The Mountain Vision

A Free Publication of Christians For The Mountains

Volume 7 No. 15     Spring 2021

Truthfulness

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the Truth.  (1 Cor. 13:6)

The world faces a crisis of truth. There are so many of us humans living on a planet of finite resources and resiliency. Nations are armed with massive potent weaponry. Sophisticated propaganda assaults us on every side. Media sources propose conflicting claims. Wild conspiracy theories seduce millions. Once respected institutions of religion, science, and government do not have the trust of many. Our parents taught us children basic truths to build our character and ensure our safety. “Look both ways before crossing the street.” “Eat your vegetables, they are good for you.” As we matured, we gained through wise counsel and “school of hard knocks” experience truth of what works and what does not.

Genesis 3:4-5 illustrates the original lie in the Garden of Eden. “You can be like God,” the Serpent seductively says. “You can choose to make up your own truths.”

Paraphrasing Pope John Paul II, “Freedom untethered from truth is freedom’s worst enemy. For if there is only your truth and my truth, and neither one of us recognizes a transcendent moral standard (call it “the truth”) by which to adjudicate our differences, then the only way to settle the argument is for you to impose your power on me, or for me to impose my power on you.”

Jesus teaches that following Him with single-minded dedication in word and action is to walk in truth. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

A popular phrase circulated among Christians in the 1990’s. The abbreviation, WWJD? was worn on bracelets, T-shirts, and ball hats. It stood for “What Would Jesus Do?” for situations requiring a virtuous decision. This is worth keeping in mind for the ethical decisions and personal relations we encounter every day.

In this issue, we try to face some hard truths. We do not say we discern full truth on issues with 100% accuracy, but we try not to back away.

All life on Earth is threatened with annihilation by nuclear weaponry as well as ecosystem collapse from greenhouse gasses. Are we willing to face this truth?

Larry Gibson shook and inspired his listeners with truth. His biography matters. Metaphorically, little David defeated giant Goliath in a pipeline battle. Without pipelines, fracking would be less, and physical and mental health better.

Do our lifestyle practices honor God and neighbor? True cost accounting matters to other people and to nature. Coal industry practices past and present are often covered up. We lift the sheets.

We pay loving tribute to our dear departed Peter Illyn, a servant of God.

God calls Christians to a life of integrity. The world is watching us.

The Earth Belongs to God... and Everything in it.”
(Psalm 24:1)
Truthfulness is Indispensable
by Allen Johnson, Editor

Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” (John 18:37,38 NASB)

Jealous cunning religious leaders have brought Jesus before Pilate to convince the high Roman government official to execute him as an insurrectionist. Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you King of the Jews?” Jesus responds that he is not a political king, but rather indeed a king sent to testify to truth.

Quid est veritas? Pilate’s jesting response has been famous among philosophers ever since. Translated from Latin, “What is truth?”

Standing before Pilate was Truth incarnate.

Jesus, image of the invisible God, in Him all things in the universe created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:15 ff). Jesus the Way, the Truth, the Life (John 14:6).

Pilate did not find fault in Jesus. Yet he bent truth to the will of the crowd yelling “crucify him!”

Truth. Naked, exposed, light-illuminated truth can be hard to fess up to. Fallen creatures that we are, we humans learn at an early age to fudge truth. Maybe just a wee bit. So hard, sometimes, to face the reality of what went on, is going on, might happen in the future. Especially difficult, it can be, to face the truth about oneself. About our friends, family, society, heroes we admire. The great southern writer, Flannery O’Connor, wrote, “The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it.”

Truth is having a difficult time in our present American society. One could posit that much of the divisiveness in our nation is over charges on who possesses the truth and who is deluded or blatantly lying. Is climate science a real threat, or a hoax? Was the recent presidential election fair or stolen? Is popular media fair or fake? Vaccines life-saving or dangerous? The proliferation of Internet blog responses by know-it-all pseudonym pundits is virulent. QAnon and other preposterous conspiracy theories have millions of believers. George Orwell said, “In a time of deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

Too often trusted leaders betray their followers. People are further disillusioned of leadership with exposures of graft in government officials, crookedness in businesspersons, and sexual sin and/or greed among religious leaders. Personal integrity should be the most prized of human traits!

The Bible is chock full of verses about dishonest business. “A double standard of weights is disgusting to the LORD, and dishonest scales are no good.” (Proverbs 20:23). Advertisers often use sophisticated knowledge of human psychology to manipulate. How do we trust?

When talking about climate science, Bill McKibben often says that political views do not change physics and chemistry. Or as Aldous Huxley said, “Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.”

Christians believe in the God who created and manages the entire cosmos and its attributes, yet who is lovingly personal to us humans. Just as God has created laws of physics, and created how life functions and ecosystems work together, so God sets out ways for humans to live rightly with each other. The primeval sin in the Garden of Eden is Adam and Eve falling to the temptation to be gods themselves to devise their own truths. This is the continuing temptation and sin of every one of us. Following Jesus is to repent of our being gods and to be free to live and love as God created us to be.

The profound Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, “Above all, don’t lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lies comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love.”

Jesus’s teachings, such as the Sermon On The Mount (Mt. 5-7; Lk. 6) go so much against what we humans think are realistic, practical, or possible that they are pushed aside or spiritualized. Loving your enemies? Giving away your treasures? Yet those who press into His teachings and way find life-giving truth.

I won’t end this by claiming I have all truth, or that Mountain Vision is infallible. Precious is truth, often gained through difficult experience, personal stumbling, learning from others, with prayer asking God to reveal truth into our heart. May we be seekers of truth, humble to admit when we fall into error, and happy to put into practice the truth given to us.

The Bible uses the metaphor of military armor to demonstrate how we are to stand victorious against the spiritual darkness of falsehood and treachery. Stand strong, with the belt of truth tied around your waist and the protection of right living on your chest. On your feet wear the Good News of peace to help you stand strong. And also use the shield of faith with which you can stop all the burning arrows of the Evil One. Accept God’s salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need. To do this you must always be ready and never give up. Always pray for all God’s people. (Ephesians 6:14-18, NCV)
We Welcome Your Partnership

“Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) core mission to honor the truth of Psalm 24:1.

“The Earth and all it contains belongs to God”

Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) is a network of persons advocating that Christians and their churches recognize their God-given responsibility to live compatibly, sustainably, and gratefully joyous upon this God’s earth. CFTM is nondenominational and non-partisan. CFTM takes a critical prophetic stance to advocate for justice, righteousness, and peace for the land and its inhabitants. CFTM seeks to be respectful to all voices seeking truth.

The central Appalachian region is our geographical focus. However, CFTM is not only against abuse, but is for a sound, clean, sustainable economy with high quality of life in sufficiency of material goods, neighborliness, social and ecological harmony, richness in culture, mutual service, and bright hope. Rebuilding Appalachia from the ravages of over a century of exploitation and ruination is our dream.

How CFTM Finances are Used

All volunteer. Yes, CFTM has no payroll. We work for free. All our funds are going for the following:

1. Contract with Marybeth Lorbiecki to research and write the biography of Larry Gibson. See page 6 why this is important for our region and nation.
2. Publishing our Mountain Vision paper and running our website (which currently is under revision)
3. Frugal home office and travel expenses related to our mission while working with many partner groups.

YOUR ONLINE DONATION IS WELCOME at www.christiansforthemountains.org/

Some Excerpts from our Mailbox

July 14, 2018
Dear CFTM Friends:
Thank you for the current “The Mountain Vision” which contains several fine helpful items. John Rauch’s item is one of the best I have seen on that subject. He is a good Appalachian theologian friend.
Can you send me a one-time bulk quantity of 20 copies of the current “The Mountain Vision”? I will be giving these to personal friends and colleagues in Appalachian Ministry with a note suggesting they become supporters.
Thanks—Frank Hare (Amesville, Ohio)

November 20, 2020
I’ve thought of you many times through the years and about all the essential work you continue to do to protect our planet and its people.
The wonderful memories of filming the religious leaders’ mountaintop removal tour have always stayed with me.
With all my best wishes, Marty Ostrow (producer of the Renewal film)

Thank you for your good work,
I enjoy receiving and reading “The Mnt. Vision.” The words fill me with a deep love of the earth and awe in the presence of its mystery.
I feel a connection to the people, the land and our God.
With gratitude, Carol (and John) Bellinger

To Whom It May Concern
I chanced upon your publication at my local library and the name struck me. Christians For The Mountains isn’t a common idea despite the prevalence of the Christian churches and the love for country life.
I would much like the opportunity to have a membership with your organization… I am willing to help in whatever capacity I can.
Sincerely, Nicholas Johnson

We Ask For Your Financial Help Right Now

Our original intent was to have the biography written and to a publisher by now. It would be quite simple, a bit about Larry’s growing up years, then sorting through the voluminous material on his anti-MTR activism years back on Kayford Mountain, WV.

However, our writer’s research kept leading to more valuable information. Marybeth has interviewed over 90 people in over 120 interviews averaging 2 hours. This massive trove of information is a compendium of the Appalachian struggle for life with hope. Melding this complex inspiring person into a readable, motivational book is our work and prayer. Please be patient with us. It will be worth it. Our expenses have increased. Please help.

Invitation to Join Together With Us

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| Mountain Mourning Collection DVD Write us or Circle “Yes” here for a copy. |
| Tell us if you would like to make a gift in honor of someone important to you. |

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Nuclear Weapon Idolatry by Allen Johnson

Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with Death, And with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by. For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception.” (Isaiah 28:15)

Our 16-year old son had participated in a local, multi-denominational youth retreat. Among prizes given out, he had won a gift subscription to Breakaway magazine, a youth publication of James Dobson’s organization, Focus On The Family. Yet when his first issue arrived in December 1992, we were shocked and dismayed!

On the front cover was an artistic rendition of a Trident nuclear-powered submarine launching nuclear-armed missiles. The accompanying title to the feature article started out in bold capitalized letters. COOL…WOW…. WHOA! The article proceeded to take the readership on an awe-struck tour of the massive submarine while it docked in port.

We wrote the editors of the magazine sharp questions challenging why a self-proclaimed Christian publication would tout nuclear weapon delivery systems. The article quotes the tour host saying about the missile silos, “There are more explosives in these 24 silos that in all the explosions and gunfire….ever.” Yes, “ever since the Chinese invented gunpowder.”

