

THE VILLAGE GREEN

Number Twenty-five, June 3, 2020

Do you want to know what local environmental ecological and climate events (on-line and in person) have been scheduled for Grey, Bruce and environs?

They're listed and described at Grey Bruce Climate Action's event listing: <https://greybruceclimateaction.ca/events>, where you can also add your own organization's upcoming events. Current listings include:

- **June 4:** Plastic Pollution: Microfibers to tires, how do we sort through the waste? on-line, hosted by Lake Huron Centre For Coastal Conservation
- **June 5:** Environmental Trivia Night, on-line, hosted by Bagida-waad Alliance
- **June 6:** Just Cool It - Eco Fair, on-line, hosted by Transition Meaford
- **June 8:** Let's Talk Food Sustainability, on-line, hosted by Bagida-waad Alliance
- **June 8:** Georgian Bluffs Climate Action Team meeting, on-line, hosted by Georgian Bluffs CAT
- **June 18:** Go with the Flow: Water levels and what shapes Lake Huron, on-line, hosted by Lake Huron Centre For Coastal Conservation

YOUTH ACTIVIST CREATES ON-LINE DISCUSSION SERIES

Aidan Randall is a twenty year old climate activist and one of the driving forces behind the youth-organized *Fridays for Future* movement in Owen Sound. But with face-to-dace rallies out of the question right now because of the pandemic, Aidan has turned his organizing talents toward a series of Friday evening on-line sessions at which prominent local climate personages can help educate the rest of us.

He has hosted two on-line Friday evening sessions so far. The first was an Earth Day panel discussion involving *Fridays for Future* youth activists Aidan Randall and Lydia Dyck as well as local filmmaker, poet, artist and community organizer Liz Zetlin and Owen Sound municipal councillor John Tamming. It's on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTWulChu_9Q. The second session, on the impacts of animal agriculture on our health and the environment, featured Jim Ansell, owner of Owen Sound's Bleeding Carrot vegan restaurant (on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oLSMaZU40Q&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2_DdzNRatSVzWcgI2JfXK2EILj-6PjkolaYEcmrZGI7GQqBvX9VgyNks).

Aidan came by his interest in environmental and climate issues partly from growing up on a farm near Durham, where his parents, who home-schooled him, instilled in him a respect for growing things. The family moved to Owen Sound, but they still spend their weekends on their farm.

While Aidan has not yet decided on his career path, he knows that public speaking will be part of it and he has joined Toastmasters to hone his speaking skills. He credits his parents as well as Bernie Sanders and Greta Thunberg as inspirations driving his activism.

Aidan feels the world will have to create a "new normal" as the pandemic abates – a way of thinking that he calls a "minimalist society" in which non-essential elements of our lifestyle are reduced or eliminated, and essential elements are protected and strengthened. Flying less, driving less and cutting back on consumption will be part of that new society in Aidan's view.

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Aidan is proud that youth are standing up and taking action, and he has advice for older generations: listen to young people, and use your power to vote as a tool to create a better world. He also derives lessons for all of us from the COVID-19 crisis. If governments treated climate change as a crisis, the way they treat the pandemic, we would be well on our way to solving climate issues. And with climate issues as with the pandemic, listening to and acting in accord with the advice of experts is important.

To get advance notice of future Friday evening sessions hosted by Aidan, keep an eye on the Grey Bruce Climate Action event listings at <https://greybruceclimateaction.ca/events>. And if you want to find out more about what Aidan is doing, you can follow him on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram:

<https://twitter.com/AidansAction>

<https://www.facebook.com/AidansAction>

<https://www.instagram.com/aidansaction/>

Aidan can also be reached via e-mail at aidansaction@gmail.com.

CALLS INCREASE FOR THE FEDS TO ISSUE A GREEN AND FAIR COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

Activists across the world have pushed recently for their governments to design pandemic recovery plans that aren't "business as usual" – that instead move the world toward greener economies rooted in social justice. However, many traditional fossil fuel-hungry industries are lobbying governments to move in the opposite direction.

