

# Big Footprints Lead to Small Steps

*By Rob Fensom*

One foot in front of the other: it's the usual way to get around for most folks, though many of us use cars and trucks which leave bigger footprints than a guy plodding along in his sneakers. Footprints are big news these days, at least carbon ones, not my size nines. Our choices and lifestyles give most of us larger footprints than our feet need. Some time ago I answered a questionnaire and took a workshop on carbon prints. I was actually surprised how low I was compared to many of my classmates, even though my back yard is forty-five acres and my house is twice the size of most folks.

Yes, I am one of a disappearing breed, a farming, Christ-centred, conservative Friend. No, I do not wear braces, black wool pants, and a straw hat. Blue jeans, western shirt, and a cap do me fine. My horsepower is a diesel-burning tractor, and I love any machine that saves my back and is cost-effective on our farm. I run chainsaws, riding-lawnmowers and a "Gator" (mini pickup) all of which burn fuel and give me black points on the carbon scale. So with some trepidation I set about working my way through the book at the workshop, calculating house size, heating system, car mileage for all vehicles, and air mileage per year. No stone went unturned.

When we had all finished I drew the short straw and had to read mine out first. I read the totals in each column and felt shame and guilt. Finishing, I looked up and was met with a circle of faces staring at me. Many seemed to show disbelief and shock. Oh boy, I must be a fuel hog. No one even offered a comment. I felt two inches tall.

As we went around the circle I started to realize that my footprint was the lowest. Maybe all those shocked faces were because mine was so low compared to theirs. I started checking my results, as surely I must have done something wrong. Panicking I re-read the calculations and worried all the more because I could not find my mistake. When we had reached the end of the sharing I could see I must appear to lead a boring life. I claimed no airline flights, no RV, boat or motorized toys, no holidays or weekend get-a-ways, no foreign wines; just some out-of-season fruit and vegetables in winter. This guy was beginning to sound like a stay-at home bore!

The instructor asked me questions, no doubt to see why I had the lowest score. Well yes, I walk to work - it's only twenty yards across the farmyard. I walk to pick up the mail - the mailbox is on the corner by our pasture. When I was asked about food I began to feel like a lowly peasant. We grow all our own vegetables and fruit in season; have chickens for eggs; lambs and pigs for meat, and fresh milk for some of the year when the goats are lactating. We heat with a large outdoor wood stove. I felt sure this would give me extra points, as we burn a large volume of wood. Turns out the print from the wood stove, for the square footage of our house, even with my large volume of wood, was still well below that of hydro, natural gas, or oil.

On the farm we graze our pastures in rotation. This sequesters large amounts of carbon due to the generation of humus by the die-back of roots each time the grass is grazed. We only run the tractor when haymaking and feeding. With permanent pasture we do no cultivating, and farming organically means even fewer passes over the field with our tractor. As for travel, because we do not commute to work, it frees up mileage for our trips out of the valley. Even with those trips we ended up below average in that category, as commuting is the elephant in the room. Most attending the workshop drove to work, often using two vehicles, one for husband and one for wife.

I am not boasting my eco saintliness. Going into the process I was worried that I would be the one to be tarred and feathered for carbon crimes. The big lesson was not big at all but little: it was all the little things that accumulate into a large carbon footprint. It's not any one thing, which at first made it seem hard to give up anything and change our habits. Then on reflection I realized, if we turned it around it would be easier to change or even give up a few little things. If lots of us did the same, chipping away little by little, we could make a big difference.

We are all called to be good stewards of God's creation, not just the farmers and those close to the land and sea. Many can grow a small garden or support local farmers' markets. Some could walk or cycle to work, even if it's only when weather permits. Also, any time you buy food or items made within a hundred mile limit, you are cutting large pieces off the carbon footprint of those items, while at the same time supporting more favourable labour practices. Think of it as Fair Trade locally. As a farmer I often chuckle over the keenness for Fair Trade coffee, tea, or chocolate, but few give a thought to Fair Trade wheat, lamb, chicken, or pork produced here in Canada.

When George Fox and the early Quakers were forming the first Meetings the whole economy was small and local. Many never left their villages or bought products from outside their county. Today we have the technologies and the know-how to drastically reduce our footprints, and the stuff and clutter we accumulate, without giving up our standard of living and going back to the horse and cart. The problem is willpower. Worse yet, we worry about what other people will think of us. I realize now, that was the reason for my panic at the workshop. First, the fear of being the main carbon culprit in the room, then second, the fear of making a silly mistake and looking stupid in front of everyone. These are silly fears and they are the main reason we are scared to take the first small steps in a new direction. Other people will think we are weird, or more politely, eccentric. Yet Early Friends were strong and fearless despite public opinion, ridicule, and often persecution. Our fears, by comparison, are trivial. To make a difference is fashionable now (though maybe not with Shell or Exxon). These days you will not serve time in the stocks, or have your tongue bored with a hot poker for trying to make a difference to your personal carbon footprint. To be eccentric is not all bad. Remember early Friends were known as the *Peculiar People*, a badge they wore with honour.

I encourage you all to take a few small steps and reduce that size fifteen carbon print to a more human size eight. The Quaker call to simplicity does not mean braces, straw hats, grey bonnets and long skirts, unless you feel called to wear them. It does however mean a life of less, which will give us more. Good husbandry and stewardship are not just for the farmer, they are a burden and a blessing for all of us to share.

*Rob Fensom farms near Salmon Arm BC.  
He attends Vernon MM when time and carbon allow.  
Rob can be reached for a friendly chat at rancherdaddy@  
hotmail.com .*



## Book Review:

*Life, Money and Illusion -  
Living on earth as if we want to stay*  
Mike Nickerson (New Society Publishers)

Reviewed by Genevieve Jones

I like to be informed, but last winter I made myself quite sick reading too many disaster books. *Life, Money & Illusion - Living on earth as if we want to stay*, is different. Read the dedication: "To Daniel, Eliza, Taegan, Lillian, Zephyr, and all the children who will follow, from whom our generation borrows the earth". This author knows it's not over. "There are abundant solutions, well within our grasp, if we choose to apply them", Nickerson writes.

The title outlines the main themes of the book. Life: how a species succeeds. Money: its history and how it works. Illusion: how the current expanding economic system is at odds with our success as human beings.

Mike took ten years to write this book, and it's easy to see why. The scope is massive. Basically, he has outlined the major problems of the world, and proposed solutions. His manner is clear and gentle. He doesn't disparage 'evil doers', or create monsters out of corporations or governments. He calmly explains how people have made the mistakes that got us here.

The book is well researched and easy to understand, even though Mike discusses some very complex topics. He describes the history of money in all its forms: why we use it, how it has worked in the past, and how the economy works - or doesn't! As I read this, I realized, 'Holy cow, I'm reading and understanding economics for the first time in my life! I get it!' Whether it be the science of money, molecules, or media, Mike is always informative without inducing sudden deep sleep. He goes from issue to issue, gently tying them together, defining them and posing solutions as he weaves in personal stories, philosophy, and history.

Problems addressed include human impact on a full planet: pollution, destruction of habitat, loss of agricultural and wild lands; extinctions, resource depletion; inequity among people through domination, exploitation and poverty; failure to consider future generations, and much more. Mike explains the oil/transportation crisis, the role of the media, the evolution of war, overpopulation, unemployment, and unstable economies.