

Another killer summer



By Nate Smelle

Growing up in a household where the weather channel regularly dominated the television screen, since my childhood I have always had an eye on the weather. Until about the age of 24 my interest in the weather report was tethered to my passion for camping and fishing.

I developed this habit following in the footsteps of my father, who watched the weather like an osprey, scoping out the best days each week to chase salmon and lake trout around Lake Ontario. Eager to spend a day on the water with my Dad, I would sit and watch the news each day, waiting to see the seven-day forecast in hope of seeing the sun icons land on either Saturday or Sunday. Once I turned 16 and got my own set of wheels to carry me wherever the fish were biting, I then began paying attention to the weather report for cottage country.

Looking back on that time, it never really mattered what the meteorologist said, since nearly every weekend, rain or shine, I would hop into my gas-guzzling 1981 Buick Riviera ? lovingly and aptly named ?The Beast? ? and drive north from Niagara. Relatively unaware of the impact ?The Beast? was having on the climate and the environment that I was reveling in during my spare time, I never worried about where the three tanks of gas ? approximately \$60-\$70 worth at the time ? that I was burning up each weekend came from or where it was going. In fact, it wasn't until the end of ?The Beast's? reign when I was having to refill the oil each way, that I even considered the consequences of driving such a thirsty machine.

Even then, it wasn't the environmental disaster I was helping to manifest each trip that grabbed my attention. Instead it was the impact the dying beast was having on my wallet. After an economically and ecologically expensive summer of feeding it oil every time I went for a drive, I decided to trade it in for a more fuel efficient vehicle ? a 1995 Ford Windstar.

By no means was the Windstar fuel efficient according to today's standards. Still, my decision to part ways with ?The Beast? relieved the strain it was causing on my bank account, which in turn lessened the toll my unnecessary emissions were taking on the natural world that I was appreciating more and more with every moment I spent outdoors.

Twenty-plus years later and oh my has the world changed. Thinking about how much more aware we have become of our place on this living planet over the past two decades, we no longer have the ability to use our previous ignorance as an excuse for inaction on the climate crisis.

Fortunately for the sake of our shared future on Earth, journalist Eric Pooley had his finger on the pulse when he declared the unwritten rule of local news: "If it bleeds, it leads." Now, every time we turn on the news we are reminded of the consequences of our ecological neglect by the reports of the record-setting heat waves, wildfires, flash floods, and deadly storms stealing lives and wreaking havoc on the Earth ecosystem.

Reading one report after another on the bottom of the screen of several extreme weather events that drew blood in Canada and around the world over the weekend, there was no need to wait for the meteorologists' first reports of the day to be reminded of the chaos our changing climate is causing on the morning of July 17.

Surfing channel to channel, I jotted down some of the news briefs appearing in the morning crawl that highlighted the lethal impacts of the climate crisis:

?A 19-year-old firefighter was killed as she was battling one of the 89 wildfires still raging in the Northwest Territories. She is the second firefighter killed in action during the 2023 Canadian wildfire season.?

?More than 60,000 people died in Europe last year because of the heat. Heat waves becoming hotter and more frequent.?

?Record high temperatures recorded throughout the U.S., Asia.?

?At least 40 people perished in landslides caused by heavy rains in South Korea.?

?Five people dead, including mother of two children still missing as a result of flash flooding north of Philadelphia.?

?Heavy flooding throughout the state of Vermont in the U.S.?

?Tourist attractions in Greece closed due to record-setting heat wave.?

?Tourists collapsing because of heat stroke throughout southern Europe.?

While each of the above mentioned numbers tell a unique story in their own right, like puzzle pieces, they come together to form a bigger picture that is far more terrifying and telling than the individual statistics on their own. As much as I have always taken joy from the experience of watching a powerful thunderstorm roll over me, the words ?extreme?, ?dangerous?, and ?erratic? are far too quickly becoming the most commonly employed words, when it comes to describing the weather we have been experiencing of late. Having observed our weather on a relatively regular basis for 30+ years now, there is no doubt in my mind ? or in anyone who takes an honest look at the statistics gathered by those who have dedicated their lives to understanding and solving the climate crisis ? that the extremely dangerous and erratic weather we are experiencing is highly problematic for those of us with a lust for life.