

# The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



## Transition Culture, Transition Network with Rob Hopkins

Big ideas from this session:

- Transition Towns as “the biggest urban brainwave of the century”
- The necessity (and gift!) of moving from oil dependence to local resilience
- “Engaged optimism” as a key to staying sane and empowered in difficult times

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Michael: Rob, thanks so much for joining in this conversation series The Future is Calling Us to Greatness. I’d like to invite you at the beginning, as I do all my guests in the series, to share. I don’t want to assume that everybody is familiar with your work and the whole transition movement and that sort of thing. Could you share a little bit of your own story, how you came into this work and help us get to know who you are?

Rob: Well, hello. It’s lovely to be here. My name’s Rob Hopkins. I live in Totnes in Devon, which is a small market town in the southwest of England. My background is I was a permaculture teacher for a long time and kind of campaigner. I was into natural building so I did lots of straw building and compound building and set up one of the first ecovillage trading center projects in Ireland. I lived in Ireland for ten years.

I have four children and I grow a lot of food in my garden. I, in 2005, had this kind of sort of peak oil movement, I suppose, a moment. The tools that I then had to kind of design a way out of that were permaculture thinking tools.

Michael: Rob?

Rob: Are you still there?

Michael: I’m still here. I just turned off my video because when you started talking about peak oil you cut out for a little bit. I’m going to save the bandwidth. When you’re speaking I’m going to take my video off. You’ve gotten garbled there with the peak oil so could you just say that again?

Rob: Okay, that'll be the NSA listening for those words. Yes, in 2005 I found out about peak oil and climate change. I had my peak oil dark night of the soul, I suppose. Then the tools that I had to kind of design a way out of that I suppose were permaculture design principles, which I'd been immersed in and teaching for the previous ten years or so.

The last year that I was in Ireland, which was 2005, I asked my students on the course I was teaching to use permaculture thinking to try to delineate a way away from the oil dependency of the town where the course was based towards a more local, more resilient, low-carbon way of doing things.

The remarkable thing about that town was nobody seemed to be doing that, really. Most of the responses, if you Google such that Google was at that time for responses to peak oil, they tended to largely be very hairy, American men heading up into the mountains with four years' worth of toilet roll, shotguns and lavatory paper, baked beans. That didn't really seem to me like a very good response, particularly on a crowded island such as this.

My students then produced their various bits of work and I kind of cobbled them together and called it the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan. It was just a student project, really. Then we had the conference shortly after and Richard Heinberg came and David Holmgren came and various people. Richard Heinberg said, "This is awesome, this is fantastic. Why doesn't anybody know about this?"

He went off to America and showed it to other people. Then it was downloaded thousands of times. At that stage we were moving back from Ireland back to England, which is where I'm originally from. I thought that's really interesting, I wonder if we could take that idea and develop it further.

That was really the inquiry that started what has now become Transition Network. There are 50 countries around the world now where transition's happening, thousands of communities. It's really become a sort of bottom-up, solutions-focused, citizen-lead, open-source, collective experiment really, trying to figure out what does a way of living that is appropriate to the times that we now live in actually look like.

It's creative and fun and empowering and kind of viral, really, I suppose.

Michael: That's certainly been my experience. I know quite a few people involved, in fact Michael **Brownley** is a dear friend. We've stayed at his house before, he and Marie.

I was actually involved. You wouldn't probably know this about me, I was involved in the early days of the creation of Earth Haven in Asheville, North Carolina.

Rob: Fantastic.

Michael: I did permaculture training at the farm in Tennessee and dear friends with a number of permaculturists. Because I think, and obviously you do too, permaculture is so central, if you could just share just a little bit about when you say permaculture principles, to people who aren't familiar with permaculture what does that mean?

Rob: Earth Haven is something that inspired me quite a lot a long time ago. I thought it was very interesting things that they did there. Permaculture is one of those things that's always quite tricky to sum up in a snappy sentence. Often if you're asked in a pub what permaculture is you have to get a flip chart out and start drawing pictures of chickens and compost heaps and arrows going around.

