

Keredy's Cape Cod

"I don't mind a windmill in our backyard. They're pretty. I'll put tulips around it. And the flowers will live because there won't be any smog!"

My father rose from his easy chair after flicking off the television in disgust. He was muttering about Senator Keredy's latest speech, in which he said he supported alternate energies such as wind power...only not within twenty miles of the Quabbin Reservoir. He claimed that the oversized pond was a tourist attraction. He said that the windmills would "destroy" the beautiful New England country scenery and upset animals. But we who lived around the Quabbin wouldn't have minded. We never saw any tourists, and lately the animals were growing scarcer and scarcer. I was young back then, albeit old enough to know that Keredy was wrong. In fact, my personal opinion was that tourists would be impressed by our area's ambition to rely on other fuels besides coal and oil. Certainly smokestacks and smog turned off spring peepers more than sleek silver windmills would! But Senator Keredy was worried about the tourism industry and its contribution to the economy. So we townspeople shrugged off the issue...we figured our dependency on fossil fuels wouldn't matter anyway. We looked to the next proposed location – the Berkshires – and handed them the baton. Looking back, I wish we had protested more to Keredy's "rule" about the Quabbin Valley and windmills. Maybe we could have prevented what was to come.

The conflict over energy and pollution had all started back in 2006. Our Senator Keredy had been confronted with the option of putting windmills on Cape Cod. But he denied the alternate energy company access, talking down the bill that would have allowed a building permit for the windmills. Keredy's "no" vote was enough to mean that the bill wasn't passed. Due to rising pollution since 2006, combined with this bill's failure, the sky had become so smoggy that we were lucky to catch a glimpse of the Big Dipper at night. I remember a time when I couldn't count all the stars in the sky after sunset. I cry when I think that my descendants won't be able to enjoy a clear, celestial view. Thanks to factories built to support a growing population in suburban Boston, our CO₂ emissions had increased fivefold since the start of the twenty-first century. The Connecticut River was filled with trash, and was ten percent toxic waste at that time. We couldn't, and still can't, fish or boat on it for a thirty mile stretch downstream from the factories. I used to catch dinner with my father on the banks where he grew up. Now, the coastal fields he played at as a child are eroded, eroded away by acidic water. I haven't eaten fresh, local fish in years. Senator Keredy was disappointed with the state of the environment. But his friend and factory owner Pro Duce more had lobbied him into voting down a bill that would have limited the coal used by factories like Duce more's. If only that law had gone into effect, we might not be in our present state!

The weather has also been affected by the greenhouse effect, which we hadn't done anything to slow down. Last summer we had three heat waves. I spent hundreds of dollars

on sunscreen, ice, and hi-tech clothes that supposedly prevented hyperthermia. Keredy cursed the unlucky weather, promising a cooler summer next year. He told us that it was only Mother Nature's prank, a freak thing, not global warming. After walking out of a lunch with Duce more, Keredy gave a press release denouncing the scientists' studies of the heat waves, calling them public scares crafted to profit windmill companies. I read about his oration in the next day's paper. Keredy's words made me feel ashamed to live in Massachusetts. My father and I discussed it over dinner, which was all fruits, vegetables, and meats imported from other states. All the land in Massachusetts is polluted and can no longer support crops or livestock. I predicted that Pro Duce more would stop Keredy from building any windmills. My dad reluctantly agreed. I followed the news as location after location requested permission to build windmills; the desires were shut down and refused. Finally, as our town felt the effects of what scientists said was global warming that could be reduced by cutting down on non-renewable resources, we submitted an application for a wind farm. At the town meeting, there was a hot debate about whether to permit the mills. I went to our town meeting for the first time. Unfortunately, I was too nervous to speak up in support of the alternate energy. The moderator's seriousness and the crowd intimidated me. Luckily, in the end, windmills were okayed at the town level even without the vocalization of my opinion. Of course, the state interfered and killed the plan. Meanwhile, the newspapers published more and more news about global warming, the greenhouse effect, pollution, rising water levels, and the near extinction of the Atlantic salmon.

