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Teaching sustainability and learn-by-doing in remote Africa

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Dick DeRyk
The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small mountainous country in Africa, completely surrounded by the nation of South Africa. Spelled L E S O T H O, it is pronounced Le-sue-too and is named for the original and still main ethnic group, the Sotho. Their language is Sesotho and the name Lesotho translates to land of the Sesotho speakers.

It became a crown colony in 1884 and became independent in 1966. The government of South Africa had designs on incorporating Lesotho into their republic but the British government had made a commitment that Lesotho would not be handed over to the Apartheid regime that surrounded it. In fact, Lesotho publicly opposed apartheid and granted political asylum to South African refugees during that era from 1948 to the early 1990s.

The Yaholnitsky family farmed south of Mikado, and while Ivan is now in Lesotho -- what he is doing there is the topic of this podcast -- his brother Michael and sister-in-law Carol Yaholnitsky are the owners of Miccar Aerial and Good Spirit Air, based at the Yorkton Airport.

Lesotho is a poor country. The majority of households subsist on farming. Nearly two-thirds of the country's income comes from farming, and it is common for the men to work in the mines of South Africa for parts of the year. A quarter of the population is unemployed, according to the government of Lesotho website. The eastern side of the country is mountainous, having the highest peak in southern Africa. Lesotho officially proclaims itself as the Mountain Kingdom.

That's where Ivan arrived in 1987 to teach at the high school in the village of Bethel in the eastern part of the country. And that is where he still is today. He and Antonia Nthabiseng from the village were married there in 1993. They raised a son and daughter. And that same year, Ivan established the Bethel Business and Community Development Center, or BBCDC. On our website, YorktonStories.ca, you can view a half-hour video produced by his daughter, Audryana, in which Ivan talks about many of the projects BBCDC has undertaken.

To set the stage for that video and our podcast, some basic information about BBCDC. It is a commercial and technical school located in a remote rural district, although not quite as remote as when Ivan arrived there. Thanks to the work of the organization, as we will talk about, road building was one of the things it undertook. It began operations in 1993 on barren land with support from UNICEF and the local Roman Catholic Mission Church.

It sees as its objective providing skills and knowledge to young men and women for well-being and self-reliance through learning by doing. In August of 2012, ground was broken for construction of a 2,600 square foot learning center, which includes workshops in a central area, which is a social space for students. It was built entirely by students and staff and opened two years later.

BBCDC started with 10 students and four staff. It now has 300 students and close to 40 staff and graduates between 100 and 150 students every year. Students pick four of the eight courses offered. Instructions are project driven with heavy emphasis on sustainability. The course options are construction, woodworking, metalwork, solar technology, food science and culinary arts, environmental science, business and IT, and tourism.

As for Ivan, after finishing high school in Canora, he attended the University of Saskatchewan, where he majored in economics and political science, graduating with a master's degree in political science in 1986. He had worked on the family farm and spent a few winters on the drilling rigs in Alberta before he made his way to Lesotho.

You went to Lesotho in 1987 with the World University Service of Canada. Why Lesotho? Did you have a choice or was that what they were looking for at the time?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
You know, when we apply, World University Services has client relationships and they have a database. So when they have applications from people like me, they simply match the field requirements to the qualifications of their volunteers. So I ended up going to Lesotho purely by chance, actually. It wasn't something that I chose to do.

Dick DeRyk
How did you view that? What was your motivation?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
I felt personally the need to make some sort of a break from the community where I grew up. And I just remember we were in Saskatoon once, and we were in a bar, and there was a guy who just came back from travels and he was talking about traveling, moving around the world, and I was really sort of taken with his tales of adventure. And I thought to myself, boy, you know, here we are, we're just a bit spinning around in our own circles. I remember that made a big impression upon me. And it was really quite by chance I saw this full-page ad at the back of the Toronto Globe and Mail for World University of Canada. I mean, you know, you're an old newspaper guy, and I used to drive to Yorkton to buy the Toronto Globe and Mail. You know, in the days before good media, internet, I was sort of a voracious reader, so having that Saturday newspaper was really something. And even when I was in university, I mean it was the main information, good daily print media.

