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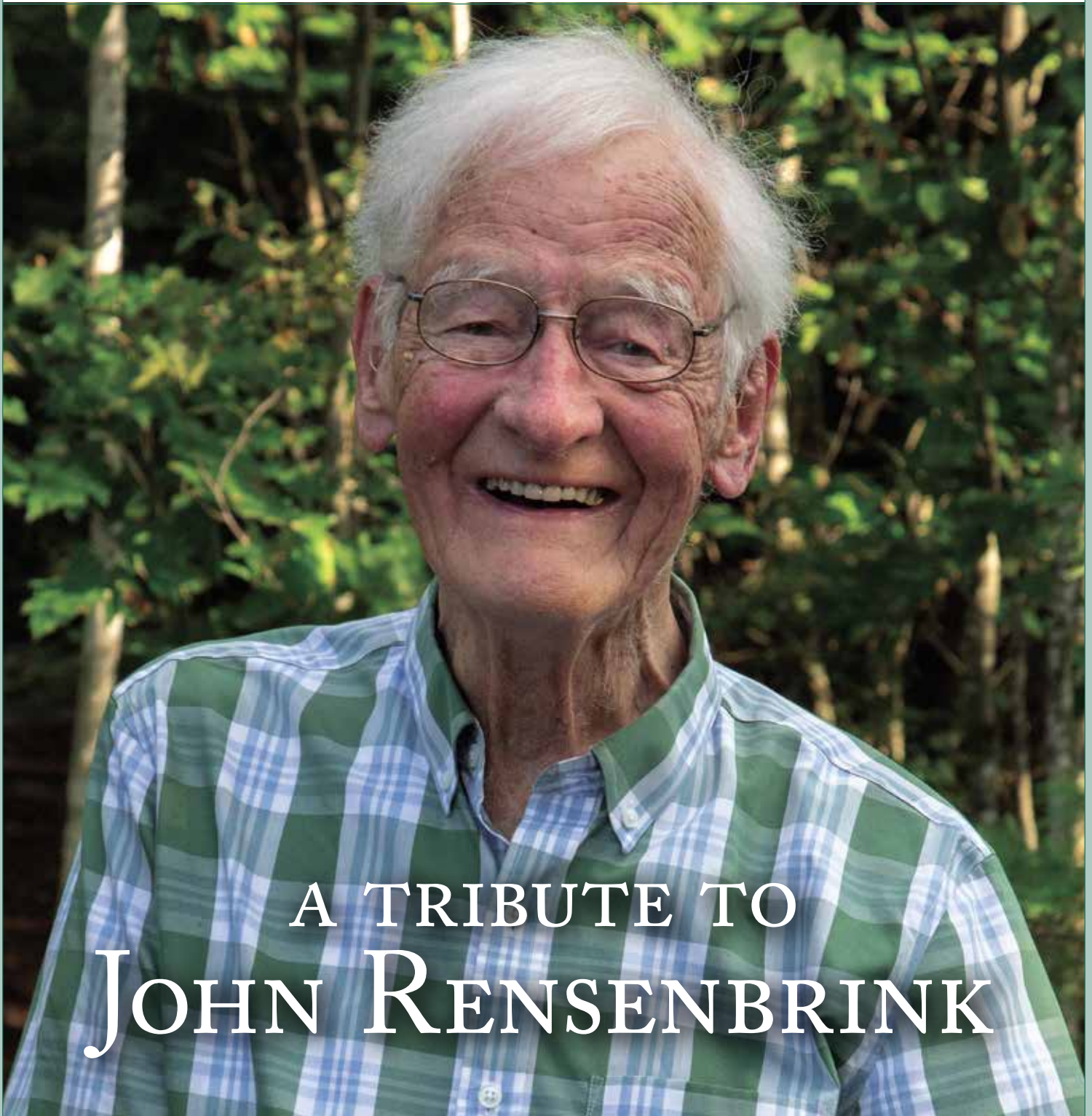
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# GREEN HORIZON

*Magazine*

..... AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE GREEN HORIZON FOUNDATION .....



