

## On becoming an activist: A 'progress report' on a 37 year journey to date

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### Abstract

The author, writing as a 6th generation Tasmanian, tells the story of his journey to a new form of environmental activism. The influences of social context, family history and personal learning on his development as an activist are described and discussed. It is argued that Tasmania is still in the grip of an oppressive post colonial colonialism<sup>1</sup> that continues to shape the roles and expectations of ordinary Tasmanians. The author sees his crisis of oppression as a microcosm of that gripping the social context, including local grassroots activism. From a young age the author sought to understand the nature of his crisis and what could be done to change the situation within and beyond himself. His journey has taken him from fear, indignation, and frustration to a new understanding from which he is seeking to facilitate new forms of social activism that will hopefully take Tasmanian environmental activism to a new place. Living Theory is playing a role in the development of the *next steps* as the author further refines his ideas and practice as he works through a series of 'Living Contradictions' in his inner and outer 'lives'. In this sense he is in an important phase of personal reinvention and spiritual rejuvenation.

**Keywords:** Environmental activism, Tasmania, Community Based Auditing, Living Theory, Post Normal Science, Colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup> I see Tasmania as still largely in the pioneering phase of its history. In this sense we are still in *early days*, so to speak, particularly in regard to cultural issues associated with defining our identity and dealing with the consequences of European settlement. We are settled, yet somehow strangely *unsettled*.

## Introduction

I write as a middle aged white male of European heritage. For the past 37 years I have been an environmental activist here in Tasmania, the southernmost island State of Australia.

This paper tells the story of my personal journey to this point and how I worked with other like minded activists in initiating an idea for a new form of activism that aims to create conditions whereby the citizenry can actively participate in natural resource planning and management in Tasmania. The story includes an explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which I live and work. It explicates the meanings of the embodied values I use to give meaning and purpose to my life as an environmental activist and shows how I use these values as explanatory principles in my practice and living standards of judgment in accounting to myself and others for the life I am living. It makes an original contribution to knowledge in the development of a form of community-based audit that I include as a responsive feedback approach to integrating evaluation in the process of working to improve practice. It makes an original contribution to living educational theory with its focus on accounting for a life as an environmental activist.

## My approach to this narrative

As a writer, activist and researcher I work with emergent understanding and thrive on constructing understanding and *special theories* based in the particular and in local settings. I therefore, prize local knowledge and *common sense*. This means that my methods and techniques are fashioned as required so to speak. I therefore, class myself as a bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 2-3). A bricoleur in this sense is a writer/inquirer who works rather like a craftsperson, picking up and adapting tools in innovative ways to deal with the job at hand. He or she is a kind of 'handyman' and innovator who develops inquiry tools and methods as situations demand. What more could be asked of an activist!

In this paper I intend to keep to these commitments as I reinterpret my journey to environmental activism. Yes, that is right – *reinterpret*. As I write this very piece I am mulling over what it all meant and means and so this version of my story is to some extent unique – I am still discovering as I write towards understanding my Living Theory. Above all I am seeking to become a better practitioner as I develop my competencies through helping others. In a sense then the very writing of this very text has facilitated the emergence new themes, ideas and leads for further inquiry and therefore I am inquiring as I write! (Richardson, 1994, pp. 520-521).

I will begin the paper with a discussion of the powerful shaping forces within my social context and then move to discuss the educational influences, learning and experiences that took me to my *next stage* of practice and understanding, leading ultimately to new ideas and innovations. Lastly I move to a discussion of the significance and relevance of my learning experiences for my Living Theory as I continue to learn and grow *and* learn to grow!

In keeping with my bricoleur style (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pp. 2-3), I will include anecdotes such as letters to colleagues and friends as well as excerpts from my research journal. These will help to give further insights into the development of my Living Theory and at the same time enhance the credibility of my story thus honouring my *contract* with the reader.

## My Social and cultural context

Tasmania was settled by the British in the early 1800's and by the 1830's it was home to several thousand of British convicts. In 1836 the European population of Tasmania was around 43,000 of whom about 26,000 were free settlers (Skemp, 1959, p. 124). There was much suffering and hardship in the early days and the Aboriginal people suffered badly at the hands of the white invaders. Many aboriginal people were massacred and also many died from introduced diseases, and in the short space of only 30 years the population was all but exterminated (Skemp, 1959, p. 149). By 1847 there were only about forty Aboriginal people remaining. Skemp, in his book *Tasmania Yesterday and Today*, lamented: 'It is a tragic and pitiful story, this extinction (sic) of a race, 'colonialism' at its worst: a story for which British people may rightly feel ashamed...' (Skemp, 1959, pp. 149-154). Reynolds (cited in Gray, 2008) has written on the exploitation and cruelty of Aboriginal people in the broader Australian context. He tells how the aboriginals attempted to cooperate with the white settlers. But this soon turned sour as the aboriginals realized that the settlers wanted their land. This soon led to ongoing conflict and in 1869 one white pioneer on mainland Australia wrote: 'every acre of land in these districts...was won from the Aborigines by bloodshed and warfare'. Although Reynold's interpretation has been disputed by other scholars, the tragedy of the Tasmanian Aboriginals appears to be confirmed by Skemp (1959) and stories handed down through my own family. My ancestor, who was sent from Britain as a 'capital respite' prisoner, ultimately became a policeman and then a farmer and the family story has it that as a policeman he was deeply traumatized by the way aboriginal people were treated by the whites. I remain very much affected by the terrible past of a state that has suffered at the hands of white settlement, which Gray (2008) terms the 'Euro-Celtic encroachment'. The emotion is still raw and I personally feel that a pioneering ethos resonates in this colony and is still entrenched in many of our *visible and invisible institutions* here in Tasmania. I believe we are still in the grip of a subtle form of colonialism which began with the way in which the land was taken and then *shared* among a few key people who were in turn part of the colonial power base of the day. Over the years this power influence has permeated the government, the public service and the traditional power structures within Tasmanian society. This has led, in my view, to an ongoing culture of control and manipulation and runs deep in our culture and is one of the reasons I continue to support citizens and community groups in struggles with the environmental issues that continue to plague the State. Flanagan (2007) discusses some of the effects of the present culture of control still evident in Tasmania. For those readers who would like to learn more about these aspects of Tasmanian culture it is instructive to read Flanagan's (2007) [article](#).

## My journey to environmental activism

My activist/advocacy work is voluntary. I also hold down a part-time job to support my family and activism. I have fought a number of causes over the past 37-odd years, rising to prominence in the 1990's with the development of a number of approaches to improve the effectiveness of environmental activism here in Tasmania. In a 'Letter to a Friend' I tell the story of my move to activism. I have reproduced the letter here to further emphasize my passion and commitment and at the same time provide a thumbnail sketch of my history and learning as I look back over the years. The focus of the letter below is on only one pathway, namely the path to Community Based Auditing (CBA). Of course there were many other paths and sub-paths, several of which I indicate during the course of the letter. I find letters a useful means whereby one can interpret and reinterpret the stories and narratives we tell ourselves and others. The sharing of such narratives via letters of course invites response and so the interpretation continues.

### **A Letter to A Friend**

#### **Making of my activism**

Hi F,

*Thank you for your thought provoking email. Your thoughts are very valuable.*

*Can I say at the outset, I would be the first to agree that the process of CBA [Community Based Auditing] is far from easy. I agree when you say, "To find, out in the wilds of Tasmania or any country/remote area, such qualified people I feel is difficult". But nonetheless they are there. They are housewives, farmers, school teachers, parents, all sorts. That's the gold, that's the real thing. We have shown that 'ordinary folks' can do it. I'm not sure who learns the most from each intervention me or my co-learners! Working with these folks is a delight and a revelation in the positives of the human spirit. Most of what is needed is right there. Even back in the 1990's when I was running Community Based Sampling workshops around the State I quickly learnt that folks were much cleverer than us (at that time) experts could believe!. I tell you, for me every CBA workshop is an uplifting experience and opportunity for tremendous learning. Trust me when I say that compared to what our future may be like, going through change processes like CBA will seem like a bloomin buzz.*

*Below I give a quick history of how I came to CBA (some of which you may already know) before offering some other views.*

*I've been in the activist game for nearly 35 years now, making my 'start' back in 1973 (fresh out of Silent Spring) when I was mixed up in some pretty serious issues regarding the use of pesticides in agriculture. I did some work (a self funded research project) on a product containing an insecticide known as diazinon (an organophosphate) and its movement in the environment. Since then I have been involved in many 'campaigns', the longest being the Exeter Tip issue. During a period of 7 years I supported and represented an Exeter farmer in his fight over problems caused by chemical run off from a nearby tip that caused death and deformities in his farm animals. The issues ended up as a court case in which 3 co-defendants were sued (one of the very first joined suings of its kind) where the local council, the then Department of the Environment and an employee from DPIWE were served with Supreme Court writs – the matter was settled to the farmer's satisfaction). Those days I was*

using the forerunner to CBA, known as Community Based Sampling (CBS), which in 1989 was probably the first time that an activist used a structured program of environmental sampling to build a case of negligence. From the early 1990's until now there have been many more projects (aerial overspray, Toxics Action Network, involvement with political parties [the Greens and the Democrats], the toxic issues [PCB's] at the Exeter Child care centre [basically about a proposal to use a former Hydro Electric Commission workshop as a child care centre!], water pollution issues and organic agriculture to name a few). These experiences gave me a very good grounding in the issues, the political process and the nature of activism.