A Canadian campaign, *Movement for a Just Recovery*, has secured endorsement by several hundred environmental, climate action and social action organizations of six "Just Recovery Principles":

1. Put people's health and wellbeing first, with no exceptions
2. Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people
3. Give high priority to the needs of workers and communities
4. Build resilience to prevent future crises
5. Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders
6. Uphold Indigenous rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

A further description of the Movement for a Just Recovery is at <https://justrecoveryforall.ca/>

Recently the climate advocacy organization 350.org Canada launched a program to organize on-line "teach-ins" across the country by June 7 to mobilize people to send collective and individual messages to the Federal government calling for a green and fair recovery plan comprising three phases:

1. Respond with a "people's bailout"
2. Recover with a plan that leaves no one behind
3. Rebuild with a Green New Deal.

Over 30 teach-ins have been organized across Canada – none of them in Grey or Bruce Counties. Information on the teach-ins and links to the initiative's resource materials are at <https://350.org/jr-teachins/>.

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NORTHERN BRUCE PENINSULA SEEKS CLIMATE ACTION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula (NBP) is looking for up to six residents of NBP to serve on an ad hoc Climate Action Committee. This Committee will operate until 2022. A fillable application form and Committee Terms of Reference are at www.northbrucepeninsula.ca. The town will accept applications until Thursday, June 4 at noon.

COLLINGWOOD COUNCIL WANTS BAN ON DISPOSABLE WIPES

Reacting to a disposable product that isn't sewer-friendly and that adds to the landfill burden, Collingwood's municipal council has voted to petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a ban on single-use disposable wipes, attaching a similar motion from Bracebridge council that kick-started discussion of disposables by many Ontario municipalities.

The issue wasn't easy, however, because Health Canada includes Clorox disinfecting wipes on its list of hard-surface disinfectants with evidence supporting its use against COVID-19.

Two councillors were willing to vote in support of petitioning upper-level governments to require standardized labels on disposal wipe packaging indicating the wipes aren't flushable, but didn't vote in favor of the ban. All other councillors voted in favor of the motion calling for a ban.

Collingwood will now send its support for the ban along with Bracebridge's original motion.

THE ECONOMIST TOUTS PANDEMIC GREEN AFTERMATH

The influential magazine *The Economist* has lent its voice – and its front cover – to the idea that recovery from the pandemic can be, and should be, a green recovery. Its May 21 cover shows a giant hand wrenching a swath of industrial smoke away from a factory, with the headline **“Seize the moment: The chance to flatten the climate curve”**.

Said its editor-in-chief Zanny Minton Beddoes:

“Our cover this week calls for a global effort to tackle climate change. Covid-19 creates a unique chance to steer the economy away from carbon at a much lower financial, social and political cost than before. Rock-bottom energy prices make it easier to cut subsidies for fossil fuels and to introduce a tax on carbon. The revenues from that tax can help repair battered government finances. The businesses at the heart of the fossil-fuel economy—oil and gas firms, steel producers, carmakers—are already going through the agony of shrinking their long-term capacity and employment. Getting economies back on their feet calls for investment in climate-friendly infrastructure that boosts growth and creates new jobs. Low interest rates make the bill smaller than ever. The world should seize the moment.”

ERNST & YOUNG UPDATES GLOBAL GREEN INVESTMENT ATTRACTIVENESS LIST

EY, a newsletter and website published by the global consulting firm Ernst and Young, produces a *Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index*, an annual list of the attractiveness of countries for potential investment in green energy businesses. Of the 40 countries on this list, Canada ranks fifteenth.

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Countries are ranked on these criteria:

- Is there a long-term need for additional or replacement energy supply, and a strong case for energy from renewable resources in particular?
- Is policy helping the ability to exploit renewables opportunities in a country?
- Are essential components in place to ensure project delivery, such as long-term contracts, grid infrastructure and availability of finance?
- What does the strength of natural resource, track record and project pipeline reveal about the outlook for particular renewable technologies?
- Does the macro stability and investment climate enable the ease of doing business in a country?

Says Ernst and Young:

While the contours of a post-pandemic economy are not yet clear, there is reason to believe the renewable energy sector will prove resilient. Certainly, renewable energy is not immune to the economic disruption being wrought. Some projects under construction are struggling to source equipment. Operating and maintenance teams are harder to move around. Lower power prices will squeeze margins. The collapse in oil prices will raise questions about the ability of oil and gas companies – recent converts to the attractions of clean energy – to continue to invest in the sector. But many of these effects are likely to be short-term. Already, manufacturers in China and Europe are restarting production. Utilities have worked hard to keep generation going in difficult circumstances. And power demand will rebound as economies get back to work. Certainly, institutional investors are continuing to direct new money to the sector.

