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Pulse Earth Day

On Thursday
Take a vacation
from worrying with
"Roadtrip Nation."

Tuesday, April 22, 2003

Vegetarians curb fecal conditions, immoral industry

Joseph Bechard
Edge Culture Columnist

It's friggin' Earth Day — that exciting one-day event when a few people make a futile effort to persuade others to think about the environment. I'm sure this day, since the first-recognized Earth Day 33 years ago, has changed the way some people think about their impact on our world. But from where I see it, it's not working that well.

Let's use my pathetic life as an example. I'm a vegetarian and, apparently, that's amusing stuff.

It happens a couple of times a week. Some guy whose car is lined with Carl's Jr. burger wrappers or whose teeth are peppered with Taco Bell Gorditas, tries to poke holes in my logic. I guess it's easier to make fun of the guys with morals.

The stupid insults about my manhood or intelligence don't work. I know I'm an idiot. But I'm a compassionate idiot, and no one can make me feel bad for giving a damn. Especially when none of them even bother to understand why I made this choice.

This first assumption is that I do it for health reasons. People love to chide me when they catch me doing something unhealthy. While I'm sure mankind is aching to keep my hot bod around as long as possible, I think I have a better reason.

I chose vegetarianism because, for me, it's pious. It is a constant manifestation of ethics and an agreement with the cosmos. It says to whatever god may be out there that I respect what I have and am willing to make a sacrifice for a greater good. I recognize the inhumanity of this industry and peoples' decisions to ignore it. By avoiding the stinking, putrid and be-deviled flesh of improperly raised animals, I have a couple reasons for feeling better about being a disgusting human.

First, I'm boycotting an exploitative and sickening industry. The federal Animal Welfare Act and most state anti-cruelty laws don't protect farmed animals. Because of this, many of these animals endure agonizing and painful lives before they ultimately become our food, soap and makeup. These animals live in confined and fetid environments — anyone with the stomach for it should check out the "Why Vegan?" link at www.veganoutreach.org. Under these horrible conditions, animals are pumped with antibiotics and hormones and are handled with an utter lack of respect.

Vegetarianism is also an act of minimalism. For anyone who feels even remotely guilty living in this land of excess, avoiding animal products forces them to be conscious of what they consume. Most Americans don't even take the time to consider the impact of their decisions as a consumer.

We don't think about where all those great products come from, we just use them. We continue to believe in eating meat for our three daily meals. And we'll fling ignorant insults at people who try to do something positive.

I listen to jokes about how I don't "measure up" to my beefed counterparts. People insult my intelligence by calling me a "granola" or "that freaking moron." They'll try to persuade me into eating meat again with something like: "But humans were meant to eat meat. It's natural."

But those freaking morons won't ever listen to what I'm trying to say. They don't care about the unnatural conditions in which these animals are raised. They won't hear my sermon about man's sick relationship with the earth. All they want to hear is the sizzling flesh of a cow that grew up wallowing in its own feces at some nasty, polluted feedlot. They are only thinking about the next time they can bite into some pork that never saw the sun because it grew up indoors covered with pig waste — in tiny pens with hard, disgusting floors.

These animals have some sad lives. But what's worse is how discussions of this topic are discredited. We never question the morality of some of the crazy things humans do; we flippantly justify them with anthropocentric nonsense.

I can't avoid all animal products in this world of mass production, but I sleep a little easier knowing I don't have any tortured little souls trapped in my body. And I'll insult you with that.

Contact the Pulse columnist at josephbechard@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Joseph Bechard
Cultural Obstetrician



Danielle Hickey Emerald

The Downtown Broadway Plaza was the site of an Earth Day celebration on Saturday, where children juggled, bands played and booths gave out eco-friendly information. The celebration also featured the annual "Procession of All Species" parade.

Earth's day in the sun

Hundreds gathered on Saturday for Eugene's annual Earth Day celebration to address issues facing the community and planet

Kara Hansen
Freelance Reporter

Bright sunshine welcomed the hundreds of people who gathered in Downtown Eugene on Saturday to celebrate the 2003 Earth Day.

Beginning with an American Indian blessing, the celebration boasted six hours of music, activities, demonstrations and exhibits.

Although most gathered for the same purpose, different individuals expressed different feelings about celebrating the holiday. For some, the day offered a chance to learn, while others hoped to party in the name of Mother Earth.

It was Emerald People's Utility District's first year participating in the celebration, and for Communications Coordinator Judith Manning, celebrating



Adam Amato Emerald

The Honda Civic hybrid comes equipped with a four-cylinder engine and recharges when pressure is applied to the brakes.

meant expanding awareness.

"This year, we wanted to take it to the larger community — to bring a rural population to the Downtown event," she said.

Earth Day blossomed in 1970 as a

nationwide, grassroots demonstration for the environment. According to the Wilderness Society Web site at www.wilderness.org, organization

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Earth Day rooted on 1960s activism

Earth Day celebrations, such as Saturday's in Downtown Eugene, were inspired by an anti-Vietnam War grassroots protest

Ryan Bornheimer
Senior Pulse Reporter

Perhaps it isn't surprising that the first Earth Day sprang up from a period of almost constant political activism — the 1960s. In those days, a voice seemed to rise up for nearly every possible social concern. But what is surprising is that more than 30 years after the initial celebration, Earth Day continues to grow and thrive in the national consciousness.

This weekend brought the Earth Day celebration to Downtown Eugene. Marketing and Events Director Amy Nielson said last year's event drew nearly 4000 visitors.

The far-reaching political importance of the first Earth Day might get lost amid the current and somewhat benign celebratory festivities held in

cities across the country. The original event actually represented the birth of the modern environmental movement — coming at a time of broad changes in environmental law and an increased awareness of surrounding issues.

While the first official Earth Day was held April 22, 1970, the seeds were planted nearly a decade earlier.

Former Senator Gaylord Nelson, D-Wis., came up with the idea in 1962, after persuading Sen. Robert F. Kennedy to embark on a national conservation tour. Nelson had grown increasingly troubled by the fact that the state of the environment was a non-issue in the politics of the era. Kennedy's five-day, 11-state tour was unsuccessful at driving home the importance of the problem. However, it was a major inspiration for what would become Earth Day.

Nelson envisioned the event as something similar to the anti-Vietnam War "teach-ins" of the time — a grassroots protest lamenting environmental

abuse. As soon as Nelson announced in September 1969 that the protest would be held the following spring, the idea spread like wildfire.

Instead of one locally observed day of protest, Earth Day ballooned into a national event with forces functioning independently and in conjunction with Nelson's original concept. Nelson has been quoted many times as saying the event "organized itself."

The effects of that first Earth Day can still be felt today.

Ecological Design Center co-Director Robyn Scofield said the creation of Earth Day can be linked to important environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act, and the creation of groups such as the Environmental Protection Agency, both enacted in 1970. Scofield said such changes set an example for the rest of the world.

"Those legislations set us apart from other countries," she said.

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