

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



Breakthrough Communities, Breakthrough Possibilities

with Carl Anthony and Paloma Pavel

Big ideas from this session:

- Honoring the legacy of Thomas Berry by promoting eco-justice, eco-peace, and legacy consciousness
- How to build creative collaborative coalitions in service to a just and healthy future
- Breakthrough Communities: Sustainability and Justice in the Next American Metropolis

Michael: Carl and Paloma, it is so great to have you with me and I thank you for being part of this conversation series, *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*.

Carl: Thank you very much, we are happy to be here.

Paloma: Thank you, Michael. It's an honor to be here.

Michael: Cool. It's an honor to have the both of you and I want to just invite you at the beginning to really share with our audience, because not everybody will be familiar with you and your work. Take some time to help us get to know who you are, what you are particularly passionate about or committed to and that sort of thing, and just run with it. Don't be bashful, please.

Carl: I've been an environmentalist for about 30 years. I was trained as an architect and an urban planner, and I got involved with environmentalism and ended up being president of Earth Island Institute. I started a program there called the Urban Habitat Program.

The basic idea behind this program was to actually address the issues of race in the context of the emerging vision of the environment and we found that we had to make adjustments going both ways, so I have been working on that now for 25 or 30 years and Dr. Pavel, do you want to say who you are?

Paloma: Thank you. I have also been working in the environmental movement for about 30 years and I came to this through my work in deep ecology. Actually, I had been part of a Benedictine monastic community on the coast of Maine and also created a learning and leadership center, which we built by hand that involved listening and learning from nature and living systems as an inspiration for our current passion and action in the world.

Carl: We have been struggling with these ideas and growing and learning about these ideas, and the basic thing I think if I would just simply reduce to a message, particularly since we've been so much influenced by Thomas Barry and the *Idea of the Universe* story that this vision of human beings being part of the evolution of the universe gives us a major opportunity to reconceptualise the way we think about race and also really puts into highlight the need for people of color to assume leadership, not only for their own communities but also to share in the leadership of the whole society.

Michael: That's great. In fact, I'd like you to actually say a little bit more about that but I am also noticing we've got a slight bandwidth issue. When you are talking, I am going to go off my video so you won't see my face but then I'll come back on when I am talking. That way, you've got the most bandwidth so it doesn't cut out.

Yes, please say more about that because one of the things I loved about or where I felt the synergy is that we both have some of the same people that have deeply inspired us, Joanna Macy, Thomas Barry, Brian Swim, Mary Evelyn Tucker and so yes, please continue on in that direction you just started in, Carl.

Carl: To put it simply, we have a conception of race, which we actually have inherited from the last 400 years, maybe 300 years. The idea of race came into being as part of the application of the slave trade and we understood and conceptualized African people as being slaves who were subordinate to white people.

When we really look at big history, we can begin to see that this picture is entirely false. Now many of us have known that it's been entirely false but I think that the issue is that we now have both awareness of our destiny in relationship to the whole evolution of the stars, but we also are facing a huge crisis on the planet where we really need to have all hands on deck, so we are very excited about that.

Michael: Amen. One of the things, as I understand you all were recently at the International Big History Association Conference, weren't you?

Paloma: That's right.

Carl: Yes, in fact we were.

Michael: That's great. What did you present on while you were there?

Paloma: Our topic was Bit History Meets Climate Justice in California and one of the things that we have been excited about is taking the big history ideas and the universe story concepts and really applying them in innovative settings.

We have been working with coalitions who are working multiracial, multi-sector coalitions that are working for climate reform in California and we have been very excited about seeing how big history has a role to play with coalition.

One of the strategies that we shared at the Big History Conference was a giant climate change map, where we started with the Big Bang at one end of history, and then moved forward into this sort of funnel moment where we can act and then also seeing history moving outward into the future from that, and had people actually begin to feel their own story in this moment in time and the various movements that they are part of being part of big history.

Carl: As a matter of fact, I think one of the main innovations that we have also put forward is the idea that we need to think about transforming our cities and our regions, the places where we live, work and play because in actuality, even though we really very much connect to the vision of the [indiscernible 06:25] transformation we need to really understand that over half of the human population now lives in cities and in the United States, it's really up around 75 percent.

We need to think about how we are going to transform these cities in their daily life in ways that actually can help to conform to a greater resonance with the needs of ecology and other species on the planet.

We see this moment in terms of big history, some of the people who have talked about it have talked about these eight great thresholds. We see ourselves being on the edge of the ninth threshold which if we are successful, we will come through and actually produce a different kind of society but if we are not successful, then we really face the way of dinosaurs, we are just done.

Michael: You've touched on so many things I want to go about four different directions at once. Let me take them one at a time.

Paloma: I'd like to say one thing that describes some of the intersections that we are working at. We see this environmental heating up and the economic meltdown and the social equity disparities, the growing gap of rich and poor, these three areas of economy, environment and equity as being in one way a triple threat, but we see it as a triple opportunity.

So, here as we are facing climate change together, as these new city people we've really in the space of a century become a city planet. In 1907, there were only seven percent of the world in cities, and now it is 70 percent, so we are now a city planet. We see that this triple threshold is our triple opportunity to really assist all three of those moving forward and we think it's really one of the most exciting moments in the history of the planet.

Michael: Exciting and terrifying both but I am glad you are focusing on the inspirational side because so often times, people can get paralyzed by the challenges before us and not be present to how all crises, all breakdowns, all difficulties also have the seed within themselves of new possibilities, new opportunities and sometimes the bigger the crisis the bigger the opportunity, but it takes that crisis to actually catalyze something new.