Well, true. That submarine and over a dozen others like it each were equipped with 24 Trident Intercontinental missiles capable of a range of 4600 miles. Each of the 24 missiles carried 8 independently targeted reentry vehicles armed with 100 kiloton nuclear bombs. As a reference point, the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was 15 kilotons. Thus the submarine in the Breakaway magazine dazzlingly seducing its teenage readership had the potential to destroy 192 cities, each with explosions over 6 times more powerful than what destroyed Hiroshima. And upgrades to these submarines soon made them more potent, including intercontinental missiles with an effective range of 7400 miles and nukes up to 475 kilotons each.

Mutiny is when people who claim allegiance to a legitimate authority then refuse and rebel against that leader. This is the word that describes those who claim to follow the Prince of Peace and then demonstrate the willingness to destroy all of God’s creation. Nuclear weaponry is a satanic fist in the face of God who lovingly created the world. Followers of Jesus must have none of it!

What is the Recently U.N. Ratified Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty (TPNW)?

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons with the ultimate goal being their total elimination. It was adopted on 7 July 2017, opened for signature on 20 September 2017, and ratified into force just recently on January 22, 2021.

Did you as a reader know about this? Not likely, since U.S. media, political figures, and (sadly) church leaders have come to ignore the most extreme deadly threat upon life on planet Earth. Could be the end of all life.

For those nations that are party to it, the treaty prohibits the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as assistance and encouragement to the prohibited activities. For nuclear-armed states joining the treaty, it provides for a time-bound framework for negotiations leading to the verified and irreversible elimination of its nuclear weapons program.

Unlike chemical, biological, and anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, nuclear weapons had not been prohibited in a comprehensive universal manner. Signatory nations to the TPNW do prohibit these, and try to exert pressure on non-signatory nations (especially the nuclear powers) to join.

The TPNW emerged following the creation of a UN working group in 2016. It was supported by 123 countries, with 38 voting against. The US, UK, France and Russia were all opposed, as was Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons. China, India, and Pakistan abstained.

Over the next several years the signatory nations worked within their own government structures to legalize their commitment. On January 22 of this year the TPNW went into force. Of course, more work is to be done. Some cities including Baltimore and Los Angeles, as well as the state of California have made resolutions supporting the TPNW. The most important work is to convince nuclear-armed nations to disarm their nuclear arsenals and develop mechanisms to nonviolently address conflict.
Before I was old enough to read, I was fascinated looking at pictures in National Geographic magazine. I learned the world was a big place with exotic animals, diverse cultures, and varied geography. It became my favorite magazine, and still is. I now read the articles, most of them anyway, while still enjoying the vivid photographs.

April 2020 was the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. National Geographic commemorated that key event with a unique layout with two front covers. One of the covers is titled, “How We Lost The Planet: A Pessimist's Guide to Earth in 2070.” 60 some pages follow on that dreary theme.

My wife, Debbie, usually reads the newest National Geographic first, then gives the magazine to me. She started out reading the optimist side. My turn, I started with the pessimist side. (Dear Reader: Which one of us sees the proverbial glass half full and which one of us sees the glass half empty?)

The upshot is that the future 50 years from now will be vastly different than today. And today in many ways or “today” is more problematic than the era of even a couple decades ago.

I suppose, though, that if citizens think the state of the world is rosy dandy, then why change anything? So let’s start this essay with the grim reaper. The list is long. Too long, dreary, pessimistic, even deadly...

Scenario 1: We Humans Destroy the Life on Planet Earth

The earth will be completely empty. The wealth will all be taken, because the Lord has commanded it. The earth will dry up and die; the world will grow weak and die; the great leaders in this land will become weak.

The people of the earth have ruined it, because they do not follow God’s teachings or obey God’s laws or keep their agreement with God that was to last forever.

So a curse will destroy the earth. The people of the world are guilty, so they will be burned up; only a few will be left.

(Isaiah 24:3-6, NIV)

Of all the pressures that are exerting upon planet Earth, high emissions of greenhouse gases are worst. CO2, methane, and other gaseous compounds are highly beneficial to life on earth. That is, to a point. An analogy is a blanket that we use to keep us warm while we sleep. Too thin a blanket and we are cold. Too thick a blanket and we feel too hot. The increase in CO2 from pre-modern levels 280 ppm to 410 ppm today means the earth has a heavier blanket over it. And the warming blanket effect is most pronounced toward and in the high latitudes of the Arctic and Antarctic. This is leading to massive ice melt in Greenland and Antarctica along with less polar ice. And while white polar ice reflects sun energy, open water absorbs that energy. As vast northern tundra warms, vast stores of methane gas are released into the atmosphere. Methane is 84 times more potent a greenhouse gas than CO2. Furthermore, the warming northern Taiga boreal forest and tundra are on fire more, and fires release CO2. These are examples of positive feedback loops, in that one warming ecosystem component sets off a chain of other components to warm.

Mid-latitude and tropical latitudes also experience changing weather and rainfall patterns. Sea level rise from massive ice melt threatens coastal cities and agriculture. Higher temperatures in some locales become unbearable for life, and for food growing. The oceans are absorbing most of the emitted CO2, which is beginning to change the pH to more acidic. Major coral reef bleaching is almost global as ocean waters warm and acidify. Wildfires are on a rampage in Australia, California, and elsewhere due in large part to rising temperatures.

Human pressures are also leading to shrinking of species populations and a major increase in extinction. Factors include poaching, habitat destruction, pesticides, invasive species crowding out natives, and overharvesting for human food. Scientists are noticing major declines in bird populations, insect populations, and pollinator populations that are essential for many human-raised crops. In Appalachia and elsewhere, bat populations have plummeted from the White-nose disease. Swiss Re, one of the world’s biggest reinsurers, says “that one-fifth of of countries globally are at risk of their ecosystems collapsing due to a decline in biodiversity and related beneficial services.”

The verdict is clear and unmistakable. Without major human changed (called repentance), the future is bleak.

Scenario 2: We Humans Go All-Out To Protect Life On Earth

Rapidly reducing human-caused CO2 emissions is technically possible. Rapidly developing technology involving transportation, electric power generation, building insulation and comfort, battery storage capability, food growing, reforestation, and construction materials that can significantly reduce and even eliminate CO2.

Atmospheric CO2 only slowly breaks down or sequesters into plant and forest. Most of the CO2 presently in the atmosphere will still be there in year 2070. Our societal challenge is not to add more CO2, and then build in mechanisms to avert the worse effects of a warmer Earth. Political will is essential. Individuals each can do our part. Ultimately, it will take all of us collectively to repent and change.

Good news is that solar and wind power are now cost competitive with fossil-fueled steam generation plants. The automobile industry is already in a major transformative shift from gasoline to electric vehicles. Some factories (even steel making) are transitioning to “green-generated” electricity. Very importantly, battery storage capacity is becoming more powerful and less costly, thus mitigating the earlier concerns over intermittent wind and solar generation.

Increasingly, governments and nonprofits are protecting vulnerable species. Larger marine sanctuaries can protect and enlarge fish stocks that actually increase fish harvest outside those areas. Calls to increase wildlife habitat and protection are increasingly effective.

Youth are stepping up big time! We need to support those conscientious young people whose leadership is prophetic today.

The Bible story of Jonah is revelatory for our situation. God sends Jonah to deliver a message that the wicked city of Nineveh would soon be destroyed. The people believe his message. The king of Nineveh repents, as do his subjects. In the story, God changes His mind, and the city is saved. May it be so for us!
Background Notes — Allen Johnson

On several occasions in 2012, the last year of his life, Larry Gibson asked Christians For The Mountains for help in writing his biography. We promised him. Shortly after Larry died, we began to conduct interviews with key persons while gathering information, and developing outlines and strategies. However, we were unable to land a skilled, experienced biographer with a heart that would resonate with Larry Gibson.

The Best Writer for the Bio

That is, until October 2018, when Marybeth Lorbecki eagerly agreed to further research and then write Larry's biography. She is a long-time friend to CFTM, trustworthy, a dedicated Christian, and passionate for justice (including environmental justice). Among her numerous published books is her acclaimed biography on the influential conservationist, Aldo Leopold. She immediately engaged the research and writing with enthusiasm and heart. And she has endeared herself with all the ninety or so people she has interviewed during talks averaging two hours. As one well-known activist said of Marybeth, "You are the one!"

The heart of the narrative will be Larry Gibson's passionate, courageous, and motivating efforts to resist mountaintop removal. The style will be to inspire readers to emulate and draw from Larry Gibson's character and action that will inspire and equip them to act for justice in their own contexts. Historical background, family upbringing, anecdotal stories, quotations, news stories, and cultural context will be tools toward telling this story.

A Story of Redemption

Research began to uncover troubling yet insightful knowledge of Larry's childhood and early adulthood that is a compelling story in itself. Larry's life was one of hardship, self-destructive anger, struggle, and eventual finding redemptive purpose in life. Larry was an overcomer. Love overcame him.

In midlife, Larry found his life's meaning in leading his many relatives to establish a foundation to save the home of his boyhood, Kayford Mountain, from utter destruction from mountaintop removal. He worked diligently to develop skills in reading, writing, speaking, and organizing. He was the ignition that sparked a strong people's movement to abolish mountaintop removal. His indomitable persistence and fearless courage in the face of constant threats to his life, along with his wisdom from the land, has inspired thousands of people to active advocacy for justice.

Melding this complex inspiring person into a readable, motivational book is our work and prayer. CFTM's invites your prayer and support.

Marybeth Lorbecki, MA, is researching and writing the biography on Larry Gibson. She is an experienced and acclaimed author of numerous books.

Her website is at: marybethlorbecki.com

Janet Keating’s Reflection

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12:2 KJV

When a significant event happens in one's life, we remember where we were or what we were doing when we hear the news. I was sitting on my little front porch when I received the call that Mountainkeeper, Larry Gibson, had a heart attack on Kayford Mountain after laboring there all day. He was taken via helicopter to a Charleston hospital where he died on September 9, 2012. I met Larry who was volunteering for West Virginia Citizen Action Group in the early 90s at the time when the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC) was opposing the construction of what would have been the largest pulp and paper mill built on the Ohio River at Apple Grove, WV. Almost as soon as that David vs Goliath battle was won, OVEC began working with Larry and others to oppose mountaintop removal strip mining of coal (MTR) in West Virginia.