I guess for me it's the design glue that we use to stick a sustainable culture together. There are all the different bits and pieces that are a sustainable culture, whether it's renewable energy, local food production, sustainable forestry, water management and all those sorts of things. Permaculture is using design to stick those together in the most effective way possible.

It draws from observing how nature works and how efficiently nature puts things together and manages resources. What I love about it is that it kind of distills out the essence of what you need to know in order to be able to do certain things.

There's a guy called **Yental** Evans you might know who's a comp teaching instructor in Oregon. In his courses we used to have a session called foundations in 15 minutes, which is everything you need to know about building foundations for a house. It's really not that complicated. We'll do it in 10 or 15 minutes and then that's everything you need to know.

Actually, in the same way do you really need to study soil science for three years to how to have healthy soil? You don't really. What permaculture does beautifully, I think, is it distills out the things that you need and gives you a kind of design framework, a template, to stick them all together in the most effective, efficient way possible.

Michael: That's great. That's fabulous. One of the things that I've found particularly inspiring about permaculture is, as you say, it takes nature as the fundamental teacher in terms of how do living organisms in healthy ecosystems relate to each other and relate to the foundations of their existence, the air, soil, water and life upon which they depend and in cycles rather than sort of a linear flow to the waste heap or whatever.

I think that the work that you're doing in that and really all the permaculturists as well as the work that Bill McDonough and others that are focusing on design, how do we design human habitation, how do we design human buildings, human organizations such that it's modeled on nature.

Say a little bit more. If you could go into it the theme of this conversation series is the past is rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness. The name of it is The Future is Calling Us to Greatness. I'm interviewing just people sort of at the real forefront of sustainability, peak oil, climate change and especially how to stay inspired in the face of some really scary stuff.

Your work in the transition movement is so vital. Help our listeners who aren't real familiar with that yet get a picture. What does this look like? Some examples perhaps of what's being done, various initiatives or whatever.

Rob: Transition, the foundation of transition is always a group of people, a group of people who come together to get it started. I think one of the things that's been really ignored, in permaculture but often in most of the kind of environmental initiatives that I've been involved with over many years has been an acknowledgement that you need to look after that group. That group needs certain skills. It's not going to happen by magic.

Even in permaculture there's talk of the three principles that are dependent on: Earth care, people care and fair share. That people care bit is starting to be looked at more I think in permaculture. For many years it was in there as a founding ethic but actually the way that particular Bill Morrison, I think, sort of presented permaculture it wasn't really that much of a thing.

There is that typical activist model, I think, of keep going, burn out, keep going, burn out, carrying the heavy burden of saving the world on your own up the mountainside and collapsing and getting up again. That's what it feels like for many people.

I know in my early 20s I was quite involved in some of the road protests in this country here. You had people who spent years and years campaigning against new roads being built and putting their bodies on the line. Often became very burnt out and exhausted.

What transition is trying to do is really at the work of the local scale, of the community scale, of the neighborhood scale to say there's actually an enormous amount we can do at this scale. If we work at this scale we can be much more effective than if we work trying to lobby at the national level. If you stay below the radar you're less likely to attract the big interests to try and kind of rubbish in and undermine what you're doing.

You can work much more effectively, I think, below the political radar. When you're working nationally it's much more easy to pigeon hole you, you're left-wing, right-wing, pro-capitalist, anti-capitalist, whatever. Transition, when you work at the local scale, is very skillful at just being about how do we make this community more resilient, involving people across the spectrum in those kinds of projects.

Increasingly the focus, I think, is becoming one of the other things that I observed for many years in this field is that there is the volunteer is king. Somehow having an organization of people who are all volunteering is somehow seen as the most ethically pure way of doing anything. As soon as you introduce any money or pay anybody or whatever somehow the whole thing becomes tarnished and we need to scuttle off somewhere else and start again.

