



# The Daily Gleaner

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## Inspiration Wanted . . . and Found

After attending a talk several days ago given by one of Canada's great minds, Stephen Lewis, I realize that inspiration finds you in its own time, not necessarily when you are looking for it or when you think you need it. Fortunately this week it found me, and I did need it, but hadn't had time to look for it.

In his career Lewis has been a politician, broadcaster, diplomat, and humanitarian. He has served as leader of the Ontario NDP party, Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, and Deputy Director of UNICEF, amongst many important roles. He is currently Social Sciences Scholar-in-Residence at McMaster University. The common thread that runs through this distinguished career is that in each role he has been a thought leader and social conscience on the plight of the human condition, the upheaval of our climate and natural world, and the complex interaction of these.

This week Mr. Lewis spoke of the dire consequences of climate change and the grave impacts it is having, and will continue to have, on our world. However, as citizens living our everyday lives we often don't want the doom and gloom story. Fredericton is not in crisis and it is hard to imagine that it ever would be. But every now and then in an informed and engaged community, such as the one we live in, we do need to raise the helicopter up a few thousand feet and think bigger and longer term than makes us comfortable. This week, for a group of 300 Frederictonians, Stephen Lewis did that for us. He took us to a place that made us uncomfortable; he made us look up and out.

Climate change may not be overtly noticeable here in Fredericton, but Mr. Lewis took us to Africa and other countries around the globe that are feeling the very real and catastrophic effects of a climate in crisis. Sadly, there is no social justice when it comes to climate change and the countries that are and will be most affected by climate change are the countries that are least able to economically and socially deal with the outcomes.

Several times in his talk Mr. Lewis mentioned notable environmentalist and writer, Bill McKibben ([www.350.org](http://www.350.org)). I recently read one of McKibben's essays, and in it he tells a story about great desert writer, Ed Abbey, who was once a ranger in Utah's Arches National Park. Abbey would tell tourists when they entered the park: "Turn off the air conditioner. Take off your sunglasses. Get out of the car." He wanted them to feel the heat, feel the cold, feel *something*. Indeed, there are many senses and emotions that work outside the narrow range in which we normally set our personal thermostats. Today Mr. Lewis made us feel *something*.

But he also gave us a quandary. He spoke of the grand, sweeping changes to political structures, systems, regulations and global interactions that are needed to truly get hold of the climate crisis. He told of what many climate experts believe will unfold this century – how climate changes already set in motion will spur a cataclysmic event between 2030 and 2050; and that all the changes we make from this point forward will not prevent that, but will set the stage for society to persist in some form and adapt beyond this point. These are harsh words at 8:30am on a normal day, in a normal week, in the beautiful month of June, in Fredericton.

It is a quandary because life happens for us in the small everyday moments. We live, we work, we travel, we parent, we play, we eat, and we socialize. So how do we make sense of the uncomfortable big picture?

I believe we do it in incremental ways. And there are several provincial and local government programs like Efficiency New Brunswick, Recycle NB, and Fredericton's Green Matters program that believe this too. They were designed specifically for our everyday lives, but with an eye on the big picture. For now, in the absence of grand, sweeping political change on a national and international level that will truly set a new course and spur monumental actions to address climate change, we cannot sit on our hands.

Mr. Lewis says that changing a light bulb and taking shorter showers is not going to solve the climate crisis. He is right. But the power of individual and collective awareness and action is a force to be reckoned with. And if our sense of power is derived from making a sustainable choice – the car we drive, the fuel we consume, the energy we use – this forms a foundation for a society tuned in and ready to push and support a government that finally determines it is time to make the tough decisions required to set our province and country on the right track this century. This, of course, means that our politicians must hold true to beliefs and convictions that extend far beyond a four-year mandate and fear of defeat. I guarantee you, if there is one thing that is worth 'going to the mat' for – this is it.

Inspiration wanted . . . and found. Thank you Mr. Lewis.

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