

Choices Touching our Future

It's the end of a long cold winter in Orange. The crab apples and wisteria have come into fragrant bloom and we stretch our limbs and spirits in the newly returned warmth of the sun. In springtime, we stand on the threshold of possibility: we stand at the crossroads between the choices we have available to us and the impact our decisions will make.

As the spring ripens, I find myself spending time sitting with my Grandmother. She's 100, and she's slipping from us. Some days she's bright, feisty; some days I feel her spirit slipped so far from her body I wonder if she will ever return. In my own body, another child grows and as I feel the ebb and return of my Grandmother's spirit, I sense the profoundness of the cycle of life which connects us all. It touches me deeply, leaves me very quiet.

One of the thresholds of choice which stands before us in Orange this spring is the proposal before our local Council to expand the boundaries of the city into an area of rich farmland between Forbes and Molong Roads. It is the land which has been named "area B".

I'm pondering this as I sit with my Grandmother. I'm pondering it because if the development were to go ahead, it would impact my family, my unborn child directly. The proposal is to build 2000 houses on land which borders our family vineyard, Brangayne. Such a development would make it virtually impossible for us to continue growing our red wines, the Tristan and the pinot. It would have a similar impact on the wines of Bloodwood, and of Ross Hill and Bush Piper.

We have opposed this, and will continue to do so. But as I sit with my Grandmother, amid the tumultuous emotions of pregnancy and farewell, my thoughts on the development slip into another dimension.

At the dawn of the 21st Century, a new paradigm of thought is emerging in our consciousness. This is a stepping-away from the sense that the world is a well of resources to be exploited, to an emerging but also very ancient sense *that we are all part of a delicately connected web which makes up a whole. Each choice we make impacts the whole system, and remains our responsibility.*

Urban and industrial expansion in the last 2 centuries, combined with unsustainable farming practices have caused untold impact on the delicate environment of our planet. Climate change is a reality that farmers now deal with every season. Environmentalists have come to realise that climate change is not something which happens on an easily predictable graph. Instead, the system seems to be able to absorb the impacts over a long period of time, while only small changes appear to result. But then, suddenly, and often without warning, the whole system morphs into something else, with abrupt and massive impact. It is like the straw that breaks the camel's back, and it happens in human systems too.

Orange sits on some of the richest soil in Australia, a country of which only a tiny proportion is arable. The proposed development would potentially sit 2000 houses on some of the best of this land. This land is the gateway to our city, and it *could* be developed into high-value horticulture, producing locally grown fresh produce for the city. I can envisage lavender, truffles, olives, fruits, vegetables. Or it could lie fallow beneath monstrous houses, the rich soil never to feed us again - and ending the production of wines which celebrate Orange.

The decisions we make as a community regarding this development will need to be taken with great care, as they will impact not just a few vigneron, but all of us. Have we considered what we are creating by our continued urban expansion? What will be the straw that breaks the camel's back?

Our current culture celebrates economics above all else, but in our hearts, most of us know that there is much more to the fabric of life than this. We do not need to make the assumption that endless expansion is essential. We do not need to make the assumption that keeping land prices down is more important than anything else. For if we do, we risk missing the heart of things.

As I sit with my Grandmother, I am reminded that in the end things are very simple. We need to eat and drink. We need to breathe clean air. We need to love and to be loved. My three-year-old sits beside me as I hold my Grandmother's hand. "All of us die, don't we?" she says. Yes. But while we live, we can make choices about the world we leave behind us.

- Nicola Hoskins, Brangayne of Orange, October 2003