

Then Erik, if you're ready, could you give us a bit of your background and how you came to permaculture and the work you're doing now?

Erik Ohlsen: Yes. So, I came to permaculture when I was nineteen years old. A group of friends and I got together in response to what we started to learn about genetically engineered seeds and some of the things going on with Monsanto and the terminator seed technology. Actually really turned on this group of young folks and we started a non-profit to give gardens away and save heirloom, open-pollinated seeds. So, that was the beginning for me at the age of nineteen and in that process, I found permaculture and some of our local mentors here in northern California sort of took us under their wing. And that began my journey of learning permaculture design, becoming a permaculture teacher, and a permaculture activist.

So, I'm thirty-four now, so I'm closing in on nearly half my life and my entire adult life in the practice and application of permaculture. And in that process, in the last fourteen years or so, I have applied the concepts of permaculture in a lot of different kinds of settings and different types of organizations. I've founded and worked through various non-profit organizations, mostly local to northern California, so had some experience in that realm. Also, worked on more of an international stage, bringing the solutions that permaculture and ecological design offer to the global justice movement in the early 2000s. So I did a bunch of traveling around the country and the world where the WTO would meet or the G8 or some of these larger meta-institutions that create policy for global agriculture and water. And we would come to these sites, these places, these mobilizations, and offer alternatives to privatization of our basic resources like water and seed. So that was quite a wonderful and interesting experience, and from there I moved into starting a family and have localized my effort, and have started my own design contracting company called Permaculture Artisans. We're in our eighth year now, and we've done dozens and dozens and dozens **(5:00)** of designs and installations over the years. And our range is from small, suburban scale homesteads all the way to multi-acre broad scale land management. So, my experience has really come from experience, I never ended up going to college or any kind of academia-type schooling, just working with mentors, producing my own projects, and just gaining experience on the ground.

Who have been some of your mentors and the people you've studied with over the years?

EO: The two mentors that really got me going in this were Penny Livingston Stark and Brock Bollman. Took my first PDC from them in 1998. Penny really brought me under her wing and brought me up as a teacher. Also, Starhawk became one of my main supporters and mentors in the early 2000s, and we did a lot of the international, global work together. And both Penny and Starhawk have brought me up to teach PDCs, and I taught my first PDC when I was 23. And so in the larger permaculture network, those are some names that people would know. Locally, here in my area, I also had numerous mentors, organic farmers, herbalists, healers, business coaches who have led me on my way.

It sounds like you have a really useful support network where you are in California with the people who you've had the opportunity to study with. I think when it comes to permaculture education how important that is, to be able to stand with others who have been doing this for a long time, and be able to help and support one another as we move forward.

EO: Yes. It's absolutely vital, and I've told my mentors many times over the years just how important their work with me has been. And, coming to a point in my life where I'm ready to offer that kind of support to incoming permaculturists and farmers and designers, and as I start to mentor folks and I get an understanding of just how difficult real enriching mentorship can be. And it has enlightened me to understanding my mentors and their approach with me, and it gives me another sense of gratitude for, you know, being able to give me some critical feedback. That might be hard to hear at times, but I think it's a really important role of a mentor, to be able to offer critical feedback in the right time and to allow us to grow and do this work. And so, at the time, it doesn't always seem valuable, when you get knocked back or whatnot. But, as you take what your mentors offer you and start applying it, you can really see the wisdom and understand the courage it takes to be a really good mentor. And so, I have real gratitude for our support network.

In addition to that, I would say my peers as well, folks who got into permaculture at the same time and folks who I've worked closely with over the years, developing new projects and working on designs and installs, we share so much with each other, and I find right now in the permaculture community and the movement as a whole, there's so much to learn from all of our peers. And, if we're open to sharing with each other, in some ways I've learned more from just the people working next to me, the crew that installs my projects has taught me so much. And I feel that's been a real gift that permaculture has given me, is the ability to really be a learner. The ability to observe not just natural systems and understand, to a certain degree how natural systems operate, but, also technique, installation techniques, communication techniques, project management techniques. My ability to gather information through observation or seeing how other people do it really came from the permaculture lens. And that perspective is something I try to share with my students.

