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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## My Creation Care Story

*by Sarajane Snyder, for the Wisconsin Conference Creation Care Team*

In 1960 my dad bought a lot on the Oconto River. I was 5. Our whole family loved that place. Then spring arrived and it became clear the river was badly polluted. The Scott paper company a few miles upstream had been dumping effluent into that river for over 50 years. The effluent was a thick, black scum that floated on the water in vast rafts. The surface dried and ducks, geese and birds would land on it and walk across it. It was not possible to push a boat through. We saw deer try to walk across it because it looked so solid, then fall through and be unable to get out.

The other rivers in Wisconsin with paper mills were in similar polluted condition. Dissolved oxygen was so low that fish and frog populations were decimated. My dad worked for General Electric selling electric motors to paper mills around the state so he saw this in many places. He decided to get the Oconto cleaned up; formed a neighborhood association, got people to write their reps, sent his kids out in a canoe to secretly photograph where the effluent was pouring into the river; then made a case to Gaylord Nelson and Bill Proxmire that we could improve the river and it wouldn't shut down the paper mill.

Our family worked with our representatives in Madison, it took a number of years and we got that river cleaned up. The nation passed the clean water act. Wisconsin's rivers drastically improved. We can swim and fish in them now.

This project shaped my life. I understood that one person can inspire great change. I became an activist. I marched to end war, improve rights for black people and women, and improve the environment. Then the government interfered and shut us down. I learned to hide my candle under a basket in order to survive. That was the 70's.

This past May and June I was able to take a class called "Climate Change and Spirituality" thru the Wilmette Institute of the BaHai faith. This was life changing for me. I knew a lot about climate change, having been a lifelong environmentalist, but this class is relevant and up to date. I gained some good talking points. But mostly, I gained confidence. No longer will I sit quietly when others spew nonsense about climate change. The Wilmette classes are online and students are from anywhere in the world. We listened to lectures by top climate scientists and watched excellent videos both of damages and hopeful changes. On discussion boards we talked about what each of us sees in our areas.

All this was the dose of reality I sorely needed. It would be easy to fall into the American media trap and think climate change is somehow out of our hands. It's very reassuring to truly grasp that the entire rest of the world has the ball rolling to do everything they can to improve the situation.

I'm excited to be on the UCC Creation Care Team and try to help churches see what concrete steps we can be taking to reduce our churches carbon footprints and our individual carbon footprint. There's no way around the facts: the situation is dire. The time to act is now. Everyone can help. Our team will provide you with sources of information for moving forward and we hope to inspire some changes and necessary adaptations. To help get you started I recommend watching a video called, "Home", put out 8 years ago. It's on YouTube, an hour and half long. Beautifully filmed scenes from all over the world illustrate geologic and natural history, while they explain how we got to where we are now.

Gods Peace,

Sarajane Snyder