From 1997 until Larry's death in 2012, like so many "ordinary" people who find their power, Larry was a tireless advocate for saving our mountains and homeplaces. We watched with awe how Larry, given the resources and support he needed, engaged thousands who visited his beloved Kayford Mountain. His hope was that once a person saw the wholesale destruction of entire mountains, he/she would be inspired to help him save them. And many of them did, especially the young people. But Larry's story is so much bigger than the couple of decades that I knew him as a leader. I think a part of Larry must have understood that, for shortly before he died, he asked Allen Johnson (founder/director of Christians for the Mountains) to find someone to write his biography.

Pat Hudson’s Reflection

I only met Larry Gibson once. It was in Nashville when many of the folks fighting mountaintop removal coal mining gathered for a fund raising concert at the Ryman Auditorium. The musicians included such luminaries as Emily Lou Harris and Dave Matthews, but for me, meeting Larry in person was the highlight of the evening.

He was wearing his signature neon green shirt, and when I introduced myself, he looked me up and down and said: “You need a button,” and handed me a “Stop MTR,” button from the bag he was holding. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I had more than a few of those buttons back at my office, but I wasn't wearing one at that moment, and I expect that in Larry's eyes, I was wasting a perfect opportunity to spread the word.

“Come see me at Kayford,” Larry said to me before we went our separate ways. I meant to, but before I could schedule a trip, Larry was gone. When I did finally make it to West Virginia, it was for Larry's memorial service. There was disbelief and grief at that gathering, but also an unresolved resolve that Larry's spirit would live on in the work of others. When I returned home to Tennessee, I dug out my bag of “Stop MTR,” buttons, and never missed an opportunity to hand them out — just like Larry.

Ongoing Vision Taking Root

- Mountaintop removal sadly continues, such as two new permits in 2021. The ACHE Act for a moratorium on new permits will be reintroduced in Congress in 2021 to a more receptive committee. We also urge the restart of the health studies on mountaintop removal that was stopped by the previous administration.
- The 100 anniversary of the Blair Mountain insurrection is this summer when miners marched for justice confronting a violent coal industry. Local art, drama, storytelling.
- Community building including local food growing, processing, and marketing; drug rehabilitation; youth empowerment; such as Maria Gunnoe's leadership in Boone Co., WV.
- Heritage Homestead Landtrusts like what Larry pioneered on Kayford family land.
- Emergency evacuation plans for everyone below slurry impoundments. Dewatering, safely extracting rare metals from sludge.
I met Larry Gibson in the autumn of 2004 at his home place on Kayford Mtn. He showed us around the land we walked on and told us the stories about the land that was no longer there. As I looked over the giant surface mine site from the edge of his family cemetery, I prayed, and as I prayed I knew my life was changed that moment. I walked into that call for the health of Appalachia, and with that I found a wonderful friend.

Larry was a regular guy who had the same questions about life and emotional wrestles as anyone else. We would go on road trips together, and just walk around the mountain talking about music, women, today’s youth, the mountains, Dollywood, God, etc. But there was the uniqueness of Larry that made him a legend. While his body was weak, his spirit was strong. He had a life of hardship and pain coupled with a deep love of the land and the people of not only Appalachia but all places, though Appalachia ran deep in his blood and heart. This combination kept lit a fire in his belly for justice. Inexcusable was the way the people of Appalachia have generationally been taken advantage of and abused. The destruction of the mountains through surface mining was the last straw. He fought hard so that others may live in justice and thus have a sense of peace.

Once, Larry was stopped by three surface miners on the way to his house. Getting out of their trucks, Larry purposefully left his gun, letting them see he was unarmed. As they yelled and threatened him, short Larry poked the biggest guy in the belly saying, “I’m doing this for you too man. When I was a boy it was expected I’d follow my dad into the mines. Tell me, can your son expect to follow you into the mines, into a job?” The man paused, softened with sadness. Larry continued, “You know that this type of mining doesn’t leave anything left. Listen buddy, I’m doing this for all of us, and our grandkids and more; for the future of Appalachia.”

“Coal kills – surface mining and deep mining.” Larry knew all this personally - he buried much of his family from coal related deaths. He also said it was our responsibility to help get people new jobs.

Never afraid to speak his mind, and humble enough to ask questions. He sought out truth, and stood by it. Larry, a man of courage, faced regular attempts on his life, yet stood his ground in the pursuit of justice for Appalachia for he knew this work was much bigger than him.

He found the biggest blessing of his life in his wife Carol. I remember when he realized he needed to marry her. Nervous as he was then, he says it was the best decision he made, for they were truly in love, and it was obvious. While God revealed Himself to Larry on the mountain, Carol helped him find healing in the church. God did a mighty work in Larry Gibson throughout his life, and in the last year. He went even deeper. Larry repainted the white rock on Kayford to remember the church once there and restored the three white crosses standing there. We talked about the God that doesn’t dwell in buildings made by human hands, but who Larry walks and talks with in the woods and everywhere he goes. He wrestled like most of us, but Larry came to accept God’s free gift of grace and love in Jesus Christ. So Larry, buddy, you are a legend, a short giant, an inspiration and very close friend.

Thank you for all you have done for the mountains, for me, for all the people. Hey Patriot Coal is stopping surface mining! May you rest now, brother, in peace and deepest joy walking face-to-face with Jesus Christ. So Larry, buddy, you are a legend, a short giant, an inspiration and very close friend.

Robert Russo has worked with Christians For The Mountains in community and church outreach, health studies, and education.

Earlier, Russo was a co-founder of Mountain Justice Summer, which trained and logistically supported young people to volunteer their advocacy toward ending mountaintop removal. He was given the nickname, “Sage,” during that time.

Russo is a graduate of Warren Wilson College, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and is ordained to the ministry.

Robert and his wife, Jessie, and their two sons live in the Asheville, NC region. Gardening, sustainable lifestyle, and building a healthy family, are important values and practices of the Russo family.
In a news release announcing the decision, Dominion Energy and Duke Energy, builders of the ACP, stated, "A series of legal challenges to the project's federal and state permits has caused significant project cost increases and timing delays. These lawsuits and decisions have sought to dramatically rewrite decades of permitting and legal precedent including as implemented by presidential administrations of both political parties. As a result, recent public guidance of project cost has increased to $8 billion from the original estimate of $4.5 to $5.0 billion. In addition, the most recent public estimate of commercial in-service in early 2022 represents a nearly three-and-a-half-year delay with uncertainty remaining."

This is a stunning development, as opponents faced an uphill battle against two of the nation's most powerful corporations, compromised politicians and crony-capitalist regulatory agencies from the moment the ACP was announced in 2014. However, the ACP ran into a collection of mountaineers determined to hold onto their homesteads, public health experts, ecologists, environmental groups, lawyers and scores of unnamed but very determined human beings that refused to roll over for Dominion and Duke. They understood from the first day that the companies pushing fracking and related pipeline development on unsuspecting citizens cared nothing about property rights, public health or the environment.

The ACP, originating in North Central West Virginia and intended to stretch more than 600 miles into eastern North Carolina after traversing mountains, valleys, streams and woodlands of the Appalachian Mountains, was generally supported by the governors and legislators of both Democrats and Republicans in West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina. So, those wishing to preserve their home places and the incredibly diverse beauty and environment of the Appalachians could not count upon politicians. They had to count upon themselves.

So they did, especially the folks living in the mountainous portions of the route. From its source, the ACP headed southeast, across the eastern counties of the Mountain State into Virginia, where the ACP threatened national forests, the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Landowners sued and were sued by the ACP over eminent domain, protests were held, and thousands upon thousands of comments sent to federal and state regulatory agencies.

Meanwhile, Allen Johnson shares, "We are elated. The last year or two we thought they were up against the wall, with no [new energy] demand and being short of permits. We were hoping they would throw in the towel." Still, he says, "We were surprised. But it was an ill-conceived project from the beginning." The high mountains of the Allegheny and Blue Ridge were simply not suited for the project, explains Allen. And, Dominion admitted as much to Barroso. Says Johnson, "They had the money and the political power. We knew at the beginning it would be a long shot, but we thought we would try." Johnson is also the president of the Eight Rivers Council.

He recalled that it was not long after the ACP was announced that the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance — a coalition of more than 50 organizations — was formed to challenge the ACP (and other threats to the region's ecology). Johnson said the group has focused on education, having landowners write to regulatory agencies, trained monitors and provided aerial surveillance of pipeline construction and regulatory adherence.

"It has just been amazing citizen participation. It gave me faith in the democracy to which we aspire. There is so much money that can be used to obstruct the will of the people."

Still, the Johnsons have prayed as much as they worked to delay. "As late as yesterday, we were riding by a fracking yard where a beautiful farm used to be. We prayed against the pipeline." He shares, "Debbie took the lead on it. We prayed for delay because we felt that delay would work. Friday we prayed for delay."
He emphasizes, though, that their prayers were diverse. "You pray for unity, perseverance, skill, give us wisdom, courage." And yes, he says, "We were praying that God would soften the hearts of the opponents, that they would understand that throwing in the towel was the right thing to do."

In an email, he said, "I believe all of us who joined together in this battle have come to appreciate one another, knowing that when we join together we can be a force for good. Together in this struggle we have built community among ourselves and reached out far and wide."

That outreach must continue, according to a pointed statement released by POWHR (Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights Coalition) members fighting the MVP. Maury Johnson, POWHR Executive Committee Member and MVP impacted landowner, says, "For six years the people of West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina have been terrorized by pipeline companies like the ACP and the MVP. Today is a great day for those people who have devoted their lives to educating the public and fighting for their water, air, and property, and to lead the way to a cleaner energy future. Today—as an ally with those great people and with thoughts of my dear friend April Pierson-Keating, who did not live to see this day—I rejoice. But the job is only half finished. Today we enjoy this victory, but tomorrow we must double down our efforts, pull together and send MVP and the MVP Southgate to the scrap heap of bad ideas with the ACP."