A TRIBUTE TO  
JOHN RENSENBRINK

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Cover photo by Jim McCarthy

# A Special Appeal for a Special Issue

John Rensenbrink started *Green Horizon* as a newsletter during the 1990s and then expanded it into a notable international journal seventeen years ago. It's now the only major *print* magazine in the United States that features the coverage of Green politics and the broad "greening" social-transformation movement.

For the sake of maximum circulation we mail out copies to anyone who requests to be on our Receivers List. In that way it reaches some of the most influential activists in the country. Our experience has been that, over time, many show their appreciation by signing up to become regular financial Sustainers of the publication.

The Sustainers are our lifeblood. Their names appear on the inside back cover of each issue (though some choose to remain anonymous). Many go beyond

just providing funding; they also request multiple copies of the magazine for distribution to colleagues or for tabling at events.

*A special way to honor John would be to sign up as a Sustainer. This would be an opportune time to do so because Green Horizon Foundation is making plans to branch out. We're considering publishing pamphlets and books, sponsoring conferences, and hosting webinars. It would take additional resources for us to start reaching an expanded audience in those ways. Meanwhile, in the immediate future, we're hoping to be able to print additional copies of this issue of the magazine for distribution at literature tables during the upcoming campaign season. Please help us make it possible! Checks and correspondence can be mailed to us at the postal address below or donate at [www.Green-Horizon.org](http://www.Green-Horizon.org). Thanks!*

*With uncertain circumstances as we go to press, we express our concern for the safety and health of all our readers, writers, and supporters. Greens are often "best builders" of their communities; the latter can be our refuge and solace during these times of trial. For our next issue we'll welcome your thoughts and experiences during the unfolding crisis that may possibly augur a civilizational turning point.*

## THE TEAM

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# The Primacy of Ecology

An influential, insightful individual writes, speaks, organizes, and leads over the course of a lifetime. How to distill the essence of their vital contribution? This special issue of *Green Horizon Magazine* contains tributes to the work, presence, and prescience of my co-editor, John Rensenbrink. They embody a variety of attempts to convey the essence. Here's my own:

The left of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recognized that democracy and peace require social justice. This comprehension was important, yet attempts to base social-change praxis on that theoretical foundation were disappointing. As of the 1960s it was apparent that a focus limited to class struggle, identity politics, wealth redistribution, and/or economic socialization was failing to usher in the envisioned era of democracy, peace, and justice. Meanwhile, a crisis outside the purview of traditional leftism was increasingly consequential. It showed that, instead of making progress toward an ultimate "highest stage of history," we appeared to be heading into an abyss of social breakdown, climate catastrophe and mass extinction of species.

*The theory and praxis needed to change.* It did so on the basis of an emerging new worldview. During the 1970s the nascent Green movement suddenly presented an alternative to all the old ideologies. It was based on Four Pillars. They included the standard three of the traditional left, phrased as Grassroots Democracy, Social Justice, and Nonviolence (peace). But the Green perspective pointed the way toward a paradigm shift via appreciation of a new factor—ecology. John Rensenbrink, early on, was among those who realized the primacy of the "additional" pillar: Ecological Wisdom. And he has worked tirelessly over the years to enlighten the social change movement based on that realization. The title of his masterwork, *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*, indicates his recognition that more is at stake in our time. And more is required of us. Nothing less than a radical transition of our politics and a full transformation of our lifeways will be required to re-establish ecological balances and to restore our righteous citizenship within the community of life.

\* \* \* \* \*

What you'll read in this issue shows the extent to which John's insights and erudition have touched the lives and influenced the thinking of one individual after another over the course of his career as an educator, activist, and organizer. Some members of the Green Horizon Board had the idea that this would be a good time to commemorate his achievements. As close colleagues we had much to affirm toward that end, but we decided to reach out and see if others might join us in contributing material for a special issue of the magazine. We were stunned at the response. So many acknowledgments, reminiscences, appreciations, and pictures flooded in that our only chance to fit it all in one issue was to reduce the usual font size of the text! Over 70 submissions have been included. We apologize to those who heard about the project belatedly or weren't able to meet the deadline. Perhaps we'll accommodate the overflow with a special section in the next issue.