I can really appreciate that. I think it was David Holmgren who said in our interview together that it's the idea that with permaculture, and I'm paraphrasing here, we have to be general in our understanding of permaculture while also specializing in one area because there just is too much available to be perfect in all of it.

EO: Exactly. It's a lifelong learning and, in some ways, I feel like if I considered myself a master at anything, I'd really be cutting off my opportunity to grow and learn. And, it's exciting to feel that there's so much to learn out there, you know, a lifetime's worth of knowledge and information just makes life really exciting,

(10:00) keeps that childlike curiosity alive, which I think is important as a culture for moving forward.

No, we never stop learning so we can always move forward regardless of how young or old we are or what situation we find ourselves in. I want to talk to you more about that idea of education, because of the skill center that you're working on opening, or I should say, the permaculture skill center that you're working on opening. But before we get there, you've been running your business for, you say, eight years now, and I'm wondering if you could share with us what it's like to get a functional, profitable permaculture design company off the ground and make a living doing this work.

EO: That's a great question, and this is a conversation I really love to have, especially through observing the somewhat scarcity model that generally comes out of the permaculture community, just the challenge of making money doing this work, the emotional and cultural side of it as well as the logistical side. And, as an activist for many years, I really almost hated money as I was a self-proclaimed anti-capitalist and working hard to put a spotlight on corporate privatization issues and such. And there was a turning point for me in my mid-twenties when I realized that in order for us to take permaculture to a large scale and in order for many, many more people to see it as something that's a career path, something that we can professionalize. And we needed to come to terms with our relationship around money.

When I started my business, it started with one project that I was able to sell to my client. And I got one project that was able to hire my friends, and it just kind of started that way. And that one project taught me so much. I made quite a few mistakes, which are always good learning opportunities, so one of the things I learned is that, because there is an exchange, you need my time and my friends' time for money to produce this project, we actually planted more fruit trees, developed more water harvesting systems in that one project than in a whole entire six months of one of my previous non-profit organizations where we were trying to fundraise and kind of working off of a scarcity model. And what I started to realize is that money is really a representation of value, and it could represent very destructive things, but it could also represent very positive things. And now what I like to tell people is that one of my jobs is to plant money--is essentially to offer services that have a financial exchange, a monetary exchange, and that money goes directly into planting trees, building topsoil, enhancing habitat, creating right livelihoods for my crew, my staff, and everybody involved in the project.

And in the first couple years of my business as this realization hit home, it occurred to me that permaculture as a movement would benefit from a more professional representation in the business community. And to use some of these business structures to our advantage, to move the process of healing planet earth and caring for humanity along much faster, at the rate that is necessary for survival.

So, I worked through my issues around money and business, and we started to

grow, and what became very apparent was that in order to professionalize, we really had to play the game right. So, as I got a second project and was able to grow the business, we became licensed contractors, we started renting office space and buying equipment and getting insurance and taxes and all those things in place, and now, eight years later, we have fourteen staff and a growing and budding business, and we have navigated all those sorts of legal issues. And it feels really good to have found a way to professionalize this kind of work and now provide for a fair amount of people doing it.

I think something I'd like to share that I share with all my students, and this is getting very candid about some of the patterns that I see in the permaculture community especially, is that some folks might take a PDC, a permaculture design course, and come out of it with a lot of passion and a lot of excitement, and with a true yearning to create a life path, a career path, **(15:00)** doing this kind of work. And there's not a lot of opportunities for that out there and when we talk about the permaculture skills we can talk more about that, but something that I like to share with folks, it's not always easy to hear, is how important it is for us to really up our game when it comes to work ethic. I feel like it may just be a California community, but it may be larger than that, that, although we may come with a lot of passion and knowledge, a lot of the folks coming through the permaculture community may not have the greatest work ethic. And I feel it's really quite important when we're looking at professionalizing this kind of work to really do it professionally. So, I think that's something that as permaculture teachers we can really support our students in learning how to be punctual, call people back, do what we say we're gonna do, and these sorts of things will really put a new face to permaculture as a new force for change.

