Vicki Robin
Hi, I'm Vicki Robin. In partnership with the Post Carbon Institute, I'm hosting short to the point conversations with diverse cultural scouts, asking each one the same question: What could possibly go right? The invitation is to see through these wise eyes What is opening up in the present moment, as normal as up ended and next is not at all clear. These conversations were recorded a few months into the pandemic, and in the weeks following the murder of George Floyd. Let's see what today's guest says.

Vicki Robin
Welcome to our project, "What could possibly go right?" We're asking cultural scouts to actually let us see through their eyes into the confusion and complexity of this moment. So consider that you're in a circle of people who are really interested in taking action, not analyzing what went wrong, or the idealized future, but the hope now. So I just want to say to our assembled people, that I'm with Ocean Robbins, a dear, dear friend for many, many years. And also, he is the Co-Founder and CEO of the 500,000 member, Food Revolution Network and he's the author of the 31 day Food Revolution. So just to settle in, Ocean: Where are you? And how are you?

Ocean Robbins
Hmm. Well, I'm in Santa Cruz, California, at my home. Many of us are at our homes these days, it seems. I am well, although well encompasses everything, you know. I think that what I'm interested in is being a friend to what's so, rather than fighting it, because you can't argue with what's true; with what it is. You either get with the program, or you die trying, or you fight it every step of the way. I believe willpower is best utilized when we align with reality and then recognize that part of what is so, is our own capacity to respond.

Vicki Robin
Wow, well, that could have been enough, but we're going to continue. Yeah, so I'm here on Whidbey Island. Safe and sound; so safe and sound, that it almost feels unnerving; at least safe and sound as the world explodes. But I am proud of my little village of 1000 people, that we stepped up to many different kinds of demonstrations in the last week. So it's heartening. That's heartening. So here we are to peer through Ocean's eyes around this question of "What could possibly go right?" You take it away, Ocean.

Ocean Robbins
Well, it's an exquisite question. In some ways, there are as many answers as there are life forms because for each of us, that answer emerges creatively. But here's the thing that I know. Every cell in our bodies carries within it, life and the DNA of life and the capacity, therefore, not only to learn from our history, from all that our ancestors have undergone, that collective wisdom of how to respond to every crisis, every challenge, every pestilence, every violation and keep going and somehow find a way, is within us. But we also have this phenomenal ability, this phenomenal intelligence to learn and discover anew; to respond creatively and effectively to what happens now. So your body can develop antibodies to a virus that has never even been before, because it will literally invent in real-time. As it learns to understand, it will invent a healthy and creative and effective response. I believe that that same principle is true. Recently, I had a bike accident and I got some cuts on my arm. I looked at my arm and I thought to myself, my body knows how to heal this. It's literally going to know how to make the skin layers and make the scab and I've been watching every day in awe, as my body knows what to do. I'm like, what's gonna happen next, oh my gosh, now it's getting a little moist. Now it's getting dried out. Now, it's like cracky and eventually the scab is going to come off, but not until it's time. It'll come off when there's enough skin layer underneath. I have a little teeny bit of understanding of
medical knowledge of what's going on. But mostly I'm gasping; I'm thinking, Oh my gosh, my body knows how to do this. He knows how to regrow arm cells, rather than head scalp cells, you know, because every part of the body works in synchronicity. If you break a bone, your body knows how to create stem cells to trigger the reconnecive process. This all happens in exquisite harmony. There are in your body at this moment, millions of processes happening right now that you have no knowledge of intellectually, but they're happening all the same. So life is brilliant. It is extraordinarily complex, and magnificent in its ingenuity, and it has the ability to meet the challenges we face in creative ways none of us could have imagined.

Ocean Robbins
So what could possibly go right? Well, here I will say that your mind might be the last to know. But there is within your life form, within all of our life forms, the ability to respond creatively and brilliantly and effectively. I think the right use of our minds is to have a curiosity and a wonder, and our humility to learn and discover from the potency, the vibrancy, the creative ingenuity of life itself. Within that, our minds can gasp in awe. They can learn and then occasionally they can make little tweaks that help us improve; like a surgeon will go in there, if you break a bone and doesn't quite heal right and get it shaped up right, and then your body knows what to do from there. So there is a place for intervention. There is a place for strategy, but it exists from within a profound context of humility. We get to be participants in life. So how does that relate to the numerous crises that we face in the world right now; from economic crises, social crises, racism crises, health crises, ecological crises, all of which are compounding and confronting us. Well, here's the thing. Our minds do not know how to solve this one. I given up a long time ago on thinking I can figure it out. But I believe that life has some answers. I believe that the same life force that brought us into being against all odds... We are the unbroken. We are part of an unbroken chain of ancestors who live long enough to reproduce against all the odds at times when one out of 15 babies survived. We come from the line of the one that made it, right, and here we are. The odds of you being alive right now are infinitesimally small. But here you are, here we are, and here we go. So to me, what could possibly go right is we get to discover how life and its creative, magnificent brilliance works through us to respond to the crises of our times.

