

BONNIE MCKINLAY

# Fighting for the planet

BY ALICE HARDESTY ■ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Bonnie McKinlay arrives at my house a little out of breath, greets my dog, and apologizes for being late. She's wearing a Norwegian wool sweater and a huge backpack full of materials. Although she almost always rides her bike, this time

she has driven because she's taking people with her to testify at a hearing in Longview, Wash. I'm a little surprised to learn that she actually has a car.

Despite her 64 years, she has few gray hairs and a great deal of youthful

energy. Although soft spoken, it's clear that she can be vigorously persuasive.

We settle in at my dining room table with a simple lunch of salad, cornbread and tea. Before we've taken more than a few bites, the conversation gets right down to basic essentials and I reach for my notepad.

"We are in crisis," she declares. "When will people wake up to that?" Bonnie assumes that everyone knows about the consequences of climate change, that those who deny them are either bought and sold or just ill informed by the media, that the secrecy surrounding the Trans-Pacific Partnership and its implications for climate are malevolent, and that the consequences for future generations are catastrophic — unless we do something to change the course right now.

"Our planet's climate is allergic to carbon. We know that. If your child were allergic to carrots, for example, you wouldn't keep feeding her carrots, would you? Why are we doing this? What is more important than the civilization that would be lost?" She's referring to the loss of multiple species of animals and plants, people's homes and families through mass migration, cultures, literature, music, lives, all the consequence of unmitigated climate disruption.

Bonnie grew up on Long Island until age 12, when her family moved to Southern California. Her parents always encouraged her and her brother to speak out, to raise their voices whenever they felt that people were being treated unfairly or when moral issues arose. During the civil rights movement Bonnie longed to go to Washington, D.C. and join the marches, but

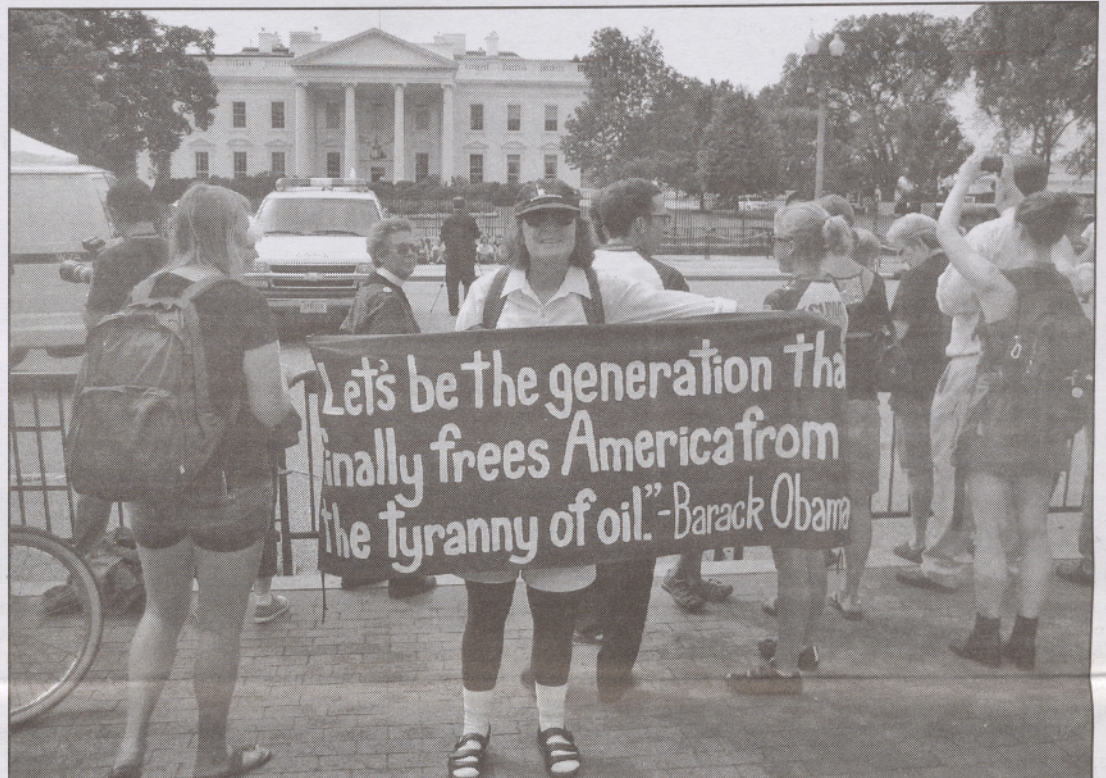


PHOTO COURTESY BONNIE MCKINLAY

Bonnie McKinlay holds a sign in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., during a July 2011 rally against the Keystone XL Pipeline just after she was released from jail. She and other protesters were arrested for standing too long in an area near the White House.

she was too young. Instead, she sold handmade potholders in the neighborhood and donated the money to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

At 18 she moved to Portland, where her brother had gone to Reed College. Here she earned her teaching credential at Portland State University, got a master's degree in media studies, and went to work as an elementary school teacher and librarian. She enjoyed working with children, helping them understand subjects experientially, not just from books. She remained drawn to issues of political and social justice.

"I have always been an activist," she explains. "There is a human tendency to shove things under the rug, and I find myself fighting against that." During the Vietnam War, as Bonnie protested, her brother refused the draft and somehow managed to carry it off, and her husband, Jim, was a conscientious objector.

Bonnie is a natural organizer. Over a period of several years, she and her friends and family put on meal fundraisers. They would empty their house of furniture, bring in lots of tables and chairs, invite the community, and serve a big meal. They held

raffles and games to raise money. Right after the Haitian earthquake they raised \$8,000 for Doctors Without Borders. Later, with the organization 350.org, they raised \$3,000 for relief efforts in the Philippines after Typhoon Yolanda. She and friends went on to use this method fundraising for several other causes.

Then in the summer of 2011 there was a call-out from Bill McKibben, the well-known author and co-founder of 350.org, to come to Washington, D.C. It was just after the famous statement by former NASA scientist James Hansen that the Keystone XL pipeline would be "game over" for the planet because of global warming. "Jim and I looked at each other and said, let's go!"

They took the train because they had sworn off flying, and when they got to Washington they took the civil disobedience training from 350.org. They stood in an area near the White House where people are allowed to stay for only 20 minutes, and they stayed rooted there. The police warned them three times that if they didn't leave they would be arrested. And so, of course,

See MCKINLAY, page 11

NOTHING  
makes me  
MORE  
HOPEFUL  
than discovering  
another human being to admire.

— ALICE WALKER —

The NOTHING MORE HOPEFUL series originates from a workshop taught by Martha Gies. "Last fall, as I tired of hearing the ISIL Hour, interrupted only occasionally by a warning about Ebola's imminent arrival in Europe or the U.S., it occurred to me that the media was deaf to good news," Gies says. "I remembered my friend Sr. Rosarii Metzgar once telling me she believed all the terrible news with which we are daily battered must surely be offset by small and unseen acts of good." Gies resolved to enlist some writers who would hunt down and write those stories.