Particular thanks go out to Tony Affigne, Mike Feinstein, David Doonan, Ralph Monö, and jacqui devenau, who (along with John) sent in the photographs that so enrich our appreciation of the trajectory of John's career. Tom Putnam obtained permission from publisher Matthew O'Donnell for us to reprint an interview that originally appeared in the *Bowdoin Magazine*, and photographer Michele Stapleton graciously allowed us to include the photograph that accompanies the interview.

I, personally, am honored to present this compilation of tributes to the longstanding, deeply effective, and widely cherished work of my co-editor, John Rensenbrink. I anticipate that this issue will find special resonance among Greens and the broader social-change community—because, as you'll see, a survey of John's life and achievements serves up a fascinating review of the history of the Green politics movement in this country. John was present at the creation!

—Steve Welzer



When I came into the Green Party in 2000 as an activist working on the Nader for President campaign in Toledo, Ohio, I was one of a small handful of people of color in the party. I found the focus on seeking consensus cumbersome and tedious. In short, it was a culture shock and I wondered if the Green Party was the right fit for me. John Rensenbrink was one of the visionary leaders of the GP who were willing to address the truly difficult issues of our time in a comprehensive and compassionate manner. This went a long way toward convincing me to give this fledgling party a chance.

I noticed that there were many educators among GP leaders, and it made sense to me that people who spend their lives researching and educating would play an important role in building a political party that seeks to move humanity forward. John was one of those critically thinking educators of the Green Party who laid the groundwork for the GPUS based on a set of values, the Ten Key Values.

As a Green Party leader, John is kind and compassionate while also being courageous and tenacious. He fights the right way, with ideas, innovation, and vision. I will always be grateful to him for the example that he sets and for the countless hours he has devoted to the creation of tools for transforming the voice of the people into a political force.

*Anita Rios has been co-chair of the National Committee of the Green Party (2001-2004 and again 2018-present) and co-chair of the Latinx Caucus (2017-present).*



## John Rensenbrink's Green *praxis*

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY TONY AFFIGNE

*Few friendships in my life have been as important, or as fruitful, as my partnership with John Rensenbrink. Here's why.*

John Rensenbrink and I met in the midst of the political and economic crises of the 1970s. At home, mass movements were defending Black, Indigenous, Latino, and Asian peoples, advocating women's equality, and opposing US wars abroad. Internationally, decolonization was underway, a powerful anti-apartheid movement threatened white nationalist regimes in southern Africa, and insurgencies and counter-insurgencies (funded by the US) kept Latin America in turmoil. Salvador Allende had been overthrown and assassinated in Chile, at US direction, just two years before. Domestically, both major political parties were enmeshed in the Cold War, and the left had largely been purged from both the Democratic Party and the labor movement. In the post-Watergate era, the Republican Party was well down a reactionary path toward Ronald Reagan's coming assault on the postwar consensus. A growing environmental movement

was battling both industrial pollution and nuclear power. Economically, American communities were struggling to recover from the 1973 oil crisis, from wholesale deindustrialization, and from corporate attacks on hard-won labor agreements. While this was the world we lived in at the time we met, John's own personal and political roots, I later learned, were in the Great Depression. He learned his lessons well. As much as anyone I've ever met, John understands how our world works, politically, economically, and culturally.

### WALKING WITH KINDRED SPIRITS ON COMMON GROUND

Against this backdrop, John and I first crossed paths at a national meeting of radical scholars convened at



John and Tony



Brown University in Providence, RI. In his keynote lecture to a hundred peers including Betty Zisk, Frances Fox Piven, Richard Cloward, Murray Bookchin, Christian Bay, Joan Roelofs, Murray Edelman, Stanley Aronowitz, Morton Schoolman, and many others, John delivered a rousing call for personal courage and political action, at a time when political science in particular (the profession we now share) had come to seem a timid and soulless enterprise. John was president of the group which organized the conference, known as the Caucus for New Political Science, while as student president my role was decidedly more humble. As a veteran of the prior year's successful mobilization to overturn cutbacks in minority student admissions, financial aid, and faculty diversity, I appealed to the visiting scholars for relevance. If the nation's foremost radical academics couldn't communicate with activists on the ground, how could they ever change history?

