

UCSC Early Days of Ecotopia

Introduction

Ronnie Lipschutz, Provost College 8

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Today, we are going to have a series of discussions, presentations and discussions about, Utopian Dreaming more generally, and of course here we are at UCSC, the sight of so many Utopian hopes more than 50 years ago. Jim Clifford, who is out in the audience, and some colleges organized a wonderful exhibition, which I think is closed now, right, about the origins of UCSC and of course there are all of these photographs of these white guys, in suites, being driven around the Cowell Ranch, and presumably being completely mesmerized by it, and the alternative was over at the Almaden Valley, and I seem to recall the story that it was a hot muggy day and that of course here it wasn't, so they were really captured by it, and as a result, and the City of Santa Cruz was really interested in getting the University the University to come here, and I also suspect that it also regretted the decision for a while with all of the students and all of the things that were going on.

So this is the 50th Anniversary (of the founding of UCSC). There is a lot, this is a 50th year event, there are various things that have been going on all year. One of the inspirations for, in addition to *Ecotopia*, for the conference was that 50th year anniversary and thinking back on "the early Utopian Years of the campus." So, I wanted to find some one that could speak to that, and of course there are all of the usual suspects, but Barbara Laurence, who has been around for a long time, proposed some one that has been involved in fairly early years of the campus. He was a student of Page Smith's, who some of you know was one of the founders faculty members and then left, and I do not know the full story about that, but maybe our speaker will tell you about it. Our speaker is Fred Mc Pherson.

I first of all want to note for those of you don't know, there are several other Fred McPhersons running around Santa Cruz County, and our Fred Mc Pherson is not those Fred Mc Phersons. So that is the first thing. The second thing is, I am going to, since you got the program, and you have his biography in there, I am going to be very brief and let him take the floor. The important thing to note is that Fred, and again he will probably speak about it, left the university along with Page. He was working on his PhD, so instead he earned a PhD from Santa Cruz Paidea with Page. He did work, in particular on the San Lorenzo River, and particular the restoration of the San Lorenzo River. He continues to teach, and somehow I thought that he would give a much more interesting presentation than one of our, sort of more standard speakers. So, I am going to turn the floor over to him. We have titled it Utopia at UCSC, the Early Years, but it is up to him to decide what he is going to say.

Thank you very much.

Fred Mc Pherson's Talk:

Thank You, Thank you so much. I am so excited to be here and have this opportunity to talk about this period in history. We are talking about 50 years ago for UCSC, which you know was founded in 1965. Fifty years gives you kind of permission to go back in time and open the doors and say what really happened in the 60's.

A lot of things about the 60's have been forgotten, deliberately hidden, or misrepresented. A lot of things about the Viet Nam era and psychedelics and those sorts of things people have not wanted to talk about. But that was the era in which UCSC was founded, 1965. So I am delighted and thankful that I do have this chance to be here today and also personally go back in time and think about what that time meant for me and what I was doing there, and how my life fits in with this 50th year anniversary of the founding of UCSC.

Let me just say that in 1965, I was not at UCSC, or even in this area. I was out in the Mojave Desert teaching Biology and doing porpoise research at the Navy Ordinance Test Center in China Lake. I only moved up to this area around 1966. I had the opportunity to get away from an environment where they were working on and testing all of the Napalm and other weapons for the war and come to this area to be involved in Pacific High School, a school that grew out of the Peace Movement over in Palo Alto. I could tell a lot of stories about the school. It was actually a school that the students and the staff built together. It is still there. Now it is Jikoji Zen Center on Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35) about 2 miles north of where Highway 9 intersects with Skyline. Anyway, it was an alternative experimental high school that we built where the curriculum was, you might say, individualized. Each student had a chance to explore topics that they were interested in by themselves and in groups.