The U.S. secured the top position because of a planned US\$57 billion investment to install 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, and an extension of a production tax credit. The Business Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC) is the U.S. income tax credit for some types of renewable energy projects including solar, geothermal and fuel cell energy. Under the ITC, owners of qualifying energy projects can claim a tax credit up to 30% of their project's capital costs.

FORESTS ARE GETTING YOUNGER AND SHORTER

A study published last week in the journal *Science* shows that the world's forests are losing their bigger and older trees because of rising temperatures, climate-related disasters such as fire and insect outbreaks, and deforestation, leaving forests shorter and younger. Old growth trees, provide habitat for wildlife and store more carbon than young trees. The researchers surveyed more than 160 existing studies that looked at forest loss and combined those results with satellite imagery and computer modelling to record forest loss from 1900 to 2015. They found that over the last 115 years, the world has lost more than one-third of its old-growth forests. North American and European tree mortality doubled over the past 40 years.

EUROPEAN UNION TO PLANT THREE BILLION TREES

As part of the European Green Deal for the European Union, three billion new trees will be planted across the 27 member states, says the European Commission. Alongside tree planting, plans include commitments to reduce the use of chemical pesticides and protections for vital pollinators, like bees, whose numbers are in decline. The European Green Deal website is at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.

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Said Virginijus Sinkevičius, the EU's Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries:

“Nature is vital for our physical and mental wellbeing, it filters our air and water, it regulates the climate and it pollinates our crops, but we are acting as if it didn't matter, and losing it at an unprecedented rate.”

At least 30% of Europe's land and seas is set to become a protected area. A further third of these areas with very high biodiversity will come under “strict protection” which will keep human intervention to a minimum. Legally binding nature restoration targets will not be outlined in detail until 2021.

The aim is to raise €20 billion every year to fund the plan from public and private funding with a vast amount of the EU's climate budget used to invest in biodiversity. However, skeptics warn that the initiative must be accompanied by carbon emission reductions across the EU as part of a coordinated approach to climate change.

STUDY: METHANE LEAKS KILL URBAN TREES

A recent study in Chelsea, Massachusetts, a low-income immigrant community near Boston, suggests that methane leaks from underground pipelines kill trees in densely populated urban environments, adding to concerns over such leaks fueling climate change and explosion hazards in areas with aging natural gas delivery infrastructures. Dead or dying trees were 30 times more likely to have been exposed to methane in the soil surrounding their roots than healthy trees, according to the study published last month in the journal *Environmental Pollution*.

The study measured soil concentrations of methane and oxygen at four points around the trunks of 84 dead or dying trees and 97 healthy trees. For trees that had elevated levels of methane in the surrounding soil, the highest concentrations were found in the dirt between the trees and the street, suggesting that the gas had leaked from natural gas pipelines buried beneath roadways.

Methane, the main natural gas component, is 84 times more potent in warming the atmosphere than CO₂ over a 20 year period, so plugging gas leaks is crucial in tackling climate change.

VATICAN SPURS “LAUDATO TREE” INITIATIVE IN AFRICA

The Vatican, through recent pronouncements by Pope Francis and through support from the Vatican bureaucracy (via its Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) has given renewed attention to the “Laudato Tree” movement, inspired by Pope Francis' Encyclical ***Laudato Si: on the care for our common home***. *Laudato Si*, which is arguably the most comprehensive endorsement of ecological and climate action yet produced by any faith community, can be read or downloaded from <https://laudatosi.com/watch>.

Laudato Tree, a charity inaugurated in 2018 by the President of Ireland, supports the Great Green Wall, a pan-African initiative that aims to plant a belt of vegetation 8,000 miles long to reverse the effects of desert expansion caused by climate change in the 11 countries of the Sahel-Saharan region. Its website is at <https://laudatotree.ie/>. Laudato Tree works with the African Union, the U. N., the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and other supporters of the Great Green Wall to have the whole Wall in place by 2030.

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Organizers originally envisioned a Laudato Tree contribution of one million trees to the Green Wall, but with the Pope's encouragement that target has risen to seven million trees.

