

Vicki Robin

Hey everyone. We're here for another (final) episode of "What could possibly go right?" and a special special special treat. I am here with Amy Buringrud. She's the Communications and Marketing Director at Post Carbon Institute and the behind the scenes architect of the outreach for "What could possibly go right?" Hey, Amy.

Amy Buringrud

Hey Vicki. Thanks so much for doing this. I am so excited to talk to you. But before we jump in, I don't think you've ever been introduced during the series, so I'm gonna take the opportunity. I am talking to Vicki Robin. She is the author of "Your Money or Your Life" and "Blessing the Hand that Feeds Us". She's an incredible community and environmental activist, a prolific speaker and an inspirational social innovator, among many, many other things. And I have one more thing to say before we get started. As you know, you have been an inspiration to me for much longer than we've worked on this project, but just want to share my appreciation for this opportunity to work with you. I have enjoyed every minute of it. I want to say thank you from the Post Carbon Institute; everyone at the Post Carbon Institute. We are so grateful to have your time and your dedication and your creativity in bringing these episodes to life. We are just immensely grateful. Thank you.

Vicki Robin

Wow. Well, it just makes such a big difference to me to work with an enthusiastic team of people and to get together every week and be excited about what we're doing, and dream and scheme. I think a lot of these shows, podcasts - at the end, they say, "And we want to thank..." and they do this list of names, the people behind the scenes. I know from what we've done together how much it really is the relationship of the people co-creating it that is the dynamism behind anything that works. That's why I wanted you to do this with me, because we have so much fun together.

Amy Buringrud

We do. It'd be even more fun if we could be together in the same room.

Vicki Robin

Yeah, right. When the pandemic's over in my next lifetime, and maybe yours. Right. I just wanted to ask you before we go any further, since you've been part of this. What are some of the highlights? We've done all the interviews now. They're all published. What are some of the highlights for you? What stands out for you; whether it's in particular or whether it's in general? What have you heard?

Amy Buringrud

Yeah, well, you know, I really liked this whole idea from the beginning. I was very excited to work on it because everything felt so heavy. I mean, of course, everything that's going on now, that was going on when we dreamed this up was hard; was very hard and heavy. And this opportunity to think about what positive next steps could come from this mess; that's a gift. So I came into it feeling very positive about the project and I feel like it was better than I even had hoped. What I mean by that is I think there's kind of two directions people can go: over the top optimism or they go doomer. This was such a nice balance of realism and... maybe not hope, that might be too strong of a word, but something similar to that. I feel like all your guests had a common theme of offering us a realistic look at where we are, and this sort of encouragement to do the difficult work for what needs to happen next. Maybe in that, there's hope in that. I don't know. I think it's hard to choose specific moments. I feel like there were a bunch of them and

also each guest brought some important elements to the project. But I think one that stands out for me is your conversation with Reverend Yearwood. That was incredible. I feel like he really got to the heart of how important this is right now, this racial justice reckoning that we find ourselves in. And we just can't go back to how we were, you know. I think he called it a heart scare and you called it a health crisis. That really made sense to me. You have a heart attack; you can't go back to how you were before, unless you want to just kick it. I don't know. So, that really spoke to me. And about the conversation with Saru; I had no idea that the restaurant service or the food service industry had that direct connection to slavery. That was completely news to me. So, I had to really rethink my perspective on tipping. I never, never imagined that that was anything beyond a show of gratitude. But what about you, Vicki? What do you think?

Vicki Robin

I love that you brought up Reverend Yearwood because I'd like to jump in with my own "What could possibly go right?"

Amy Buringrud

Yes. Actually, that's the question I want to ask you, that we all want to know. What do you think could possibly go right?

