

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

Number Twenty-seven, October 6, 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.**

## WHO I AM

In the last edition of *The Village Green* I said I wanted to re-orient it from news and announcements to analytical essays and human interest stories. One reader suggested I start the human interest stream by telling readers about myself. Here goes.

I was born in England and raised as an adopted only child in a working class family in Sudbury Ontario. Childhood blood-clotting deficiencies (now long past) kept me from athletic activities and roughhousing, so I found books as my compensation and I honed my sense of humor as my alternative to fighting my way out of tense situations. I don't remember ever feeling hard done by, oppressed or repressed at any time in my childhood. It was close to idyllic.

My teen years involved five years as the only non-Catholic in a Catholic high school. I take inordinate pride in having gotten the school's highest marks in Religious Knowledge for three of those years. This created a problem. The award for highest RK marks each year was supposed to be a rosary blessed by the Holy Father. Giving rosaries to St. Charles College's only heretic would have embarrassed my dear teachers, so they gave me books instead. I graduated with no rosaries but (thanks to these teachers) with an interest in the ethics of social change.

After a lackluster university stint (drugs and alcohol were more interesting than classes and essays) I took a summer job with the psychology department at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. The summer job lasted seven years. I did research, clinical, teaching and administrative work. I thought I was God's gift to people with mental illness. I was wrong.

I then spent three years in the bowels of Ontario's Ministry of Health, helping set up 32 local district health councils (DHCs) – bodies that advised the Minister of Health on health needs in their communities. I then served as Executive Director of the Algoma District Health Council for three years, ED of the Peel DHC for eleven years, and ED of the Association of District Health Councils of Ontario for six years. In these jobs I had the privilege of making just about every mistake it's possible to make in health system planning.

Thereafter, armed with my quiver of mistakes, I created my own consulting company called The Agora Group. I and my affiliated consultants specialized in planning and organizational development in the health and social service sectors. I added more luminous mistakes to my glowing and growing portfolio. After sixteen years I retired and we moved to our rural property in Grey Highlands, where I indulge my passion for local history, exploring the lives of people who were magnificently more successful, and egregiously more mistaken, than I.

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A bit over a year ago, friend Danielle Valiquette asked me to organize a public Green New Deal session in Grey Highlands. I knew squat about climate action, but I knew a bit about meeting facilitation. We hosted almost a hundred people at the meeting in Flesherton.

A few participants said that regular written communication with local climate activists would be useful. So I created **The Village Green**. Through it I've met and learned from some of the most committed, thoughtful, collegial, incisive and decisive people I could ever have the honor to know. To those folks, thank you. I continue to learn from you.

That's who I am.

## IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: THE GURU GRADIENT

***“There are many guidelines for moving forward; we do not have to invent them, we simply have to integrate lessons already learned into our planning processes.”***

*Planning Through the Lens of Climate Change,*  
Climate Action Team Grey Bruce, John Anderson, Spring 2020

Folks in the climate action movement need every resource they can get. Knowledge, distilled into wisdom, constitutes one of the major resource pools available to us. That knowledge and wisdom are embedded largely in what people, past and present, have recorded as the world's wisdom trail. Follow it and add to it, and we may get where we want to go. When Greta Thunberg and others advise us to “*follow the science*”, they are urging us to walk the knowledge trail.

We could define the trail narrowly, meaning only “*follow those scientists steeped in climate-related sciences*” – ecology, meteorology, glaciology, oceanography and quite a few others.

But the trail is wider than that. It is wide enough to allow for social sciences, as well as a host of fields that we don't call science. It is wide enough to allow the passage of philosophers, engineers, theologians, poets, lawyers, film makers, practical politicians, journalists, planners, pedagogues, clergy, business administrators, stand-up comedians, communication experts. The trail is wide enough to allow for theoretical thinkers, experimenters, technicians, craftspeople and people who have suffered – anyone whose knowledge and wisdom can help get us out of the mess we're in, who can help us to define the problem and to solve it.

So the dictum “*follow the science*” fits well within the broader dictum “*follow the wisdom*”.

Much of the wisdom is embedded in people (and their writings) who live beyond Grey, Bruce and Simcoe. But within our own areas we have more than a few people who, with their knowledge and wisdom, can help us walk down the trail of wisdom – and who can walk with us.

