

The missing buzz



By Nate Smelle

IN MY FIRST spring reporting for Bancroft This Week back in 2013, I recall there being a buzz leading up to April 22 that began in late March. No, I'm not talking about the early awakening insects taking advantage of the warming temperatures. I'm talking about the buzz that kicked off what became known by those in the environmental movement as 'Earth Month.'

The buzz began with ecologically-concerned individuals, communities, and businesses around the world turning off non-essential electric lights, for one hour from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., on the last Saturday of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet. Simply put, Earth Hour, as the event was called by its organizers at the World Wildlife Fund, encouraged everyone on Earth to take a single hour out of a single day to turn off, tune in, and connect with each other and nature.

Having participated in and covered this annual event on several occasions, I always found it interesting to see how the absence of the glowing buzz of electronic interference in our lives would compel us to interact with our environment and one another in ways unusual to our daily routines throughout the rest of the year.

Some would use the opportunity presented by Earth Hour to go for a night hike or bike ride; while others would light a candle and talk with their loved ones; others might pick up a guitar and lead their family and friends in a singalong. The best thing about this campaign was that whatever people did during this hour, they did in celebration of life on Earth.

For the next few weeks following this short pause for our home planet, I would receive press releases from local not-for-profit organizations about upcoming Earth Day events. There would be Letters to the Editor from members of the public on my desk and in my inbox, aimed at reminding their fellow community members that Earth Day should be every day, not just on April 22. Local businesses would also help amplify the buzz by putting out Earth Day themed ads.

Looking back, by the time the buzz peaked on Earth Day, it had grown loud enough to reverberate throughout the community for most of the summer; inspiring a wide variety of events intended to raise awareness of our place in the natural world, and why we need to protect it.

Noticing April 22 come and go with little to no attention over the weekend, I wondered where the buzz I had once counted on covering starting each spring had gone.

With the fossil fuel industry raking in record profits by shaking every last penny from our pockets to continue their assault on the

planetary system that gives us life, we are nowhere near solving the climate crisis. With the Ford government's plan to pave over the last hubs of biodiversity in the province by stripping environmental protections from Ontario's Greenbelt and Provincially Significant Wetlands, we certainly have a long way to go before we remedy the rapid loss of biodiversity underway.

In light of the work that still needs to be done to secure a healthy and sustainable future, the missing buzz demands that we ask questions.

Does the next generation in Ontario care about the planet more or less than previous generations?

Did we learn anything about our interconnectedness with each other and the Earth from the time gifted to us by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Perhaps, hopefully for the sake of our shared future, we are still processing everything that went down the past few years. Perhaps we are awestruck; rendered speechless by our newfound awareness of the ecological interdependence of all life on Earth.

No matter what the reason for the relative silence this spring from the environmental community, there is still hope for the future in scientific truth. As one of Canada's greatest Canadians, scientist, broadcaster, and environmental activist Dr. David Suzuki wrote in his book *The Sacred Balance*:

'As beings who emerged from and are formed by the elements of the Earth, our existence is absolutely dependent on air and sunlight to kindle our metabolic furnaces, water to facilitate and give form to life's processes, and soil to provide the atoms and molecules that enable cells to grow, replace themselves and reproduce. These foundations of all life are enriched and maintained by the totality of life's diverse forms. Together these factors set the real bottom line, the needs that must be met for us to live. Our bodies reflect the importance of those needs with fine-tuned physiological alarms that impel us to obtain air, water, soil and energy when they are needed. Our ability to grow and flourish is directly related to the quantity and quality of these fundamental requirements.'

In a recent interview with *The Canadian Press* after announcing his retirement as host of *The Nature of Things*, Suzuki shed light on how his experience on the front-lines of the environmental movement has shaped his understanding of the word 'hope.'

'Hope is action,' he said.

'If people are going, 'oh, yeah, things are really bad, I hope it works out,' that's not hope. That's hopium. That's giving you an excuse not to do anything... If you're not acting, there is no hope.'