I don't think it seems to be the nature of life that it goes off without pain, without suffering or without death. If you look back, we have a pretty good track record of seeing that there's been a lot of death in our history. There's been a lot of pain and suffering. Sometimes we learn stuff, quote, the hard way. But if we're present, if we're willing, then we can learn. And personally, I am interested as a selfish creature with an ego and preferences. I'm interested in having as much joy and love and beauty as possible; and as little pain and suffering as possible. I believe that life will have its way with us. There's the old saying: "She who will, the fates lead; she who won't, they drag." So we're going on a journey. We're here in this form in this life, and if we're willing, perhaps we can be led. We're still going to end up kind of in the same place, and quite frankly, physically, we're all going to die. But along the way, maybe we can bring some beauty. Maybe we can bring some love, maybe we bring some peace, maybe we can bring some justice to this crazy world of ours. That's my intention, with every cell in my body. I want to bring more love, more beauty, more justice, more peace, more alignment, more integrity, between my values and my actions, and it's all within a greater context of awe and respect, reverence and wonder.

Ocean Robbins
So maybe I'm being too meta for you, because you're, "that's so meta", right? A little, like: "Okay, if that's the million-foot level, what's the 30,000 foot level of that?" So, I think that we are seeing... I work in the food movement, you do some too. We're seeing an explosion of interest in organic local natural foods, precisely because so many people are sick. A lot of people are saying, How can we do better? Now there's a growing interest in food justice. They're looking at
the reality that there's this massive gap and statistically, the poorer you are and the darker your skin color, statistically, the more likely you are to depend for most of your calories on toxic unhealthy foods; and the more likely you are to suffer the consequences of lifestyle-induced illness, with epidemic rates of heart disease and cancer and type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's and autoimmune disorders, and all of the other ailments that are caused by lifestyle. So in fact, when we look at the opportunity gap that we face today, one of the big forms it takes is health. What I'm seeing is there is an explosion right now of interest in that too. We're seeing more and more community gardens. We're seeing pilot programs where food stamp dollars are being doubled for fruits and vegetables. We're seeing schools trying to serve healthier meals. We're seeing programs like Feeding America, which is providing food aid for 50 million Americans right now, trying to bring healthier food into their Food Pantry Network. So as this happens, we can start to see how powerful it is. We can slash healthcare costs, we can bring down health insurance costs. We can, by reducing the burden that hospitals have to spend treating people who don't have insurance, who are suffering from lifestyle-induced illness, which impacts all of us. So it's a massive cost savings to provide healthier food to low-income communities. I think there's a growing awareness of this; there's a growing awareness of the ecological impact of our choices. More and more people are choosing to put solar panels on their roofs and more and more people are choosing to get electric cars. More and more people are trying to consume less, fly less, lighten their impact, eat lower on the food chain. In one study, 25% of teenagers are vegan or want to be vegan, for example, in the United States right now. In Germany, 30% of the population is on a low meat or no meat diet. This is largely fueled by ecological concerns, by people's concerned about the human environmental impact of factory farms in particular. To me, this is heartening and to me, this is how life responds, resiliently and creatively through human beings. We need to make sure that we are to the best of our abilities, bringing our lives into alignment with our values. That's a tough thing in a toxic culture. But step by step, I see a lot of people asking, What can I do? And the truth is that you don't just serve the world because the world needs it. You serve the world because it makes you feel good and aligned and integris. Who wants to be contributing to destruction on planet Earth? What does that do to our self-esteem, to our sense of dignity, to our sense of place on the planet? So I believe that for self-interest, we all have a moral obligation to be on the right side of history, wherever we work, wherever we come from, whatever resources we have available to us. What I'm seeing possibly going right is more and more people recognizing our interconnection; recognizing how linked we are. With the whole COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen the largest experiment in mass cooperation in world history unfold. As human beings all over the planet have chosen to stay home, forgone livelihood. In some cases, people have been unable to feed their families or pay rent, because they were staying home to flatten the curve, to slow the spread. For some people, that's been because they don't want to get sick and die, of course, but for a lot of people, that's been because they don't want to spread to other people. To me, this shows that we're in this together. While we can respond to crises and pandemic by isolating and separating, let's not forget that we've also been cooperating in a tremendous way and we've seen that what happens in one part of the world spreads to everywhere on Earth. So I say, so too does love. So too does cooperation. So too does integrity. When humanity recognizes and identifies a common shared problem and realizes the research is clear, we are capable, we have seen, of saying that human life is more important than the economy. Human life is more important than business as usual. If we can do that with COVID, maybe we can do that with climate change too, once we truly face reality of what we're up against and realize how urgent it is. So what could possibly go right? Maybe human beings will find new ways to cooperate. Maybe human beings will find new ways to respond to crisis. The danger with climate change, unfortunately, is that it's such a long game in human terms, because it can take decades for the impact of our present actions to show up. By the time we truly see millions upon millions of people flooded out of their homes, by the time we see our inability to grow food, by the time we see vast areas of
human habitated areas turning to deserts, it may be too late to turn things around. But my hope is that we're learning, that we're growing, that we're evolving; not without pain, obviously, not without suffering, obviously, that maybe we can make something more beautiful out of it all.