Being able to put the suit on and go into the office and sit down and have a meeting with people on their terms rather than asking them to meet us on ours.

EO: Exactly. And the comfort level of that comes with that and for people who...Let me put it another way. I hear often this conversation about how 'alternative' permaculture is, or that people in the permaculture community have created some kind of exclusive group that's very hard to access. And every time I hear that it just makes me sad that permaculture is being represented in this way, and part of it is, and this is coming from my own experience in the activist world, is that I feel it's very important for us to drop our judgments about the way other people live their lives. And people take a permaculture design course, you experience, it's a paradigm shift, and our understanding of the embodied energy of products, say, the issues around fossil fuel use and climate change, there's a tendency to want to judge other people who aren't playing their part. And I feel we need to replace this concept of judging others with the concept of supporting them to be accountable for their actions. And to transition away. So as I started to drop my judgments about people, all of a sudden I was having conversations with conservative type people, business type people, who saw a professional offering services that could benefit them,

potentially even financially benefit them, would increase the efficiency of their system through permaculture design, and it opened a whole new door for getting people access to these solutions, and as well for supporting people in transitioning away from destructive consumer habits and destructive land-use practices.

So rather than go out and beat someone up about the decisions they're making you lift them up so they can see the impact of their decisions and make a difference.

EO: Exactly.

You're saying so many things that I regularly think about. And it's strange to hear what feels like my own thoughts being repeated back to me from someone else's words.

EO: Well I picked up on that when we first started talking. It was like, wait, I've thought about that same exact thing!

As I've moved down my permaculture path I realize that really what I...where I'm trying to go with sharing this information with the people I'm trying to reach out to are the middle eighty percent. And sometimes I feel like I'm in the middle of a field out by myself by being like this middle road kind of person.

EO: Well, you're not alone. And I think part of seeing this kind of shift that you're representing and what we're trying to do with the Permaculture Skills Center is realizing that there's so many people and so many folks in really important industries like agriculture and landscape people in local government positions that really do think similar to us, it's they're just using a different terminology, and so one thing I've found is when is the appropriate time not to use the word permaculture. To kind of understand who we're speaking to and to use a language that everyone can understand and feel comfortable with.

And when we get right down to the basics of all of this, and you take political party affiliations out of it, and you take subculture issue things out of it, what we're really talking about is benefitting all people, all humanity, with the work that permaculture design and implementation techniques offer. And it's really important to break down these barriers that make these kinds of solutions look different or alternative, **(20:00)** because, in truth, we need to normalize the idea that clean water and healthy food is important for all people to have access to. That just needs to be normalized, it's not alternative, it's not different, when it comes down to it, that's one commonality that really all people could sign on to. So part of my strategy in building the movement in the way I have and communicating with people is really talking about the common ground and not focusing on the differences as much. And I often say to folks that, here at our five acre Permaculture Skills Center ranch, I want the Republican rancher dairy farmer to be able to feel comfortable walking on this site and learn some of our rotational grazing pasture management techniques and find value in it and not be turned off at the beginning by some cultural view.

So even though you may have a particular viewpoint about the farmer's current practices, you're not going to focus on those, you're going to focus on the common ground about if they're doing a pastured, a pasture-based raising, that's the conversation you want to have, not necessarily because they're doing a monocrop or something else that you see as bad.

EO: Exactly. And if you start communicating that in terms of money, you know, and let's talk about pasture management for a second, forage quality and quantity is a very big issue for anyone grazing animals. So if we're offering solutions that will increase forage quality and quantity, right there it's an economic savings and all that other stuff can just get put aside for a sec, all the issues and differences, and let's just talk about the economic savings about implementing a practice that manages pastures in such a way that will reduce a rancher's need to buy feed. That's a really good entrance point to then linking those practices to building soil, to habitat restoration to infiltrating and cleaning water, all those things can really link to this conversation around increasing quality and quantity of forage, and that's sort of the entry point. And that's just one example of strategy that can be used to talk to a diversity of people and excite them about the kinds of solutions that will not only benefit them and their business, but benefit the ecosystem as a whole.