Russell Chisholm, POWHR Co-Chair, adds, "The Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines have been doomed from the start, yet recklessly and carelessly proceeded to trample people, sacred places, and human rights to serve their own financial gain. Like MVP, Dominion’s disaster has been propped up by hollow and baseless assurances to investors and regulators alike. Only four months ago Dominion argued before the US Supreme Court they should be permitted to burrow their pipeline under the historic and iconic Appalachian Trail. Dominion’s abandonment of this project serves as a reminder to all who are working for environmental justice: stick together, keep fighting, keep showing up for each other. Today we celebrate with the community of Union Hill and pipeline fighters everywhere."

And, Roberta Bondurant, also POWHR Co-Chair, shares, "The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission capitulated to Dominion and ACP over the objections of communities, dragging landowners through the wringer of eminent domain abuse and an arduous certification process—only to see ACP defeated by the very same challenges still facing MVP. ‘Build first, fix problems later’ will always fail the public when our very real—now proven—concerns for our water and other natural assets are ignored in the name of private profit. Nelson Mandela said, ‘It always seems impossible until it is done’. Applause and congratulations to our friends along the now abandoned ACP. We celebrate with you."

Michael Barrick is the editor and publisher of the Appalachian Chronicle. Barrick is a native of West Virginia currently living in Lenoir, North Carolina. Barrick spends much of his time in his ancestral Lewis County, WV, and Sweet Springs Resort on the WV/VA line (designed by Thomas Jefferson and a long-term renovation project).

Of the Appalachian Chronicle, Barrick says, "If you are interested in stories about Appalachian people working in the creative and performing arts, environmental activism, historical preservation and generally working to preserve our sacred mountains, read at https://appalachianchronicle.com"

Opposing The Atlantic Coast Pipeline by Allen Johnson

A day of jubilation! Yes, on July 5, 2020, Duke Energy and Dominion Energy threw in the towel and cancelled the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. David and defeated Goliath. Land, water, peaceful communities, landowners, science, and climate defeated the deep pockets of major corporate powers and their government puppets.

I remember an early ABRA coalition strategy meeting in Virginia. Our lawyers from Appalachian Mountain Advocates and Southern Environmental Law Center were telling us that the ACP plan had regulatory weaknesses. They would take ACP to court on these deficits. In the meantime, all of us would continue to rally people to write FERC, policymakers, and train to be watchdogs if the project commenced. And "delay" would be our friend.

Initially the project was slated to cross 20 miles north of my home in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, and northerly on adjacent counties. But the route ran into serious karst issues. As it turned out, ACP was rerouted to a more southern route. I remember the cold winter day when I learned the route would be 600 yards from my home of 40 years. I quickly contacted neighbors. And decided then and there that I was not a NIMBY (not in my backyard) person. After all, if the pipeline was to be built, it would intrude on people. Why should I be exempt while others would suffer? And at least with this new route I would be living close enough to monitor it.

Over the next several years I helped organize community meetings, letter writing campaigns, environmental monitoring training, and collaborated with many wonderful people locally and through our partnering collaborations. Besides ABRA and its 50 coalition partners in Virginia and West Virginia (several of them branches of national organizations), I will point out several.

The Greenbrier River Watershed Association educates communities on the value and needed protection of this longest untamed (unblocked) river left in the eastern United States.

The Mountain Lakes Preservation Alliance a multi-county membership organization in central West Virginia that promotes clean water and air, clean energy, landowner rights, public health and safety, and sustainable and inclusive economic development through education and advocacy. The late April Keating, a founding member, worked indefatigably to stop the ACP. She is deeply missed.

West Virginia Rivers, a state-wide organization, provides scientific studies, advocacy to state government, and coalition power to protect and enhance the waters of the state. Autumn Crowe is an experienced trained environmental scientist in wetland delineations, environmental site assessments, and permitting. Executive Director Angie Rosser is adept at policy advocacy, community organizing, coalition building and program administration.

Eight Rivers Council is the local organization I lead to protect the eight rivers that have its source in my home Pocahontas County.

Over the several years of fighting the ACP, we and other organizations held training sessions for citizens to monitor construction-based water silting, improper protections, and slides. Jeff Singleton volunteered his airplane to fly over construction to take high-resolution photos that other volunteers examined. Some of us had drones to photograph sites. Many wrote to policymakers and regulatory agencies, wrote Letters to their newspapers, held meetings to educate the public, and put out "No Pipeline" signs.

And yes, my wife and I prayed that the pipeline would "cease and desist” every day we drove by the equipment yard.
Atlantic Coast Pipeline in the Rearview Mirror By Lewis Freeman

Dominion Energy and Duke Energy, partners in the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) project, announced on July 5 that they had decided not to proceed with the project. In a joint statement, the companies said: "This was a necessary decision given the legal uncertainties facing the project, and we deeply regret that we were unable to complete this project."

The timing of the announcement was a shock to most, particularly since the owners of the project had won an important Supreme Court decision 3 weeks before that. But, the Dominion/Duke announcement was not a complete surprise. In March 2019 Duke CEO Lynn Good conceded in an interview with Bloomberg Television there was a possibly that the project might not be completed and that if that were the case Duke would need a "Plan B." According to a recent post-mortem article in the Charlotte (NC) Business Journal about the ACP cancellation, consideration about abandoning the project began as long ago as late last year.

Construction status of the ACP at the time of cancellation

Construction on the ACP had been suspended in December 2018 due to the project losing its permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement, as required by the Endangered Species Act). At the time of the ACP cancellation announcement, only 72 miles (less than 12%) of the 600-mile route had been under construction), half of it in West Virginia and half in North Carolina. No construction was ever initiated in Virginia. In addition to the 72 miles of construction activity, trees had been felled along an additional 169 miles of the route.

Reasons for the decision to cancel the ACP

There were many factors that contributed to the companies’ decision to pull the plug on the ACP. Among them were:

- **Delays and cost overruns** – The ACP was significantly behind schedule and projected costs were twice what had originally been announced. When initially proposed in May 2014 by Dominion as the Southeast Reliability Project (it was renamed the ACP in September 2014 when Duke Energy became a partner), the pipeline was to have cost $4 billion and been completed by the end of 2018.

- **Changed market conditions** – The original cited need for the ACP was to provide natural gas for new power plants. 80% of the gas that would have been carried by the ACP was earmarked for such plants. Since 2014, market conditions for natural gas have dramatically changed and numerous new plants that were planned were cancelled. Further, the overall demand for natural gas diminished considerably in the intervening years, creating a supply glut.

- **The loss of 8 key permits** – In addition to losing its permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the ACP had lost court challenges that vacated permits from the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Park Service, four districts of the Army Corps of Engineers and the air permit for a compressor station in Buckingham County, VA. As the Dominion/Duke joint statement noted, there was ongoing uncertainty as to when and if all the necessary permits would be restored. This is despite the companies’ successful appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court on one issue involving the Forest Service permit: the ability to cross the Appalachian Trail.

Contributions of ABRA and its members to the cancellation of the ACP

The circumstances that contributed to the cancellation decision for the ACP didn’t occur in a vacuum. The efforts over the last six years of ABRA and its member organizations, including West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, and many allied groups helped shape circumstance.

- The numerous successful legal challenges that delayed the project were brought by two law firms that are ABRA members – Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and Appalachian Mountain Advocates (Appalmad) – on behalf of client groups that were primarily member organizations of ABRA and in conjunction with several allied organizations, in particular the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, both ABRA members, provided important legal assistance.

- **ABRA’s Compliance Surveillance Initiative (CSI), created in early 2018 as a program to monitor construction activity on Atlantic Coast Pipeline in rearview mirror (Continued from p. 1) the ACP provided valuable research and intelligence that helped SELC and Appalmad in the legal cases they filed. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has been among those groups providing strong financial support for the CSI program.

- The thousands of impacted landowners and volunteers in Virginia and West Virginia who were recruited and organized by ABRA and its member organizations applied critical commentary and public pressure to responsible regulatory agencies, legislators and the media. These combined, coordinated efforts were critical to influencing Dominion and Duke’s decision to abandon the ACP project.

Lew Freeman is Executive Director of Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA). Lew has extensive experience as a lobbyist in Washington, DC with several trade groups, including creating the plastic recycling code. Lew has also been president of an opera company and is a professional actor and singer.

Lew lives in Highland County, Va.

The Conservation Hub: A New Tool

The Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA) announced in November 2020 an exciting new program: The Conservation Hub. ABRA’s Conservation Hub program promotes responsible resource management by providing data-focused tools that enhance a project’s transparency, strengthen its accountability to regulatory agencies and facilitate public participation in its evaluation process. The Hub is a regional information and mapping portal, tailored to specific projects in the central Appalachian region of Virginia and West Virginia encompassing 52 counties (26 in VA and 26 in WV, see map below), but also an information resource on the natural resources and character of the region.

Projects beyond the region will be considered on a case by case basis.

The Conservation Hub is an outgrowth of the mapping system developed for ABRA’s Construction Surveillance Initiative (CSI), a program that was created to monitor construction activity of the now-cancelled Atlantic Coast Pipeline. (Note: The CSI program will continue until restoration of the ACP route has been completed.)

Among the lessons learned from ABRA’s fight against the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project were the limitations that regulatory agencies often have in conducting in-depth analysis of a project’s impacts, particularly those projects that would have cumulative impacts. Also, the complexity of many projects creates challenges for members of the public wishing to comment and participate as stakeholders in decision-making processes. ABRA believes the Hub program can help address these and other shortcomings of the permitting and regulatory processes that govern projects by making it possible to:

- Effectively examine project plans and proposals in appropriate geographic, environmental, and regulatory context,

- Maintain oversight of implementation compliance and performance by overlaying approved plans (erosion and sediment control, slope management, stream crossing, etc.) with georeferenced aerial photography of actual construction, and

- Track regulatory system efficacy by mapping noncompliance and agency enforcement actions.

