Practicing citizenship today means practicing global citizenship, for we are beyond the age when less mature forms of citizenship were acceptable. We know too much: we cannot claim ignorance as an excuse for persisting in old patterns of behavior and avoiding the responsibility that our epoch places before us.

Practicing citizenship requires awareness, including self-awareness. Individually and as a global community we must wake up.

Practicing citizenship requires imagination and knowledge. It requires goal-directed and evidence-based new learning. Basic and continuing education is as important to the practice of citizenship as it is to the practice of medicine.

Practicing citizenship requires connections. Not only is responsible citizenship directed toward fostering healthy community; to be successful, it requires community. This chapter includes a description of two projects in which I have been involved, each designed to promote connections at local and global levels.
Practicing Citizenship

Practicing citizenship requires active, creative engagement: problem solving and innovative action advancing the health of the local and global communities. Another goal of that creative engagement is personal growth, empowerment, and well-being. In practice, these are natural consequences of this creative engagement. We empower ourselves and promote our own well-being as we work toward empowerment and well-being of others.

The global citizen as hero for our time

In novels, stories, films, our culture has been fascinated with the hero, and has visited and revisited the question of what it means to be a hero. As human beings we have been doing this for millennia. In his classic study of myth and hero, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell seeks to understand the essence of the hero as he or she appears in each epoch. Campbell comes to conclusions that differ significantly from the “myth of the hero” as a means of denying death. Instead of denying mortality, the hero must pass through a fully human struggle with limitations and full awareness of approaching death. The end of all that searching brings the hero to a transcendent vision for rebirth of his or her society and culture. And having made the arduous journey, the hero’s second task is to convey that vision to the world.

In the concluding section of his book, entitled “The Hero Today,” Campbell comes uncannily close to describing the work of the global citizen:

The community today is the planet, not the bounded nation; hence the patterns of projected aggression which formerly served to co-ordinate the in-group now can only break it into factions. The national idea, with the flag as totem, is today an aggrandizer of the nursery ego, not the annihilator of an infantile situation…. And the numerous saints of this anti-cult — namely the patriots...
The *ABCs* of Human Survival

whose ubiquitous photographs, draped with flags, serve as official icons — are precisely the local threshold guardians … whom it is the first problem of the hero to surpass. (1949, 388–89)

Through our own efforts toward self-actualization, each of us can bring a unique gift to the world. The process of discovering and developing the unique potential that is within each of us is essential to the practice of responsible global citizenship. The hero is not someone out there, remote and exalted, but a possibility within ourselves.

*Awareness*

We live in a profoundly dysfunctional global community — even insane, in the terms of observers such as Erich Fromm and Eckhart Tolle. The practice of citizenship is a process of healing that insanity. Practicing global citizenship requires an acute and abiding awareness of the insanity, in terms conducive to healing it.

The illness is spread not by self-conscious wickedness but by ordinary people, usually in the course of doing things that are socially acceptable and often in the course of doing things that are considered good (patriotic, Christian, godly, self-sacrificing, or even heroic). The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions. Adolf Eichmann was, in Hannah Arendt’s view (1963a), an example of the everyday quality of evil. He facilitated the forced transfer of innocent people to incarceration and death because it was what the established authorities had ordered, and because for Eichmann, obedience — following orders without question — was a characteristic of the good person, a servant of the fatherland.

In the Nazi era, many Germans watched in silence or indifference as fellow human beings in Germany were being deprived of their human rights by the German government. This happened between 1933 and 1940, with full public knowledge of the process, before
Practicing Citizenship

the Holocaust. Many of those who were silent and complicit called themselves Christians. And of course, those who were silent and complicit could have given you very good reasons for their silence and complicity.

In our era, many North Americans watched in silence or indifference as fellow human beings in Iraq were being deprived of their human rights by economic sanctions. Those sanctions, imposed and maintained by the government of the United States and its allies working through the UN Security Council, violated international human rights law. The UN Security Council was violating the UN Charter. The effects of the sanctions proceeded with full public knowledge of the process, before the invasion of Iraq. Many of those who were silent and complicit called themselves Christians. And of course, those who were silent and complicit could have given you very good reasons for their silence and complicity.

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart? (Solzhenitsyn 1974, 168)

If we have any interest in advancing the health of the global community, we will have to begin by cleaning up our own act. That includes bringing our government and the governments of our allies into compliance with international law.

As individuals, each of us carries to some extent the pathology of our society, just as a drop of pond water from a polluted pond carries the toxins of its source. Cleaning up our own act necessarily includes healing ourselves. The restoration of sanity, if it is to happen at all, must take place both within individuals and within
The *abcs* of Human Survival

...continues here.