It's interesting that you talk about an entry point because one here that we deal with is total daily load on runoff from farms. I think about how you could use that then as a starting point to have a conversation about functional riparian buffers.

EO: Absolutely.

And again that goes back to one of the ideas that Mollison presents in the Designer's Manual about how this is about collaboration and cooperation, not competition. And then how that touches on our invisible structures and how you're talking about communication, and how if we communicate poorly with someone, it's an easy way to turn them off to the path that we're on.

EO: All it takes is that one turnoff for some people. It just takes that one turnoff, and they'll just write it off from then on. I've had some folks come into some of my permaculture courses, and three-quarters of the way through, we have a conversation, a similar conversation that we're having right now, about how permaculture is represented around the world. And I ask the question, how many people here have been really really turned off to permaculture prior to coming to this course? And often, there's at least one or two people who have a story about someone they met, a permaculturist they met, or a class they took, where there was a really negative experience and it was for a variety of issues. They might be class issues or race issues or some of these socio-cultural things that really have turned people off. And the reason they came to our course was because it's more of a permaculture course and also a social organizing class. So we were able to draw from a different group in the community. But I hear people just share these stories about how turned off they were to permaculture that they didn't even keep an

openness to the potential solution because someone communicated it in such a way that turned them off.

I've been contacted by probably a dozen people with questions about, well, what is permaculture? I found this class here that talks about this and this, but that doesn't jive with what I read somewhere else. I'm coming to you because I've listened to your show and you've had this different range of people on including scientists who know nothing about permaculture because something they have to say is of value to our movement (25:00) so that's why I'm here talking to you now, can you help me clarify what this is or is not? But, there's a fellow I know who gave me an article that I put up on the website, Andy, and it was all, what is it, I believe it was called *All Roads Lead to Permaculture*. And I think about all of the different ways that people find permaculture and get here, but because the path of permaculture leads from some people have a very spiritual resonance with permaculture on one side, and then you have people on the other side of that who see permaculture as a very hard-core design science, and depending on where people fall within that spectrum, well, who they encountered as their first introduction to permaculture could completely turn them on or off to the idea.

EO: Exactly. Exactly. And you know we've all seen those youtube videos about permaculture that may focus more on a spiritual side, and that may shut off, you know, a whole group of people even just seeing a video like that. All of that being said, I attempt to be non-judgmental on all sides of it, and think that if permaculture can thread its way into spiritual communities, I think that's wonderful. But, I feel like it's really, really important that we make some effort to professionalize this work, and something that I've been concerned about for the last few years is that the permaculture model doesn't have any real tangible economic models that people can really take on. Now, there's lots of alternative economy stuff like LET System and alternative currencies and things like that that have taken root in some communities, but it's very difficult for those to find their way into the mass, at this time in our culture at least.

And so, I ask myself, what can we do now to create an economic model for permaculture, because I think when it comes down to it, everybody still needs to pay for their rent or their mortgage, or their car, or their bike, or their student loans; we're all, for the most part, very tied in and wrapped up in the economic system that's dominating the planet right now. And, I feel a good leverage point and entry point to bring permaculture to scale is to look at developing economic models that really show career paths for people. When we talk about that, now all this other stuff can kind of fall away, that alternative culture stuff, whether it's spiritual or not, and let's just focus on career paths. Let's focus on creating right livelihood and get people. There's so many folks who take permaculture courses or people in the community who are interested in it, it's all as a hobby. A hobby I do on the weekends and I'm waiting tables during the week to pay for my rent or whatnot. And we really need to flip that, so that people are spending most of their time doing this work and

if we create an economic model that gets people to work where they spend forty hours a week designing and implementing systems that are healing the planet, or bettering humanity. That kind of change is one that can be rapid, accessible, and really have an impact.

So that's the kind of thing we're focusing on at our new Permaculture Skills Center, in developing a model just like that. It's going to take some time for us to work out all the kinks, but I'm very excited for the potential of the model that we're creating.