Dick DeRyk
So you go to Lesotho, you were going to teach at a high school. Did you know much about the country in that particular area? Was it a surprise to you when you got there? Like what did you find when you get there?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
It was a shock. I knew absolutely nothing about Lesotho or South Africa or the conditions here. Really, we didn't have very much information, although we did have a good induction and some training in Ottawa for a couple of weeks, but really it was a complete surprise. And I must say the first couple of weeks were really quite traumatic. You know, I mean, you're put into a position that's so completely different from the one you came from. I always say that we grew up Canadians, we're spoiled. We have lots of cars, refrigerators always full. There's a ham and cheese sandwich, there's always a few bottles of beer, even in the worst of times, there's a few bottles of cold beer at the bottom of the fridge. So coming here was not like that. But anyway, you know, I started working. There was a beautiful workshop that had been left and for some reason abandoned, like with good power tools and equipment and a welder, because the school did have a big diesel generator. And just after that first week or two of real anxiety, I just started doing things. That was a discovery getting going, making things. I made a wardrobe for myself, I made a bed for myself. I had the privilege of moving into a fairly new house. So I landscaped the garden and just got myself going. And then I enjoyed teaching. It was interesting to teach. You know, children were interested in us because we were a bit probably more motivated than the other teachers. Our English was good, so the students were interested in somebody like me and very active and eager in the classroom. So that also was an interesting experience.

Dick DeRyk
English is spoken there, right? Was it spoken fluently by the students?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Not at all, and especially at that time. I mean, it has changed since then, but that was one of the reasons for bringing in foreign teachers like us because our English was good, and the English of other teachers was not good. So English was seen as sort of the pipeline to being able to access globalization, higher education. So there was a strong push for a good English language teaching.

Dick DeRyk
What did they make of the name Yaholnitsky?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Yeah, well, that's still a tough one. I get that question even now, every day. That hasn't changed much.

Dick DeRyk
So you taught at the high school for five or six years, and during that time, you developed an idea that something more was needed for the local population as far as training. What led you to that decision to start thinking about what ended up being the business and community development center?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
The one thing that I maintained all those years there, airmail subscription to The Economist. So probably for, I don't know, 20, 25 years of my life in Lesotho, I received by airmail a couple of weeks late, a full print edition of The Economist newspaper, which, you know, in its peak was a very thorough, well-written, excellent piece of journalism. And, you know, some of the best thinkers in the world were writing for The Economist.

And I remember starting to see this trend, more and more talk about sustainable development, World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Brundtland Report, 1987. And this was always sort of bubbling away with some you know, some reference. And, you know, again, having a good education myself and a good start in life, you know, you're looking at the world and you're trying to make sense of it. You're trying to see, well, where is the future? What are the drivers? You know, how is this bus of civilization supposed to stay on the road? What are the forces moving us? And I guess at the same time, about one or two years after getting to Lesotho, I discovered permaculture, which is a design science about sustainable development, you know, obtaining food, energy, water on a very compact area and being much more self-reliant. And it's a response to this, I say, global problem of overconsumption and of unsustainable development.

Dick DeRyk
So you had high school students. Were they left after they finished high school or whatever level of education with no place to go, nothing to do locally? What was there for them locally before the the Bethel, the BDCDC got set up? Did they have opportunities?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, not really. That's a great question, because what I discovered soon after getting there is that only a handful of my students were geared up for higher education or post-secondary education. They weren't suited to it and they weren't even interested in it. On the other hand, when we used to go out and do practical projects in development studies and agriculture, and you know, just working on weekends, I found people who were extremely interested in doing things and diversifying their skill set. And they were passionate and eager about this.

