 1st world people that cigarettes are bad, cause cancer and emphysema and are

harmful to fetuses and are furthermore highly addictive.

Some argue that we have a choice with smoking but with the promotional advertising in the past and the fact that tobacco is highly addictive it was always going to be an unfair war.

We are still paying in human lives lost and the medical cost to society for the tobacco industry's decades of misinformation.

Bamberger has pointed out several empirical findings which admittedly are not scientifically analytical. They are observations – much as Doctors reported that of the X numbers of patients they saw in a year, Y percentage were smokers and that of those with lung cancer there seemed to be an inordinate percentage who smoked cigarettes.

Bamberger amongst other findings reported that:

- Deer tended to move away from areas where gas was being exploited and that there were cases in which the population dropped by 45% and the survival rate decreased.
- A farmer that had 2 pastures, one with access to a stream into which well waste water was purportedly dumped, of the 60 head of cattle in the enclosure with the stream their only source of water, 20 died and 16 failed to produce calves the following year. The 36 head in another pasture, with no access to the contaminated stream, suffered no health problems.
- At another farm, 140 head were exposed when the liner of a wastewater impoundment was allegedly slit, as reported by the farmer and the fluid drained into the pasture and the pond used as a source of water for the cows. Of those 140 head exposed to the wastewater, approximately 70 died and there was a high incidence of stillborn and stunted calves. The remainder of the herd was held in another pasture and did not have access to the wastewater; they showed no health or growth problems. These last two cases approach the design of a controlled experiment, and strongly implicate wastewater exposure in the death, failure to breed, and reduced growth rate of cattle.
- After a well worker shut down a blender during a fracking operation and accidentally released fracking fluids into an adjacent pasture, 17 cows were killed within one hour and that on another occasion when hundreds of gallons of fracking chemicals were inadvertently leaked into a pasture, that resident goats which were exposed, suffered reproductive problems over the next 2 years.

For the non farmers in the audience, the loss of just one breeding season and the loss of 1 calf in a head of livestock's lifetime over an entire herd would be a financial catastrophe for a farmer.

Bamberger and Oswald go on to report the incidence of domestic dogs becoming ill after being exposed to well waste products which had been spread on the dirt roads in the countryside – either to reduce dust or melt ice. This seemed to be a fairly standard practice in the States and sounds pretty horrific. Is this possible that the O&GC's could do this??

Furthermore they describe 3 detailed case reports which I will not bore you with but in brief, they write about livestock suffering a wide range of symptoms and illnesses including:

- Weight loss and poor weight gain
- Anorexia
- In-coordination

- Reduced fertility and abortion

which they relate as being possibly due to exposure to drilling mud pits and waste water impoundment areas which were not fenced in and to which the livestock in question, had access.

In some of the cases mentioned the drilling companies did offer and undertook to fence off waste dumps and to accommodate farmers in motels. I can imagine that most of the farmers told the O&GC's to take a hike.

No responsibility for the mishaps was ever taken by the gas companies or their sub-contractors. There was no compensation for the loss of livestock or the treatment of animals or for damage to the farmers' land.

So what do the illnesses and in some cases deaths, have to do with us? Animals remember, are in simple English, mere economic units. All the incidents mentioned had to be factored into the farmer's cost to company; no different to any other conventional business.

But there is a high degree of importance and relevance in studying animal health as it does have a very significant bearing on our health. Animals have a shorter life than humans, in many cases a faster metabolism and a shorter reproductive cycle than us and they live far more intimately with their natural environment. They serve as harbingers of the health of a particular environment. The proverbial canary in a coal mine.

In many of the cases cited, testing, postmortems and the like were often incomplete. Toxicological analyses were often scanty or not done at all. Remember livestock are economic units and not pets! You drink their milk and eat their meat and the skin from their back is holding up your breeches! A sick cow gets slaughtered and hopefully makes its way into a rendering plant to end up as dog food or chicken food. A dead cow is an economic write off and expensive tests and analytical work are in most cases out of the question.

So where do we stand? We have a pile of empirical data pertaining to the exposure, often accidental of animals to chemical products used in the drilling and extraction of gas from shale reserves. The oil and gas companies deny any culpability for the illness or death of farm livestock; but there is certainly something abnormal about what is happening to production animals where there is hydraulic fracking – occurrences clearly not happening elsewhere. But we can't prove anything can we?

We are where the medical industry was several decades ago when it seemed to be clear to all..... except the tobacco industry, that cigarette smoking caused pulmonary emphysema, lung, mouth and throat cancers, hypertension and chronic bronchitis amongst other ailments.

Without going over the road well trodden about the nature of the chemicals used in the fracking process, it may well be demanded that the industry demonstrates that what they use and how they propose to use it is safe. That might put a halt to any fracking in the Karoo with immediate effect.

The oil and gas companies however propose to mitigate damages.

Sandra Steingraber, a renowned scientist takes huge exception to this approach and takes issue with the term mitigation; i.e. “making something less bad” – perhaps bad English – but you get the point.