Initial work has begun on several projects. For more about the Hub program, including the aforementioned trial projects, visit the Hub link appearing at the top of the ABRA website homepage at https://www.abralliance.org/.
Hydraulic fracturing has boomed in the U.S. over the past decade, but unless you live near it, you may not realize how close fracking wells can be to homes and schools. In Colorado, the wellbore – the hole drilled to extract oil or gas – can be 500 feet from someone’s house under current state rules. In some states, like Texas, drilling can be even closer.

For people living in these areas, that means noise, pollution and other stressors that can harm physical and mental health.

People with homes near fracking operations describe vibrations that can make sleep difficult and disturb their pets. Truck traffic around wellpads adds to the noise, dust and other airborne pollutants, creating another layer of industrial disruption.

One woman I spoke with had a 30-foot-high sound wall put up around her house, but the parade of semitrucks at all hours still rattled her home, and the sound wall couldn’t keep out the noise. When she opened her bedroom curtains, all she saw was a brown wall where she used to have mountain views.

As a social scientist who studies extractive industries and their environmental justice and health impacts, I have spent years in communities with unconventional oil and gas activity, visiting homes and well sites.

My research shows that living near fracking sites can lead to chronic stress and self-reported depression. These effects often relate to systemic problems associated with the industry.

**Consequences of the fracking boom**

The boom in hydraulic fracturing started around 2010 and made the U.S. the No. 1 producer of hydrocarbons globally. In Colorado, fracking has since helped quadruple oil production and increased natural gas production. But that growth has come with consequences. By 2017, researchers estimated 4.7 million people lived within 1 mile of an unconventional oil or gas well in the U.S.

Health studies have found respiratory difficulties like coughing and wheezing in people living and working near fracking sites. Other studies have found increases in endocrine-disrupting chemicals that can affect pregnant women and children, including raising the risks of birth defects and childhood cancers.

Emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change, have also spiked around oil and gas activity.

Less well understood have been the effects on mental health.

In a new study on the mental health effects, I examined multiple communities across northern Colorado, surveyed hundreds of households and visited people's homes, schools and wellpads.

Two drivers of stress and mental health harm stood out:

- First, people report chronic stress and depression related to their uncertainty about environmental and public health risks – and inadequate access to useful information about it.
- Second, stress and depression relate to people’s experiences of political powerlessness – particularly their inability to control the activity, where it occurs, and how it is regulated.

Previous studies have suggested links to depression and lower quality of life, as well as social psychological impacts, such as increased tensions within communities, but these studies typically used surveys or government data. This new research looked closer at people's experiences.

**Fearing the unknown**

Imagine you live in northern Colorado. A company notifies you that it will start drilling in the open space in your subdivision that you can see from your backyard or deck. You try to find information about the health or environmental risks, but that information is locked behind a publisher's paywall or it is buried in hundreds of pages full of technical language.

One of the people I interviewed, a 45-year-old teacher who has lived in his community his entire life, talked about stress from the uncertainties of living near fracking: “What’s stressful is the unknowns and how this industry is operating behind a curtain all the time. … When you don’t know the chemicals they’re pumping down. You don’t know where they’re getting the water. You don’t know how much these tanks are leaking. … To me, that is stressful, the not knowing.”

Other people reported feeling stress over uncertainties about long-term impacts. A retired former city worker said: “We’re lab rats right now. They’re learning about it as they’re going. … We don’t know what the impacts are going to be 20 years down the line.”

Many people feel powerless to do anything about it. In Colorado, people typically have only three minutes to talk during public meetings, while the companies have more time to present their cases.

A middle-aged woman living with a wellpad about 1,000 feet from her deck explained why public meetings felt so exclusive: “This was a public hearing … and they turned it over to [an oil company] to give their slideshow. … [The oil company] proceeded to do about a two-hour presentation, so there was no time for public input. So four or five people out of a hundred people who wanted to protest got a chance to talk. It’s very hard to be heard.”

These patterns emerged across my data.

About 90% of the people I interviewed reported increased, chronic stress related to nearby fracking operations, and 75% reported feeling long-term depression – particularly because of the uncertainty about the impacts and feeling powerless to stop it.

**What can be done about it?**

Governments could help address some of these systemic problems fairly quickly.

The first step is to provide easy-to-understand, accurate information about the environmental and public health risks, as well as the economic risks and benefits.

Governments can also give people more meaningful opportunities to participate in zoning and other decisions about how, when and where hydraulic fracturing takes place.

Fixing the health and environment risks that underlie the stress is more challenging. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission is expected in early November to finalize new drilling rules that include a 2,000-foot setback from homes, the widest statewide rule in the country, but wells could still be built closer.

People I've interviewed have reported feeling a sense of empowerment by organizing with others to fight for more local control. But solutions aren't only the responsibility of governments or the public; companies must be accountable, too.

Stephanie Malin is Associate Professor of Sociology; Co-Founder and Steering Committee Member, Center for Environmental Justice at CSU, Colorado State University.

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“Thank You, Lord, for this food. Amen.”

Praying a “table grace” before a meal is a practice in many homes. Maybe because the Bible says Jesus blessed bread before giving it to his disciples at the Last Supper. So it is common in family groups, church picnics, even at some secular organization meals, for someone to ask people to bow their heads to pray a blessing on the food. Then people eat.

A Story of that Bite of Food You are Eating

That morsel of food you put in your mouth has a story with many chapters. You have sat down to eat a nutritious dinner. After praying grace, you take your fork and spear a bite of broccoli to eat. That broccoli you munch on was born and raised on an industrial farm 2500 miles away in central California. That forkful was sprayed with chemical fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide. Tended from planting to harvesting by migrant field workers who travel from place to place following seasonal crops. Picked, packaged, and placed by workers into a refrigerated truck whose driver takes it to a large distribution center. Workers there put what has become your mouthful onto a delivery truck whose driver drove it to a grocery store and unloaded it. A grocery worker put it on a display case and priced it. Then you picked it up, paid the cashier for it, and took it home. This evening you cooked it and set it on the table. You eat.

Each “story chapter” has an impact upon the environment and the laborers. Sunlight energy, water, along with soil to hold the plant and provide nutrients. Hospitable weather. Workers who are paid well or not paid well. Safety and housing of migrant workers. Application of chemicals, and fuel energy to run equipment, refrigeration, even the transportation that workers use to get to their jobs. Indirectly are the stories behind the manufacture of farm equipment and transportation vehicles that are part of the food process.

Positive and Negative Externalities

An externality is a side effect or consequence of an industrial or commercial activity that affects other parties without this being reflected in the cost of the goods or services involved. An externality can be positive or it can be negative. An externality is often further classified into consumption or production.

An example of a positive externality is the pollination of surrounding crops by bees kept by a beekeeper for honey. Another example: Appreciation of home values due to the development of a nearby city park. A “Free Rider” is a person who benefits from something without expending effort or payment or avoiding a responsible social commitment.

The classic example of a negative externality is the factory that dumps untreated waste into a river. People in communities downstream who access that polluted river water either pay to have it treated or else suffer health and recreation diminishment.

Environmental Full Cost Accounting and Ethical Consumption

Companies and individuals can often increase profit margins by cutting corners through irresponsible pollution or habitat destruction. Taxpayers and communities “downstream” pick up the tab or suffer consequences. Those who dump their responsibility onto others are dishonest and akin to thieves. Governments have set up regulatory agencies to ensure honesty and fair play, but sometimes these protective agencies are muzzled by governments corruptly influenced by polluting industry campaign funding.

Ethical consumers seek out honest, fair-play companies which to do business. Watchdogging government policies for fairness, and advocacy for just, effective, enforceable policies is needful. Educating one another in a complex world takes patient diligence but is crucial toward getting a sufficiently critical mass of people to successfully influence good policy.

Gratitude for God’s Good Gifts of Life

A list of blessings just connected to our food could be a mile long. We should remember some of these. And importantly, commit ourselves to striving the best we can to help every step of the chain involving our food to be just, honest, and compatible with God’s creation order.

“Thank You, Lord, for this food. (and for so much more…. ) Amen.”
Food Waste as Irreverence to God

by Allen Johnson

Copia™ has developed the world's first end-to-end solution to get excess food from restaurants, hotels, hospitals, cafeterias, convention events, and other businesses to people with food need. Utilizing technology, such businesses can alert Copia to pick up unused food to take to nonprofit organizations that distribute the food. (gocopia.com)

What Can Church Folks Do?

I had the privilege of working closely with Ron Sider in the early development of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) in 1993-94. During that same time I took Master's degree courses from him in theology as related to public policy. Of his many authored books, Sider's most influential work was titled, "Rich Christians In An Age Of Hunger." First published in 1978, it has since gone through several revisions to update source material. It is widely used in classrooms and church study groups.

Sider's work addresses biblical principles for Western churches whose pews are filled with affluent people in a world where hundreds of millions of people are desperately poor and hungry. How to productively help the needy requires research, a willingness to help, self-sacrifice, and compassionate love for God and people.

Jesus explains clearly that helping the hungry, or not helping the hungry, is a criteria for eternal judgment. (Matthew 25) Many churches help their local communities with food banks, soup kitchens, clothing distribution, and assistance to recover from fires, floods, and storms. Helping the homeless, substance addicts, establishing refugees, and running community youth programs are other worthy endeavors. Untold millions of volunteer time is productively harnessed to do good. Responsible public policy witness is a prophetic role for discerning Christians.

Individually, some congregations are careful to minimize disposable food items, take care to conserve electricity and heating/cooling, and importantly, teach their congregants reverent stewardship of all God's gifts of material blessings. More congregations are retrofitting their lighting, HVAC, insulation, and even solar. So Church, conserve God's gifts, share them, and reverence the Creator of it all.

Surplus: Throw Away or Use?

Jesus asked that the excess food not be wasted. The Bible does not say what happened to the gathered-up food. One can conjure from studies of that time and place that almost everyone in the crowd Jesus spoke to was poor. Some perhaps on the cusp of life-supporting nutrition. One study suggests a typical hard-working adult Palestinian peasant of that time existed on a daily diet of about 1400 calories. The poor would snap up the excess.

As a boy growing up in the 1950’s I sometimes turned up my nose at the meal on my supper plate. I remember my parents admonishing me to be grateful for food, since people in China were starving to death. Years later I learned what they said was true. From 1958-1961 an estimated 30 million Chinese died of starvation due to a combination of weather-related crop failures and Communist regime mismanagement. Even if my supper food logistically could not reach a hungry Chinese child, God knows when we have a wasteful attitude toward surplus food in a world with much dire hunger.

