



## Sustainable Shift

By James MacAdam

### Care for all first, ask questions later

*This column explores the inner process of learning to live in harmony with one's self, community and the natural world.*

Liberal mouthpiece that he is, Michael Moore sure puts on a good show. His 2007 film *Sicko* scathingly portrays the U.S. health care system in comparison with the universal systems of France, Norway, England, Canada and Cuba. True to form, Moore one-sidedly (and entertainingly) bashes the U.S. system while glorifying his foreign examples.

What moved me about the film, however, was not the irony of Moore's presentation, but the quality of what his interviewees from other countries had to say about the idea of universal health care. When questioned about the issue of providing health care for each citizen, the collective response was (to paraphrase), "of course we would provide for the health care of those who are less fortunate."

That providing health care to all is considered a "no-brainer" by these people moves me deeply. It really shouldn't, as one of the central tenets of sustainability is social equity, which includes, at a minimum, universal access to adequate medical care. However, any discussion about providing universal health care in the U.S. is mired in grumbling about taxes and economics, accusations about personal responsibility, and a cringing at the intimation of — *ugh* — *socialism*.

The truth is, we want to stay separate. We want to believe that other people's problems are not ours, that statistics have nothing to do with us personally.

As we get older, however, most of us find that statistics have stories behind them. We lose our mobility through an accident or disease, our child suffers from asthma, we

get cancer. Some suffer quietly, while others take up the charge for "finding a cure" for whatever ails themselves or their family. The problem is, we don't consider it our problem until it directly affects us or our loved ones. Until then, it is a blissfully abstract concern for others to deal with. As anyone who has "become a statistic" — particularly those with less financial means — can attest, this is no way to live.

What can we do? How can we grow, internally and socially, to a level of humanity where each human life is considered valuable, worthy of respect, and sacred? Our advocacy groups and the lumbering barge of government chip away at this effort, individual institution by institution. We can continue to use that approach, and we can work on ourselves.

If selfishness, blindness to others' problems, and a sense of separateness exist in my world, they exist in me. It's not my job to waste energy worrying about everybody else's problems, but it can be my job to practice *compassion*. Compassion is how we grow, individually and as a society, from a screaming infant who believes the world revolves around him, to a mature adult who sees others' welfare — including the planet's — as important as his or her own.

The best practice I can think of to cultivate compassion right now is putting ourselves in others' shoes. As the elderly woman fumbles impossibly slowly with her change in front of you at the grocery store, imagine yourself making your own way through this concrete jungle, old and alone, 20, 30, 60 years from now. How will you act when your physical and mental capacities have diminished? When you read of someone's tragedy in the newspaper, be willing to let it touch you — how would you feel if you were in their situation? The idea is not to mire one's self in pity and

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Promoting awareness of sustainable seafood in our community

## Seafood Watch shows healthy fish choices

By Jennifer Kachur and Jeff Hartman

Ever go to the market and pick out a wonderful fish fillet, only to discover later that the fish you selected is not that healthy for you? Or that the species is rapidly declining?

If so, you're probably not alone. That's why the Sonoran Sea Aquarium, in cooperation with the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, recently became the Southwest stewards of the Seafood Watch program coordinated by the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

"Our goal is to help people make healthy and environmentally sustainable choices regarding the seafood they eat," said Franklin Lane, Sonoran Sea Aquarium's director of education. "Seafood conservation is an uphill battle and we want to do our part."

The Seafood Watch program provides people with information to help them make decisions about the seafood they eat. The Monterey Bay Aquarium has carefully researched the issue and compiled a list of positive seafood choices. The list has three categories — best choices, good alternatives, and what to avoid. There are three reasons certain seafood may make the "avoid" list: overfishing, method of harvesting, or health concerns.

"Overfishing could lead to the extinction of many significant top level predators, such as the Chilean Sea Bass and Blue Fin Tuna," Lane said. "Losing these predators would have a significant impact on the ecosystem."

If the method of fishing is indiscriminate, meaning there is a lot of bycatch associated with the harvest, it is considered to be unsustainable. (Bycatch is the unwanted portion of a fishing catch.) One example of this is bottom trawling for shrimp in the Sea of Cortez. Ninety percent of the biomass the trawlers pull up is bycatch, and most of it is killed in the process. Only 10 percent is actually shrimp, and that means the method of fishing is obviously hurting the environment. On the other hand, Alaskan long line fishing for Cod is a good choice because the lines are deep in the water, and there is minimal bycatch of turtles and sharks relative to traditional surface fishing.