None of these threats to the Earth's well-being could convince Senator Keredy to find an energy crisis solution. The President demanded that all factories switch from using one hundred percent coal or oil to at least half wind or solar power, but Keredy set a state deadline ten years away. By then, said the newspapers, if our rate of CO₂ emissions and pollution were to continue, salmon would be extinct, the Connecticut River would have double the level of toxic waste, and no stars would be visible at night. The price of gas was predicted to rise from \$3.63 per gallon to over \$4 by the time Keredy's statute requiring all cars to be hybrids or entire solar or electric powered takes effect. The cost of a barrel of oil was beyond \$100. My sixteenth birthday was no big deal. I couldn't afford to buy a car, not with gas prices so high. Keredy complained that poverty levels had risen, but did nothing to target the true cause: inflation of gas prices and its ensuing effect on everything, even groceries. Even the tolls on the Mass Pike had increased. My family hadn't taken any vacations in three years, and we were considered well off. Keredy's friend, Pro Duce more, bought Keredy a house on Cape Cod, in Provincetown to be exact. In the speech that had so revolted my father, Keredy claimed to be in touch with the "common man". The truth was that our senator was cruising around Boston Harbor in a gas-powered boat while we were scrounging around in our pockets for enough money to fill our cars at the gas pump. The circumstances enraged me, too.

The situation was obviously bad.

Then it got worse. The scientists' forecasts came true.

The ocean only raised one and three quarter millimeters in the course of that year, so we were able to go about our business without even noticing. Although, come to think of it, that year was when the beach in front of my aunt's coastal house started shrinking. Even if we common folk were oblivious to the dilemma, however, the oceanographers could tell, and tell they did. The newspapers' headlines screamed "Fish Happy with New Home", and "Now You Can Boat a Little Farther". Only the scientists didn't see the humor. There were articles about the sudden rise: for three thousand years (starting in one thousand Before Common Era), the ocean had risen at about .125 millimeters per year. Combined with the continents' shifting, this rise was hardly noticeable. In the twentieth century, ocean levels rose at an average of 1.5 millimeters per year. This increase was still only slight, but became steadily obtrusive as the second millennia approached. In 2006, the sea level was increasing four times faster than in 1900. Luckily, other states noticed this and lowered their CO₂ emissions. Here in Massachusetts though, we kept puffing out greenhouse gases. I'm surprised we weren't as alarmed by our shrinking beaches as Florida was: at the rate that the ocean was rising (2 millimeters per year), shorelines such as Cape Cod's retreated by three meters each year! By August, the Atlantic had risen another millimeter. The effects of the greenhouse cycle were insinuating themselves into our lives by this time. Another one and a half meters of shoreline was lost. Public beaches closed early because high tide reached all the way to their parking lots. Scientists warned that if CO₂ emissions were not reduced to halt the melting glaciers, Cape Cod would be underwater by January. Parents tried to comfort us as they rushed to sell their coastal properties.

Teachers were especially worried about our ability to understand the severity of global warming, CO₂, and the ocean's ascent. In English class, we wrote letters to Senator Keredy pleading with him, beseeching him to allow wind farms near the Quabbin. For social studies class, we had to take notes on one of Keredy's orations. My notes read: "He refuses to build windmills. He thinks that the scientists' ultimatum is a scare tactic." In science class, we analyzed air and water samples to determine the amounts of pollutants. The water's pH level was two, more acidic than Coca-Cola. For math homework, we were assigned to graph the correlation between rising CO₂ emissions and water heights, and then in class we plotted another graph displaying the relation between CO₂ levels and average temperatures. At home, my family and I counted our blessings and gave thanks that we had relatives in Oklahoma. Where they lived is about the farthest location from any ocean a person could get should he or she need to relocate if the Atlantic Ocean continued to rise. We also listened to Keredy make excuses for himself. The one defense given by Keredy that the newspapers loved was the quote "Massachusetts is small. New York or California should be the ones doing more to stop pollution and CO₂." Apparently Keredy hadn't done his research, because California's hills were dotted with windmills and New York had the third lowest oil consumption rate in the country. While the nation hurried to construct solar panels and erect windmills, neither Keredy nor Duce more did anything to change the main energy source of Massachusetts.