Actually, I think there's a real tyranny in that kind of culture of volunteerism. The people look around and say, "Why is everyone doing this white middle class?" Well, I don't know, maybe it's the fact that only white middle class people are going to have the time, the expertise and the confidence to actually contribute to this.

When I was in the US last year I did an event in north California with **Dorian** Robinson from Richmond in California. She said, "If this is a revolution that depends on volunteers I can't be part of this revolution, and no one where I live can be either because people are working so hard just to keep the roof over their heads."

There has been a real shift I think in the last two or three years within transition as well to say it's not enough just to say we need to localize our economy. Who? What do you mean we? Which we is that and what do they actually look like? Where do we start? Where are the people that are going to do that? Where do we get the investment to do that? What support do people need to do that?

We have what we call the REconomy Project which is about supporting transition groups to turn the many, many ideas that transition brings to the surface into new livelihoods. To also be thinking realistically about what's the potential of this.

Actually, I think we're now at a stage where we can say that transition is a form of economic development. We've done what we call economic blueprints for a few different places where you map how much money is spent on food and actually if you were able to localize some of that what's the economic benefit. I know Michael was involved with that kind of work in his transition group. It's very, very powerful.

You asked for some examples. In terms of strategies for supporting that economic localization the city of Bristol has a local currency scheme, the Bristol pound, which is the biggest one in the country now, which is accepted in about 800 businesses. You can pay your council tax with them, you can spend it on the busses, you can pay your business rates with them.

The mayor of Bristol takes his full salary in Bristol pounds. They have a pay by text system where you use your phone to text the shopkeeper. They're really starting to do some very interesting things working with the city council about how Bristol pounds could be woven into

how the council procures. When it's looking for contracts about how it spends its money if a company accepts Bristol pounds then that makes it more likely that they'll get the contract. These kinds of things are really groundbreaking, interesting stuff.

We do a thing every year down here in Totnes which I'm very fond of which is called the Local Entrepreneurs Forum, which says who are the people in this community who are the entrepreneurs of the future, who are going to create this kind of more resilient, local economy that we want to see. Then we bring them together with potential investors and mentors, people with experience who want to pass on.

We spend a day getting to know each other and mingling and stuff. Then in the afternoon we do a thing called the Community of Dragons where different people pitch their business and then the community can pledge its support for different businesses.

Michael: How did you come up with the name Community of Dragons?

Rob: There's a television program here called Dragon's Den. I think it's called something else in the US. It's a program Donald Trump does where various people come before them. They have a panel of successful business people. I can't think what it's called in America. They come along and say, "Here's my business idea," and then the millionaires either invest in them or humiliate them on national television.

I've really decided I have a bit of a nice aversion to that. Everybody in this town is a potential investor in the economy of this space, whether you can just lend someone a pen or whether you can lend them \$10,000. You're investing in that person's business. It's just the most magic event. That's something.

Transition groups start local food projects. They start urban food growing on rooftops, food transition groups growing food on railway stations, all kinds of different stuff going on around that.

Lots of communities setting up their own community energy companies and the successful ones starting to support places around them to do that. I'm involved in a project, which I've been very excited about for a little while called the ATMOS Project.

Michael: ATMOS?

Rob: ATMOS, which is this little badge you see here, [INAUDIBLE 00:16:39]. This is the heart of any economy. There's a derelict industrial site in the middle of our town next to the railway station. We've now spent seven years trying to get that site into community leadership. We'll be making an announcement sometime in the next couple of weeks about its future.

Development is something that usually happens to communities. Developers come in, they buy land, no one has any say. They build horrible houses that we now have to live with and all the money is extracted off elsewhere. That model is really morally bankrupt and completely inappropriate. The UK is currently trying to claw its way out of an economic collapse caused by an unsustainable housing bubble by creating an unsustainable housing bubble. What could possibly go wrong? I don't know.