The planting season for trees in the Sahel is in July and August. Laudato Tree aims to plant 100,000 trees this year, including a symbolic gift of 1,000 trees from Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson of Ghana on behalf of the Pope. Turkson, who was a leading candidate for election as Pope in 2013, is head of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, created by the Vatican in 2017 to amalgamate the work of four social justice-oriented Pontifical Councils. Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, a Jesuit priest, is under-secretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery. Czerny's pectoral cross (a crucifix worn around the neck by Catholic bishops) is made from the remains of a boat used by migrants to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa

The Great Green Wall idea was conceived by Burkina Faso's President Thomas Sankara and was given early support by Pope John Paul II, who in 1984 founded the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel. The Foundation has distributed us\$64 million across the Sahel to support both Christian and Muslim communities.

Papal support for the Laudato Tree project is part of a larger year-long Vatican initiative to mark the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si's* publication. The anniversary year runs until May 24, 2021.

WOULD WE DO THIS TO CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL?

To expand an iron ore mine, Anglo-Australian mining company Rio Tinto has destroyed, by blasting, two Juukan Gorge caves in Western Australia that were continuously occupied for 46,000 years and are sacred to local Indigenous Australians. A dig in 2014 unearthed more than 7,000 artefacts and showed that the caves are the only known sites in inland Australia that were occupied throughout the last Ice Age. Finds included a 4,000-year-old length of plaited human hair, woven from strands from the heads of several different people, which DNA testing revealed were the direct ancestors of Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura traditional owners living today.

Burchell Hayes, director of the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura Aboriginal Corporation, says the blasts might make it impossible to show future generations their links to their heritage: *"We can't take them out there to stand at the rock shelter and say: this is where your ancestors lived, starting 46,000 years ago."*

The act of destruction was legal under Australia's antiquated Aboriginal heritage laws.

Rio Tinto often conducts environmentally devastating mining operations. Norway's Government Pension Fund divested itself of Rio Tinto shares and banned further investment due to severe environmental damage from Indonesia's Grasberg mine partly owned by Rio Tinto. The company is one of the world's top 100 industrial greenhouse gas producers, accounting for 0.75% of global industrial greenhouse gas emissions between 1988 and 2015. In 2018, Rio Tinto was urged by institutional investors to set rules requiring it to adhere to the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Rio Tinto's top executives rejected the resolution.

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COMMERCIAL ELECTRIC PLANE FLIES

The world's largest all-electric aircraft took to the skies over Washington State for the first time last week for a full 30 minutes and generated zero carbon emissions.

The plane is a Cessna Caravan, retrofitted with an electric engine. It can carry nine passengers but a test pilot took the inaugural flight alone, cruising at a speed of 114 mph. The engine maker, magniX, hopes the aircraft will enter commercial service by the end of 2021 and have a range of 100 miles. Roei Ganzarski, the CEO of magniX, said current conventional airplanes are both expensive to operate and very polluting:

“Electric airplanes will be 40%-70% lower cost to operate per flight hour. That means operators will be able to fly more planes into smaller airports, meaning a shorter and door-to-door experience, with no harmful CO₂ emissions.”

Ganzarski said the company believed all flights of less than 1,000 miles would be completely electric in 15 years' time, but he also said:

“Battery density is not where we would like to see it. While it is good for ultra-short flights of 100 miles on a retrofit aircraft and over 500 miles on new design aircraft, there is plenty of untapped potential in batteries. Now that the first commercial aircraft has flown, all-electric, battery companies are starting to work more diligently on aerospace-ready battery solutions.”

COP 26 POSTPONED FOR ONE YEAR

The United Nations and the British government have announced that the next round of global climate talks, COP26, is postponed until November 2021, a year after it was scheduled to take place in Glasgow. Said Alok Sharma, UK business secretary and Cop26 president:

“While we rightly focus on fighting the immediate crisis of the coronavirus, we must not lose sight of the huge challenges of climate change. We are working with our international partners on an ambitious roadmap for global climate action between now and November 2021. Everyone will need to raise their ambitions to tackle climate change.”

Under the terms of the Paris agreement signed in 2015, countries must come forward every five years with revised plans on curbing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris goal of limiting global heating to no more than 2°C, but preferably no more than 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels. Current national targets would lead to at least a 3°C temperature increase.