From around the early 1990's I began to reflect on what I believed were problems with Tasmanian environmental activism (that complex of institutional and 'lone gun' activists, which I will continue to refer to here as activism). As I saw it Tasmanian activism did not seem to understand the nature of Tasmanian post-colonial culture (although I would argue that we are still in the colonial moment of our history) possibly because it was trying to use models of activism that simply did not fit into the Tasmanian context. As a result when it came to political action only a small number of citizens could be reached (i.e. voted for change). That was (is) the first problem. I'll touch on this again a bit later.

There was a second problem. When it came to fighting issues there was (is) a tendency for the activists and the movement to 'stack on the evidence' in order to win the arguments and therefore the day. This was particularly problematic when the use of iconic species or places no longer worked as a means of swaying public and political opinions. Of course a good argument must be more than a pile of evidence (albeit very good quality evidence!). For a start, it must be clearly written down so that others can learn from it and thus enter the general discourse to challenge other, perhaps dominant ideas. That is how knowledge grows – via the written word. All that's left in the end is text; our stories, theories, arguments.... As important as Emotion, passion and protest are to the change process (paradigm shift) they can never (on their own) hope to replace the careful building of reasons for why we should make a change. Human beings use reasoning processes to change their minds. In short, our well crafted arguments challenge beliefs and understanding on particular issues, leading people to reassess what they think they know. Many times changing one's mind tends to be a slow process, even slower for institutions (including the movement). As 'right' as the theory of Relativity may have been it still took many years for it to be accepted. Way back in Galileo's time the proposition that the Earth was not the centre of all things was seen as sheer heresy (much like the way our 'authorities' carry on when one makes the proposition that The Blue Tier should be preserved for future generations!).

Following my graduate studies in 1994 (I spent 2 years studying sustainable development with a focus on sustainable agriculture) a lot of things became even clearer to me, particularly the role (and value) of personal transformation in the overall change process. By 1997 I had stepped across paradigms and was now seeing the world through a new lens. For me this transformation was a painful and at times terrifying process as I moved from the worldview of 'objective scientist' to that of novice 'participatory action researcher'. I spent the next 5 years developing my understanding and praxis and in 2002 graduated with my M.Sc. (Hons). What came out of all that was a better idea as to who I was becoming and what I could do about my two 'problems' discussed earlier. Indeed, even in 2002 they were still problems and the work on CBA during 1999 to 2001 showed that something could be done! My Ph.D. work continues this dual inquiry, both into my 'becoming' and my practice as an activist.

As a relatively 'young' methodology CBA is still evolving and we continue to look for ways to make it work better (it's by no means perfect!). While CBA has been successful in 'catching government out' that is by no means its real objective. CBA is about exposing the flaws and weaknesses in the way science is applied within NRM [Natural Resource Management]. It exposes an over reliance on the notion of certainty. Unlike other forms of activism CBA is a systemic effort to prompt and document the deconstruction of science as applied to NRM and at the same time invites personal

*transformation for those who practice it. In normal activism activists try to use the same science to challenge the very science that set up their issues of concern in the first place (a bit like trying to lift one's self up with their own bootstraps!). This is deeply problematic as it keeps those who practice it away from the real problem and at the same time takes them deeper into the present environmental crises by supporting science (and all that flows from it) in its present form.*

*In approaches such as CBA we give up some of the ideas of fighting against those in authority, favouring instead to use focused inquiry to take them to ever deepening levels of justification until we expose flaws in their reasoning. Such exposure is possible only by virtue of the fact that all science rests on assumptions which makes it uncertain and therefore unable to lay claim to any 'high ground' (at all!). Bringing project proponents to the point where they are forced to acknowledge that their proposed operations will have areas of significant uncertainty (despite earlier claims to the contrary) is very powerful. Suddenly, the debate is no longer about water, forests or whatever, but about the quality of their science and 'what could go wrong'. This is what happened in the Diddleum Plains farm case: the forestry proponents could not substantiate (using science) the guarantees they had given because their methods were not used at the correct scale (the Achilles heel) over the site of concern. In short, there were flaws in the way in which they used science. This set up the potential for a 'house of cards situation' and the Forest Practices Plan was withdrawn. The significance of this move on the part of the forestry proponents was not easy to spot and was largely missed by all but a few of us. I would argue that it and similar cases are opportunities for vital turning points in activism. But in that case, the old story, folks were 'so pleased it was over' and just moved on not realizing that you have to run the last 5 meters to win the race (i.e. to make public the exposure!). That said my comments should not be seen as a criticism, but moreover simply a statement of how it was – still, a vital learning experience, after all it was our very first CBA!*

*I assert that in all cases where science has been used to provide the public with assurances there will be an Achilles heel/s awaiting discovery. The significance of these Achilles' heels is not that well understood and can be very hard to grasp. This hunt for the Achilles' heel I call Post normal activism (by the way I think that is a brand new term, so if you share it with others please acknowledge the source). The problem with 'normal activism' is that while it is very good at raising the issues and mismatches it is usually unable to take matters much further. So the necessary paradigm shift to take us to the 'next level' of human understanding will be a very, very, (very) slow and painful process. And growing even slower given the emerging technological, institutional, social and economic complexity that is now very much a part of activism.*

*And yes, CBA is a huge intellectual challenge and does demand high energy and sticking power. But (in my view) look at what activists do now most of the time... a lot of energy expended, a lot of as you say, 'racing around the hills' and what for? Where are the documented arguments, where is the connection with community? Where are the wins since the Franklin and Wesley Vale? Alas, there must be another way; there must be a new activism. That said it is not about winning as much as about deconstructing the foundations of the thing that causes us to go out and seek to win in the first place. In short, those of us using approaches such as CBA are trying to speed up the process of the revolution of ideas that will be the paradigm shift. By the same token, take nothing away from the power and necessity of emotion, passion and protest. I am not claiming that current activism is wrong, rather I am arguing for a means whereby we can help to progress toward the goals and visions so vitally important for the survival of our now, shall I say, very Blue Planet!*

*Coming back once again to the problem of connecting with community (I promise to be brief). As activists we are advocating on behalf of communities and those citizens yet to arrive in this earthly domain. Despite the good intentions and energy of this advocacy it is surprising to hear what 'ordinary' folk have to say about activists and 'the movement'. The upshot is there appears to be a*

*disconnection or a breakdown in the relationship (was there ever a relationship?) between the broader community and the 'movement'. I think this is a complex 'problem' and to some extent may go back to the historical roots of our Tasmanian culture. My gut feeling is that we are still living with the aftershocks of a dark and violent past that was (is) this colony, and that while we may not be explicitly aware of this it nonetheless still tends to shape the behaviour and responses of 'dinky-di' Tasmanians? In terms of my own personal reflections on this I take the position that the hand of Euro man has caused shock and trauma where ever 'he' has ventured on the planet. Perhaps as a 6<sup>th</sup> generation convict I myself am still grieving, still getting over the trauma of realization? My original ancestor in this Great Southern Land was first sentenced to death at Lancaster for plotting rebellion, but was later sent to Van Diemen's Land under the order of 'Capital Respite'. He and his family suffered at the hands of the establishment, which he fought at every turn. In my view the oppression caused by the institution that was the Exclusives (the Pure Merinos) still lives on in our institutions, in our laws, in our environment. I am thankful for what the yeoman farmers brought with them to the colony, albeit in later years: namely new ideas of peace and maybe the roots of our own version of organic farming??? Anyway, my thoughts on the nature of disconnection and what to do about it are still developing. Without spilling too far into my 'autoethnography' I just wanted to pass on my deeper feelings as to what could be really wrong here in our little colony. Okay all just an idea, but interesting don't you think?*

*Our work in CBA continues to wrestle with the 'problem' of connection, which is linked to the matter of representation, but that's a whole 'nuther' story!!!*

*I thank you for bearing with my somewhat rambling submission and again thanks so much for your wonderfully thought provoking email.*

*Cheers,*

*Phil*

(P. Tattersall, personal communication, February 2, 2008)

In nearly 40 years the cost of my activism in direct dollar (Aus\$) terms is of the order of \$150,000 Australian dollars. But this is not my primary measure, rather my measure is in the countless folk I have helped and given hope to over those many years (Tattersall, 2009, pp. 233-236). In one case I supported a farming family in their efforts for environmental and social justice. I include their public *thank you* below to show their gratitude for the help I provided. This case was the launch pad for the Community Based Auditing (CBA) approach referred to in the previous letter. In many ways Ann and Martin's letter is representative of many similar cases I have fought over a period of many years. I use the term 'fought' because much of environmental activism is still very combative, aggressive and highly adversarial. To my mind this presents an interesting challenge for those of us who wish to introduce innovative change strategies leading to improved standards of governance and greater participation on the part of the citizenry. Of course this will involve much in the way of creative thinking on the part of activists, industry, government and the citizenry, all of whom must be accountable and able to demonstrate the highest standards of goodwill and good governance.

