

**The Revolutionary Road(s) of Bob Thomson**

Revolutionary Roads: How a born-again Christian Thunder Bay high school student studied engineering, volunteered in Peru for 2 years, became a federal civil servant, then whistle blower, helping Chilean refugees and Canadian churches develop Canadian refugee policy, met Caribbean revolutionaries, wrote a thesis on agricultural self-reliance, consulted for international social change organizations, helped Third World fair trade coffee farmers fight transnational caffeine vendors, then in Paris challenged OECD Export Credit Agencies to respect their environmental and human rights criteria, joining the international degrowth movement as a slowcialist and then exposing Israeli secret service manipulation of the French judicial system to falsely accuse a Lebanese-Canadian university professor of bombing a Paris synagogue.

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*This is a work in progress. Comments from friends and family who have accompanied me on these 78+ voyages around the sun would be welcomed. [bthomson@web.ca](mailto:bthomson@web.ca)*

- *A digital version with access to the built-in links is available at <https://tinyurl.com/BT-revoroads>*

## **A short bio**

As a young UofT civil engineering graduate who grew up in Thunder Bay, I worked as a Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) volunteer on community projects in rural Peru. [1968-70] Returning to Canada I worked with the Ontario Ministry of Environment [1970-72], the Latin America Division of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) [1972-73] and then in CUSO's Projects Division and as Eastern Caribbean director in Barbados. [1974-1980] Following an MA in International Affairs at Carleton and a thesis on Grenadian agricultural self-reliance; 13 years as an international consultant; including 5 years as volunteer Chair of [Bridgehead](#), Oxfam Canada's fair trade company; I founded and managed Fairtrade Canada, the Canadian branch of the international fair trade certification label [1994-2000] and then facilitated the environmental network [Export Credit Agency Watch](#) from Paris for 3 years [2005-2008]. I'm now actively "retired" but still involved in many campaigns and issues in Ottawa. I was the recipient of the 1999 VanCity Ethics in Action Award, the [2013 Integrity Award of Canadian Journalists for Free Expression](#) and a special citation of gratitude from the President of Chile. As a father of two children I'm now a grandgather too.

## **A quick review of Bob's 78 voyages around the sun**

Early days: Born in Winnipeg in 1945 my dad was a street car driver after WW2. Our family moved to Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) in 1947. Dad always joked about being lucky enough at craps at the Trenton Air Force base to raise a down payment on a house. Dad joined Eatons as a hardware clerk and worked his way up over the decades to department manager then as store manager in Moose Jaw and Winnipeg. Our family grew with my brother David in 1947, Maureen in 1950 and Nancy in 1957.

Scottish (Dad) and Northern Irish (Mom) family backgrounds were predominant in our family, our relatives, our surroundings and at our schools. Dad's active involvement in the YMCA meant not only swimming lessons at their pool but also active access to their campground at Lake Shebandowan, where we eventually built a family cottage. Tent camping also played a big role in our family life, with vacation drives to western Canada, northern USA and eastern Ontario. I spent a lot of time fishing in McVickers Creek and we filleted a lot of pickerel from the lake to eat over the winter. Hunting partridge and rabbits was part of our life too, with air and 22 calibre rifles and bows and arrows part of our learned skills. I took piano lessons in grade 8 and learned the clarinet in grade 9, but never really became a musician.

Farm life was also an element, as my Dad's sister and also an old school friend of my mother lived on farms. At age 12 I spent a summer at Oak Lake Manitoba on my mom's

friend's farm, learning to milk cows, trap and/or shoot gophers, build hay cylinders and shear sheep. One day we ran over a skunk family with the swather and I captured a skunk kit that became a pet. (My "uncle" told me if I held it up by the scruff of the neck it couldn't "squirt" me. Not true! My clothes from that first encounter are still buried on that farm.) I was able to pay the vet to remove its scent glands with my "earnings" of 5¢ per gopher tail bounty.

In 1957 at age 12 as a paper boy I saw my first black person at the Port Arthur train station when he handed me the Toronto newspapers I was to deliver. We didn't have television and lived in essentially white surroundings. I naively asked him "what happened to you?" Having just passed 1500 km of bush to a forsaken northern town, he undoubtedly recognized this as ignorance vs racism and kindly replied that he came from a part of the world where the sun was hotter than here and everyone got burnt. I got my first outline of world race and demography at home that night.

I never played hockey, baseball or football, but discovered in Grade 9 that I had promise as a longer distance runner, finishing second in my first high school marathon. In 1960 at age 15 I became an honorary Finn in Thunder Bay. I won a cross country ski race on a -50 C winter day at a Finnish club north of Thunder Bay.

I was virtually the only non-Finnish Canadian cross country racer there at that time, sometimes even needing a translator for coaching. They declared me an honorary Finn for the day and invited me into the sauna. All the boys were running out, nude, and jumping into a hole in the ice on the lake beside the sauna. Expecting me to join them now as an honorary Finn, I hesitated because of the cold and because there were girls from my school out there. They picked me up and threw me into the lake and I tore back into the sauna very quickly. The next day at school, a gorgeous blonde Finnish Canadian senior, the heart throb of all the older boys, congratulated me on my win, and in putting our school on the local cross country "map". "I know you were embarrassed" she said, "but nudity in the sauna is a Finnish thing and you didn't need to be." She added "And anyway you had just been thrown into freezing cold water and you were so small there was nothing to see."

Television and the internet have certainly changed that in Port Arthur and many other places around the globe. As a niece once mentioned at a family gathering, I left the "bubble" of northwestern Ontario. Exposed to a very different world. I have now, some 6 decades later, become tri-lingual, lived in Peru the Caribbean and Paris and have travelled widely, in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Russia, Africa, the Philippines.

**Much of what follows is based on an [interview](#) I gave to [Marion White](#) on CUSO's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July 2011**

Bob, tell us how you first got involved with CUSO.

Well I don't know how far back you want to go.

When I was in first year at Lakehead University in 1964 I was a born-again Christian at St. Paul's United Church in Thunder Bay (Port Arthur) where my father worked for the department store Eatons. I saw a Moral Re-armament movie about Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, the gist of which was, we have to help people in Latin America out of their poverty or they'd become communists.

At that point Lakehead University only offered first year of engineering, so I went on to the University of Toronto, where I heard about CUSO. My Chinese-Canadian roommate in second-year kind of talked the born-again Christianity out of me, although I have maintained many Christian contacts and friendships, mostly with liberation theology advocates. I also have many Jewish, Muslim and non religionist friends and colleagues. While in university I had summer jobs in Provincial parks, lumber camps, and on wilderness geological (Quetico) and hydrological (Albany River) surveys. I joined CUSO right after graduating from UofT and it was largely a paternalistic kind of thing. I was out of the born-again Christian phase of my life, but I wanted to help people out of their poverty, and so ended up in Peru in September 1968.

The day I went to sign my contract with the Peruvian Ministry of Public Works in Lima was the day of the military coup of October 3rd 1968. The military took over and pronounced a revolution that was pro workers and peasants.

I ended up a relatively naive, wanting to do good, civil engineer, working for a Peruvian government Ministry that was doing rural community projects such as agricultural access roads, micro irrigation systems and schoolhouses. The communities would decide what projects they wanted, they would provide the labour, and we provided the technical assistance and some of the materials. The Peruvian military turned over Cooperacion Popular, this division of the Ministry of Public Works, to the Peruvian left, as part of their effort to organize the peasants against the backward feudal landlords.

Their plan was to [modernize feudal agriculture](#) in Peru. Rural Peru was a feudal society at that point. The lady who rented me a room in Pomabamba in 1968, a lawyer, owned, yes owned, 150 peasant families. They worked 3 days a week on her land to produce crops for her and 4 days a week on her land for their own subsistence - a classical medieval feudal society.

In Cooperacion Popular I found myself working with Maoists, Stalinists, Trotskyites, Social Democrats and Orthodox communists. One guy in my office had helped Hugo Blanco organize land invasions in Cusco in 1965. That was my introduction to politics – an education in inequality, the roots of poverty and a view of a world at 3000 metres altitude in Spanish and

Quechua - very different from my life in Thunder Bay. One of the first books I read in Spanish was Che's 1967 Diary.

After 10 months in Peru, I returned to Canada in June 1969 to marry my UofT sweetheart Cynthia King and returned to Peru with her after our honeymoon at Shebandowan. The wedding was arranged over a US Benedictine monastery's ham radio in the provincial capital of Huaraz and I managed to get a cheap flight to Canada on a cargo plane carrying tropical fish and monkeys from the Peruvian amazon to Miami and back three weeks later.

After we had lived in Pomabamba and then Huaraz for about a year-and-a-half, I was laying out an irrigation canal in Quiches, a village high above the banks of the Amazon tributary Marañon River, about a day and a half on horseback from the nearest road. We kept running across a series of stone lined micro irrigation canals. At that point I spoke enough Quechua and local officials enough Spanish for me to ask what this network was. I discovered that we were about to chop through an 1100 year-old pre-Inca micro irrigation system that was supporting about 300 families. We were going to destroy the lives of many of those families but "modernize" all those downstream of the canal.

I went back to my bosses in the provincial capital of Huaraz and said, we can't do this. They said, but we are going to do it. So I said, well not with me you're not, and I resigned. That was one of a number of things that were going on in my job at the time. I had just had my salary raised to the level of a junior Peruvian engineer from that of a volunteer, a CUSO policy. After 3 months working at a Peruvian engineer's salary I was told that couldn't be. That I had to be to be paid the same as a US Peace Corps volunteer, and the extra money I had been paid was taken back from me. That and the immorality of the irrigation canal decision quite annoyed me, so with CUSO's support I quit.

The 1968 Peruvian military "revolution" promoted "modernization" of Peru's medieval feudal agriculture system. Billed as a pro worker and peasant revolution, the military coup of October 3 1968 was indeed a class revolution, but unbeknownst to my sociologically challenged, politically naive and paternalistic Western techie mindset, was actually a pro bourgeois revolution – something I only discovered years later as I proceeded down the long road of "development" education that I have followed. Their plan was to modernize agriculture and create a flood of unemployed displaced peasants to become a pool of cheap labour in Peru's new urban manufacturing economy. I used to joke that my agricultural access roads brought in beer and took out people. It was years before I discovered just what a bad, indeed tragic, "joke" this was.

We came back to Canada in June 1970 just after the [May 30th 7.8 scale earthquake](#) which killed 50,000 people in the Rio Santa valley where we lived, including two US Peace Corps

friends. We were in Lima at the time, preparing to travel around South America for a month. Because I had lived in the region, through the CUSO FSO's local connections I spent a day helping the Peruvian Air Force analyze aerial photos of earthquake damage. I was one of the first to see the photo of the Yungay landslide, in which 50 million cubic metres of ice fell from Huascarán and wiped out a city of 20,000 with a multi-storied wall of mud that carried bodies 200 km to the Pacific! My legs buckled and I almost fainted.