The last reason a particular seafood might make the avoid list relates to health concerns. Mercury is a particular concern because of its impact on nerves and prevalence in the environment. Mercury, which is released into the air by coal plants, falls into the ocean and eventually enters the food chain, reaching dangerous levels in certain fish species, particularly the bigger, predatory fish.

Other health issues are related to the practice of fish farming. In many countries, fish farming is not well regulated and many species are raised in unhealthy ways. For example, in some countries the estuaries are simply blocked off, and water circulation soon becomes poor. Fish are grown and left in unsanitary water and disease soon becomes prominent. Many countries also administer unnecessary prophylactic antibiotics, steroids, and sedatives to the surrounding water, which the fish absorb and pass on for human consumption.

There is also a concern that some of these fisheries overfeed the fish. For a fishery to be certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), it must feed each fish no more than 1.5 pounds of food for every pound of fish produced. Most fisheries use anywhere from 5-7 pounds of food for every one pound of fish. This practice is unsustainable because it takes much more energy and resources to grow the fish than it is worth because fish can thrive on much smaller amounts of food.

The United States has passed a Country of Origin Labeling law (the COOL Law) that requires all seafood retailers to label their product with the country of origin. This allows people to consider where the fish came from before making their purchase. The COOL Law requires labeling on both canned and pre-packaged products.

Each state has its own fishing laws about methods of fishing, where and when you can fish, how much of a fee is required, and how much bycatch you are allowed to have. Each fleet must follow the laws from that state. However, despite the different state laws, the U.S. does have one of the most sustainable fisheries in the world.

A group of volunteers from the Sonoran Sea Aquarium conducted the first local audit last summer. The goal of the audit is to identify those stores that offer "best choices" and "good alternatives" and then make that information available to the public. The sustainability class at City High School — a class devoted to studying, promoting and helping with local sustainability issues — recently followed up with a winter audit to document seasonal differences. The Sonoran Sea Aquarium has compiled the results and will make the list available to the public.

If you are interested in being added to the mailing list or helping with future audits, contact Franklin Lane at: [flane@tucsonaquarium.com](mailto:flane@tucsonaquarium.com)

**About the authors:** Jeff Hartman teaches a class on sustainability at City High School in Tucson, and Jennifer Kachur is a student at City High.

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## Life Unplugged

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horizon for the telltale white blow from the lungs of our warm-blooded relative.

Dolphins always accompanied Donis, never failed to appear along the wavelets, playing among the tanned surfers in their bright wetsuits, yellow, red, aqua blue — surf boards plying through the curl of glassy waves.

We reached the pier and ate at the local pub: a fresh snapper or grouper, shrimp or lobster and an icy cold beer. As we dined, families came to our table to talk with the beach celebrity who, by her third decade of teaching, had raised up generations of people to love, understand, and conserve the ocean's natural communities.

Donis' lifelong partner, Don, was the boy next door. They fell in love as youngsters, married early, and bought a house for \$15,000 on the cliff overlooking San Clemente beach. When I came to know them, their home was worth nearly a million dollars. They had added a wing and a two story tower on which you could see whales migrating for hundreds of miles.

Visiting their home was to enter the kingdom of play. A huge glass coffee table

supported by three dolphins, hanging glass sea baubles in brilliant colors, flying dragons with big grins that forced me to grin back, let me know I had entered a fifth dimension created by a little girl and boy who were still in love with life.

When they needed to invigorate their love for each other, they packed their suitcases for a whimsical vacation and then walked to the back guest room, pretended they were at a far flung hotel, and made love with abandon — I always imagined they did so with a lot of creativity.

Donis and Don worked hard, paid their taxes, raised three boys, and participated in civic life. But they remained unplugged from the tiresome aspects of society, somehow managing to stay focused on the silver lining of daily life.

I believe their wisdom derived from daily exposure to an abiding natural tide.

**About the author:** Susan Williams is a freelance writer and education consultant who believes that caring for people and caring for the Earth are interdependent. She founded Write For Change in 2003 to support non-profits working toward a more sustainable future for us all.