

introduction
My Friend The Beast
by Stephen Morris, Editor

Dan Chiras lives in Evergreen, Colorado. He doesn't have a Wikipedia page (yet), and Oprah has never featured one of his books, but quietly and methodically over the past 20-odd years he has churned out more than two dozen environmental books, including *The Homeowner's Guide to Renewable Energy*, *The New Ecological Home*, *The Solar House*, *The Natural House*, *Superbia! 31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighborhoods*, and *The Natural Plaster Book*. Within the world of green building he's a superstar.

I first encountered Dan when he submitted a proposal to Chelsea Green, where I was publisher, for a survey book on green building techniques called *The Natural House*. This became a successful book that was named Book of the Year by our state publishing association. Dan's next proposal was quickly accepted and resulted in a second successful project.

Although no one at the company had met Dan in person, he quickly acquired the nickname, The Beast, in recognition of his prolific output. He came East on a family trip, and we finally had a chance to meet The Beast in person. It was clear from the moment he arrived that Dan was a card-holding member of our little clan. In addition to our intertwined business relations, he shared our beliefs, our attitudes and values, even our companywide love of music. It was my personal pleasure to host Dan and his sons at my home overnight.

Not all of Dan's projects were dead center for us, and inevitably he submitted something we had to reject. We suggested a rival publisher, New Society Publishers located on Gabriola Island, British Columbia, and even offered to put in a good word. It wasn't needed, and Dan soon found himself with two publishers.

My relationship with Dan continued on a professional and personal level even as I moved on to new ventures. When I sent him a copy of *Stripah Love*, the inaugural offering from my experimental publishing venture called The Public Press, I was gratified when he responded with genuine enthusiasm and even agreed to write a review on Amazon. I was even happier when, some months later, Dan approached The Public Press about publishing his first venture into fiction, a novel called *Here Stands Marshall*. This book was published in 2005.

By now Dan and I were colleagues, with an established relationship that had roots in producing successful products, exchanging money, and (all too

infrequently) breaking bread. Our personal encounters were few, brief, and warm. We connected briefly at events like SolFest in Hopland, California, and it was always like encountering a long-lost treasured friend.

I am fortunate to have other professional connections where the contact is as much about collegiality as about business. Two people with whom I always enjoy crossing paths are Chris and Judith Plant. When they came to Burlington to attend the BALLE Conference in June 2006, we huddled over lunch to swap industry gossip, exchange notes on common acquaintances (such as Dan Chiras), and exchange publishing war stories. I told them about my recent acquisition of *Green Living Magazine* and my goal to merge it with the interests of The Public Press. They mentioned casually that if I ever wrote a book that explained the ideas and practices of “green living” they’d be interested in seeing a proposal.

“Who’s got time to write a book?” I protested. “I’m already the busiest guy in the world!”

It took several weeks for the extent of the opportunity to become apparent to me. Maybe I could take on the project if I could enlist a little help from my friends. Towards that end I contacted a number of friends and friends of friends, Dan included, and asked them to jumpstart the process by identifying the seminal books, ideas, events, and people that have defined our current world view.

As usual, Dan did not let me down. He wrote back:

I don’t believe that any single book or idea has influenced the human-environment relationship — how we think about our place in the natural world and how we act. Rather, it seems to me that our understanding, and to a lesser extent our way of life, has evolved over time, thanks to several key books and seminal ideas.

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, of course, had a profound influence early on. It helped us understand just how dramatically humans could influence the environment through the application of pesticides. This book was a wake up call that many claim gave birth to the environmental movement.

Then came Paul Ehrlich’s *Population Bomb*. This book broadened our understanding of another key issue, notably overpopulation. I think that it started an important debate and considerable action throughout the world.

Then came Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*. This marvelous book got many of us to begin thinking about technology, notably appropriate technology. This idea helped sow the seeds of sustainability.

Limits to Growth by Dana Meadows, her husband Dennis, and Jorgen Randers, arrived on the scene with much fanfare, and deservedly so. This seminal work showed us that our current way of

thinking and our current patterns of growth and development had no chance of success — that they were fundamentally unsustainable. It showed us that our future was profoundly influenced by pollution, resource demand, and population growth.

Our Common Future by the World Commission on Environment and Development was yet another influential book that raised the level of discussion on the human-environment interaction — specifically outlining a hopeful strategy for sustainable development. It has sparked a considerable amount of thinking and action aimed at creating an enduring human presence.

Thus, an organizing principle was born. Although our book list and sequence differs from Dan's, the principle remains the same. This new Village Green is just like its predecessor, but in a constant state of evolution. It extends from Vermont to Gabriola Island to Evergreen, Colorado to parts beyond. It is joined by electrons and personal connections. It features colorful characters from Chellis Gendinning of New Mexico, who inquired if I had run into her ex-husband in my Vermont travels, to Albert Bates of The Farm in Tennessee, who extended my regards to an old mate who lives there.

The New Village Green proves that the world is a small, but beautiful place. It's a place of colorful characters, interesting ideas, and even delicious food. What has been lost as the human species careens forward has found a new expression. Let's hope the best ideas are likely those still to come.



Gorgon-headed starfish