

July 6, 2009

Bits and Pieces

Junkyards

by Barrie Hopkins

The first big breath of fresh air that our environment has seen in a long time is the collapse of the auto industry. What a blessing in disguise. So swings the pendulum of evolution. Perhaps it has struck a loud, long-lasting, clear-sounding gong to which we all should be listening.

The unsung heroes on the tail of this industry have long been overlooked, criticized and looked down on as unsightly junkyards blemishing our countryside. And I'm talking, folks, about those unappreciated, well-educated in their field, far-seeing folks who are known as those in the auto recycling business. Where end-of-life vehicles are retired with environmentally friendly dignity. Where quality used parts and scrap metal are sorted, cleaned and put back into the circle of use and reuse. Where environmentally unfriendly substances are carefully collected and disposed of in a proper, sustainable manner.

By fate, fame, fortune or divine guidance, I recently had the opportunity of casually touring one of these local facilities, Fergus Auto Recyclers, 6252 County Road #29, just east of Fergus, and believe me, did I have my eyes opened wide. I was not growled at by the imaged glare of a lip-curved, snarling, white-fangs flashing junkyard dog. I did not see huge, randomly thrown piles of unsorted, paint-peeling, rusting debris. I did not see gasoline, anti-freeze and oil spills. I did not smell the stench of the dead and the dying. Nor was there the smell of mildew, rot or mould. What I saw was a well-fenced clean and tidy yard, circled by a healthy, multi-species, wetland tree population.

What I saw was containers for carefully collected anti-freeze from the radiators, oil from the crankcases, Freon from the air conditioners and fluid from the brakes. I saw that gasoline, sucked by compressed air vacuums, cleaned by filtering, and filtered once again to be used in their own vehicles.

And most important of all, I saw a small jug-sized container where collected within were the tiny units of mercury. Those are from the mercury light switches that conveniently turn on the little light when you lift both the hood and trunk lid. One of these units, small as it is, the size of a baby's fingertip, if improperly disposed of, is quite capable of killing, by pollution, all the fish, turtles, frogs and aquatic life in a lake of 20-acre capacity.

What I also saw were neatly rowed piggybacked, stripped-down auto bodies, waiting to be crushed there on the site to fit into transportable containers, ready to be recycled in the molten cupolas of the giant steel mills.

Our sleepy-eyed, short-sighted political parties – federal, provincial and municipal – in the language of gardeners, have long been leaning, as they too often are, on the wrong end of the shovel. The industry that should have subsidies directed to, or in the lingo that excites the media, bailed out, in these times of receding economy, is not the excessive dollar-hungry mongers, legal thieves of the auto industries, where repair was unheard of and replace was the norm. Where need was forgotten and overpriced luxury, exhorting excessive speed, was foisted on the brainwashed public by easy credit, encouraging without fail, the fatal, stranglehold of deficit purchasing. Where assistance should be directed, if politicians should so wake to reality, with the possible forethought of passing a sustainable world on to our grandchildren and their children's children, is to the so-called scrap yards that have been struggling for years to keep a foothold in a down-trodden industry that favours our environment greatly. Through no fault of their own, they have received little or no favourable recognition and certainly little in well-earned, government-regulated assistance.

Today's recyclers provide low-cost, high-quality used parts in a way that benefits the consumer, the industry, and our earth. In so doing, they help reduce insurance rates, vehicle repair bills and staggering amounts of pollution. Should they not be given a much fairer shake?

Once again, a reminder, folks, this is the week I'll be lounging at Roxanne's Book and Card Shop, on the south side of the main street of Fergus, on July 4 from 10am until 4pm. Get off of your butt and toddle down and pick up a couple of my recently published books. Each one contains 200 easy-to-read articles of bygone years. An ideal, interesting gift item to replace the clutter on your coffee table. A valuable keepsake of historical memories.

Next week, on July 11 and 12, I'll be at the seventh annual Art in the Yard, in Elora, from 10am to 5pm. A double loonie or single toonie gets you in the door. Children are free. What a deal. See you one place or the other. Perhaps both?

Take care, 'cause we care.

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