**The Latin America Working Group (LAWG):** In the wake of the May 30 1970 7.9 earthquake in Peru I met a Quebecois journalist in the Canadian Embassy in Lima. He said: "If you're looking for a way to further your Latin American experiences with CUSO that you say have opened your eyes to a more progressive world, when you return to Canada, get in touch with this guy named John Foster with the Latin America Working Group in Toronto." I did, and John and LAWG indeed were seminal influences, opening my eyes from my original semi-paternalistic engineer's desire to help the poor, onto a radical road, through Chilean cables, ICFID evaluations, Oxfam, Bridgehead, church fair trade networks and innumerable conversations and actions around Canada's role in the world, over many of my subsequent voyages around the sun.

After a month of exploring South America by bus and train we ended up in Toronto. I worked for the provincial Ontario Water Resources Commission for two years on municipal water and sewage projects. We helped municipalities with pollution and drinking water problems to build projects with Provincial funding. During this period I made friends with the [Latin America Working Group](#) and Cynthia got her B.Ed. at OISE and taught for a year in North York.

We moved to Ottawa in April 1972 for my new job with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as a project officer in the Latin American Division.

On my first day on the job at CIDA, the VP for Administration, filling out my security clearance form, asked one of its many questions: "Have you ever visited a communist country?". Yes I replied. Which one? Cuba. When was that? Yesterday I replied, having just returned from a one week tourist vacation between jobs with Cynthia on one of the first Canadian charter flights to Cuba in March 1972.

The CIDA job was in a French language division of the federal public service and I attended French courses several times in 1972. In October 1972 I made a CIDA trip to Cuba to explore areas of potential CIDA work and to visit the [University of Havana CUJAE CUSO project](#), which involved month long visits by Canadian engineering professors giving sessional lectures on technical topics and issues.



On returning from the CIDA visit to Cuba in October 1972 flight cancellations forced me to return to Canada from Mexico via Chicago. In the brief stopover in Chicago, US Customs officials found 2 bottles of Cuban rum in my luggage and threatened to confiscate them. Having a green Official Canadian passport, I held the bottles over the concrete floor and said I'd drop them if they confirmed this. It seems that risking diplomatic relations with Canadian officialdom won out, as they told me to put them back in my suitcase and get the hell out of there.

In September 1973 I attended a 3 week international development seminar in Bordeaux France. While there, on September 11, the Chilean military launched their brutal coup against the Allende government. On return at the end of September I had access to confidential cables from the Canadian Ambassador in Santiago Chile in which he supported the brutal military coup and recommended Canada support them. I had been active in NDP foreign aid policy discussions and recommendations at that time. I leaked copies of some of those secret cables to a member of Parliament, who read them out in the House of Commons, creating quite a scandal on the part of Canadian churches, trade unions and human rights groups, who knew just how brutal the coup was and were working to save Chilean opponents of the military. I was eventually found out, and while I could have been fired, charged and jailed under the Official Secrets Act, I was only asked to sign a simple letter of resignation. That leak turned out to be a catalyst in a broader process in which dozens, if not hundreds, of Canadians demanded that the Trudeau government develop a Canadian refugee policy. They did, and Canada welcomed about 7,000 refugees from Chile and Latin America.

*[See my 2013 CJFE award acceptance speech at <https://tinyurl.com/Chile-CJFE> and the article by Doug Murray "That's the Guy" on page 24 below.]*

Right after that, in early 1974, I got a job as the Latin America and Caribbean project officer with CUSO's Projects Division, then became its Projects Director and also interim Director of Fundraising. Having partially "escaped" my original paternalistic motivations to help the poor, I embarked on a career in "development" which began in a government aid Ministry and moved to a non-profit Non Governmental Organization (NGO). I entered CUSO's world of "radical" support for alternative forms of "development", still embedded however within the dominant Western paradigm of modernization and income redistribution, but with local control over resources instead of transnational corporations.

One of my responsibilities with CUSO's Cuba Program from Ottawa in the 1970s was to find someone to personally carry Quebec Agricultural Ministry Holstein cow semen to Havana on the weekly Cubana flight from Montreal. This was part of a project to cross breed Cuban Zebu cattle with tropical disease resistance with Canadian Holsteins with high

milk production capacity. It had to be done quickly as the semen had a limited life once extracted from the Holsteins early in the morning. One day I convinced the Cuban Ambassador to Canada to carry the vials. An hour after the flight arrived in Havana I got a telegram asking simply "**What happened to the Ambassador's semen?**" It turned up at the airport after a frantic search & got to the Cuban farm on time. I framed the telegram & presented it to the Ambassador at an Embassy reception months later. Years later, I met the Ambassador's son, also a Cuban diplomat, and told him this story. He said "papa never told us about this", with a sly chuckle in his voice that made me think this was going to become a family story.

In another communications mixup, one day I signed a telegram from Ottawa to a community group in Colombia as "Bob". They replied "Estimado Bobo", which means clown in Spanish. From then on I became Roberto in Latin America.

In 1975 as Director of CUSO Projects, I was attending a meeting of the International University Exchange Fund ([IUEF](#)) in Geneva, an international NGO which CUSO's Projects and East Africa Programme supported in their award of fellowships to African students, largely South African refugees and members of various national liberation movements. ([FRELIMO, MPLA, PAC and others](#)) At this meeting I met [Craig Williamson](#), of IUEF, who unbeknownst to us at that time, turned out to be a [South African Intelligence spy](#) and possibly even involved in the 1986 assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme. He was also a collaborator of [Peter Worthington](#) of Canada's right wing [Citizens for foreign aid reform](#).

Our son Boyd was born in November 1975 in Ottawa and family added another dimension to our lives. (More on this to come.)

In July 1976 I became the field staff director of CUSO's Eastern Caribbean programme based in Barbados and responsible for programmes from Guyana to Antigua and also relating to the CUSO Jamaica/Belize office.

In my three years in the Caribbean, with other CUSO staff, we changed the CUSO program from mostly teachers in the high school systems of many islands, which were inherited from the UK O&A level exams system, toward an orientation to youth employment projects, popular education projects, support for banana farmers, gestetners for community and popular group newsletters, exposure of the Space Research Corporation use of Caribbean test guns to develop improved howitzer shells for apartheid South Africa, human rights groups, support for Grenada's New Jewel Popular Education Centre, etc. I had been introduced to Walter Rodney, Tim Hector, Maurice Bishop and many other Caribbean activists by my friend [Franklyn Harvey](#) who I had met through the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) in



Toronto. This was something of a departure from CUSO's largely volunteer programme which created a bit of a numbers game with respect to CIDA funding. This three year stint as an NGO representative in the Caribbean honed my "development" education further, with the help of local liberation theology friends, the New Jewel Movement of Grenada and the Working Peoples' Alliance of Guyana. Cynthia was involved in editing the bi-monthly Caribbean Basin Report of regional synthesis.

We worked with CADEC, the Caribbean Council of Churches development arm. Rickey Singh, Guyanese Editor of their Barbados based newspaper, Caribbean Contact, introduced me to Clive Thomas of Guyana's Working Peoples Alliance. Tim Hector, the principal of an Antigua school where a CUSO volunteer worked, was also the leader of the Antigua Caribbean Liberation Movement and introduced me to cricket and many other activists across the region. *See p.25 for an outline of the Space Research Corporation issue and Tim's call to me in 1977.* Ron Green of Dominica, was the cousin of Marlene Green in Toronto (*who took over my position when I moved back to Canada in 1979*). He introduced me to a number of groups in Dominica that we helped find support from other Canadian NGOs. We also worked with the Carib Reserve in Dominica and supported a Quebec indigenous leader as a short-term CUSO volunteer to identify possible projects on the Reserve.

The New Jewel Movement (NJM) took over the government of Grenada in March 1979. I had been introduced to Maurice Bishop by Franklyn Harvey in 1976 and I had hired George Lewison, an NJM member, as a CUSO host-national volunteer to be the project officer of the Grenada Council of Churches. He went on to become the NJM Minister of Agriculture. Jacqui Creft, the Youth Programme Coordinator of the Caribbean Council of Churches and a graduate of Carleton University, was another acquaintance who became the NJM Minister of Education.

Our daughter Pamela was born in Barbados in March 1979. (More on this to come.)

Come Mister Tallyman, tally me bananas... While I was the CUSO FSO in the Caribbean I supported a number of farmers' initiatives, one of which led to the formation of the Windward Island Banana Farmers' Union. Later, in 1987, the Latin America Bureau of London published the book "[Green Gold: Bananas and Dependency in the Windward Islands](#)", which I helped write. I was named the author (in Canada), possibly to protect the many other contributors, as there were concerns that the multinational Geest Industries might sue them/us for exposing their depredations against banana farmers. Under the switch to field packing in 1986 farmers took on more work with respect to packing as well as growing. The farmer now did the work that the Geest boxing plant workers used to do, but for less than half the money. (Dominica Farmers Union Newsletter January 1987). In addition, Geest receives about 19% of the retail price for its part in the ripening of bananas, almost double the farmers' 10%. Who takes the risks? Farmers, because of crop diseases, hurricanes, foreign exchange rate fluctuations for the EC\$, etc., etc.

After those 3 years in the Caribbean, I was the first Latin America and Caribbean Coordinator in a new CUSO structure from 1979 to 1980. On one trip to a regional meeting I was stressed out over conflicts with some staff hirings that I broke out in a case of acute psoriasis on the flight to Lima. In that period, Cynthia worked with the MATCH International Womens' Fund, Canada's first international organization to place the issue of women's rights and empowerment as central to successful and sustained development in the global South. This brought gender issues forward in my own work.

After moving back to Canada in 1979 we moved into the Carillon Housing Cooperative in southern Ottawa on the Rideau River, a 54 house community with a wide range of housing subsidy beneficiaries, students, single parents, NGO staff and social activists. Over 15 years we played roles on the Board, various committees and social events. I was involved in maintenance, finances and even as President for a while. It was a great place to raise our two children, with good schools, lots of playmates and access to all kinds of community activities for cooperative socializing.

In September 1980 I entered a Masters programme in International Affairs at Carleton University, somehow winning a CIDA bursary despite my history with them. My MA thesis on [agricultural self-reliance in Grenada](#) was guided by many of the people in the New Jewel Movement in Grenada who took over the government in 1979, and by Guyana's Clive Thomas whose book [Dependence & Transformation](#) formed the theoretical framework of my thesis. My thesis was meant to form the basis for the New Jewel's agricultural import substitution plan.

This Masters program in "development" introduced me to Marx's theory of surplus value and a more radical study of the complex flows of global resources, money and production. This was further consolidated and my awareness of these complexities raised when I wrote and successfully defended [my thesis on agricultural self-reliance in Grenada](#). I defended it two weeks before the US invasion of the island and the New Jewel revolution's collapse in a fit of Leninist ideological and personality conflicts which "justified" the US military intervention.

The next decade as a father and as a self-employed evaluator of "development" projects and programs under contracts with NGOs, churches, unions and even CIDA, kept me busy pointing out the ways local definition and control of "aid" enhanced its impact – still within, however, the dominant paradigm of "development" as modernization and industrialization.