We had a lot of guest groups up there. One week we turned the whole school into a Zen center for a week. Another time we invited the Black Panthers up for a visit. One of the guest groups that came up to the school for a participatory performance to introduce the students to playing spontaneous "perfect" music was from Boulder Creek. They called themselves the 25th Century Ensemble. They did a perfect spontaneous music session with the students and staff. A group of great musicians brought the Space Base and other musical instruments. I said to myself, "This sounds like a great group to start playing more music with." They met down in Boulder Creek and I got involved with them playing music on a regular basis. We did a lot of benefits around the Santa Cruz area. We would do benefits for the peace movements. Then up here at UCSC, Allan Chadwick came to the campus in about 1966. If you do not know who Allan Chadwick was, he was a very charismatic organic gardener, dedicated to the Rudolf Steiner school of Horticultural and the French Intensive double-digging gardening system. He started the now famous garden near Stevens and Cowell Colleges. The 25th Century Ensemble was asked to come up and do some benefits on the UCSC campus for peace events, anti-draft protests and for the new organic garden. These were still the days of the draft and there were protests against the war and the draft. These events were my first contacts with the UCSC campus and took place about 1968. I thought that it was all just wonderful!

I have brought a couple of artifacts with me from that time. (Fred goes to the table and brings back Holly's book and a thumb harp to the podium).

These are genuine artifacts from the early days of UCSC.

One is in relation to the photographs and stories in this book that has recently been published by the author Holly Harmon. It is titled *Inside A Hippie Commune*, and it deals with the life of the author, who was a teen age girl growing up in the San Lorenzo Valley, who did live in a hippie commune at the Holiday Cabins in Ben Lomond. Also this book is a history and chronology of life in the Santa Cruz Mountains. (Fred holds up the book toward the audience and flips through some of the pages.) Just look at these beautiful black and white pictures; it is very well illustrated, and has great stories. Here is Suzukey Roshi up at Pacific High School, and stuff about many of the things that went on in that era. It also deals with what happened at the commune, and one of the things that they did was to help with do light shows. They would come around to various places like the Barn (in Scotts Valley), and that is dealt with in here (Holly's book) and UCSC, and a number of other places, and they would do light shows with our local dentist Captain Outrageous, Dick Smith. The light shows that went on up here at UCSC were incredible. (Fred puts down Holly's book.)

I just wanted to describe those because they were my first real contact with UCSC. The stories that you may hear about what went on there are maybe different than what I would like to say about them. You know, UCSC when it first started was founded on the idea that it would be interdisciplinary and each of the new colleges that were started would be small, kind of a liberal arts colleges, and they would have faculty from different disciplines on the staff. Some of the people who are here in the audience today were part of that in those early days. What they would do every so often, maybe once a month, was to have a festival celebration of some sort. These would be multidimensional, multimedia, interdisciplinary events that featured music, dance, the arts, technology of putting on a light show, which is quite involved, movies, slides, and a number of other things that go along with a light show. And these would be held in the dining halls, like at Cowell College or Stevenson when they were first built, and they'd have a big screen on one side and on that screen they would project some of the light show. Imagine that this is a dining hall here, and you'd have projectors up there, and they'd project a lot of things happening at once up on a large screen and also on the walls all around the room. You could put slides in there about the theme. When we did a benefit for the garden we used lots of pictures of flowers and butterflies in the garden and people in the garden.

Sometimes we'd do other ones that would project movies. A big movie that we made and used in lightshows was called *Beachhead in Paradise*. And that's now available along with Holly's book. (Fred holds up the DVD to audience.) The original movie is on this DVD that was made by Max Hartstein and it featured a big event at the Holiday commune where they presented this first Space Base in inner space. If you want to see a little bit about what actually happened at that event and what was projected into the the light show, this is a great DVD to look at. So that's one other artifact I bring from that period.

