



PHOTO: Tim Hull  
Lisa Shipek, executive director of Watershed Management Group in Tucson

# Humble water goddess

lounging on the beach or scouting discos. Passionate about bridging connections between people and the environment, Shipek and her husband, Catlow, a hydrology technician with the Southwest Watershed Research Center and one of the founders of WMG, spent eight months on the road a few years ago. Along the way, they lived in rural Costa Rica for three months, working with local farmers on sustainable water projects and reforestation in a landscape that had been degraded by intensive ranching and pineapple farming.

"We got to know the people and attended their watershed meetings and helped where we could," Shipek told me during a recent conversation. "That was probably the point where Catlow (some may recognize the name of her Tucson-native husband from the Louis L'Amour book of the same title) and I decided that we wanted to dedicate more time to the nonprofit; we had had it going for a while but it was going slow, so when we got back I dedicated all my time to it."

And now, a few years later, she's dropped her anchor into a deep ocean of community projects - from small backyard rain harvesting to large-scale conservation projects along the river basin. She runs water harvesting workshops around town and creates demonstration sites with volunteers through the group's Greening Urban Watersheds Program.

It's all part of a life-plan the slender, freckle-faced young woman has had since she was a freckle-faced kid, when her mother and a teacher inspired her to spend her life working for the environment. She grew up in small-town New Hampshire, where her mother started a recycling program and took her out to pick up trash on Earth Day.

"From middle school on I knew I wanted to be in this field," Shipek says.

She majored in environmental science at Principia College in Elsah, Illinois, where

she met Catlow. The couple moved to Tucson after graduation and Shipek entered a graduate program in Latin American studies, wanting to add a social context to the science of sustainability. She ended up studying water issues in Ambos Nogales, but when she first arrived in Tucson, she wasn't sure if she'd be staying.

"I was thinking then that I didn't want to live in a community that I didn't think was sustainable, and I thought Tucson fell into that category," she says. "All the resources that come into the city that aren't from here - I didn't think I wanted to live in a community long-term that was built on that premise."

But she's changed her mind a bit since then, she says, partly because of some things she learned while traveling in developing countries and taking part in local-level sustainability projects.

"When we were in Costa Rica this last time," she says, "seeing the way the people were there, it really made me want to work for a community I cared about; they [rural Costa Ricans she met] care about each other and care about family, and that's what is really important to them, and from those relationships they build trust and are able to get projects done, and that really inspired me to be part of community. I had never felt like that before."

Shipek, who spends her free time traveling around the West with an Ultimate Frisbee team and coaching the UA's club team, is now putting her roots down right here in Tucson, a place she says has "hooked" her.

"Now I want to be a part of and help make this community more sustainable," she says. "Instead of trying to be part of an

## WHO TO CONTACT

Watershed Management Group  
P.O. Box 65953, Tucson, AZ 85728  
520-396-3266  
www.watershedmg.org

ideal situation, I want to try to make something better, to help be part of a change. When I was younger I really wanted to work abroad, and I still do want to do that, but as I worked abroad and traveled around I realized that I wanted to put down roots in my own country, be part of a community, and really make change there; it's hard to make change to other communities when you can't do it in your own home, and I think there is incredible energy here - there's a good sense of community and a real genuine interest in doing good things socially and environmentally."

Shipek says the nonprofit WMG decided to concentrate on water because, especially here in the arid Southwest, it's "the resource that ties all other resources together."

The group has thus far concentrated on water harvesting and changing the way people think about landscaping -- into which some 40 to 60 percent of our water resources flow.

"Water harvesting has been a means for us to reach a lot of people and start an education process," she says. "It's practical and kind of fun, and easy for people in urban areas to do."

Currently the bulk of the group's work is done through a series of workshops that began about two years ago and now consist

Continued on page 15

**Before enlightenment,  
Chop wood, carry water.**

**After enlightenment,  
Chop wood, carry water.**

-Zen saying

By Tim Hull

It took a wanderer's existence to help Lisa Shipek realize she wanted roots, and now she's putting them down deep in Tucson and soaking them with harvested rain water.