Again without going into the litany of events purportedly related to shale gas fracking as pointed out in the populist cult documentary “Gas Land”; which if nothing else, least of all scientifically, did arouse the general public from its somniferous coma into an awareness of the shale gas industry and its relevance to the our way of life and indeed survival on the planet.

Steingraber and others do not want to see the possible harm of shale gas exploitation mitigated: they want to STOP the problem. That’s in the United States. Those of us here in South African with the same philosophy want to PREVENT IT from ever getting off the ground.

As easy to get carbon based energy and reserves are rapidly being depleted so we must dig deeper and broader in the earth for more hidden reserves. Shale gas, Athabasca type tar sands, deep sea drilling and massive open cast coal mines are to the oil and gas companies the way forward.

Many of us decry these oil and gas companies when we see how they appear to be bugging up our planet, our environment and our health. But who is really to shoulder much of the blame? We all are of course! We go ballistic if the gas price goes up, we demand cheap food and inexpensive clothing and the infinite range of consumer items we cannot seem to go without – most of which come from India and China which are polluting our planet with their wastes for our “benefit” and our consumption!

We as a society must be content to drive less in smaller more fuel efficient cars – says he driving a large diesel guzzling 4x4 – we must demand hybrid technology in our cars as a minimum. We must be prepared to live more in the “dark” and to make our houses beacons of green technology as far as is possible. We have to consume far less of everything!! We are hogs at the hog trough grabbing as much as we can and it has to stop!!

That’s my social commentary for today.

Steingraber goes on to point out, as we are all too aware; the billions of gallons of water, millions of tonnes of sand (with its inherent problems) and tonnes of toxic chemical cocktails (with their inherent problems), the millions of diesel truck miles driven on under-maintained country roads spewing their own waste, the billions of gallons of brine and waste water, the thousands of miles of pipelines, (and I add here) the leaks in the pipes, the vented and flared gas, the contamination of surface and ground waters, the generators, compressors and mixers and pumps, the noise and light pollution, the dust, the tonnes of radioactive drill cuttings and the social upheaval in her neck of the woods in New York State – saying nothing of the infinitely worse social catastrophe which would befall the far more backward and vulnerable Karoo social fabric.

Just a mention about the controversial topic of fugitive or lost gas in the mining and shipping of natural gas. There are articles going back and forth between Howarth from Cornell and Cathles also from Cornell about the exact percentage of fugitive gas...be it 0.9% or 8 point something. It doesn't really matter what the exact percentage is and I don't think that anyone here would disagree that we accept 2%. It will in all probability turn out to be far higher. Now if in 2007 the planet produced something like 3.198 Trillion Cubic metres of natural gas if just 2% was lost...normal retail shrinkage in most industries, then 2 % would be the entire gas consumption of Holland, Brazil, the UAE, Argentina, France, Spain, or India. Like one huge smoke stack pumping pure methane right up into the sky...and we accept this as being OK?

We have all read about these issues in the popular press and scientific papers. They are real issues which must be addressed and not mitigated. Here I might like to digress to quote from the preamble to the American Constitution; just substitute South Africa:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We can each interpret this in our own way. I shall leave that to you, but I would like to place the emphasis on the General Welfare part.

Steingraber elaborates that if we see fracking as inevitable and unstoppable then we must look for all sorts of areas in which there can be mitigation – complete disclosure of IUPAC and CAS descriptions of chemicals used, reports of all health problems around the industry, independent analysis of ground and surface water before and after drilling, and close inspection of the operation by independent 3rd parties, as well as overseeing by rigid central government and local ordinance. If, on the other hand, we “see fracking as a human rights violation, then you are morally obligated as a scientist”, and I add, as a citizen – to “speak out forcefully against it and to turn a scientific enquiry into a force for public health protection.” I shall add that it is the right and indeed obligation of every citizen living in a democracy to object, to resist and if one feels morally and spiritually compelled, to disobey any law in contravention of one's honest moral belief. Cassius Clay / Muhammed Ali was a man who did exactly this in a former age. Nelson Mandela would still be lingering in jail had the citizens of SA not willingly disobeyed bad and unjust laws. The same should apply to those who are forced to sign non-disclosure agreements. They are bad agreements, they affect the lives of countless other people, and therefore should be disobeyed in the interest of society. It is the right thing to do!

To revert to the Bamberger paper on the “Impact of Gas Drilling on Human and Animal Health” she writes that, “Communities living near hydrocarbon gas drilling operations became de facto laboratories for the study of environmental toxicology in an uncontrolled health experiment on an enormous scale”.

I must make reference to the title of Steingraber's discussion paper about

"Taking the Handle off the Fracking Pump"

as it is somewhat prophetic in the present context. In brief there was a cholera outbreak in London in the mid-1800's. No-one knew the cause of the epidemic but a certain Dr John Snow did some empirical and statistical studies of the outbreak and he claimed that the disease appeared to be related to a certain well which was being used for drinking water in the area. He took the handle off the pump and the epidemic subsided. The science of the day could not prove Snow's case, that there were certain water-borne pathogens in the well water – which as it turned out came from an old disused sewer drain nearby.

