

Faith's Story

February 2016 for Plan Curtail

WHERE I BEGAN



Putting up deer fence at our Vale garden

I grew up in an intentional community of 12 homes called The Vale, founded by my parents, Griscom and Jane and other Friends (Quakers), two miles south of Yellow Springs Ohio. The Vale is a 45-acre parcel of mostly wooded land tucked in between a farmer's fields and Glen Helen, a 1000-acre nature preserve. My family lived frugally, growing a large garden each summer and putting up food for the winter. Homes were small and many are energy efficient. My mother's home, where I now live, was designed with this in mind. A few years ago 80 homes were audited in YS and ours was one of the top three in low energy use.

When I was three and a half my mother contracted polio. She could no longer trek down to the "bottom" land where our garden was. My brother John and I took up the tasks of planting, maintaining, and harvesting. My upbringing at The Vale led me to have strong pacifist views, a love and appreciation of shared work in "community," a passion for gardening, and a deep belief in honoring the spirit in all living things. Before moving to northern California with my second husband, Pat Murphy, I worked as a potter, house painter and remodeler.

PEAK OIL

I was living in California with Pat when the 2001 "9-11" attack on the World Trade Center occurred. As with most Americans, this was a traumatic experience for us. Pat began research into the Middle East. This led him to write a 45-page paper we called, "Burning Times," which was a history of the colonial period in that part of the world. We were shocked at the struggles countries had gone through to break free of colonial power, some of them quite recent.

Several months later, in December 2001, two other things happened that affected me deeply. One was a meeting I attended with author and activist, Miriam Simos, know more popularly as Starhawk in Santa Rosa California. We had gathered to hear speakers and discuss our reactions to 9-11. The phrase I came away with was, "community is the solution to what we are facing." The second was a talk by Richard Heinberg that Pat and I attended, also in Santa Rosa. Richard explained "peak oil" and all its ramifications, describing a future without cheap fossil fuels. This led us to attend the second Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas (ASPO) in Paris in 2002, where we met many committed people including Colin Campbell, Matt Simmons, and Julian Darley, founder of Post Carbon Institute. At that meeting we decided to put on an annual conference on peak oil in the U.S. with the help of Richard and Julian. We eventually held five Community Solutions conferences.



Richard Heinberg and his wife Janet, ASPO 2006

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

In 2001-02 the board of Community Service, Inc. (CSI), an organization founded by my grandfather Arthur Morgan, had become somewhat dormant. Pat, Don Hollister, Trustee Richard Zopf and I worked together to develop a new direction for the organization. The outcome was a proposal from us to the board for a new program called “Community Solutions.” This brought together this major issue of our day with the basic tenants Arthur Morgan developed in founding of CSI, the importance of the small local community. We moved from California to Yellow Springs when Pat became Executive Director. I had been on the CSI board for two years.

Pat and I had been working as a team for many years in our software company, Computer Integrated Building, developing and selling a design/build CAD system called SolidBuilder, so I was used to working closely with him. Although I was not officially working for CSI, I helped put on conferences, was the main editor of his book *Plan C*, and did fundraising and administration for the organization. Working with Pat in this new venture changed the direction of our lives drastically – in a good way.

CUBA

Pat and I went to Cuba in July of 2003 after reading an article in *National Geographic* about the Cuban lifestyle. I was captivated by their move to organic and local agriculture as a way to combat loss of fossil fuel inputs. We returned to Cuba in October of the same year to study their agriculture. We traveled from Havana to the eastern tip of the island, 1,700 miles. We took Richard Heinberg’s book, *The Party’s Over* with us, giving out copies and explaining peak oil. At one point an executive in Cuba said to another in Spanish, “These people say America will have a Special Period, [a major drop in oil].” We came back with a commitment to capture what we had seen on film, and the CSI board agreed.



Southern Cuba, 2003



My first video camera filming *The Power of Community* in Cuba, 2004

In October 2004 we went back to film in Cuba with a team that included my brother John (still photographer), Greg Green (videographer for *The End of Suburbia*), and Megan Bachman (CSI Outreach Director). Eric Johnson of Yellow Springs became our editor and Vale member Roy Eastman made sure we didn’t lose the sense of community in the film.

