

Introduction

I once heard a story on National Public Radio about how delicious it is to eat a deep fried turkey, and I was intrigued. I started deep frying turkeys on special occasions and started wondering what to do with all of the left over fryer oil. I was exposed to biodiesel, and started using the waste vegetable oil to make fuel for my tractor.

The story of Piedmont Biofuels, which took Rachel, Leif and I from a barrel in the backyard to the corporate boardroom is chronicled in my first book, *Biodiesel Power: The Passion, the People and the Politics of the Next Renewable Fuel*. It ends just as we are about to embark on building a commercial biodiesel plant. By now we have finished that plant. We converted an abandoned industrial park on the edge of town into a thriving enterprise that manufactures and ships four thousand gallons of biodiesel a day.

By day I work at Piedmont Biofuels. As I was writing this book, I spent my days moving gallons of fuel into the world, and my nights moving words into this book.

But this is not the continuation of our story. Our story gets a chapter. While ours may well be an amazing project, it takes place inside the context of a dozen more.

Time changes every story inexorably. By the time *Biodiesel Power* came to market, everything had changed. When I referred to it as “obsolete,” my editor at New Society, Ingrid, corrected my description to “a snapshot in time.”

By the time this book arrives in bookstores, people will have fallen in love. And people will have moved away. And people will have died. And people will have traded in their partners for different models. Which means that this book too, is a snapshot.

In his book *The Great Turning*, David Korten lays out a vision based on five thousand years of human existence that states we are at a place where we can choose our destiny as a species. We can either continue on in our imperial ways on the road to ruining our garden planet, or we can begin “The Great Turning” toward a sustainable earth community. At the heart of Korten’s thinking is the idea that we need to change our stories.

Unbeknownst to me, I was happily doing just that by publishing entries in Energy Blog. I was pushing out hundreds of vignettes — on everything from the visiting Fire Marshal to policy discussions to the time Rachel took a “golden shower” in used vegetable oil.

And remarkably it developed a following. Faraway readers came to identify with the real people in my life as if they were characters in a fictional tale.

This is non-fiction, folks.

This book gets some distance on biodiesel and takes forays into a broader world that is our small town.

I’m not an economist. But I have been wholly engaged in one sort of business or another in Chatham County for the past eighteen years, and for this book I have trolled those businesses (and others) for stories which might tell us something about how we can participate in the Great Turning of which Korten speaks.

I also think this book is partly an answer to some of the questions James Kunstler lays out in *The Long Emergency*. He is curious about whether or not we possess the vernacular knowledge to survive in the face of resource depletion and societal collapse, and in as much as this book is an investigation of his questions, the overwhelming answer is “yes, our community will be just fine.”