John and I were clearly kindred spirits. Since that first meeting we have shared many spaces, an experience I've found both inspiring and exhausting. John never stops moving! After all this time, I'm still awed by the depth of John's love and commitment to the people around him, and to the natural world. Those who've worked with John Rensenbrink will recognize this: for him, the hard intellectual work of understanding where humanity has gone wrong, and the practical work, the *action* to make things right, are equally important. In other words, John's passion for social and ecological change embodies a deep *praxis*, where transcendental thought guides transformational action. He is inspired by a distinctive vision but knows how crucial it is to work in concert with others. For John, *praxis* isn't an empty word. It's a way of life. It's how he balances an awareness of what to do, and a determination to actually do it.

### A GLOBAL GREEN MOVEMENT

And do it, he has. John has been a central figure in Green intellectual and organizational history, building strong organizations and framing new ideas, in so many areas of life, across so many years, that no one person (except, perhaps, his wife Carla) could possibly name them all. After standing with John at just a few of his historic moments in Green political history, I've seen firsthand how deeply his understanding of both people and the Earth has shaped his political work. When John helped establish the Green Politics Network, which gave rise to the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP), which then became the Green Party of the United States, he imbued GPN with much of his own spirit. The GPN mission statement, for example, drew heavily on John's conviction that "how we treat each other is as important as achieving our goals." At a time when Greens were struggling to find common ground with one another, let alone with the broader public, John concluded it wasn't enough to have the right ideas, we also needed the right spirit, of respect, consensus-building, and trust, all sorely lacking in the 1990s.

John's international role has been just as important. Greens from 70 countries came together in Canberra, Australia, at the Global Greens Congress in 2001 to approve a Global Green Charter and unify the international Green party movement. At that first-ever gathering, John led the effort to ensure that somewhere in the new global organization would be a place for broad, grassroots participation. John's campaign culminated with a unanimous vote to authorize a Global Green Network (GGN), including representatives from every national party, as "a means of effective worldwide communication among Green parties and Movements." Without John's perseverance the only formal structure of global Green cooperation to emerge from the 2001 Congress would have been the small leadership cadre of the "Global Green Coordination," dominated by the powerful, well-resourced Greens of western Europe. Instead, the role of the 12-person Coordination became balanced, if unequally so, by



As he is one of the founders of the Global Greens and the US Greens' International Committee, I can always count on John's solid knowledge of the history of the Green politics movement—and his encouraging and supportive advice that has been a great help for me in my work as a co-chair of the International Committee.

*Bahram Zandi*

Since I have long been a member of the International Committee (IC) of GPUS representing our mainland's last colony, Washington DC, I first met John when the IC convened during past conventions and other events. A meeting during the US Social Forum in Detroit in 2010 stands out in my memory, where a rather contentious debate occurred. John was principled but direct in his remarks without making it personal.

John's contribution to *Green Horizon* has been invaluable, a journal providing badly needed in-depth analysis and provocation to our members and interested readers who may not have joined our party yet. Articles show the rich diversity of our party—let this dialogue continue!

The most recent outstanding contribution John has made is the letter he drafted to the Global Greens, promoting principled unity. It already has received a positive reception. I am looking forward to many more years of working with John Rensenbrink. Our party's contribution is critical to mounting an effective prevention program embodied in an ecosocialist Green New Deal as tipping points to catastrophic climate change loom ever closer.

Long live John Rensenbrink! Long live *Green Horizon Magazine*!

*David Schwartzman is Professor Emeritus, Howard University (biogeochemist, environmental scientist). He's a longtime member of the DC Statehood Green Party and the International Committee of GPUS. David serves on the editorial board of Science & Society and the advisory board of Capitalism, Nature, Socialism. He authored Life, Temperature and the Earth (2002) and co-authored The Earth is Not for Sale (2019).*

the broader, two delegates per country, Global Green Network. Again, John's vision of a participatory Green movement, accessible to the global South and East as well as the West, found its way into Green history because he was willing to actively engage, as leader of the US Green Party's International Committee, and as delegate to the Global Greens.