*Vicki Robin*

Yeah, wow. Okay, now I'm going to ask you to just go on the rooftop with your binoculars, looking out a little bit more on the mess of the moment. And in that, as you look, and I think you may have said that, but I'm just gonna ask for another dialing up of clarity. Where do you see in the midst of this pandemic, in addition to that we're cooperating around the world... Where do you see that, given your background and food and health, etc. Where do you see the green shoots of things that we could really reinforce now because they're already in motion.

*Ocean Robbins*

People are growing more gardens than ever. Here's the thing a lot of people don't know; about 100 years ago, we had a flu pandemic sweep through the world. 1918, 1919; it came right after World War One and it killed 50 million people worldwide. It killed 650,000 Americans and the world population was a lot smaller then. The sometimes called the Spanish flu pandemic, although it didn't actually start in Spain. It started potentially in Kansas, but regardless, we call it the Spanish flu pandemic because Spain was a country that was willing to report the numbers and everyone else was in denial that it existed. So we thought it originated there, but it didn't. In any case, that's an aside, but it instigated the massive amount of social distancing. In fact, people stayed home to not get sick and that catalyzed... also there was a massive breakdown in food supplies. The food system wasn't nearly as complex as it is today but even then, food moved a lot of miles from person to person and place to place. A lot of that broke down and so what a lot of people started doing was growing backyard gardens, for their own survival, for their own ability to eat. That continued right through the Great Depression, when unemployment was high, and poverty was high, and people again grew a lot of backyard gardens. Then that continued right into World War Two and the concept of Victory Gardens. While soldiers were off fighting, they weren't able to attend to the fields. Also, while Japanese were forced into internment camps, a lot of them had been working in the fields, they no longer could do so. So there's a kind of a dark racist side to this too. But the bottom line is the Victory Gardens were forms as a way for people to eat and at one point, about 40% of the fruits and vegetables in America were growing in backyard gardens. So interestingly, in the last number of months since COVID-19 hit the United States, we're seeing a surge in backyard gardening. People are planting seeds. People are buying seeds. Online seed suppliers are running out of supply. A lot of people are growing food right now. They're growing it because it's the safest food available because they know it won't be contaminated with viruses. They're growing it because it keeps them from having to go to the store and we've seen that supply chains can be disrupted. They're growing it because they may not have a lot of money. And maybe some of them have more time because they're home more or they're unemployed. So there are all these factors that converge, that inspire people. Then some people are growing it because it's healthier. And here's the thing: there's all kinds of side benefits to growing more food. Not only does it give you food security, but also, there are studies showing that people who grow more vegetables, eat more vegetables; and if you eat more vegetables, that's good for your health. That helps bring down your risk of heart disease and cancer and type two diabetes and autoimmune disorders and all sorts of other ailments because you're getting more antioxidants and other phytonutrients; because you're saturating your body with fibre and all sorts of good stuff that helps you thrive. There are tens of thousands of studies published in peer-reviewed medical journals that tell us that eating more vegetables is good for us. So now we're finally doing it and one of the ways that inspires us to do that is by growing those vegetables right in our backyards. I think that's a really beautiful thing and I'm hoping we can grow the backyard gardening movement.
dramatically in the years to come, whatever happens with pandemics. The thing is, that if we took the lawns of America and turn them all into backyard gardens, we'd grow about four times the amount of fruits and vegetables we currently consume. So we could totally transform our food system just by turning lawns into gardens. I find that inspiring and I think that it's one of the things that's emerging right now that gives me a lot of hope. Another thing that's emerging right now is we're discovering that we can do without flying so much. Personally, I was flying a lot, like every week or two, I was going somewhere. Now suddenly, for the last number of months, I've been home. I'm finding that I have a lot more time freed up when I'm not traveling and that my mental space and my emotional space is clear because I'm just here, and I'm having more time with my family. And I'm having more time, honestly, more time to work, which is because I work online, so I'm able to do that and my company is still growing and responding to the times as best we can. I feel so grateful for that learning, that maybe all this buzzing around isn't necessary and maybe we can do very well staying in place more. From a climate perspective, that's a pretty big deal.

_Vicki Robin_

Absolutely. Well, you know I'm 100% on the same page with the not flying. I'm so glad to not be in aeroplanes and also backyard gardening; you don't have to even deal with the farm bill. It's such a great disintermediation. It's such a great way for people to take their power back. It's just so direct. There's so many things that we can support in that. I just want to thank you, Ocean, for this amazingly profound reflection on this simple question of: What could possibly go right? So, blessings, my friend, and thank you.

_Ocean Robbins_

Thank you so much, Vicki. What a beautiful question. What a beautiful being you are, I'm so grateful. We are all so blessed, everyone who's here right now. Thank you for being a part of one of the most important conversations there is right now. How do we bring something beautiful out of the pain and the suffering of our times? How do we make something worthy of it, that the pain not be in vain, that the suffering not be in vain, and nobody who dies, their death needs to be in vain. Let's all learn. Let's all grow. Let's all make something of it. And we are, you know, that's what's happening. So thank you for your part in that, Vicki. Thank you for your brilliant, exquisite, intelligent, creative leadership and helping us all to play our part.

_Vicki Robin_

Thank you