Carl: I think we shared the [indiscernible 09:10] in here most recent book called the *Act of Hope* and the idea is not just simply be optimistic about the way the world is going to change but there is a commitment in the face of all the tragedy and in the face of all of the crises to really make a commitment to transform that and so we are joining hands and joining many people around the world in trying to find new ways to transform our cities that are consistent with the sustainability of life on the planet.

Michael: I completely agree. In fact, Joanna Macy's book *Active Hope* is our bestselling book. Connie and I support ourselves by traveling around the continent, speaking in churches and colleges, and what have you. We set a self-serve table of books and DVD in the back and her book *Active Hope* is actually our top-selling book, so I agree with you.

It's often just to be engaged in one thing and the right direction can take the depression or the overwhelm away. Say a little bit more about how you see or experiences you've had about changes within cities and folks who live in urban environments, please.

Carl: As I say, we are looking at transforming urban environment. We were blessed and there was a fortunate convergence of interest and the State of California passed a pretty exciting legislation. One was AB-32 which required the state as a whole to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions through 1990 levels by the year 2020 –

Paloma: Just to give that some graphic representation, we are going from 14 tons of carbon per person in the state to two tons.

Carl: That's what Arnold Schwarzenegger put forward in executive order by 2050 to reduce these CO₂ emissions to two tons per person. So that's a radical transformation. That means everything must change. So we took some steps. There is another piece of legislation passed, SB-375, in which the goal for each of the metropolitan transportation agencies was to reach a certain target for each region which means getting people out of their cars, planning to

build more of the housing that's needed, new transportation corridors and really walking and other various activities that would really support that.

Michael: That is great. Do you all know David Gershon by any chance?

Paloma: Sure.

Michael: I interviewed him for this series but I also worked very closely with David for five years. I met him 1990 or 1989, I guess, and then did a couple of eco teams. Then I became the campaign manager for the Global Action Plan eco team program in Portland, Oregon, the Portland Sustainable Lifestyle campaign and then also in New York. David has been an older brother on the path and a mentor, and a friend for decades now and his work with cities and trying to from the ground-up get people to change their lifestyle habits to habitually use less water, drive less, compost, recycle and all the different aspects of living a more earth-friendly sustainable lifestyle have been really important.

We can't really just on the top-down and of course as we all know, habits don't change easily. We typically need peer support and accountability for habits to change, so I was not at all surprised that you are familiar with David.

Carl: Let me just say this. One thing that we have been really advocating is to make sure that we integrate the issue of social justice in this transformation. Very often, people talk about a green transformation and think of doing very important things connected with that but they don't really see the widening gap between the rich and the poor and really how do you address the racial diversity of the country, what kind of positives steps need to be taken.

From our point of view, just climate change offers us an opportunity to reconceptualize the issues of race and think about them in new ways. We have a number of things that we put forward, I've just mentioned a few that I think would support this kind of transformation.

One of them is really a very large issue, which is investment without displacement. We have for example in California many people who already live near transit stations and they live there because it's an affordable lifestyle.

They live in neighborhoods and if in fact more wealthy people move into those neighborhoods and buy up housing in those neighborhoods, the potential reality is that the poor people will be pushed way out to the fringe and will end up having to drive three or four times as much as they did before. So they will be contributing to the greenhouse gas emissions but also the social inequities in a sense of giving a privilege to the people with more money.

Michael: The work that you are doing in terms of bringing the big story, big picture, big history, epic of evolution, universe story or whatever you want to call it, Connie's and my main website is TheGreatStory.org, so bringing that and the deep sensitivity to climate and the challenges before us and the focus on urban transformation and a strong attention to the justice issues, both in terms of racial justice and also in terms of – as you said now a couple of times – this growing gap between the rich and the poor, which we now know, we don't believe it, we know that that contributes to the demise of civilizations.

It's just utterly unsustainable and it's not like we can only deal with one of these issues, we've got to deal with all of them and that's what you all doing.

Carl: We deal with them simultaneously.

Michael: Share a little bit more in terms of what your experiences are like.

Carl: We are very excited also there is a great demographic shift is going on in America and by 2042, the majority of people in the United States will be people of color, so we have this transformation that's been going on the last couple of decades which is now going to reach a peak and therefore a real important question is how we can really more substantially address the issues of social and racial justice at the same time that we are dealing with climate change.

One thing is on our side I am going to say is that even if you look at polling statistics, you find out that people of color generally are in terms of their voting and in terms of their behavior, they are generally more responsive to the requirements of environment than are the white population.

What we have to do is continue to reinforce those characteristics at the same time giving the people of color the benefits of a more inclusive way of life.

Michael: I am curious, how do the two of you engage in this big picture but practically local work that you do and stay inspired in the face of some pretty scary stuff? What are some of the practices or how do you think or anything that you would like to share in terms of your own spiritual practice or emotional, or whatever it is that allows and empowers you to do the work you do in the face of really challenging times and scary stuff?

Carl: Do you want to answer that?

Paloma: I would love to. Michael, we have been in this coalition building soup where we have been growing and challenged and learning really at the speed of soul the last couple of years and I wanted to just share a little bit about what we have been learning.

Our organization is called Breakthrough Communities and this book is really kind of the basis of the work that we've begun doing here in California. After ten years of working nationally with groups, we began listening and learning for what it is that actually makes groups and coalitions most successful and we began discovering that there was actually a kind of code, an embedded model of leadership development and of action in the world.

We would love to share that with you. It is five stages, it is something that we can learn from and apply. We apply it in our individual lives, as well as our organizational lives, and it's been helping us with our coalitions here in California, and we would also like to share some of the successes and the results that we have been having with that.

Michael: Please, go for it. You've got our attention.

