

## INTRODUCTION

If you are looking at this book, you are probably someone deeply interested in environmental issues. You may be surrounded by other people – friends, family, neighbours and acquaintances – who are also quite ‘green’ in their ideas and habits. Or you may not be. If you are not, you are probably keenly aware of it and wish you had more like-minded people around you.

There was a time, not so long ago, when being ‘green’ could be hazardous, especially in certain settings. Even in the early 1990s when I was living in rural Australia I remember feeling decidedly nervous the day I parked my Volvo with its rainbow-coloured Greenpeace bumper sticker immediately downhill of a truck with a bumper sticker that read: “Save the earth. Doze in a greenie.” And right now, here in my English village, there are locals campaigning vigorously to prevent the erection of wind turbines. But with climate change looming large and an ever-growing awareness of the environmental destruction that our species has wrought, most people these days make at least a token effort to be green. Even the anti-turbine folks almost certainly use their kerbside recycling bins.

In 1999, sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson published their book: *The Cultural Creatives. How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (NY, Three Rivers Press, 2000). Based on extensive research, it was an attempt to reveal just how many people in the Western world really do care about important issues such as environmental destruction and social justice (and that was before we even realized the full extent of climate change). Their results were surprising—and somewhat heartening. You are likely to be a Cultural Creative, they explained, if you...

1. love Nature and are deeply concerned about its destruction
2. are strongly aware of the problems of the whole planet (climate change, destruction of rainforests, overpopulation, lack of ecological sustainability, exploitation of people in poorer countries) and want to see more action on them, such as limiting economic growth
3. would pay more taxes or pay more for consumer goods if you could know the money would go to clean up the environment and to stop global warming
4. place a great deal of importance on developing and maintaining your relationships
5. place a lot of value on helping other people and bringing out their unique gifts
6. do volunteering for one or more good causes
7. care intensely about both psychological and spiritual development
8. see spirituality or religion as important in your life, but are concerned about the role of the Religious Right in politics
9. want more equality for women at work, and more women leaders in business and politics
10. are concerned about violence and abuse of women and children around the world
11. want our politics and government spending to put more emphasis on children’s education and well-being, on rebuilding our neighbourhoods and communities, and on creating an ecologically sustainable future
12. are unhappy with both the Left and the Right in politics, and want a to find a new way that is not in the mushy middle
13. tend to be somewhat optimistic about our future, and distrust the cynical and pessimistic view that is given by the media
14. want to be involved in creating a new and better way of life in your country
15. are concerned about what the big corporations are doing in the name of making more profits: downsizing, creating environmental problems, and exploiting poorer countries
16. have your finances and spending under control, and are not concerned about overspending
17. dislike all the emphasis in modern culture on success and ‘making it,’ on getting and spending, on wealth and luxury goods
18. like people and places that are exotic and foreign, and like experiencing and learning about other ways of life

If you thought about these questions in relation to yourself and answered “yes” to ten or more of them, you are likely to be one of this huge, hidden band of people who are trying to create a peaceful, sustainable world instead of the tumultuous, dangerous, inequitable, unstable and unsustainable one we currently have.

Ray and Anderson estimated that by the year 2000, Cultural Creatives already numbered around fifty million in North America – which is about a quarter of the adult population – and eighty to ninety million in the European Union. That’s a huge, invisible, world-wide swell. Later surveys have shown that the numbers continue to rise. So how can it be that there is a group this big and yet nobody seems to have recognised it till now? Well partly because the mainstream media are slaves to the consumer culture and the corporations that profit from it, and it is from the media that we tend to form our impressions of the societies we live in. But partly because this movement – if one can call it that – has not yet fully recognised itself.

What emerged from this study was a realisation that the people we now recognise as Cultural Creatives did not just pop up like mushrooms overnight. They have actually been here all along. It is simply that they have each been busily focusing on the issue which matters to them the most, be it nutrition, health care, spiritual growth, alternative education, the peace movement, the environment, feminism, animal rights, social justice... or whatever.

Economist, environmentalist and social activist Paul Hawken spent over a decade researching organizations dedicated to restoring the environment and fostering social justice. He discovered that from billion-dollar nonprofits to single-person dot.causes, these groups collectively comprise the largest movement on Earth, a movement that has no name, leader, or location, and that has gone largely ignored by politicians and the media. Like Nature itself, it is organizing from the bottom up, in every city, town, and culture and is emerging to be an extraordinary and creative expression of people’s needs worldwide. Hawken’s research led to the publication of his book *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming* (Viking Press 2007).