There's just stuff being built all over the place, it's awful. We really need a different model where the community owns the site, consults everybody. It's held in community ownership, it's building truly affordable housing that's inter-generational. That's kind of a sense.

Transition is really about how do we make the economy of this place, the community of this place more resilient, more localized. How do we support each other to do that? How do we build community and personal resilience into that model as well?

One of my favorite things that we do here in Totnes is something called a mentoring program where Totnes is a place that has long had a history of a sort of counter-culture center, I guess. I often say Totnes has more psychotherapists per square foot than anywhere else in the country.

Actually, one of the things that they do which is fantastic is going back to the earlier point about burn out and feeling like you're carrying the world's woes on your shoulder climbing a hill, there we have a mentoring program where they offer, free of charge, their time to support anybody who's working in the middle of transition town Totnes. Anybody who's in there doing whatever they're doing can get free of charge support to spend time looking at the things that are really there for them at that time. It makes an enormous difference in terms of burnout. It's just fantastic.

Michael: I'm sure.

Rob: It's really brilliant.

Michael: One of the things that I'm inspired by as you speak is that it seems that this whole transition approach really goes back to what we should know as humans, which is the primary unit of survival is the community. We're not just individuals, not isolated families who don't even have extended family anymore, but we are tribal creatures. We thrive in community and we don't thrive when we don't have community.

Of course, the way education has happened for 99% of human history in terms of healthy education is mentoring. People who know how to do something or have the resources or are older or wiser or life experience supporting others.

It feels like to me what this approach does, and I've thought this for a long time, is at least here in America, I don't know what it's like over there but here most Americans are either in the denial camp, the myth of perpetual progress, things are going to just keep getting better and better. Look at the last 100 years. Without factoring in at all our impact on the air, water, soil and life upon which we depend and other species.

The others, you've got sort of the survivalists, the myth of the apocalypse, that the whole thing's going to hell in a hand basket so they just need to isolate and get a big dog and a big gun and a lot of stockpiled food and that sort of thing.

Yet what you're modeling and what this whole transition approach to sustainability and to thriving and using permaculture principles and this sort of thing is it allows people to be in action in ways that can take the depression or the overwhelm or the fear or the anger or whatever and engages them in something useful and productive. Also where they've got others to share their values and share their commitments.

We can support each other. If I'm overwhelmed I can rely on you or if you're overwhelmed. We support each other emotionally. That's one of the things I find so necessary and really you are modeling that.

You've used two terms that you and I know what they mean and most people I think intuitively know. I'm just wondering if you want to go a little deeper into either one of these. The term resilience, the need to be able to adapt to whatever is real because there are so many unpredictable things. Then also localization. Again, most people probably have some intuitive sense about what both of those mean but because they're at the heart of what you're doing I'm wondering if you can say a little bit more about them.

Rob: I guess the word sustainability is great. There's lots of stuff sustainability as a concept has built into it: social justice and looking seven generations and so on. What it doesn't tend to have built into it is the ability to prepare for the unexpected. As we see with what's already happening in terms of climate change and various things like that, actually we need to design in that ability to respond to shocks. When the shocks come what do we do? How prepared are we to go with that?

If we design imagining that we're going to get to a steady state and we can just carry on like that without any shocks that's not really very sensible. Sustainability is kind of a good thing. Resilience in itself isn't necessarily. There have been some pretty horrible resilient societies in the past. I think what resilience brings is that observation that we need to be designing for shock.

It's often talked about in terms of the ability to bounce back. How do you bounce back after you've had something go wrong? The way I kind of reframe that, I think we need to

be thinking about how we bounce forward. The things around us are moving and changing so quickly that we need to use any crisis and preparation for a crisis to actually be preparing for what looks most likely into the future.