I always talk about experiential education, how there's literally a stampede for the door rather than kids listening to a teacher drone on about some sort of symbolic theoretical analysis with a lot of equations and abstract talk, you know. But when we would go and do something, again, very practical things, building water supply, shop work, building furniture, there was immense enthusiasm. Again, food, cooking, this sort of thing. And I think that's again something which I've discovered even to this day that we've overemphasized purely academic education throughout the world, in all of our institutions, probably globally. There's really not even very much happiness related to us as a species, as a human being, sitting behind the desk working with the pencil all day. I mean, it's part of life, but again, most human beings are the happiest on their feet, moving around. It's how we evolved. Again, this is something which took me many decades to discover.

Dick DeRyk
The concept of a technical school, did the local people support that? Did they look at it as kind of pie in the sky? What was their reaction to that?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
You know, now that you asked that question exactly, I remember the moment. I'm not sure what we were doing, but one of the senior people from the village, he was a person who had, I think he'd worked as a police commissioner, he'd achieved quite a high rank in life, he was retired. He was sort of one of the senior people in the community at that time. And he said to me, this is what education should be. I remember him saying it very, very clearly and specifically. This is what we need. We need practical, hands-on learning-by-doing education.

Dick DeRyk
In 1993, Bethel Business and Community Development Center was formed. What are the first things that you were teaching?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, there were several areas. Again, this may sound corny, but the idea came to me a little bit by accident and also a bit as an epiphany. We were building solar cookers at the school, which by the way worked absolutely fantastically. In fact, today I was doing some solar cooking here where I am.

Dick DeRyk
You were doing that with the high school kids already.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Exactly. We were doing that with the high school kids. So we're making these box cookers that just worked like a bomb. And I didn't know at that time, know the physics myself. I learned it later. I mean, I can now put on paper why a solar cooker works, the radiation, the physics, the amount of energy that goes into cooking a three-pound chicken. I know it now, but I didn't know it then. But we discovered that it worked.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
And there was another WUSC volunteer who was married to a young woman from the Philippines, and they were interested in the solar cookers, and the head of UNICEF at that time was a person by the name of Ralph Diaz with a PhD, and he was from the Philippines, and somehow he got wind of this solar cooker. So out of the blue, I'm just this high school teacher at Bethel, you know, nobody pays much attention to you. And I got this letter from Ralph Diaz, you know, on the UNICEF letter head, asking me to come in and see him because he thought this was great and something worth supporting and whatnot. So that was the kernel of the thing, you know, that got things going. So that put me in contact with UNICEF. And then Ralph said, you know, maybe we should support this. And I remember him also saying to me in the first meeting that kids in Lesotho needed to learn to earn. You needed a business focus, you needed hard-boiled technical skills, and you needed business acumen to get people going.

Then the idea for BBCDC, oddly enough, it just came to me one night in an epiphany. I just sat down, I think I worked on my laptop till 4 or 5 a.m. I just put together this curriculum, very broad-ranging, building construction, metalwork, woodwork, solar technology, of course, a core item there. And then food science and culinary arts and agriculture and permaculture, and you know, again, business and IT, a bit of accounting. So I put together this curriculum. I just sort of hammered out this outline that that was the beginning.

So then with that, I went back to Ralph. He wanted a concept paper. So again, I went back, and you know, after you've been in university, this is what they teach you to do, you know, to put pencil to paper and you know, flesh out an idea. So I had a good background in that. I wrote this 30-page concept paper, submitted that to UNICEF, and he was extremely supportive. And of course, the institutional support for land came from the church. I was close to the people running the church at Bethel Mission all those years. Father Leo Rochelou was the priest in charge of Bethel Mission,

the sisters. You know, I had a great admiration for the work that those people did, which was very basic, you know, running schools, making sure water and power is running, building roads and construction. This is the kind of thing that they were doing. So we had support from the bishop. He also thought it was a good idea. So basically, he just greenlighted it. He gave us four hectares on the east side of Bethel Mission to get the school going. We had the institutional support. I was the middleman, kind of the enabler. UNICEF provided again some financing. We had a grant from the Canada Fund, which was very timely to get the first buildings up, the tools, equipment. And I mean, it was tough. I was a lot younger then, and I don't know if I could do it again, but we gave it the best shot, and it turned out in the long run.