What we are seeing now, therefore, is a picture of the convergence of many movements, coming together in the same way that streams converge to create rivers.

This coalescence, of course, was inevitable. It is finally dawning on us, in this twenty-first century, that there can be no good health without better education, nor vice versa. It has become obvious that globalisation, multinationals, the rise of supermarkets, junk food, obesity, the widening poverty gap, climate change, degraded topsoil, acidified oceans, animals going extinct, and farmers committing suicide, are all faces of the same monster. We are realising that patriarchal, ‘dominator’ values harm both women and the Earth, that love of money really is the root of all evil and that peace, social justice and environmental issues are so intertwined that they cannot be disentangled. Above all, we are seeing clearly that a total change in consciousness is imperative. All issues are really one issue. The truth facing us is that human beings must either find new ways to live together sustainably and in harmony on this planet, within the limits of its ability to support us and with deep respect for its natural systems, or we shall all perish – and take most other life forms with us. So those single-issue streams are now becoming a wide, deep river. Either we must all work together to find solutions, to create a new paradigm, a new culture, a new way out of the morass, or the game is up. The planet will survive, even though it may well end up as dry and barren as Mars, but we certainly shan’t and neither will most of the other organisms that make up our living world.

Defining ourselves as Cultural Creatives does not mean that we swap all our lapel pins and membership cards for one big, new one. It means that we keep on doing exactly what we are doing, each in his or her own way, to try and make the world a better place. Just as it took many different craftspeople, many talents, many activities to build one of those magnificent, Gothic cathedrals, we each play a unique part in the creation of a new whole.

However, beyond whatever else we do in an organised, social way, the most important thing we can do to further this great work is to translate our beliefs into action in the way we live our everyday lives.

Ray and Anderson wrote:

*Cultural Creatives are redefining what success means, away from success at work and making a lot of money, toward a more soulful life focused on personal fulfilment, social conscience, creating a better future for everyone on the planet.*

So the big question we must ask ourselves is: do these ideas, beliefs and values that we claim to hold actually translate into concrete, individual action? Statistics based on attitude surveys and those based on actual consumer behaviour sometimes tell two different stories. It is imperative that we ‘walk our talk.’

That inspirational essayist, Wendell Berry, says that the environmental crisis is not really an environmental crisis at all. It is a people crisis. For it is we, the people, in our day-to-day decisions, who either help to preserve the natural world around us or help to destroy it. When you buy a ‘conventional’ supermarket banana rather than an organic and Fair Trade one because it seems cheaper, it isn’t really. The true cost is the health of an exploited plantation worker you will never meet. Every plastic bag, every litre of petrol, every unnecessary purchase made by every individual has a hidden cost. Those billions of small, everyday decisions are costing the Earth.

So apart from all the other important work we are doing, one of the two most significant contributions we can possibly make is to shift towards a simpler way of life, based on quality, on being, rather than having, getting and spending. It is better for our health, better for our sanity, better for our fellow creatures – human and otherwise – and better for the planet.

Are we doing that? It seems we are starting to. Despite the relentless urging of consumerism, ‘downshifting,’ as it is called, has been one of the most noticeable social trends of the past decade in the USA and elsewhere, and shows no sign of slowing.

So if you have identified yourself as a Cultural Creative, look around, reach out, keep your heart open, watch for signs. Millions of people share your beliefs, values, hopes and dreams. Together we are creating a new way of life for people on this planet. I call it living green.

But that is not all. Beyond simply living green there is yet another step to take. The other most significant work we do is the work we do on ourselves, on our attitudes, on the way we define who we are. For there is an even more radical way to live. And that is to understand, with your entire mind and body and soul, that you are not simply ‘on’ the planet, you are an intrinsic part of the planet. You already feel a sense of responsibility for the planet’s wellbeing because you really get it that your personal wellbeing and that of the planet are one and the same thing. As above, so below. What is good for the Earth is also good for us. But when you can truly know and feel yourself not as something separate from the Earth, but as a cell in the body of a great living organism we call Gaia, you touch into a deeper level of awareness. And not only to know and understand that but to live your entire life out of that humble knowing, that is deep green living, and that is what this book is about.



~ Marian Van Eyk McCain