Despite the apparent sophistication of environmental activism here in Tasmania it still struggles to support citizens on a one-to-one basis. The building of supportive relationships is a vital element of what I term *the new way for activism* as we activists seek to learn with and from our citizenry.

## A Grower Story<sup>2</sup>

By Ann and Martin Gschwendtner

Diddleum Plains, North Eastern Tasmania

*Our story begins about two years ago in the North Eastern Highlands of Tasmania. Martin and I bought our farm in 1985, specifically with the intention of farming organically. The farm was a run-off block for dairy and beef cattle, so we continued in the same vein. Being in a highland area, our farm is situated between 600 and 700 meters elevation, with an annual rainfall of around 1600mm. We moved onto the farm in 1990 and applied for certification with BFA, which was granted in 1993.*

*We confronted Forestry Tasmania in 1994 about the application of atrazine and 1080 on land adjoining our northern boundary. We were concerned about possible impacts and long-term effects. We were not reassured by their answers to our questions and so we campaigned to prevent atrazine and 1080 being used by Forestry Tasmania during plantation establishment in the area. Due to community effort and the then recent experience at Lorinna, atrazine and 1080 were not used. We had hoped that this was the end of conflict with Forestry Tasmania – not to be!*

*In July 1999 we discovered Forestry Tasmania intentions to log an area above and behind us across an upper catchment area servicing three major rivers in the Northeast. They are covered some 300 hectares. Naturally we were concerned about the way a logging and plantation operation would impact upon our farm. The obvious concern was possible impact on our water supply. It was about this time (some 14 months ago) I contacted (Tasmanian Organic-Dynamic producers Cooperative) T.O.P and spoke to Secretary Philip Tattersall about our situation. We had only been friends of T.O.P since its beginning; even so we were given clear and professional advice as to what direction we could take. Drawing on Philip's varied and multi-faceted talents we followed a community based risk assessment strategy to address the issues at hand – namely to determine the nature and likelihood of impact upon our farm. This information was gathered from a number of professionals, including a forest hydrologist, soil engineer and risk management consultant, forest management consultant and the numerous letters extracted from Forestry Tasmania. The overall conclusion drawn from the professional reports and critique of Forestry Tasmania information was that our farm was undoubtedly at risk and so was the integrity of our certification status. The next stage of the strategy began. Under the guidance of Philip's sound advice we developed further key strategic issues. In the meantime we applied for and were granted Full Certification Status with T.O.P as organic beef producers.*

*Due to concern from our local Waterwatch group and two neighbouring councils (the controversial logging area straddles the Launceston and Dorset Municipal boundary), the issues had been raised and maintained in the media. A seminar was organized for an on-site tour by Dorset Waterwatch (closely monitored and directed by Philip) to inform the council and associated groups as to the nature of the area of concern. Philip presented the issues and explained the purpose of organic certification and in turn the significance of TOP accreditation with Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, and how the Forest Practices Code is not appropriately harmonized with the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce. A journal was founded (Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania) to report on the finding of our risk assessment case study. Copies were distributed to those in attendance at the seminar (over 60 people), media, researchers and general public.*

<sup>2</sup> The author warmly thanks the editors of Seasons and authors for permission to reproduce this article.

*Due to the intransigent attitude of Forestry Tasmania and their reluctance to consider a fair and reasonable solution, we chose to take the matter before the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal (we were represented by the Environmental Defenders Office). The outcome from this hearing saw Forestry Tasmania withdraw its Forest Practices Plan, and they cannot log the coupe until another Forest Practices Plan is drawn up and approved. This expected to take place over the next two months. We will consider our options upon reviewing the Forest Practices Plan.*

*I'd like to extend our sincere appreciation to T.O.P for its donation to Dorset Water Watch and the new Journal edited by Philip Tattersall. The constant support and encouragement given by Philip Tattersall throughout this challenging time. We would not be where we are now if it were not for this.*

(Gschwendtner & Gschwendtner, 2000)

I spent the past 10 years working on environmental issues involving natural resources (forests, rivers, flora and fauna). I am now a member of a group who *self organized* around the problem of effective advocacy for the natural environment and the many communities who have an attachment to it. Members of our group came together because we felt that present environmental activism, while generating conflict through a focus on issues, was not taking the *next steps* in finding ways to resolve the increasing number of environmental crises within Tasmania. As we saw it the focus of environmental activism tended to be on highlighting problems or issues rather than their solutions. In reflecting on past collective practice we could see opportunities for the development of inclusive processes capable involving interested citizens in new forms of community based activism that tackled the causes of environmental issues and problems. This approach would enable the citizenry the opportunity to voice its concerns and possible solutions. This subtle shift from the traditional role of the activists *doing the telling* ushered in a new era for Tasmanian activism. The next task was to develop ways to engage community members.

The next step involved asking the wider community for its views on the issues raised. We use a method known as 'street corner survey' to gather information and mandates from citizens. Although this is hard work we believe it is vital to have citizens driving the process. After all it is the wider community who pays and has to live with decisions made on its behalf. Indeed the Tasmanian community is tired and worn down by the endless conflict and strife particularly around forestry management practices and decisions made supposedly on its on matters such as irrigation and industry development. Our community survey work over the past decade in North East Tasmania has shown that citizens more than ever want to be heard and that there was evidence of a 'breakdown in the relationship between the community and the authorities who are charged with the responsibility of managing its resources' (Eastman & Nicklason, 2007; Eastman et al, 2008). This finding tended to confirm my observations gathered over 30 years of supporting community activism around Tasmania. In a survey of community opinions on a series of dam proposals in North East Tasmania the researchers found that citizens tended to 'leave it to the experts' when it came to important resource management decisions. This finding was very concerning in a community where there had been several years of 'boom and bust' cycles in which high profile industries and investments continue to rise and then collapse. The huge amount of public money being injected into the local economy with limited success has led to questions about the validity of the current model of economic development where a small number of key people appear to hold all the power.

## Educational Influences

### My own learning

Was there a moment, an event or turning point from which I began my journey? Or was it a case of a gradual coming together of events that shaped my trajectory? What was the nature of those *formative processes*? And, what was my Living Theory, and what is it right now in this moment of my life (Whitehead, 2008, p. 104) after many years reflection and the completion of my auto-bio-ethnography<sup>3</sup> (Tattersall, 2009), I still find myself reinterpreting my answers to these questions. Why bother seeking answers, can't I simply accept who I am and then move on? The quest is important for two reasons. Firstly, an understanding of the nature and causes of my trajectory may provide clues that could enable me to better understand myself and the Living Theory underpinning my practice, thereby opening the way for improvements in my practice and personal competencies. Secondly, in sharing my story it is possible that others may be drawn into an interpretive process (Richardson, 1994, pp. 516-529) whereby they also begin to reflect on the meaning of their practice and life. In this sense my story moves in subtle ways from the particular (special theory) to the broader or general theory.

My first memories of being aware of education occurred when I was 6 years old. In 1961 I changed schools as my family moved to a large pastoral farm in the northern midlands of Tasmania. The move from the north west of the state took its toll on me. Right from the word go; there were problems. At the end of that year I turned in a less than satisfactory school report and it was recommended that I repeat grade one. My parents and in particular my father were horrified, and I was interrogated and made to recite numbers and words in order to somehow catch up on what was regarded as a wasted half-year. This was very traumatic. From that time, my early school years were nothing less than a torment. I developed a sleeping disorder and a serious stuttering problem as well. This of course exacerbated the ongoing problem and saw me labelled as the 'black sheep'. A series of ear infections left me hard of hearing, which meant that most of the time I had trouble hearing what the teachers were saying. I became more isolated. In 1966 I took a big interest in science and chemistry in particular, setting up a home chemistry laboratory in a shed at the bottom of the garden. In that year things came to a head at home when at the year's end, I brought home a model nuclear reactor that I had made. Dad was mortified that all I had to show for my year's work was a model reactor! Dad was a practical man. He tied fishing flies, practiced taxidermy, built boats and was a keen hunter and fly fisher. I can see how my efforts must have looked. He was outgoing and worked his way up from gardener to stud overseer of an award winning pedigree sheep farm in the Northern Midlands of Tasmania where we lived for many years.