Thus began a new creative outlet for me as a filmmaker. (While in California I had become both a painter and sculptor). The documentary, *The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil* (2006) spelled out the hard facts about peak oil. But it also provided a sense of hope and inspiration because it told the story of Cuba going through and surmounting incredible problems in dealing with a forced reduction of energy.

PASSIVE HOUSE

I don't think I could have made the documentary on Cuba if I hadn't had such a strong background in agriculture and gardening. After *The Power of Community* was released we became aware that the major issue we are facing is not peak oil but climate change. Through Pat's research we learned that buildings were the biggest emitters of CO₂, before food and transportation. Pat developed what we called Agraria, an idea for a low-emissions housing development. Homes were to be 50% more efficient than code and clustered leaving land free for gardening. Cars were to be parked on the periphery and people were to walk to their homes. Soon after that we found out about the Passive House method of building through a journalist and friend, Thomas Quinn. This changed our thinking about building efficiency. We increased our efficiency requirement for the Agraria project, but were unable to get zoning approval for the land we selected.

Passive House is different from "passive solar." It is a method that reduces heating and cooling energy use by 80% by such techniques as super-insulation and air sealing. In California I had been a building inspector in the San Francisco Bay Area, so was familiar with construction. Pat had been a custom homebuilder for ten years. This background helped me understand the concepts behind passive house building. We decided to create a second documentary, *Passive House Revolution* (2013) to explain this concept. The film described both new construction and retrofitting to a very high-efficiency level.



Passive House in Cleveland, Ohio

People are surprised to learn how much energy buildings use, but are not sure what to do. Buildings cost a lot to build or retrofit and construction professionals usually do the work. Unfortunately, most building professionals are not familiar with this kind of construction and most of the super-high efficiency components come from Europe. The film gives both lay people and professionals a first time overview of this method.

LEAVING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

In the fall of 2010 I took on the job of Executive Director to Community Solutions and Pat became Research Director. (CSI had been renamed Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions). We continued in these roles until mid 2014, when we hired a new Executive Director so we could retire. We aided in the transition for a year, helping put on our final Community Solutions conference – dedicated to honoring individuals who are taking action to curtail in their lives. In mid 2015 we left Community Solutions. We decided not to retire and to focus our efforts on helping people understand their role in the climate issue. We founded Plan Curtail and obtained nonprofit status in early 2016.

PLAN CURTAIL WEBSITE

This website is a first step towards our idea of creating what Pat has called a "Curtailer's Emissions Guide." Our goal is to provide the necessary information for people to create a budget

for emissions reductions in their everyday lives, information that can guide them in personal emissions responsibility.

EARTH ISLAND – OUR NEW DOCUMENTARY

We have long viewed Cuba as a model for a new low-energy way of living, a model where people and the environment are both taken into consideration in planning and implementing future strategies. Our new film *Earth Island*, will use Cuba to show how this can be done using renewable energy, energy efficiency, and aid where needed.



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WHERE I AM TODAY

This energy/climate work came into my life unexpectedly. It's been rewarding and at times exciting and intense. Pat and I have enhanced each other's work, enjoying this joint effort that has affected our personal life so strongly. We hope to make one more big effort to help reverse the cultural direction of consumerism. We are in a time in history when there is great need for a new paradigm of cooperation, mutual aid, and equity. It is my wish that with Pat's research and writing and my film making, people will be inspired and feel empowered to take personal responsibility and action to heal and sustain the climate.



Garden produce, our back yard garden

One place I take responsibility is gardening. Eating out of the garden is important to me, plus putting it up for winter use: canning (applesauce, tomatoes, meat, green beans, jams, condiments, and broth), freezing (green beans, peas, corn and fruit), and root cellar (white and sweet potatoes, butternut squash, onions, garlic), fermented goods (pickles and mixed vegetable sauerkraut), and refrigeration of apples from my brother's and our orchards.



Our 2015 sweet potato harvest at The Vale