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As we create and nurture a greater number of climate action groups in this area, we can wait to see if our local wisdom-carriers choose to join our climate action groups, or we can actively seek them out – we can cajole and pester them if necessary until they share their wisdom with us. If the Upper Rubber Boot Climate Action Team doesn't have a trained publicist who has joined the team, then the team can find one and make it easy for her to share her wisdom with Upper Rubber Boot and with other communities and teams.

Sitting back and waiting for local wisdom to come to us should not be our default position.

But there are a few boulders on the path.

One boulder is the occasional marriage of knowledge and arrogance. By that, I mean the person who, by virtue of their knowledge, dismisses all other kinds of knowledge, or who assumes that because they are an expert in one field, they are an expert in other fields.

One version of this I've encountered a few times is the person trained in science or engineering, passionate about climate issues, who believes their knowledge and commitment axiomatically make them experts in how to lobby government or conduct a planning process or write a media release. They are dismissive of other thinkers and disciplines and often trot out their academic credentials as if those credentials alone prove their case. This is a form of arrogance sometimes born of hubris, and sometimes born of frustration because the expert has not been heard and heeded in the past. Folks wrapped and trapped in this form of arrogance can be merely annoying or actually dangerous.

This crossed my mind recently when I read a posting on *worktogether* (Keybase) from a local climate scientist, venting his frustration. Said he (speaking of his aggrieved self):

***"By now, it is understood by many that there is only one climate scientist in the County. I have offered my service, pro bono, to WG [West Grey], Grey County, and the Green Party. Stuffed, all three."***

He goes on to question the integrity of one of the community processes he offered to help:

***"It's worse than you think. The 'sympathetic' response you got from WG [West Grey] was a front. They aren't really interested in change."***

His tentative solution for engaging municipalities – assuming it's not mere sarcasm – seems to have been formulated without the most basic understanding of how to mobilize community support:

***"Maybe set up a discussion roundtable, invite them all, try to shame them into action?"***

Yes, I'm picking on the man. I'm doing it to make a point. We shouldn't be building arrogant knowledge empires. We should be building knowledge bridges, using blueprints that are based on how little each of us knows in the face of all the knowledge out there.

As I write this, I'm reminded of the lesson I keep trying to heed from the work of esteemed life scientist Edward O. Wilson. Originally an ant biologist (in part because a vision impairment led him to focus best on little things), Wilson realized at one point during his time as a Harvard researcher and professor that the tools and concepts he had absorbed as a biologist were insufficient to help him fully explore the social behaviors of ants. So he did the near-unthinkable

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in academia of the 1970's – he walked down the hall to talk to and learn from folks in the sociology department. Ultimately this reaching out to other knowledge bases led him to help found an entirely new discipline – sociobiology. Many findings of sociobiology are open to dispute. Nevertheless, the coming together of disparate bodies of knowledge did create a new synthesized body of knowledge that advanced our thinking about the place of living beings acting in congregates in our world.

Wilson followed up his sociobiological explorations with a book, **Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge** (1998), in which he argues that knowledge has split into more and more isolated and at times antagonistic bodies of knowledge, and that we need a “jumping together” of these separate knowledge bases if we are to learn and survive.

Fortunately a great many of the experts in our communities are not of the “me-and-my-kind-know-everything” variety. Many of them, by virtue of their knowledge, are willing to share, learn and build bridges. Many of them are aptly described by the old English adage “**The more appelen the tree beareth, the more sche boweth to the folk.**”

On the guru gradient running from knowers who exclude and hoard, to knowers who include and share, let's engage the knowers who include and share. Identify them, chase them down, include them, learn from them, honor them.

Let's think of ourselves as sponges with legs, capable of moving to what and who we need, rather than waiting passively for knowledgeable people to enter our neighborhood.

Respectfully submitted to the *polis*,  
John Butler

## IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: I'M STILL CRANKY

Another knowledge glitch plagues our movement from time to time: the True Believer<sup>1</sup>.

Sometimes – but not always – the True Believer is a new “convert” to climate action who has been exposed to a single climate idea or approach or book or guru, and who has become so besotted by the fragment of knowledge they've just found that they expect everyone else in the movement to become just as besotted. “**I've just watched a wonderful video,**” says this True Believer. “**It outlines five steps to get from here to Paradise. Let's all now follow these five steps, and only these five steps, while singing Hallelujah.**”

If this version of getting from here to there keeps the True Believer engaged in change, fair enough. But it is often in the nature of True Believers to be preachers and missionaries, eager to reap converts to their new-found beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this phrase, and some of the ideas surrounding it, from Eric Hoffer's book **The True Believer: Thoughts On The Nature Of Mass Movements** (1951). Hoffer's life itself is a lesson on where we find knowledge. Hoffer, a migrant worker, longshoreman and gold miner, wrote ten insightful books. He had no academic qualifications. He once said that America's underclass was “*lumpy with talent*”. One could say the same for our communities and for the climate action movement.