At the time I simply shrugged off the criticisms and jibes and just got with my interest. As time went on, I was left alone more and more by family and friends as no one understood what I was doing. In effect I became a curiosity, a kind of family anomaly. My passion for chemistry continued into high school where I met with the next *moment* of

<sup>3</sup> A term I invented to describe the melding of two approaches to life writing.

oppression. In 1970 I was in year 9. At about the mid-year my mother was given the job of telling me that I was to be taken out of school at the end of the year to work on the farm. I was told that as I was doing poorly at school, there was no chance of me becoming a scientist and that was that! I was horrified and remember feeling betrayed and crushed. I remember sharing the story with the school principal. The principal was very approachable and used to give the most enlightening speeches at the weekly Assemblies. He would talk of Martin Luther King, freedom, democracy and fairness. My little talk with him led to my doing the unthinkable for a shy, introverted stutterer: I campaigned for election to the Board of Prefects. In the September of 1970 I was elected. Of course when the news reached the ears of my parents, there was no way I could not complete my final year and achieve my Schools Board Certificate.

On leaving school in 1971, I was told that the family could not afford to send me to Matriculation College, and that I would have to find my own way in terms of my education. I quickly sought advice and enrolled in a chemistry course by correspondence. For the next few years I juggled full-time work and study.

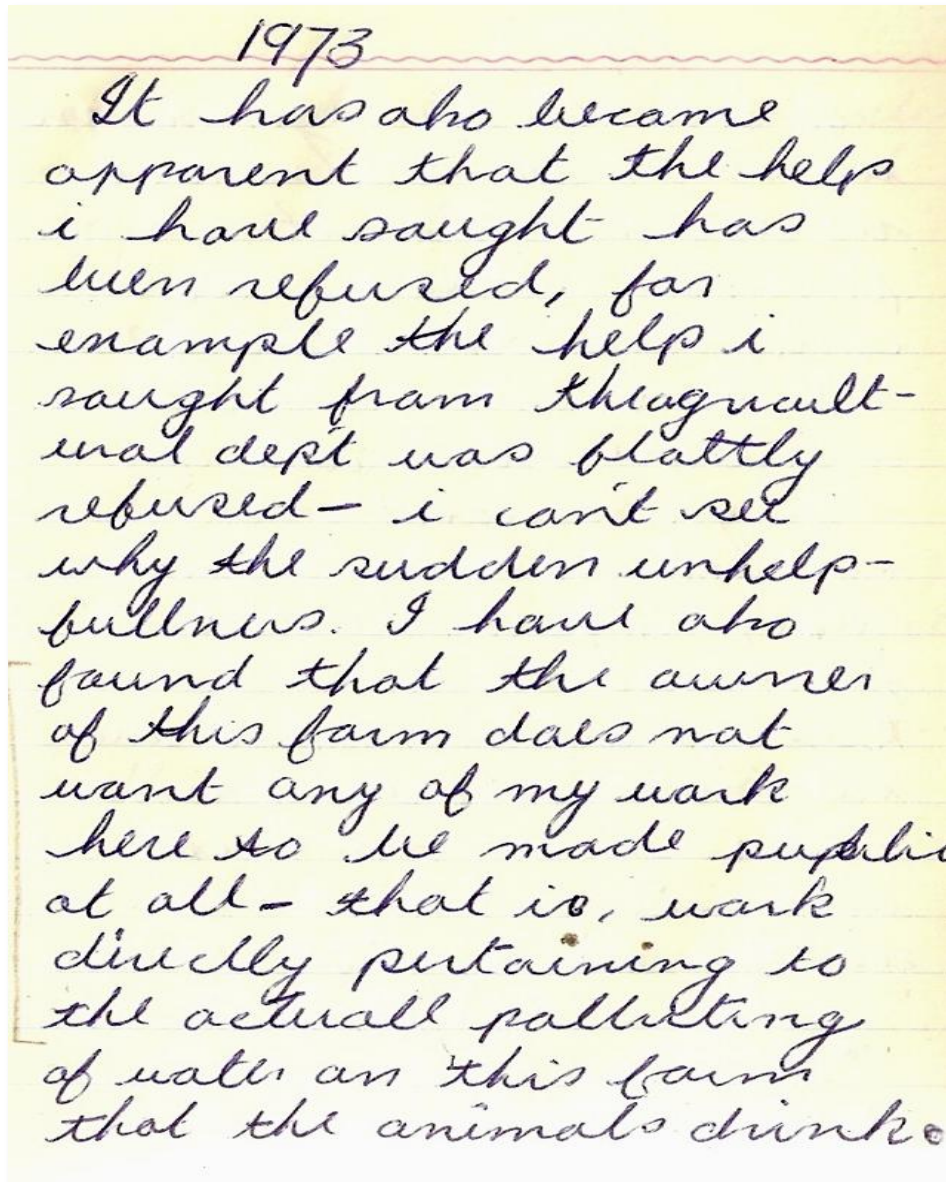
My next tango with oppression came in 1973. In my final high school year, I took a big interest in ecology, having read *Silent Spring* (Carson 1966). This was a story about how one person confronted the issues relating to the impact of manmade pesticides on natural systems. The “Spring”, as I called it, was such a release, such a confirmation for a new way of thinking! It talked about ecological and social connections and got me thinking about fallibility and led me into reading the history of science, where many more discoveries awaited me – where I learnt about how science was really done (Bronowski, 1973; Jeans, 1946; Runes, 1962). I learnt that science was about knowledge and that there are no absolutes, no certainty only endless possibility. I used to espouse, ‘the only certainty is that there is *no* certainty!’

I used to enjoy projects and in one case I studied the differences in a number of ponds on the farm on which I lived. I was interested in why some ponds appeared to be almost choked with life whereas in others there seemed to be a scarcity of life. I commenced a series of observations looking at water flows in and out of the ponds. I noted that some of the ponds received run off from nearby homes and while others received runoff from nearby paddocks. One pond in particular was of great interest in that it appeared to receive run off from an internal road and paddocks and compared to the controls (with in similar settings) had lots more biological activity (many more aquatic plants and an intense algal growth). Closer inspection revealed that seepage was coming from stock yards where animals were temporarily held for dipping and other husbandry work. The result was that I found large concentrations of phosphate in the water and mud in the pond and much less in the other *control ponds*<sup>4</sup>. I traced this to the organophosphates that were used to dip the sheep. These chemicals (descendants of the chemicals used in warfare) are very powerful insecticides. As animals were drinking the water in the *affected pond* there was a potential link into the human food chain. My research was a bombshell. During my work I had been asking questions of the local Department of Agriculture. It was not long before word got back and I was *pressured* to shut down my research. This led to conflict in

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<sup>4</sup> Those pond that were not receiving run off from houses or yards

our family as Dad was given the job to tell me to stop the research. I have included below (Figure 1) my research diary entry on the day I received the news (the footnote contains the transcribed entry<sup>5</sup>):



1973  
It has also become apparent that the help I have sought has been refused, for example the help I sought from the Agricultural Department was flatly refused - I can't see why the sudden unhelpfulness. I have also found that the owner of this farm does not want any of my work here to be made public at all - that is, work directly pertaining to the actual polluting of water on this farm that the animals drink.

**Figure 1.** Research diary entry

<sup>5</sup>

It has also become apparent that the help I have sought has been refused, for example the help I sought from the Agricultural Department was flatly refused - I can't see why the sudden unhelpfulness. I have also found out that the owner of this farm does not want any of my work here to be made public at all - that is, work directly pertaining to the actual polluting of water on this farm that the animals drink. (P. Tattersall, personal communication, December 21, 1973)

Needless to say, I went ahead in my own quiet stubborn way to complete what I had started. In order to finish my research I would awake at 2 to 3a.m. in the mornings and go to my chemical laboratory – a shed at the bottom of the garden- to work. I did this for nearly 6 months. I published my work in my first book, written in longhand.

The book was in two parts, the first titled, *Cloning – A Preliminary Study* in which I teamed up with a friend to grow plant tissue cultures from carrot seedling root hairs in coconut milk. The second part was somewhat lavishly titled, *Effects of Biodegradable Phosphates on Protozoic Systems* (Tattersall and Jones, 1973). My test organisms were *Paramecia* on which I tested the effects of the organophosphate pesticide. This was my first foray in research while still in my teens, living nearly full time in my chemistry lab (see Figure 2). The projects commenced in 1971 and were completed in 1973. One thing was for sure, I was bitten by the urge to inquire and do science!



**Figure 2.** Me (at age 17) in my chemistry laboratory<sup>6</sup>

Now that I analyze these events I can see how they established in me a unique view of the world, and I remember at age 19 a lot of things came together that would make much more sense a short time ahead. By this time, I was seen as a trouble maker for no other reason than I asked questions. This ability to ask significant questions would shake the foundations of our entire family. On leaving school in 1971 my parents could not afford to

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<sup>6</sup> Photo taken in 1972.

send me to college. I was desperate to study chemistry and so enrolled in a part time correspondence course and worked on the farm where we lived. I studied for my Diploma in Analytical Chemistry with the International Correspondence Schools. I completed in 1975. This was a significant achievement for me, but I had to battle to have my qualification recognized, finally being recognized as a certificate chemist. This took the next 3 years during which time I secured various junior laboratory positions.