Putting in place local food systems, although in some ways they kind of struggle to be viable when placed alongside the globalized supermarket model, the more of that infrastructure we can get in place the more appropriate that's going to be. Community-owned renewable energy is something that enables us to bounce forward to the kind of world that we want to see. That's really what resilience is to me.

Localization is really the observation that globalization, the idea that we should be rooted more and more and more in international markets, we should have less and less barriers to trade, is really last century's idea, I think. It takes massive amounts of cheap energy to make that happen. It undermines social justice. It undermines resilience both here and in the developing world. It is a model designed to funnel more and more money to less and less people.

Localization is sometimes dismissed as being the argument that we've just become self-sufficient, which is not at all. It's really saying the more that we can source closer to home the more benefits that we have.

The way I like to think of it is I wrote a thing recently about looking at Los Angeles and the water system in Los Angeles. The figures off the top of my head is something like every year LA spends a billion dollars getting the water to LA. It's the biggest use of electricity in California.

At the same time about half a billion dollars' worth of water that lands on the roofs of California, in LA, is just disposed of as greenly as possible. You've got this insane system. The water, you've got to pipe it in. The stuff you've got, you get rid of it.

Actually the way that a forest manages water is completely different. An oak tree with a 100-foot span holds about 57,000 gallons of water in its root map. You think of the leaves as being a floating lake, really, the water is held there as well. It regulates its own climate and so on. Maybe we can start to think of the towns where we live and their economies as needing to do that much more.

It's not that they're all isolated from each other but the resources, money for example, that come into the down cycle as many times as possible before they leave. They make as much stuff happen as possible before they leave.

Increasingly our economic model is this kind of extractive industry of supermarkets, big chain stores that have no loyalty to a place. They just exist to extract, like big, fat leeches on the street. They're extracting that energy off to somewhere else.

Actually, localization says we can do better than that. We can actually own these enterprises and in doing so we can create more work locally, skills locally. We can provide housing better than they can. We can generate energy better than they can. We can do it based around fairness.

I think it's the big idea of the next 10, 20, 30 years. We need to look at the economies in a different way. It's like in an electrical system how you build in the surge breakers so that the shock doesn't just come through and knock the whole system out. The degree to which economies are more localized it builds in that protection.

The analogy I always talk about is I remember when I was about 18. I finished school. I wasn't very good at school. On the day we were waiting to get our exam results I remember sitting on the grass in the sunshine in front of my school with all the people, with all my friends who'd just gone to get their fairly mediocre exam results.

I remember looking around thinking, "We are such a useless lot. If we all got washed up on a desert island we wouldn't even know when to eat each other." We just had nothing at all.

Actually, when two people meet each other who have no skills at all it's a very different quality of relationship than when two people meet each other who've been brought up very practical. Even if they don't know how to do something they could figure it out, they could work their way around to doing it.

I think actually it's not saying every town, every city needs to be self-sufficient. Actually, when those two communities interact with each other in a way where they're much more resourceful and self-reliant in that kind of a way, I think that really changes the quality of everything.

Michael: Yes, absolutely. I couldn't agree more. When you were talking about LA I couldn't help but be reminded of just last week Connie and I, my wife and I, she's a science writer. We watched Cadillac Desert, which is all about the western US mostly and how the relationship to water and damming up rivers that is so unsustainable. Los Angeles was like the poster child of unsustainable relationship to water. Of course, now California's really feeling it in terms of the drought there.

I think it's quite possible, in fact I would probably say likely, that over the course of the next ten or 20 years we're going to see a fairly large migration out of California because they're just not sustainable. Either that and or sort of radical localization on smaller scales.

On your website I know that you've used this phrase and I loved it, engaged optimism. Say a little bit about how you stay inspired, how you wake up each day to do the work you do in the face of really scary stuff. What does engaged optimism mean?

Rob: I was talking to my next door neighbor last week. We were standing in front of her house and I don't quite get what she said. She said something like, "Yes, I really must make an appointment to go and see my [INAUDIBLE 00:29:48]." It sounded like she said, "I really must make an appointment to go and see my optimist."

