

Why Should We Even Bother?

As a long-time climate activist, when speaking to groups about our planet's plight, the question that most often comes up goes something like: "If we take it as a given that we are in a climate emergency, then how do we live our lives in a way that helps to address that? How do we respond as individuals in a meaningful way?"

That question always leads to discussions about actions that might help mitigate the man-made damage we've inflicted upon our beleaguered earth.

What I'm noticing now, though, as that doomsday clock gets closer to midnight without aggressive action being taken, is that the question has shifted from 'How' to 'Why', as in:

"Why should we bother doing anything if we're all doomed anyway?"

I understand this question- it's commonly accompanied by the observation "Why does it make a difference if I recycle my garbage when China is spewing out enough carbon to overwhelm the planet anyway?"

I hear that frustration, though I maintain that even if it's hard to tell if we're making any difference, giving up and doing nothing can't possibly help, so why not do the little things? If we all do, my hope is that we WILL notice the difference- and I also think we have to hold on to hope or we are all lost.

One of my heroes is Pete Seeger, who said *"If the human race is still here in 100 years, it will be because of lots of people doing lots of little things. Bigger things can get co-opted or bought off by the powers that be. But if there are many, many little things going on it will be too hard for them to keep up with all of them. I consider myself to be a sower of seeds. Some seeds fall on stones and don't even sprout, but some seeds fall on fallow ground and multiply a hundredfold"*.

Our sense of well-being, in my view, is enhanced when you take part in community. When we're doing 'lots of little things', you get a sense of belonging, a sense that your voice matters, that YOU matter. It's the opposite of the 'everyone is out for themselves' attitude that pervades the extreme capitalism that is at the root of our crisis. I can certainly say from experience that partaking in community, getting involved, doing stuff collaboratively, brings many rewards. And I'd ask, even though we have a daunting task ahead, "what's the reward in doing nothing"?

Another one of my heroes is Greta Thunberg: She was famously quoted as saying *"I want you to act as if the house is on fire- because it is!"*- As much as I am a fan, I would amend this statement to say that "yes we need to act as if the house is on fire and at the same time use all the new tools we are gathering to put that fire out". If we just think that house is burning down and there's nothing we can do about it, we'll just watch it burn. We'll be lost in our despair. Do we want that?

Personally, I find that I swing wildly between hope and despair every day, but I stay more hopeful when I'm getting my hands dirty helping the cause. Join a group! Get together with your neighbours. Get involved with GCAN! In worrying about whether what we are doing is effective, we lose sight of the fact that the act of doing, of creating, of relating with your neighbours and friends, of really being in community, can be as important as WHAT you are doing. Not to get too hippy on you, but collectively we need to re-learn how to love and nurture our planet and each other.

Environmental activist Paul Hawken has said: *"When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world."*

I find that people are often hesitant about diving in to 'being the change' because they think it will mean too much personal sacrifice. That's because we've become trapped in the consumerist culture that is the bastard child of capitalism.

We can get off the endless consumerist quest for 'more stuff' that is filling our oceans with plastic and quickly draining our resources, and it doesn't have to mean sacrifices. It just means shifts in our thinking and our lifestyle, shifts that can be more satisfying than the 'stuff' you might have to live without.

Kurt Vonnegut said *"We'll go down in history as the first society that wouldn't save itself because it wasn't cost effective"*.

The short-term thinking that pervades right-wing governments often leads to decisions that support tax breaks now at the expense of our future sustainability. This is happening right now in Guelph with the Strong Mayor tax cuts. 'Saving ourselves' might hit the profit margins of the billionaires who are exacerbating our climate problems, but that's going to ultimately be a positive thing. Shifting away from being led by corporate greed to community-driven leadership can only be accomplished by exercising the main privilege we have in our so-called democracy: VOTING. Corporate-controlled political parties, like Ontario's current leadership, succeed by undermining our education system so that we lose the critical thinking skills necessary for understanding the massive change we need to survive, and by promoting false, climate-change-denying narratives.

So. Vote! Stay informed! Get involved! Get off the couch and onto the streets. It's time. We can do this. Getting together with your community can be effective, fun, and sometimes there's even pie. We must all be explorers in a new world now, searching for the source of the healing waters that can put Greta's housefire out.

James Gordon