In 1978 while working as certificate chemist I began to inquire into my family history. No one in the family (father's side) could give a clear account of our history. I was told that we were a family of weavers and watchmakers who emigrated many years ago. My inquiry of course came up with the convict heritage, which was met with hostility. The only problem was I had the birth and death certificates to prove my case. This saw me ostracised from the broader family, all made worse by my discovery (some years before) that, according to registry records, I did not exist. Apparently, my mother was married previously and ran off with Dad (me as a babe) and they never bothered to change my surname on the birth certificate. In other words I had the surname of the previous husband instead of my actual father (so I was told!). This came as a complete shock to me and seemed at the time to be a confirmation for reasons to deny our heritage. It was a very strange feeling. I felt we were somehow continuing to play our convict role, even in the way we denied our roots.

As far as I could determine, the genealogy of the convict descendants was well known by the Tasmanian establishment. As I trawled through the histories I could see how and by whom the history of Tasmania was written. I drew the conclusion that a selected history had been told. I saw all of this as yet another way to make sure all the power and influence was kept in the hands of a handful of families. My conversations with librarians tended to support my emerging theory. It seemed to make sense that in such a small place those who controlled the information would know 'who was who' and thereby could control the centralization of the wealth and power. I felt I had got my first glimpse into what I termed 'Tassie Inc.' I linked these ideas to the experiences of my family as working class on northern midlands farms with the fact that we were living in the very contexts built by our convict ancestors. I saw and felt that oppression as a worker on the farm where we were expected to address the owner by using 'Mr' as a prefix to his Christian name. This was very painful for me to be living like a convict. My parents had to hand milk cows and hand separate the milk then take the first cream and milk to the owner. We were allowed to sell cream. My parent's working day was 7a.m. to 7p.m. and that was in the mid 1960's. I did not resent so much the work or the lifestyle; it was the unwritten expectation that we were *servants* that annoyed me. I remember my Dad coming to me in 1967 and telling me that the boss wanted me to tend to the stud sheep each morning and evening and mow his lawns each Saturday during the warmer months. This meant that for most of the year I was 'on call' each and every weekend to care for the sheep, which involved cleaning the pens and feeding them for an hour morning and night and if it rained, making sure they were penned in the stud shed. I'm not trying to apportion blame or retribution here, rather I am making the point that we were uncritically and unwittingly carrying on a tradition that was not of our choosing. This was my first recognition of what I now know to be a living contradiction (Whitehead and Rayner, 2009, pp. 6-12) in which I was experiencing a tension between who

I was and who I was expected to be. In a sense I was out of step with my time. The late 1960's and early 1970's were a time of great personal turmoil for me.

But I digress. I could see from the way I was directed by my father, who was in turn directed from on high, to discontinue my research that the master-convict relationship was alive and well. My father might have been king at home, but he was most certainly a servant at work! I could see what the overlords did to the convicts they also did to the land and the original owners. This culture was then passed into the homes and families of the convicts themselves. Any dissention was suppressed or worse. I remember being very upset that I was not given a choice regarding the expectation that I should work, especially when I was trying so hard at school. I was told that my father had agreed that is what the boss expected. I felt we were being treated as second class citizens and what was worse we tended to act like them. That grated on me to the extent that I could not stay another minute on the farm.

### **My Early Personal Theory**

By the time I was in my mid 20's I had developed a working theory, which served me very well in my developing activism. I'm the first to acknowledge that my early theory may appear somewhat misguided, but will attempt here to 'tell it like it was'. My theory was simple and involved identifying what I saw as deception and misuse of power. This had its genesis in my experiences on the farm and in the family home, especially the occasion when my father exclaimed on the occasion of our dinner debate over the meaning of religion, 'I am never wrong... go to your room!'. I had him in quite a bind with my assertion over the idea of reality. I disputed his assertion that because a tree was complex and intricate it must thereby have been created. My position was who says a tree is complex, who gives you the authority to make that statement? I was sixteen at the time. Our dinner time debates were usually quite nasty, but highly significant in my intellectual development nonetheless.

My methodology involved challenging what I saw as misuse of power. My method was to seize on any assertions or claims made and use techniques of questioning to bring matters to a head which would then give me reason to conduct a deepening inquiry, the results of which would be declared as publicly as possible. This usually had the effect of causing an outburst of oppressive behaviour on the part of my opponents, thus revealing their hand. When done well it worked beautifully. The theory itself posited that those with power and influence will by and large end up oppressing ordinary folk who dared to question and above all put forward well argued points of view. Using such techniques it was only a matter of time before the oppressors would reveal their hand, proving that they expected others to do as they were told and not to question. By and large my experiences showed me that ordinary folk were usually at a disadvantage either because they were not articulate enough to argue, were simply too reasonable and trusting or did not have the knowledge base to tackle those in authority. In short, most of the time ordinary folk simply had to trust those in power, be they experts, bosses or professionals. That is not to suggest that all experts, bosses or professionals would automatically abuse trust. My problem was how would ordinary folks be able to test the word of the power holder. This challenge turned out to be one of my key missions in life.

I felt my simple methodology went some way towards adjusting potential power imbalances. No sophisticated psychology was needed. It was all a matter of savvy. For me the family unit offered the opportunity to work at close quarters with other human beings and see and feel the reality of power in action. That is not to say that my home life was a continual battleground, but on certain issues I would stand my ground and fight for what I believed in. This was seen at the time as challenge to authority and as such I saw it as mirroring the *post*-colonial moment and expectations of the day – tug the forelock and don't argue! In those days I was challenging much more than the authority of my parents.

For me my experiences in that part of the journey were vital and I still have some of the techniques fashioned from those times rattling around in the bottom of my activist toolbox. I reveal some of those techniques here:

### **Do the unexpected and do it quick**

This was one of my favourite techniques. 'It works because it works' was the expression I used to use. Successful use of this tool involves an ability to read the play, to pick that moment when you will have maximum impact. Being first is vital and of course leads to surprise. One must be able to act in ways that appear to be counterintuitive to your opponents. That way your opponents spend most of their time confused. I recall one project in which I was helping a farmer with his struggle against government departments who were maintaining that the animal deaths and deformities on his farm were not due to emission from a nearby uncontrolled refuse site. My pro bono project took 7 years before the authorities admitted there was a problem and paid compensation to the farmer. My role was to discover if there was a link between the animal deaths and deformities and toxic leachates from the nearby tip site. Following many months of investigation I found that toxins were present on the site and on the farm. The authorities had failed to conduct the correct tests. We published the findings in the State press and showed that our approach was good science. We moved to sampling and analysis only after several months of trying to show the departments where they had gone wrong. Suddenly it was a case of *citizens as scientists*.

### **Generate 'new' information**

This tool has served me well for over 30 years and something I wish the environment movement would use more. It certainly worked in the case above. In the 1990's I developed a tool for citizens whereby they were trained to take environmental samples and have them analyzed. For years I had heard complaints about aerial overspray incidents and pollution from industry allegedly falling on suburbs and so I thought I would do something about it. It seemed to me that a way to propel a concern from indignation to action would be to generate new information. In short, go out and take a sample. The tool I developed was Community Based Sampling and lo and behold there was action everywhere, suddenly we moved from allegation to 'hard data'. It was too much fun. By the time I had finished we

had trained some 200 people around the State and as far as industry and governments could see citizens were equipped and ready for action. This was powerful.

### **Get the message out**

This tool involved working with the media, including letters to the editor, to bring the message to the community in the form of reports such as radio interviews, news articles for TV and radio, letters to the editor or an editorial article. From 1983 to present I have had many successful media contacts. I have nearly always worked alone or with small groups to bring information to the wider community via the media, newsletters and public speaking. The developments during the late 1990's saw the development of a highly sophisticated means of public communications. This is discussed further on.

## **The Next Phase of My Journey – My Learning Through Influencing the Learning of Others**

Up until around the mid 1990's I was playing the role of expert utilizing activist strategies and methods which I largely developed myself. One such strategy was Community Based Sampling or CBS (Tattersall, 1991). Basically CBS was a methodology to equip interested members of the community with the skills to undertake environmental sampling as part of community environmental campaigns (Tattersall and Eastman, 2009; Tattersall, 2009). At that stage I had not read any literature on activism, nor did I consider myself a 'campaigner' as such. I saw myself more as an advocate, helping citizens when they had nowhere else to turn. In fact many of my projects would begin with citizen requests such as, 'they said you would help, I've tried everywhere and no one knows what to do, but they said you would.' By 1995 I had worked on over a dozen cases, many of them at the behest of citizens in need. One case lasted 7 years. However, by that time I began to have concerns as to my effectiveness. Having completed graduate studies in sustainable agriculture in 1994 I began to reflect on the need for personal change and how such change could affect professional practice (Gill and Johnson, 1991, pp. 4-5). This was triggered by the debates raised within the course, which delved into the philosophical roots of environmentalism and explored personal and institutional change. For its time the course (Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture) was ground breaking and students were encouraged to develop their own lines of inquiry within the broad structure of the syllabus.

