

Local man cycles toward sustainability

by Chris Ulmer

While most Penn State graduates will be enjoying one final summer vacation, interning or starting full-time work, William Morgan, a recent graduate, will be cycling across America with four friends in hopes of raising awareness for sustainable living and environmental issues.

"The ecosystem of earth is what motivates us," said Morgan, who graduated in 2009. "The current culture of America is unsustainable. It systematically pollutes the earth, water and air. Humans cannot go on with infinite growth in a finite world. We are hoping to empower the individual to reconnect to the earth."

The friends want to connect with people who are already dedicated to their environment during the cross-country trip.

"We are focused on meeting people who

are dedicated to the community. These are the people who can make the biggest change," Morgan said.

The bicyclists will begin in New Jersey, then bike around the Great Lakes, and to the Canadian border. They will ride along the border to Washington, then head south to San Francisco, their final destination. When they arrive in San Francisco, their sustainable lifestyle will have only just begun.

"One option we are hoping for is to live in a permaculture establishment," explained Morgan. "If this does not work out, we could always settle down in San Francisco." Permaculture is a method of gardening that mimics nature with edible and medicinal plantings.

Morgan and friends are not concerned with a fairy-tale ending to their story. They are more concerned with showing others it is possible to live sustainably.

"It is not the ending I am concerned with, but the journey," Morgan declared. "If we are able to empower the individual, then maybe things will start to change."

The initiative for such a long journey did not sprout up over night. Last year, Morgan was homeless and unemployed. He was lured from Centre County to Boulder, Colo. with the promise of work.

"It did not go according to plan, and I was left with nothing but a bicycle and backpack," Morgan said. "I was in Boulder for a month and a half without a home. This is when I began living life on the road. During this time I was able to gain confidence that I was capable of biking across America."

Morgan grew up in the mountains of West Virginia. It was here that he was first introduced to life in the wild.

"I have had a call to the wild you could say," Morgan said. "Growing up in West

Virginia I was surrounded by nature. In a way I have been training for this trip for 23 years."

While Morgan and his friends will be spreading awareness of sustainability, the group expects this trip will lead to personal growth.

"In a way the journey is the destination," Morgan said. "This is going to be a great experience that will change our lives forever. In a way you cannot plan for something like this. There are too many things that will come up. This is why we have allotted four months to complete this trip. This way we do not have to be constantly rushing. It will allow us to stop and smell the roses."

The spirit which Morgan and his friend possess could help prove these naysayers wrong. Morgan quotes Mahatma Gandhi as his inspiration: "Be the change you want to see."

Peace is personal at Boalsburg pole planting event

by Suzan Erem

Just hours before yet another peace vigil at the intersection of Allen Street and College Avenue in downtown State College, another kind of peace movement was getting off the ground behind a chiropractor's office in Boalsburg.

People passing through State College can see self-identified peace activists standing with signs every Wednesday night at 5 p.m. and every Saturday at 1:30 p.m. These vigils are organized, largely, by the State College Peace Center and the Friends Meeting, but a different group gathered in the parking lot of Matthew Hertert's office on a recent Saturday morning in May.

Just down the street from the Pennsylvania Military Museum, the chiropractor who has been on a mission for three years to plant a peace pole at the location drew a small gathering of people from an array of nonprofits including Tides, and Clearwater Conservancy, the Mennonite Church, a Peace Corps volunteer and staff

from the Centre County Youth Service Bureau. Young couples with children, members of the LGBT community and curious neighbors met one another while small children explored the area.

After an hour of viewing display tables while listening to live music, the group assembled to hear from Bonnie Milner, of the Center for Alternatives in Community Justice and Brandon Green, Mennonite and Penn State graduate student.

Comments by both focused on the search for peace, a search that for them begins first within a person.

"Recognize our own limitations," Green told the gathering. "Figure out how to come to peace with ourselves."

Hertert, who organized the event largely through word of mouth, offered a very specific challenge.

"Pick one place to put a prayer, or a good intention, or a positive thought, each day, something that inspires and motivates you to put peace in your lives," he said. "I want this to be a community touchstone for increasing peace."



Photo by Suzan Erem
Matthew Hertert, left at podium, invites people gathered to plant a peace pole and to find one place in their lives to make a change to promote peace.