What a fantastic thing, the idea that you would have your own optimist to go and see when you were feeling a bit glum. Go along and they say, "It's not that bad." I thought there's a good professional training there for somebody. What do you do? I'm an optimist.

I kind of feel like in a way that's one of the things that transition does, but not in a naïve, "It'll be great," kind of a way but more in a sort of. I suppose for me what kind of nourishes me is seeing what people can do. I sit in kind of a privileged place.

Sitting in Transition Network what my role is really is almost like a sort of storyteller in residence. I kind of Hoover up these stories from around the world of what people are doing and then I present them out in blogs and films and so on and so on. Just incredible stuff that people are doing.

The other side of it is I have four sons.

Michael: How old are they now?

Rob: The youngest is 12 and the oldest is 21. For me, what's always driven me is I want to be able to look their children in the eye and say, "I did everything I could. My every waking hour I gave to trying to do something about this and trying to turn things around."

Actually, that's something which I find really feeds me in some way. I suppose as well in some ways a lot of the stuff that I do, I write and I blog and I draw sometimes and I work with people to make films, for me transition is almost like an arts practice as well. It's something that really tries to harness people's creativity.

There's incredible flowering of stuff that people do through transition. All of the arts and all kinds of different ways. Incredible kinds of engagement activities based around community theater practice and all sorts of stuff.

Ultimately I like that thing that Joanna Macy says about there's no guarantees. There are no guarantees with doing this work and anybody who goes into it thinking it's definitely going to work. Anytime I have moments of doubt and I think transition is just not fast

enough, we need something else, what would something else look like, I always go off on this whole mental circle all the way around and then come back to where I was and go, “Okay, I haven’t come up with anything better.” Maybe we need more professional optimists.

Michael: I love that. Here’s a question that Connie, my wife, has asked me to ask my guests. After this I’m going to actually ask you to talk about your books and films. This question sort of is off the wall. If you could invite any three people from human history to a dinner party where you’re having dinner with all three of them or a one-on-one over a pint of beer or a cup of coffee or a meal or whatever, who would those three people be? Either one-on-one or all four of you together. Why would you choose them?

Rob: It would be Martin Luther King because I do a lot of public speaking. He was one of very few public speakers I think through history who could just make every hair on the back of your neck stand up. Whenever I listen to him speaking it moves me in a way that very few other people do. I’d like to ask him for some tips.

I would invite Sterling Morrison who used to play guitar in The Velvet Underground because he was this lovely mixture of one of the best guitarists in the finest band that ever walked the Earth but also a real lover of literature and a very quiet, thoughtful kind of man. I’d like be able to teach me a few riffs.

The last one would be someone called King Songtsen Gampo. He was a Tibetan king who when Tibet was basically just a lot of feuding clans who were all just fighting all the time he was the first great unifier king in Tibet. He was the guy who brought Buddhism to Tibet and really accommodated Buddhism coming to Tibet. He’s incredible. His story about how within his lifetime he basically just dismantled the army and built monasteries and built a culture of peace within one lifetime I think is really a story that we really need now.

Michael: That’s great.

Rob: I’d love that.

Michael: Tell us about your books and films. Help us get a sense of what’s available.

Rob: Well, the first book I did was called *The Transition Handbook*, which was in 2008, which was what kicked it all off really. Which not many people know, actually. It’s a square book. Actually the reason it’s a square book was mostly because it meant that it would always stand out on the bookshelves. Secondly I asked the publisher if we could do the book the same shape as a seven-inch single. Which for me is the great art form of the 20th century. We did, so that’s why it’s that shape for anybody wondering why did you make a square book.

Michael: I wondered that myself but now I know.

Rob: There you go. Then we did a book called *The Transition Companion*, which was actually modeled on Christopher Alexander's book *A Pattern Language*, which was designed to be all the different elements of transition and you assemble them in a way that you want to.