Paloma: When we began seeing this kind of us rise-up out of the work it was thrilling and the first stage is waking up. At any stage of this work, we are waking up to new aspects, so part of what we are waking up to is how when you lead with equity that environment and economy can also succeed –

Carl: As a matter of fact, we went through a process in the Bay Area which is seven million people live in Bay Area in nine counties. We went through a process of developing together with a number of groups in our coalition a plan for the whole Bay Area and we surprised everybody because it turned out to be more successful than addressing the greenhouse gas emissions and other alternatives.

This was one of the alternatives that were developed by [indiscernible 19:35] and Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Paloma: I think that actually would be interesting to your audience that there are these processes of planning that are going on and citizens are often invited to them but don't always know until they are over what the decision are that were made, and so by having a coalition it stays alert and tracks with some of the activities of that. It enables the whole group to succeed.

The processes that we are about to describe were ones that we used together as part of the six wins for regional equity in the Bay Area and Carl is describing a time when the six groups came together and we had to make a big decision, which was how do we learn to work together?

We had to learn and wake up to our power is greater together and if we don't learn how to work together, we are not going to be able to have the influence and the impact that is needed for the size and scale of what we are facing.

It wasn't a small thing for groups to come together and decide we can't eat each other.

Carl: In addition to that and also I guess the second point you are going to mention about the compass, many of these groups have been involved for years in protests and we see the value of protests, it's really very important.

This decision came up are we going to actually support and reinforce a public mandate to really change the way that we live in these cities, and there were many reasons why people would say, "No, we are not going to support that at all. We don't want to be displaced, we have many disadvantages in the current society but it could get a lot worse." So there was this temptation to really say no.

Paloma: Right, and I guess maybe we could talk about the five stages of our compass.

Michael: I would love you to do that but I just want to say one thing. I just want to interject one thing first which is that two of the other people that I've interviewed as part of the series are longtime friends of mine, Peggy Hallman and Tom Atley, and both of them of course have worked with a number of different groups and Peggy is really one of the world's experts in terms of various processes, with ways of communicating and coming to decision and dealing with differences that facilitate collective intelligence, rather than collective stupidity.

Of course, Tom Atley's work has been that too and what you are pointing to is the importance of building coalitions and then finding processes within those gatherings so that really collective intelligence and collective wisdom is elicited.

Carl: Exactly.

Paloma: Exactly, and these skills are evolving in this time and are knowable and learnable, and we are always ready to share what we have been learning. In this case, we are working with multiracial coalitions and also multi-sector coalitions. So some folks are working in areas of housing, others in transportation, others in public health and it's a shift that happens in learning to see the world through the eyes of another so that it seems as though climate change is an issue about transportation.

Forty percent of greenhouse gas emissions in California come through the transportation sector and yet, where our housing is located affects how far we have to drive, so transportation is a big part of it, and for many of our vulnerable communities the face of climate change isn't a polar bear, the face of climate change for many of our communities is children with asthma, health effects, elderly and young people who are having asthma or respiratory infections that are exacerbated by rising temperatures and heat factors.

When we finally got the public health and the environmental transportation folks and the housing people, and the people who are working against displacement and gentrification as Carl described, and economic opportunity, some people say if it doesn't drive the economy it is not going to really make a dent.

So, getting these six sectors together so that they actually could work –

Carl: Picture this, these groups have been organizing around a single issue. I am housing advocate or I really believe in transportation or we think jobs are really the most important thing. So these groups had their own language around each individual issue and what we were saying is that we now have come to a point where there is a huge opportunity and we can either come together and find a common thread that connects all these groups and reinterpret the individual agendas with that or we are going to go down the tubes.

So, I think this brings us also to the next level of this compass that Dr. Pavel is talking about, which is after we get ourselves together and we say, “No, this is what we don't want,” we now have to think in terms of how do we get grounded and understand what it is that we do want.

It meant that all of these groups had to come together, listen to each other, learn about our current situation and also put forth a vision that comes out of the integrity of their individual work, but actually blends them into a powerful coalition that crosses all these things.

Paloma: At the getting grounded stage, sometimes it's also about learning the science or learning the public policy strategy, how are decisions getting made, who are the people who are going to be around that table deciding what the plan is, in our case for spending \$270 billion on new infrastructure. It's like getting grounded.

This is going to come down the pipe and it's either going to benefit –

Carl: Right. It is going to benefit a few people who are at the top and most of the people will end up suffering, and we know that most of the extreme suffering is going to be by the people who of course are in there, so we have a vested interest in helping to create more cohesive societies in the face of climate change.

I want to just mention one important fact about this. In terms of adaptability, one of the things that has been demonstrated many times over again is that communities that are cohesive and/or organized are more apt to succeed in terms of protecting their health and what not in the face of disaster than those that are not.

Michael: Absolutely. I've got to ask for me what the obvious question is, which is both of you are clearly visionaries with big heart and a big picture. Who is the master facilitator? Are

both of you great facilitators? Because taking groups of people this diverse and having something really quality come out of them surely requires some gifted facilitation. Is that both of you or one of you or is it somebody else on the team?

Carl: The truth of the matter is that we both have different strengths and different capabilities and Dr. Pavel is trained as a psychologist and has an enormous wealth of experience that comes out of her experience as a psychologist. I am an architect and urban planner and my history has been working with groups around some of these technical issues.

At different times and different places, I think we both have to make our contribution.

Michael: That is awesome. Continue describing both your process and what you've learned, or your experience.

Paloma: At this getting grounded stage, actually I think the skills that each of us bring are both needed in different ways. Some of the technical things about how we measure greenhouse gases, how we map and track those assets of vulnerability, as well as strength in our communities, that's a place where Carl is a genius.