...
powerful forces for positive change. Our consumer and careerist culture is astonishingly limited in its capacity to harness this force, or even to be aware of it, because that culture is rooted in the old paradigm of the individual’s impotence in the public sphere. The old paradigm severely limits what can be learned from reality. It will be a while before our society makes the paradigm shift, but don’t wait for them. The faster you shift your paradigm, the faster society will follow you.

**Imagination and knowledge**

Imagination and knowledge have always been world-transformers and will continue to be so. Einstein may have said that imagination was more important than knowledge, but they work beautifully together. Imagination and new learning not only transform the world; they also transform the imaginative person. Depression can be thought of as a psychological state devoid of the capacity for imagination, new learning, and self-transformation.

The evil in the world comes from ignorance, and new goal-directed learning is an essential part of the practice of global citizenship. With that process comes growing awareness of one’s own power to change the world, along with growing self-esteem. To engage in responsible citizenship is to refute the doctrine of impotence.

Imagination is conceptual blockbusting. As examples, I’ll suggest three specific blocks to progress that can be busted by reimagining: 1) using narrowly conceived (compartmentalized) issues as the conceptual basis for activism; 2) neglecting the energy of conflict as a potential power source for positive change; and 3) underestimating the value of breaching walls of silence. For each of the blocks, I will provide an example of how a collective act of imagination has blockbusted.

*Efforts to promote the common good are often too narrowly issue-based. Progress may depend on moving past the resulting*
The **abcs of Human Survival**

*compartmentalization of energy and effort.* Instead of thinking of issues such as warfare, environmental devastation, poverty, homelessness, and hunger as unrelated, it is time to consider how progress on each of these issues can benefit from recognizing them as multiple aspects of one problem, and redesigning approaches to solving them, and the larger problem, on that basis. The history of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) illustrates the concept. In 1987, thanks to a convergence of those who were passionate about affordable housing and others who were passionate about conservation, the VHCB was created by the Vermont legislature, and three million dollars in state funds were appropriated for its work. The following year, the legislature appropriated an additional twenty million dollars, and the VHCB became a line item in the state’s budget. The state’s commitment to land conservation and affordable housing was steadfast through subsequent difficult economic times.

The principal key to Vermont’s success has been the coalition of organizations with seemingly contradictory objectives: housing versus open space…. The original idea for a state trust fund was to protect farmland. Later, the proposal was expanded to include protection of wildlife habitat, recreation areas, and historic buildings. Despite a clear need to protect these lands from the pressures of development, it was not until affordable housing was added to the list that the idea captured the attention of the governor and legislative leaders. With this political support and favorable economic times, VHCB was established in a single legislative session. (Libby and Darby 2000, 267)

If you did not previously know this history of the VHCB, then you now have some new knowledge. If you are trying to address homelessness or some other challenge, that new knowledge and
your imagination might just carry you past the next obstacle toward your goal.

Conflict is associated with energy, and that energy can sometimes be converted into a power source for a positive outcome. A project to establish a Calgary Centre for Global Community is described later in this chapter. The earliest step toward that project illustrates the concept of energy conversion.

Several years ago, a conflict arose over an event in Calgary hosted by the Palestinian-Canadian Students’ Society at the University of Calgary. The event had been criticized in an article in the Calgary Herald and had generated some randomly directed energy. In particular, a few members of the Jewish community in Calgary were distressed by the idea, presented by a rabbi, that Judaism and Zionism are incompatible: one cannot, said the rabbi, be a good Jew and be a Zionist.

As luck would have it, we were able to convert the energy of the conflict into a constructive dialogue, choosing a goal of potential interest to everyone involved in the conflict. We discussed how to establish a standing forum on life-threatening conflicts, to be open to concerned citizens and connected to the media in Calgary. I invited the author of the article who had criticized the event to co-host the dialogue with me. We brought into the effort two journalists; various members of the Jewish community, including a co-founder of Stand with Israel (a Zionist organization); the president of the Palestinian Canadian Students’ Society; the president of the Muslim Students’ Association at the University of Calgary; and others.

Soon we had a draft of a short document on a Calgary Media Forum on Life-threatening Conflicts. It specified operating principles such as openness to all concerned, as well as the necessity of compliance with the Forum’s code of conduct, including respectful listening. What was most remarkable, however, was the participation of such diverse and even adversarial advocates.

That year we were holding a larger conference entitled “Media
The ABCs of Human Survival

Coverage of Life-threatening Conflicts,” with keynote speakers and panelists from the media. In one of the many sessions at that conference, the participants in the dialogue presented the concept of the Forum to an audience of about five hundred people. The president of the Palestinian Canadian Students’ Society and the co-founder of Stand with Israel stood together at the microphone to explain how the Forum could work, and how it could be a substantial asset in advancing public understanding of extremely difficult issues of life-and-death importance.

The goal of the dialogue was to work out how to establish the Forum, not to take on the work of doing it. Years later, however, the document generated from the energy of that conflict became the seed for a project to establish a Calgary Centre for Global Community.