Travel barriers limit lives of those with disabilities

by Joel Solkoff

"Are you really my son?" my 84-year-old mother, who suffers from dementia, asks. Six weeks ago my mother, Dr. Miriam Pell Schmerler, stopped answering the telephone by herself. Our weekly calls were models of the bizarre, with my combining Hebrew and English into the conversation, knowing that hearing my name in Hebrew sparked recognition not otherwise available. The once a week calls followed a pattern. I would tell her that I was her son. "Really?" she said, "how nice." Then we would talk about some aspect of her life: her career including a doctorate in Hebrew letters (received in her late 50s) from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

In our calls I repeatedly identified everyone, Mother's daughter, grandchildren, and husbands. "You know you were married three times." "Three times," she said,



*From
Where I Sit*

"that's a lot, isn't it?" I then described each of her husbands, including my father who was 27 years older than she. "Isn't that a big difference in age?" she asked. The ongoing saga of her life amused her. It filled me with a tenderness for my mother I do not recall ever having felt. I remember a Buddhist minister saying that he had "issues" with his mother. The word "issues" seems so refined and polite that I adopted the word instantly. During our conversations, the issues disappeared. My cousin Michael once commented about how witty and charming my mother is. I said I had never observed it. Michael said, "Of course not. She is your mother. She cannot allow herself to be witty and charming in front of you."

Now that she did not recognize me, other than as a friendly caller telling stories about her life, my mother became a real person for me. My children, Joanna and Amelia, found distress in mother's inability to recognize her grandchildren. While I tried to explain my perspective, I could not alleviate their distress.

Nor could I alleviate my own distress in mid-March when I called Mother and she did not answer the phone. I began a new routine, calling the staff at the excellent nursing home and asking Jackie, Brooke, Marina, Mary Anne or Kim to go to moth-



er's room and hand the ringing phone to Miriam. My mother's voice conveyed a sense of confusion and distress. The conversation was largely gibberish. It became clear that I had to see her. But how?

The answer is circuitous. My 1993 Buick was broken. I entrusted it to Gary D. Green's College Heights Exxon, a wonderfully reliable institution. My mechanic Jeff told me he needed more time to figure out what was wrong. Nevertheless, I needed to go to Altoona, headquarters of the Blair/Clearfield Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, for which I work.

I researched bus service to Altoona which would take me downtown (and my power chair has enough battery power to take me to and from the office), but I could not get to a safe accessible motel where I planned

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Harvey Milk has his day



Photo by Adwoa Spencer

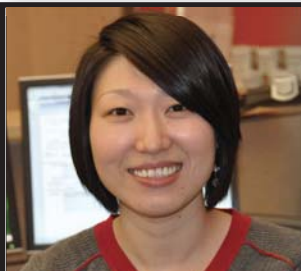
Jes Luckey (left) and Shani Robin (right) rally the marchers at the first-ever Harvey Milk March, organized by the LGBT community and the Justice League, in downtown State College in May. The march and rally at the borough building drew an estimated 50 residents and was the only one of its kind in the state. Milk was the first openly-gay man to be elected to public office in California.



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to stay the week. There is no train.

I had heard about a disability van service called Wheelchair Getaways. After talking to Shannon Markley, I decided to pay for the incredibly expensive rental, knowing my creditors would and would not understand. When Shannon mentioned a slight discount for a week or more, I decided to spend the weekend seeing my mother—something I could not do otherwise. For a lengthy drive, neither my Buick nor my stamina could not be relied upon to hold up while going from the wheelchair lift at the rear of the car to the driver's door, brushing my body against the car in the process.

The van has a button on the ignition key, which when pressed twice, opens the passenger-side panel door and a wheel chair ramp unfolds. I drive my power chair (the airlines at the State College airport refuse to accept power chairs on their flights) up the

ramp. After closing the door with two key presses, I use the controls for the driver's seat to move the seat back, sideways and up, so I can transition from power chair to driver's seat without difficulty.

Without the van, I would not have been able to go to work, see my mother and have lunch with my two children. This month's column raises an ongoing theme: the critical nature of travel for those of us with disabilities. Employment opportunities require going to where the work is located. Families separated by miles need to be together even if only on occasion. The worst thing for the economic survival and the individual feeling of self-worth is being confined to one's room without the opportunity to earn an income and see loved ones. Travel must be made easier for those of us with disabilities.

—Joel Solkoff, author of *The Politics of Food*. Contact him at jsolkoff@gmail.com. Or visit Joel's blog: voicesweb.org/joel-solkoff

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