We would usually have a band or bands. Sometimes they were student bands and other times, local bands, also described in the book here. The same bands that played at The Barn also played here at UCSC. Then toward the end of the evening — some of you that are here

may remember, Mike Walker is here and he might remember this, and Ralph Abraham, — we would start with a moment of silence and then the thumb harps would start; people would provide a thumb harp and play it. I brought a thumb harp, the other artifact (Fred shows a thumb harp to audience and rattles it.). This is a '69 model [begins playing], probably good for this microphone. Then the thumb harps would start playing, sometimes we'd have two, three or more thumb harps playing. It would be like a choir of thumb harps. And then maybe some of the drums would come in. And then the idea was that whoever heard a note that they wanted to play would just play it. This is called perfect music, and pretty soon dancers would begin dancing, and the light show would be going on, and sometimes we'd just all be going for hours. This one (Fred stops playing and holds up the thumb harp) is made from recycled plywood we found somewhere locally, and these little metal prongs (tines) came from the street sweeper up there in Boulder Creek. Sometimes it would lose them while sweeping, so we had those recycled. You can play it standing up or (Fred walks over to the chair by the table on the stage that has microphone and other artifacts on it) you can also play it sitting down, putting it between your legs and play it like this [Demonstrates]. They have a great versatility. (Fred walks back to the podium carrying the thumb harp).

So, out of these wonderful events, some of the richest parts of the early days at UCSC came to me and the community, because when you get everybody together playing music, dancing, celebrating life, celebrating the things that people cared about, and studying to prepare these festivals and then doing them, it would bring people close together and to me, it really characterized the early days at UCSC.

The 25th Century Ensemble also started becoming involved in playing at moon festivals all over the place. In the hills above Aptos, Soquel, Boulder Creek, and Bonnie Doon, we'd usually have a moon festival once a month. So between playing all these festivals at the Barn and doing light shows and moon festivals, we had a very active community. Now this also relates to what Ernest Challenbach incorporated into his *Ecotopian* stories and his vision of *Ecotopia*. It eventually affected the whole community, and these kinds of events went on all up and down the Santa Cruz Mountains. Over in Palo Alto, Ken Kesey and his prankster group were doing them also, and they went on up in San Francisco, and so this became a lifestyle of the Peninsula and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

My main contact was there at UCSC with these benefits in the early days, but in 1969 I left Pacific High School life and bought a little house in Boulder Creek about 1967, '68, somewhere in there, and I started to live more over on this side of the hill and got more involved in playing music and things like that, while I was still teaching at Pacific. Eventually I found a job with UCSC Extension. It was actually teaching some of the first classes about Human Ecology back in the fall of '69 and the spring of 1970. And then, as there was a growing interest in this area and things were going good at UCSC Extension, I was asked to also be a program coordinator. I started coordinating organic gardening classes throughout the UCSC Extension service area, like over in Palo Alto and Menlo Park and places like that as well as over here.

And then, in the spring of 1970, you may remember this, all the Utopian fun, excitement, and opportunities that came with the new campus and the alternative education experiment of the early days of UCSC—all came at a time when the Vietnam War was intensifying. When it was confirmed that the bombing in Laos and Cambodia, that was not supposed to be taking place, was indeed actually taking place, and the extent of the destruction and horror of mass killings of the civilian populations was disclosed to the public, mass protests broke out around the world and particularly on college campuses. There were huge protests on many college campuses, as some of you here may remember, and then from the protests there was a backlash, a reaction from the institutional authorities. There were the killings of students at Kent State University, and when students shut down some of the facilities at Berkeley, and here on the UCSC campus and at UC, Santa Barbara, there was this big reaction from the University of California, as you might imagine. There was a lot of fear that things were going to get out of control and that the experiment that had been started up at UCSC was already out of control, and so there was a backlash.