During 1995 a lot of ideas were incubating that led me to reassess my philosophy and practice. I had serious misgivings about the way citizens seemed dependent on me to provide the answers as they hung off my every word. I saw this doctor-patient relationship as unhealthy. In short, I was seen as yet another expert who would provide all the answers. While this made me feel honoured and empowered, I asked myself where does this leave the citizens themselves? After all isn't the goal to empower concerned citizens to take on a leadership role? At the time these were important considerations for me. Looking back I can see now that I was ensnared in an ethical crisis, where I saw myself in a different light. As a 'lone operator' I was not bound by many of the issues facing what I term the institutionalized activists, such as a dependence on funding and strong political affiliations

and loyalties. Maybe this is one reason individuals really can make a difference when trying to change things. I reasoned that the role of activists was not only to raise issues of concern, but to ensure that the citizenry were involved as empowered participants and if at all possible leaders in the change process.

The three years from 1995 to 1997 were very troubling as I struggled to make sense of my new problem. In 1996 I commenced a masters degree (M.Sc. Hons) by research in which I used action research to explore farm sustainability. My interest in action research stemmed from my earlier postgraduate studies. I was attracted to action research because of its use of dialectic tensions. I saw the methodology as a perfect tool for activists and I resonated with the idea of using *controlled conflict* to drive inquiry. I reasoned that as an 'issue' was the difference between an existing situation and its 'desirable' state, then stakeholders may be able to work together even though the politics of the issue may generate discordance. I felt that a certain level of discordance was essential to the change process (hence my interest in dialectical processes), and was particularly beneficial when individual stakeholders understood this. The next couple of years took me into a number of important areas including a growing interest in my philosophy.

My exposure to action research enabled me to continue the journey that began a few years earlier, but this time with a greater understanding of what it meant to 'research'. While the action research process guided my research, another important thing happened that I did not cotton onto until I was well into the research, and that was to do with what I now term my 'philosophical shift'. I was slowly becoming aware that my world view appeared to be rooted in the qualitative paradigm. My reading and reflection took me into the philosophy of inquiry and led me on an extended journey through my master's studies. In this way my research into farm sustainability ended up being a quest within a quest. When I discovered 'my way of thinking' during 1998/99 I remember feeling a sense of relief about the way I 'did my science'. It turns out that my 'qualitative ways' had been in place for many years and explained why I would look at things differently to my peers and family members. It explained why I valued the *particular*<sup>7</sup> and why my method of inquiry was essentially exploratory, where in the end I would seek explanation and tended to steer away from prediction and control. I also valued the views and perceptions on actors with a setting and celebrated genuine collaboration. In a sense I had discovered my epistemology. My strong sense of fairness and justice and commitment to help those in need was, in part, driven by my passion for revelation. This was a very difficult period for me as I tried to balance my 'objective quantitative science' side with my qualitative subjective side. In hindsight I was in yet another moment of 'living contradiction'. This dialectic tension was resolved when I analyzed my past experiences and talked with others about the effectiveness of my practice, something I further wrote about in my letters to colleagues and friends.

Once I was at peace with myself a whole new epistemology of practice became possible. Now it was time to reflect on the development of a methodology that would bring change within and beyond my practice as I strove to support an inquiring citizenry.

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<sup>7</sup> That is valuing locally constructed understandings and inductive processes of inquiry.

By the end of 1999 I was able to make sense of my journey. While I could see the reasons for my choices and actions, it would be a couple of years before I would be able to construct an approach to activism that brought together the many strands that were to be my methodology for change. The first formidable barrier was to be my psychology of activism.

### **Moving beyond 'No!'**

I felt that my activist practice, although seemingly effective, was not addressing the real causes of the issues I was helping to tackle. There were two things that bothered me; the first was that we seemed to be attacking symptoms rather than causes and second we activists were acting in ways that further disempowered the citizenry who saw us as yet another group of experts who would tell them what to do. The environment movement here in Tasmania continued to say 'No!' to anything it did not agree with. Like the other institutions (governmental and industrial) the environment movement lectured and 'talked at' the citizenry using language that emphasized negative outcomes and consequences. In the letter below I discuss the need for a new way of activism that is more inclusive of community. These are ideas I continue to debate. Many in the grassroots movement here in Tasmania also struggle with these ideas, but that too is all a welcome part of the exciting change process.

#### ***A Letter to A Colleague: On Tasmanian environmentalism***

*Hi P,*

*Thanks for the reply. I must admit that I wrestle with these questions on a daily basis as I reflect on my practice and where environmental activism/advocacy is going. Below are some of my initial thoughts. I am somewhat 'on my feet' with this discussion and am yet to more fully think things thru, so bear with me.*

*My concern is with what I see as the disconnection of the environment movement from the citizens. The movement/activists have not attended that well to their obligations as a social movement. As I see it the movement has tended to 'lecture' at the citizens as part of a process whereby it (the movement/activists) sees lobbying government as the main goal. Meanwhile the citizenry has been largely left out. In fact it is they who we should be 'lobbying' (if I can use that term loosely!).*

*While advocating for the environment (because there are issues and it has no voice) is important, such moves do tend to further isolate the activist/advocate from the citizenry. I am in my 36th year of activism and am the first to agree that we must fight for environmental justice, but what worked in the 1970/80 is now giving less and less return for effort. I am calling for a new way that retains some of the tools of the past and at the same time takes an important innovative turn, part of which invites innovative engagement with the citizenry. After all that was the bottom line with the Franklin - citizen pressure. But the new era will be engagement with a difference. No longer can we rely as much on raw emotion and iconic place or species to 'win the day'. No longer can we expect to win the war by fighting campaigns as we have done in the past. The context has changed, and our tools for engagement no longer quite fit the 'problem'. I would also argue that the suite of goals of activism has increased/changed. Activism/advocacy needs to recognise the importance of social change processes in the move to a new environmentalism. As well we need to recognise that the very science we employ is also evolving toward a more participatory process of inquiry. Activists, though their use of normal science, have fallen victim to yet another institutionalized process that has effectively*

*disconnected the citizenry from any hope of meaningful input, let alone 'control'. A new science is indeed waiting in the wings, a science that seeks to engage citizens as active participants.*

*A new innovative engagement will also hopefully give us much more as we seek to facilitate the emergence of a critical community, made up of individuals who are more than simply receivers of goods, services and information - dare I say it, conned-sumers who seem to be pulled and pushed by the relentless tides of 'advice and direction' from all sides. Citizens are trapped by the belief (largely unexamined) that they as non-experts must be given direction and guidance as to what to do and think. Government, industry and 'the movement/activists' are all vying for the attention of the citizenry in order to gain what support/authority or imprimatur they can (sway public opinion). I hasten to add that getting citizens 'on side' may not be the same as supporting them toward empowerment and a sense of control. In the big picture that (empowerment) has its challenges too as the institutions will be required to relinquish some of their 'power'. A challenge here in post colonial Tassie! But if we are serious about 'empowering' citizens (as activists in their own right?) then we had better start developing ways to do that. I think the movement needs to transform itself to meet these challenges. The movement, after all these years, is still seen as "No!" and the challenge is for us to move beyond that by taking an active leadership, which means working with and seeking mandates from communities in a proactive way. While these are big challenges for us all it is clear that change is needed to the 'way/s in which environmental activism/advocacy is done'.*

*I continue to wrestle with these questions as I hope all activists/advocates do.*

*For us activist's being right is no longer quite enough. The nobleness of our causes are no longer as self evident as they used to be.*

*I look forward to your comments and discussion on the points I have raised in this my somewhat rambling missive.*

*Regards,*

*Phil*

(P. Tattersall, personal communication, December 12, 2008)

In the end I could see that my practice had also mirrored this norm within our culture. For their part the citizenry continued to play their part, looking for guidance and direction at every turn. As far as I could see we were victims of a self fulfilling prophesy of our own making. I struggled with how best to break out of this crisis 'within and without' my practice. My reading revealed that other researchers had wrestled with these problems and concluded that the environmental movement was in a sense lobbying the wrong people and that instead of lobbying the politicians and 'men of influence' they should be lobbying the citizenry (Zoretic, 2006). As well, I realized that activists and citizens needed processes and tools they felt comfortable with and would lead to outcomes and outputs that addressed issues of immediate concerns as well as deeper problems of engagement, empowerment and justice.

With these thoughts in mind I saw an opportunity for innovation. If I was part of a problem that saw the citizenry somehow disconnected from playing an active role in much needed environmental change then what could I do to change the situation? How to reinvent activism so that it looked more like community advocacy? As I reflected it occurred to me that activism was in need of redefinition here in Tasmania. In my new role I saw myself as part of a solution.

