

BIG JOLT: A COMPENDIUM OF THE SUDDEN PRODUCTION

HISTORICALLY OF ACTIVISTS

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Chapters

1. Activists and change
2. Environmental Activists
3. Killing Animals
4. Social Activism -- Seeing for Oneself
5. Social Activism -- Personal Trauma, Hearing and Reading
6. Into Politics for Social Action
7. Anti-Racism
8. Anti-War
9. The First Wave of Feminism
10. Feminists -- Personal Experience
11. Feminists -- Changed by Observing
12. Birth of Self Esteem and Thinking for Oneself
13. Becoming Healers
14. Turning onto the Arts
15. Becoming Vegetarians
16. Mass Influence

People whose Big Jolts defined their future are documented briefly in this book. They are:

Jane Addams - poverty in Chicago
Carl Akeley - preservation of gorillas
Elizabeth Garrett Anderson - doctor
Ethel Annakin - social activist
Susan B. Anthony - women's rights
Brooke Astor - philanthropist for the arts
Hertha Ayerton - suffragette
John Baldwin - environmental education
George Ballard - women scholars
Judi Bari - forestry
Thomas Barnardo - child poverty
Elspeth Wallace Baugh - feminist author
Betty Baxter - feminist coach
Lydia Becker - suffragette
Linda Bellos - feminist activist
Marcy Benstock - urban environments
Sylvia Bernstein - social activist
Annie Besant - justice and liberty
Stephen Best - wildlife preservation
Norman Bethune - doctor
Ela Bhatt - lawyer in India
Florence Bird - women's and poverty issues
Elinor Black - doctor
Elizabeth Blackwell - doctor
Vladimir Bondarenko - actor and film director
Ryan Camp - ex-drug user
Glen Campbell - cowboy singer
Douglas Cardinal - architect
Andrew Carnegie - philanthropist
Mary Carpenter - child poverty
William Case - enlightened man
Emma Chatterton - peace activist
Johnetta Cole - Black academic
Shelagh Conway - feminist author

Anne Innis Dagg - feminist academic
Brian Davies - animal welfare
Voltairine de Cleyre - author and anarchist
Ding Zilin - human rights in China
Dorothea Dix - social activist
L.C. Dorsey - Black activist
Emily Dunning - doctor
Virginia Foster Durr - social change
Mary Baker Eddy - Christian Science leader
Gertrude Elion - medical biochemist
Daniel Ellsberg - whistle blower
James Endicott - Canadian communist
Millicent Garrett Fawcett - early feminist
Lynne Fernie - feminist
Eva Figes - anti-war activist
John Fleming - Black activist
Paulo Freire - educator
Betty Friedan - feminist activist
Joe Gelders - social activist
Lois Gibbs - waste disposal
Margaret Gillett - feminist academic
Rumer Godden - author
Earl Godfrey - bird expert
Shirley Goldsmith - pollution
Glenn Gould - musician
Victor Grayson - political activist
Angela Grimke - abolition of slavery
Harriet Grote - women's rights activist
Donald Hall - peace activist
Anita Hill - feminist lawyer
Marion Hilliard - doctor
Joan Hinton - social activist in China
Thomas Holloway - philanthropist for poor
Adelaide Hunter Hoodless - social activist
Julian Huxley - animal behaviourist
Sonia Johnson - Mormon dissident
Yvonne Johnson - feminist author
Charles Jones - Black lawyer
Eleanor Josaitis - poverty in Detroit
Louise Kehoe - anti-poverty communist
Annie Kenny - suffragette
Janet Aitken Kidd - artist
Cheven Bowers King - Black lawyer
Louise de Kiriline Lawrence - nature author
Anne Knight - suffragette