In that spring of 1970, the first Earth Day was scheduled all across America and maybe the world. We planned a big celebration for the event, because we had this big network of people who liked to get together to play music and have festivals and benefits and so forth. We planned a series of events. One event was over at Cabrillo College; Mike Walker coordinated that; one event was down on the Pacific Mall (The beginnings of the Spring Faire); and the other event was supposed to be up here at UCSC. When we got to the celebration at UCSC, there was a band there, and we came in with our light show and musical equipment, ready to play, but we were met by a group of police. They were really concerned about what was going to happen. People came inside, saw the police and then turned away. A few people stayed. Any money that was donated we had to give to the police to cover their salaries for the night. No band member, nobody, made any money for that event at all.

When I went back to work the next Monday, my Dean, Dean Tcherendsen, brought me in and said, "There are some things you can do at UCSC and there are some things you just can't do. So we no longer need your services." And oh, I was so heartbroken, because I was just beginning to do the Ecology classes that I wanted to teach and had the opportunity to coordinate the classes for organic gardening that I cared so much about. That same kind of thing happened to other people after that first Earth Day event. So what happened up here at UCSC was kind of the epitome of a backlash to the protests of the late '60s.

I want to say what the characteristics of early days of UCSC were. I wrote a little list (Fred turns pages, finds his list) of what the founding vision and goals were for UCSC. It was supposed to have been like a new, innovative experiment, an alternative experiment in education, where we would have small colleges, kind of patterned after the liberal arts colleges, and they would be independent, but within the context of the whole UC system. So UCSC was deliberately at the very beginning set up to be an alternative experiment. And so from that perspective, they wanted to permit and encourage the staff and students to find new rules and have an opportunity to explore these goals in different, new ways. They were hoping that this would be an example of a new form of education. The idea was that this would then be "the city on a hill" to show the way to other, more innovative,

interdisciplinary, multimedia kinds of exploration of learning and student involvement. The first colleges were small. I think the first year, it started in '65, they only had about 600 students, and even five years later they only had 3,000, and as someone mentioned earlier, now there are about 15,000 students, so things have changed quite a bit in terms of the size of the campus and the number of students, faculty and staff.

So those are some of the size characteristics of the earlier days at UCSC. There were, of course, younger faculty and first- and second-year students. The other theme that was prevalent up here was that you wanted to teach by example. You didn't want to just talk the talk, you wanted to walk the walk. That was the commonly understood way of proceeding. Also, there was a great concern about being good stewards (caretakers) of the environment and having sustainability here on campus and developing the campus facilities in a respectful way in relation to various aspects of the environment.

One of the other innovative things that sort of just happened was that Alan Chadwick showed up. He was not hired by the university. There is a whole story about him coming to the campus that is quite intriguing. Paul Lee eloquently writes about that in his memoir called *A Garden in the Mind*, a tribute to Alan Chadwick. So, I suppose if you want to learn more about those days, you could read that book, and other books Paul Lee wrote about what happened on the UCSC campus.

What happened after Earth Day? Well, a lot of things happened to faculty members. Some were denied tenure, and it's not really clear exactly why. Was it because of the anti-war protests? Was it because of their stance on the draft or on Vietnam? Or was it because they did not publish enough? Because the rules of the UC system are that you are granted tenure and advancement based on how much you publish. Well some of the professors who were involved in all of these other wonderful activities that I have tried to describe were not publishing as much. And so for various reasons, Paul Lee was not granted tenure, and then Page Smith, who was the Provost of Cowell College, is reported to have said, "If this place (UCSC) does not have a place for Paul Lee, then it doesn't have a place for Page Smith."

So they both left the university along with some of the other faculty, and they moved down into town. I would say that all of that happened around 1974. Now some people would say that was the end of the golden days, those early days of UCSC, but I would actually contend that once they went down into town, wonderful new things happened. So it was like a kind of transformation. When they moved down into town, between Page and Paul and the others, they started the William James Foundation, and in that, or out of that, they started things like the William James Work Company; it was sort of like a little Santa Cruz CCC project. They also started the Penny University, and it still goes on today. They started Paidea University as well.

