

For Danny Beaton, Greenbelt Celebrates Mother Earth

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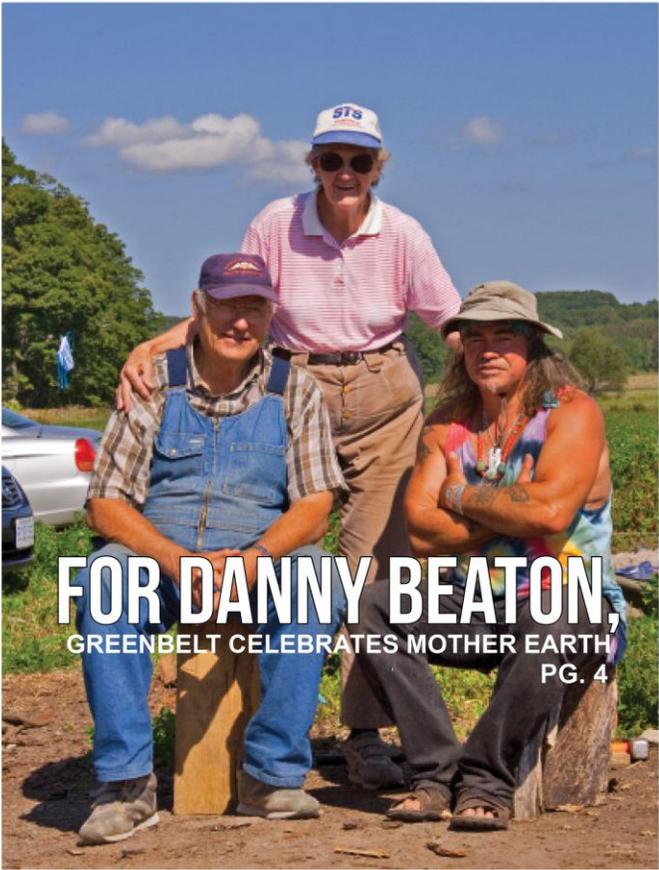
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*Harold and Ann Boker and Danny in Art Parnel's clover field, Simcoe County
Photo Courtesy of J.E. Simpson, 2009*

Now in a ponderous and tentative way the Ontario government is engaged in a consultation to expand the Greenbelt into the sacred heartland of Huronia. It is the core of the civilization that produced the prophetic figure, the Peacemaker.

Technocratic words about wetlands, cold temperature water, moraines, aquifers, base flow and the key indicator species, the Brook Trout are the language of the long overdue exercise to expand the Greenbelt. They have little resonance however, compared to those expressed by Danny Beaton's, passion for Mother Earth.

In contrast to official jargon, Beaton explains that, "under the Nanfan Treaty the Mohawk nation has the Right to water and wood from Six Nations to Georgian Bay as long as the grass grows and the sun shines...therefore as a Mohawk man I have a right to protect our sacred waters, sacred farm land and our spiritual animals."

Beaton, a Mohawk of the Turtle Clan, took his great stand in the defense of Mother Earth in the campaign to defend the world's purest source of drinking water. It was located near Elmvale, where the greatest settlement of the people of the Peacemaker was located.

Beaton has termed The Peacemaker's World, "The Healing Place." He finds its "probably one of the most beautiful places that I have been to in my entire life. The waters are everywhere. The forests are everywhere. We pick the berries." Here he eats the fish and gathers cedar on a regular basis.

There was a 22 year struggle that sought to protect the world's cleanest water from becoming a garbage Dump. It was called based on an engineering report, Dump Site 41. Beaton played a major role in stopping the dump from receiving garbage.

Beaton first organized an eight day walk from where Dump Site 41 would be built to Queen's Park. It was called The Walk for Water. He saw the trek as bringing "attention to the Sacred Waters of the Alliston Aquifer and the tributaries that run into Georgian Bay."

Following the Walk Water Beaton organized an occupation of the site. It blockaded excavation machines from digging up the Sacred Mother Earth of the Peacemaker's World.