What you just said there about how we're tied to the system, it's one of the walls I run up in communicating permaculture because of the idea...permaculture is such an amazing, world-changing design system. It has the possibility to do a lot of good, so to hear that you're developing a career path for people and a model they can use to develop some kind of economic gains that are actually part of their financial capital so if they want to, you know, pay for a private school for their children because that meets their needs that they can make the money to do that, is something that's very powerful to me and empowering and necessary for the next wave of permaculture to really have a mass impact.

EO: It absolutely has to happen. I mean, it just, it's the natural next step and in some ways time is running out with the global issues with climate crisis and water privatization and such that there's a sense of urgency to bring solutions to scale. And, I am so appreciative and I admire people who are able to live off the grid and live in the woods and not be so tied into the economic system. I think that's a valuable model and I admire the courage and the hard work **(30:00)** that people do to create that kind of life for themselves. But, I'm really about being practical and tangible in how I use my energy and I think if we're looking at turning the herd, so to speak, if we're looking at how do we implement mass solutions to potentially save humanity, potentially save planet earth, if we're looking at the scale that is upon us, then the strategy is well what are the tools we have to use *right now* to take permaculture to scale? And one of the tools that we have to use is economics. And it may be one of our more powerful tools in the near term. And I'm all for deconstructing capitalism in the long-term. But for right now, if we want to be successful, if we want to have a massive change, it's important that we put aside our judgment about how a lot of people are leading their lives and get the solutions to them, get the career paths to them, get people spending their time, all of their time, doing this kind of work. And, it's just not going to happen if there's not a financial incentive to do so.

And I'm very critical about the fact that generally, permaculture education is not very affordable to a wide diversity of people. And I think that the reason why that, partially the reason why that's happened, is because we haven't really been applying the principles and design practice of permaculture to developing these economic systems. And if we start thinking of it as a design project, we could find ways to make permaculture education very affordable. If we tie it to micro-enterprise industries that are producing products and services for the community that have an

educational or vocational overlay to them so that you get people a high level of job training and permaculture design and implementation training while at the same time they're working with an industry where they're actually producing some kind of economic return. And, that's the edge that really gets exciting to me, is, I think we can pull it off, we can create career paths in this work, and make the education really affordable to a wide diversity of people.

So, from the sound of that then, you're trying to add additional value to permaculture education beyond just the 72-hour hi, come, here's your certificate, go out into the world and do good?

EO: Yeah. Especially here in northern California we have a lot of organizations that are putting on 'speller' permaculture design courses, and, I teach parts of all those courses and am very networked in with all those organizations, and so I think what we're developing at the Permaculture Skills Center is very intentionally different than what our colleagues are doing, and it's, the intention is to supplement those design courses, those intro courses, and that more concept pathway that people take when they're more into the concepts of permaculture. And, being a landscape contractor for eight years and, prior to that being someone who has a strong work ethic, I'm much more about getting people to work. I would rather spend half the day taking apart a whole irrigation manifold and putting it back together with a class than just sit and talk about how to use a drip irrigation system on your farm or whatnot. So, I'm really excited about the opportunities of giving people real tools which you could, it doesn't have to be called permaculture, it could be called plumbing skills, you know, carpentry skills. There's a lot of skilled people in the community to learn from, so even our mentor set we can bring into our classes and training and they don't have to be permaculturists, they can just be contractors, people in the trade to have a high level of consciousness around the work they perform and the ecological impact it has. And it's really linking up permaculturists with these people, and really great businesspeople, entrepreneurs who also are thinking a lot about ecological regeneration, could be really, really valuable mentors for people who are trying to create a career path in permaculture.

So I'm really into empowering people with tangible tools that make them hireable in their community and or support them with starting their own businesses.

How does that then translate into the work that you want to do with the Permaculture Skills Center?

EO: Great question. So, we are actually developing this program right now here at the Permaculture Skill Center. It's this site, it's here in Sebastopol, California, and it's on a busy highway, so we specifically bought a property that is on a highway **(35:00)** with very easy access to a diversity of people. And we are creating vocational training programs here just like I have been describing to you. And part of the vocational training programs we're creating are tied into the ag-related micro-enterprises that we're developing here on the farm like a CSA and a you-pick

strawberry patch, and we have a fiber program going on with alpacas and sheep. So, we have a variety of micro-enterprises we're developing here and our students will essentially be running these micro-enterprises. And by doing that, it makes the class very much more affordable because there's a product on the back end that generates revenue. So, for a percentage of our students we can offer free or work trade or scholarships, and we'll be really focusing on vocations and hands-on types of work and spending less time in lecture or conceptual format and really focus in on skills.