Page Smith was really discontent with what had happened to the PhD studies programs on campus and in higher education, where students had to become so very specialized and abstracted from broader aspects of life in their academic pursuits (as explained in his book *Killing the Spirit*.) He supported the Paidea idea that if you are going to give a PhD, the candidate should be a good scholar but also do something useful for the community as part of his academic achievement. That was going back to the ideal of Athens, Greece where you

were granted recognition for your academic work if you also, as part of your studies, did something useful with it for the community. And so that's where I got involved in Paidea with Page and we started working on the restoration of the San Lorenzo River. Also, the Homeless Garden Project grew out of that movement off campus. The Art in the Prisons project that still goes on came from Eloise, Page's wife, getting involved in that project. And as I mentioned, a lot of things happened with the restoration of the lower San Lorenzo River, and then it ultimately resulted in the restoration plan and project that we do have in place now, and a lot of improvements that have been made along the San Lorenzo River, in the lower part.

One of the other spin-offs that happened also, was that KUSP Radio was started out of some of the same musical, social energy for the festivals that were going on. Also, one thing that happened to me when I was asked not to return to UCSC Extension after the Earth Day celebration, my wife was pregnant at the time. We had been thinking about having a home birth. Shall we have a home birth or not, you know? At that time there were the beginnings of the midwife movement here in Santa Cruz. At the moon festivals there were a lot of women involved and some of them had had home births. Women and men were involved with playing music, dancing, sharing food. When I got laid off, we did not have any health insurance or income for awhile, and it became increasingly attractive to have a home birth. So we got involved in the home birth movement. There were home births going on in the community, and Mike can tell you about this over where he lived in Aptos and we had a home birth, and so out of that, the whole midwife movement momentum and started becoming more active and eventually there was a group of women who started the Center for the Feminine Arts and Midwifery up at Camp Campbell in Boulder Creek. So that was the beginning of the woman's home birth movement, at least from our perspective.

A lot of new things happened, of course, politically. There were struggles over land use, energy use, the greenbelt idea, the lighthouse field battle, the battle over the atomic energy plant out in Davenport—all those things went on, but they happened in a way that was different because of the movement of activists from the campus into the community.

So I could go on and tell you stories for quite a long time, but I just wanted to say that, when we think about the early days at UCSC, I think not only of what happened up here on campus, but what happened to the whole community in those early days, and to these, what we call, alternative lifestyles, alternative energy, alternative cultural movements that started in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I think that this is what Callenbach picked up on and incorporated into his Ecotopian novels in various ways, not just what happened up here at UCSC, which was a little like a Utopia, but what happened in the whole community. And when we think about the future, what I see is that out of all this, it seems like we have a duality. But there's really a potential for reintegration of all the wonderful things that have gone on, and are going on in the community, with all the positive things that have continued to happen up there at UCSC. And what I think is going to happen is that we're going to have an unintended Ecotopia.

Because of the challenges of global climate change, we have no other choice. If we're going to confront the real challenges that scientist tell us exist, that of not increasing the temperature for more than 1.5 to 2 degrees centigrade, and bringing the carbon parts per million down to about 350—we have to do that, we have to really implement huge technological lifestyle changes, and very, very fast. So I would say that lots of things that were prophesized in the Ecotopian novels will come to pass, because we have to make those changes soon, and we have to make them in a really massive (world-wide) way.

So that's my hope for the future, and it was a joy to be able to come up here and share a little bit about my memories of the past, and my perspective. I want to mention that we do have a group that's been meeting for about the last five years or so or maybe longer to focus on that period of time. We're calling ourselves the Santa Cruz Hip History Group. If you Google "Santa Cruz Hip History Ralph Abraham," you'll come to the website. And we're posting some of our stories, pictures, and things like that on that website. You're welcome to contribute if you like. There's a way of doing that. Ralph's here today. And we're telling stories, like the one I told today, about what happened to us individually, and maybe out of those stories and out of the pictures and movies and the work Holly's doing in her book, we can get a better insight into those days, a truer insight.

**** So thank you very much for this opportunity ****.