The 29-year-old executive director of the local nonprofit Watershed Management Group (WMG) has spent time in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Nepal - and very little of that time was spent



# Inner Shift

By James MacAdam

## Going It Alone

"To me, the most pivotal environmental issue we're faced with is not climate change or hunger or biodiversity or deforestation or genetic engineering or any of those things. It is an issue that is going to determine what we do about it all: our deeply felt ambivalence toward the human race and our presence here on planet Earth." ~Ross Robertson

"Hell is 'other people.'" ~Alan Cohen

My girlfriend and I took a trip to the high pines of Arizona last weekend, seeking the cool, quiet beauty of the mountains. Recovering from a surgery and unable to backpack, I was limited to camping near the car. We quickly found out that car camping in the White Mountains in summer can be a lot like hanging out in our Tucson neighborhood: bright lights, loud engines, barking dogs and lots of people. As we fell asleep to the sounds of generators and stumbled into camp side deposits of used toilet paper, my "inner curmudgeon" emerged to the surface. This is the part of me that cynically thinks, "I can't see the forest for the RV's." In the end, we found a secluded streamside spot (I can't tell you where - says the curmudgeon), but my stormy thoughts revealed my own "deeply felt ambivalence" toward people that Ross Robertson mentions.

How do you feel about people? At times it can seem as if humans do more harm than good, particularly where the care of the Earth is concerned. Many of us answer the question with our feet: given the chance -- like vacation or retirement -- we run away from humanity to the most untrammelled piece of nature we can find. Sure, we'll bring our family along, but our private property signs indicate that "other people" are generally not welcome. Unfortunately, as I found last weekend, "nature" (as opposed to human creation) is shrinking fast. The more the collective human footprint expands, the more pertinent the questions become. Are humans capable of living in harmony with nature, with each

other? Or is the curmudgeon right -- does everything we touch turn to toilet paper and diesel fumes?

Most of us have moments where we lose faith in humanity. This only becomes dangerous when those momentary losses of faith turn into a worldview. Politically, conservative critics have made great hay of portraying environmentalists as being "anti-people," polarizing and paralyzing crucial debates that need all of our participation. Physically and socially, the thought that we can "go it alone" is a myth. Spiritually, it is suicide: while it is appropriate to reject bad behavior, rejecting others wholesale is evidence that we are rejecting ourselves.

During times like last weekend's camping excursion, I have discovered that my own negativity about people is not a worldview at all, but a misapprehension of reality. The amount of negative stories I have Inner about people is directly related to how I feel about myself. If I am happy and content, it's so easy to see the good in people, to forgive, to forge solutions that work for everybody. If I'm down, there's something wrong with "them." For me, the work has become less about

Continued on page 5

**"Things To Do In Tucson"**  
On almost every page.  
Log On Today!  
**MyGREENTUCSON.COM**

**Tony Ray Baker** ABR, CRS, GRI  
Full time Realtor serving Tucson since 1994

(520) 631-TONY (8669)  
tonyrbaker@aol.com  
1650 E. River Road #202

**Low Auto Insurance Rates**

Pick from many Quality Carriers, including...

Your Independent Neighborhood Agent

Full Source	Home
Auto	Life
Business	Bonds

**"Your Worries End When Our Coverage Begins"**

**GET A QUOTE**

**(520) 327-3369**

1717 N. Tucson Blvd.  
Tucson, AZ 85716

**Worldwide Wrappers**  
gourmet wraps & juice bar

**Gourmet Wraps & Real Fruit Smoothies!**

21 Gourmet Wraps  
Fresh, Flavored Tortillas

Vegetarian & Vegan Selections Available  
100% REAL Fruit Juices & Smoothies  
Everything Freshly Made In Front of You  
ALL Menu Items Are Completely Halal (Zabiha)

HEALTHY EATING!  
Catering For Parties & Business Meetings!  
Everything Made Fresh Daily!

RESTAURANT 884-7070  
500 North 4th Ave.  
NE Corner of 4th Ave. & 6th St.

ORDERS 624-1001

M-TH: 11-8 • F-SA: 11-9 • SUN: 11-6  
www.wrapperson4th.com