



Review of What a Way to Go: Life at the End of Empire

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

This review is by Mick Winter (www.DryDipstick.com), the author of Peak Oil Prep: Prepare for Peak Oil, Climate Change and Economic Collapse (www.peakoilprep.com). The What a Way to Go website can be found [here](#).

A two-hour poem of great power and beauty. The story of a personal journey; yet a journey that is also deeply universal. As humanity rushes towards a nexus of catastrophe, is there a world beyond denial and despair? The film suggests the possibility.

"What a Way to Go" is a 123-minute ode to life as it could be, as it should be, as it has been in a distant past, and in some way, as it is now, as rejective of reality as that may be. We, who should be stewards of the earth, have instead tragically become its dominators, bending the rest of life to our will. But there remains the hope that within us are the seeds of wiser people and a better world.

I have seen a number of films on Peak Oil, climate change and the other ills of our society and planet (yes, even Nobel Laureate Al Gore's Oscar-winning "An Inconvenient Truth"), but none has moved me so much as this one. While it does include some facts and figures, it primarily deals with the human psyche—the emotional and spiritual pain experienced by those living in, or victims of, industrially civilized countries. It builds a deep emotional and spiritual connection between the viewer and the planet on which we live, and the fellow creatures of all forms with whom we share life on this planet. It becomes clear that the suffering we experience as humans is shared by the entire biosphere. Because of the beliefs which have entrapped us, we are alienated not only from nature, but from each other and, indeed, from our true internal nature. What we have done to our planet we have also done to ourselves.

I have never seen a film quite like this before. The many brilliantly chosen film snippets—usually archival—are mesmerizing. Somehow using film clips from decades past creates a feeling of distance, connection and immediacy, all at the same time. I can't explain it, but I found their use extremely effective. Despite the often staccato use of the film clips, and the frequent interspersal of talking heads, the film flows smoothly, carrying us along in its grip as it goes. This is largely due to the narrator (writer/director Tim Bennett), whose words are interesting, compelling, and powerful, delivered with a soothing calmness and more than a touch of sad weariness, and because of the superb editing of the film, which according to the credits was done by Bennett and producer Sally Erickson. It is also a tribute to the film's very effective original music score.

"What a Way to Go" is a two-hour poem of great power and beauty. It is the story of a personal journey, yet a journey that is also deeply universal. A journey that encompasses ignorance, awareness, fear, depression, denial, grief and despair. But when denial can no longer be

maintained, and grief and despair can no longer be endured, there remain two options. Once is self-destruction; the other action. The narrator chooses action.

The topic of this film is human life, and our survival. "What a Way to Go" addresses many of the major threats to our life as a society which are, as we all know, coming together to form a "perfect storm"—a nexus of catastrophe that could sweep many, if not all of us, into extinction. Peak Oil quickly becomes a simple hors d'oeuvre as the film moves on to climate change, mass extinction, population overshoot, famine, disease, toxins and other threats to civilization.

Interestingly, the film identifies agriculture as the point where trouble first began for the human race. Growing food instead of gathering food became humanity's first truly disruptive technology. The logical outcome of being able to—and needing to—stay in one place was cities, which by their very nature cannot be sustainable. They have no choice but to be dependent on resources from outside their area.

Agriculture appears to have been the point of division, the time when humans began to change their surroundings rather than simply live within them. It was the beginning of our separation from—or at least our perceived separation from—nature. More than 10,000 years later, it can best be expressed by the words of that wise observer of society and human nature, Woody Allen, who has said: "I am at two with nature."

I referred above to "talking heads". A better term would be "talking hearts" or even "talking souls". Although scientists are interviewed, the majority of the commentators in the film are writers, artists, academics and others who demonstrate clearly that our society should give equal time to the creative observers of our society. Some of the better known are Thomas Berry, Jerry Mander, Daniel Quinn, William Catton, Derrick Jensen, Chellis Glendinning, Richard Heinberg (in his role as a generalist and humanist as well as a Peak Oil expert), Richard Manning and Ran Prieur. They and many others offer insightful observations on our society, our plight and our possibilities. They speak with concern, caring and humaneness.

The film could easily be seen as a major bummer. The reality of our planetary situation is grim, and the movie pulls no punches. Depression and despair are expressed, discussed and absolutely not dismissed. Indeed the narrator cautions us toward the end of the film that there will be no happy closing chapter.

But the filmmakers are not without hope. Were they, there would have been no film. They leave us with the recognition that even if we are facing societal death, we can face that death with honor, knowing that we have tried everything we could to right the wrongs that we ourselves have created. If we lose, let that loss be noble. And maybe, just maybe, we might tap into that strength that comes from recognizing that all life on this earth is not just connected, but one. It would be a glorious finish, and even more glorious were we to come out successfully on the other side.

"Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid."

- Basil King [from the film]

My congratulations and thanks to Tim Bennett, Sally Erickson, and to all involved in this film. I intend to buy a number of copies of this film to give to friends. I highly recommend you buy a least one yourself.



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