Dick DeRyk
Was it intended for young people or adults as well? Who were you hoping to attract?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, it's still true to this day. At that time, the reason UNICEF was so interested in this is because the school was a funnel. Many entered and few left, basically. So a very small percentage of young people were going through the school system in Lesotho with credentials that which would take them to higher education. Most were dropping out, or they were completing with a poor pass or not passing at all. So there was this huge, huge number, maybe you know, at that time 80, 90 percent, and it's still true even almost to this day, that leaves school with very few skills or survival capacity. So that was the target.

We had 10 students to begin with, and then we stayed at that level for really quite a long time, maybe 10, 15 years, and then I don't know, about 15 years ago, the enrollment really turned around. We have 300 students now. We've worked hard to maintain a gender balance. That was always something we did just from the beginning. And then coming back to the name of the institution, Bethel Business and Community Development Center. I was part of the development community. You're watching what everybody's doing, the World Bank, Ireland AID, USAID. You're kind of in this milieu and you're watching what people are doing or not doing, or maybe failing to do. And it really occurred to me then that you needed business to be involved in sustainable development. You needed entrepreneurship, you needed, you know, a spirit of enterprise, people going out there and making some money, federalism. I like that word now. I use it a lot. Decentralization. You needed capacity at the periphery.

Dick DeRyk
You went beyond just providing training, though. You also, over the course of the years, set up several businesses. Those were to provide practical experience for the students?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Yes, that and also a high degree of financial self-sustainability. We received a huge payment from the World Food Program. Over the last six months, we had a 100,000 US dollar contract basically to do construction of water supply, irrigation, and climate change mitigation strategies in several communities in Lesotho. So we did that. And today they paid us in full for the work that we did. It's a business. I mean, it's pushing wheelbarrows, pouring concrete, getting men and materials, solar pumps, steel. It's really a serious undertaking, but I'm proud of what we accomplished. We have a lodge at the school, full service lodge. We run three restaurants now in Lesotho. We have workshops. We run a full service solar energy company. One of my technicians just walked in here

now. It's the hurly burly of business. Over the last month, we had, I don't know, 50 or 60 employees. So that was really, it's really something. You're making decisions as you go, buying what you need, selling and signing contracts and delivering results, you know, demanding results. I think that is what the world needs more of, and that's the road we took, walking the talk. We used to have this saying that when somebody would be talking too much, we would all just say, do it, do it.

Dick DeRyk
Are you still off the grid? Are you still dependent on diesel generated and solar power?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
We ourselves have no diesel generators. We went completely solar about 10 years ago. Again, the numbers are very simple. Lesotho always had only about 20 to 30 percent electrification. I think it's closing now on maybe 50 percent electrification. And also the numbers. Lesotho has always needed about 150 megawatt of electricity, but they only produce about 75. So they've always had to buy about 75 megawatt. And I recall a workshop several years ago that Lesotho needs 450 megawatt really to develop, to get enough industry and trade and to electrify a higher, much higher percentage of the population. So we fall very short of that yet. We're really we're really lacking in electrical generating capacity.