The Sandinista revolution and the Zapatista insurrection, the struggles against apartheid and colonialism in Africa, unfair and inequitable unfair trade relations - all formed part of my growing awareness of my own map of revolutionary roads to “development”.

My awareness of the overlap between the “development” paradigm and entrenched political power was further enhanced when in 1984 I was denied a security clearance for a job in the international office of Agriculture Canada because of my supposedly “greater loyalty to left wing causes than to Her Majesty”. CSIS virtually fabricated a number of misleading or blatantly false accusations beyond the single Chilian cables “incident”, which would have been enough on its own to deny me the clearance. They accused me of being a chronic liar; of supplying classified information to Roberto Rivas of the Cuban Embassy in 1980 (it wasn’t classified information, it was basic openly published public Canadian government information); of forwarding classified information to Caribbean recipients (it was drafts of my thesis); of consulting Alberto Rabillota of Prensa Latina re Cuba’s response to the US 1984 invasion of Grenada prior to my multiple media commentaries on that issue; and introducing Don Rojas, an NJM Grenada press officer to Alberto Rabillota when I had merely dropped Rojas at the Ottawa bus station for his meeting with Rabillota and hadn’t participated in their meeting.

After six stop and go years in the courts, despite the support of the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC, the government overseers of the intelligence service), two court wins and many loyal friends, lawyers, and human rights advocates, I lost this struggle for the right to hold independent views in a government job. I did however, win at virtually every stage except, in the end, at the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court recommended that the SIRC legislation be changed to give them the authority to force my hiring but of course this never happened..

*Five decades later I have just been asked by the [Centre for Free Expression](#) at Toronto Metropolitan University to donate my whistle blowing records to a new Whistleblower Archive at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.*

It was years later when I was given the [CJFE Ethics Award in 2013](#) that I really discovered how much my role in tossing the fuel of the Ambassador's cables on the fires had further enraged Canadian churches, unions and human rights groups already fighting against the coup, and that this rage was but one of many catalysts in their efforts to bring thousands of Chilean refugees to a new life in Canada and to finally force the development of a national refugee policy. Hugs from a number of grateful refugees were my ultimate and immensely satisfying reward for my “small” challenge to the status-quo. Doug Murray’s story of my hug from a Steelworkers Union rep on page 29 below is one example of this.

The 20 years from 1984 to 2004 doing evaluations and studies of international cooperation and solidarity projects with churches, unions, NGOs, and, sometimes CIDA (!), broadened my experiences and views of the world. My first consulting contract in 1984 was with the Jesuit Centre in Toronto to investigate potential Canadian NGO support for the new Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. That was followed by reviews of the work of the Interchurch Committee for International Development and a number of other Interchurch Coalitions, the Anglican Church's development programmes in Kenya, NGO housing projects in Mexico, Honduras, Colombia and Chile, the news service Africa Information Afrique in Zimbabwe and South Africa, pharmaceuticals in Cuba, training Caribbean human rights organizations in the use of the internet via email and web pages and working for the then International Federation for Alternative Trade, now the [World Fair Trade Organization](#) (WFTO).

In 1986 I became a member of Oxfam Canada's program committee as a Caribbean resource person and was asked by them to join the board of directors of Bridgehead, their fair trade company. In 1987 I was the last person around the table to duck when the president of the board resigned and I became the Chair of the Board of Bridgehead. That lasted until 1992, when I was doing some paid consulting work as information co-ordinator for the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), and, since the Managing Director of Bridgehead was also the Treasurer of IFAT, I resigned from the Bridgehead Board to avoid potential for a conflict of interest.

*At a fair trade conference in Ireland in 1991, I met Mike Cooley, author of [Architect or Bee](#), in which he delivered an overview of the human learning curve, presented here on page 21. His description of how we sort masses of “data” with our subjective “filters” leads us to see patterns which become information, then knowledge, was a very important contribution to my education in the world of “development”.*

In 1993 I had my one of my first experiences with internet activism. At a fair trade conference in Manila I had my little 8x11 Tandy model 100 laptop with its 40 characters and 8 row screen and a 300 baud modem which I had learned to attach to a telephone handset, taking the mouthpiece off and attaching alligator clips from the modem cable. Working with AlterNet Communications of Ottawa I was part of an early NGO international internet network which also had a node in Manila. Reading through their news online, I ran across a story in which a German transnational corporation had hired Filipino lawyers to sue the NGO network for libel. The Filipino network had published a request from a group of sugar workers on a plantation using a German pesticide for help in researching potential health dangers from those chemicals. The network was looking for help in countering this legal threat. I sent them the email address of a US environmental lawyer associated with

Peace Net in California and the address of a German environmental group. The American lawyer wrote a letter outlining how a request for information was fair comment and could not be considered libel in US, German or Filipino law. The German group organized a small demonstration at the German corporation's headquarters, accusing them of bullying small farmers. Only a week later the Filipino lawyers withdrew their suite. Two short emails mobilized international legal services and political action across the world in only a few days.

Also in 1993 I was organizing a contract for the delivery of vitamin B chemicals to Cuba from Canada in response to a debilitating nutritional epidemic resulting from reduced food imports due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ongoing US embargo. We were able to supply 5 times the number of pills over Canadian purchased pills by doing an end run on the export of US chemicals to an advanced Cuban pharmaceutical manufacturing plant and facilitated the manufacture of many many more pills in Cuba instead.

In 1976 I had attended an election rally with CUSO staff in Havana and was impressed by loud public critiques from Cubans around us who thought the candidate for the Communist Party was taking unfair swipes at a non-Party community candidate. Freedom of expression was clearly evident, contrary to US propaganda about freedom in Cuba.

In February 2021 I met with Oden Marichal of the Cuban Ecumenical Council and the only non-Party member of the National Assembly. He talked extensively about debates in the Assembly and the question of consensus, with people voting for or against resolutions. He showed me an example of text & internal material from a roll call on a law for rental houses and was sure it was all OK to discuss this with foreigners. He is an Anglican/Episcopal minister. He works extensively with the Caribbean conference of churches in Jamaica and Barbados. Lois Wilson in Canada once took him to northern Saskatchewan in the dead of winter. Problems with the US Electoral College system and state governors gerrymandering US electrical Districts was an example of a lack of democracy that he gave me.

Cuba has serious problems, largely attributed to the US embargoes, but also to internal administrative and political issues. My 15 visits to Cuba over the past 50 years and these vignettes give me confidence that their impressive advances in education and health give them an advantage over the ignorance and deceptions so evident in the crisis and political chaos of the US today.

In 1994 the [European fair trade certification movement](#) was looking to get a toehold in North America and asked Bridgehead if there was anyone in Canada who could help with that. The Managing Director of Bridgehead suggested that I might be interested. We had a



meeting with Transfair International in Toronto and I ended up incorporating a Federal non-profit company which we called Fair Trademark Canada, a franchise of Transfair International. We got a lot of support from Canadian NGOs, churches and trade unions, and eventually from CIDA, and I became a member of the Transfair International board.

In 1995 Cynthia and I separated, and as one way of dealing with the pain of that experience, I threw myself into the management of Fairtrade Canada. With both parents active in feminist and international “development” careers, two teenagers, Pam in high school in Ottawa and Boyd in first year Engineering at Queens in Kingston, plus cooperative housing and NDP politics, I was experiencing many complex issues in my life.

I was the Managing Director of Fairtrade Canada for 6 years, and we parlayed it from hundreds of thousands of church network coffee sales to a full-scale national fair trade certification system approving millions of dollars a year of fair trade products.

I joined a local mens group in 1995 which became, and still is, a great source of support through many many discussions and reflections on life, gender relations, personal experiences and new friendships.

In 1997 I moved in with and then married Heather Stevens, a public service union activist that I met at an Ottawa-Cuba pot-luck supper. She had also been to the Supreme Court of Canada as a plaintiff in the decision to allow federal civil servants to participate in election campaigns. When we tell this story, she always adds, with a glint in her eye, that she won, whereas I sort of lost.

In 1997 Heather and I, with my daughter Pam and a family of my friends, (another Heather and Bob) visited Chiapas coffee farmers, Zapatista coops and Mayan ruins. In 1999 while attending a Specialty Coffee Association of the Americas (SCAA) conference in Oaxaca, I took a small group of American and Canadian coffee executives and roasters to visit Mexican coffee cooperatives and visited UCIRI, one of the central coffee coops in the founding of the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO). [Father Frans Vanderhoff](#), its founder, became another important friend.

One of my favourite fair trade stories comes out of Mexico. In January 1998 we invited a representative of the coffee farmers co-op UCIRI to tour Canada promoting the new fair trade coffee logo as part of the Interchurch Committee’s lenten campaign on ***10 days for Global Justice***. While in Ottawa he stayed with us, and one weekend we took him up to a friend's cottage on the Ottawa River west of Ottawa. In the morning, looking out on the snow covered river, he asked "what are those people doing out in that field?" Let's go out and see I said. As we stepped off the dock I asked Gutberto if this was the first time he, a



devout Catholic, had walked on water. I had to scrape away the snow to show him we were on ice on a frozen river not in a field.

Several years later we had occasion to visit him at UCIRI. Over his mantle was a picture of him with the ice fishermen. On arrival at his home his wife immediately took me to their kitchen to show me the special smokeless oven they had purchased with the premium from fair trade coffee. She explained how their children no longer lived in fear of lung problems from oven smoke. Even more, she went on to explain how the more efficient oven meant she only had to spend two days a week searching for firewood instead of three, giving her a whole extra day a week for herself and other family and village responsibilities. This led me reflect on the rarely recognized impacts of the efforts of dozens or perhaps hundreds of fellow fair trade “workers” – and similar womens’ liberation bonuses for thousands of other farmers around the globe.

In 2000 I had attended a US fair trade workshop in Colorado and met many of the actors in the fair trade process. *[The article by Doug Murray about my Chile experience on page 24 below was also one result of that workshop.]*

By 2000 I was quite burnt out and the job started to be more of an auditing and ISO 65 accreditation process than being a salesmen for small coffee farmer cooperatives in the south, a role which I strongly identified with. I left Fairtrade Canada in October 2000 and went back to consulting for a few years. I was the coordinator of the Ottawa Food Security Council for a year and in 2002 helped Oxfam Canada evaluate their programme in Cuba.

In 2002 I got involved in human rights monitoring of the Ottawa Police Service after police violence against peaceful protesters at a G20 Finance Ministers’ meeting in Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Services Board refusal to hold an inquiry, I helped former Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar organize a [Citizens’ Panel on Policing and the Community](#) which held hearings and then the establishment of the [Ottawa Witness Group](#) to monitor police during demonstrations and lobby for police reform.

In 2003 Heather and I visited a friend at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow and toured St. Petersburg as well. Then we visited good friends, the other Bob and Heather, living in Maastricht in the Netherlands, and ended up over several years looking after their house there while they took month long annual summer holidays at their cottage outside Ottawa. A wonderful introduction to Dutch bicycle trails and the great European rail network.