### ROAD TRIPS AND GREEN HORIZON

Through more than forty years, it's been my pleasure to walk some of this path with John, and with others who also found inspiration in his leadership, and an example in his life of service. He and I have worked together as political scientists, promoting the study of ecological and transformational politics within a broader community of politics scholars. We've teamed up to help organize national and regional gatherings including Third Parties '96, which brought together 27 independent political parties, producing a "Common Ground Declaration" achieving broad and unanimous points of agreement. Under John's direction, he and I produced the first iteration of *Green Horizon*, when it was still a small project of GPN, with John handling most writing and editing, and my duties final composition and layout. Before long John, Steve Welzer, and the Green Horizon Foundation had transformed that first incarnation into the international journal you hold in your hands.

For many years, John and I traveled together as Green Party representatives, including a road trip from Providence to Topsham and on to Ottawa in 2000 as guest speakers at the Green Party of Canada's National Convention. John's speech explained the difficult electoral environment we face in the US, and mine addressed developing relationships between US Greens and Indigenous sovereignty and sustainability campaigns. In 2004 we traveled to Rome, Italy in the US delegation to the founding congress of the European Green Party. We drove together to Quebec City in 2008 for the hemispheric meeting of La Federación de Partidos Verdes de las Américas (Federation of Green Parties of the Americas), where FPVA welcomed new parties from Guatemala, Bolivia, and French Guyana; initiated the Young Greens of the Americas; established the FPVA Women's Commission; and voted to oppose the resurgence of nuclear power around the world.

### PRAXIS AND GREEN POLITICS

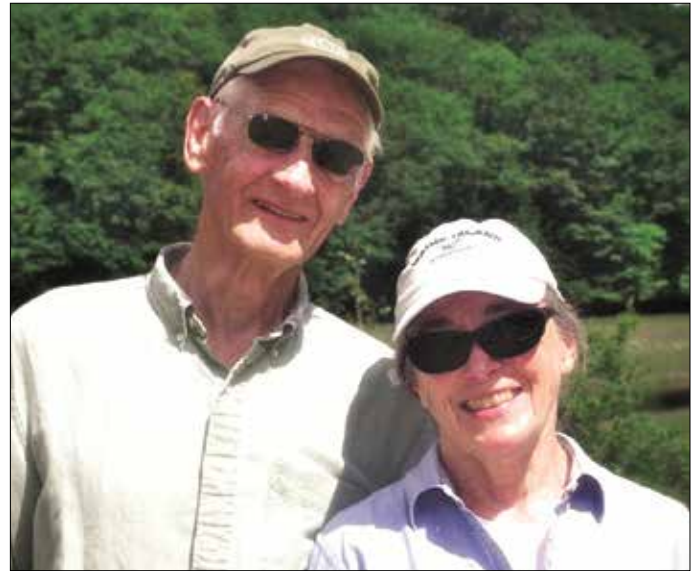
It's remarkable that so many years have passed since John and I first took our seats on the Green Party's National Committee, he from Maine and me from Rhode Island, sharing responsibility for a new Green *praxis*. With hundreds of others, we've worked together for more than two decades to develop party ideology and organization, and to ensure that US Greens were well represented internationally. We had both been at the



Tony and John with Canadian Greens

2001 Santa Barbara meeting of ASGP where the Green Party of the United States was founded, and over the years have felt a common commitment to grow the party while holding fast to its founding principles—Ecology, Equality, Democracy, and Peace. To be sure, John’s history goes much farther back than mine. He was there at the very beginning, in 1984, when US Greens first came together. Since then, his contribution to the US and international Green movements, his clarity of thought and steadiness of purpose, have been unparalleled.