Sonam Wangdi of Bhutan, Chair of the UN's Least Developed Countries group (countries most at risk from the pandemic, global warming and ensuing economic dislocations), said:

“The postponement of climate negotiations should not be taken as postponement of climate action. Climate action has been delayed long enough ... To focus on recovering from the Covid-19 crisis while ignoring action to address the climate crisis would only lead to more devastation in the future.”

Said Janine Felson, of Belize, who chairs the U.N. Alliance of Small Island States:

“Small island developing states are at the brink of economic collapse, with the major drivers of our economies at a standstill. This comes at a time when we are preparing for a volatile hurricane season.”

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FOUR DAY WORK WEEK ON THE HORIZON?

Dr Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, director of the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford University, believes that changes being made due to the coronavirus could be the first step towards a four day work week. Says De Neve:

“I do think if there’s one silver lining, probably the biggest silver lining coming out of all of this crisis, it will probably be the potential for more flexible working hours and work from home practices. I think in the future it would be very hard for a manager to say nope, you can’t work - say Wednesday afternoon or Friday from home - because we’ve kind of shown we can.”

Two versions of a four day work week are currently under debate around the world. One version involves four days of work, still totaling 40 hours per week. The other version involves a four day week but also a reduction in total hours worked per week. This version is sometimes proposed as a way to increase employment in a post-pandemic world, but founders on the issue of whether it’s feasible to reduce working hours without reducing incomes.

A 2012 study by the Britain’s Henley Business School estimates that a four day 40 hour working model would see U.K. employees driving around 560 million fewer miles every week, reducing emissions from traffic.

During Microsoft Japan’s 2019 trial of a four day work week, the company saw electricity costs drop by nearly a quarter and those who took Fridays off printed 60% fewer pages. In the U.S., studies have suggested that adopting shorter, more European working hours could cut carbon emissions by 7%. After a 35 hour work week was implemented in France in 2000, studies showed that people spent their newfound free time on activities with low environmental impacts – spending time with family or enjoying local public spaces for instance – rather than buying more or taking carbon intensive trips. As well, pilot projects in work-week reduction suggest that the reduction makes employees more productive.

A June 2018 Angus Reed poll of Canadians showed that 68% of those surveyed said they would prefer working 10-hour days for four days a week. All age groups were open to the idea of reducing the work week by one day while still working 40 hours. Seven-in-ten from each generation said this is something they would support. Almost half of respondents (47%) said that moving to a 30-hour work week from 40 hours is a good idea. Notably, the size of the group saying the opposite – that this is a bad idea – is less than half of what it was in the 1950’s and 60’s, down to just 31%.

Last week Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand’s Prime Minister, suggested reducing the country’s working week to four days. During the eight weeks between March and April 2018, the New Zealand company Perpetual Guardian conducted a corporate experiment by allowing staff to only work four days a week. All other employment conditions, including remuneration, were unchanged. The results found work/life balance improved significantly from 54% in 2017 to 78% in the post-trial survey. Staff stress levels dropped from 45% pre-trial to 38% post-trial. The results also found productivity had increased by 20%, and employees were more engaged and enthusiastic.

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OUR READERS KNOW A THING OR TWO

Responding to an article in the last issue about the activities of a private high-tech tree planting firm, and alluding to reader responses to Michael Moore's film *Planet of the Humans*, a dear reader said:

"The Flash Forest initiative sounds like an intriguing techno green/silver bullet, but there aren't any really. They ought to start by saying they'll track their seedlings rather than 'up to 5 years' for something more like 'at least 10 years'; These are seeds, not even 10 inchers. Our experience with our plantation (sadly) forest is that it initially also needed mowing. No wonder they can deliver a forest for 25% less -- if they can deliver anything. Good luck to them.

What of course we also really need is slower – and less – development. An economy not based on exponential growth (and exponentially growing inequality), which some of our readers pointed out in response to Moore's film (and of course others dodged by saying 'Oh, we're supposed to just throw up our hands.')"

ADD ONE HALF A CUP OF SHREDDED BLEAT

The Presiding Official said a subcommittee of experts has been struck.

The Presiding Official said it's all under our control, no need to worry.

The Presiding Official said files have been created, papers written.

The Presiding Official said risks have been calculated in advance.

