

Earth Day Reflections – Janice Franklin, April 2019

I have always had an affinity for outdoors and being in nature. As a child, I spent lots of time in trees, loved being at camp and going camping, and dreamed of living in the country close to nature. It wasn't hard for that to develop into an adult feeling of responsibility to preserve the planet.

Over the years, I have committed to a series of actions in my daily life to truly live with respect in creation.

- I ride my bike as often as I can, to commute to work and to do errands – I estimate that I save 2000 – 3000 km in my car each year this way.
- We are committed to eating local food – We get our vegetables, eggs, and meat delivered to our door from Cooper's Farm. Although now we have cut so much meat out of our diet, I have cancelled our meat share. In the summer and fall we supplement our farm box with produce and fish from local farm markets. We still need to buy some food from the grocery store, but we build our weekly menu around the food from the farm.
- We rarely buy takeout food, and avoid buying prepared and packaged food or anything with single serving disposal containers. I've been making my own yogurt for years – last year the grade 7 and 8 students at my school calculated that I have saved about 100 kg of plastic from going into landfill. I have a job where I work 50 – 60 or more hours each week and there are lots of times I am tempted to cave to the convenience of prepared food. However, in last week's sermon, Emily talked about how even something as mundane as washing dishes can be a spiritual experience. So for me, chopping vegetables for soup, getting lettuce or herbs out of my garden to cook for my family becomes a spiritual experience.
- We never, ever buy or use bottled water. My past students have calculated that a bottle of water is at least 1000 times the price as the same water that comes out of the 7 different taps in my house. Many people still don't realize that most bottled water is municipal tap water and no different from the water in the tap.
- One big change we made two years ago was moving to a smaller house, a townhouse only a couple of blocks from where we lived for 25 years –

less space, less heat, less waste, less maintenance, considerably less lawn and garden to maintain.

- I clean with natural products like vinegar and baking soda and I am careful about what personal care products I buy, choosing the simplest ones with the least chemicals, like Ivory soap.
- I research where and how my clothes are made. I try to buy good quality clothes that will last several years and buy 2nd hand clothes when I can – I rely on a few retailers whom I trust have ecologically sustainable practices. I own relatively few clothes, what Pinterest might call a capsule wardrobe, and have limited pairs of shoes with one pair of black Blundstone boots that I wear every day for three seasons of the year for almost all occasions. No adult has ever commented on the repetition of my outfits, although I have had 6 year olds ask me why I have worn the same pair of plain black dress pants two days in the same week.
- We always use the library instead of buying books, movies, or magazines.
- We own one small tv, and we're not interested in the latest upgrade of electronics. When we do have to replace electronics that have stopped working, we tend to buy used and refurbished.
- I question everything I buy. I am constantly reflecting on need versus want, where things are made, how they are made, who made them, why are they so cheap? At whose expense? How far did it travel? As a result of all of this angst, I find it is often easier just not to buy anything, which ultimately protects the environment.

In a high school science class, my daughter was once asked by a teacher to make a list of suggestions of how their families could live more ecologically sustainable lives. My daughter told her teacher that her mother already does everything that can be done. As much as I appreciated her confidence in me, she was seriously misguided. I continue to struggle with some ongoing challenges.

- Plastic is one of the biggest – As hard as I try, I have not managed to keep plastic from coming into our house. I don't use straws, water bottles, plastic produce bags, plastic carrier bags, or any single use plastic items. However, when we throw out the one kitchen-sized bag of garbage that we usually create in a two week period, it is mostly filled with plastic that can't be recycled. I am also aware that much of the plastic that goes into the blue box does not get recycled. We create far more plastic waste than the market can bear and much of it gets shipped to developing countries where it sits waiting for a solution. So, I really need to redouble my efforts to radically decrease the plastic that comes into our home in the first place.

- In spite of my commitment to cycling, I still feel like I drive more than I should – Every couple of weeks, we drive to our family cottage on Georgian Bay. This is an invaluable respite from my demanding work life, so although I feel bad about the driving, I am not willing to give this up. I often have to drive for work because of meetings that are outside of reasonable biking distance. I know I need to focus on using my bike whenever there is a choice so that I can continue to use the car when I need to for work or to maintain precious balance in my life.
- Flying is also something I will not give up – Our daughter lives in New Zealand, and our son is on the verge of moving to Prague for a year or so. My husband runs marathons and ultramarathons and flying is often the only way to get to destination races. We also need to commit to buying carbon credits.

This can be a discouraging journey. When I am riding my bike, surrounded by cars in the suburban car paradise in which I live and work, I wonder if I can possibly be making a difference. I fret about disinterested governments, more focused on cutting taxes than preserving our planet. I get angry when I stand in line at the grocery store and watch people ask for plastic to be wrapped in plastic as they prepare to hoist their cases of water bottles into their massive SUVs. But then, I read about young people all around the world staging walkouts for climate change. I get inspired by books, blogs, podcasts, social media, and TED talks. I hear about people committing to decreasing their meat consumption and committing to alternative transportation and power sources. I know that even though some politicians have little interest in making meaningful changes to address climate change, there are millions of people who do recognize the need for change and ultimately, they have more power than the politicians. We have more power than the politicians. So, I have hope. I am constantly inspired by the words of Margaret Mead - Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.