The same story can be told in different ages and different circumstances. As Steingraber says the characters have changed – cholera, lead paint and pipes, tobacco, asbestos and others, but the principles remain the same, that science, thorough and real science is very slow and often particularly tedious. But in the end they get it spot on.

As she concludes "Fracking is a vast human experiment whose study subjects did not volunteer." Very much the same conclusion as Bamberger.

The last point I would like to bring up revolves around matters not particularly pertaining to activities happening around shale gas exploration, drilling, fracking and pumping operations. This is a far more important issue and it relates to global warming – or climatic change – which is a fact of life whether you accept it or not.

If you accept climate change you are probably in the 95% majority who live on a spherical planet and not a flat earth!

We are at a very important juncture in our civilization. In the past revolutionary changes to our lives as human beings took hundreds of years or decades. How long did it take for our primitive stone age ancestors to develop first a triangular wheel, then a square one and finally a round one? But as civilization and technology developed on an ever shortening time frame our advancement as a smart species also quickened.

Even the demise of horse power to the motor car came about in a relatively short period of time. Horses were just about the only means of land transportation since the time of the Pharaohs, yet Henry Ford was able to put the horse traders out of business from after WWI to well before WWII. The horse traders tried to develop better horses and better buggy's, they even had the equivalent of Avis Rent-a-Horse, but they were up against a better technology headed by a man of the future. A visionary; a man for the New Age.

We need such a man today – a Thomas Edison, an Alexander Graham Bell, a Henry Ford, a Bill Gates, or a Steve Jobs. Is it coincidental that all are Americans?

Sadly we do not have any such a human being yet who can lead us into a new age of energy consumption – away from fossil fuel carbon to one based completely on green, solar and hydrogen; a future age which will permit our species to survive and indeed flourish.

We have oil and gas companies which will fight tooth and claw in a bloody battle before they relinquish control over our use of energy. Like the Feudal Landlords of old. They have seemingly unlimited resources at their disposal. They are determined to keep us in the saddle or on their buggy and to prevent us ironically from hopping into one of Mr. Ford's horseless carriages.

We here present are too old perhaps to reap the punishment for the systemic and continued misuse of energy on planet earth. We needed horse power and it served us well, but we moved onto a new plateau which enabled mankind to do things he never thought were possible.

We have to come to the realization that once again we are going to have to look to the future and make another quantum leap.

It is important that we place matters of our energy requirements and usage into real terms. It is fine to advocate the movement away from coal and gas to renewables but it may not be possible within the lives of most of us present here.

No-one can seriously advocate zero carbon in the near future, but we can categorically state that to look to shale gas as a bridging fuel is certainly the wrong road to take.

The Climatologist Ken Caldeira and techno guru Nathan Myhrvold have very recently proposed that the only hope to prevent catastrophic temperature elevations this century is by the aggressive deployment of zero carbon technologies, something which we are not doing to any serious extent. We are at what they call the tipping point within the next 20 or so years, a point, which if not corrected, would see irreversible climate change and damage to our environments and extinction on a scale not seen before. But they insist that we start the fundamental processes NOW as the benefits will take up to 100 years to be realized. Time is not on our side.

As they point out the bottom line is: "If you want to have a serious chance at averting catastrophic global warming, then we need to start phasing out all fossil fuels from a climatic perspective. Carbon-free power is the bridge fuel until we can figure out how to go carbon-negative on a large scale by the end of the century."

....I will conclude by reading the Conclusion from the Caldeira/Myhrvold article in Environmental Research Letters, 16 February 2012.

N P MYHRVOLD AND K CALDEIRA

GREENHOUSE GASES, CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE TRANSITION FROM COAL TO LOW-CARBON ELECTRICITY

It has been estimated, however, that 10-30 TW of carbon-neutral thermal energy must be provi-

sioned by mid-century to meet global demand on a trajectory that stabilizes the climate with continued economic growth.

It appears that there is no quick fix; energy systems are intrinsically slow. During a transition, energy is used both to create new infrastructure and to satisfy other energy demands, resulting in additional emissions. These emissions have a long legacy due to the long lifetime of CO² in the atmosphere and the thermal inertia of the oceans.

Despite the lengthy time lags involved, delaying rollouts of low-carbon-emission energy technologies risks even greater environmental harm in the 2nd half of this century and beyond.

This underscores the urgency in developing realistic plans for the rapid deployment of the lowest-GHG-emission electricity generation technologies. Technologies that offer only modest reductions in emissions such as natural gas and – if the highest estimates from life-cycle analyses are correct – carbon capture storage cannot yield substantial temperature reductions this century. Achieving substantial reductions in temperatures relative to the coal-based system will take the better part of a century and will depend on rapid and massive deployment of some mix of conservation, wind, solar and nuclear and possibly carbon capture and storage.

For comments, suggestions and criticism, please do not hesitate to contact us via e-mail at any time.

If you wish to submit material we shall look forward to receiving your writings or photographs.

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Yours Sincerely,

The New Richmond Reader

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