Dick DeRyk
But your ability to generate solar power, does that give you enough capacity to do everything that needs to be done for both the BBCDC and and for the community surrounding it?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, it's possible. You know, the technology has improved immensely in the especially in the last 10 or 15 years. PV panels are very inexpensive, even here. I'm sitting here in Mohale's Hoek at the SolarSoft office. 550 watt panels we're able to buy them for about $100 each. 550 watt solar panels. Again, the numbers are good, the balance of system is good, the inverters, the batteries, we have some lithium-ion batteries. Prices keep moving down. It's getting simpler, cheaper, and better as we speak, especially in the last 10 or 15 years. All energy ultimately comes from the sun. The fantastic thing about solar energy is that there's almost no disintermediation of energy. Because if you have solar panels on your roof, the distance from the roof to the source sink of where the power is needed is a couple of metres, literally, like above your head right now. If you're powering your house with solar energy, the cable runs are two or three meters. You know, what we've done over the last hundred years is we've covered the planet with this extraordinarily expensive and wasteful network of wires and cabling, which again, in some cases, large industry, automobile plants is justified. But at today's state of technological development, it's not necessary.

Dick DeRyk
You have solar baking, solar cooking. You've also done things like rotating solar roofs, solar evaporation systems.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Yes, and greenhouses as well, energy efficient greenhouses in a cold climate, because they allow you to produce seedlings, they allow you to extend the season, and then also drying. Drying is a

good technology, you know, taking the water out of tomatoes, for example, you still are left with a very high quality product, and you don't have the transportation costs, and you have good shelf life with dried food.

Dick DeRyk
You did some road building.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, what happened in 1994-95, is we had an extremely terrible drought. It was just, you know, one of these 200-day events where there was no rain and no cloud. So it was a crisis. I was walking across the football field from where we were, Bethel, BBCDC, to the high school, and I met the chief, the area chief, and he just mentioned to me that we needed drought relief projects because the World Food Program was willing to provide food for work projects. I just said to him, we need to build a road from Bethel to Mount Moorosi because we were cut off from the main tarmac highway. There was no road, and a river was in between us, a fairly large, you know, the Orange River, the Sanctuary River, is a big South African river system. And I mentioned to him, how about building a road? He thought it was a great idea.

So at that time I used whatever connections we had and explored the idea, and somehow we managed to secure food for work for a hundred people for four or five years. So we built 11 or 12 kilometers of road, basically with pick and shovels and wheelbarrows. There was some small capital support from the European Union, and we just kept going. We got to the Orange River, and we built a stone causeway across the Orange River that we were able to use seasonally from 1999 up to 2017 when a proper bridge was built. We just hauled in boulders with a 40 horsepower tractor with a front end loader and just kept slowly hauling the rock in.

Dick DeRyk
The other thing that intrigued me about the work you're doing, sand dams. And that's a major piece of work.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, exactly. We've built something like 11 or 12 sand dams. We just finished up a project two weeks ago, actually, for the King of Lesotho to improve the hydraulic situation of his rangelands, where he has a fairly substantial herd of sheep and cattle. So we did that, and the work that we did for the World Food Program most recently is on sand dams. Sands contain much of the potable water that we drink.

We have it in Saskatchewan. You know, when the glaciers receded 15, 20,000 years ago and all that ice melted, it laid down these massive beds of gravel all over Saskatchewan. We have them near our farm in Mikado. And you know, we have clean water in that sand. So what sand dams are is just an intervention into a seasonal stream bed where you build a low stonemasonry wall across the stream, and then floods, which you get episodic floods, which are carrying a lot of coarse sediment. They fill up the reservoir with sand. And then the sand is 30% water. You're achieving a couple of things. You're reducing evaporation because you don't have open water standing, and then the sand gives you a modus for abstracting clean water because as the water moves through the sand, it gets filtered. That is the idea of the sand dam.

Dick DeRyk
Before sand dams, what did people do for water? Nobody can live without water, right?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
In Lesotho, typically it's a mountainous country. So a lot of the rural water supply, it's either boreholes, you know, which are drilled wells, or they're springs. So you have in the sign of a hillside or a mountain someplace coming out of the rock, for one reason or another, you have a you have a stream of clean water coming. That's declined because of land degradation. So right now, Lesotho is fighting a situation where the hydraulic conditions are deteriorating. There's more runoff, there's more evaporation, there's just not enough infiltration of water. So a lot of the water supply that was traditionally dependent on is becoming more and more unreliable.

