

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

Can the Wealthy Have A Separate Peace? - Revisited

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on August 7, 2010 - 6:03pm in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

This is a guest posting by [Altaira](#), who has a Masters Degree in Agricultural Science. She is employed at an NGO working on issues related to sustainable development. The [article](#) was originally posted in August 2009.



I normally don't mix with millionaires, but through "6 degrees of separation" circumstances I found myself in an extensive and personal conversation with a wealthy and highly connected person. He knew that I was "preparing" for economic decline, including skills in household self-reliance.

As the conversation evolved and took various twists and turns, he eventually proposed that a business helping the ultra rich establish "lifeboats" would be both lucrative and timely, and that I might be especially qualified. Imagine the family of an investment banker being plucked from their rooftop helipad in upper Manhattan to a prepared enclave in the country, while watching burning tires and broken glass 40 stories below. They could end up in upstate New York, or in a more exotic place like their personal island in the South Pacific.



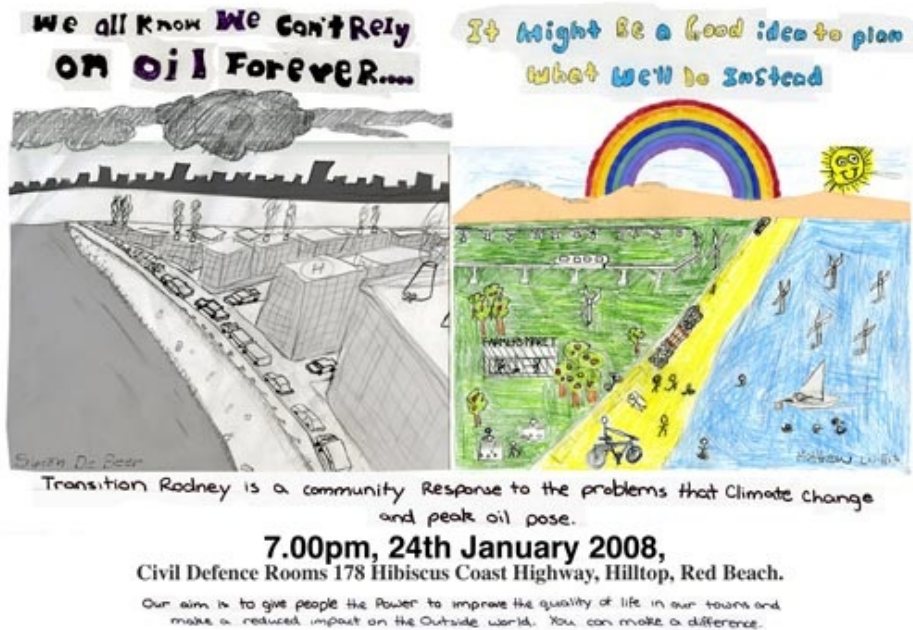
He then named about a dozen families on the Forbes list of [billionaires](#) who have already prepared for doomsday on a spectacular scale, including multiple geographic options. These were the early adopters, I was assured, and now a second and much larger wave will be in need of professional advice and on-the-ground know how.

Of course I would need to have a well-recognized partner in the armed security business, such as Blackwater. There would be guarded walls, prime farmland, renewable energy systems, stockpiles of essentials, fallout caverns, as well as necessary amenities like tennis courts and pools. Presumably, beyond the walls would be squalor, misery and violence.



I called a friend who had a career in high finance on Wall Street to get his perspective on my encounter. He had a similar story to tell—many (not most) of his old connections were thinking about financial collapse and some about personal security. He said it made sense. The people who made big money have highly competitive personalities and are likely to reason that if money doesn't work anymore they will need to directly take the resources that money used to buy. They are ambitious, bold, and often ruthless, traits that served them well in a society where success is measured in pecuniary conquests.

Obviously, a vast chasm exists between the attitudes and strategies of a 'separate peace' for the wealthy and that of institutions like the Post Carbon Institute, the Transition Town Initiative, and sustainability in general. We are an extremely variable species - the spectrum between cooperation and competition varies greatly not only among individuals but among groups of individuals.



I must admit, this experience took me a bit by surprise. I was unaware (a) that these sort of ‘high level’ retreats were being built, and (b) of the utter disregard, almost contempt for the common man and woman I witnessed. Even so, I found myself wondering if my new friend was correct about the direction of the future, and whether it might be smart of me to acquiesce, and position myself for the “inside” rather than the “outside” of the walls being built.

So I emailed The Oil Drum. What does the Campfire think?

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Some questions.


Do the highly ambitious and wealthy have a different understanding of “human nature” than the more egalitarian and communitarian minded? Are these different views the result of scientific understanding of human nature or from whom one tends to associate with?

Will enclaves of extreme wealth be built on a massive scale? Will they succeed in protecting their inhabitants? Are they “moral?”

Are we in a situation that could be termed “disruptive selection” where hyper individuality and hoarding OR highly cooperative behavior and equity might succeed?

Can we identify forces that would send societies one direction or another, and places more or less likely to take a particular path?

Is there a middle ground between these alternate views/strategies, for example, personal wealth being used to transform a village or town, i.e., build an inclusive lifeboat based on essential needs short of tennis courts and swimming pools?

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