In October 2004, I was hired as the facilitator of Export Credit Agency Watch ([ECA-Watch](#)) an international network of mainly European NGOs based in Paris chasing down

Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) export credit agencies, trying to force them to monitor and respect the social and environmental criteria they set for the billions of dollars of projects they finance for fossil fuels, aircraft sales and other export subsidies to national corporations which undermine global climate goals. Paris is a big dirty city of 11 million people, with some of the worst social problems in the world - but it is Paris, with many fascinating things to see and do. Heather loved it and so did I!

In October 2006 I attended an [Afrodad conference on export credit agencies and African debt](#) in Cameroon. I took advantage of this trip to hike up [Mount Cameroon](#). At just over 4000 metres it is the highest peak in sub-Saharan western and Central Africa and my 3 day [“safari”](#) in a circle of the summit from and back to Buea was wonderful.

While in Paris for 3 years I came across the French degrowth movement and got interested in what a [post growth society](#) might look like. I became a slowcialist - workers of the world relax - a heretic in the church of growth. In Paris I met Serge Latouche, José Bové, Francois Schneider and a whole lot of other people in the French décroissance movement. I went to one of their rallies in Nevers in 2005 and met a guy named Francois Schneider who was walking around southern France with a donkey, talking to people about slowing down their lives. I came back to Canada in May 2008 and thought about writing up some of the ideas of the French, Spanish and Italian degrowth movements, since there was really nothing available in English. So began my participation in the international degrowth movement.

In 2008 at the end of my Paris contract, on the recommendation of an international fair trade colleague, I helped the world renowned [Transnational Institute](#) (TNI) based in Utrecht to undertake an internal evaluation, helping them to gauge programming outcomes and longer-term impacts of their programmes and wider promotion of networks, and to assemble a sufficient amount of clear and systematic information about their performance and potentials as others see them. In the process I became a friend of their President [Susan George](#), author of *How the Other Half Dies* and many other well known authors and academic members of the [TNI network](#).

Returning to Canada in 2008, I’ve edited the ECA Watch monthly newsletter [“What’s New”](#) for 16 years, although I have not participated in the regular activities of that network beyond this.

Within the degrowth movement, I ran into a whole discourse of [Andean indigenous peoples](#), who were talking about “living well but not better”, Sumak Kawsay in Quechua, under which indigenous people were developing a whole historical memory of what life was like before Spanish colonization, but in a very different way from our critique of western decolonization.

Language and cultural narratives: Language is an important element of our planet's thousands of “cosmovisions” or cultural narratives. This was profoundly brought to my attention at an AlterNet meeting in the 80’s of Ottawa environmentalists and the Ardoche Algonquin to plan how to keep a uranium mining exploration team out of their wild rice fields. Mireille Lapointe, co-chief, challenged me on a point, saying I didn’t understand because my first language was English. She noted that English is a language based largely on nouns, while Anishinabe languages (Algonquin, Cree, Ojibwe) are dominated by verbs, resulting in cultures which focus quite divergently on objects versus process, with a resultant tendency to objectivize or integrate nature. It is perhaps no accident that English (nouns-objects) is the dominant language of capitalism, which sees all objects as something to commodify. This example further reinforced my awareness of my own personal filters, along with Cynthia’s reinforcement of feminist “filters” and the role of Mike Cooley’s learning curve in my life, as described on page 21 below.

In August of 2010 I took a trip back to South America to attend the [Americas’ Social Forum in Asuncion Paraguay](#), the last country to complete my travels to all of Latin America. I was also able to visit Alberto, an Argentinian-Canadian friend in La Paz, as well as see the spectacular [Iguazu Falls](#) on the Brazil/Argentina/Paraguay border, take a bus across the pampas back to Bolivia and then return to Huaraz and Pomabamba in Peru. Pomabamba then had 15,000 residents vs 3,000 in 1968-70, and in addition to the telegraph line that connected us to the world back then, in 2010 there were 3 internet cafes!

In 2011 an opportunity came along to organize the Third International Conference on degrowth. I had been a volunteer at the first conference in Paris in 2008, and attended the second conference in Barcelona in 2010. I pulled together a group of people from McGill and other Montreal universities and we made a proposal to host the third conference in Montreal in 2012. While they really liked our proposal, the politics of the degrowth movement in Europe was such that the Italians won and the formal third international Conference was held in Vienna in September 2012. We decided we had enough support and momentum, so we went ahead and organized a [Degrowth in the Americas conference in Montreal](#) in May 2012. I was able to get an airfare to Istanbul in 2011, courtesy of the Montreal Tourist Bureau, to promote our Montreal conference at the European Social Forum. We convinced David Suzuki, Naomi Klein, Edgardo Lander, Joan Martinez-Alier and many other speakers to come to Montreal and it was a very successful conference.

I attended the 2012 degrowth conference in Vienna and then the 2014 conference in Leipzig as well. I've maintained the [Canadian degrowth web site](#) since 2011, but have not been very active organizationally beyond the web site lately, and participating in discussions here and there.

In August-September 2013 [my personal quest for ways down](#) from the overburdened, unsupportable capitalist growth mountain “plateau” we've built, before the cracks opening at our feet swallow us, led me to a six week stay at [Can Decreix](#), a farm and degrowth retreat centre in Catalonia on the French/Spanish border at the Mediterranean. Can Decreix is a good example of the thousands of small-scale alternatives all over the globe which are trying to define and build multiple, pluralist, livable “valleys”, somewhere below our impossible growing mountain “plateau”. They show that there are no simple, all purpose responses in the multitude of global cultures and environments we live in, but there *are* responses. On the policy level, the degrowth movement, largely a European phenomenon only recently introduced to North America, is an example of still politically isolated efforts to promote truly alternative global policies and constructive responses to the multiple crises we face.

My stay at Can Decreix was a mixed experience: discovering what convivial degrowth, voluntary simplicity and community are about, before returning to the 'real' world and continuing to look for ways to start a transition, personal and political, to something more sane and healthy. Adapting to a vegan diet, spartan living and harder physical work than my urban norm was actually relatively easy, even pleasant. My guess is that I “lost” some 10-15 pounds. I met many good people from very diverse backgrounds and experienced how shared values really are inherent across diverse cultures and life experiences, and they provide hope in human communities. Can Decreix is one of a number of alternative communities in Catalonia. I also briefly visited Cal'Afou, an ecoindustrial postcapitalist community northwest of Barcelona, and met with representatives of the [Integrated Catalan Cooperative](#), which networks hundreds of individual co-ops with thousands of members who are working out ways to share production, consumption and resources and even develop an alternative regional economy. [Richard Swift's 2013 CBC documentary](#) covers these degrowth experiments well. My return to the 'real' world via Barcelona, Marseilles and Paris after those 6 weeks brought home the large, harsh examples of alienation and dysfunction which must be faced if we are to change our overall societal and industrial metabolism.

These days, I try from time to time to take a forest “bath” in an urban Gatineau retreat just across the Ottawa River from our apartment. A short bike ride and one is in a pine forest several kilometres square, quite isolated from our urban surroundings and amidst deer, other wildlife and quiet ecological diversity.

Going back now to 2008, one day a friend asked me if I wanted to go for a hike in the Gatineau Hills outside Ottawa. It turned out to be with a group of friends who were sureties for [Hassan Diab](#), a Lebanese-Canadian friend falsely accused of planting a bomb at a Paris synagogue in 1980. We took him for outings once a week when he was under house arrest during a long four year legal process for extradition to France. We became friends and during my own visits to Paris I visited him many times over the more than three years from 2014-18 that he was unjustly held in solitary confinement in a prison outside Paris. Experienced French magistrates finally admitted there was no case and released him to return to his wife and two young children in Canada in January 2018. The saga continues today however, as the French quasi judicial system, unable to name a bomber, has succumbed to Israeli secret service manipulation of elements of the French Jewish community who quite justly want resolution for that violent terrorist act. An April 2023 in absentia kangaroo court in Paris with scandalously questionable “witnesses” not even born at the time of the bombing and which ignored exonerating evidence, declared (didn’t find!) Hassan guilty and sentenced him to life in prison 5 years after his 2018 release. We now await word whether the French have or will request his extradition again, and whether Prime Minister Trudeau will honour his 2018 personal declaration that “what happened to Dr. Diab shouldn’t have and must not happen again.”

Today, in 2024, I still maintain [my degrowth blog](#) as a resource for these initiatives. I am now trying to relax after 78 voyages around the sun and starting to prepare my memoirs of those fruitful, sometimes controversial but always exciting voyages. With comments from friends and colleagues, I hope to be able to add additional material here ruminating on what future experiments and adventures might lead us out of the chasm where international economic exploitation and war seems to be taking us.

## **The Space Research Corporation saga – fighting apartheid**

When I was living in Barbados from 1976 to 1979 a Canadian company named [Space Research Corporation](#) based there, run by a guy named [Gerald Bull](#), whose specialty was developing a better howitzer artillery shell. He had also worked for a McGill University project called HARP, the [High Altitude Research Project](#), which was trying to develop a howitzer shell to be used as the first stage of a rocket to launch small communication satellites. The shell would reach its apogee and would be a second rocket which would put a small satellite on its nose into orbit. They had a test gun to do this in Barbados as well as a site on the Vermont Quebec border. They tracked the apogee and height of each test shell with a radar system. They moved this to the island of Antigua sometime around 1976.

In 1977 a high school principal in Antigua who had CUSO volunteer teachers at his school, [Tim Hector](#), also leader of the Antigua Caribbean Liberation Movement, called me in Barbados to tell me that a worker at the Antigua port had just brought him a live howitzer shell from a container which accidentally fell on the dock and broke open as it was being loaded into a boat called The Tugelaland. The captain of The Tegulaland had told him that his boat was going to South Africa, not Canada as claimed in the bill of lading. I quickly said, "Tim this is dynamite, why are you telling me this over a public telephone line". He replied "we have a friend at Cable and Wireless and this call is being routed through several European cities and can't be traced." I passed this information along to Bob Carty a CBC journalist friend in Toronto and he gave it to the CBC's Fifth Estate, who did an [exposé](#) of Canada's violation of the international embargo on arms shipments to South Africa. The story was also picked up by the [BBC's Panorama](#) program. When South Africa invaded southern Angola in 1974 in support of Savimbi's UNITA & the CIA's efforts to overthrow the MPLA government, they were stopped by Angolan and Cuban troops, partly because the Russian "Stalin Organ" rocket launchers used by Cuba had a slight range advantage over the best Western artillery. They were able to sit back outside that Western howitzer range and pound South Africa & Savimbi back into South African controlled Namibia. Gerald Bull through Space Research was trying to develop a howitzer shell to overcome this disadvantage and was shipping them to South Africa from Antigua and sometimes via Israel.

This was a beginning of the end of that [particularly complex southern Africa liberation struggle](#). In the Angolan civil war, the reduction of Western support for white South Africa and the late 1980s collapse of the Soviet Union, and therefore its military support for leftist liberation forces, eventually led to white South African negotiations with the ANC and Nelson Mandela's 1994 election as President of South Africa.