Conflicts become destructive and sometimes deadly when communication fails. Walls of silence surround us. Some of them are significant impediments to progress, and some may be remarkably easy to breach. Identifying such high-yield points for establishing communication can be a powerful strategy.

Here are some examples of walls of silence: Social activists may refuse to talk to people who are in the hierarchy of large corporations, or vice versa. Peace activists may find nothing to express except anger at academics in the field of military and strategic studies. Police officers may see no point in having any sort of ongoing communication with people who organize or participate in protests. Homeless people may feel the need for an effective channel of communication to others in the city where they live, yet be unable to find or create such an opening. And people may be so busy that they scarcely know the names or anything else about their next-door neighbours. The walls of silence are endless.

There are countless ways of creating openings in those walls of silence. Recently I learned of the Oasis of Peace Village, established in 1976, where fifty-four Arab and Jewish families in Israel have lived together with the goal of promoting “equality, mutual respect,
and cooperation within the community and beyond.” I learned about it through a member of the Canadian Friends of Oasis of Peace. This was not long before a traveling art exhibit was to arrive in Calgary featuring the works of children from Oasis of Peace and from the Tulkarem Refugee Camp on the West Bank. The exhibit is the outcome of an event in June 2008. Children from the refugee camp had attended an art workshop in the Oasis of Peace Primary School, together with twenty-five Jewish and Arab children from the village itself. About eighty pictures on canvas and paper came out of the event, as well as a day and a half of interactions among the children.

The establishment of the Oasis of Peace Village is epoch-making, an ongoing process of breaching walls of silence in the Middle East. An event such as the art project organized by the village involves cooperation between organizers in the village and in the refugee camp, interactions among the children and art instructors, cooperation and communication between the village and hosts for the countries receiving the artworks as a traveling exhibit, and interactions among visitors to the exhibit in the host country where it travels. This illustrates the number and diversity of ways that such an initiative can breach walls of silence. Notice also how the concepts presented so far in this section can generate synergies. Dissolving the narrow conceptual domains of issue-oriented advocacy, transforming the energy of conflict to enable a fresh initiative of potential interest to all the adversaries, and creating breaches in walls of silence all derive from and lead toward imagining new possibilities and generating new knowledge. Such is the work of civil society and, perhaps, the journey of the Good Life.

I have already mentioned many references in this book that I consider useful as sources for practicing citizenship. Here I will emphasize two short books, available in paperback, that convey this sense of growth, imagination, exploration, and empowerment.

Anthony Weston’s *How to Re-imagine the World: A Pocket Guide*
The *Abcs of Human Survival*

*for Practical Visionaries* (2007) is lively and evocative. In fewer than 150 pages, Weston conveys the optimism, energy, and creative enthusiasm of citizenship. Because of its quick, light style and its emphasis on reimagining, Weston’s book is a particularly effective antidote to the pessimism and impotence that dominate so much of our political culture today.

Equally exhilarating is Frances Moore Lappé’s short book *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in a World Gone Mad* (2007). Based on decades of observation and experience, this book would be a good choice for a book club or discussion group. Among its many contributions, it includes a contrast between a “spiral of empowerment” and a “spiral of powerlessness.” The author evidently prefers the first option. Each of these two books includes a short list of other references. The two books and their references are valuable resources for practicing citizenship.

Practicing responsible global citizenship may not be for everybody. Modern life seems hectic; it’s hard to keep up. Just having a beer and watching the news or sports on television may be just the right thing for some after an exhausting day at work. Each person is the court of last resort on how his or her life will be spent, and each must accept how it has been spent when its end draws near. The extent to which this experience of practicing citizenship can enhance your life in the living of it, or enhance your sense of a life well-lived, is obviously for you to decide. But understanding the option will surely enable a wiser decision.

**A 35 percent solution and the game of global citizenship**

The vast majority of the work essential to a healthy society occurs every single day, everywhere, almost invisibly. We take for granted the work of parenting, teaching, and providing essential goods and services.

But there are significant differences among us in our potential
for self-actualization as global citizens. Sociologists are familiar with a tendency to conformity and deference to authority figures as social characteristics. People differ in their abilities in this realm. Stanley Milgram’s study revealed that 65 percent of his subjects could not stand up to unethical demands from an authority figure. That’s the bad news. The good news is that 35 percent of his subjects could stand up to those same unethical demands, thus following their conscience instead of illegitimate authority.

Milgram was concerned with the perils of unconditional obedience. Society is made up of individuals with extremely diverse sets of strengths and weaknesses. Just as some are gifted athletes and others are not, some have a genius for citizenship in the terms described here. Others are less gifted, and some are probably uneducable. The 35 percent of Milgram’s subjects who could repudiate illegitimate authority could be considered “natural athletes,” if we take athletics as a metaphor for citizenship.