Dick DeRyk
So if you have a sand dam and behind the dam is sand, and the sand is holding water, and you end up with a couple hundred days of drought, does that hold enough water to supply a small community?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, of course, and it also recharges your aquifer. Like at Bethel right now, we're flanked by a small stream, and we have three sand dams on it, you know, kind of over a course of about maybe half a kilometer. There's three sand dams there. So I've lived there now since 1993, and we have dramatically more water than we ever had under similar conditions. Again, you know, science is always based on a counterfactual. It's hard to know what it would be like without that, but I have personally witnessed that we have more water. We're able to weather more severe drought conditions. The amount of perennial water supply we have has increased substantially, all things being equal.

Dick DeRyk
All of this takes money.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
A little bit, but again, you know, we were going through this re-verification a couple of weeks ago. The banks here always do this client re-verification. So you have to go in and prove who you are and what you're doing. And one of the questions they asked was, what is the source of funds? And a little bit tongue-in-cheek, I said it's the providence of God, you know. The rain rains, the sun shines, you know, a really tremendous amount of wealth is based on biodiversity and the natural vitality of ecosystems. It's not trading that we're bringing something in. So you can grow wealth ultimately. Water use efficiency, water.

We had about 80 millimeters of rain in in the last two weeks, which is again an enormous amount of water. 80 millimeters of rain is 80 liters of water per square meter. So if that water can stay where it fell, a professor of agrometeorology from South Africa told me that drop of rainfall needs to stop and stay where it is, go through a plant. He said it very, very forcefully. He was waving his arms. So what you get in a degraded environment, and the vast swathes of the planet are degraded. Rain falls, it comes in and it flashes off. It doesn't stay in place. This is why you get this kind of crazy flooding in places like Australia, in Africa. Surface conditions are not conducive to holding rain. You have this lopsided cycle of flash flooding followed by drought.

Dick DeRyk
Some of the sources of financing, you mentioned a couple of them, Canada Fund, UNICEF. Do you also have individuals or corporate interests?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Yes, absolutely. Over the years, my goodness, I can't even name all the people who have helped me personally and helped the institution. Because of solar cooking, 20, 25 years ago, we began a very good cooperation with the Brace Research Institute at McGill University in Montreal, which was headed by Dr. Thomas A. Lewand. And Brace Research was set up by Colonel Brace. He set it up to assist with the revitalization of arid and saline lands around the world. So Brace Research was working on a global level to assist with revitalization of arid lands. And they had good technology for solar energy. Dr. Lawand sent us several interns. And then later, when he retired, he was very generous. He used to send some funds to me personally because he loved what we were doing with solar cooking. And there were very many numerous individuals like this that that helped us over the years.

Dick DeRyk
The whole idea, you mentioned it earlier, is that you need to be or want to be self-reliant, sustainable. Are you there?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
I think so. I think so, especially most recently. We've passed a kind of an inflection point where our business units are powerful enough. And again, you need to grow. We've always had an institutional goal of growing at 10%. If you grow at 10%, that doubles your income in seven years. In my career, I saw other NGOs, other institutions, and they tended to go to a bit of a boom and bust cycle because they're so dependent on grant funding and subventions. Whereas we really did our very utmost to diversify our income stream. And also, again, to focus on local resources, things like the ability to produce food, to have good soil under your feet, to have a lot of biodiversity, agroforestry, for example, food forests. We have a beautiful set of pecan nut trees on the campus. It's a beautiful tree here. It grows so well. Once a year, that's one of the most pleasurable things that we do is harvest those pecan nuts.