Vicki Robin

I think what could possibly go right is, if we just all wake up in the morning and listen to our better angels. You know, in a way, this whole process of the pandemic and the economic unraveling and the racial justice uprising; it's just pulled the rug out from certainty and, Man, the whole point. One of the whole points of this repetitive narrative that we live inside of, Western capitalist systems, is we're certain and we're going to be more certain and stick with us guys because it's certain. So I think that there's been a humbling that's having this really crucial... Anyway. I got myself off topic right away. Back to Reverend Yearwood and this sense that, what I called it in that was a moral moment. As I look at what's happening, I guess it's someplace between an observation of an emergent property and a prayer, that those of us in the sort of Western colonialists dominator mindset, mostly located in the United States, but not exclusively; that worldview that's spread around the planet... It's given us an opportunity to, as you say, put blinders on to basically the working class; blinders on to the services that are provided by nature and by other human beings that allow this whole Disneyland story to continue. It's almost like we're getting to see all of the footage on the cutting room floor, that we've had this beautiful movie presented to us but, Oh, there were all these scenes in which people suffered. All these scenes in which the fires happen. Oh, but don't worry about the fires because they're not in the next scene. Don't worry about it. It's almost like we've been, the dominant narrative has been, snipping out parts of the story so that we won't look at them. But this period of time has revealed to us the shadow of our bright light, and part of the shadow is the racial injustice. For me, that work has been and I think for many people - I think so many people I know are in the same embarrassed awakening, like: How could I have missed that? How was it that all of these murders happen and I turned the page on them? That I turned the page on them, and I turned the page... This word intersectionality has come to the fore in the last few years. Right now, in this moral moment, we're recognizing that all of these - the women's movement and feminism and environmentalism, climate and racial justice, and the poor people's campaign - it's almost like these streams have been coming down this. Imagine the layout of Washington DC, that we've been marching down all of these avenues and we're finding ourselves finally in this mass movement of awakening, to the wrongness of what's going on, and the lateness of the hour. With the racial justice work, my shock at my own ignorance, my own bubble, my own living in a white world and not even noticing it, has taken blinders off. Now I'm seeing more. It's not just

about my own unconscious racism and white privilege that I've enjoyed, but the blinders are coming off about many other things. It's like I had a narrow channel and now it's widening and I see that happening. So there is a sobriety that's available now. When I'm talking about all these movements coming together, it feels like this is the moment that's available to us. I'm not sure that we're going to collectively actually get there. But it's a moment that's available, of that hitting bottom in an addiction. It's like seeing, finally coming face-to-face with the consequences of your actions. Looking in the eyes of the pain that you've caused, in such a way that it touches not just your mind, not just your, like, Where shall I live? You're doing this, not your strategies. It touches your heart. You realize, I have been out of alignment with the moral truth; the golden rule of no man is an island. I've allowed myself to enter into a story of exceptionalism, an impervious story, an individualistic story that I can separate from this. So these are the things that I think of, when I think of morality. I joke that I'm a morality junkie and that it's not a word these ideas of repentance and reparations and restitution. These moral words are not words that come easily off the lips of most people I know. People like to talk about spirituality or trauma. They talk about the inner many important things but for me... Because morality also comes out of being a congregation. It's like, until we understand that there's some higher value, some higher source or deeper source, whether it's Gaia or whether it's God or whether it's the Universe, there's something that is a harmonious whole, out of which our lives come and that we have a duty towards; if we don't get that, if this is just a technical solution, I'm not sure all the pain has been really worth it. It's like I see in individual lives. You see somebody who's messing up their life and messing up their life, but they're just dodging bullets. Then something happens, like their wife leaves them, and it's that time when everything they've done in life puts them in that moment where they could make a different choice. Then they go, "You know, I didn't love her anyway." On they go into the next. So that's the thing about it. I feel like it's a moral moment. It's a moment of sobriety. It's a moment of humility, of the recognizing that for all our cleverness, our cleverness fits on the head of a pin and our ignorance is vast. I think also the sense of social solidarity. The virus is very just, you know. It's making us realize that we are in something together and it's only if we are addressing it together that we're going to get through it. I think I've lived in an inconsequential... I think the boomers are sort of quintessentially inconsequential generation. It's like we were born into an expanding economy and pretty much we've had a silver spoon in our mouths, and I know that many, many people have not, but just in terms of the peace that we have, by and large, lived in. We didn't live through something where everybody did it together. We didn't live through the Second World War. We didn't live through the Depression. So this is the moment when we're realizing that we're all in this together and if that sense of social solidarity can start to produce policies and candidates... Speaking about policies and candidates, I think this is a time when, I think Heather Cox Richardson said this, that politics is not a spectator sport. I think this is the time when we're realizing that if we're going to pony up energy to make things better, whatever better means; we don't know what better means. But if we're going to pony up the energy, it's going to have to be politics, the space where we come together to make decisions about our collective future. We've sort of gone on automatic with that. So it's time of solidarity. It's a time of realizing that we don't go to the doctor; we get the doctor as part of a health care system. It's like we don't realize that we're living in systems that have been, slowly over time, withered in our complacency over how good we are and "we're the best" etcetera. So the food system is not as secure as we thought. The supply chains are not as secure as we thought. The healthcare system is not, even the postal system is... The systems that we have depended on for our lives and the essential workers who staff those systems; now we see that we're not going to be able to hold it together as a civilization without those. So all of this for me comes together under the sense of an awakening. And I call it a moral awakening because it's an awakening that isn't into bright shiny sparkles and unicorns and rainbows. It's a sober awakening to the consequences of our actions. And whatever position we've had on the game board as these consequences have built; it's ours. This is our crisis. This is our crisis.