Then the most recent one was called *The Power of Just Doing Stuff*, which was a short kind of outlining of what a new economy could look like based on transition thinking.

*Transition Handbook* is pretty much out of print now. Actually, it's pretty much kind of outdated. The model that it talks out in terms of how to do transition, we don't really do it like that anymore. *The Transition Companion* is a good place to start.

We made two films called *In Transition 1.0* and *In Transition 2.0*. You can see both of those on YouTube. Particularly 2.0 is still a very current overview of transition and what it's all about.

I blog prolifically. If people go to [TheTransitionNetwork.org](http://TheTransitionNetwork.org) website and then look for the link to transition culture it's the blog that I do that's a fairly relentless torrent of gibberish on there.

Michael: How often do you post? Every day?

Rob: I try to but it's not necessarily every day.

Michael: I found that I couldn't keep up a pace of even once a week. I'm somewhat amazed. One of my favorite bloggers is John Michael Greer. Every Wednesday Connie and I just wait to read the next installment on *The Archdruid Report*.

Rob: The other one is, oh I can't think of the name now. Oh dear, it'll come to me, it'll come to me. She blogs about food. Astyk, Sharon Astyk.

Michael: Sharon, yes.

Rob: I love her stuff. She's very, very good.

Michael: I'm just curious, where did the name *The Power of Just Doing Stuff* come from?

Rob: I grew up with punk when I was young. I really always loved the kind of do it yourself spirit in that. There was a thing I used to love was a really bad drawn thing of how to play three chords. Here's A, here's E, here's G. Now form a band. I loved that kind of get on with it, have a go.

We sit around and we think about it wondering have we got the model right and have we really thought through it? Just figure it out, just get started. There's a brilliance about just getting going, I think. That was really the idea.

What I see time and time again when I go around the country or outside the country to different places to see transition happening is that where people step across from thinking, "Someone should really do that thing. When's someone going to do that thing? It'd be really good if somebody did that thing. It's just sitting there. Someone really should do that thing." When they actually go, "I think it's me, actually. Do you want to give us a hand?" What people get from taking that step across is amazing.

I spoke to this woman in Portugal in this very depressed town in Portugal. Many places there have been really hit hard by the financial crash there. She lived in a block of flats. She lived in this apartment for years and years. She said, "Over the last 20 or 30 years I've watched my town and my city crumble. People turning their backs on each other."

She got involved with the transition group and they were a group that really worked on this idea of what we call the power to convene. Actually transition groups are great at getting a group of people together and going to do something.

They came around. She had this idea of turning this pretty small piece of lawn in front of her apartment into a food garden. All the people in the apartment came out, people she'd never met before. They did this garden. It wasn't going to feed one person in the apartment but never mind the whole lot.

She said, "All of a sudden we had something to talk about with each other again. We had something to do together again." It started to give people confidence and it kind of built from there.

What we see here is people sometimes dismiss transition and say it's not political. The scale of the challenge is so huge that the only thing that's going to work is politics. Why don't you run to try and get into the Senate or whatever and get involved with politics?

I think we're really seeing now actually how the opposite is true and that by rolling up your sleeves where you are and getting on with creating the future that you want to see it creates kind of a virtuous, self-propelling momentum to it.

Here in the UK we have now many, many places, some transition, some not transition, starting their own community energy companies, putting in place energy-generating infrastructure in ways where the community owns it, the community benefits from it, the community can invest in it. In some places there are models where the community can take their

pensions out of the usual kind of ghastly fossil fuel invested model and invest it in their own community energy company.

In Berlin recently was an attempted community takeover for the grid of the whole city of Berlin, to bring it into community ownership. These models that are popping up all over the place. What's interesting here is that rather than lobbying the government why don't you help start community energy? People just get on with it.