At the 2014 state convention of the Maine Green Independent Party—commemorating yet another of John’s many founding roles—his fellow Mainers invited me to speak, to bring greetings from Rhode Island and to remind his closest neighbors of the special place John holds in the hearts and minds of Greens around the world. At his 90th birthday party in 2018, John’s family invited me to do the same, but from the warmer, less formal perspective of one who’s been both friend and political ally. As I did on both occasions, it’s my great pleasure to share these memories with you, with respect, admiration, and love; to affirm again, to *Green Horizon* readers, that John Rensenbrink is one of the world’s very best. He is an inspiration, an example of just what a well-lived, fully-engaged life can be, and a challenge to us all, to rise above the despair the modern world invokes, to think broadly and deeply about what we must do to survive, as a species and as a planetary ecosystem, and above all, to keep faith that our human purpose is greater than we’ve seen so far. We can *be* better, we can *do* better—and fortunately for us all, John Rensenbrink’s lifelong Green *praxis* points the way.



John and Carla

*Tony Affigne was present for much of the US Green Party’s early history, as a co-founder of the Green Party of Rhode Island, the Green Politics Network, Green Horizon Quarterly, the Association of State Green Parties, and the national Latinx Caucus. In 2001 he co-chaired the roll call vote in Santa Barbara, California which established the Green Party of the United States. Tony represented US Greens at the first Global Greens Congress in Australia, served as GPUS International Committee co-chair, and attended the founding of the European Green Party in Rome. Before there was a Green Party, Tony was already something of a historic figure in Rhode Island politics; as independent candidate for Providence City Council in 1982 and Citizens Party candidate for governor in 1986, he became the state’s first-ever Latino candidate for public office. He holds a doctorate in political science and is currently a professor at Providence College, where he teaches courses in urban and environmental politics, Black studies, and Latino studies.*

I had the good fortune to know John for years in the capacity as “my dear friend Liz’s dad,” getting to know him little by little over the years, including during annual visits to Maine. After moving to Maine in 2015, my spouse and I coincidentally moved to a house up the road from John and Carla, who generously introduced us to people, places and activities, welcoming us to our new hometown. I then began to work with John on some of the administrative work associated with his book, *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*, and then with *Green Horizon Magazine*.

Through our work together, it has been my pleasure to get to know the visionary side of John and to be continually astounded by how open he is to ideas. John sees the world with a very broad vision, which I admire. It’s inspiring to work with someone who has such passion, energy and drive for furthering ideas that benefit the common good.

It’s been my complete honor to work with and know such a kind and joyful person as John.

*Charlene Swift lives near John and Carla in Topsham, Maine along with her spouse, dog and cat. Charlene has volunteered with the administrative duties of Green Horizon Foundation and Magazine for the past several years. She works for Maine Coast Heritage Trust, a statewide, coastal land conservation organization.*



John Rensenbrink is a GIANT. He can move people to vote, to work on Green campaigns, to answer reporters' questions, to organize Green Party meetings, to write books about the Green Party, to work on national committees, to educate the public with letters to the editor, to go to almost every GP Annual National Meeting since the eighties, to help write the party Rules, Procedures and Platform, running for the US Senate as a Green, doing television and radio interviews, publishing *Green Horizon Magazine*, going to state meetings for years and years, testifying for the Green Party at the Statehouse on many issues, and traveling endlessly all over the state to help Greens advance!

John wrote this in 1992 in his book *The Greens and the Politics of Transformation*: "In times of great change, people feel directly and personally a threat to their existence and way of life. This is how it is now for more and more people. We are under threat for our physical and psychological safety, our health, and in our opportunity to find and enjoy a new life."

If some of the rest of us could do this kind of work, all without pay, for so many years...we might call them a GIANT too!

John is the Maine Green Giant of all time.

*Nancy Allen ran Jesse Jackson's second campaign for president in Maine in the '80s. She had been elected to the crew going to the Atlanta Democratic Party Convention that year and was so shocked at how Jackson was treated that she came back to Maine to work as a Green. Since then she has been a co-chair of the Green Party and worked on many issues with many committees (for example, she started the Media Committee for the Greens). Through the years she's worked with John often.*

# A Fearless and Enthusiastic Educator

BY BARRY MILLS

John Rensenbrink is professor emeritus at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. John spent almost his entire career at Bowdoin after he first came to the College in the 1960s from the Midwest after a short stint at Williams College. John remains to this day a profound influence on generations of Bowdoin students who were inspired and challenged by him in and out of the classroom. John, who is a scholar of political philosophy, represents the best of educators at a liberal arts college. His fearlessness and enthusiasm in connecting the concepts of a broad set of disciplines make him special, and important in the careers of so many Bowdoin students.