The exposure of this violation of the arms embargo was one element of many, forcing white South Africa to realize it could not maintain apartheid militarily or diplomatically, and a decade later drove them to begin negotiations with the ANC and Nelson Mandela. I played a tiny role in this [historical process](#), along with the thousands of others in Canada and around the world who fought apartheid.

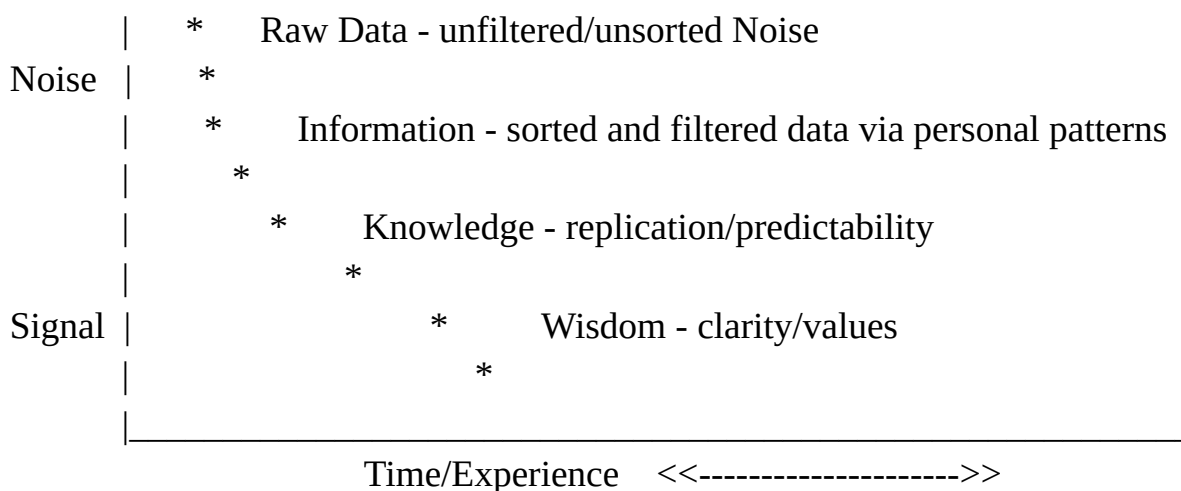


## Mike Cooley's Learning Curve and the Information Revolution

As I noted back on page 12, Mike Cooley's learning curve has played a central role in my understanding of how we learn and thus who we become. With all the hype in the press these days about the "information superhighway" and the use of computers to provide us with "information", it is important that we understand a few basic concepts about human knowledge and learning in order to avoid unrealistic expectations, and to put the information revolution and "Artificial" Intelligence (AI) into a context that we can deal with in our daily lives. The following introduction to the learning process and curves based on a meeting with Mike Cooley at the IFAT conference in Ireland in 1991 has had a profound impact on my ability to observe, understand and comment on international work.

The graph below shows the process whereby we sort the raw data which comes into our lives through our eyes, ears and other senses over time or with experience, and how each of us progressively turns this data into information, knowledge and eventually wisdom. This is **the learning process** and we all use it every day. The left axis of the graph shows "noise" or a measure of unintelligibility at the high end and "signal" or clarity of understandable patterns at the low end. The greater the signal, the more useful the information.

### Mike Cooley's learning curve



Mike Cooley, Slough UK, from a talk to the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), Kilkenny Ireland, April 1991.) [Mike Cooley: Architect or Bee? p.12](#)

Most of the hype about the information revolution and the information superhighway focuses only on the increased availability of data, and not on the means by which we sort and use all this data or information.

The graph above shows how we use our own individual and highly personal and subjective filters to discern patterns in the mass of unsorted data. These patterns allow us to turn data into

information. Further sorting of information into broader patterns turns information into knowledge, and over time into "wisdom". This sorting process is crucial to learning, because it is through the use of "filters" that we see patterns in the mass of unsorted data. These "filters" are many and varied e.g. religious and political beliefs, language, gender and race, scientific methodology and previous sets of patterns that we have stored for future reference. The transition from data to information to knowledge and wisdom is a continuous, highly individual process. Information can be "data" for the application of broader filters and patterns, turning it into knowledge and similarly from knowledge to wisdom.

*The time/experience axis above is deliberately shown as bi-directional.* At any point in our processes of learning, we might, and often will, or should, discover a flaw or necessary refinement in the personal filters and patterns we used to move from one step to another, at which point we need to go back and, using our new filters, re-sort the original "data", along with any new "data", to arrive at new "information" and eventually new "knowledge" and "wisdom".

One frightening aspect of the information revolution is that there is so much data available now that we give up trying to sort it. In doing so, we can succumb to chaos and powerlessness, giving up personal empowerment and knowledge to "gurus" who claim to have it sorted already and to serve it up to us in intelligible packages using ***their*** filters, with no effort required on our part to do any of the sorting ourselves. With global access to information through television and the press, the incredible complexity of the world and humanity becomes very evident, while at the same time, giving power to anyone with control of television, the press and Internet content to spoon feed us.

With artificial intelligence now so prevalent and growing exponentially, computer bots look at millions of web sites, [40% of which the Washington Post notes are corporate](#), and feed us pre-sorted, "simplistic" information based on *their* religious, political or economic patterns and interests, *i.e. their cultural narratives, not ours*. What's more, they consume huge amounts of fossil fuel, pumping more and more carbon into the global warming "furnace".

While it is useful, and even necessary, that someone help us to sort the masses of data now available through global communications, we give up personal power if we do not retain some control over the sorting process and remain skeptical and questioning in our daily lives. Simplistic, pre-sorted and attractively packaged information, as we all know, can be deceptive and manipulative, or even false news.

Bill Rees has noted: *"All cultural narratives, world views, religious doctrines, political ideologies, and academic paradigms are 'social constructs' - products of the human mind massaged or polished by social discourse and elevated to the status of received wisdom by agreement among members of the social group who are creating the construct... By the time most people have reached mature adulthood they will have accepted their culture's overall 'narrative' and will subscribe, consciously or not, to any number of subsidiary religious, political, social and disciplinary paradigms."*

At the very least, we should be aware enough of the overall process of learning and individual acquisition of data or information so that we recognize our own subjective personal filters and cultural narratives, and those of the people or powers that feed information to us every day. Unfortunately, most people are too busy scrambling to earn a living to step back from daily struggles to see what is happening to themselves and their "knowledge" process, much less to challenge it and spend some time learning about learning.

The education system, in teaching us and our children how to operate computers, does not put enough emphasis on the basics of learning and the recognition and development of personal and corporate data/information "filters" in the learning process. We only learn how to acquire or get access to data, or how to manipulate its presentation via printed or audio/visual formats using word processors, spreadsheets, accounting software and multi-media or graphics. We don't learn enough about the philosophical, cultural, economic, political, religious, racial, gender, linguistic, etc. filters that also sort information in ways that are more subtle than print or audio/visual formats.

We can deplore the status quo and conclude that manipulation of information by corporate power requires the destruction, not the development of the information superhighway. Or we can use computers as tools for the democratization of information. We must insist that our governments and educational institutions prepare us for this new kind of technical democracy and integrate it with the centuries old mechanisms of political, economic and community democracy and freedom of speech, which, although they don't always work perfectly, certainly work better than corporate autocracy and the global "free" market.

**Douglas Murray - Colorado State University**

*[Much of this is covered by my own writing above but is a nice independent overview]*

**Douglas L. Murray**: Emeritus-Professor of Sociology, Colorado State University and CFAT Co-Founder. He is co-editor of the study, [One Cup at a Time: Poverty alleviation & fair trade coffee in Latin America](#) and the recently published [We Can Change the World](#), of which this is Chapter 11. He also advises NGOs and international development agencies on issues of agriculture, fair and alternative trade, and social change.

Acts of conscience are not common, but neither are they rare in the history of my generation. Many of my friends, I have discovered belatedly, made moral commitments during the 1960s and 1970s as conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War. Others made choices that were less widely recognized but no less noble, and some made those commitments at great personal sacrifice. Acts of conscience occurred not only in the United States, and not only against the Vietnam War. They were occurring around the world as a growing sense of outrage over injustice became part of the identity of the post-World War II generation.

In the late 1990s I began working with colleagues at Colorado State University investigating the potential and limits of the nascent fair trade movement as a vehicle for achieving social change. In 1999 we were awarded a grant from the Ford Foundation to bring together the leaders of the movement from around the world. For three days in the spring of 2000, a group of twenty-five participants gathered in Keystone, Colorado, to analyze the movement's efforts to improve social, environmental, and economic conditions among poor, small-scale farmers in the developing world.

On the evening before the workshop, we gathered in a local pub after dinner to get acquainted. I sidled up to the bar and ordered a beer while striking up a conversation with a soft-spoken man about my age named Bob, who I already knew by reputation. He was a driving force behind fair trade in Canada. As was the case repeatedly throughout that gathering, we began exchanging stories about where each of us had been during critical moments in a shared history of political activism. In passing I mentioned that my first trip to Latin America started out in late 1971 as an effort to get to Chile and experience the first socialist revolution achieved through democratic elections. I noted that my trip was cut short by a serious illness, to which Bob responded, "That probably was a lucky turn of events."

I responded by asking him what he meant by that peculiar observation, to which he explained that the coup that put an end to the Chilean experiment in 1973, which happened

at the time I likely would have been there, changed many lives, and not for the better. He then, in a near mumble, said, “It had a pretty profound impact on my own.”

Quizzing him further, I soon learned a most remarkable story of a decades-long journey that remains an inspiring account of commitment to the pursuit of human rights and the trials one man endured for embracing his beliefs.

In March of 1972, Bob joined the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the nation’s capital of Ottawa as an entry-level project manager. It was a first step on the career ladder of foreign service. Within a year he was promoted. If he continued at this pace, he would likely get his first embassy posting as a third secretary within another year. Family and friends pointed to his achievements with pride. He appeared to be on his way to a career as a development specialist or even a diplomat. Bob had spent two years previously in Peru as a Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) volunteer, Canada’s equivalent to the US Peace Corps, leaving him with a keen interest in Latin America.

One of the most intriguing developments in Latin America at the time, perhaps the most significant since the advent of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution in 1959, was the 1970 election of Chile’s president Salvador Allende, an avowed socialist. To many in the region this was an experiment pursued through “the ballot rather than the bullet,” as preceding attempts at radical change had come largely through armed conflict. While the prospects excited some, the new Chilean regime provoked the ire of others, particularly the United States government under then-president Richard Nixon. The United States was steadfast in its opposition to socialist-leaning regimes emerging in the hemisphere, even a democratically elected one. The CIA pursued a variety of covert measures to destabilize Allende’s government from its inception. It was only a matter of time before it would lead to crisis.

That crisis came on September 11, 1973, when a faction of the Chilean military, led by General Augusto Pinochet, launched a bloody coup d’état. In the ensuing days and weeks, the military rounded up thousands of civilians, including university students, priests, trade unionists, and others. The capital city of Santiago was locked down as tanks and military patrols swept the neighborhoods in search of suspected Allende supporters. Machine-gun fire echoed through the city day and night. Helicopters thumped overhead as truckloads of soldiers grabbed civilians off the streets, in some cases gunning them down where they stood.