Arthur Koestler - German communist
Alexandra Kollontai - communist
Olayinka Koso-Thomas - re female genital mutilation
Maggie Kuhn - social activist
Christine Lamont - social activist
Stephen Langdon - political activist
R.D. Lawrence - preservation of wildlife
Vera Leff - peace activist
Eva Le Gallienne - actress
Lenin - communist leader
Hanny Lightfoot-Klein - against female genital mutilation
Marchioness of Londonderry - suffragist
Sam Lovejoy - anti-nuclear development
Amory Lovins - sustainable living
Constance Lytton - suffragette
Rita MacNeil - Canadian feminist entertainer
Annie Macpherson - child poverty
Lee Maracle - Aboriginal community worker
Lorna Marsden - feminist academic
Vina Mazumdar - feminist activist in India
Mary McCarthy - author
Nellie McClung - Canadian feminist activist
Margaret McDougall - poverty in Ireland
Marilou McPhedran - feminist lawyer
Kate Millett - anti-violence activist
Jack Miner - conservationist
John and Shawna Mitchell - religious free thinkers
Lucretia Mott - abolitionist and feminist
Farley Mowat - author of environmental and animals issues
John Muir - preservation of nature
Diane Nash - Black social activist
Holly Near - peace activist
Alma Neuman - healed widow
Barbara Noel - feminist convert
Alma Norovsky - feminist academic
Caroline Norton - women's rights
Jill Oakes - designer
Grey Owl - preservation of nature
Madeleine Parent - feminist and union organizer
Rosa Parks - Black activist
Priscilla Peckover - feminist activist
Roger Tory Peterson - bird expert
Anne-Marie Pharand - feminist activist
Connie Purdue - social activist
Phineas Quimby - healer

Chet Raymo - author of natural history
 Naida Robbins - Methodist but free-thinker
 Robert Robinson - Black worker in Russia
 Renee Roth-Hano - Jewish social worker
 Laura Goodman Salverson - author
 Margaret Sanger - birth control expert
 Henry Schwarzschild - political activist
 Ignaz Semmelweis - crusading doctor
 Ernest Thompson Seton - conservationist
 Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury - politician activist
 Juliet Sherwood - feminist
 Gloria Steinem - feminist activist
 Harriet Beecher Stowe - author
 Shirley Temple - Republican ambassador
 Ruth Shepard - waste disposal
 Justine Siegemundin - midwife
 Peter Singer - animal rights advocate
 Patwant Singh - poverty in India
 Ethel Smyth - suffragette
 Philip Snowden - quasi-feminist
 Diane Solway - biographer
 Lynne Spender - feminist author
 Elizabeth Cady Stanton - suffragette
 Gloria Steinem - feminist activist
 Marie Stopes - birth control expert
 Baroness Bertha von Suttner - activist for peace
 Birgit Voss - feminist activist
 Phyllis Webb - author
 Lady Wilde - Irish author
 Roger Wilkins - Black lawyer
 Paul Yee - author

Introduction

The argument of this book is straight forward:

** Most of us think that the world would be a better place if we had more activists working for the good of human society and of the environment. By definition here, the good of society grants the most possibilities for a full life to the greatest number of people; the good of the environment is the support and encouragement of the greatest possible diversity of habitat and of animal life as possible, given that people also live in the world.

** Many activist are not born that way, but become so after they receive a Big Jolt that shakes them out of their ordinary patterns of living. (Little jolts change people's behaviour too, but far more slowly and over a longer period of time).

** If we knew what triggered Big Jolts for individuals, we could perhaps produce more

activists.

** To find out what *does* trigger them, we can look at the brief stories of the people turned activist chronicled here. All of these activists were and are thoughtful and idealistic by nature and anxious, from their perspective, to make the world a better place.

In this compendium most items are about people who changed their belief system and became activists because of some external stimulus. This work also includes accounts of people, mostly women in earlier times, who have had Big Jolts which opened their eyes to the possibilities for them personally, as women, of becoming feminists, or doctors, or creators in the arts. It also includes a short chapter on vegetarians.

To gather material for this book, I read the writings of or about hundreds of activists written before the mid-1990s to find out what inspired them to become activists and to address some of society's wrongs. This is merely an idiosyncratic collection of course; there are many thousands of other descriptions that could be used to describe similar sudden changes in peoples' lives. **The Big Jolts that galvanized people into action are the heart of this compendium, along with information about what activism was undertaken in the various areas because of the jolts.** The contents will, I hope, be updated on this Website over the next few years to include more modern activists. If any reader wants to follow up on the quotes cited in the text, the author can supply page numbers for the books and articles containing the quotes. She can be reached at: adagg@uwaterloo.ca

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This book is arranged by areas of activism, so that the reader can see for each area (see chapter titles) what kind of Big Jolts were effective in creating activists there. The first chapter gives an overview of ways to effect change in general.

Chapter 1. ACTIVISTS AND CHANGE

Activists are people who want to make a difference in our world. They are unhappy with things as they are because they know they could be better, and they are willing to put their hearts and minds and energies to work toward improvement. Activists are vital to progress. Without them, few things change and they change slowly. With activists, because of their behaviour, we can begin to aspire for equality and an end to discrimination for all people, a decrease in violence in the world, an environment that is not desecrated, a greater sympathy for animals-- in short, a better life for everybody.