Then when it comes to how we actually get ourselves all in the room and listen to one another, and learn to talk together in a way that surfaces the issues that are not just easy to talk about but some of the things that represent our deepest fears and sense of vulnerability, that is something that I have a passion for.

Getting grounded can be also getting grounded in our histories and stories and sometimes it takes a slowing down and getting to know one another on deeper levels and we'll often bring people together with telling your three-generation story of how you traveled to here.

We are finding that more and more people are river people, are people who have migration stories of various kinds that we've all flowed from other places and come to this place. Some of us through the bottoms of slave ships and some of us crossing in boats at great risk.

Carl: I think it's also true that people have different vulnerabilities when it comes to actually exploring and understanding who they are. In particular, I've been really looking much more closely at the African and African-American experience and we find that there is a whole series of experiences that people have had over generations which the dominant society has not been willing to look at and to some extent, I don't know if you are familiar with it, a wonderful book that was written by Wendell Berry called *The Hidden Wound*.

He wrote a book called *The Hidden Wound* and the basic point of this was the impact of racism on him as a white person, the ways in which it destroyed his sense of who he

was. He goes for elaborate distinctions in his own livelihood and he realized that after a number of years, he had completely erased these experiences because they were too painful.

What he also found out was he erased his whole experience of childhood because he comes from Kentucky where the black population are much larger at Stanford University where he was teaching.

Michael: What you are reminding me of, obviously yes, I am deeply familiar with Wendell Berry's work, although not that book, I've held him as an older brother on the path for decades now but what you are reminding me is I pastored three churches over the course of a decade, three United Church of Christ congregations and my third church was in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

It's quite an extraordinary little church. About 25 percent of the church were African-Americans, very peace and justice and sustainability oriented congregation and I came to that congregation when I was 37 years old or something like that and I thought I understood racial issues and this sort of thing, multicultural issues and boy they took on educating me, because as a first born male, I was just completely oblivious to all the places and ways that I had experienced privilege and just taken for granted, and thus lacked certain sensibilities and sensitivities and so it sounds like Wendell Berry has made a significant contribution with that book.

Carl: That certainly is the case, and I also would like to remind some of your listeners that may not know that United Church of Christ also played a really important role in the beginning of the environmental justice movement, the Commission on Racial Justice. They published that book called *Toxic Waste and Race*, actually identified the location of hazardous waste sites throughout the country and found out that three out of four are located in communities of color and did an investigation that really put forward that, and I really take my hat off to them.

Paloma: One of the things that we are finding when you talked about toxic waste and toxic race Carl is in that stage of getting grounded, we often find that people begin to unearth a way in which we have built our cities with a kind of spatial apartheid and that that spatial apartheid where we build freeways to keep us from community groups that we are afraid of or we've kind of created the other side of the tracks as now kind of the other side of the highway.

What that spatial apartheid also is a reflection of this spatial apartheid in our own consciousness, so there are places that we've walled off, like Wendell Berry and like each of us and as we begin looking at our cities from a deeper standpoint, we also have the opportunity to make our own selves whole as we see what we have walled off inside of ourselves and among our communities.

Carl: One of the things that I also point out in the next stage of development according to this compass that Dr. Pavel has been talking about is reaching for new opportunities. One of the things that we found is that sometimes people are so entrenched in their own understanding of their own situation that they fail to see the assets around them that they could actually reach for.

This one of the wonderful things I think about the Universe story and all of the work that is going on in the big history is that this is a really new opportunity for us to stretch toward an understanding of who we are, not only as descendants of our mothers and our grandmothers, and grandfathers but also that we actually descended from the stars and that means that we need to actually own the whole evolutionary pattern that we have come to learn about, as scientists have learned how the evolution developed and in popular sense, we need to really embrace that as an example of something that really represents our potential.

As we reach for new opportunities and reach for the stars, we also can unlock many of the hidden gifts and treasures that exist in society.

Michael: Amen, brother. You've got an amen corner here. I assure you.

Paloma: A really beautiful example of a community that did that in a spectacular way is a group in West Harlem called the WE ACT, the West Harlem Action Coalition, beautiful, amazing work that they did as they were waking up to their capacity and power as a community, they learned to say no to a sewage treatment plant, a huge – one of the largest in the history of the United States.

It was going to be built right at the end of the 125th Street, on the Hudson, the last waterfront in all of Manhattan and they were able to stop that. That took them into that stage of getting grounded and going, “How come we are the dumping crowd? What parts of our history can we draw on that are actually noble and powerful?” The Harlem renaissance and a whole cultural visionary history, a political history, very exciting that they could reclaim to help them actually gain a new horizon and a new opportunity.

We were with them the day that we stood on the coast, on the edge of that place where that sewage treatment plant that they'd said no to and they looked out and they went, “Look, it's the Hudson River! It is the Palisades.”

Carl: You could see all the way up to the beginnings of the Hudson River and down toward where the Statue of Liberty is and this was like, “Hold it! This is ghetto and we are actually connected to this, standing here who we are as people,” and it was the one place that was left reconnecting the waterfront of the whole of Manhattan.

Paloma: As they did that they then began envisioning what's a greater vision of greatness that we can have for this neighborhood and for this part of Manhattan that actually would be inventing something new? What's something that we can say yes to that we can move from saying not to the sewage treatment plant, what's the yes that we can dream together here? What's a new vision?

They came up with three facets of a new vision on that day and one was that this could be our park and this could be a park that connects us to a larger regional park asset surrounding all of Manhattan and linking us up historically to this Hudson River, to the assets of the river and it could be a place that our community can take advantage of but also is a destination, so an environmental asset.

They also saw that they have a tremendous cultural identity and rather than having this African-American and Latino, Puerto Rican fight going on that separated their power, what would it be like to actually link and create a kind of bi-cultural center that would bring in masters of poetry, music and dance from around the world, not just in Manhattan.