We're developing this right now, and in two weeks on June 15th we're having our official kick-off. We've owned the property for about a year, and developing this model for the past year and we're just ready to unveil it to the community. And our goal is, in five years, we will have worked out the kinks and put together a model that can be replicated throughout the country as an actual model that can be tied to other kinds of permaculture education like the PDC.

And is that something then that you plan to offer to the community once you have the kinks worked out, that you can give them kind of a roadmap for how they can get things started?

EO: Absolutely. That's, that's really a large goal of ours is to develop this pilot program and to really get it all figured out and then share it en masse and then support others in developing the same kind of model. We have a lot to learn, so what the model will be in the next five years is probably going to be very different than what we're envisioning right now because, as I've learned through experience, once you hit the ground and start getting to work things change. And so I'm inviting and open to how this process is going to teach us what is really needed, you know, what are the skills that people really need to create a career path in this way? What are the kinds of mentors and mentorship program that are going to be really valuable for people to create some kind of job path for themselves? So, that's going to be our learning over the next few years, and we're really excited about it.

Going through this process, it allows you to make the economic gains that are necessary to be sufficient to meet your needs while also in a way subsidizing the education that you're doing and material that you release for free to the public?

EO: Yes. You know, once you start applying permaculture design to these kinds of systems they get really complicated really fast because there's so many functions to stack and so many linking relationships between things. But, so far what we're developing is not only our educational and our vocational programs tied into the onsite ag-related micro-enterprises but also we're finding ways to link to existing businesses out in the community to create internship programs where interns from our programs can work with other businesses and learn the ropes and support other companies in doing, you know, the right thing. In that way the other value people get is they will be networked into the community by the time they complete

one of our programs, they'll already have potential leads for jobs, they'll have networks to rely on and people to go to.

So, what's really important about this, and where I feel a lot of our existing permaculture education models, in some ways, can drop the ball, is, you know, you take a PDC and you go out into the world, and you don't feel held anymore. And, we want to really create a system that, once you're, once you've made it through our program, you're completely tied into the right network that will see you successful. So, that takes a lot of outreach to existing businesses and people in the community and get buy-in from them, and we need to find incentives and ways to encourage other businesses to see the value of being connected into our program. And I think this is the kind of design **(40:00)** plan that can allow it to be replicable, because the community is different, and so what we do here, the exact micro-enterprises that will form here may not be applicable in other regions, but the model of weaving relationships with the things that are applicable in the individuals and the companies and the community that are applicable, that *that* kind of model can be very replicable.

I'm still working out my sound bytes on all of this, because it's a fairly complex model that we're creating and so, it's pretty difficult to put it into, you know, two sentences, but, well, we're getting there.

Quite alright. I come from a very technical background where I'm used to starting at 30,000 feet with a big overview and then breaking things down 'til you get to the bottom. I'm just taking this and I'm taking bits and pieces and re-assembling them in my head to put them together in the way that I think. I'm listening to what you're saying and it makes me think while you're doing something in northern California that I'm trying to accomplish in an online environment because you're using your knowledge and skill set and the network that you're tied into to create this very productive, functional educational path for people, whereas I'm kind of doing the mirror of that by using my own skills and my own specialties to do a very similar thing. It again makes me feel like I'm not alone in what I'm doing.

EO: Yes! And we need to approach this shift in how we bring permaculture to the world from these different angles. I mean, you're reaching thousands and thousands of people with the work that you're doing, and the work that we're doing will hopefully create dozens and hundreds of people who will have real tangible skills they can go out in the community and be of service and be hireable.

And by having this conversation and being candid with one another, at the same time we're also collaborating by getting to know one another in a way that we can network and use the relationship that has just developed in this interview process to aid one another in the future and also our students moving forward.

