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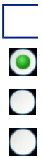
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Life

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The environmentalist's song; Green-Up's Donald Fraser has fused two of his great passions: entertaining children and promoting an Earth-friendly lifestyle



Updated 1 day ago

Late in the afternoon on Earth Day, Peterborough Green-Up's Donald Fraser rides into Ecology Park on his bicycle, guitar slung on his back, the hair under his helmet still sticky from the Professor Gerald Von Green Haus costume he'd occupied only hours before.

After catching his breath, Fraser, 38, flops on the picnic table and drinks down a tall cup of water.

For Fraser, Earth Day was a whirlwind - shows and presentations at schools, rehearsals with the Green-Up All-Star band, a benefit concert for Ecology Park at the Spill and media interviews, all reached by bicycle.

Fraser, Green-Up's manager of air quality and transportation, has been with the local environmental agency for eight years.

As an environmentalist and a children's entertainer, he has managed to fuse two of his great passions.

He sometimes performs solo, but often joins forces with other local performers as well.

With the Paddling Puppeteers he partners up with local entertainer and puppeteer Glen Caradus.

He plays Billy Idol, a "washed-up wannabe rock star" with issues when it comes to environmentally friendly personal transportation.

At the Peterborough Folk Festival, Fraser can be found strumming his guitar and holding children's songwriting

workshops.

But nothing compares to the reaction he gets working alongside an orange spandex-clad super hero who rides a six-foot unicycle and juggles bowling pins, he says.

Cool Captain Climate, played by collaborator Tim Holland and occasionally by Caradus, rides into schools to teach the children about climate change, breaking up a lecture by Fraser's character in the process.

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Fraser plays the lecturing mad scientist Professor Gerald Von Green Haus, who feigns outrage at Cool Captain Climate's disruptive teaching methods.

By the end of the show, Von Green Haus finds himself bitten by the showbiz bug and begins dancing deliriously, much to the delight of the children.

Through silly antics and some didactic song and dance, the dynamic duo teach children, sometimes as many as 800, that conservation and environmental responsibility are things everyone can do.

"I wear a lab coat, my hair is a bit gelled up, glasses, miss-matched socks," Fraser says. "The kids go just bonkers.

"You feel like a rock star."

Since 2001, he says, the pair have taken the Cool Captain Climate shows around to local schools playing to "thousands and thousands of kids."

It's easy to understand Fraser's appeal as a children's entertainer. He's incredibly animated, flailing his arms and scrunching up his face when he talks.

An environmental message is the common thread woven through most of the lyrics to the songs or in the puppets' dialogue.

"I love seeing (the kids) get it. I can see all these little sparks happening," he says, snapping his fingers wildly around to indicate all the light bulbs blinking on over children's heads.

"Taking that message to youth in that manner is so important. Bringing the music, the dance and the puppeteering in makes that message much more accessible."

Often, he says, those newly enlightened children bring that message home, shaking their fingers at their parents after catching them not recycling, or leaving the lights on.

Fraser calls it the "trickle-up theory."

"Kids are sponges, and it just seeps out," he says. "They are taking this information home and that has much more life than anything I can do.

"And it's always good when they kick their parents in the butt."

Born in Montreal, Fraser spent most of his early years in Southern Ontario, but his family is originally from the Maritimes, he says.

He came to Peterborough in 1991 to attend Trent University, but stayed once he started to plant roots.

"I've left several times, but I keep getting lured back to the P-dot," he says.

He's now an East City homeowner and engaged to marry his "sweetie," Krista Campbell, a high school teacher in Cobourg, in August.

The couple met in Peterborough while both were working for Peterborough Green-Up.

It was only by virtue of a fluke hitchhiking encounter that he got involved with Green-Up in the first place, Fraser recalls.

"I was hitchhiking from Trent University and was picked up by the chairman of the board of directors, Ray Dart.

"I guess he pushed the wrong button and I started spouting off about climate change issues."

After hearing Fraser's green diatribe, Dart promptly steered him in the direction of the local environmental group.

"Next thing I knew I was sucked into the Green-Up vortex," Fraser says jokingly. "I have a degree in English, but I've managed to have a day job as a full-time environmentalist."

But even before he reached the point where he was earning a living as an environmental activist, green issues were always a top focus for Fraser.

"It's something I've always tried to live and it accidentally became a career." he says.

"Global warming, climate change, these words are now on the tips of people's tongues.

"When it comes to climate change, we're getting to the point now that the movement is mainstream for Canadians, toppling health care as the number one issue."

Although his parents would never call themselves environmentalists, Fraser says, he was raised with a practical understanding of how individual actions affect the bigger picture.

"My mom's side of the family came from generations of people who grew up on farms. I don't think there's a farmer out there who isn't accidentally an environmentalist/ecologist, because that's his career.

"My parents have some green ideas, especially when their youngest son hammers on them for long enough."

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