

Climate Change comes home

By Sarah Sobanski

Among the rolling hills of Bethany, Ont., is a modest home dropped between hundreds of gangly, nerdy trees -? skinny, tall and quivering slightly.

At dawn in the spring, you can creep up on families of deer behind the house. When they flee from a snapped branch, they pop over its shoulder high fence like it takes mere thought to do so.

At night in the winter months, you can see the twinkling lights of the subdivisions below. In the morning they all but disappear.

It's all too often that we talk about climate change from a distance. Living in rural Ontario where there are trees and lakes and wildlife for days ? it's something that can be seen, but you have to look closely. The increase in tree diseases, the warmer lake temperatures, the decreases in precipitation are all quiet indicators that are easy to ignore. Sometimes Canada seems unaffected, slumbering off like my quiet house in Bethany. This past weekend, however, that dream almost turned into a nightmare.

I got a call mid-afternoon from a friend who lives back in Bethany. The first thing he asked me was if I was ok. I replied with some cheeky remark that if I had a coffee in my hand, I'd be better. Then he told me that there was a forest fire in Bethany.

The way my father would later explain it on the phone; he was working outside when the sound of hundreds of people walking through the forest snuck up on him. He said he looked up, and a wall of orange 20 feet high and 100 feet wide, was climbing down the hill towards the house.

For reasons I can't fathom, he grabbed the garden hose ? Lord, help me ? while my mother packed the dogs in the car and grabbed as many photo albums as she could carry. (Pictures are the one thing you can't get back if they're destroyed.)

Luckily, by the grace of some 17 firefighters ? and a garden hose ? the fire didn't reach the house.

My family has lived in that house for over a decade. We've never had something like a forest fire occur. This year it's happened twice ? last month too, when someone ignored a fire ban.

Now, Bethany has a history of fires. It burns down every century or so just to keep things interesting. Unlike this fire however, dry conditions and Mother Nature didn't cause the fires that have swallowed up the town before.

Up until a few weeks ago, Ontario was experiencing one of its driest summers with less than a third of the average precipitation having poured for this season. The diversity of impacts by climate change make them hard to quantify. In Canada especially; on one hand multimillion-dollar real estate markets have turned into flood plains, but on the other forest fires have wiped out cities. Flash tornadoes are becoming ever more frequent, touching down in townships close enough to make a girl wish she hadn't watched *Twister* so many times ? certainly not if it was going to become a regular occurrence in her own backyard.

I've heard a few people comment that Trudeau expects too much of Ontario, that he's pushing too hard with his climate change plans. For many people its being unable to afford the way energy is going.

When we stand, however, on the precipice of a two degree increase to the global climate ? where sea levels will rise between five and nine metres -? we can't afford not to.

It seems fast. It seems undoable ? and maybe it is. Green pushes like the Leap Manifesto that suggest an end to all fossil fuel consumption by 2050 seem insane, but there's something to be said for not paying attention until it smacks you in the face.

Climate change has been happening for a while. We've been dragging our feet about it. Maybe if we hadn't killed the electric car in the '90s we would've been able to walk towards climate change reform ? but we didn't, so we'll have to run. If we didn't have people who said let's go 100 per cent green, renewable, perfect world scenario, there wouldn't be anyone to pull the zero per cent green people up to meeting in the middle. We can't continue to go down the same road. We can't continue to build infrastructure or implement initiatives that encourage our old ways of thinking.

Do I think that we're squandering the potential of Canada's largest export by not building pipelines ? maybe. Up against whether or not I want my family home to burn to the ground ? absolutely not. So that leaves me at anti-pipeline. What can I say, I'm big on compromise.