### **A fortuitous meeting of minds – an opportunity for genuine collaboration**

Late in 1999 I called a meeting of concerned colleagues with whom I had been working on and off over the previous 5 to 7 years<sup>8</sup>. We all shared concerns over the direction of activism and whether something needed to be done. The group was made up predominantly of women, the significance of which I will discuss later, turned out to be highly beneficial for our brand of activism.

In early 2002 we formed The Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Inc. (TCRA). Our group comprised a mix of scientists and activists. Our primary focus was the conflict and community disquiet surrounding natural resource management in Tasmania.

While each member brought unique experiences and expertise to the group, there was a common concern that stood out from the myriad of natural resource issues we had dealt with over a collective period of some 50 years. The focus of the concern was the way in which citizens were being treated by industry, government and to some extent the environment movement. It was clear to us that citizens were left out of key decision-making processes.

Our experiences were rich with examples where communities were asked for feedback and input, but seldom if ever involved in strategic decision-making. When citizens attempted to assert their arguments a range of ploys were used to shut down or divert debate.

We all recalled instances where industry and government referred to community members as non-experts or laypersons, assuming those citizens would find it difficult to understand complex matters. More extreme examples included situations where governments stepped in and changed the law when community expectations differed from the direction that government and industry wanted to go. The latest example being the fiasco over the diminution of the powers of the Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC) in relation to the review of the proposed pulp mill in the Tamar valley in northern Tasmania (Flanagan 2007, pp. 4-7). The RPDC was the agreed umpire whose role was to review the proponent's application and any other evidence. Amid a huge uproar over assessment timeframes, technical matters (relating to scientific aspects of assessment), due process and alleged interference with the independence of the Commission there were a number of resignations from the RPDC panel and a former head of the expert panel threatened to resign citing government interference and concerns over maintaining the status and integrity of the RPDC process, and in particular the provision for public input into the pulp mill approval process. These concerns were later played out in dramatic fashion when the government of the day introduced a new law in an attempt to fast track the mill approval process (Flanagan 2007, p. 5). Such a move had the effect of shutting down public input into assessment process. These events caused deep concern and outrage in the community and serve to demonstrate the complexity of natural resource management issues in Tasmania.

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<sup>8</sup> This meeting of minds was precipitated by a new approach to citizen based inquiry I and other colleagues had been working on in relation to forestry management in the North Eastern Highlands of Tasmania (Gschwendtner et al, 2001 ). The Community Based case Study was the springboard for a new approach to citizen initiate inquiry and action.

Further discussion and reflection within the TCRA group revealed that concerned citizens are treated in one or all of the following ways:

- Outright dismissal of citizen's concerns by institutions and authorities;
- Citizens given the run around from institution to institution or department to department resulting in burnout and frustration on the part of the affected citizen;
- Citizens expected to 'prove' their concerns. This was evident in several cases and was a ploy often used to put the onus back onto the citizen, although in some cases it was clear that the government/industry did have a case to answer and owed a duty of care to the community;
- Citizens threatened or intimidated in order to coerce them into dropping their concerns;
- Use of experts and advisory groups in order to convince citizens that their concerns were unfounded. Such approaches tend to drown the citizen in facts and figures. This effectively leaves citizens again isolated as they find themselves unable to connect with the language in order to mount confident counter arguments despite the feeling that their concerns have not been addressed. The air of authority that prevails during such encounters often leaves citizens with a feeling of diminished power.

Environmental NGO's (non-government organizations) in the State are able to lend moral support and perhaps support by writing letters of concern to industry and government, but are not able, in the majority of cases, to provide ongoing in-depth support. Usually such support is left up to those of us who provide *pro bono* support to community.

The TCRA Board agreed that while in some cases the concerns of citizens may be unfounded, there were many other cases where concerns appeared to be legitimate. Time and time again, our experiences showed that citizens with legitimate concerns would have to fight an uphill battle just to be heard, let alone listened to. In many cases the official response has been to simply ignore concerns, especially where there is the potential for serious outcomes that may reflect badly on industry or the government. For their part, the various groups within the Tasmanian environment movement are so fixed on their main agenda of 'saving the environment' that they simply have little energy, time or resources to support the range and number of issues raised by community members.

On the basis of our experiences it was also clear that governments, industry, environmental NGOs and activists of all persuasions were either telling communities what was good for them or advocating on their behalf without actually ever undertaking regular dialogue as to their concerns and opinions. We found this left citizens confused and de-energized and likely to simply switch off, such was their sense of frustration and feeling of isolation. Little wonder we continue to hear claims by government authorities, industry and sections of the environmental NGO's that communities are growing apathetic. The unfortunate upshot of all of this is that the community is open to exploitation while these conditions exist. In short, the waters are continually muddied, as vested interests claim to be acting on behalf of communities who, some of the time at least, have simply lost interest. Once that happens the scene is set for overt exploitation by vested interests.

When TCRA board members further reflected on these issues and possible ways forward, the question arose as to whether our efforts would simply be more of the same, namely supporting citizens on a cases-by-case basis, fighting each battle as advocates leading the charge. On the other hand, we wondered whether our efforts would be better spent tackling the problems of citizen empowerment in a more systemic way. We posited that our task was actually about embarking on a process of social change and at the same time providing technical support to concerned citizens and thereby promote a 'new activism'. This was an important turning point for our group. In the following 'Letter to A Colleague' I discuss the need for a new way for activism that helps those citizens who have an interest to move to a new position of engagement.

### **A Letter to A Colleague**

#### **The new Activism**

*Hi B,*

*What you have said sounds like a good start. I have some reflections on what you have said and some ideas after some 30 years of activism here in TasTopia that may or may not be worthwhile!*

*One thing is for sure activism can't go on in its present form for too much longer. There is a body of good research that wrestles with problems such as 'connection with community' and 'representation/advocacy of community'. The work of Bill Moyer and Lyn Carson is well worth a read. They have done research in the 'real world of activism' and so their views are especially useful. I have been working with groups overseas, where we have developed innovations along the lines of action research and PNS [Post Normal Science], all with 'some' success. The thing that comes out of it is the reality that personal change is such an important ingredient in the broader change process (for both activist and citizen!). What to do about it is, in my view, one of the key 'problems' facing us.*

*As it stands, activism in its present form is headed into extinction. As I'm sure you will all agree when you look at the diminished 'returns over effort' in the past, say 15 years....*

*It seemed to work 'better' when we had iconic places and species with which to dazzle and influence the public and pollies. Since those times however we have entered a new theatre, far more complex and sophisticated. The 'old' tools and methods (and methodologies) no longer work as well as they once did. In response to this we 'push harder', only to find that the apparent resistance increases! Something has to give: we need to question our thinking! No longer can we lay claim to the mantra that 'being right is enough' and that all you have to do is keep repeating the message...*

*The governments and industry have also become wise to our methods and strategies and have set up a number of sophisticated 'processes' to nullify our efforts. It is very easy to do this in a small place like Tassie. I argue that this and other phenomena make Tasmanian a somewhat 'unique case'. You only have to read Christoff's critique or Tim Doyle's book to see how successful successive Federal governments have been in not just turning public away from the 'movement', but effectively neutralizing much of its (the movements) effectiveness.*

*Another big problem is that while we are busy 'activising' to 'change the situation' we forget that the citizens are also part of that situation. The result is that we seldom attend to the job of helping citizens to become activist in their own right. Instead, the reality is that next time the 'issue comes around' we find ourselves revisiting that same old script (and a lot of the time engaging with the same actors!). My recent reengagement with the Lutana lead and cadmium issue is a case in point, where after nearly 17 years I literally 'picked up the thread' as tho it was yesterday! As activists we all do it, me included. It's a script, where we have been part of the social norming that has created the citizenry we seek so keenly to 'empower'. It is such a 'strange attractor', don't you think?*

*Maybe all we can hope to do is hilite the issues, expose corruption and keep holding strategy meetings?*

*Phil*

(P. Tattersall, personal communication, May 14, 2008)

Having identified what we felt was the main problem we then attempted to put in place a strategy to assist citizens in need. At the same time, we reflected on ways to ensure that the process would be self-perpetuating as it spread through the community with citizens helping each other, either on a one-to-one basis or via support groups. As a group we were also keen to ensure that the inquiry process also provided opportunities participants to grow as well as take the broader community conversation to new levels.

It is important to reiterate here that the majority of our group members are women.

Experience has shown me that women play a very important and vital role in what I term an improved activism. Having worked in male dominated and mixed gender groups I find that female dominated groups seem to work much better when it comes to creative problem solving. Also the level of competition is much lower in the all women groups, and individuals do not seem to hold on to things as much. Our meetings are always very productive and fulfilling. By the same token as a male wanting to get on with the action aspect of activism I was much challenged and it took me quite some time to adjust and learn from those around me. As things turned out it was one of the most valuable learning experiences of my life and the associations enlivened my creative and spontaneous side. Dinner time discussions and debates were full of energy and life affirming positive feeling as ideas and brand new innovations would suddenly spring forth as though by some magic. The shift from the specifics of environmental issues to the overall problem of environmentalism was so powerful and the ripples of excitement and energy have been felt for many years since.