If activists are important, why aren't there more of them?

Many people are conservative by nature, feeling that somehow, even if things aren't very good, they could be worse and that working for change might make them so. Better to leave things as they are.

As well, most people haven't the temperament to be activists. They may not be happy with the world around them, but they haven't enough interest or drive to try to change it. Often they will do good works such as coach a soccer team, bake muffins for a charity,

or volunteer for Meals on Wheels, but they aren't willing or able to devote their whole energy to a cause. Some people are too busy to be activists. Business people who work 12 hours a day, and parents who are raising a family and working full time, don't have the strength to strive all out for a good cause.

But some people, the people we are interested in here, seem ordinary, probably the recipient of a number of Small Jolts until some Big Jolt galvanizes them into becoming activists. A very few people seem to have been born with a feel for Natural Justice which may in future lead to activism.

No one is born an activist. When we are young, we believe what we are told by the people around us, especially our parents and guardians but also our brothers and sisters and friends. It is only when we have some experience that makes us suddenly question these beliefs-- a Big Jolt, or many Little Jolts, or a presence of Natural Justice-- that we may (or may not) begin the journey to activism.

Inborn Sense of Justice - Why to a Different Drummer?

A very few people seem to have an inborn sense of justice. In a large group of neighbourhood families, there is sometimes a person who doesn't fit in with the household or neighbourhood culture, although there seems to be no reason for this.

One such example is **Angela Grimké** (Birney, 1969; Lumpkin, 1974). The Grimkés 200 years ago were a large wealthy family, the father a judge in Charleston, NC, and the mother overseeing the running of the household. She gave birth to 14 children, 11 of whom grew to maturity. Each child had his or her own slave servant. In addition, their household would have had other slaves-- cook, kitchen help, butler, footman, chambermaids, waiting maids, coachman, stable boys, seamstresses and laundresses. Other slaves owned by the Grimkés lived on a plantation far inland from the city.

Children are born without prejudice, so the Grimké children had black as well as white playmates when young. As they grew older, however, they had to accept the fact that the black children could not be equal to them, but were born to be servants. Some of the children found this grossly unfair at first, but eventually they came to accept the different treatment of the two groups.

Three of the Grimké children were especially attached to each other. The youngest, Angelina, born 1805, was doted on by her sister Sarah, 12 years older. She in turn was devoted to her brother Thomas, six years her senior. Of these three, the two daughters became world-famous abolitionists who spent much of their lives trying to overthrow slavery. Thomas, along with his other brothers and sister, became slave owners in favour of the institution of slavery. Thomas was a liberal-minded man who worked for reforms in education, politics and religion, but he never objected to the evils of slavery. For 11 young people growing up in the same household, why did two people perceive slavery as evil, while the others condoned it?

Little Jolts by Life Experience

Little Jolts can produce activists in two ways, the second of which interests us here.

First, they can cause incremental changes in a person's behavior which in time can create an activist, and secondly they can produce in a person a Prepared Mind ready to receive a Big Jolt that converts them instantly into an activist.

As an example of a person undergoing Small Jolts over the years that led to activism, let's look at the life of prominent feminist Florence Bird (1974). Florence Rhein, later to call herself Anne Francis, was born into a wealthy doctor's family in Philadelphia. She remembers having a few twinges against inequality-- for example, when she was young she wasn't convinced when her mother told her that their Irish maids, "bog trotters", didn't mind living in the unpleasant attic bedrooms of the family house. She began her university studies at Byrn Mawr, but left to "come out" for a year as a debutante. Her mother was against this, saying "A debutante is like a girl in an oriental slave market. She's dressed up and strutted around at teas and dinners to catch the highest bidder."

The next year she travelled with her mother, her aunt and her young brother in a chauffeur-driven car on a six-month Grand Tour of Europe. During this trip John Bird, a South African expatriate who had become enamoured of her and whom later she would marry, wrote her many letters telling her that she was made of good stuff and could mould herself into what kind of a woman she wanted to be. She noted in her diary, "He thinks some day I can develop into a real person if I work on it." She writes in her autobiography, "Gradually the idea took hold of me that a woman can be what she wants to be and can follow any path she wants to follow."