The British-based Food Ethics Council says, “Every piece of food carries within it the efforts of the people who’ve made it and the natural resources of the planet that’s nurtured it. The waste of embedded energy, carbon, water, labor and land-use is deeply unfair.”

“Around one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted across the food system, from farm to fork, much of it unavoidable. Sometimes it’s because of the way the food system is set up, and sometimes by our behavior. On farms, food is thrown away because it doesn’t look perfect, and at home we chuck away almost 50% of the UK’s total food waste.”

University of California's Nutrition Policy Institute researcher Wendi Gosliner says, “Food waste presents a major challenge in the United States. Estimates suggest that up to 40% of the food produced nationally never gets consumed, causing substantial economic and environmental harms. Wasted food utilizes vast quantities of precious land, water and human resources, yet rather than nourishing people, it feeds landfills, producing methane gasses that poison the environment. Much of the food waste (43%) occurs at the household level.”

Food waste is a huge contributor to climate change. If food waste were a country, it would rank third place in greenhouse emissions behind China and the United States. Producing food takes water, land, labor, and fossil fuels for fertilizer, farmland operations, transportation to markets, processing, packaging, and preservation such as refrigeration. Thrown-out food when decomposing emits climate-warming methane. In other words, we are wasting our planet to grow much food that no one eats.

The U.S. spends $218 billion a year, or 1.3% of GDP, growing, processing, and transporting food that is never eaten. That adds up to 52.4 million tons of food sent to landfill annually. Add to that another 10.1 million tons estimated to be discarded or left unharvested on farms and in packinghouses, and you have a 63-million-ton mountain of wasted calories, resources, and energy. Put another way, if all of our country’s wasted food was grown in one place, this mega-farm would cover roughly 80 million acres, over three-quarters of the state of California. Growing the food on this wasteful farm would consume all the water used in California, Texas, and Ohio combined. (Refed.com)

Studies show that over the past several decades dinner plate sizes, refrigerator capacities, and restaurant portions have gotten larger. Trends also show increased food waste and obesity. When portion sizes are smaller, even if second helpings are available, thrown-away food decreases.

Sadly, perfectly safe, nutritional food gets thrown out because it is blemished, becomes spoiled due to languishing in refrigerators, or simply because people do not want to have “leftovers for supper.”

Meanwhile, about one in eight Americans do not have a steady supply of food to their table. How do we convert food that would be thrown away into food that is consumed by needy people?

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. (John 6:11-13, NLT)
"Appalachia's most valuable export is our young people."

So a preacher told me decades ago. It is as true then as it is today. Not coal, not gas, not timber, but our young adults are our most valuable exports.

Citizens of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia all pay taxes to educate the children of their communities. Parents raise and train their offspring. Civic groups build libraries, playgrounds, sponsor sports teams, and youth organizations. Churches teach values.

And then the kids grow up and move elsewhere. Especially the more talented and motivated of them, who in their leaving further impoverish their birthplace communities. Their new communities reap the benefits. It is well-known that the vibrancy of communities is directly proportional to the business and community vigor that the Middle Class brings. Too often, the best of Appalachian-grown youth bring those attributes to outside places.

Rural Depopulation is National

Rural Depopulation has been more the norm than the exception in the United States for the past several censuses. In February 2019, Kenneth Johnson and Daniel Lichter authored their extensive study, “Rural Depopulation in a Rapidly Urbanizing America” (University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy). Following are some excerpts (bold emphases ours):

"Depopulation is prevalent in remote rural counties that are not adjacent to metropolitan areas: more than 46 percent of these remote counties are depopulating, compared to 24 percent of those adjacent to metropolitan counties, trends that may reflect the advantages of proximity to urban labor markets, services, and economic activities. Depopulation also reflects the historical impact of employment declines in agriculture resulting from mechanization and farm consolidation. More than 80 percent of all rural farm counties are depopulating, compared to just 15 percent of nonmetropolitan recreational counties and 13 percent of retirement counties. Indeed, 59 percent of the recreational and 74 percent of the retirement counties are currently at their population peaks."

Population loss from outmigration is the most important factor in the initial stages of depopulation, and young adults are particularly prominent in these outmigration streams. Depopulating rural counties had an average migration loss of 43 percent of their 20-24-year-olds in each decade from 1950 to 2010, and such chronic young-adult outmigration meant that there were far fewer women of childbearing age and, as a result, many fewer births. In contrast, the sizeable older population that did not migrate aged in place, resulting in rising mortality. Consequently, between 2000 and 2010, 60 percent of depopulating rural counties had more deaths than births. This combination of young-adult outmigration, fewer births, and more deaths produced a downward spiral of population loss that can be difficult to break.

Why Depopulation Matters and How to Reverse the Drain

Urban areas have certain advantages in efficient scales of economy and services. For example, more remote rural areas struggle to have affordable high quality broadband. Utility companies back off installing expensive long fiber cable that only gains a few customers. The proximity to airports, business hubs, and even more concentrated government services favor urban areas. Talented young people often find better starter jobs in urban areas, and youth-oriented social life can be more available on any day of the week.

Rural schools, hospitals, and similar public services and some businesses have fixed costs no matter how few or many people these entities serve, creating higher expenditure per capita. And once high outmigration begins in a locale, the process seems to accelerate. The young leave in greater numbers for reasons just stated while the older remain. These emmigrated young people have babies in urban areas. The remaining rural older people die off.

Attracting young people to stay, and outside young people to move to Appalachian or other rural communities requires several pillars. (1) A critical mass of creative people, diverse culturally; (2) A clean, attractive, recreationally enjoyable natural environment; (3) Quality technology (such as strong broadband), and availability of quality education at all levels; (4) A warm welcome to newcomers.

In 2017 the Roanoke Times printed an Editorial that lauded the idea of welcoming immigrants into Appalachia. The article showed how formerly declining rural Canadian communities had picked up economic and social vigor by inviting and initially assisting immigrants from other countries into their communities. Historically, thousands of foreign immigrants as well as southern African-Americans moved into Appalachia to work the coal mines in the early 20th century. Work was plentiful then, albeit brutal. Today good jobs are scarce in the coalfields, as employment has dropped precipitously. Yet in some rural areas, an influx of immigrants could induce vitality and economic vigor.

Enterprise young people can forge opportunities toward a satisfying life in Appalachia. And indeed, young adults are driving many of the new businesses and services opening up in Appalachia.

Generation West Virginia, for example, is a statewide organization dedicated to attracting retaining, and advancing young people in their state by networking, educating, identifying priorities, and influencing public policy.

The bright lights of young leaders are our present and future hope to reversing rural decline. Let us support our talented, altruistic younger generations!
Local Folks are in the Way Of Mining Coal So Move Them Out! ?? by Allen Johnson

The huge scale of mountaintop removal surface coal mining sooner or later rubs up against the homes of local people. The coal company covets the coal beneath the landowners, and finds it an unprofitable regulatory nuisance (weak though it be) to mine near homes. And the home dwellers are bothered by the noise of blasting, the carpeting of their furniture with dust, and the increased health hazards associated with the pollutants. Building foundations are cracked by explosions, water wells sometimes dry up, fly rock dislodged from blasting can pound into a house, and flood damage often accompanies the loss of mountainside vegetation and stream diversions.

Sometimes a coal company might try to buy out landowners, especially if a community is small in population. Because of the noise and dust and heavy traffic associated with mountaintop removal, nearby landowners experience massive devaluations of their homes. After all, who would pay for a home with such a mining operation close by? Who? The coal company.

No One Lives in Lindytown, WV

Lindytown in Boone County, WV is a prime example. In 2008, Massey Coal began to buy out residents' homes. As reported in NY Times (Dan Barry, April 12, 2011), James Smith (68), a retired miner who sold his home explained, “You could wash your car today, and tomorrow you could write your name on it in the dust,” he says. “It was just unpleasant to live in that town. Period.”

Smith continues to say that Massey was a motivated buyer given that it was probably cheaper to buy out a small community than to deal with all the complaint-generated inspections, or the possible lawsuits over silica dust and “fly rock.”

Family cemeteries by law are supposed to be protected by a 100-foot buffer zone from surface mining. Supposed to be, as often these cemeteries are desecrated since blasting and heavy equipment disturbs graves. Furthermore, families wanting to visit cemeteries surrounded by mountaintop removal have egregious, time-consuming red tape to navigate. Of course, the serenity is ruined.

A Lawyer Pushes for Forced Depopulation

In my hand is a 19 page talk and narration by H.L. (Jack) Snyder, at the time an attorney for the Charleston, WV, Law Office of Robinson & McElwee. The paper is for a presentation at the adult Sunday School class of a large prestigious Episcopal Church in that city.

On January 9, 2000, John Taylor, a board of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, had given a presentation to that class on reasons why mountaintop removal coal mining is a wrong that Christians should oppose. Snyder, whose firm often represented coal firms, asked to lead a session defending mountaintop removal. Request granted.

Snyder leads off by explaining, “This paper deals only with the southwestern coal counties of our State. The coal mined here is the best in the world…” Snyder then proceeds to show a slide show of mountaintop Removal reclamation, followed by what he believes are logical refutations of Taylor’s main arguments.

The closing pages of Snyder’s paper is chilling! He argues that the State should hasten depopulation through a combination of enticement and coercion.

To set up his argument, Snyder accurately says that mining employs far fewer workers than in earlier eras. While demand for coal was strong in 2000, mechanization had long ago replaced mules and hand tools. Strip mining and mountaintop removal required far fewer workers than underground mining. Furthermore, more coal was recovered in surface mining.

Lower coal employment in mono-economies by itself can bring about depopulation to a region. Populations that remain have higher rates of poverty. Snyder’s solution is to induce those remaining to move. He claims they will be better off.

Snyder says, “I want to offer five proposals. They may not be sensible in political terms, but they’re sensible to me. They’re designed to hasten the depopulation of the ten counties—and yet make a better life for the people most affected.” Following are his proposals. (He has commentary on each)

Proposal One: The state should systematically destroy decrepit houses in the coal fields.