So they wanted a cultural center and then the third was to link themselves, like we talked about the economy, linking themselves to jobs, to the financial centers of New York and of the world and to be on the rail line so that the subway came and was a stop there.

So those three things they fought for and that was the part of the yes, and it was thrilling to be there for the cutting of the ribbon of the Julia de Burgos Cultural Center that's now at the destination place of the public transit and then walk down the street to the new park that is there and it's something that is now a destination in a positive sense for West Harlem.

Carl: That is one exam we have in our book *Breakthrough Communities*. We have 12 case studies of places all across the country, including people who were losing their land that they inherited for many generations were losing it to developers.

We have cases in Chicago and the biggest cities in Los Angeles, the transformation.

Paloma: Detroit, New Orleans.

Michael: So you tell these stories in your book?

Carl: This book has been out now since 2009.

Paloma: Yes, we tell the stories but what we do is we make this vehicle available so that the each story is told two ways and it's told through the voices of the people on the ground who

did the work and they tell it in that, “This is where we started and it was really tough and this is how we made it through.”

Then we tell it also through the voice of policy experts who give the anatomy of that strategy and show, so it’s a tool that you can take to your decision makers and say, “We want to do land banking here, they did it in Detroit, and this is how you do it. It’s all laid out here, and it’s already been done.”

Michael: This is brilliant.

Paloma: It also tells the story through the empathy of what it’s like to really make it through on the ground with that effort. So, we are really the weavers of this book and of the voices of people throughout the United States. We are working in 12 different regions for success and that’s where this theme of breakthrough comes about is that communities that were considered to be in breakdown are actually rallying their multiracial leadership and having this transformation of the economy, the environment and equity by leading with social equity and social justice.

Carl: What I would like to do because I don’t know how much time we have but I would like to mention three book projects that we want to talk about. The first one, which is my book, which is near in completion. The new book is near in completion. It’s called *The Earth, the City and the Hidden Narrative of a Race: Discovering New Pathways through the Great Work of Our Time*.

This book actually looks at the history and evolution of the African and African-American communities from the first hominies that came out of the trees and walked across the Savannah up to Katrina and the present day and proposes this metropolitan strategy as a real focal point of a new generation of policies that affect not just black people but actually promoting social and racial justice for all people, including many of the immigrants that are coming to society.

The second book which is also in press, which probably Dr. Pavel can talk about. She has two books to talk about, but the second one really describes the heroes of this movement for climate justice in California around SB-375 and then one that’s just hot off of the press...

Paloma: That is *Climate Justice: Frontline Stories from Groundbreaking Coalitions in California*. If we have time, we would love to share one of the groundbreaking stories here in California that coalitions have had in the last year.

Michael: Go for it. Absolutely.

Carl: Then the other, which is also a real treasure which is Paloma is the author of this and it has a foreword by Desmond Tutu, called *Random Acts of Kindness*. Maybe you can say a few words about this.

Paloma: Yeah. This is really a prose poem, *Random Acts of Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty*, and I was thinking we might, as part of our ending today, have a couple of lines from it.

Michael: I've heard that meme for years and for decades. Are you the creator of that?

Paloma: Ann Herbert, my co-partner and co-author in this and I are the original originators of the phrase in the book.

Michael: So cool, I didn't know that.

Paloma: Yeah, it was very amazing in response to actually initially the Rodney King incident, racial violence in America and the pending Persian Gulf War at that time and how we saw that we were hell bent on the drumbeat for violence and war, and we were trying to think of how to create a kind of spell that might break this trance that we were in.

I think that it has taken the phrase random violence and senseless acts of cruelty and reversing it, so I think the meme and part of why it has caught on for people is because that's embedded already in our consciousness and in our routinized listening, and then to hear random kindness and senseless acts of beauty as the reversal of violence and cruelty, and the antidote.

Michael: What you say makes so much sense and it was always unconscious for me and it's like in this moment I am having this big, "Wow!" light bulb come on.

Carl: And this was 20 years ago.

Michael: I know.

Paloma: Our 20th anniversary edition is coming out with this foreword by Desmond Tutu and what he really awakens in us and in responding and honoring the work of this Random Kindness project, because this book with the 20th anniversary edition is really launching our Global Climate and Community Resilience project.

The compass that we are describing is actually part of a multimedia interactive workshop and training that we have been offering and it starts with the inspiration and big picture, and a video that Carl has created to go with his book, *The Earth, The City and the Hidden Narrative of Race*, and then it takes people into that deep personal journey of what is it that I bring to this moment in history?

How is Gaia calling me in this moment? How is this great triple threat also my personal opportunity to greatness, and we see that transformative process that people are being called to as they get involved with this activism.

It's just thrilling and then we have the practical strategies that we practice and kind of walk through together, and then we leave with celebration going forward, including some of the spirit and stories from *Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty*.

Michael: I have been inspired. I am interviewing 40 amazing people or actually 42 amazing people and you are the first time that I've actually had two people on the screen at the same time and I am just blown away.

It's a very humbling process because I know Connie and I are doing great work in the world but it's so incredible to meet people who are doing work that I keep having this thought, my god, this is the most important work on the planet, and I certainly feel that about what you are doing, what you are up to and what you are sharing.

I am actually going to suggest that this interview be put on Skype just a way of enticing and introducing people to this whole series of the *Future is Calling Us to Greatness*. Please, continue.

Paloma: Thank you. What Desmond Tutu offered when he responded to *Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty* was to really remind us of both this ancient understanding of Ubuntu, the notion that I am because we are, that we are interconnected radically and deeply and that he calls us to be life artists in this moment, and that we have in each moment the choice to – in our book we say to find delight or start the fight – so we see that this moment of this deepest challenge and complexity actually calls for the greatness that is in us that there is like a jewel or a kind of quality of leadership and that we all have different qualities of leadership, a kind of ecology of leadership whether it's the quiet moss or the whirring brook.