To pursue the metaphor of athletics: A large percentage of the general population, with coaching and the will to succeed, can become fairly accomplished at a game in which they want to excel. But of course they have to understand the game, learn the basics, and above all have some enthusiasm for playing the game well. Not everyone can rival a Michael Jordan on the basketball court, and very few people can match the accomplishments of a Gandhi. Nonetheless, a large part of the population can probably learn to become very competent global citizens if the programs for promoting the basic knowledge and skills are put in place.

So the evidence from Milgram’s study gives reason for optimism. If 35 percent of the general population were able to repudiate unethical demands from an authority figure, even with no prior training in the game of responsible citizenship, there is reason to believe that good training programs could significantly improve the level of skill at responsible global citizenship in the general population — and produce some epoch-making athletes in the process.
In the culture of a militant nationalist state, there will probably be ferocious resistance to initiating programs based on principles such as those presented in this book. That should make the task interesting. Of the countless domains for practicing global citizenship, one is the field of education: the task is to establish the curriculum for learning to live together as human beings, school district by school district.

Certain aspects of this game of global citizenship make it particularly appealing, once it is understood. One is that skill at the game can continue to increase throughout life. A 75-year-old can be more skillful at the game than she was at the age of 25. Another appealing aspect of this game is that it has incomparably greater potential than ordinary sports for outcomes of lasting importance. The many people who contributed to advances in civil rights, for example, achieved something far more useful and of more lasting importance than the person who won this or that athletic trophy fifty or a hundred years ago.

Like athletics, effective citizenship and democracy depend on the support of communities. The next four sections focus on connections as an essential requirement of effective citizenship and democracy.

The basic building block of democracy

You can’t have a democracy if you can’t talk with your neighbors about matters of mutual interest or concern. Thomas Jefferson, who had an abiding interest in democracy, came to a similar conclusion. He was prescient in understanding the dangers of concentrated power, whether in corporations (“holding companies” in his day) or in political leaders or exclusionary political institutions. Direct involvement of citizens was what had made the American Revolution possible and given the new republic vitality and hope for the future. Without that involvement, the republic would die. Eventually, he saw a need for the nation to be subdivided into
“wards” — political units so small that everyone living there could participate directly in the political process. The representatives for each ward in the capital would have to be responsive to citizens organized in this way. A vibrant democracy conducted locally would then provide the active basic unit for the democratic life of the republic. With that kind of involvement, the republic might survive and prosper.

In *On Revolution* (1963b), Hannah Arendt emphasizes this aspect of Jefferson’s later life and thought. As Arendt explains in some detail, revolutions have had to decide between two different outcomes of the revolutionary process, one in which the freedom of individuals included their free and effective participation in governance and in public life, and the other in which their freedom was almost entirely confined to their private lives. The revolutionary spirit necessarily includes citizens’ active engagement in public life — that is, the first option. If freedom applies only to their personal lives, then the people have lost the revolutionary spirit.

The French Revolution went through a phase in which popular societies and the Paris Commune had a voice, but this voice was soon suppressed by the central government. More than a century later, the Russian Revolution went through a similar experience, with the voice of the workers’ soviets (local councils) being marginalized by 1921. The consequences for both those revolutions were catastrophic.

Jefferson was one of the few, even then, who understood the dangers of a lack of participation in public life by citizens. As Hannah Arendt makes clear, the point was also lost on historians. “Democracy” has been reduced to the level of a spectator sport.

Democracy, of course, is supposed to be a form of governance in which power is in the hands of the people. In New England in the eighteenth century, this was often remarkably close to the reality. Democracy was participatory. Townships were politically active, and direct political action was part of the experience of many New Englanders. In the process of forming the Constitution, many had
assumed that this direct public involvement would be formalized in the machinery of the new government, through the process of representation.

In the American Revolution, and in others, political leaders not only lost sight of the necessity for effective, direct involvement of citizens in public life; they actively suppressed that involvement. And thus the people have lost the very essence of what they were supposed to have won in the Revolution. That is why, early on, Jefferson saw recurrent violent revolution as the only way to guarantee the survival of the republic. (It was only much later that he came to see the ward system as a non-violent alternative.) Even very early in the experience of the American republic, elected “representatives” ignored the basic necessity of responsible and responsive engagement with those who had elected them. One such representative, Benjamin Rush, suggested that power belonged to the people only on the day of an election (Arendt 1963b, 236). This was tantamount to abandoning the new republic’s most important asset.

Hannah Arendt saw this failure to formalize the structures for direct citizen involvement in governance as a fateful turning point. While recognizing the important achievements of the Constitution, she also recognized its Achilles heel.

What eventually saved the United States from the dangers which Jefferson feared was the machinery of government; but this machinery could not save the people from lethargy and inattention to public business, since the Constitution itself provided a public space only for the representatives of the people, and not for the people themselves.