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Being cranky, my tendency is to want to tell such True Believers to sit down, shut up, listen and learn. But that approach kills two good birds with one bad stone. That approach is a negation of both message and messenger. It drives away a potential comrade and it leads us to ignore the part of the True Believer's message that may be a valuable addition to our knowledge base. A little tact and patience and openness make more sense than throwing a stone.

Another version of the True Believer is that person, be he a newcomer or old hand, who opts for simplicity above complexity. Sometimes the climate solutions that will work are complex. Sometimes they have internal inconsistencies. Sometimes they are not easy. Sometimes they are a mix of faith and evidence. Some of us (including myself at times) hanker instead for the simple, the Five Easy Steps To Save The World. Yearning can trump evidence.

Another kind of True Believer can be the inventor of a belief – the person who has conceived what they take to be an effective and marketable new idea. In the course of marketing their idea they oversimplify it, they ascribe to it more power than it really has, and they dismiss other ideas. They are missionaries for religions they've invented. At worst, they sell snake oil.

Many social movements (and climate action is a social movement) end up experiencing civil wars between different sets of True Believers, or between True Believers and less ideologically driven members of the movement (we have our Bolsheviks and Mensheviks). Honest debate is essential to keep social movements from atrophying, but civil wars in which sides aim at extinguishing each other are wasteful. They lend themselves to two pernicious logical fallacies:

- The fallacy of *argumentum ad lapidem* ("appeal to the stone") that consists of dismissing a statement as absurd, invalid or incorrect, without giving proof of its absurdity
- The fallacy called *invincible ignorance* – the refusal to believe the opposing argument, ignoring any evidence given.

It would be paradoxical of me to suggest *Five Simple Ways To Avoid Oversimplification*. There are not five simple ways. If there were, I would write a book about them and urge you to buy it. But one can at least try to adopt an open mind while not surrendering to analysis paralysis.

For my own part (it may not work for everyone), I try to act in accordance with the motto of the agrarian movement that flourished in the nineteenth century called The Grange<sup>2</sup> (even though I don't always succeed):

**"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity"**

Respectfully submitted to the *polis*,  
John Butler

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<sup>2</sup> Its full name is the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry. It still exists, though much reduced. Its motto is derived from the motto of the Moravian Church: **"In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, love"**.

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## OUR READERS KNOW A THING OR TWO

One dear reader responded to the last issue's proposed change in the focus of *The Village Green* by making a tempting suggestion:

***"I for one enjoy The Village Green and missed it when you took a break for a few months. Alas, that is what old farts do. Those ten minute power naps turn into a two month coma. I am OK with the changes that you have proposed but suggest one additional feature. Publish a list of offenders – all the people who breach the natural laws of respect for our environment. You could circulate a map identifying their locations and we could paint nasty slogans on their barns etc. You could call it 'The Village Idiots' List!'"***

Another dear reader shared these thoughts:

***"I particularly liked understanding all the things that Ziggy Kleinau worked to do during most of his life, because he really wanted to help make necessary and meaningful changes in the areas he could. I truly admire people who have long-term goals and who do everything they can to make them happen. When people do that, the final outcomes are not as important to me, just because regardless of outcomes, the person was devoted and caring. And the world needs to be inspired and appreciate that, and take over moving things like climate and environmental forward if they so choose."***

## SHE SAID / HE SAID

On October 5 the Vatican issued the third encyclical written by Pope Francis. A papal encyclical is a kind of letter about Roman Catholic doctrine, authored by the Pope and usually addressed to patriarchs, primates, archbishops and bishops in communion with the Holy See.