Proposal Two: The State should make annual assistance grants for a period of years to low-income families who choose to relocate outside West Virginia. If they came back, they’d lose their entitlement.

Proposal Three: The State should offer free college education at State-supported schools to the coal-field kids whose families move out and stay out.

Proposal Four: The State should condemn the land of stubborn people in the way of a permitted surface mine project, pay ‘em the cost of relocation as well as the value of their property, and sell the condemned land to the permittee or its landowner.

Proposal Five: A family should have the right to qualify for assistance under two or more of the other proposals.

Snyder’s Proposal Four is what all of this is really about. Get rid of the people in the way of mountaintop removal. He is terribly condescending to the inhabitants, many who have lived on their lands for many generations.

Snyder haughtily concludes, “The most self-reliant of the laid-off miners are long gone, and the most self-reliant still around would be the first wave of applicants under my proposals. Almost every kid with a grain of sense already leaves the southwestern coal fields as soon as formal education ends.”

Snyder’s paper is not an official reflection of his law firm’s view. To read Snyder’s entire paper, go to https://ohvec.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/depopulation-plan.pdf
The Esau Scrip and Rape Rooms

Hushed rumors sometimes surfaced about an upstairs company storeroom where desperately poor wives of injured coal miners paid off their debts with sex to coal bosses. That was the Esau Scrip.

In the Bible, Esau is the older twin brother of Jacob. In his society, the eldest son held the birthright to a larger portion of the inheritance. One day, Esau came home very hungry and smelled stew that Jacob was cooking. Jacob tricked Esau into selling his birthright for bowls of stew.

Hearing from mine historian Wess Harris about the Whipple Company Store, Appalachian folklorists Michael and Carrie Kline interviewed the building owners, Chuck and Joy Lynn in 2010. The Lynns had bought the long-closed store building five years earlier to save it from being razed. They hoped to turn it into a learning center about the era of coal company stores. At times elderly visitors would stop by the building to reminisce stories with the Lynn’s about the bygone era. Here and there, stories would whisper out about the Esau Scrip.

The Whipple Company Store Museum and Learning Center is an imposing multiple-storyed building located a few miles southwest of Oak Hill, Fayette County, West Virginia. Built in 1893, the 6000 sq. ft. structure housed all the commodities coal miners purchased for their needs. Coal miners were not paid in U.S. currency, but rather in company-issued scrip that could only be spent at the company store, to pay for their company housing, and pay the company doctor.

The former Whipple Country Store has since been repainted since this old photo. The Lynn family sold the property in 2018. The new owners plan to raise funds for a new roof.

In 2011, the Kline’s stirred up a hornet’s nest when they published Appalachian Heritage (vol. 59 no. 5), their study of the horrible working conditions in coalmines of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, topped by the scandalous Esau Scrip. The article infuriated the coal industry, and upset academic historians who excused their negligence in reporting the dark seamy side of that coal industry by charging insufficient corroborating data.

One elderly gentleman, retired after 50 years working in the coal mines, told the Lynn’s, “When you lived in the coal camps back early on, if your daddy got killed in the mines, your mama had to pack up and leave. There was no ifs, ands, or buts. She was out, out, just out. But if she had a young boy eight or older, he could mine in place of his daddy, and that way his mama could stay in the mining camp.”

The Whipple Store has a secret second floor, like a closet five feet high, accessed by an elevator from a basement entrance. Coffins were stored inside. As Joy Lynn says, “They needed coffins every day, because we lost mining men in large numbers to accidents and occupational diseases. And the coffins would service three mines in the area. Some days they’d need forty, some days they’d need ten, some days one, and some days sixty. We’re talking about the period between 1893 and 1930.”

Funeral expenses were deducted from the deceased miner’s last pay.

Coal camp housing was rigidly segregated. Blacks had to live by the railroad track where black smoke from the passing steam locomotives would rain soot upon them. Blacks were only allowed at the company store at certain hours, and then had to come to an outside window to hand in their list. Immigrants from Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Italy lived in “Hunk Hill,” having been pounced upon by recruiters as they disembarked from Ellis Island, NY. With such wide language differences, the coal companies believed they could better thwart union organizing.

The Whipple Store had a large, ornate ballroom on the third floor for coal owners and bosses to dance. A small curtained room is off to the side. It served as the fitting room.

Joy Lynn says,

…women were accompanied by one of the guards from the first floor to try on shoes they had seen displayed in the shoe department. A woman, of course, seldom had money of her own and barely enough scrip or credit at the company store to cover the week’s groceries and rent. So when she got up to the shoe room she found it furnished with a cot upon which the guard encouraged her to sit while trying on the shoes. When the door shut behind her, she found herself alone with the guard.” Lynn says that several women have talked to her as calling this the “Rape Room.”

According to the stories, women, having been raped, would be escorted downstairs. Lynn says, “They would have to keep their mouths shut tight about what happened upstairs. If the miners got wind of this, what would a husband do? How would he react?” A belligerent man might have a mine accident find him. Pushing back at coal bosses was dangerous.

The Esau Scrip underscores the cruelty of coal mine companies and their bosses. Miners lived pay day to pay day. Joy Lynn shows company-issued papers dated in the 1920’s. She explains, “Well, sometimes the men would get sick and couldn’t mine coal, and the women would need food for their children.” Desperate to provide for their children, they would take loaned scrip to buy food at the store. “If a man could get back to work in the mines in thirty days, and he was a good miner, the woman wouldn’t have to pay it back.”

Joy Lynn adds,

Though penniless and often with her family facing possible eviction, a miner’s wife nonetheless possessed physical assets, which the Baldwin-Felts guards and other company men at the store often found compelling and greatly desirable. Esau was a kind of super credit issued by the company store superintendent only to mothers of hungry children.

For the miner’s wife, forfeiting on the Esau agreement meant submitting to the sexual depredations of the company men, compromising her own integrity and birthright all for a poke of beans to feed her children or a week’s rent to keep a roof over their heads. She perceived herself without options, totally victimized by a well-established, bureaucratic system conducted through the company store at a time when corporate profits were mushrooming: the black gold rush of the eastern mountains. But corporate ethics and responsibilities had yet—and still have yet—to be defined outside the calla of raw profiteering. Such excesses were built on a system which kept the workers’ pockets empty and their spirits broken...

King Coal’s Censorship

Michael Kline ran into a brick wall trying to publish his article in West Virginia. Goldenseal Magazine, the premier quarterly of West Virginia history and culture, declined to print it. “The main challenge we face from a publishing standpoint is the overall intent of this manuscript to expose the sins of the coal industry, accusing them of rape and murder on a (this was in the 1920s). The coal camps were isolated with access only through railroad, so escape back to home would be difficult.

The coal industry in Appalachia expects all citizens,
Coal Propaganda in Public Schools

Eight grade public school students across West Virginia take a course in their state history. High achievers can take a competitive test for an award as a Knight or Lady of the Golden Horseshoe. Each of 55 counties has two winners (110) with another 121 given out to other high tests. Since its inception in 1931, about 15,000 eighth-grade students have received the Golden Horseshoe pin. Yet the largest insurrection since the Civil War, the Battle of Blair Mountain and related miners’ union struggles, typically drew a blank from these students. This history was purposely avoided. The students did get a large dose of coal industry propaganda. Why? First of all, the award was established by Phil Conley, who was the human relations officer for the Consolidated Coal Company before becoming managing director of a coal propaganda organization, the American Constitutional Association (ACA). The ACA shared office space with the West Virginia Department of Education. The ACA provided institutes to train teachers in its version of history favorable to the coal industry and red-baiting of labor organizing. (I should add that in recent years there has been some opening up to students to the truth of labor struggles and mine disasters.)

Miner Woes

You load sixteen tons, what do you get
Another day older and deeper in debt
Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store

Hoot Gibson (Larry’s uncle) was interviewed by Michael and Carrie Kline about his remembrances of working in coal mines on Kayford Mountain as a young man. Following are some excerpts (thanks for Elise Keaton for transcribing)

Back then, the company had you hooked because you worked there for them and you lived in their houses, you had to pay them rent, and if you loaded coal in the ton, you had to buy your own powder to shoot with, you had to buy your own tools, you had to buy your own carbide to have a light. They weren't putting out nothing. And they had a blacksmith that sharpened the tools, but every time you had your tools sharpened, they'd check so much off of you for the blacksmith. So you're paying the blacksmith, the company wasn't paying you.

And they had a check weigh-man. For years it was a company check weigh-man, when the men load by the ton, and they found out he was cheating them so bad that they union hired their selves a check weigh-man. And if you had a little bit of rock in that car when you loaded it by the ton, they'd say, “oh, we're going to dock you for this car.” And they'd go ahead and dock him for that car and then dump it anyway. See you had a check you put on the side of the car, your number, check number. I can remember when they made, I believe it was back in the early '30s, I believe they got 32 cents a ton for loading coal. They had a lot of men up there that'd load 50 ton a day with a shovel…. Today it takes 60 seconds to load a whole car of 240 tons to a car.

Child labor was common in Appalachian coal mines. Poor families needed the extra pittance from children such as this eleven-year old “tipple boy” working long hours one mile deep into the Turkey Knob Mine in W.Va. (1908)

Lewis Hine’s shocking photos of child labor stirred enactment of federal child labor laws in 1916.

Wess Harris is a sociologist, farmer, and educator who is widely recognized as a leading authority on West Virginia’s Great Mine War. His other books include editing William Blizzard’s When Miners March and ‘Cross the Pond: Vietnam Vets Uncensored. Written in Blood (PM Press, Oakland, California, 2017) is a collection of writings by several writers, edited by Wess Harris. These researched essays expose the corrupt and evil depredations past and present of the coal industry upon West Virginia.

Much of the storyline and many of the quotations in the above article are from Written In Blood. Michael Kline writes several of the essays. Michael and Carrie Kline can be accessed their website at folktalk.org/
Peter Illyn, a Christian environmental evangelist and resident of La Center, Washington, died on Friday, December 11th, 2020, at the age of 62 after an 18-year battle with cancer.

Peter is survived by his wife of 40 years, Debra Illyn (nee Watson); his children Alexis Rose Williams and Andrew Peter Illyn; his sisters Kathy Moore, Beth Yount, and Amy Holiday; and three grandchildren, Phoenix Illyn, and Wesley and Levi Williams.

