

Recalled to Life

Ralph Martin, Feb. 2020

Mail coach passengers heard a galloping horse. The horse and its rider, Jerry, unseen in heavy fog, halted and then, cautioned by the coach guard, slowly emerged from mist to hand passenger Lorry a note.

He opened it in the light of the coach lamp and read “Wait at Dover for Ma’amselle.” “Jerry, say that my answer is ‘Recalled to life.’”

Jerry started in his saddle. “That’s a blazing strange answer,” said he, at his hoarsest.

“Take that message back and they will know that I received this, as well as if I wrote.”

And so Charles Dickens introduced a resonant theme in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The 1775 answer in the mist pertained to a withering prisoner, Dr Manette, who was ‘recalled to life’ as a physician and doting father. We are also beckoned, nearly two and a half centuries later; ‘recalled to life.’ Our stagnation and decay in today’s prison of increasing greenhouse gases does not have to persist.

An attitudinal blueprint to effectively meet our current challenges, was offered by Graham Saul in his 2018 Metcalf Foundation paper, ‘Environmentalists, What are We Fighting For?’

Later Saul was interviewed by Steve Pakin on TV Ontario and asked how to convince people about the urgency of the climate crisis. Saul paused, smiled and said that Martin Luther King didn’t say ‘I have a nightmare’ although he may have had many, before his historic speech. He chose to say, ‘I have a dream.’ He acknowledged and talked about the nightmare of racism and yet inspired people with the dream of how it could be different.

Today as I think about how we daily add carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, I wonder what will inspire a course correction? Will it be more data? I value data, as a scientist, but I

increasingly recognize that data lack the pizzazz to motivate. Will it be more lecturing? Ask millions of youth.

We are called to imagine a possible future with energy sufficiency and without fossil fuels. My recollection of erecting barns from well worn timbers of decades past was that each wall was constructed with large puzzle pieces, on the ground. On barn raising day some of us would pull on ropes while others pushed on pikes, to slowly tip the frame 90 degrees, from flat to ramrod straight. The collective exertion was coordinated to the rhythm of our chant, ‘yo-heave, yo-heave, yo-heave.’

Together we did it. My fascination with these efforts may be a male proclivity for muscular solutions and yet collaborative possibility, so tangibly realized, was imprinted on me for life. A barn destroyed by fire can be replaced with a better barn, while the community continues to thrive. Fossil fuels replaced by better clean energy can similarly support community resilience.

In 4-H, our motto was “learn to do by doing.” If we are to replace fossil fuels, we can learn to replace by replacing, one step at a time. We can see more possibilities as we do it. It’s a lame excuse to delay, because we insist on seeing the whole picture first. Start by doing what is reasonably imagined.

The words regeneration, reconciliation and freedom are associated with being ‘recalled to life.’

Regeneration is more than sustaining what is. Farmers, with their cash crops, service crops and trees, regenerate soil by sequestering carbon dioxide from the air to increase soil organic matter. Furthermore, efforts to regenerate biodiversity restore resilience.

Reconciliation with those who have governed themselves for millenia, on Turtle Island, is to integrate indigenous knowledge and practices to broaden our heart-felt understanding of life and to use only what we need from Earth while adapting to the variability of climate change.

Freedom from injustice and the tyranny of the few is a value to clutch when being “recalled to life.” Freedom was so clearly depicted by Mel Gibson playing William Wallace in the movie, Braveheart. The Scottish commoners by struggling for justice and equality, no longer

accepted their trapped lives, as determined by corrupt nobles, those holding most of the land and money.

If we stop cowering and replace what imprisons us, there are opportunities to be fully alive. Take that 'blazing strange answer,' act on it and we will live, beyond what can be written.

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