Dick DeRyk
In the past, Lesotho has had some political instability. Has that impacted you? Is that something that you can kind of stay away or stay above?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
I guess the advantage we had is that we're 250 kilometers away from the capital. So during all of that instability, we probably did better because we didn't have to go to so many meetings and travel so much. So it's a four or five hour drive because you're going through a lot of villages and difficult terrain. In fact, when I look back about COVID, it was extremely productive for us because so many things got canceled. We weren't traveling, we were just able to stay at home, mind our own business. We were doing landscaping, we were doing all sorts of renovation and refurbishment that we never had time for. So COVID really didn't affect us at all. Other institutions actually closed down, they weren't able to pay salaries. We just breezed through it. We didn't have to restructure or scale back anything. So again, that underlined a little bit of the bench strength of the institution that we had by then.

Dick DeRyk
You're not getting any younger. None of us are. Is BBCDC going to survive Ivan? What happens at some point in the future?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
You know, there's a lot of people here working at the institution. It's always been since 2007 governed by a board, which consists of people described by the Education Act. The proprietor, which is the Roman Catholic Church, appoints the chairman and the vice chairman. And then there are three parents' representatives of the students, which are always chosen for a three-year term at an annual meeting. There's a staff representative, the local counselor. But we try to do things well. You know, we have a business license, we have a tax clearance certificate, we're registered for income tax, we have a tax number, we pay VAT. Something I've always been proud of is that for the kind of an institution that we have, we're a significant taxpayer. The board has overall responsibility. Our books are audited every year by a chartered accounting firm. So, you know, there's a lot of foundation for continuity.

Dick DeRyk
Are you thinking retirement at all?

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Well, not really. I'm supposed to be retired, but I think in the last six months I've been going, I've probably gone harder than I've ever gone in my whole life this last six months. My brother and I, we don't have a high regard for sedentary retirement, so no.

Dick DeRyk
I know your brother, and he's still going pretty strong as well. Yeah.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
I have the opportunity to be a mentor in one of the programs that we're doing now, and the persons that I'm mentoring, I'm encouraging them to be very extremely ambitious. I've been thinking of this cluster of risk, stress, anxiety, and alienation a lot, because you know, when we study social science or when we're trying to understand history or the human condition, you know, this often arises. And I think people at the forefront of sustainable development and trying to imagine what humanity could look like. We're trying to really grapple with that situation, that condition, and to think about happiness.

I mean, when I was teaching, I don't teach anymore, I was teaching practical subjects like construction, solar technology, and what have you. I would often digress and talk about happiness because it's an elusive thing. But I think it's what all humans strive for. And it's a physical situation, you know, so that happiness can be obtained from the conditions that we can create for ourselves, the homes, our gardens, our workshops, our immediate surroundings, so that we don't have to get into a bus or a train or a plane and travel very long distances in congested cities always to be able to earn a living. Somebody on Twitter the other day they used the word coherence, you know. So there's a lack of coherence in how we live and approach economics and livelihood and how we live. So to me, that's really the most interesting question. I feel very privileged that I've somehow stumbled upon a degree of satisfaction and happiness in how I live

my life and am able to enjoy days which are quite different from maybe what life is for most people.

Dick DeRyk
I saw a quote the other day, and I can't remember where, I was probably online somewhere. But somebody was saying that when you meet somebody new, you say, Oh, well, what's your name? Where are you from? What do you do? This, that, and the other thing. And he said, Nobody has ever asked me, Are you happy? He says, That's the question we should be asking people. The rest of it is just window dressing.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Exactly. And that happiness is also a very individual personal situation, which as institutions, you see, we herd people into boxes and we kind of shunt them around into these careers which have absolutely no bearing in the personality and peculiarity of individual human beings. So, again, in a progressive institutional environment, we want to have as much opportunity for people to discover their talents and to discover those buttons that make them happy and give them the capacity to pursue those dreams that they have. I mean, really, to me, that is the ultimate aim of good education.

Dick DeRyk
And I'm assuming the ultimate aim of BBCDC.

Ivan Yaholnitsky
Exactly.