Encyclicals aren't a dime a dozen. They are well researched theologically, and sometimes well researched socially and scientifically, as the foundation for their moral and ethical pronouncements. At the very least, an encyclical sparks discussion and debate within a Christian denomination numbering 1.2 billion people. Encyclicals addressing broad social issues often have influence well beyond the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis' second encyclical, ***Laudato Si'*** ("***Praise be to you – On Care For Our Common Home***"), issued in May 2015, is a ringing endorsement of climate and environmental action. It is at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

His third encyclical, just released, is ***Fratelli Tutti*** ("***Brothers All***"), an unfortunately gender-biased title. It should strike a chord with those who believe in the Green New Deal's principle that says we can't tackle climate change successfully unless we also deal with socioeconomic issues. Francis takes particular aim at trickle-down economic theories that have been, for decades, a bulwark of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The encyclical is at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

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***Fratelli Tutti*** will probably annoy the hell out of people who want churches to stay out of politics. It will also annoy the bejesus out of conservative Catholics who already believe this Pope is too radical and who would like to limit the Church's political activities to the issue of abortion.

Below are some of the encyclical's key passages:

**168. The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith. Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of “spillover” or “trickle” – without using the name – as the only solution to societal problems. There is little appreciation of the fact that the alleged “spillover” does not resolve the inequality that gives rise to new forms of violence threatening the fabric of society. It is imperative to have a proactive economic policy directed at promoting an economy that favours productive diversity and business creativity and makes it possible for jobs to be created and not cut. Financial speculation fundamentally aimed at quick profit continues to wreak havoc. Indeed, without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function. And today this trust has ceased to exist. The story did not end the way it was meant to, and the dogmatic formulae of prevailing economic theory proved not to be infallible. The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need.**

**169. In some closed and monochrome economic approaches, for example, there seems to be no place for popular movements that unite the unemployed, temporary and informal workers and many others who do not easily find a place in existing structures. Yet those movements manage various forms of popular economy and of community production. What is needed is a model of social, political and economic participation that can include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny, while also ensuring that these experiences of solidarity which grow up from below, from the subsoil of the planet – can come together, be more coordinated, keep on meeting one another. This, however, must happen in a way that will not betray their distinctive way of acting as sowers of change, promoters of a process involving millions of actions, great and small, creatively intertwined like words in a poem. In that sense, such movements are “social poets” that, in their own way, work, propose, promote and liberate. They help make possible an integral human development that goes beyond the idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a project that reunites peoples. They may be troublesome, and certain “theorists” may find it hard to classify them, yet we must find the courage to acknowledge that, without them, democracy atrophies, turns into a mere word, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future.**

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170. I would once more observe that the financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world. Indeed, it appears that the actual strategies developed worldwide in the wake of the crisis fostered greater individualism, less integration and increased freedom for the truly powerful, who always find a way to escape unscathed.

171. I would also insist that to give to each his own – to cite the classic definition of justice – means that no human individual or group can consider itself absolute, entitled to bypass the dignity and the rights of other individuals or their social groupings. The effective distribution of power (especially political, economic, defence-related and technological power) among a plurality of subjects, and the creation of a juridical system for regulating claims and interests, are one concrete way of limiting power. Yet today's world presents us with many false rights and – at the same time – broad sectors which are vulnerable, victims of power badly exercised.

172. The twenty-first century is witnessing a weakening of the power of nation states, chiefly because the economic and financial sectors, being transnational, tend to prevail over the political. Given this situation, it is essential to devise stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments, and empowered to impose sanctions. When we talk about the possibility of some form of world authority regulated by law, we need not necessarily think of a personal authority. Still, such an authority ought at least to promote more effective world organizations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defence of fundamental human rights.....

174. Courage and generosity are needed in order freely to establish shared goals and to ensure the worldwide observance of certain essential norms. For this to be truly useful, it is essential to uphold the need to be faithful to agreements undertaken (*pacta sunt servanda*), and to avoid the temptation to appeal to the law of force rather than to the force of law. This means reinforcing the normative instruments for the peaceful resolution of controversies... so as to strengthen their scope and binding force. Among these normative instruments, preference should be given to multilateral agreements between states, because, more than bilateral agreements, they guarantee the promotion of a truly universal common good and the protection of weaker states.

175. Providentially, many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, its lack of attention to fundamental human rights and to the critical needs of certain groups. Here we can see a concrete application of the principle of subsidiarity, which justifies the participation and activity of communities and organizations on lower levels as a means of integrating and complementing the activity of the state. These groups and organizations often carry out commendable efforts in the service of the common good and their members at times show true heroism, revealing something of the grandeur of which our humanity is still capable.

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# **THE VILLAGE GREEN**

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**a dog howling  
sound of footsteps  
longer nights**

**Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)**

**For information about *The Village Green*, or to subscribe to it (free), please  
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