John introduced the study of Africa at Bowdoin in the 1960s. He was a charter member of the efforts to bring environmental studies and literacy to the College at the dawn of environmental education as a discipline. John led with persistent and fearless work at the College in the environment and in the importance of education about the environment in an interdisciplinary manner. In addition, John, through his activism and political work, modeled for students and for the College how important it is to be a person of principle and, at appropriate moments, pragmatism.

John ensured that diverse voices would come to the College to speak about important issues of the day, especially educating and leading conversations about the linkage of social justice, the environment and income inequality. John brought these vital concepts to Bowdoin well before these issues were at the forefront of conversation and education on America's college campuses.

John is well known as a person of principle and courage. He was an important institutional presence at Bowdoin educating and challenging his colleagues and college presidents and administrators to ensure that Bowdoin was a place that was intellectually open to the most progressive of concepts and institutional change, while he always maintained a profound commitment to intellectual rigor in his teaching, scholarship and leadership. But, in all those efforts to challenge, John was always deeply committed to Bowdoin.

I was one of those students at Bowdoin in the late '60s who is forever grateful to John for his influence on me. When I returned to the College as president in 2001, I found that in my travels to see alumni around the globe, there was so often the alums' request to know about John Rensenbrink and to ask to be remembered to him. John's legacy at Bowdoin is secure and is etched into the fabric of the College.

*Barry Mills is President Emeritus of Bowdoin College.*

John Rensenbrink is a legend in his own time as a Green founder and leader. Though I haven't often had the opportunity to work directly with John, I've seen the fruits of his labor at all levels of the party. From his hometown, to Maine, to the national and Global Greens, his vision and community-building have laid the foundations for the party for people, planet and peace that we continue to build today. I've been fortunate to have several articles in recent years included in the *Green Horizon Magazine* that he co-founded and am honored to be among those paying tribute in this special issue.

*Dr. Jill Stein is a mother, organizer, physician, longtime teacher of internal medicine, and pioneering environmental-health advocate. She was the Green Party presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016.*



# Pathfinder Toward a Transformational Politics

BY TED BECKER

When I first met John Rensenbrink, in the mid-1980s, I had not even heard of him. After all, we political scientists all had our research reputations residing in sub-fields or niches. His fields were political philosophy, Africa, and Eastern Europe (Poland). My focus was in a field I helped create: Judicial Politics and in Conflict Resolution, which I also practiced in the real world.

So, how did John and I meet? It was in an unlikely place. In the mid-1980s, the American Political Science Association was sensing a crisis for itself. Its prize was the *American Political Science Review* (APSR), the top-ranked peer reviewed journal in the field. Its readership was approaching an all-time low because the editor in chief at the time, Professor Nelson Polsby of the University of California at Berkeley, had turned it into a statistics and mathematics publication. Fewer and fewer professional political scientists could read its contents. This was diminishing the attendance at its premier annual meetings. Moreover, the upper ruling class of the APSA was hearing increasing grumbling and discontent from the peasants.

One method they used to re-recruit disaffected members was to allow them to organize new “sections” of the APSA which could enroll a couple of hundred members into these neophyte “organized sections.” In order to join these new entities which were allowed to organize their own professional panels, one had to pay the APSA fee (which enabled you to receive and junk the APSR) *plus* a fee for the organized section as well.

At that time, I was chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Hawaii’s main campus. I was immediately notified by numerous members of my department of a new organized section called “The Transformational Politics Organized Section,” to which about ten members of my department joined. At least half of those had also begun to organize the Green Party of Hawai’i, a group I also joined. When we had our first meeting of the new section, it became obvious to me that it was the de facto APSA “organized section” of the Green Party of the United States. I had no problem with that either.

It was at that first meeting that I first heard of and heard Dr. John Rensenbrink of Bowdoin College in Maine. It was immediately clear that he was a guru of the section and had strong links to the U.S. Greens. I was impressed. Over the next twenty years or so, the lifetime of the Transformational Politics section of the APSA, the more I met and interacted with John the more I got to like and respect him as a top flight political scientist, Green Party activist, organizer, and person. He walked his talk. He led by example. He had a major trait that eludes many American political scientists: human empathy and compassion.