It was from this culture of learning that a new form of Tasmanian environmental activism steadily grew. The key was the explicit use of relationships and conversations as a way to invite citizens into the inquiry process.

## **A model for participation**

Our challenge was to somehow meld elements of participation, values and perceptions with processes of inquiry that would enable concerned citizens to play a meaningful and active role in environmental decision making. Our learning from our inquiry into forestry activities in the North Eastern highlands of Tasmania proved very useful. We used a form action research to great effect and ended up running two major community forums to report our findings and canvass views and ideas for the future of community based forestry management. This process helped the inquiry team members analyze their actions in terms of both a critique of forestry practices and to propose alternatives that would involve the wider community, beginning with an invitation to participate in a conversation. For many years there had been disquiet and confrontations with forestry

operators over pesticides in drinking water and the impact of operations on threatened species in the catchments. While the approach adopted by activists was to say 'No!' to logging there were no clear arguments with which the community could identify as to what else could be done – it was 'no logging or nothing'. Such posturing left the community confused and frustrated, with concerns about employment on the one hand and a desire to protect water and species on the other. In retaliation to the activists' rhetoric the Tasmanian *government-corporate complex* would threaten mass unemployment and an exodus of key industry from the State, knowing full well the working classes would bend toward the employment imperative. This is the context in which we continually seek to renegotiate a relationship with communities as to 'what is best for our economy and environment'. As we see it our citizens have been largely living in the shadows of a *new colonialism*, born out of the intersection of the new economic world order with the Tasmanian socioeconomic culture. However the recent 'hung parliament' election outcome in Tasmania, with the Greens holding the balance of power has sent a strong signal that change is now on the way. The old ways are beginning to crumble as those in the two party political system begin to realize that things will never be the same again.

Our inquiry processes have continued to develop along the lines of an audit approach using expanded peer review, whereby we test the claims made by the forestry managers against the reality of the actual on-ground operations. The method involves visits to the site of proposed operations, while at the same time referring to the documented management prescriptions. Teams of trained citizens then walk the site and through observations and measurement they verify the claims made by the proponent. External experts then review the data. The information is then pulled together and reported in a Journal format for distribution. In 2001 Community Based Auditing (CBA) was born (Tattersall, 2007; Tattersall & Eastman, 2009). This methodology, based on Participatory Action Research (Reason, 1994) and the principles of Post Normal Science (Ravetz and Funtowicz, 1999), takes activism from anger and indignation to reasoned argument and the presentation of alternatives, and the building of a peer reviewed referenced literature. That said, much more work remains to be done to further refine the methodology.

The initial stages of CBA were fraught with difficulties and problems as we wrestled with the emerging issues. Supporting citizens with a view to somehow liberating them, although laudable and gratefully received, still left us with the feeling that we were treating a symptom and not the cause. While there was evidence that CBA was beginning to take off, we still had to work on a case-by-case basis, slogging through the maze of issue and problems surrounding the core problems in each case. We were sure that the key problem was a social one and that working with citizens in the context of *their world* was a viable way to progress meaningful and informed action that would lead to empowerment.

### **Deeper problems within natural resource management began to emerge**

By 2003, a new concept of CBA began to take shape as ideas about context, methodology and methods emerged. By mid 2003 an important finding occurred to do with the basis of the ongoing conflict over the way natural resources were being managed. It became clear, on the basis of several interventions and subsequent reflection sessions that the underlying problem was to do with certain expectations held by all of those affected by

the conflicts over natural resource management. At issue were differing expectations over the concept of certainty. For their part, the communities have been led to expect binding guarantees that management proposals would not lead to negative impacts on community or the environment. Industry expects to see approval for projects once the necessary requirements of regulations had been met. The governments expect best practice and that its codes and regulations will be met so that environment and community will be protected from loss or damage. Each expectation is underpinned by an implicit belief in certainty.

Of course several CBA projects had shown quite clearly that the expectations and values of citizens could not be met and furthermore nor could those of industry and government. In short, it was clear that natural resource planning and management, particularly in relation to certain forestry activities (as practiced in Tasmania) could not guarantee certainty.

In a search for deeper understanding, we undertook further reflection and analysis, which led us to conclude that natural resource managers were making decisions using an inappropriate scientific framework. Applied science is unable to deal with any but the simplest forms of uncertainty, and is totally incapable of accommodating human values and perceptions. A weakness was soon evident. Other authors (Funtowicz and Strand, 2007) have eloquently discussed the tangle of problems faced by the 'Modern Model' of science and have proposed new approaches to grappling with the above problems.

Since 2003 we have completed over a dozen audits and helped many citizens throughout the State. Through training workshops we have trained over 200 people and continue to promote debate on citizens based inquiry. We publish the journal *Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania* where citizens can report their inquiries and investigations into issues of concern.

While progress is slow, we realize that the cultural climate in Tasmania is such that we must move carefully and sensitively as we build an ongoing conversation in a reasoned and supportive way. We realize that our work is taking place in a culture of fear and intimidation and that Tasmanian's size and social-institutional linkages as are such that 'word and influence' spread very quickly. This means that honest caring individuals can find themselves marginalized within their own communities for simply having an opinion. Accordingly the *new activism* carries with it a sensitivity and understanding that is very different from the old ways. Thus our journey continues.

## Distillations and My Living Theory

I was 'different' from a very early age and did not fit in to either my family or, it would seem, my social context. I developed into a typical environmental activist, passionately working on my 'issues', trying to influence anyone who would listen. Through circumstance and design I came to question my effectiveness both as a practicing activist and human being, who was seeking to inquire within and upon everything and who, through a strong sense of justice, was seeking to awaken citizens to their potential. This ended up being the core of my search, but to be effective in my search I had to search within in order

to develop the necessary capacity and capability. In short I had to undertake an important journey that would lead to important transformations in my practice and an ongoing inquiry into my philosophy. The linkages between practice and philosophy mean that there have been outputs, such as Community Based Sampling and Community Based Auditing as well as outcomes such as a greater empathy for and understanding of the plight of the citizenry here in Tasmania, and how vitally important it is that we activists celebrate and value their good will and trust.

My empathy originates from the way I was treated, particularly in my younger life, so I 'know how it feels' to be treated oppressively and this has had a major impact in shaping my activism. But as importantly, as I grew older I felt the *pull of the past* more strongly with each passing year. My inquiry into my family history revealed insights not only into the life and times of my early ancestors, but also revelations about the darker side of what it means to be Tasmanian, and the very shaky pillars upon which we now stand! I feel, in deep sense, that the *blood is still somehow on our hands* both in terms of what we have done to the original owners of this place and the way we have treated the environment. I feel my search for justice and resolution is driven by this deep despair and concern for justice. This is the base of my 'Living Theory' and this is what drives me. My personal battle has been to move to a position where I could understand my rage and in turn do something purposeful that would help me and others in both the short and long term. I am growing as a spiritual being. Living Theory has enabled me to further explore and nurture my 'growing' in partnership with others. My story in many ways is only just beginning and I yearn for growing and understanding each and every day. My transition through periods of Living Contradiction has been sometimes painful but nonetheless essential steps in the growing process, rather like making a bungee jump when one is in terror of heights. Two things are at stake: one to do with dealing with the sense of terror and fear of my own unknown, and the other to do with who will I *be* when I come through the experience. Fortunately more periods of contradiction are no doubt looming on the horizon and that is very exciting.

On the very practical level, my self-inquiry, conducted over the past 10 years has enabled me to not only understand the nature of my trajectory, but also to reflect on ways in which I can change and in so doing improve my practice and my personal competencies. Community Based Auditing has been one means whereby I have been able to reshape my practice. More importantly working with my colleagues in TCRA Inc has shown how genuine, loving and sharing does create a space for positive change in our practice and being.

During my involvement with TCRA Inc I have been privileged to work with a team of women who have shown a whole new 'way of activism' that continues to be both refreshing and challenging and has provided the nutrient for the ongoing development of both the *idea* and the individuals involved. Below is a note from a friend and colleague who shared with me her thoughts on our time together as activists over the past decade or so as she makes a decision to take a new direction:

I have learned so much in the last 10 years working alongside you, all of which has given me power and perspective and contentment really - a way of feeling okay about each and every day as I know I am up to the task. I haven't let go of our partnership lightly. You have contributed to me unselfishly for years and I am really grateful for that and I have stayed on working longer than perhaps I had the motivation for, simply to honour your commitment to our partnership. That is not a good place for me to be coming from and produce good results

so it is time to call it quits and create new opportunities - you know, stepping into those possibilities we are always talking about. (Colleague, personal communication, April 23, 2010).

I am enriched and humbled by this honest and heartfelt note from a respected colleague. It confirms for me my positive role and at the same time allows me to continue my inquiry into aspects of my practice and being.

My journey continues and I intend to remain in this context that is *post* colonial Tasmania and work to influence and encourage others toward a just, ethical, innovative and cooperative activism that will hopefully take us to a better place.

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