Tens of thousands of people were taken to a large soccer stadium in downtown Santiago that had been converted into a makeshift prison. Prisoners sat in the unsheltered bleachers during the day and slept in crowded rooms, sometimes a hundred to a space where they had to take turns to lie down, all the while awaiting their turn to be taken to a complex of offices

and concession stands converted into interrogation chambers. Many were tortured and some summarily executed. An estimated 20,000 people were detained in the stadium in the first months of the coup as a steady flow of military trucks arrived at the stadium each day loaded with prisoners. At night trucks left the stadium filled with bodies or detainees destined for other torture sites from which few returned. Amnesty International reported in December of 1973 that anywhere from 5000 to 30,000 civilians were killed in the first two months. More recent official reports set the number at 3,200 victims. The counting of the dead was hindered by the military and police forces' practice of "disappearing" victims, often dumping their bodies in the streets of Santiago or the Mapocho River that ran through the city. On other occasions prisoners were taken by helicopter over the Pacific Ocean and dumped far out to sea or buried in clandestine graves around the countryside.

When the coup occurred, Bob was in a month-long training program in France. He learned of the atrocities and repressive military measures through daily accounts in *Le Monde* and various Parisian media sources. In Canada, official reports were sketchy, but the networks with links to Chile, primarily through Catholic priests and bishops as well as through academic channels and unions, kept a steady flow of eyewitness accounts in the Canadian press. Public outcry was growing, with demands that the Canadian government take measures to curb the violence and protect Chilean civilians.

But to the consternation of many, the only action in the initial weeks from Canada's government was to swiftly recognize the military regime as the new legitimate government of Chile, one of the first countries in the hemisphere to do so. As one cartoonist observed in a major daily newspaper, it took Canada twenty-four years to recognize the Chinese government of Mao Zedong, one year to recognize the Cuban government of Fidel Castro, but only eighteen days to recognize Pinochet's military junta.

When Bob returned to Ottawa at the end of September, he went back to the rather mundane tasks assigned to junior-level staff, including filing daily cables between the home office and embassies throughout Latin America. Bob soon grew alarmed at the communications between the Canadian ambassador to Chile and the office of the minister of foreign affairs. What he read was at great odds with what he had learned while in France. In response to questions from the home office about extrajudicial killings, torture, and disappearance of Chilean citizens, the ambassador advised that the Canadian government should not interfere with the new military junta's "thankless" efforts to put an end to Allende's "political madness." The ambassador went on to acknowledge that violent repression was occurring, describing it as both "abhorrent and understandable," observing that the targets of those actions were mostly "the riff raff of the Latin American left." He further offered that



Pinochet would soon restore order to the country through these repressive measures, which would be to the longer-term benefit of Canada through its trade and economic ties.

Bob was shaken by the callous disregard for human life. He went home one night and talked at length with his wife. He then sought the advice of a friend about what he had learned. He was consumed with the feeling that he needed to do something. Both his wife and friend counselled him to keep quiet, warning that he was up against the most powerful interests in the country and was putting his career in jeopardy. After a sleepless night he went back to work the next day and made a fateful decision that would irreversibly change his life.

Bob copied several of the telegrams and took them to a member of an opposition party in Parliament. That parliamentarian in turn shared the cables with the press, and then presented them to the House of Commons. The public outcry was immediate and intense. The tone of the assessment of the situation in Chile was in keeping with the hardline Cold War views held in conservative Canadian circles, believing that any form of socialism, even if it arose through a popular election in a country with a relatively robust democracy, was an existential threat warranting any and all measures to halt it. The traditional popular view of Canada as a defender of human rights stood at odds with the blunt embrace of military brutality as a viable means of eliminating challenges to northern hegemony in the hemisphere.

The ambassador was roundly criticized in the press and in Parliament. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and others did not come to his defense, and the public was left with the impression that perhaps he was operating from a personal rather than official perspective.

A senior diplomat from Ottawa and a team from the Canadian Embassy in Argentina were sent to Santiago to facilitate what became a major shift in Canadian immigration policy. The team even went into the holding cells to help prisoners make application for asylum, an unheard-of step in Canada's refugee program. In January of 1974, a Canadian military jet transported the first 137 Chilean asylum seekers to Canada. Where only six Chileans had been granted immigrant status in the year prior to the coup, Canada gradually, then rapidly, increased its acceptance of refugees through the winter and spring of 1974. With the adoption of what came to be known as the Special Movement Chile, Canada eventually admitted some 7000 refugees, an unprecedented expansion of immigration policy toward Chile. A significant number of those admitted were taken directly from their cells, including many from the ranks of the political prisoners awaiting an unknown fate in the soccer stadium. The new Canadian refugee program likely saved the lives of countless Chilean citizens.

In 2013, on the fortieth anniversary of the Chilean coup, the Globe and Mail, one of Canada's leading newspapers, ran a feature-length article chronicling the evolution of

national immigration policy toward Chile. Almost as an afterthought, in a single sentence near the end of the story, the article observed that the changes in Canada's policy toward Chile had been triggered when classified cables were leaked by an "obscure government bureaucrat." Forty years on, Bob had become little more than an anonymous footnote to a momentous event in the history of Chile as well as Canadian diplomacy and foreign policy. But Bob's actions were neither obscure nor soon to be forgotten in the eyes of some in his government. The source of the leak was quickly uncovered by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and Bob was subjected to intense interrogation and threats from security officials. The minister of foreign affairs called for Bob's prosecution and imprisonment. The demands were echoed by members of the government and Parliament, railing on about his disloyalty to Her Majesty and the Crown.

His immediate family, while not entirely understanding his reasons, stuck by him, as did some friends. Others had strong opinions against him, and still others just did not understand why he would throw away his promising career. Many of his colleagues in CIDA kept their distance out of fear they might jeopardize their careers merely by association. At one point, his hometown newspaper, after listing his family members living in the community by name and address, went on to opine at length on his disloyalty to his country.

With the growing outcry over the human rights violations occurring in Chile and outrage over the initial lack of opposition to the military coup by the Canadian government, the minister of foreign affair's efforts to prosecute Bob were put on hold. He was given the choice to resign to avoid the still strongly held desire by some to put him in prison. He decided to take the offer and left CIDA.

Bob's aspiring government career was over. In time he found work with nonprofit organizations, including the CUSO volunteer service and various church and humanitarian organizations. Much of this work involved short-term contracts without the security government employment had provided. His salary and financial opportunities remained constrained for years after that fateful decision.

In 1984 he was offered a government position in Agriculture Canada, based on his work with rural projects in Latin America. But the offer was soon rescinded when he was denied the requisite security clearance. Thus began a seven-year battle through the Canadian legal system, with Bob challenging not only the intelligence agency's refusal to allow his hiring but also a number of grossly misleading claims about his political views and integrity that had underpinned the agency's justifications for denying his clearance.

After twice winning victories at the appellate court level, the Supreme Court handed down a ruling in 1991 that both vindicated Bob and still left him without a security clearance. The Court ruled that legislation was required to empower greater oversight of the intelligence community at which point the denial of Bob's clearance should be overturned administratively. With that Pyrrhic victory he was left with little hope of ever renewing a government career.

Nonetheless, over the decades, Bob became a progressive presence in both Canada and Latin America through his work with various development projects and organizations, eventually becoming Canada's leading advocate for the newly emerging fair trade movement. In 1998, not long before we met at the workshop in Colorado, he attended a Canadian Steelworkers Union event. Bob was leading a workshop with union activists exploring how the union and the fair trade movement might develop mutually supportive initiatives.

When the meeting broke for lunch, Bob found himself at a table of steelworkers and several nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives. Across from Bob sat a large man with a shock of black hair and beard, conversing with a woman from a Canadian church organization. Noting the man's rather heavy accent, Bob asked where he was from. He responded, "I am Chilean." Bob then asked when he had come to Canada, and the steelworker replied, "It was in early 1974."

"Ah," Bob offered, "you were one of the lucky ones."

"Indeed," he replied with an inquisitive look. Then, with a mirthless smile, he went on, "I was picked up and held in the soccer stadium because I was a member of a Chilean trade union. I thought I was going to die. Then some guy leaked a secret telegram. The Canadians came and got me and took me in as a refugee."

Bob just smiled and nodded, saying nothing.

Then the woman sitting beside the steelworker leaned in and whispered in his ear, "That's the guy." For a moment the Chilean sat there, his brow furrowed, as if he was not understanding her over the din of the crowd. As she repeated herself, a look of comprehension passed over his face. His gaze rose slowly, and his eyes grew wide, locking on Bob's. He suddenly stood, his chair screeching backward and nearly tumbling over. He strode around the table, grabbing Bob by his shoulders and lifting him from his seat. Holding him in a fierce embrace, tears filling his eyes, he whispered in a choked and quavering voice, "Thank you."

Not long after the encounter, Bob was shopping in a Vancouver liquor store. He and his wife were looking for a bottle of wine to share over dinner. While Bob wandered back down the aisle to the wine section, his wife struck up a conversation with the woman behind the counter, asking her for a recommendation. The woman offered that she knew the Chilean wines best since that was her

native land. The two carried on a conversation until Bob approached the register. As he placed the bottle on the counter he glanced to his wife who was staring back with a big grin.

“What?”

He looked to the clerk who was smiling as well, but hers was breaking, betrayed by a trembling lower lip. Before Bob could say anything more, the woman came from behind the counter, tears streaming down her face, stammering something in both English and Spanish he could not grasp. In another moment all three were hugging, laughing, and crying, as if in a reunion of long-lost friends.

These encounters were repeated over the years as the small Chilean refugee community came to know who that obscure government bureaucrat was. “That’s the guy” has followed Bob ever since, even if its meaning can only be truly grasped by a few thousand people who escaped the horror of a time now a half-century gone.

In 2013 Bob was awarded the Canadian Journalists Freedom of Expression Integrity Award. In typical fashion, he deflected the praise being heaped upon him. He pointed out once again that he had only played a small part as a catalyst in the actions of many people that led to the freeing of Chileans from the grips of the military dictatorship. Indeed, Canadian church groups, academic associations, unions, and human rights activists led a powerful and ongoing campaign that drove the changes in Canadian policy. Nevertheless, that lone act of conscience that forever altered the course of Bob’s life, mostly lost in the contemporary narrative of Canada’s history with Chile, should not be underestimated, Bob’s modesty notwithstanding. In receiving the award, he concluded his acceptance speech simply by offering, “And before you ask the inevitable question, the answer is yes. It was all worth it.”

**Some more of Bob's stories** (create a link? See also the link to some of my writings on p.38)

There were many adventures in Peru:

**Lightning:** Hiking across a high level plain at 4000 metres above sea level, suddenly the hair on my head went straight up. Realizing I was about to be struck by lightning, I fell to the ground. We all then rolled down the hill to find trees taller than us so as not to be the highest objects on the horizon.

