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LIVING

Thinking about our grandkids

Local chapter of 4RG (For Our Grandchildren) gets start with climate seminar

Two years ago, I became a grandfather for the first time when my daughter, Julia, gave birth to a baby girl. And what a wonderful experience it is proving to be. However, I know that I am not alone in my anxiety about the kind of world our children and grandchildren will soon be inheriting. Although some of us may still be in denial, there is every reason to believe that climate change will seriously disrupt life on this planet to a degree that few of us would have ever thought possible.



**DREW
MONKMAN**

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

Why do I say this? Because I believe in the scientific method, in peer review of scientific findings and, therefore, in what the vast majority of climate scientists is telling us. No national academy of science anywhere in the world rejects that human beings are causing climate change and that the impacts will be almost entirely negative. Among other broad projections, we can expect a dramatic loss of species, more frequent and more serious storms such as hurricanes and tornadoes, increased drought over vast areas, huge challenges for food production, a lack of fresh water for hundreds of millions of people, rising sea levels and flooding of coastal cities. We only need to look at history to know that severe climate-induced stresses such as these will almost certainly lead to violence and war.

On May 25 I had the pleasure of attending a climate change forum at St. John's Anglican Church hosted by an organization called For Our Grandchildren (4RG). The event had the rather ominous title of "Waking up to Catastrophe." According to the organizers, the storms, droughts and climate extremes of 2012 have brought about an awakening, especially in the U.S., to the reality of climate change.

4RG's vision is to connect and empower grandparents - and prospective grandparents - who are concerned about the impending effects of climate change and the huge impact that it will have on the lives of our children and grandchildren. The group wants to offer opportunities for grandparents to fulfill "our duty to future generations" - to learn, comment and to come together with others to discuss initiatives that can bring about action on the part of decision-makers.

Peter Jones, a Toronto lawyer and founding member of the organization, made an important point in his opening comments. He explained how the "noise" of day-to-day weather often makes it hard to notice just how quickly the climate is actually changing. This is especially true right now. Although the weather this June has been cooler than usual, the cool weather is happening against a background of steady warming. 2012 capped the hottest decade on record for global temperatures, and every year since 1996 has been warmer than the long-term average. We need to remember that climate is statistical, long-term weather and pay attention to what the statistics are telling us.

Jones also reminded the audience that even the bastions of economic orthodoxy see human-induced climate change as a major threat. Speaking at the 2012 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, called for a new kind of economic growth that respects environmental sustainability. "This is one reason why getting carbon pricing right and removing fossil fuel subsidies are so important."

Two well-known environmentalists were invited to the forum to cover specific dimensions of climate change. Alanna Mitchell, an award-winning Canadian journalist and author of the recent book *Sea Sick: The Global Ocean in Crisis* reviewed the increase of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). She explained that the failure by the nations of the world to cap the emission of carbon dioxide means that the critical limit of GHG in the atmosphere will soon be exceeded. This means that warming is on track to soar above the 2 C degrees of warming (above the pre-Industrial Revolution baseline) that most scientists believe is the upper limit of what we could cope with. According to Bill McKibben, the leading American environmentalist on climate change, present emission levels mean that by 2028 the world will have emitted the required amount of additional GHGs (about 565 billion tons) to bring about 2 C of warming. This is about the time my grand-daughter will be graduating from high school. Alanna Mitchell also pointed out that the oceans are absorbing so much carbon dioxide that there has already been a 30% increase in the level of acidity. This is impairing the ability of marine organisms such as clams to make shells and is leading to a huge disruption in the ocean food chain.

Gord Miller, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, reviewed what climate change has in store for the



DREW MONKMAN photo

Drew Monkman's granddaughter, Anouk, checks out some backyard tomato plants.

Kawarthas. He explained that by mid-century, the temperature and precipitation regime that we now have in Kawarthas will have moved up into northern Ontario. We therefore won't have the type of climate that is necessary to support the kind of forest and vegetation we have now. Our climate will have become more like that of the south-central United States. Miller acknowledged that Ontario has made progress in reducing GHGs but pointed out that there are few programs in place for continued reductions. "Our tool box is empty," he said. Miller went on to explain the kinds of measures he would like to see. They include some kind of carbon tax, the inclusion of GHG rules in Ontario's building code and agricultural sector and the eventual electrification of transportation. Miller pointed out that electricity in Ontario is fairly low in terms of CO2 output, so we should use this electricity to run vehicles.

Jeff Leal, Minister of Rural Affairs and

MPP for Peterborough, reviewed the various programs instituted by the Ontario Government that have put Ontario close at the top of Canadian provinces in reducing GHG emissions.

During the second half of the program, Guy Hanchet, a member of the 4RG Steering Committee, presented the theme "A Tale of Two Cities", comparing Peterborough, Ontario with Peterborough, England, both of which have suffered serious flooding in recent years. He contrasted the strong commitment of the U.K. government to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change with the half-hearted measures of our federal government. After his presentation, there was a question and answer session with members of the audience. Discussion centered on the high level of emissions from the Alberta tar sands. Some people also made suggestions such as campaigning to persuade institutions like churches and universities to divest themselves of any investments in fossil fuel companies.

Favourite tree tales

Peterborough's heritage trees have more tales to tell than just the number of rings in their trunks. This is why GreenUP is looking for stories and photos of these living relics for a new book being produced this year. Heritage trees are of importance by virtue of their age, size, form, genetics, rarity, prominence, location, culture, and/or history. They may include individual trees or groups of trees. In addition to stories, GreenUP is in need of winter and fall photos, images of tree-lined Peterborough streets that no longer have large trees, pictures of kids in trees and even shots of people picking fruits or nuts off of city trees. Any photos of this spring's ice storm would also be welcome. Please email Sheryl Loucks at sheryl.loucks@greenup.on.ca or call 705-745-3238 ext 217.

Many of readers of this column are grandparents or will become so in the near future. I believe that we are uniquely positioned to be advocates for our grandchildren. In many cases, we have the time, resources, experience and frame of mind to speak out forcefully - what do we have to lose at this point in our lives!. Personally, I think we need to be arguing for the implementation of a carbon tax along the lines of the tax in British Columbia. I would also love to see a broad-based coalition of concerned organizations come together to counter the onslaught of slick television ads from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. These daily ads extol the national economic and social benefits of the oil sands. Yes, the oil sands produce jobs, but so do the tobacco and asbestos industries. CO2 emissions and the climate change they cause are simply disrupting our lives - and eventually our health - much more slowly. And don't get me wrong. Everyone of us who uses fossil fuels is to blame. But personal action such as lifestyle changes will never be enough. We need nothing less than a climate change Marshall Plan.

If you are a grandparent concerned about the impending effects of climate change, visit <http://fourgrandchildren.ca/> You can also contact Guy Hanchet at 652-9761 or guy@hanchet.ca Guy is forming a local chapter of 4RG and organizing a meeting to explore how we as grandparents can make a difference.

Drew Monkman is a retired Peterborough teacher and author of *Nature's Year: Changing Seasons in Central and Eastern Ontario*. He can be reached at dmonkman1@cogeco.ca. Visit his website and see past columns at www.drewmonkman.com