The Presiding Official said quantitative studies have been done.

The Presiding Official said move on nothing to see here folks.

The Presiding Official said our best interests are factored in.

The Presiding Official said this isn't the first time you know.

The Presiding Official said credentials have been certified.

The Presiding Official said the data are invariably robust.

The Presiding Official said no stones will go unturned.

The Presiding Official said your help is unnecessary.

The Presiding Official said in all matters, prudence.

The Presiding Official said we know who you are.

The Presiding Official said O etcetera etcetera.

The Presiding Official said you must trust us.

The Presiding Official said yes we hear you.

The Presiding Official said no we hear you.

The Presiding Official said we must fly.

waddle

waddle

waddle

and then

let's begin again.

John Butler

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IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: THE TYRANNY OF THE LAWN

My first paying job as I grew up in Sudbury was the exalted position of gardener's helper at Sudbury Memorial Hospital. I was the sole helper to the hospital gardener, a man named Luigi, an Italian immigrant. There are five men I've met in my life who I could say were complete gentleman. Luigi was one of them. The highlight of each working day for Luigi was the afternoon coffee break. It became my highlight too. We hunkered down with our coffees in the gardening storage room, reclining like Roman patricians on bags of fertilizer while listening to Italian opera thanks to a portable record player Luigi kept in the storage room. I knew nothing about opera. Luigi knew everything. He taught me.

Luigi hated lawns. He had to care for the hospital lawn, keeping it green, shaved, flat and mummified – not an easy feat because the hospital was built into a bedrock hillside. He liked growing flowers better, but his passion in life (beyond family and opera) was growing vegetables. Tucked into a patch of peonies near the hospital's emergency entrance, he grew several tomato plants. The tomatoes were for an elderly cleaning woman who dropped by from time to time to say hello to Luigi in his little tool-strewn equivalent of Massey Hall.

Luigi loved Thursday afternoons, when he and I would take the hospital pickup truck, laden with tools and bags of potting soil and fertilizer, to the hospital administrator's house to tend his private lawn and garden – a misappropriation of hospital manpower and supplies, but something Luigi didn't mind. Back in Calabria, he said, there was always a "Direttore" or two who expected such personal service and subservience. Truth be told, Luigi took pride in knowing that his labor gave the hospital administrator the best vegetable garden in his neighborhood.

My subsequent summer jobs were as a nickel miner in Creighton Eight Shaft. There wasn't much demand for gardening skills 5,800 feet underground. Yet many of the miners – Italians, Finns, Ukrainians, Croatians, Poles by background, most of them – rose to the surface at the end of their shifts and went home to tend families and gardens. The fruits of their labors often ended up in their lunch pails, giving rise to a brisk trade in home-grown edibles during our thirty minute lunch breaks.

Truth be told again, I was never any good at gardening. I tried a few times and failed, partly through lack of skill and partly through lack of interest. For me, watching a shoot wiggle its way through the muck to become a leafy flowering thing never held the almost mystical charm it holds for some people. I envy them.

But when we grow up and put away childish things and buy a house, we usually become the owners of a lawn as well – an accursed patch of bland monoculture that turns us into a one-person chain gang, seeding, patching, fertilizing and weeding, all so the neighbors won't deem us slothful and bereft of neighborhood pride.

In Mount Joy where we lived for many years there lived a character common to many neighborhoods – a horticultural fascist. He lived across the street, four doors down. His lawn was immaculate. After rain storms he used a wet vac to sop up puddles on his asphalt driveway. He disliked children who weren't on a leash because they strayed onto his fine fescue. He hated dogs because they piddled on his greenery, and cats because they scratched up his manicured mulch (I don't think he worried about the birds they killed). We called him Mister Wonderful.

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Mister W. had a hold over me. I was convinced he gossiped with the neighbors about my slobbish lawn-craft. I felt I had been weighed in the scale by him and found wanting. I dutifully mowed and watered. I occasionally withdrew handfuls of little white pellets from a fertilizer bag that had incomprehensible sets of numbers on it, and cast the pellets as munchies to my waiting clumps of grass, each clump like a tiny baby bird, beak open and crying out for sustenance. But I was failing. I needed professional help.