The Birds settled down after their honeymoon to live in New York city, where two events soon changed her outlook on life. She became sick with flu during the winter, so they decided to contact a former parlour maid without a phone to ask her if she would work for them. Kate Cox lived in a tall apartment block in a slum areas. She, her husband, their four children and a boarder lived in a three-room. cold-water flat, sharing a bathroom down the hall with another family of seven. Bird writes that this was "the first time I have ever understood the way that people have to live in tenements of that kind. I was revolted by the smell of the place, the sordidness of it all, and felt ashamed that I had ever thought of myself as poor."

The second event took place in the summer, when she complained because of the sweltering heat. "Nobody, *nobody* stays in New York on a weekend in August," she said to her husband. John Bird then took her to the poorest part of New York where "there were people all around us. They sat on doorsteps, on chairs on the pavement, on iron fire escapes, on roof tops. They looked worn out, pale, drained, as if they had been stretched on a rack." She apologized to her husband for her ignorance.

Bird became used to poverty during the depression, when she and her husband moved to Montreal. He became a reporter while she continued writing. She studied economics and political science so she could understand why the richest countries in the world were suddenly so devastated; sometimes she gave well-received lectures to small groups.

Another incremental change in her belief system involved her overworked cleaning woman whose husband had given up hunting for work and sat home most days smoking and staring into space. One day her oldest boy was hit by a car. He needed immediate brain surgery to save his life, but the doctor by law could not operate

without permission of the father; the mother's permission was irrelevant. The Montreal police visited local bars and movie houses until they found the father and rushed him to the hospital to sign the permission form. The boy recovered, but Bird was jolted to find such a law existed.

The Birds moved to Winnipeg for some years and then to Ottawa where Bird became a top radio broadcaster, travelling to many parts of the world. She saw and gave broadcasts about the terrible conditions poor people in the world faced and the resilience that enabled them to carry on anyway. She was particularly moved by the problems women faced, including lack of birth control information, discriminatory laws, drunk and abusive partners, and hungry children. She was well enough known for her views to be asked in 1967 to head the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, a task she accepted and performed admirably. As she concludes in her autobiography, "I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth and it almost choked me. It is in the hope of helping other women to find themselves that I have written these reminiscences of my slow growth from a pampered, conceited girl to a woman with some self-knowledge, whose eyes and heart have been turned outward by experience toward other people."

Little Jolts by Higher Education

Education by nation states does not set out to produce activists; most countries want an informed citizenry, but they don't want people to use their education to rock the boat. However, the encouragement of learning to think for oneself produces a Prepared Mind that will later probably be more susceptible to Little or Big Jolts.

For those of us in the teaching profession, it is good to be able to report that people with more education are more open to change. One huge study by A. W. Astin (1977) in the United States showed that the 200,000 students he studied changed in many ways during their four years at university. These students (compared to young people the same ages but not at university) were more liberal and had more self-esteem both intellectually and in relationships and friendships. These and other small differences varied depending on factors such as sex, race, and age.

One difference for men and women was that although both became more liberal as a result of their university years, the effect was greater for men than women, perhaps because the men were more involved in political activities on campus. Although women were slightly more liberal than men when they began university, they were slightly less so four years later. University also caused fewer women than men to aspire toward postgraduate education. Although women earned on average higher grades than men during their university career, they were less likely to enroll in graduate or professional schools. Universities may make students more open to change, but they do so more for men than for women. Indeed, stereotypes were often preserved rather than reduced, so that men were shown to be more verbally aggressive and more involved in sports and technical skills, while women developed more homemaking and general cultural skills.

University also affected students differently depending on their race. Black students, compared to white, became more politically liberal and were more likely to abandon traditional religious affiliations. They were more likely to strengthen their

altruistic tendencies and to believe that disadvantage students should be given preferential treatment. They were less involved academically than whites, but equally likely to enroll in graduate or professional schools. However, the issues were complex; black men, for example, were more likely than white men to increase in interpersonal self-esteem, whereas black women, more than white women, showed smaller declines in business interests.

Change also differed depending on the age of students. As one might expect, for example, younger students were more likely than older ones to abandon traditional religious beliefs, to become hedonistic in university, and to become involved in student government and athletics. By contrast, older students were more likely than younger ones to interact with faculty, to get involved academically, and to obtain better grades. However, the data for these three categories of sex, race, and age do not fit into this present work because Astin gives no indication that changes and differences observed in students occurred suddenly rather than incrementally.

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