Every one of us has a quality of leadership that we are called to, and just like the pinecone that opens when the fire is on, those resin based pinecones that release the seeds when the heat melts the resin that the heat is on and it's calling for each of the seeds that every one of us is.

I think it would be thrilling to hear about the story of what success we've had this year as community groups are stepping forward and we are meeting up with folks whether it's people white folks in suburban churches or inner city activists are linking together on behalf of climate and having success.

Carl: I have to tell you one aspect of a wonderful set of experiences. It was called the Education Advocacy Day and this is the second time we just did it a couple of weeks ago.

What this day is it's in the morning, about 50 or 75 people come together and review a year's worth of work we have done in organizing in the morning and then at noon and in the afternoon, we go out and meet with all of the legislators who are in charge of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Government in the afternoon.

It's a lot of people that go in teams and meet with all of these folks and what this has been doing is you have people of color, young people of color going out and meeting older, white suburban established leaders and saying, "We are here because we are the next generation and we want to work with you in order to make this region a region that is sustainable and will work for us."

We just got through with a period of time of doing this. By the way, we have video document of this.

Paloma: We would love to share that with you, Michael.

Michael: Yes!

Paloma: Just the action and strategies that we see could be used in many communities and what was thrilling is seeing this cross-pollination that happens just like in permaculture when they talk about the edge between different eco zones being the most fertile place where new evolution and more resilient species evolve.

We see that that's what's happening in our communities, that these inner city and suburban white, mixed race groups are coming together and as they are putting together their housing, public health, environmental and economic activism in support of and learning to work together that it calls forth.

This is the greatness part that I see is that the commitment to that larger goal then links and as people link across differences, then as we are learning from each other, we encourage the greatness and pull forward qualities that otherwise wouldn't be released.

Carl: I think our viewpoint of this is really simple because it's within each of us but we don't know about this. We don't know about this until we actually discover it in ourselves and discover it in other people.

I just want to say a word about the traditions that we come from. Many multiracial, multicultural communities, components of this are people who come from Asia, from Africa, from Central America and also from Europe but I want to just point out that the African people were brought to the new world as captives and it wasn't until they joined up with

the people in London in the Abolitionist movement that we began to build the kind of case that we needed to do to eliminate slavery.

As we very often tell the story in terms of here is what the black people did, here is what the white people did, we don't tell it often enough in terms of this is what their collaboration was. Sometimes, people think this is really important but I don't know, I'm the first guy that ever thought of this and the fact of the matter is there is a long history about this kind of collaboration.

As we saw and we were able at the end of the Civil War to eliminate slavery and to actually make some adjustments that were right. We now have a new opportunity and a new challenge because in the same way that was the plantation on we are invested in this challenge of a society that a way of life they had to give up. They couldn't see how to do it.

We are now on the threshold of a new challenge where we have a way of life that we need to give up and we need to find just things that are wrong with the way that the world is together but we need to find a way that we can make it right and this is again you talk about the challenge of greatness, we have this capacity to this and to also demonstrate to their countries that justice is really a part of this struggles for climate adaption and mitigation. Justice is really essential part of that and has to be included along with all the other strategies that are being developed and that it's not necessarily an opposition between those saying new need to be more technically and putting together good technical locutions and the other people who are saying that we really need to come together as more healthy communities and find common ground in the kind of things that makes our communities great.

Michael: One of the things this is reminding me of is that there has only been one other time I think that in this series where I was literally brought to tears and that was in my conversation with Nikki Silvestri at Green for All and she was sharing something that you mentioned earlier was when you invite community to get to know each other, to build intimacy and trust, and rapport, you invite them to share – I forget exactly – it's something like three-generation story.

I asked her. I said Nikki, what inspires you on a daily basis to face the challenges of our time and she said, "I think of my ancestors and I actually meditate on my ancestors, the struggles and the challenges that they faced," and then she gave a couple of examples, including a great-great-great-grandmother that was repeatedly raped and children taken from her. Yet, she didn't kill herself and she is a direct descendant.

I just was blown away and I then used that story with other groups when I am trying to help people to really value the sacrifices and the struggles of past generations and that in a very real sense, mythically speaking of course, they are rooting us on, they are cheering us

on. They want us to be inspired to do similarly in a way that is such a blessing to future generations.

Carl: Absolutely.

Michael: Please, continue. Anything else, any other stories and then I've got one off the wall question that I want to ask to both of you.

Carl: I think we would be maybe good to look at your poem and *Random Kindness*. It is something that we've come to really treasure as a part the workshops that we do.

Paloma: I think when I look back on this last year, one of the transformational moments for me Carl was when our groups that had come through so many fights, so many difficulties together actually reached a critical point where we said, we are giving advice to this Metropolitan processes but they are kind of patting us on the head and dismissing us. How can we actually get them to take us seriously?

This is where some of the science and technology also comes in and we saw that we needed to learn something that we didn't already know, we had to explore a new horizon around this complex transportation modeling process.

We spent several months where we actually went out and found the best transportation modelers in the country and said, "Will you listen to us? Will you take our dreams and the indigenous knowledge that we have about our communities and what we want in this larger regional plan that they are planning that is going to determine the direction of how our metropolitan region grows over this century? Will you take our dreams and help us turn it into the language of technology that they will understand and respect in this process?"

We also did political work on the other hand where we went around and did these one on ones with elected officials and said, "We want to put forward our own plan and we want you to hear why that's important to us. We want to know if you have objections, can we work with them to actually get to a yes with you."