I hired a lawn care company. They sent an emergency team to rescue my lawn. They medicated it with God knows what. They provided me with a report that looked like a diagnostic sheet on a doctor's clipboard. It was filled with words like "*infestation*" and "*rehabilitation*". The company implied that no cost was too great, no burden too big to bear, if it rescued my lawn.

After a year of their accusations that I was a grass murderer, I fired the lawn care company. Dandelions grew again. Bare patches between my grass clumps grew bigger. I was sure that at meetings of the local Lawnist League, Mr. Wonderful cited me as an example of a lawn backslider. "*Poor man,*" I thought I could hear him say, "*He tried and failed. He just doesn't have it in him. He must be shunned before his illness spreads.*"

Then we moved to the country. Lots of land, all of it growing green things without aid of a lawn care company. No one like Mister Wonderful in sight. The house was situated in a lovely meadow replete with dozens of species of wildflowers.

"*I must make this a lawn,*" I said. And that meant buying a lawn tractor. I sat on it, proud as punch, feeling very farmer-like as the scent of my freshly slaughtered vegetation masked the cheesy smell of the pig barn down the road. It looked pretty. I thought, "*If I cut a bigger area it will look prettier.*" And each year it got bigger. And prettier. And less welcoming to life. I didn't embalm it chemically the way Mister Wonderful had treated his beloved lawn. But by last year it was large enough that it took me five hours to cut if I worked non-stop and spewed five hours of spent gasoline fumes into the air.

This year, chastened, I decide to cut way back (pardon the pun), cutting perhaps a quarter of what I had once cut. Well, maybe a third. Well, maybe a bit more than a third....

But why even a third? I need to go cold turkey. I will leave undisturbed as much as I can so it will grow as much as it wants, as tall as it wants.

I realize that I have been victimized by the social code built into lawns. It's code that says, "*I'm well off enough to own a piece of land. And on it I will grow what I want, not what nature wants, as a sign that I dominate this patch of ground. I am Alpha Man. I will decide which creatures will derive sustenance from my ground and which will not.*"

So I will let it grow. But I will mow a neat tractor-wide border around it, so passers-by and visitors know that I am not merely lazy. They will know I'm a conservationist, a bee-saver, an all-round ecologically sensitive guy.

And you never know when Mister Wonderful will drive down the road.

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FACTS THAT HELP US CHANGE THE WORLD

It was 80 degrees Fahrenheit above the Arctic Circle in Mid-May. A little farther south, in Siberia, it was 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Arctic sea ice in the neighboring Kara Sea took the deepest May nose dive ever recorded. Swaths of the region are on fire. Last summer, it reached nearly 95 degrees Fahrenheit above the Arctic Circle in Sweden. The same summer, the mercury hit 70 degrees Fahrenheit at the northernmost settlement on the planet. Greenland also melted and burned.

source: Gizmodo Earther (Brian Kahn), May 22, 2020

Village Green Editor's note: in filing this story, writer Brian Kahn said:

"I have to be honest. I'm getting sick of writing these stories. The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the globe, and what's happening there is unprecedented. But how many ways can you talk about the fact that the Arctic is just extremely, massively fucked by climate change when the impacts are relentless? After a while, the degrees above normal start to feel normal, and the records are ephemeral, set to broken again the next year. But here we are with just another absolutely outlandish occurrence. I'll keep writing about them, because even if the records start to blend together, that in itself is a sign we really need to get our shit together and cut emissions now."

SHE SAID / HE SAID

"I do not know many Negroes who are eager to be 'accepted' by white people, still less to be loved by them; they, the blacks, simply don't wish to be beaten over the head by the whites every instant of our brief passage on this planet. White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this – which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never – the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed... White people, who had robbed black people of their liberty and who profited by this theft every hour that they lived, had no moral ground on which to stand. They had the judges, the juries, the shotguns, the law – in a word, power. But it was a criminal power, to be feared but not respected, and to be outwitted in any way whatever. And those virtues preached but not practiced by the white world were merely another means of holding Negroes in subjection... The real reason that nonviolence is considered to be a virtue in Negroes – I am not speaking now of its tactical value, another matter altogether – is that white men do not want their lives, their self-image, or their property threatened."