By November, water had risen another millimeter. In three months, the sea level had increased two millimeters, more than the amount it had risen in sixteen months back at the time of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock. Scientists declared it unprecedented pollution aftermath, second only to Hurricane Katrina (that big 2006 storm). Meteorologists warned of a megastorm. The coverage of Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade was interrupted for the first in my lifetime, at least, that fall. Instead, footage from Hurricane Katrina was played parallel to live broadcasts from the coast. Both showed people rushing from homes that were surrounded by water. It was the middle of a two week period of heavy rains, I recall. All the clothes, food, deeds, money, and any other belongings owned by the unfortunate residents were lost. I remember all the Major League Baseball games being cancelled (the Red Sox and Yankees still haven't made up those games), not to mention high school soccer. It rained cats and dogs that Thanksgiving, but that "rainstorm" was only a taste of what was to come. Keredy didn't know that, but my grandmother could sense a hurricane in her pinky toe. Keredy appeared briefly at a podium, somewhere closed to the press and to the public, proudly announcing that only one hundred beachfront homes, all on Nantucket Island and Martha's Vineyard, had been damaged.

It seemed that every citizen, young and old, tried to pitch in to stop the global warming and its ensuing problems. I rode my bike more, and my dad sold his diesel truck. My mom insisted on installing a solar panel for all the lights in our house. Our town resubmitted a proposal for windmills. This, of course, was denied. My class organized a school bake sale to benefit the Red Cross Emergency Relief fund. Pro Ducemore did his service by increasing the production of his vinyl factories, so that houses could be built in the area near Quabbin Reservoir to give shelter to the displaced persons. Suddenly, development near the Quabbin wasn't so bad. I didn't want numerous ugly, plastic houses in my backyard. Neither did my neighbors. Our town protested, but Keredy didn't listen, of course. The President ordered Keredy to reduce Massachusetts's CO₂ emissions immediately and switch to wind or solar energy, but after a lunch with Ducemore, Keredy was convinced that to force factories to refit their power grids for renewable energy sources would be "a devastating suicide to the economy."

Fearing that the flood waters might breach the Connecticut River, my family packed up and moved to Oklahoma before it was too late. I knew in my mind that relocating was the safest thing to do, but leaving my home was the hardest thing I'd ever endured. My heart still aches for Massachusetts; not the polluted, soggy state that is there now, but the rich farmland of my youth. For months after our move, on my Aunt's television screen we saw the Cape Cod dwellers fleeing their houses. Now the news stations have moved on. Just as my town accepted that we "couldn't" have windmills, the country has accepted that it can no longer have Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Shocking, rising ocean levels, now topping three millimeters per year, combined with the increasingly long and frequent periods of rain, are demolishing the Cape's fragile beaches and creeping over the mainland. By the time I die, waters might have even come all the way to my former doorstep, ninety miles inland. The Mass Pike was

jammed for one hundred miles. We watched Keredy giving his speeches, calling for logical action. When asked what *exactly* to do, Keredy told the press to redirect that question to FEMA.

It was more depressing than words can describe to see my home state muddied by one cowardly Senator's unwillingness to heed environmentalists' advice. As the number of homeless people rose and a Christmas polka-dotted with heart-wrenching photos and newscasts came and went, New Year's Day did bring one reason to smile. We couldn't resist the urge to laugh out loud at the look on Keredy's face as the waters Keredy himself had allowed to rise reached the front door of his seaside house in Provincetown, the gift (and bribe) from Pro Duce more. The waters didn't even bother to knock before waving goodbye to the ocean and flowing right on in.

Afterward

This story was inspired when I saw a newspaper article and read it. It was in the Greenfield Recorder on Tuesday, April 25. The subject matter was Senator Kennedy's and Senator Kerry's views on windmills on Cape Cod. They both disapproved of building turbines, because of the tourism industry. I followed the story on Wednesday and Thursday (today), sadly reading that the windmills were most likely going to fall through. This inspired me to raise awareness of the issue, and I recalled this contest which I had read about in another newspaper over the weekend.

I quickly researched the topic of windmills. Among the things I learned was that New York allowed wind farms, that Atlantic salmon populations were in danger, and that if CO2 emissions were not reduced, global warming would continue to heat up the globe like a greenhouse. The glaciers would melt and oceans *would* rise. This scared me. I had to do something to tell people about this future.

I hope that this story will show people that sometimes they need to consider their government elections very carefully and speak out against lobbying. Sometimes it might take more than protests, and the people must be willing to do whatever it takes. Otherwise, as in the story, bad things could happen. This story is not meant to degrade Congress or any political figures. My apologies if it offended you. Its true purpose was to teach the lesson of conservation and the benefits of a healthy Earth.