... It was precisely because of the enormous weight of the Constitution and of the experiences in founding a new body politic that the failure to incorporate the townships and the town-hall meetings amounted to a death sentence for them. Paradoxical as it may sound, it
was in fact under the impact of the Revolution that the revolutionary spirit in America began to wither away, and it was the Constitution itself, this greatest achievement of the American people, which eventually cheated them of their proudest possession. (1963b, 238–39)

After all his experience, including his observations of the French Revolution and his time in office as president, Jefferson saw the ward system as essential. Arendt was well aware of the importance of this direct citizen participation in public life, based on very small, local units. The exhilaration of successful engagement in the public life, so familiar to Jefferson and many of his contemporaries, has again become *terra incognita*. It waits for rediscovery.

The basic assumption of the ward system, whether Jefferson knew it or not, was that no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power. (Arendt 1963b, 255)

In the late 1990s I no longer lived in the United States, but many of the obstacles to democracy where I lived in Calgary, in western Canada, were related to what Hannah Arendt had described and what Jefferson had recognized. Parkhill was a comfortable neighborhood in Calgary, with houses of modest size and residents from diverse walks of life. One evening in the spring of 1999, a group of us who lived in Parkhill decided to run an experiment.

*The Parkhill Pulse*

There were seven of us at the beginning. Well aware of the atomization of society, we were interested in revitalizing community
in Parkhill. That first evening, we discussed what a neighborhood might be like if we had a real democracy.

Jeremy, the youngest, was in college. Allara and Peter were only a few years older, she a dancer and he a graduate student in mathematics. The others were into their fifties, professionals, including three who were on the faculty at the University of Calgary. Like many of our neighbors, the seven of us had only very infrequent, often accidental interactions with each other and with the other residents of Parkhill. I was in the habit of going to work early, coming home late, and scarcely taking time to say hello to my neighbors.

We certainly couldn’t establish a ward system like the one Jefferson had envisioned. We set ourselves a different and potentially achievable objective. We would find out whether we could create at least some of the basic conditions of a living democracy in Parkhill. Specifically, we decided to create a forum for discussions on topics of interest to our neighbors. The topics would not be confined to political or even “public interest” issues and would be chosen by the participants.

The forum we established became known as the Parkhill Pulse. It was open to all our neighbors (and others). Personally, I thought it might last a year or so. Had it survived for three years I would have considered it a remarkable success and a pleasant surprise. In fact, it flourished for seven years.

Over those years, we held discussions about changes in the health care system, Islam and Western society, political developments nationally and internationally, and protests being planned (and later activated) at a meeting in Calgary of the World Petroleum Congress, among countless other topics.

The World Petroleum Congress protests was a topic chosen by the social justice club at a local high school, students whom we had invited to pick a topic and join us for the related discussions. That topic extended to several sessions, and we invited not only the high school students, but also some of the activists who were preparing the protests, as well as representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted
Practicing Citizenship

Police (RCMP) and the Calgary Police Services. The sessions were held, as always, in one of the homes in the neighborhood. The experience was very informative, not least for the realization that the representatives from the RCMP and Calgary Police Services were less enthusiastic and less comfortable with the invitation and the discussion than the students or the activists who were planning the protests. Had we extended the discussions as a series, I think the RCMP and the Calgary Police would have become more comfortable with the process, and we could then have accomplished much more than we did in that limited series of Parkhill Pulse meetings.

The sessions were often facilitated (but not dominated) by someone with extensive direct experience on the topic. After the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, official pronouncements about violence and threats, and counter-violence and counter-threats became the norm, along with officially promoted fear. The Parkhill Pulse responded to the situation by inviting the imam of a local Muslim community to facilitate the discussion on Islam. In doing this, the Parkhill Pulse opened an urgently needed channel of local communication. The very existence of a neighborhood forum of this kind becomes the key for opening many other lines of communication.

From its inception, the Parkhill Pulse was designed to be versatile, to move in whatever direction its participants chose to take it. The topic or activity for any month was selected in advance, often at the closure of the previous month’s meeting. That in itself was always a pleasure, for it encouraged participatory imagination. On two occasions in the summer, the group decided on an easy hike in the Canadian Rockies. In December each year, we developed a tradition of reading Christmas or winter poetry, or other seasonal literature. Once we did a play reading (Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest); on another occasion we went to a film and then came home to discuss the movie over a glass of wine.

The “political” discussions were only one dimension in the life of the Parkhill Pulse. Topics included the meaning of love in
The *abcs* of Human Survival

...your life, the meaning of art in your life, what dance can do for people of all ages, and the art of cooking. Some remarkable people facilitated these discussions, including, for the art of cooking, a chef who had competed in Japan and France in international cooking competitions, and, for the dance session, a young woman who had her own modern dance company and who happened to be a neighbor, a member of the Parkhill Pulse.