Now about six months ago the British government published a community energy strategy about how the government would support community energy. Transition Network helped to write it. People from a lot of those transition energy companies were involved in drafting it. They're trying to catch up, which is as it should be. I mentioned the Bristol pound early on with the mayor taking his full salary in it. The Bank of England have never had any full statement on that.

They're now popping up in different places and off the scale where the Bank of England for the first time had to publish a statement about its legal understanding of local currencies and how they work.

There's a place here in the UK called Balkan which is the second, I think, place where there was fracking happening here. There was an enormous campaign to stop that. I think it cost them like nine million pounds to police this site because there was so much protesting about it. It was fantastic.

The village of Balkan, the people in the village, have been under siege from this campaign and protest for months. Started their own community energy company. The idea was they wanted to through a mixture of reducing demand and investing in renewables generate the same amount of energy that fracking would have done.

It leaves me thinking what's the most political thing you can do when you're faced with something like that? We think the idea of lobbying, campaigning, protesting is the most political thing to do. I think, actually, just roll up your sleeves, create the alternative, just get on with it in such a way that it's below the political radar, it doesn't divide people, it brings people together. It's fun, it's creative, it's playful, it invites people in. That's the way to go. That, for me, is far more political.

Michael: Yes, and far more fun, too.

Rob: Far more fun, and the cake's better.

Michael: Yes. One last question I wanted to ask you, and this has been wonderful so thank you. Post Carbon Institute. I know you're a fellow in the Post Carbon Institute. Say a little bit about the work of the Post Carbon Institute.

Rob: The Post Carbon Institute started out as the Relocalization Network, I think. It was originally called something else. It runs things like Resilience.org which is one of only two websites that I check every day religiously. It's a very good digest of stories around news and news around energy and solutions and that kind of stuff.

They've done some fantastic reports looking at fracking. They've done a very good one called *Drill, Baby, Drill* all about fracking. Richard Heinberg writes for them. I think they're one of the best organizations thinking about resilience in the bigger picture who are asking the right questions about energy into the future and availability and the whole sort of dream state that people get into that it'll all just be grand, it'll all be fine and we'll get oil out of the moon or something. There's no oil on the moon, people, or wherever.

The fellows they've brought together to support their work are a really kind of inspirational bunch as well.

Michael: That's great.

Rob: Support the Post Carbon Institute because they're wonderful.

Michael: Amen to that. I wholeheartedly agree. Since you mentioned there are two websites that you check in pretty much every day. One of them being Resilience.org. I've got to ask, what's the other?

Rob: The Guardian. TransitionNetwork.org is one you should also check. There's something really interesting there every day.

Michael: That's great. Well, Rob, thank you so much. Any other resources that you want to recommend in addition to TransitionNetwork.org and what we've already talked about?

Rob: Nothing leaps to mind. There's loads of stuff, I'm sure. If you just search for transition and you start looking into some of the thousands of websites of individual transition initiatives, you'll find all kinds of stuff on there.

If you want to follow on Twitter as well, I'm on Twitter @RobInTransition. Anything interesting that I come across as time goes by I try to put it on there as well. Future

Michael: Fabulous, great. Rob, thank you so much. Blessings on your work. It's among the most important work that's happening on the planet, in my opinion, and actually most of us that are involved in this whole sense that the past is rooting for us to step up to our challenges and the future is certainly calling us to greatness.

I know you feel the same with your sons. I keep a picture of my granddaughter right by my computer, as she is the embodiment of the future calling me to greatness and to do everything I can so I can, as you said, look at my grandchildren and their children, if I'm blessed to be alive at that point, and really be able to say I did as much as I possibly could. That's where we find meaning and joy in life. Thank you for your work.

Rob: My pleasure, and thank you for yours. Thank you for the option, too, to be part of this great series you're doing.

Michael: Cool, thanks.

Rob: All the best.

Michael: Yes, thanks, you too. Bye-bye.

Rob: Cheers.