Over several months, when we finally came to the meeting that started at 5 o'clock and went on up until the midnight hour, and it was late into the evening when we were working and having meals and shifts and all that one of our elected officials stood up and said, "I propose that we recommend this equity environment and job scenario replace one of the scenarios that we were planning to test and actually include what these people have done."

We were packing the hall and it was this moment where it was –

Carl: The thing was the second vote and another elected official said, “I move that we make it unanimous.” So it was at this moment that the executive committee of –

Paloma: It was like our destiny was hanging in the balance right there and this Republican guy coming through and saying this, we were just stunned and everyone, you could hear the hush in the room and then you saw one by one the hands going up that every board member did that.

At that moment, I wish that I could take you there because at that moment, the scream, it was like the World Cup and the scream that went out and people rolled into the streets and they accepted our scenario that we had worked and figured out how to get into the running with that.

The thing that happened after that was even more amazing, Michael. That night, and I saw the power, when we watch these Olympics and things, we are watching people’s greatness but what I saw that night is we saw our greatness because we had been to the Olympics of learning how to put our ideas together and how to work together, how to step back, how to step forward, how to let the young people lead us at time.

There we were and we were unanimously invited into the process and then the next day, we went, “Holy shit! Now what happens? Now, they are going to test our thing and what’s going to happen with it?” Some of us were skeptical. I know I thought that was a token gesture, it got them off the hot seat. They would have had a riot if they hadn’t let us in. Who knows what it would have blown up that night? It was so intense in that room.

But then the miracle that happened was that after they ran the technical evaluation of all the scenarios, the number one that reduced greenhouse gas emissions most effectively against all of their professional scenarios was our scenario.

That blew us away. That amazed us about our own efforts.

Carl: Really, in a sense, I think it really is a precursor of the many new inventions that are to come. As we think about it, there is communities of color that have not been in the process that have not been allowed to participate for one reason or another.

As we become a majority, hopefully an active majority in helping to shape and to bring forward the best along with many other people, the best that our society has to offer in response to this important global challenge, and I think this is really the point when you talk about the rise to greatness. I think this is the point that we in our community, in our neighborhoods and in the Bay Area of California are saying, “We can do this and not only can we do it in the Bay Area, not only can we do it in California, but we can actually do it across the country and we can make our communities an example to the developing countries and others

who are trying to figure out how we get to a good way of life and how we do it in ways that are fair and how we do it in ways that have the most impact and empower its people.”

I think if we put our minds to it, we have this real potential of transforming the world that we live in and making it much more sustainable, and making it much more habitable for not only ourselves but also the larger than human species, and really in a sense move into a New Age.

Paloma: What we are learning is that as we learn to work across these boundaries that it really links not only to one another in our communities and makes us safer with one another but also that it moves us beyond the US to our trans-local movements with people that there really isn't a way, there isn't a way of really going around us.

We can't export our inequality or our inequity and have the use of labor or of natural resources that are inequitable placed onto other countries to have our pollution transferred and really work as a planet, that this containment issue is really a unifying issue where we really get to see our deep interconnectedness. One land, one water.

Carl: The poem.

Michael: Right. There is a poem.

Paloma: I also want to honor, even though it is the two of us here speaking that I think what we are really earning is that these coalitions and learning to work together, and learning to explore the space between the “we” space that we are better together and that that's as we move from an idea of individual spirituality that there is no private salvation, that actually by entering into this work together we are transformed in the process and that it accelerates our evolution in exciting ways.

Michael: Before you read the poem, I just want to say this because it is in my heart to say it. I remember hearing this phrase years ago and I don't even remember, I think it was spoken of Joanna Macy by somebody, I don't remember who but I feel this now with regards to not only the both of you but the communities that you actually are also giving voice to, these coalitions and the people that you work closely with.

It is that you all have many fans and most of them are not even born yet.

Paloma: Thank you, and I guess Carl, as an anchor as we are trying this, I would like to dedicate this to one of our coalition members, a young man, **Davila** Irwin who when he began working on this SB-375, he described himself as going on the pipeline to the prison.

He was from West Oakland and had really had both alcohol and drug issues in his family and was being sucked into that vortex, spiraling down. As he began learning about climate and about how it was impacting his own neighborhood, he became very interested and excited about the science of it, about the community organizing of it and as he found his voice in this movement and became a leader in this movement and became now an ambassador who is actually thinking about running for public office.

In the space of three years, this young man turned his life around and went from really seeing someone who was disposable, really already kicked to the curb by society to being someone who feels that his voice is needed to help lead and guide his community through this climate navigation, this climate change transformation that we have.

So, Davila is very much in my heart as we are sharing.

Carl: You will have a chance to see and hear him in our video. We have a video of him speaking to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, it's very moving.

Michael: Before we finish this conversation, I want to make sure that you give any web addresses where people can find, go more deeply in your work and see these videos, and this sort of thing.

Paloma: Thank you. Would that be now?

Michael: No, go ahead and read the poem.

Paloma: Was there something you wanted to ask us?

Michael: Yeah, let me actually ask this now because then I'd like to conclude with your poem, so that's good. Thanks, good timing. The off the wall question is this and I've never asked two people this to respond at the same time, so it will be interesting. You'll have to do some quick collaboration or just co-creation in the moment.

If you had the opportunity to invite any three people in human history to a dinner party where it's the two of you and these three other people, or just a one on one or one on two where you are meeting with one person at a time over a glass of wine, a cup of coffee or a meal, or whatever, who would those three people be and why would you choose them? Why would you invite them?

Carl: Wow...I would nominate Nelson Mandela as one. He is not that far back in history but after having spent that time in prison and bringing together the South African people and actually helping to mobilize and move this community into a state of ending apartheid without bloodshed, I would put him in there. I'll let you nominate the other two.