The Parkhill Pulse made some first steps toward connecting with other communities in Calgary by often including individuals from other communities. On one occasion, the Pulse met with Prairie Sky Co-housing, a small community in Calgary in which the residents themselves had been the developers, designing the housing units to promote a small, vibrant community that included a weekly common meal, monthly musical events, and a variety of participatory initiatives.

The Parkhill Pulse achieved a great deal, though it was only a small sample of what such neighborhood initiatives can accomplish. The possibilities — of connecting with other communities, with political leaders, with organizations in civil society; and of exploring the unique memories, experiences, and creative capacities of people in community — are almost limitless. The Parkhill Pulse actualized, in embryonic form, a simple message expressed by Canada25 in their 2007 report *Canadians & the Common Good: Building a Civic Nation through Civic Engagement* (p. 3): “Good things happen when people engage with others.” Of course it is a bit of a stretch from getting neighbors together to promoting a healthier global community. To bridge that distance, one would have to imagine how to connect the local with the global.

*The city as microcosm of the global community*

The challenges and opportunities of a modern city reflect the challenges and opportunities for humanity in the twenty-first century. Ethnic and cultural diversity within a large city originate in rich traditions from various parts of the global community. The
close proximity of those cultures in a city has sometimes produced conflict, but far more often it has produced creative renewal and fresh cultural initiatives.

Nationalism was one of the twentieth-century efforts to realize a healthy global community. Because of nationalism’s tendency to turn malignant, this effort has become a dead end. Yet nationalism reflects a deeply felt human need for stability and reassurance through attachment to familiar cultural and ethnic roots. That kind of security should be accessible, but it should not distract anyone from the need to realize our shared humanity and unity in the global community.

A synthesis of these two visions — a cultural identity and a global human identity — is possible. The boundaries between cultures are not sharp lines but zones of enormous generative potential.

A truly “urban” city is one which is complex enough to offer its inhabitants two fundamental kinds of experience. One is a stable space of continuity, where we can rely on our beliefs and self-identifications. The other is where we put ourselves — our beliefs and worldviews — at risk. Through confrontation with different truths, we question our beliefs, values, and identities and are thus led to expand our moral imaginations of what is possible and important. (Tajbakhsh 2002, 9–10)

The city can become a generator and transformer. It can do this best not by traditional top-down approaches to change but by creating structures and resources to actualize the creative potential inherent in individuals and communities within the city. Neighborhood communities can become a generator and transformer to the city. A city that realizes its potential can become a generator and transformer to the world.

A fundamental threat to human security is the failure of
The ABCs of Human Survival

democracy. This threat can be most dangerous where it is least visible, in powerful states that call themselves democracies. National governments of such states are perennial obstacles to progress. Civil society has become the world leader in Option A initiatives, of course, but cities, including city councils, also have the potential for leadership roles. Cities have historically been one point where citizens have gained leverage to move national governments. Cities and state legislatures in the United States have sometimes been voices of reason in response to regressive national policies.

If residential neighborhoods can become generators and transformers, they can extend that effect through alliances with organizations in civil society and through city-wide alliances that transform the city itself. I see this as an indispensable component of the work for any chance of realizing the vision set forth in the Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century.

The Hague Appeal proposes a citizens’ Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century. This will entail a fundamentally new approach, building on the recent model of New Diplomacy in which citizen advocates, progressive governments and international organizations have worked together for common goals….

… Civil society has flourished since the end of the Cold War and launched campaigns aimed at eradicating landmines, reducing the traffic in small arms, alleviating third world debt, ending violence against women, abolishing nuclear weapons, protecting the rights of children, stopping the use of child soldiers and building an independent International Criminal Court. These grassroots efforts are having a major impact. They are succeeding because they mobilize ordinary people, because they integrate different sectors (human rights, the environment, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, sustainable development, etc.) and because they invite the full participation of women,
Practicing Citizenship

youth, indigenous peoples, minorities, the disabled and other affected groups.

These campaigns have generated unity and cohesion and demonstrate what can be done when people are listened to instead of talked at. (2000, 2)

The Hague Agenda designates specific themes, initiatives, and target areas for transformation to achieve its vision. Available as a United Nations document and online (www.haguepeace.org), it is a kind of strategic roadmap, a very useful outcome of a collaborative process. The project is supported by its offices in The Hague, Geneva, and New York, which facilitate and provide information on absolutely essential work in many parts of the global community.

What percentage of the population in Calgary, Alberta, Canada has ever heard of the Hague Agenda? I would guess that it’s below the level of statistical error. What difference would it make if people in Calgary not only knew about the Hague Agenda but took possession of it the way they took possession of the Winter Olympics in 1988? I don’t know, and neither does anyone else, but I think it’s an interesting question. How difficult would it be for a neighborhood forum such as the Parkhill Pulse to inform their part of Calgary about the Hague Agenda? It would be a piece of cake.