EO: Let's do it, I'm game!

I think that's one of the really powerful things though about permaculture as you get into the mindset, and you go through those ethics, and I know that the third ethic is one that's very, I don't want to say troubling but I think it's a hot-button issue for some people, what does it mean to share the surplus? Or, you know, the idea of limiting population and consumption, the various ways that that third ethic winds up becoming iterated to people?

EO: Well, I just want to say it's good that it's a hot-button issue I think. I think it's important that that third ethic can bring up a very important conversation. And it's ok that there's these different perspectives about permaculture like, say, the more purist kind of form of just being out of the consumerist, capitalist system completely and such. There's a place for that. And I think that the reason why it's a hot-button issue and the reason why that third ethic comes up so much, is because we really haven't put a lot of time into developing the models that will see that third ethic successful. It's a great area for a lot of folks because we're still stuck in this large consumerist society and we're looking for avenues to pull out or to change and it's a very difficult thing to change. It's steeped into this global community and it's not something that can change overnight.

And so we're all having discussions and debates about how do you share surplus and what is fair share, and fair share for who? And all the issues that come up with that. To me, applying the principle of 'the problem is the solution' in permaculture, and it's like, okay, this issue, this problem that we're having about fair share, that's an indicator that there's something missing in the system, and the system that I'm talking about is the permaculture concepts, the permaculture idea, there's something missing in there. And that is very tangible models related to fair share. And very tangible models that address surplus.

And so, in a way, there's a niche to be filled there for permaculturists who are courageous enough and have the energy to take on these issues and start developing real models that can touch on all the different issues that people have around that. I think class and race and accessibility are issues we need to be talking about and addressing in how we develop a permaculture movement going forward. **(45:00)** And they're very difficult conversations to have, they're very emotional, but we need to have them. And we need to work our way through, find the common ground, and really push forward with solutions. And so, I try to keep in the mindset of solutions and really push forward with solutions and so, I try to keep in the mindset of solutions, let's inform ourselves about the issues, let's be aware, let's practice what we preach in a way. But also let's not get so bogged down, too bogged down in the debate, let's take the important points and let's really look towards designing solutions towards them. And I really invite not only the permaculture community but anyone who's concerned about social justice, equality, environmental destruction, anyone who's concerned about these large-scale issues that plague our society and our earth, to start working on real, tangible solutions that can be implemented today. Because it's one thing to focus all our time on alternatives that might be applicable in twenty, thirty, forty years, but, you know, I have a five-year-

old son and a three-year-old daughter and, for me, I feel very inspired and almost pushed to start creating some real tangible solutions that can be implemented today. In today's climate, in today's culture, in today's economy. Otherwise, it feels like a very bleak future.

I can understand, yeah I can totally understand that. Because I think about choices around food. And how when you do a family budget, look at how much you spend on food. That's an easy place to look at and say, well I can cut some money out of my food budget by making a particular choice. But, if you look at that and you go well, let's look at the decisions you're making and say because we want to support local economies, well maybe that does mean that eighty percent of your food is bought at the big box store because that's what allows you to free up enough money because of the low cost that you're paying there, to then go to your local farmer's market and buy their pasture-raised meat that's more per pound but you're actually putting that money into the local economy and getting to know that farmer, which is a choice that you might not be able to make if you're a family on a particular budget without knowing where you can free up money within the budget you have rather than cutting that budget.

Again, meeting people where they're at and helping them make better decisions that improve their lives rather than asking them to radically change their lives immediately.

EO: Exactly. It's that entry point again, and it's also part of also realizing that are in a transitionary time right now. This reminds me of, I've always been kind of a visionary, I'm always picking up new things and trying to get them off the ground. And for years I would come up with these visions and I would work *so hard* to accomplish them and when the year was done I would feel like a failure, you know, because I didn't accomplish my vision in that year. And, over time, through experience, what I realized is that one thing that we miss a lot in our culture is to be able to look at long-term strategy. We're so much about short-term gain these days, and especially with how ramped up everyone is with the new technology. And what I've learned now is, to really see solutions take root, it's important to see what is the realistic time frame to accomplish a certain vision. And if, let's say, the vision or the goal is a massive divestment from fossil fuels, let's say, or a radical shift in where people buy their food, that, okay, maybe there's a realistic time frame there for, say, a family, that's your example, to move their consumption of food to only local sources. But that might be difficult for them in the first couple years because of financial issues or the lack of access and whatnot.

