



Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good

By Heather Menzies



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Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good By Heather Menzies

Commoning was a way of life for most of our ancestors. In *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good*, author Heather Menzies journeys to her roots in the Scottish Highlands, where her family lived in direct relation with the land since before recorded time.

Beginning with an intimate account of unearthing the heritage of the commons and the real tragedy of its loss, Menzies offers a detailed description of the self-organizing, self-governing, and self-informing principles of this nearly forgotten way of life, including its spiritual practices and traditions. She then identifies pivotal commons practices that could be usefully revived today. A final "manifesto" section pulls these facets together into a unified vision for reclaiming the commons, drawing a number of current popular initiatives into the commoning frame, such as local food security, permaculture, and the Occupy Movement.

An engaging memoir of personal and political discovery, *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good* combines moving reflections on our common heritage with a contemporary call to action, individually and collectively; locally and globally. Readers will be inspired by the book's vision of reviving the commons ethos of empathy and mutual respect, and energized by her practical suggestions for connection people and place for the common good.

Heather Menzies is an award-winning writer and scholar and member of the Order of Canada. She is the author of nine books, including *Whose Brave New World?* and *No Time*.



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Editorial Review

Review

It's an admirable, even noble, vision, and expresses very eloquently what will have to be done if humanity is to escape the current race towards disaster. There's not much time, and it's a huge task. I hope what this book has the impact it deserves.

---Noam Chomsky, linguist, philosopher, political theorist, MIT

When the great Crash, ecologic or economic, comes, Heather Menzies' brilliant critique, provides an understanding of why it came about and a path towards a truly sustainable way for humanity to live on the planet.

---David Suzuki, author, *Wisdom of the Elders* and *The Sacred Balance*

A book made for today. Menzies marks the trail for deep participation in the healing of soul, community and creation, drawing from ancient wisdom, fine scholarship and contemporary practices of hope. An inspiring and pragmatic contribution toward meeting the greatest spiritual challenges of our time.

---Mardi Tindal, former moderator, United Church of Canada

Like most thoughtful post-2008 observers, Menzies is a trenchant critic of the neoliberal version of capitalism for its destruction of community life, degradation of the environment and accelerating inequality. Unlike most, however, she presents a seamlessly argued alternative vision. Drawing on her Scottish roots, Aboriginal history, current movements like Idle No More, environmental and social justice activist practices in many countries, and Google-friendly networks, she calls upon individuals to change the world by engaging locally within this complex matrix. She contends that it's possible, if not easy, to re-establish communities whose prevailing ethic is the common good. This would allow for markets; but instead of continuing to dominate, they would be subordinated to society's local and national priorities. A powerful challenge to the still prevailing ideology.

---Ed Broadbent, chair, Broadbent Institute, and former leader, New Democratic Party of Canada

This is a splendid, lyrical book -- exciting, well-written, scholarly and inspirational all at once ... Grounded in practical experience and sound scholarship, this book is a welcome addition to commons literature.

---Susan J. Buck, Ph.D., past president, International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC), Associate Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina - Greensboro

The constitutional principle of compelling national interest that is invoked by governments to ensure progress and development has invariably been at the expense of local-communities and local environments. As a result, the fabric of reality is damaged and torn. This damage and tearing is known by many names and phrases; climate change, war, genocide, colonization, environmental degradation, and perhaps most appropriately as the tragedy of the commons. *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good* represents, for me, a first baby-step toward repairing the breach to wholeness and toward restoring ancient pathways supported both by a scientific theory of common ancestry and indigenous story of creation held-in-common.

---Eugene Richard Atleo (Umeek)

From the Back Cover

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*When the great Crash, ecologic or economic, comes, Heather Menzies' brilliant critique, will provide an understanding of why it came about, and a path towards a truly sustainable way for humanity to live on the planet.---David Suzuki, author of *Wisdom of the Elders* and *The Sacred Balance**

Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good combines reflections on our common heritage with a contemporary call to action. Join author Heather Menzies as she journeys to her roots in the Scottish Highlands, sharing her intimate account of unearthing the heritage of the commons and the real tragedy of its loss. This engaging, groundbreaking memoir combines a detailed description of the self-organizing, self-governing and self-informing principles of this nearly forgotten way of life, including its spiritual practices and traditions. Menzies' unified vision for reclaiming the commons incorporates a number of current popular initiatives such as local food security, permaculture and community revitalization. Readers will be moved to embrace the commons ethos of empathy and mutual respect, and energized by the practical suggestions for connecting people and place for the common good.

...a splendid, lyrical book -- exciting, well-written, scholarly and inspirational all at once. ---Susan J. Buck, Ph.D., Past president, International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC)

A seamlessly argued alternative vision ---Ed Broadbent, Chair, the Broadbent Institute and former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada

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About the Author

Heather Menzies is an award-winning writer and scholar and the author of nine books, including *Whose Brave New World?* and *No Time*. She has been awarded an honorary doctorate and the Order of Canada for her “contributions to public discourse.” A mother and grandmother, a gardener and social-justice activist, Heather regularly contributes to journals and newspapers, and is in high demand as a speaker, offering a thoughtful critique of our disintegrating social fabric.

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