What made Beaton's passion so powerful is that he knew how to be arrested with dignity and power. It was a majestic dignity that the Peacemaker's words of "Peace, Power and Righteousness" resounded from the ancient times from of his ancestors.

Beaton was arrested on the blockade line by Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officers. At the time of his arrest he was submitting his photographs of the struggle to First Nations Drum and News From Indian Country. At the time he was using an upright log for his desk and sitting on a lawn chair. After being put into handcuffs he was taken to the OPP Midland Detachment Center.

Beaton distinguished himself by refusing to sign a release form. By doing so he would have pledged never to enter the dump site again. He later explained how, "I felt someone had to show the world that this was all crazy".

Beaton told the Justice of the Peace at his trial that "somebody had to stop the rape of Mother Earth." At this point, he later recalled, "I felt like crying because of all the chaos that was happening but no justice for Mother Earth."

In refusing to sign the form Beaton's words were simple but eloquent. He told reporters, "Who Will Speak to the Water?" These were his last words to the press before spending three days in prison, before his bail hearing.

Beaton's words of the need to speak for the water came at the right time to stop Dump Site 41. This is because when he went to prison the nonviolent struggle of peaceful resistance to save the world's purest water had taken on the form of a great scientific experiment. It exposed the lies of the engineering professionals that had been used to deceive the voting public of Simcoe County.

When the resisters held the line against the bulldozers the water that flowed out of the Dump Site 41 site remained pure. As soon as the blockade was breached by the force of the OPP the water that flowed out became dirty.

The stain on the water became a dirty mark upon the politicians who backed Dump Site 41. If so much damage could be caused by simply digging a pit, what people reasoned, would be caused by dumping garbage into it?

During Beaton's three days in prison where his biggest complaint was the impurity of the water, an outraged public opinion caused everything to change. Incensed citizens mobilized and phoned their councilors, denouncing them for believing the lies of the engineers.

When Beaton arrived in the Barrie Simcoe County court house, everything had changed. He was released in the knowledge that work on Dump Site 41 had been halted.

The excavations were healed by restorative work. Eventually easements were put on the land by the Ontario Farmland Trust, to ensure that this prime Class One soil would remain in agricultural use forever.

Beaton a few years later came to the rescue to another threat to the cold pure waters that feed the cold water trout streams that flow into lower Georgian Bay. This new threat was termed the Dufferin County mega quarry.

Much like Dump Site 41 before Beaton's involvement, opponents of a mega mile quarry on Canada's best potato growing land had been getting nowhere. Farm houses and buildings were burned down. Their debris clogged local dumps. Forests were clear cut in violation of tree protection by laws. Fence rows were ripped up.

Beaton met with the organizers of opposition in a corporate law office on Bay Street. He told them, literally, to "Take a Hike."

By suggesting they take a hike Beaton meant they should follow the example the stopped Dump Site 41. He called for a procession from Queen's Park, the seat of political power which could kill the Mega Quarry, to the site of the proposed giant pit. The march was held and captured the public's imagination. This sparked by death of the scheme through the unusual imposition of an Environmental Assessment.

After the end of the five day trek Beaton and I were led by one of the organizers Smiling Yogi to a place where he promised we would appreciate what the hike was all about. He took us to one of the magnificent cold water streams of Huronia.

Yogi took us to a White Cedar Brook Trout stream which is an important tributary for the cold water Nottawasaga River flowing into Georgian Bay. Here Brook Trout leaped through its sparkling fast running waters, laced with riffles, runs and pools. It was lined with verdant green watercress.

Beaton is now focused on protecting the Nottawasaga River and the Minesing Wetlands from the polluted storm water that is set to flow from urban expansion in Midhurst. His passion for Mother Earth gives substance to the call of the public consultation document for the expansion of the Greenbelt in Huronia called appropriately, "Protecting Water." The document exposes how urban sprawl is a threat to the wetlands and trout streams that nourish Georgian Bay. But he expresses it was t through the wisdom of native people who see sacred waters as Mother Earth's blood.

