

by Shelley Wood

CARBON-CAP CONUNDRUM

CO₂-wrestling in the (dis)comfort of your own home

Much to my husband's chagrin, our shared life is groaning under the weight of a personal cap-and-trade policy that—he grumblingly informs me—is threatening to squeeze every ounce of spontaneity and fun from our day-to-day existence.

Cap-and-trade, if you don't already know, is an emissions-trading plan proposed for industry to help slow global warming. Carbon emissions are capped at a certain amount and if you come in under, you can sell extra credits to folks who are polluting more than you are.

I have a similar self-imposed emissions-trading scheme tying my own brain in knots. Here's an example of the carbon-footprint sumo wrestling that goes on in my pea brain.

It's January and I really, really want to buy a plump mango that's travelled umpteen CO₂-belching miles to get to Kelowna, no doubt plucked in its homeland by some impoverished worker scraping by on 40 pesos a day. My justification: it is really hard to eat the requisite, heart-healthy five to eight servings of fruit and vegetables per day, mid-winter (relying heavily, as one must, on mealy apples and limp, locally grown carrots) without dipping into tropical imports.

So, if I ride my bike to the grocery store, blizzard be damned, (10 credits), then air-out rather than wash my sweaty clothes when I get home (15 credits) and write one letter to my local MP expressing concern for vanishing Canadian farmlands (20 credits? 100?) that might permit me one small mango. Phew.

But I desperately need some new work clothes. If I buy some kind of petroleum-based synthetic, they'll look newer longer. But if I opt for natural fibres, they'll biodegrade when they eventually enter the landfill. Cotton would be best, but it's the most over-sprayed crop since South Vietnam was mistaken for a weed-patch, and is any local company actually making organic cotton business suits?

Some new shoes would be nice: leather is classier and biodegradable—but what about the poor heifer, whose hide ended up in those adorable peep-toe pumps, gobbling up

pastures that could more economically be planted with soybeans?

I feel smug about some of my carbon credits: we own just one reasonably fuel-efficient car and bike-commute when possible. We dry all our clothes on a rack, not the dryer; we landscaped with drought-resistant plants; and we put in a geothermal system to heat and cool our home.

But I travel by plane for work, we own a half-empty deep-chest freezer, our house is bigger than it needs to be and I have a chocolate addiction that no amount of ethical remorse over forced labour in the Ivory Coast can mitigate.

Pity the poor husband: he supports my angst-ridden efforts towards equipoise, but he has his breaking point. And when, inevitably, he suggests a mid-winter escape to an equatorial destination he may as well have suggested we dice-up David Suzuki and add him to our root-vegetable stir-fry. Travel? For no reason? I brood over this for days. I hate winter. I should move somewhere where I can grow my vegetables year-round, walk everywhere I want to go, naked.

But at some point the husband notices that we're eating every meal by candlelight. Raw. The hot-tub is covered in a skiff of ice, all four wheels have been removed from the car, and every thermostat in the house hovers just above freezing. And he knows he's won. **OL**