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EARTH DAY 1970

Dorothy Bradley

When I was about 20, three reading materials landed in my lap that abruptly set me on a new life path. First, I read an article in *Science* that my father had written in 1959 with his calculations regarding the global use of water and the global population increase, concluding that water scarcity would be the first and worst of this planet's natural resource shortages, and this shortage would affect our standard of living by the year 2000. Second, I read a graduation gift—*The Population Bomb* by another scientist, Robert Ehrlich—which I interpreted to say that if I really wanted to do the planet a favor, perhaps my best contribution would be having no children. With some dismay, I realized that the rest of the world was not aware of these scientific predictions—or worse, didn't give a rip. We live in a world that doesn't listen to its scientists.

The third epiphany involved my summer after college graduation when, after making a brief overseas exploration, I returned to Bozeman where my mother was suffering from terminal cancer. During her treatment at the University Hospital in Madison, WI, I met Estella Leopold, the widow of Aldo Leopold, and longtime acquaintance of my father. She signed and gave me a copy of Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* (1949), which I read aloud at my mother's bedside. We were mesmerized. To this day, I remember the sounds and activities of Madison life going on outside the hospital while I read. It all comes back when I re-read the passages which are so underlined and highlighted that the book is worn thin. "A land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such."

After my mother's death I spent a year with my father as we coped with loss and grief. It turned into an extraordinary year when new experiences, people, and readings etched themselves into my substrata and redirected my life.

1970 was the year when Senator Gaylord Nelson and his forces started promoting and advocating the first Earth Day, to be organized at the local level in communities across the entire country. As I honed in on his idea, I remember thinking, "Wow. This is stuff I really believe. This goes straight to my heart. It goes straight to the survival of our planet. I need to give it my best. We need to build ourselves an army!" So a few friends and I started to focus on Montana's first Earth Day.

A smart and soft-spoken architecture student named Gordon Whirry organized some critical student involvement, having received a request from the American Institute of Architects to activate an MSU Earth Day. We scheduled an organizational meeting in the student center and were overwhelmed with a full ballroom of enthusiastic participants, including some particularly bright graduate students and faculty. This led to the birth of the loosely run but very effective Environmental Task Force. Much of its work took place in a tiny closet in the student government office, thanks to a supportive student body president, Bob Brown. Our first major project was, of course, Earth Day.

We decided to focus on several Montana issues that seemed particularly pertinent to our community; e.g., out-of-control billboard advertising, sprawling unplanned subdivisions, the impact of laundry detergents on our pristine lakes and waterways, and the grim results of industrial air pollution.

Our Earth Day began with a variety of inspirational speakers, one of which was a wonderfully charismatic state senator and dairy farmer from Great Falls, full of substance and vigor, but also wisdom as he advised all these newly activated young conservationists to leave behind their jeans and waffle stompers if they wanted to be effective lobbyists at the Capitol. After the speeches we divided ourselves into working groups, brainstormed for a few hours, and then gathered at the conclusion to hear reports of any points of consensus and perhaps action plans. We had no idea what to expect, but the attendance and fervor were way beyond our expectations, and no one left until the last report had been delivered and discussed. Earth Day preceded the now familiar word “empower,” but empowerment is exactly what we felt.

The celebration party that evening at the home of Liz and Eldon Smith—shrewd and sometimes impatient environmental leaders during the previous decade—was memorable, and all the more so for me because the enthusiastic Senator Harry Mitchell convinced me to run for the legislature. He said, “Why don’t you run for the legislature? What do you have to lose—you’re the wrong age, wrong sex, and wrong party.” My family friend, neighbor, and leader of the League of Women Voters—Dorothy Eck—echoed his encouragement but told me I had to move quickly. The following day was the final day for filing to run for the House of Representatives.

I had just received word that I was offered a fellowship at UW Madison, back in the countryside where the land ethic was inspired, and Senator Gaylord Nelson reigned supreme. I remember thinking, “That is a very nice gift to turn down—but you can go down that path later. Chances are you will never again have such an opportunity to crusade for

the land ethic, when truly, all the stars are lining up.” So the next day with a pounding heart and in something of a daze, I drove my VW bug to Helena and filed to run for the Montana House of Representatives.

Suffice it to say, this began a new life—for me, and in some respects for Montana. Here was a young woman, Bozeman raised, no political experience, off on a messianic mission of bringing environmental sensitivity and a “land ethic” to our communities and our laws. My agenda was huge. As I headed off on a whirl wind campaign, I distributed a car litter bag with the cheery words on one side—DOROTHY IS FOR THE BIRDS. On the back side I offered environmental tips, many of which are pertinent to this day but more than just a little bold. I suggested eliminating DDT, riding bicycles to work, sharing magazine subscriptions, and recycling bottles. I also advocated having no more than two natural children. To this day I gulp—a 22-year-old telling her community how many children to have . . . Senator Gaylord Nelson once observed, “If I said everything I believe, I couldn’t even vote for myself.” I should have taken those words to heart and kept some of my beliefs to myself. But no—I practically shouted them from the rooftops, wrote them all down, and then hand delivered my litterbag to the doorsteps of almost everyone in Gallatin County asking for their vote. It is surely a testament to the open-mindedness of the citizens that I was elected.

But the 1970 Earth Day activated a new generation. The calm and restrained Gordon Whirry was called on the carpet by an MSU vice president when he and others of us questioned the wisdom of the Big Sky development. New faces showed up in the 1971 Montana legislature and its lobby, including the distinguished republican Bob Brown, from Kalispell. The stage was set for an astonishing decade in Montana law-making, referred to as the Glory Days, Golden Years, and the Earth Decade. Montana’s new Constitution of 1972 was the most profound product of Montana’s statewide fire-in-the-belly, and the pillar of everything that followed.