And so what are those transitions, like the example you brought up, that can help people start moving towards that goal. And as we know from observing natural systems, there's always a succession. And so, we have to ask ourselves, where are we in the succession? And if you try to move an ecosystem too fast in its successional pattern, you're going to end up with failure because you didn't build a

strong enough foundation. So, even in our approach to bringing these solutions to the masses, it's very important to allow people to have that transition time and start to build that foundation of trust and collaboration and not let it get polluted by judgment and fear, and really draw people in to where they can make a change, and where they can make a shift and then that's an entry point to start introducing people to the next thing. **(50:00)** And that lifestyle change can happen over time in a realistic time frame. Otherwise we're going to lose people, if you try and push them too fast.

Now at the same time, there is a real sense of urgency too, because of climate crisis and whatnot. So my perspective is, let's be realistic, we're not going to have, we're not going to change everybody's lifestyle next year. But, let's implement solutions that will draw people in *now*, you know, let's spend time now meeting people where they're at, because if we wait, the shift isn't going to happen fast enough. It's standing on a knife-edge, in a way. Drawing people in quickly and creating solutions that can go to scale fast, while at the same time understanding how culture works and culture change works, and having the appropriate approach to that kind of culture change.

As you say about putting together your permaculture skills center, it's a big, complex system, and we can only put so much of it together at a time and get it to work and make sense.

EO: Exactly. And four years ago, I started brewing up this vision and having many conversations with colleagues and friends and mentors about the kinds of models and solutions that would bring permaculture to scale, that would professionalize these solutions, and that was four years ago that that idea was seeded. And so it took us four years to get to a place in our lives and to make the right connections for the financing and all of that to actually buy the property and now initiate the project. And it's going to take us a few more years to actually get the programs all worked out. And that's okay. It's that kind of long-term planning and thinking that will see these projects be successful. And so I just want to encourage everyone to think about, what's the appropriate time frame for the kinds of wonderful ideas that people might be having. And I always tell everybody that it's not the case that an idea isn't possible. The question is, when is it possible? And if it takes twenty years that's okay. Because if you can see things in a realistic time frame, then you won't get discouraged, because each step you take is a step towards your goal, and you can feel really good about that.

And the nice thing about that is you've put a plan in place. As you move forward, you can look back and see what *did* get done rather than focusing on what didn't get done or what is yet to be done. And then get the confidence of those small successes.

EO: Exactly! It's kind of a psychological trick on yourself, to be able to put that kind of long term planning into place. And so I would ask the community, well where do we want to be in ten years? That's almost more of the question, is where do we want

to be in ten years? And, as we start envisioning that and projecting out, now we can start taking real steps to get there. If we're trying to accomplish a ten-year plan next year, then we're just going to feel failure and then we feel discouraged.

We can't try to push too hard and do everything at once. We have to be realistic about what we can and can't get done.

EO: Burnout is a very real phenomenon. I've experienced it.

Going to say, it's why I left my old career. I completely understand it. But, I've had you here for quite some time now, this is going to edit up into a pretty nice episode; do you have any last thoughts for the listeners before we bring this to a close?

EO: My thoughts would be this: the solutions, although they seem complex, they in many ways are embarrassingly simple. And if we can just get out of our own way, because in many ways we're keeping ourselves back, if we can get out of our own way, and find ways to collaborate with many, many, many different types of people, not just people you share the same values with, not just people in your subculture community, but if we can find those threads of connections to different kinds of people in all sorts of various industries, look for the common ground and offer up solutions where it's appropriate, I feel we'll have great success and start to move some of our solutions to the scale that it really needs to be.

Well thank you for those final thoughts, Mr. Ohlsen. It's been a pleasure having you on the show.

EO: It's been a real pleasure.