

**Prologue for *Imagining the future* session at the ASC conference, 29 February 2011**

*A series of vignettes told from the perspectives of Melbourne's future residents to reveal probable future in 2030.*

It's 2030 in Melbourne. The Age of Cheap Oil is officially over. We're exporting twice as much coal as we were 20 years ago, but our own energy industry is transitioning to solar and wind. More than half the population have the capacity to produce their own energy, which they can sell back to the grid if they have surplus.

**Meet Rex. He's a business man.** He's always been adaptable. Flexi-Rexi they call him. He made millions investing in the development of nano-technology for photo-voltaic solar panels. He knows guys who got screwed investing in biodiesel – poor bastards. Government was never going to back it. He didn't get caught out though. Not him. Used to have shares in oil, in gas – he was all for fracking – but since the Federal Government passed the Clean Energy Bill in 2017 - it was only a matter of time before solar became cheaper than fossil fuels. Even if you didn't care about the environment - there was the economics of it staring you in the face. Everyone got behind it. Especially Rexi. Clean & green. That was him.

Rex wanted to live somewhere that suited his new rep. He checked out a solar-powered *earthship* in Coburg, but the community out there seemed a bit eco-crazy for his taste. He considered relocating to one of Melbourne's new *zero carbon suburbs*, some of the houses were - plush, but not quite the statement he was looking for. In the end, he snapped up a place in Melbourne's first vertical-forest apartment-complex. He was 37-floors up, downtown, with a stupendous view. Sure, it was a bit of a jungle from the outside, but inside, it was spacious and sleek and in Rex's line of business, it was crucial to walk the walk.

**Meet Charlene. She's a nurse.** She works long hours in the emergency wing of the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Her team are trained to treat heat stress and dehydration - common conditions among city dwellers in the summer months.

She's glad she lives in a time when medical science is advancing so rapidly. Most Australian kids nowadays are immunised against Cancer, Aids, Parkinson's disease - even early onset dementia. But now that these diseases are cured, and with all the climate-change refugees pouring into the country, Charlene is worried about population growth. Australia's population is set to break the 30 million mark by 2031, and food and utilities aren't getting any cheaper.

Her sister Sal is a human rights activist, campaigning for Australia's newest refugees. Changes in sea temperature have affected the fishing industries and livelihoods of thousands of Bangladeshis, Pacific Islanders and Indonesians. Many of them have been relocated to

Australia over the past decade. Sal has been out to the camps, she has seen how they live. She is lobbying the government to have them released from the 'processing centres' and integrated into towns and cities.

"It's not just that they miss their homes and object to living in prison conditions," Sal told her sister when they met for lunch last week. "It's that they hold the developed world responsible. And can you blame them? One woman grabbed my arm last week, got her face up close to mine and said "You. You people. How you live caused climate change. Forced us to leave our homes. You should take responsibility. Treat us properly."

Charlene shifted in her seat. She didn't know what to say.

**Meet Alexis. Charlene's daughter.** She's 11, and like most kids of her generation, she's extremely tech savvy. Her PC is so small it's imbedded in her shirt. It's always with her; she views it as a kind of extension of herself. She wants to travel but Mum says it's too expensive, so she contents herself with virtual travel; on Google maps she explores streets in Nairobi, San Francisco and Sydney. Photosynth and Satellite technologies have evolved so that she can see, hear, feel and smell things overseas in *real time*. It's pretty cool. She's saving up to go to Sydney on the Solar Express next year.

For pocket money she helps her Aunty Sal in a commercial garden in Abbotsford where they grow genetically modified, heat-resistant vegetables. When she grows up she wants to be a bio-technician. Aunty Sal says that before oil got so pricey - the garden used to be a car park. Fewer people have cars now though. Mum has one for work – a 'toyota solar plexus'. Lexi likes to plug it in for recharging at home.

Lexi's school is competing in the national *Race For Power*. Basically teachers and kids all over the country take shifts on stationary bikes to generate as much power as they can in 24 hours. Whatever you generate gets credited to your school's energy bill. Her school came third in the junior section last year. She reckons they might win it this year.

The future of Australia rests in the hands of kids like Alexis. Unlike her great-grandparents, she has been born into an era in which adaption of, and mitigation to climate change is taken seriously – in fact it has become the status quo.

Lexi has never known a different world to the one she lives in. Her acceptance of her world as it is, and her hopeful outlook are a result of crucial work done by climate change scientists and policy makers in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.