Peter was born in Syracuse, New York on March 19, 1958, to Alexis Vladimir Illyn and Olga Ajogin Illyn. He grew up Russian Orthodox in South Carolina and attended North Augusta High School. He left home at the age of 14, and spent five years on the road. While traveling through Portland, he stayed at the Nicky Cruz Center where he responded to the gospel, and determined to train for the ministry.

Settling in Portland, at the age of 19 he met his future wife Debbie. He finished his GED and went on to earn an AA degree at Portland Community College. He earned credentials as an evangelical minister at Rhema Bible College, during which time he and Debbie married. He then served nine years as a pastor of Foursquare Churches in Portland and Yakima, after which he earned his undergraduate degree in marketing at Portland State University.

In 1989 Peter took a sabbatical and hiked the entire Oregon and Washington sections of the Pacific Crest Trail in the company of two pack llamas. It was on that trip that he had a second “conversion” experience and received a call to care for creation, a calling he pursued for the rest of his life.

He returned to Portland State and earned a Masters degree in Business and Marketing. As a result of the notoriety from his world-record setting llama trek, he was invited to be the marketing director for the International Llama Association.

After working for a time with Green Cross, the Evangelical Environmental Network and Target Earth, Peter founded his own nonprofit in 2001 called Restoring Eden, and he served as its director until his death.

His hobbies over the years included organic farming, leatherwork, hiking and camping in the backwoods with his children. His favorite pasttime in the last few years has been hanging out in the garden with his three rambunctious grandchildren, who he deeply loved.

Peter enjoyed a national reputation as a defender of creation and a champion of environmental justice for the poor and oppressed. He inspired a generation of Christians to make their hearts bigger, hands dirtier, and voices stronger by rediscovering the biblical call to love, serve, and protect God’s creation.

In Lieu of flowers; donations can be made to the Peter Illyn Memorial Fund. https://www.gofundme.com/f/peter-illyn-memorial-fund

Peter and Debbie Illyn at the Lausanne Creation Conference at Gordon College, 2015.

Debbie Illyn is a public school music instructor gifted in piano, voice, and teaching. She was a strong, steady, loving support for Peter as he battled cancer for 20 years and traveled extensively organizing Christian college students through his organization, Restoring Eden, to advocate for God’s creation.

photo by Allen Johnson

Peter had amazing organizational skills to pull together the Appalachian Community Health Survey Project (ACHSP) that surveyed Appalachian families in communities adjacent to mountaintop removal mining pollution. He recruited student volunteers, worked up the logistics to get them to site, procured lodging and food, organized the daily task, and “herded the cats.”

Peter speaking gift was phenomenal. With his deep barrel-bass voice, he would regale audiences large and small with his intelligence, slightly irreverant humor, hipsterism, and always inspiring listeners to get out of the comfort zone to serve God with action.

Laura Dagley worked for CFTM including helping with the health studies.

CFTM's Tribute to Peter Illyn — Allen Johnson

Lots of laughs being around Peter. His sly humor would sneak up on you. Peter was a happy man with a serious message that God calls us to work for justice for all creation.

The 2015 Lausanne Creation Conference held at Gordon College in Winham, MA., was the last time we collaborated in person. Yet his fertile, creative mind continues to envision many.

December 12, 2020

Peter Illyn had an outsized positive impact upon thousands of people. Now, God embraces Peter in His Love as his body is passed from death into Life eternal.

Peter lost an eye two decades ago to cancer. His resultant eyepatch became part of who he was. Ten years ago cancer metastasized Peter’s body. His diagnosis was terminal. Yet over the next decade, Peter fought back with life-extending experimental medications. Importantly, Peter further developed the ministry he founded, Restoring Eden.

I was blessed to work closely with Peter leading evangelical Christian college students to visit mountaintop removal atrocities in Appalachia and then to Washington, DC, to visit their congressional delegations. This then led to four years of student volunteers on their spring breaks into West Virginia, Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia to gather family health histories of people living in close proximity to mountaintop removal. These studies clearly showed community health is negatively impacted by mountaintop removal. The studies were peer-reviewed and published in health journals. Importantly, these “hands-on” experiences had powerful, sometimes life-changing impacts upon the volunteers. (see photos below)

I had a brief phone call with Peter’s loving wife, Debbie, on Wednesday night. A hospice nurse was present. Peter was on powerful pain medication but comfortable and communicative. Please pray that God comforts Debbie and their two adult children and families.

Those who met Peter know of his humor, his keen insight and intellect, and his personal way of relating to people. The world is better for Peter’s life with us. His legacy will carry on through the many lives who have had the privilege of knowing him.
Hunter's Illegal Radio Collar Tortures a Bear Cub  by Allen Johnson

The pictures to the right are of a young bear that had entered into our chicken coop last August. I shot it at the urging of a WVDNR game warden, who otherwise would have to do it himself.

Several nights earlier a then-unknown predator had broken the outside of our coop enough to get in and eat two of our hens. At the time I was puzzled as it did not seem the work of a fox or raccoon. This time our dog was barking, it was mid-afternoon, and the chicken entrance was open. When I saw a small bear inside the henhouse, I first wondered how it could get through a small door one foot wide and two feet tall?

Here's why? The bear, likely a two-year cub earlier sent off by its mother, was very emaciated. A radio collar was around the bear's neck...and it's right leg had slipped through the collar! Most likely the person who had illegally captured the cub had fitted it with a radio collar to track its whereabouts. Fitted too loosely, the bear had pawed at the irritating collar and had inadvertently pushed its leg through into the collar where it was stuck.

Severely handicapped by the crippling collar, the bear was struggling to forage in a normal way. Facing imminent starvation, it had encroached upon our chicken coop.

The collar, now overtightened from the leg, had cut through the skin into an open wound infested with maggots. Clearly the bear was in misery soon to die from starvation and the infected and infested wound.

The game warden, son of a long-time friend, arrived following our phone call and picked up the bear to take away. He said the radio collar was not one that an authorized wildlife researcher would use. Yet he could not trace it.

My wife and I were incredibly sad. If the invader bear had been normal, we would have shooshed it out and on its way. We were also angry that some unknown hunter had decided to trap this cub and follow it through an illegal collar device.

So how did this hunter capture a bear cub. West Virginia is one of several states that permit a hunting method called hounding. Bear dogs are trained to get on the scent of a bear and chase it until the exhausted bear either turns on the dogs to fight them or climbs a tree to escape the pack. The dogs are equipped with radio collars so the hunters can locate the pack, find the treed bear, and shoot it.

These bear-hound states allow a training season, usually in late summer, for the dogs to practice chasing bears, typically several hours and many miles. Bear cubs are often separated from their mothers during such chases. During training season, it is against the law for a hunter to kill a bear. (to next column)

West Virginia differs from other hounding states with an all-year, 365 day bear hound training season. In other words, bears can be dog-chased for training or (in season) killing year round. It is likely that during such a “training” chase, a hunter had captured a treed cub, collared it, and set it loose in order to locate it later to train his hounds.

A Citizen’s Guide To Climate Change

The West Virginia Climate Alliance recently released A Citizen's Guide to Climate Change. The guide outlines the science behind climate change, lists some of its impacts in West Virginia and across the globe, and provides a menu of potential solutions.

What sets this Guide apart from other publications is that it was written by West Virginians for West Virginians and for those who treasure our state. This colorful publication is informative and well-written. A PDF copy of the guide can be found on the web at: https://wvrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/wvclimate.pdf and a printed copy at West Virginia Climate Alliance, 1544 Lee Street, Charleston, WV 25311

Perry Bryant, the chief producer of this document, says, “We need to be fully prepared for a robust debate on climate change next year.”

Christians For the Mountains is one of 12 supporting coalition groups.

Local Employment Dips in Fracking Locales

The Ohio River Valley Institute (ORVI) has released results of a study of 22 counties across West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio that account for 90 percent of the region’s natural gas production.

Between 2008 and 2019, the number of jobs across the U.S. expanded by 10 percent, and 4 percent in the three states. Yet only 1.7 percent in the 22 counties. Several had net job loss.

The touted economic gas boom has been a local bust. Long-term economic growth is stifled.

Fossil Fuels Kill 9 Million Globally Each Year, Twice More than Previously Thought

Scientists from Harvard and three British universities claim air pollution from the combustion of fossil fuels contribute to nearly one-in-five deaths in 2018 and nearly a third of deaths in eastern Asia. This is twice the 2017 estimate of World Health Organization.

The horrific toll of air pollution surprised even the scientists themselves. As one said, “We were initially very hesitant when we obtained the results because they are astounding.

The study estimates 350,000/yr. in U.S.
Upcoming for The Mountain Vision

CFTM was delayed preparing this edition by several months. Please accept our apology. We hope for a fall 2021 edition. Let us know if your friends would like a sample copy.

We invite you to send your own personal stories of your conversions to “Kingdom of God” life with emphasis on environmental justice.

Mountain Vision is an outreach ministry of Christians For The Mountains. Copies are sent free of charge to advocates for God’s “will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

All Things Bright and Beautiful (Hymn)

All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful.

’Twas God that made them all. Each little flower that opens, Each little bird that sings, He made their glowing color, He made their tiny wings.

He gave us eyes to see them, And lips that we might tell, How great is the Almighty, Who has made all things well.

—Brad Printz / Cecil Alexander

Psalm 104: 24-30 (KJV)

O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions— This great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great. There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there. These all wait for You, That You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

PRAYER

Prayer is not a discourse. It is a form of life, the life with God. That is why it is not confined to the moment of verbal statement. The latter (verbalization) can only be the secondary expression of the relationship with God, an overflow from the encounter between the living God and the living person.

Jacques Ellul: Prayer and Modern Man

All abuse and waste of God’s creatures are spoil and robbery on the property of the Creator.

Adam Clarke (1762-1832)

The growing possibility of our destroying ourselves and the world with our own neglect and excess is tragic.

Billy Graham: Approaching Hoofbeats

“I felt as if my legs were praying.”

(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, on returning from the Selma Alabama march demanding full voting rights for Black Americans)