Michael: That's a smart man.

Paloma: Let's see, history...I guess I was thinking of some of our –

Carl: She is trying to find a woman, that's what she is trying to do.

Paloma: Some of our early hominids. I was thinking of Lucy, our great mother, someone who came out of the trees and saw that it was a climate change moment then too, and coming from a safe place of being in the trees and crossing the Savannah. What was that like to actually bring from a place that you knew how to eat, you knew how to gather.

You weren't sure how it was going to work in this new landscape and to actually enter into that zone. I feel like we are in a great crossing. We are in both a leave taking and a new adventure together as a global tribe, and as neighborhoods. So, I guess I would want to take Lucy.

Michael: I love it.

Carl: Obviously, this is a very hard question and you can think about it.

Michael: I know and you will wake up tomorrow morning with something else in mind, for sure.

Carl: I can think of some names of different people that I would put in there but I also want to really talk about an important moment. When the first African slaves were brought to America, brought to the new world and who were faced with this incredibly complex and new set of challenges and who looked out and saw a sea of white faces and they were on the chopping block of being sold.

They had to visualize or they had to try to visualize what is waiting for me. So I would want to know have we actually mastered the dream that you held for us that made possible for us to actually not only survive but to be here and to transform this world in a way that it's not only a good home for your children and your great grandchildren but also for the grandchildren and people who come from all parts of the world to inhabit our metropolitan regions.

That is what I would say and then of course we can add Mahatma Gandhi and Tolstoy and others.

Michael: Paloma, any last thoughts on that one?

Paloma: Let's see, I guess Hildegard is rising up there. I love her sense of not only trusting her visions, god as the greening power but also the sense of being a musician, a scientist and an herbalist and so really seeing that we are of this earth and nature and that each one of us has access to the healing that is needed and is also a healer.

I think I would add Hildegard and yes.

Carl: Roosevelt fits in there somewhere too. Eleanor Roosevelt.

Michael: Yes, okay. All right, so poem and then where can we learn deeper about your stuff?

Paloma: This is *Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty*, 20th anniversary edition and it is deceptive. It looks like it could be a children's book and actually, these images are taken from a 12th century scroll by Mayumi Oda. Many of you may know her work, for those of you who don't she is kind of the metisse of Japan and has lived here in our own Bay Area but is back working with Fukushima survivors and refugees, establishing kind of a new vision for Japan in a post-nuclear, post-petroleum world.

The people who did these first images were people who did not read or write and who organized themselves through picture language. In a time where people were kept illiterate they learned and innovated to organize themselves through a picture language called the **chao-chu-giga** which is a scroll and I've had the great privilege of not only knowing Mayumi but working in Japan for the last 30 years.

The traditions of the East, as well as the West and the South are part of this work for us.

Carl: I don't know if you want to mention Desmond Tutu or you want to mention him at the end.

Paloma: Go ahead Carl, bring him on.

Carl: I think there are miracles in the world and it actually is a miracle that [indiscernible 74:04] got the Nobel Prize for Peace, another one was Nelson Mandela and the other one was Desmond Tutu.

Desmond Tutu has offered and written the foreword to this book and I think it's a very great honor for us but it is also reframing in the sense the popular image of *Random Kindness* and puts it in a context of social and cultural struggle and transformation that he came forward and did this essay at the beginning.

Paloma: Thank you, Carl and thank you Desmond Tutu. I would include him as one of the people at the dinner party, even though he is still among us.

Michael: Yes.

Paloma: Thank you, Desmond. This is just a few excerpts and lines from this.

“We never know how much and we never know how far it goes but always we have power. We have power.

We are all making the soup we are all eating.

We are all weaving the cloth we are all wearing.

What we do can't go away.”

We've talked a lot about we today.

“We are all in this circle together and anything we do, randomly and frequently, starts to make its own sense and changes the world into itself.”

Later on,

“We are right on the edge of discovering millions of new ways of being together, millions of new ways of dances we can do together, minute by minute,

We are right on the edge.

The steps we take now make new earth grow beneath our feet.

The steps we take now decide what kind of earth that will be.

In every moment, we have the choice

To find the fight or make the light.

We have power, it's a circle start the dance.”

Michael: That is fabulous. Wow! You guys are incredible. Tell us where we can find more and go more deeply into your work and share it with others.

Carl: First, I want to tell you that this book, *Breakthrough Communities* was published by MIT Press and it can be gotten on Amazon. You can also get it from us from our website, which is...

Paloma: BreakthroughCommunities.info and the Random Kindness Project with the Community Resilience Initiative is RandomKindnessProject.org and we are available. We want to come to your community. We love sharing this work. We are deeply rooted here in Bay Area but we also have wide wings and we are actually heading to Kazakhstan this week and sharing this community resilience work there and we love coming to your community.

Carl: We have two other works that will be finished at the end of this year and in the beginning of next year. The first one is the *Earth, A City and the Hidden Narrative of Race: Discovering New Foundations for the Great Work of Our Time*. That's a book that I've written and the second one, which includes many of our authors is...

Paloma: *Climate Justice: Frontline Stories from Groundbreaking Coalitions in California*.

Michael: Awesome. Fabulous.

Carl: Do you want to say what our general website is?

Paloma: BreakthroughCommunities.info. Thank you.

Michael: Just blessing on both of you, your work and the communities and networks that you work with. The next time, I promise you, the next time that Connie and I are in the Bay Area, we will absolutely look you up and get together.

Carl: That sounds good.

Paloma: Thank you.

Michael: Cool. Until then, blessings to you both.

Carl: Thank you.

Paloma: Thank you, Michael.