What if the citizens of a modern city were to use the framework of the Hague Agenda as a guide in rejuvenating the “revolutionary spirit” described by Hannah Arendt (1963b)? What if their residential neighborhoods included awareness of the Hague Agenda among the many topics in their own agenda for neighborhood dialogues? What if it were part of an ongoing project to build social capital in their neighborhoods and citywide? And how could that kind of growth and change be translated into an advantage for the global community? What sort of project in a modern city could facilitate a visionary effort of that kind?
The *abcs* of Human Survival

There are probably a lot of different answers to that last question. Here’s one, a project many of us have recently initiated in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

*A Calgary Centre for Global Community*

Civil society has in effect become the health and well-being system for the global community. The very legitimacy of governments can be measured by their responsiveness to global civil society. Yet civil society has never had anything analogous to a medical center for advancing its work. In a modern health care system, the medical center is the place where health care professionals from many specialties interact; where medical research is conducted; where medical students become competent physicians; where patients receive expert care; where conferences and symposia on medical advances are held; and where, at the interface of disciplines, innovative approaches to prevention and therapy of disease are developed.

In Calgary we have proposed to establish the counterpart of a medical centre for civil society. The following paragraphs are taken directly from a working paper on the Calgary Centre for Global Community:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the global community faces growing challenges to human survival and well-being. Old paradigms of nationalism, of profit for profit’s sake, and of environmental irresponsibility, continue to dominate many of our established political, economic, and cultural institutions. These old patterns of thought and behavior tend to make institutional responses slow and maladaptive. They are not adequate for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Civil society has been able to respond to emerging challenges with far greater adaptive intelligence and speed
Practicing Citizenship

than old paradigm institutions. Non-governmental organizations and individual citizens are identifying and activating evidence-based responses to inter-related challenges including environmental degradation, poverty, violent conflicts, inadequate public health infrastructures, and other threats to human survival. A concept of global citizenship is emerging, which connects individual well-being to the health of local communities, the health of the global community and environmental stewardship. This represents a paradigm shift of life and death importance.

But progress has been too slow. A rate-limiting factor in this progress is the level of public awareness, public support, and public engagement in the indispensable work of civil society. Public support and participation will largely determine the conditions of human existence and the chances of human survival in this century. The Calgary Centre for Global Community is designed to be a catalyst to accelerate this process. It is intended as the first of a new kind of forum for living democracy. (www.ucalgary.ca/md/PARHAD/ccgc_background.htm)

If the project is successful, it will benefit countless people in the years ahead: visitors and participants in its events and programs, people of all ages and every walk of life. They would come to the Centre not only for an enjoyable and informative experience but also for a process of self-discovery: finding within themselves, through their experience at the Centre, the potential to bring something to the world of lasting importance. The experience at the Calgary Centre would prompt visitors to explore the connections linking their creative potential, the vitality of local communities, and the health of the global community.

With the goals of the Calgary Centre in mind, we have developed a concept of three centres in one:
The *ABCs* of Human Survival

1. A **visitors centre**, where exhibits, films, live performance, and other features would provide enjoyable and informative experiences for casual visitors and where the program content would be closely related to more participatory activities at the other two “centres.”

2. A **conference centre**, where workshops, courses of instruction, symposia, dialogues, meetings, and conversations would foster the knowledge, ideas, and interactions essential for well-informed, creative, responsible global citizenship.

3. A **connections centre**, where visitors and participants would find the information, connections, and resources for a wide variety of opportunities to engage in the work of civil society, to realize their own humanity, and to advance the health of the global community.

The mission of the Calgary Centre for Global Community is to raise public awareness of the conditions essential to human well-being and the challenges to human survival in this century, and to foster ideas and initiatives — and promote knowledge, skills, and participatory research — toward a healthy global community and responsible, effective local and global citizenship.

The Centre is designed with the following goals in mind:

- to extend the scope, reach, and impact of the work of civil society and its organizations;
- to facilitate interactions among citizens, communities, political leaders, the media, faith-based groups, businesses, and other institutions, and foster research and other initiatives to promote healthy local and global communities;
- to promote respect for the intrinsic worth and creative potential of each person, and the necessity of international law to protect basic human rights;
Practicing Citizenship

• to promote knowledge and competencies essential for responsible global citizenship; and
• to promote ways of transforming and preventing violent conflicts.

The concept for the Calgary Centre has inspired contributions from many talented and accomplished individuals and the civil society organizations with which they are affiliated. The proposals we have received for program content indicate the range and genius of the work of civil society and the evocative power of the idea for the Centre itself. Among the contributions has been an architectural design for the Centre by a group of visionary young architects. Marc Boutin’s design received an international Progressive Architecture Award, one of eight projects from around the world recognized in the 54th annual competition in February 2007. A visionary structure connecting the external environment with its internal spaces, the design is extensively illustrated in the January 2007 issue of the New York magazine Architect.