James Baldwin, *Letter from a Region in My Mind*,
The New Yorker, November 17, 1962

"One of my earliest defining moments was a few years before I started medical school, when a border officer accused me of lying about having aspirations of becoming a physician. His words stayed with me for years, as I faced invalidations about my experience as a woman of color in medicine. I remembered his words when a patient asked me to leave because they could not believe that the only Black person in the room was also training to become a doctor. I did not want my story to be written by others; I did not want to be inaccurately defined on my own journey and knew that I had to reclaim my narrative."

Dr. Chika Oriuwa, the first Black woman to be chosen as valedictorian for U of T's faculty of medicine, in her valedictory address, June 2, 2020

THE VILLAGE GREEN

Number Twenty-five, June 3, 2020

“Now is a great time to be building a pipeline, because you can’t have protests of more than 15 people... Let’s get it built.”

Sonya Savage, Alberta energy minister

“For years I’ve made the argument that we need both incremental and systems change. It’s only over the past few years that I’ve realized we need both of those things within ourselves. We need small discrete behaviour change goals, and larger actions to work towards. Together, they comprise our action pie. Small efforts feel inconsequential without a bigger goal. Sustained efforts feel laborious without quick wins. It’s all about building your short and long, while wearing a shortlong. Your smalls can be simple behaviours you want to make habitual, local climate efforts you want to help out with, emails you want to write, straws you want to eschew, thermostats you want to besweater. Your bigs are the things that require sustained effort over time - a large campaign, a costly environmental retrofit, a sticky challenge, a full-time environmental job or volunteering effort.”

“Sarah”, *Minimum Viable Planet* newsletter, May 21, 2020

“The most curious of all . . . lives are the human ones, because we can destroy, but also because we can decide not to destroy. The turtle does what she does, and magnificently. She can’t not do it, though, any more than the beaver can decide to take a break from building dams or the bee from making honey. But if the bird’s special gift is flight, ours is the possibility of restraint. We’re the only creature who can decide not to do something we’re capable of doing. That’s our superpower, even if we exercise it too rarely.”

Bill McKibben, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* 2019

“I still remember asking my high school guidance teacher for permission to take a second year of algebra instead of a fifth year of Latin. She looked down her nose at me and sneered, ‘What lady would take mathematics instead of Latin?’”

Nancy Grace Roman, NASA's first chief astronomer
(NASA has named its newest space telescope after her)

“People with vested interests have been spending millions of dollars a year for three decades to trick us into believing either that there is not a scientific consensus on climate change (there is) or that climate scientists are not credible experts (they are). There is no global conspiracy among scientists to cause a global panic about climate change in order to get rich. If anything, it would be far more lucrative for climate scientists to deny climate change. For example, Craig Idso – a prominent climate change denier who has nonetheless not published on the topic since 2003 – was reportedly paid \$11,600 per month in 2012 by the Heartland Institute, a conservative think-tank funded by the oil industry. Trust me, being employed as a scientist at a university is not nearly as lucrative.”

cognitive scientist Gordon Pennycook, *How the COVID-19 crisis exposes widespread climate change hypocrisy*, CBC Saskatchewan Opinion page, May 22, 2020

“The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.”

Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, 1903

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“The evils of climate change are evident in the destruction of biodiversity as other living species of the planet face the risk of becoming extinct due to their inability to adapt quickly to the changes that we have caused. Pope Francis laments, ‘Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right’. Creatures ‘have a value of their own in God’s eyes’ and they have the inherent right not only to exist but also to fulfill their particular function in the community of life (i.e., ecosystem) and to reach the fullness of life as far as their nature would allow. If we recognize that all created realities originate from the Creator, we must also see to it that they are respected and valued.”

Pastoral letter from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 16 July, 2019

“This trend of more frequent destabilizing crises has been building over the past 20 years: 9/11, the Great Recession of 2008, Covid-19 and climate change. Pandemics are no longer just biological – they are now geopolitical, financial and atmospheric, too. And we will suffer increasing consequences unless we start behaving differently and treating Mother Earth differently... You have to be in total denial not to see all of this as one giant flashing warning signal for our looming – and potentially worst – global disaster, climate change.”

Thomas L. Friedman, *How We Broke the World*, New York Times, May 30, 2020

**A long hard journey,
rain beating down the clover
like a wanderer's feet**

Yosa Buson (1716-1784)

For information about *The Village Green*, or to subscribe to it (free), please contact John Butler at 519 923-6335 or agora@xplornet.com