We've all done it. We've done it together. And pointing fingers and blaming one another; we can engage in that, but this is a moment of reckoning. I guess that's what makes me excited. That's what could go right, is that we can actually do the reckoning.

Amy Buringrud

Yeah. I love that. As you were explaining, I was thinking about your conversation with Severn. Her reference to the native wisdom that we have sort of abandoned. I think about the way you see the world is similar. I wonder if you - I know we don't like to predict and I know we're not creating a vision, but - with this awakening, do you have a sense of where the change will happen? Is it systems? Is it internal? Is it coming together? Is it all of it? Do you see the next step?

Vicki Robin

I have blinders a mile wide and a mile deep, okay. But one of my reference points, of course, is having worked in the area of money and personal finance for so many years and watching people struggle with investing their lives in work that makes no sense to them for money to be able to meet their needs. The economy is sort of like 1000 brass rings, but you might be on the pony where you can't get them. I feel a bubbling up about a just economy. Because humans have needs. We need food, we need water, we need shelter. When our needs are not met, that's when things - whether it's revolutions or die off - that's when bad stuff happens. It's when people don't get their needs met. We're in a story of insufficiency where - because we're hyper-individualistic, because we don't feel that the systems are on our side and perhaps we've lost faith in the larger system called the Divine and or the Universe or the Earth - where all of us are feeling sort of hung out to dry. So we're living in a sense of not having enough. And even people who have more than enough, and more more more than enough, and more and more and MORE than enough, don't feel like they have enough. Whether you attribute that to trauma or childhood or, whatever you attribute it to. There is this immense sense of insufficiency on a planet where there's enough. So that is a major design flaw. I think there are many people looking at forms of businesses. How do you run a business when profit isn't the only thing. Well, wait a second. Most businesses have been run that way. Historically, it's not about shareholder value. It's about exchange in communities. So there's the idea of re-localization, the idea of universal basic income. From a libertarian point of view, that seems totally unfair. "I work for my money. I get it. You slob, you didn't work. You don't get it." But the fact of the matter is, is that it's a citizen dividend from being part of a productive economic system. So whether it's taxation, whether it's universal basic income, whether it's cooperatives, whether it's different forms of money, whether it's local investing, whether it's tithing... I feel that there is a drive in people now to reconcile their personal finances with the ecological and social conditions in this world. There's a drive to find another way. We're done adapting to, "I guess this is what we got, so we're going to have to just be good little capitalists and make our little paychecks." And it's not like it's going to happen overnight, but I think that I feel a drive to find new systems of defining what we need, how we fulfill our needs, who we are to one another. All of these are in economics. You could put it in over to spirituality, but I think it comes down to how we meet our needs, and that there are other ways to do that than participating in... It's like our value to the community is not the same as the jobs we do. I think that transformation may be more available now and because right now we're looking at turning off the faucet from the government of the extended \$600 a week. We're looking at people not being able to pay their rent, losing their homes. We're looking at an economic devastation that starts to smell like what we have heard of, of the Great Depression. When so many people are being thrown out of a system, it's gonna be like people are going to figure out other ways to meet their needs. So it's not exactly a rosy picture. I came back to something pretty dark. But I think we're going to be seeing innovations there because it's so basic. It's so basic. I think the sense of solidarity is going to be undergirded