The Calgary Centre will help connect neighborhoods and communities in Calgary. Building social capital locally is one of its primary goals. The Parkhill Pulse flourished for seven years, then came to an end. Its founders (myself included) had moved away from Parkhill long before the Pulse stopped. When we launched that initiative in 1999, we assumed it would last only for a relatively short time. We also thought that if it were successful, the memory of that success might inspire similar projects elsewhere.

That rebirth is now in progress. A successor to the Parkhill Pulse has been launched in another Calgary neighborhood. In this renaissance of the Pulse, we plan to spark similar initiatives in other neighborhoods, then bring them together for an annual symposium at the Calgary Centre for Global Community, where representatives from those neighborhoods would describe what they have done over the past year and share ideas for extensions of the concept. Those extensions would include connecting not
only with other local communities, but also with communities elsewhere in North America and worldwide.

What discoveries could this project yield? What differences might it make in the lives of individuals and families in the participating communities? What advantages will it bring to the other programs and the visitors at the Calgary Centre for Global Community? How might that forum started in the Parkhill community in 1999 affect the global community years hence? We don’t know the answers to these questions. We will have to run the experiment to find out.

The Calgary Centre is designed to foster community locally and globally, and to promote the connections essential for living democracy. You cannot have a democracy if you cannot talk with your neighbor about matters of mutual interest and concern. The Internet, for all its advantages, is no substitute for direct community connections.

Will the project to establish a Calgary Centre for Global Community be successful? Will we find the resources to accomplish the mission and the goals set out for the Centre? Will it draw visitors and observers from all over the world? Will it become a model for other cities to follow? Will it accelerate the transforming effect of civil society on the century ahead? We don’t know the answers to these questions. We will have to run the experiment to find out.

The genius of citizenship

It is easy to think that we are not responsible for solving problems facing the global community and that such great works are the responsibility of great leaders and the experts they have selected to advise them. What a load of responsibility that takes off our shoulders! How gladly the old-paradigm thinkers take that burden and that treasure away from us! How ignorant and pathetic we are as we follow them in our darkness, down the road to Option B!
Practicing Citizenship

If you are waiting for a charismatic leader or, having found one, expecting him or her to solve the great problems of the ages or of this century, you are looking in the wrong direction. Look around you, not only for the counterpart of Susan B. Anthony and Rosa Parks, but also for the others, nameless but luminous, who have advanced the consciousness of humanity. Then look within yourself and ask whether the sun of that consciousness is also rising within you.

Just as human genius can be expressed in music or literature or mathematics or the natural sciences, it can also be expressed in global citizenship. This is the critical domain for transformative genius in our time. Technical progress without the genius of human value and empathy is a shot into darkness. It may lead to the final Dead End. If I have highly developed intelligence in science and math but have no love for fellow human beings, I can easily become a clanging gong, a robot, shuffling toward some Orwellian future. Personally, I would rather have my life serve Option A, whatever choice others may make.

There are many highly skilled intellectuals who lack the genius of empathy and the awareness referred to in the present context. They could be considered intellectually skillful, but not very bright. Our society seems to place a little too much emphasis on spectacle, on various kinds of physical and intellectual achievement, and on something referred to as “charisma.” One sad residue of the heyday of monarchies is our contemporary enthusiasm for charismatic political leaders. That enthusiasm, particularly when it refers to a remote and exalted heroic figure, is misguided and dangerous. One need only consider charismatic leaders like Adolf Hitler to get the point. Any hope of a brighter future rests with individuals discovering their own creative potential and taking responsibility for developing it, guided by new-paradigm thinking. Charismatic leadership, as it is often understood, is a snare and a delusion.

Without doubt there are highly effective leaders whom we can use as good role models. Gandhi is one example. We are told that
The ABCs of Human Survival

he was initially unpromising in his chosen profession of law, and physically unprepossessing. His effectiveness as a leader was not due to outward appearance or his success at various forms of competition. He was effective because of his heightened awareness of the worth of human beings, combined with spiritual creativity and tremendous self-discipline. From such examples we can conclude that effectiveness in a leader comes from a transforming vision, rooted in self-transformation, and the discipline and experience necessary to implement that vision, very much along the lines of what Joseph Campbell described for “the hero today.” Imagination, wisdom, perseverance, self-reliance, responsible self-esteem, respect for other human beings, and enthusiasm for the possibilities of the human spirit — these are elements of effectiveness in a leader.

Presidents and prime ministers become more effective in leadership toward Option A when they recognize their own limitations and responsibility, as well as the necessity of law and the promise of democracy. It comes when they bring our attention to our own freedom and responsibility, and work with communities in actualizing human potential. Governments can be judged not only by their compliance with and promotion of international law, but also by their responsiveness to civil society and the extent to which they redirect public resources toward public interest (not the national interest) and foster the genius of responsible global citizenship.