

A Grandfather's Legacy

By Duke Castle

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I miss him. My grandfather, Papa Taylor, passed on exactly ten years ago this month.

He was an important part of my life, and someone I later came to realize was a major contributor to the quality of life we enjoy here in Lake Oswego.

I was lucky because he and Mama Taylor lived just a few blocks from our home. My earliest memories go back to 2015 when I was five years old and he would walk me to the school bus each morning and walk me home when I returned from school in the afternoon.

He was warm, kind hearted and seemed to get along with everyone. What I didn't know at the time was that he was also very active in his church group dealing with the issue of climate change. It was an issue I really didn't know much about at the time but later came to realize how perilous things were. Humanity was experiencing unprecedented heat waves, drought and storms that were the result of rapidly increasing greenhouse gasses, increases that we, human beings, were causing. Not consciously. At least not initially. But we came to learn that it was things we were doing, primarily caused by burning fossil fuels, which had led to these increases.

Papa Taylor later told me that there had been a growing concern about what was happening long before I was born. But that people were at different levels of dealing with the issue. Initially many were in denial that it was really happening, or that humans were really at fault. But as more began to realize that it was real, that we were causing it, many became angry. Why wasn't something being done? Why did everyone seem unable to grasp the seriousness of it and deal with it! And, then when the heat waves came with rising seas flooding places like Miami and New Orleans many people became depressed. It seemed hopeless and that we were all doomed.

However Papa said that a significant number of people decided that it was never too late and that something could be done. His epiphany occurred at his church. Their pastor had participated in an ecumenical gathering of local church leaders shortly after the late Pope Francis issued an encyclical stating that climate change was a moral issue that all had to face. Papa's congregation discussed what they could do and began to work with other groups in Lake Oswego – business organizations, school PTAs, senior citizen groups – and found that there was a common bond that transcended age, politics and most other things that had divided people. They decided the time was to act now.

Papa said one thing that affected him was hearing stories from *his* grandparents about the Great Depression of the 1930s. What he heard from them was how difficult a time that was but how people banded together to help each other out. Later, Papa's generation, called "Boomers", experienced prosperity and an unprecedented quality of life as the result of decisions their parents and grandparents had made. Papa said it was a similar impulse that brought everyone together around climate change. They were going to do whatever they could to see that *their* children and grandchildren had a similarly good quality of life. But they also realized that at this stage it wasn't about increasing

material prosperity but instead about relationships: relations with each other, relations between groups and relations with nature.

They realized the first step was to deal with the causes of climate change and the biggest factor was the burning of fossil fuel. One study showed that almost 90% of human caused increases in green house gas emissions were due to burning fossil fuel. So movements began at all levels of society to focus on significantly reducing fossil fuel consumption. It wasn't easy because so much of the economy and human activity depended on using fossil fuels. But when people began to realize that electricity could provide many of the same services that fossil fuel did, there was movement to electrify everything – cars, bikes, heating, etc. – using 100% renewable sources such as solar, wind and hydro. Even things that couldn't be electrified like air travel began using biofuels made of algae that didn't compete with growing food.

At the same time there were changes in Lake Oswego and other communities that reduced the need for all the energy we were consuming. Things like well insulated, net-zero homes, safe bike paths, walkable neighborhoods with easy access to food and other necessities. Car sharing services such as ZipCar and Uber came to Lake Oswego. Public transit was expanded including the opening of street car service to Portland five years ago. One clever idea that was initiated in Lake Oswego was the use of school busses during the day for public transit when the children were in school.

With all of these and numerous other changes, fossil fuel consumption has been reduced by 90% in the last 35 years. But the changes didn't stop there. All of this brought our community closer together. Just the ability to get outdoors to safely walk and ride bikes got people to set aside many of their smart phones and other electronic gadgets and interact with each other. Interestingly another factor that brought neighbors closer together was the “Really Big One”, the recognition that at any moment the Pacific Northwest could be hit by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake. Remarkably this issue came up at the same time as people began to seriously deal with climate change. Knowing that when this event happened people were going to be dependent on each other, neighborhoods began to prepare for mutual support and in the process began to interact with each other in ways they never had before. The “Big One” has not happened but the neighborhood meetings have. Relations between neighbors and among various community groups have gotten stronger.

I am really grateful that I grew up in Lake Oswego. I am grateful for what my grandparents and the other citizens in our community did at that time. The effects of climate change haven't totally disappeared but the impact has significantly been reduced from what it could have been.

What I am also really grateful for is how it brought our community together. My parents tell me that relations within our community are as good as they have ever been. Papa and his generation may not have anticipated that outcome when they took on the challenge of climate change. But that is one outcome that I wouldn't trade for anything.

Duke Castle is a retired business and sustainability consultant. He and his wife have lived in Lake Oswego since 1984.

Submitted as an example for the “LO Reads ... Lake Oswego Story Project”