**Puma tracks at my head:** In 1969 I travelled across the Andes to prepare for the construction of a schoolhouse on the eastern shore of the Marañon river, a major tributary of the Amazon. Our guide said he knew the way, but he didn't. We spent a whole day of hiking cactus covered slopes and wading up to our necks in a small river with gravel under one foot and quicksand under the other, instead of the 3-hour trail that had been promised. Settling in for the night on the river bank, not having eaten all day, we were told that the raftman on the other side had been beaten up by an army patrol for having kept them waiting a day to cross and there we were dressed in khaki! Waking in the morning I saw fresh puma tracks on the river bank 2 metres from where I had laid in my sleeping bag. Hiking back to the village we found the trail fortunately. We met a farmer with sacks of papaya on a donkey. I ate about 10 of them, our first food in 24 hours. I have a strange affection for papaya to this day!

**Tarantulas** Growing up in northwestern Ontario, I, like most Canadians, had heard stories of the deadly poisonous tarantula spider. One night I was lighting a candle in my tiny bedroom and saw my first tarantula, on my foot. I knocked it off and stomped on it, killing it, and then fainted on my bed. Shortly after the kindly priests in the house next door gave me a stiff shot of Pisco, Peru's famous grape Brandy, to calm my nerves. I learned that if a large tarantula bit a tiny baby it might die, but that generally one got sick, but not killed. Another lesson in a faraway land that changed the way I looked at the world.

**Mountain road accidents:** One day, returning to Pomabamba from Huaraz by truck, we were the first on the scene of an accident where a bus went off the road down into a creek, resulting in 4 deaths and some 40 bad injuries. As the only person at the scene with first aid experience from my teenage years as a ski patroller, I ended up being a source of aid to 40 or so injured bus passengers. I can't remember how many arms and legs I splinted or how many passengers in another bus coming the other way we convinced to pull out their t-shirts

and clean dresses to make bandages. It was a night of horrors. The next morning, a doctor arrived and set up a "clinic" in a nearby village. I helped him amputate the crushed foot of one man who spoke only Quechua.

Another accident involved a fellow worker who drank too much at a village festival celebrating our contribution to their access road. Being impatient over delays to get home when they stopped to pick up a few passengers stranded on a broken down bus, he jumped into our truck and in starting to drive off, swerved off the road and was crushed by the truck falling on him as he fell out of it. Hearing of this back in Pomabamba I borrowed the local doctor's jeep and dashed out to the accident scene. I was able to get my colleague's body, who no one would touch, out from under the upside down truck and took him to his family in Pomabamba. A day later we were able to right the truck and pull it up out of the ditch with a bulldozer. Miraculously it was still drivable, although without a windshield, necessitating a very cold 300 km drive at 3000-4000 metres above sea level to the Provincial office to repair the truck.

### **Potatoes and the industrial revolution**

In addition to the gold and silver stolen by Spain from the Incas, Aztecs and Mayans, the potato, [developed over centuries by Inca and pre-Inca civilizations](#), also helped finance the industrial revolution in Europe. Producing some [30% more calories per acre](#) than most grains, the potato required less land, and therefore labour, to feed Europe, resulting in European feudal landlords expelling peasants to the cities to become a cheap pool of labour for the new industries. Together with slavery, another source of "finance" for the industrial revolution.

### **Ontario Paper timber flume rides**

My summer job in 1966 was with the Ontario Paper Company office in Heron Bay South on the north shore of Lake Superior, the port for their shipment of spruce logs to Chicago to become newsprint for the Chicago Tribune. To get to the port from the small inland office village we had to take a special "taxi", which was a raft of spruce logs cobbled together with two (front & back) temporary fasteners holding the individual logs together. We used the makeshift raft to travel/float down a 2 km branch of the elevated flume carrying logs between the mouth of the Pic River and the harbour. At the end, you had to quickly hook both fasteners to an overhead cable, jump off the raft onto a side platform and watch the logs detach from the fasteners and fly off the end of the flume and fall 50 feet into the harbour bay, relieved you weren't still with them.



## **My first flight ...**

My first flight, maybe it was my second, was in a float plane on a small lake east of Quetico Park in northwestern Ontario. The lake turned out to be too small for the plane to carry much weight to our next geological survey camping site. As of the smallest member of the team I got to go with the canoe strapped to a pontoon in the first flight. The aerodynamic drag of the canoe made it a much heavier load than its actual weight. We backed the plane onto the beach and the pilot tied it to a big tree, putting a log under the rope to hold it up. Gunning the engine with the plane pulling at the rope, one of my colleagues on shore chopped it. We sort of slingshot off the beach and flew around the small lake three times before getting above the trees. I was sure one of the wingtips was going to go in the water on our first turn. The subsequent flights between camps that day were less stressful. Somehow I managed to get over that experience and have travelled by air many times since.

## **What are you going to do when you get to the Pearly Gates?**

On a visit to Rome I contacted an old Jesuit acquaintance who works for the Vatican and we arranged to meet for coffee. It turned out he was expecting an important call and suggested we meet at his office. He met me at the entrance to Vatican City and we met instead at his office. I hadn't thought to bring my passport, not remembering that [Vatican City](#) is a technically a "foreign" state. My friend said it didn't matter as he was known to the "border guards". Back in Canada I mentioned this to a friend who expressed concern that I hadn't had my passport stamped at the entry to Vatican City. "What are you going to do when you get to the Pearly Gates Bob" he said!

## **How some Caribbean radicals viewed CUSO**

Transforming an NGO from colonial whitewash to radical reality had its difficulties, but also some humour. One day on the island of Dominica in 1977 I was in the northern island town of Portsmouth to review a project submitted by a community group to Oxfam Canada. I stayed in the only hotel in town and in the morning, I heard a group of boys asking an adult at the bar for candy. "Rosie, Rosie" they cried. I thought, this must be the renowned Rosie Douglas of 1969 Montreal black power riot fame, as I heard the hotel/guest house was owned by his family. I introduced myself and we agreed to meet at the bar that evening. After supper we met and began chatting about development issues in Dominica and the kinds of projects Canadian NGOs might support there. He clearly identified me as a liberal development worker and made a number of comments he thought would convince me of the value of certain types of community projects. At one point, I noted that many of my contacts in the Caribbean were fans of C.L.R. James. Rosie immediately began a critique of CLR's affinity for Soviet communism. I responded by noting that my reading of CLR's writing indicated that he was quite critical of Soviet communism and a proponent of an

altogether alternative interpretation of Marx. Rosie, suddenly realizing I wasn't a liberal western development worker, launched into a story about his years in Canada and a fan of Canadian hockey. As one of maybe 5 northern Canadian men who had never played hockey, he missed the boat on that assumption too.

### **How to drive a bulldozer in three lessons**

Some adventures that one remembers forever. The first was a simple ride, taking the bulldozer from the village office in Pomabamba to a construction site down the road, about 10 km. It only involved driving the bulldozer from a to b.

The second was more adventurous. Taking the bulldozer to the office in Huaraz for repairs on the back of a flatbed truck, a trip of some 10 hours or some 300 km on winding Andean roads up to 4,000 m above sea level. Driving through the Cañon del Pato the bulldozer slid off the back of the truck, with one track on the ground and one track on the truck, leaving both at 45° vertical angles to the road. With great trepidation I backed the bulldozer slowly and timidly off the truck. Fortunately they both fell flat on the road undamaged. Now what? Another truck driver told me there was a slight opening on the road a few kilometres away where we might get the bulldozer up to the level of the truck bed on the inside of the road. I drove the bulldozer down there and there was an embankment which might work. Driving the bulldozer off the road and up the embankment I bulldozed a short level strip on the edge of the road at the height of our truck's flatbed. I walked back to get the truck, parked it beside the bulldozer and was able to drive the bulldozer back onto the truck. Fastening it properly to the truck this time we made it to Huaraz without further adventures.

My 3rd bulldozer driving lesson months later was also adventurous. Leaving Pomabamba in our truck we came to a landslide closing the road, with a dozen trucks, buses and cars on each side. It was a regular landslide and the Ministry of Transport had left a bulldozer there to regularly open the road. But there was no driver nor battery for the bulldozer. I found a truck driver willing to lend us his battery which would fit the bulldozer and start it. I was able to level the landslide to allow everyone to pass. Another one of those experiences where it's better to seek forgiveness than permission.. I parked the bulldozer, gave the truck driver back his battery and ended up driving the last vehicle to get through. As I was crossing the landslide began to slide again. Cracking open the truck door to facilitate jumping out if it was swept off, I gunned it and made it across "safely". One of the truck drivers on the far side watching all of this told me that the outer right tandem wheel on the back of our truck came across in space! Fortunately he had a bottle of Pisco in his truck and offered me a nice big shot. After calming down, having a bite to eat and letting the Pisco settle we continued on our way.

I've not had an opportunity to drive a bulldozer since.

## **Cuban girls pushed to prostitution by American sanctions**

One day in 1974 in Havana in mid-day on a main street on my way to a meeting at the Canadian Embassy I was approached by a very young girl, about the same age as my daughter, offering sex. She related to me what brought her to this. I had already passed a number of women offering themselves in return for dollars. She said this was her first attempt at this and she explained that she had been told a gringo might take her to the dollar store where she could purchase a nice dress, makeup and other unavailable things that young women thought desirable. Her mother had died in Matanzas and she was living with her father's relatives in Havana and she was low on the totem pole for gifts from his family in Miami. Someone had told her that having sex with a tourist was one way to get these things. The naivety and openness of her juvenile approach was obvious and heart rending. I gave her US\$5 and continued on to my meeting at the Canadian embassy.

The next day at a meeting of Cuban NGOs and external donors I recounted this story to several people over lunch. One woman was a VP of the Cuban Federation of Women and a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Others were young women graduate students from the University of Havana. The Central Committee member challenged my portrayal of this incident as a profoundly moving and tragic human story, saying coldly that this girl was just a prostitute. One of the university students immediately and boldly challenged the Central Committee member, saying they all knew of similar stories generated by the economic crisis facing Cuban youth. She asked the VP blatantly whether her role in government shouldn't be less focused on tourist investments to earn foreign exchange but to provide support for young women like this so they wouldn't be pushed to prostitute themselves. Her challenge received instant support from the other Cuban women at the table. I was heartened by the university students' willingness to challenge a senior Party official in front of foreigners.

I had another encounter with the sex industry. Early in my stay in Barbados in 1976, after a game of billiards with Herman de Souza and two Bajans he had met while recording "development" stories for Inter Pares, we retired to a bar for a beer. It turned out to be a brothel and after being approached by several women from the Dominican Republic, Herman suggested we interview one of them for his programme. I translated from Spanish for him and he documented the travels and lives of Dominican prostitutes in Barbados. The woman we interviewed was there with a plan to earn some US\$2000 over two months and return to the Dominican Republic to purchase a small plot of land with her husband.