by, it's gonna be a crazy time up to the election. It's just like what's happening in Portland right now, and I know this locates it in a particular time; but watching that and thinking, "Man, there's got to be some peacekeepers." And then suddenly the moms show up. It's like the moms show up to protect the people from the Federal Agents. So I think we're going to see a lot more people discovering themselves as participants in history. Every time you participate... I went to Standing Rock when I had an opportunity and participating there changed me. It wasn't that I did much by being there. I was just another body. But by being there, I became part of something. By being part of something, I was a different person and I was a more committed person and I was more intelligent and I could see further and I could see more. So I think participation in this election is going to be really transformative in the United States. I know I've got my US blinkers on. Those are some thoughts.

Amy Buringrud

Yeah. I love that. I love that idea of participating changing you. I agree completely. That's beautiful. Thank you, Vicki. So what is next? What can we expect?

Vicki Robin

I don't know Amy. I love doing this. I don't think I talked about the question per se. You know, the question was just sort of a toss off question. When we started, Asher said (Asher Miller is the head of, the Executive Director of Post Carbon Institute) and he said, "Well, okay, fine. We'll ask everybody the same question." I go, "Yeah, here's a question." But this question is so interesting, because it's an evolutionary question. It asks you to pay attention, not to what you priorly thought or what your predictions are, or your theories are or your team or your tribe. It just asks you to take a look at what's actually emerging and with a sense of expectancy that there could be something about how you participate with what's arising that could yield something beautiful, something interesting, something beneficial to others, beneficial to yourselves, some creative act, some little animal. It's this feeling. It's like a feeling of expectancy. It's like there's a gift. There's a gift in every moment and "what could possibly go right" is sort of like the gift underneath the tree at Christmas. It's like, what can be inside this package? I know it has embedded in it a little bit more optimism than it's easy to feel at this time because so much seems to be going wrong, or going in the wrong direction, or threatening to our way of life and people that we love or our income. There is so much threat to life and limb, income, well-being in this moment, that it almost seems impertinent to ask "What could possibly go right?" It's like, Don't you understand the severity of the situation, Vicki? What do you mean? But I think it actually directs attention to something that is pro evolution, because you keep participating with what is, rather than ceding territory and going like, "Well, I've already figured out what's going on and I figured out what I want and what I don't want, and I've already figured out my strategy, so there you are", which is uncreative. I love the question because it's so creative. I thought, well maybe it was just a question about the pandemic. Then, oh my God. Then we had the racial justice uprising, that surprised us all with the fact that so many white people were showing up for this one, finally. I saw an interview with Van Jones and he cried at the end. He said, "After all this time, a black man was murdered and white people cared." So that happened, and so what could possibly go right from that? We're gonna have, I really think this summer is if there's the relief package. What could go right with the level of polarization in this country? There's so many... We're going to have event after event after event coming at us for which the question "What could possibly go right?" is useful in directing attention. Because even if things go terribly wrong, we're still in an evolutionary process. Something is always coming. I think it reflects my personality too. I have that possibility personality. But I love the question and I would love to keep asking that question of people who you and I, and also people who've enjoyed this series... I'd love to not just interview the people that occurred to me but interview people that occur to other people; like, "We want to hear so and so say something

about that question." Maybe have two or three people host a dialogue. Just let this question support all of us in moving through this time in a loving and creative way, however that manifests. Who knows? That's what I'd love to have happen.

Amy Buringrud

I'm very glad to hear that because I would love to keep hearing what people have to say. I'm so grateful for you, Vicki and for everything that you have given us. I look forward to more questions like this. I thank you so much for everything.

Vicki Robin

Yeah, I couldn't have done it without you, Amy. Absolutely, positively could not, actually literally because when I proposed this to Asher and he brought it to the team like, "Oh, God. Another something." Amy says, "I'm doing it. I'm on it." So, let's do it. Whatever it is. Let's do it. Okay, so thank you. Thank you so much. We did it.

Amy Buringrud

Thank you, Vicki.