## **Quechua on an Ottawa bus**

Several years ago at the Westboro bus station in Ottawa two Latin American Canadian women chatting with each other in Spanish sat down beside me. I joined the conversation and after about 5 minutes one of them asked me where I had learned Spanish. I told them I had lived in Peru for 2 years from 1968 to 1970. They asked where in Peru, and I described the little Andian village of Pomabamba, where I was a CUSO volunteer. One of them, a Peruvian Canadian, said she had a

cousin who lived in Pomabamba. Knowing that Quechua was the dominant language in that village she then asked me my name in Quechua. And I replied in Quechua. Shocked, they asked, “what are the chances they might encounter a gringo on an Ottawa bus who spoke Quechua.” “Well ladies that's globalization eh” I replied.

**Another story: The dog lept at Heather’s throat!** In 2001 on a visit to Italy, on the outskirts of Florence in Fiesole, we came to a park with a gorgeous view of the Tuscan countryside. Walking across the park to take a photo of the hills a dog from a group of women at a park bench ran towards us with the hair on the back of its neck straight up and lept at Heather's throat. I stepped between him and Heather and knocked him out of the air. He then turned on me and got a kick in the head. The owner arrived screaming that I had tried to kill her dog and put him on a leash. Not speaking Italian I screamed back at her in Spanish that her dog attacked my wife. She then started to unleash the dog and I told her "let him go, this time I'll kill him!" Leaving the park quite shaken we passed an elderly Italian man who had witnessed all of this. Pointing at me, he waved his foot, and grasped his crotch and held his thumb up with the other hand. He knew we didn't speak Italian but had a universal way of showing his appreciation of what I had done to protect my wife. Our laughter at his gesture drained away much of our tension.

I have read that there are some people who trigger some dogs this way. It's rare, but it happened once more on a walk outside Paris. Coming down a hill to visit a historic site, a big dog came from behind us and began barking aggressively at Heather. He was accompanied by a tiny terrier which suddenly got between him and Heather and began bouncing at the big dog's chest to push him away from her. The owner, catching up with us was mortified. Her dog had never behaved like this before. She leashed the dog and apologized profusely.

### **Helping the beaver on Gold Mine Lake - [Guardian letter 22 March 2011](#)**

My youth in northwestern Ontario gave me a solid appreciation of mother nature. In 2011 I wrote a letter to the Guardian Weekly touching on an encounter reflecting on this.

A walk on a frozen creek reveals our connections with the natural world

Early one crisp winter morning, I took a walk up to Gold Mine Lake, several kilometres inland from our friends' cottage on the Ottawa river. The frozen creek was only lightly covered with snow, making my snowshoes and ski poles superfluous. Still, it was comforting to have them, as I recalled going through a shallow patch here last winter, in the lee of a beaver dam where moving water thins the ice. I was glad I had decided not to have breakfast. The slight edge of hunger made a walk in the wild more acute, bringing home a greater awareness of the integrity of humans and nature that we rarely experience in the city. It was reassuring though to have a

small package of trail mix and matches in my pocket in this frozen wonderland. The diversity of life in the boreal forest, even in the winter, never ceases to amaze. Despite their slower pace, the interdependencies of trees, grasses, water, soil and air are obvious to those lucky enough to recognize them. On the long abandoned horse-drawn rail bed leading to the mine, I ran across a poplar sapling severed in two and suspended from the crook of another tree. A beaver had dragged off the bottom and, unable to reach the top half, left it suspended. Hauling it down, I followed the beaver's waddling tracks in the snow to a hole in the ice. Leaving the rest of the poplar beside the hole, I felt satisfied after my first shift as the pizza delivery man for Wally Beaver. On the edge of Gold Mine Lake, looking up at an ancient and crumbling hunter's blind precariously perched in the crook of a large tree, I regretted not having more time to settle in for a bit to see if any photographic deer might wander by. Moving back down the frozen creek 30 minutes later, I marvelled at fresh deer tracks on top of my own footprints. They had followed me for about 100 metres and then left the creek, no doubt in search of better terrain for fodder. I spat on the ice and thought of how the spring thaw would mix my DNA with the rich life around me, leaving a tiny piece of myself in this reserve of nature for ever. I saw no wildlife, although they doubtlessly saw me, but returned refreshed by my brief solitary reintegration with mother earth, and a renewed awareness of the importance of saving her from the ravages of unsustainable industrial growth.

### **More Revolutionary road notes/stories? To fill this page**

- Almost success of Second Cup fair trade license
- Joe Owens in BGI & DOM - Rasta
- Kisumu to Nairobi drive - homes vs houses
- Hassan: Palestinians in Lebanon generations later saying they are from Nazareth not Lebanon
- [See also the list of my writings](#) on p 38

## **MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLES BY BOB THOMSON**

These can be found online at

<https://homepages.web.net/~bthomson/geocities/docs.html>

- [Book Review: The Technology of Political Control - 1977](#)
- [The American Institute for Free Labour Development - 1978](#)
- [Caribbean Contact: Rasta, Christ and Marx by Joseph Owen s.j. 1978](#)
- [Natural Resource Control: The Case of Caribbean Oil - 1979](#)
- [Canada's Space Research Corporation exports arms to South Africa via Antigua - 1977-79](#)
- [Toward Agricultural Self-reliance in Grenada: An Alternative Model - 1985](#)
- [Book Review: The Caribbean After Grenada 1985](#)
- [Green Gold: Bananas and Dependency in the Eastern Caribbean, LAB 1985](#)
- [After Grenada: Militarization, Human Rights and the Threat to Caribbean Democracy 1986](#)
- [Book Review: "The Trade Trap" - 1992](#)
- [CUSO Coalitions Study - 1993](#)
- [Book Review: "Fair Trade: Reform and Realities in the International Trading System" - 1994](#)
- [Some notes on the Information Revolution - 1994](#)
- [A History of Fair Trade Labels - 1995](#)
- [Business lessons from fair trade - 1996](#)
- [Fair Trade - Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ October 1998](#)
- [Dear Diary: G20 Protests, Ottawa, November 16-17, 2001](#)
- [Citizens Panel on Policing and the Community 2002](#)
- [Ottawa Witness Group - Protect the Right to Protest 2002-2004](#)
- [Chile: The Long Flight - CBC Radio January 2004 - 30 minute documentary by Bob Carty](#)
- [Dear Diary: The French Decroissance March, July 2-3, 2005](#)
- [Bob's Degrowth/Decroissance Page](#)
- [Bob's Degrowth/Slowcialism Page](#)
- [Entropy for Dummies, 3 March 2009](#)
- [Proposed Degrowth Book Outline November 2009](#)
- [Fair Trade: A successful social innovation - But is it enough? \(Dec.2010\)](#)
- [Guardian: The walk to Gold Mine Lake \(Mar.2011\)](#)
- [Letter from Paris 11 October 2011](#)

- [Pachakuti: Indigenous Perspectives on Degrowth \(Dec.2011\)](#)
  - [Degrowth: The Mauss that roared \(Oct.2012\)](#)
  - [Bob's photos of Can Decreix \(Aug/Sept 2013\)](#)
  - [Bob's reflections on Can Decreix 25 October 2013](#)
  - [Richard Swift's CBC Ideas documentary "The Degrowth Paradigm" December 2013](#)
  - [Canadian Journalists for Free Expression 2013 Integrity Award December 4, 2013](#)
  - [A draft "buen vivir" bibliography 2014](#)
  - [The Transition to a Post-Capitalist World 2017 \(PDF file\)](#)
  - [Notes on the Information Revolution 2020 \(PDF file\)](#)
  - [The Information Revolution and Human Learning 2023](#)
  - [AI the threats and the promises \(PDF file\)](#)
  - [Mike Cooley's Learning Curve and AI \(PDF file\)](#)
- 
- Heather and Bob's Paris Newsletters (2005-2008)
  - [Paris Photos](#)
  - [Newsletter #1 - 22 April 2005](#)
  - [Newsletter #2 - 2 July 2005](#)
  - [Decroissance March Diary - July 3, 2005](#)
  - [Newsletter #3 - 8 October 2005](#)
  - [Is Paris Burning? - 6 November 2005](#)
  - [Christmas Newsletter - 24 December 2005](#)
  - [Newsletter #4 - 29 January 2006](#)
  - [Newsletter #5 - 28 July 2006](#)
  - [Newsletter #6 - Christmas 2006](#)
  - [Newsletter #7 - Christmas 2007](#)



## A Chronology of Bob's Life 1945 - 2024 (make this a link instead?)

- Born in Winnipeg Manitoba September 1945, Moved to Port Arthur Ontario 1947
- Attended the Oliver Road and Prospect Avenue public schools
- Graduated from the Port Arthur Collegiate Institute 1964
- First year engineering, Lakehead University 1964/65
- Had summer jobs in Provincial parks, lumber camps, geological and hydrological surveys
- Graduated as a Civil engineer from the University of Toronto 1968
- Was a CUSO volunteer in Pomabamba and Huaraz Peru 1968-1970
- Married Cynthia King in Toronto in June 1969
- Survived the May 30 7.9 earthquake in Peru which killed 60,000
- Worked for the Ontario Water Resources Commission in Toronto 1970-72 developing small Provincially funded municipal water and sewage systems
- Worked as a Latin America Project Officer for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA - now Global Affairs Canada) 1972-1973
  - Leaked telegrams from the Canadian Ambassador to Chile supporting and plauding the brutal military coup in Chile in September 1973 & lost my CIDA security clearance and job
- Joined CUSO as the Latin America Project Officer in Ottawa 1974-76, also served as Projects Division Director and temporary Fundraising Director
- Son Boyd born November 1975
- CUSO Field Staff Officer for the Eastern Caribbean based in Barbados 1976-1979
- Director of CUSO's Americas Branch programme in Ottawa 1979-80
- Daughter Pamela born March 1979
- Member, maintenance chair, treasurer and President of the 54 home Carillon Housing Coop 1980-1995
- Took a Masters degree in International Affairs at Carleton University and wrote a thesis on [Agricultural Self-Reliance in the Caribbean](#) as a prelude to Grenada's NJM plan for Agricultural Import Substitution 1980-82 Won a CIDA scholarship for these studies
- Became an International Project Office for Agriculture Canada in June 1984 but was removed after 2 weeks due to denial of a security clearance. Took CSIS to the new Security and Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC) – won the job back at SIRC and the Federal Appeals Court but lost at the Federal Court Trials Division and the Supreme Court over some 6 years.
- Worked as an international co-operation consultant and evaluator for many Canadian and international NGOs in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Europe 1985-95
- Oxfam Canada Programme Committee member 1985-92
- Chair of the Board of the Oxfam Canada owned Bridgehead fair trade coffee company 1987-92
- Founded and managed Fair TradeMark Canada. Board member of the international Fairtrade Labelling Organization 1992-2000
- Separated from Cynthia King March 1995
- Married Heather Stevens 2000
- Facilitator of [Export Credit Agency Watch](#), Paris 2005-2008
- Editor of the monthly [What's New](#) newsletter, ECA Watch 2008-2024
- Member of the [support committee](#) of Hassan Diab, a Lebanese-Canadian professor falsely accused of planting a bomb in a Paris synagogue in 1980 – 2008-present