And how would I know that?

As I noted, each new section was able to organize its own panels, to wit: who would chair them, who would give papers or chair workshops, and the usual litany of “professional organizational functions” that one can put on one’s resume. Another important job was recruiting new members, because the APSA, having met its goal of corralling a larger share of political scientists into its dues paying roster, now began to bristle at the highly political content and academic riff-raff these new sections were bringing into the APSA’s annual meetings. Thus, they made it harder and harder to meet increasing floors of membership to be recognized as an “organized section.” I’d say that I was a key person in the recruitment effort, along with John. We both were

I first met John in early 1985 when he represented the New England Greens at an interregional meeting of the Committees of Correspondence. I realized the first time I met him that he would play a leading role in the evolution of the Greens in the US. And, indeed, he has. I also sensed immediately that we would be friends, as we have been for all these years.

As we both worked to get the nascent Green movement/party established in the US, we shared many a struggle in this ongoing saga. We always seemed to find ourselves on the same side of the many disputes that were part of the growing pains in those early years. Together we experienced plenty of frustration but also a sense of joy and satisfaction as we saw our movement/party grow.

Through the years, John generously gave both his time and unique talent whenever and wherever it was needed. I always knew he would be there. He never failed to come when we needed an inspirational figure at our Prairie gatherings. And this was true of hundreds of other national, regional, and local green events as well.

For me, John was and still is the lodestar of the American Greens, a defining presence, always representing its most promising aspects. His commitment to values—above and beyond loyalty to any organization—was what made him the special Green that he is.

For all of these thirty-five years I have treasured him as an activist, a leader and a friend. Indeed, my life and the Greens are both much richer because of him.

*Dee Berry has been a Green since 1983. With others, she founded the Kansas City Greens, the Prairie Greens, the Missouri Green Party and the Green Politics Network. She served as national coordinator for the clearinghouse of the Green Committees of Correspondence from late 1984 until 1988. She also represented Missouri in the governing body of the US Green Party during the '90s and '00s. She now lives in Overland Park, Kansas.*

Thanks go to John Rensenbrink, who has inspired Green efforts across several generations.

I first met John in 1992. As a scientist, college teacher, and Earth First forest activist, I was contemplating running for Congress in the Second District in order to highlight the ecological disaster taking place in the North Woods of Maine. Searching for any support I could muster, I solicited the help of a group of folks who called themselves Green. John was among this group and he enthusiastically encouraged me to run under the Green banner. His enthusiasm was contagious. We set off together to implement the first Green congressional race in the state of Maine. When we knocked on doors, people most often confused us with Greenpeace—few had ever heard of the Green Party.

Little did I know then that this relationship—*mentorship*—would continue into the future and result in the creation of a strong and viable Green Party in Maine. Today if you knock on a door most people will recognize the Green Party label in Maine—and I believe have a positive view. We have come a long way over the last 28 years. Much of this success would never have occurred if it wasn't for the dogged and politically astute guidance of that eclectic political science professor I met back in 1992, John Rensenbrink.

I know for myself that my life has been made fuller and richer because I was fortunate enough to cross paths with John. I marvel at how lots of things we talked about in our early Green campaigns, which often got tagged as radical, now are part of the mainstream. John has always been a leader of the vanguard for economic, social, and environmental justice.

Thanks, John, for all that you have accomplished. Thanks for being a friend. You are the greatest!

*Jonathan Carter, a botanist, forest activist, Maine Green congressional and twice gubernatorial candidate, is currently Director of the Forest Ecology Network.*

like circus barkers trying to lure new members into our quasi-Green Party niche. I'm more of the hyperbolic type of salesman. John was much more low-key and intellectual. Thus, we made a good team and our membership kept increasing to meet the constantly higher number of members we needed to stay alive and develop our network.

Frankly, after a while, the papers and workshops started to get repetitious and we plateaued in numbers very near the extinction level. It became hard work. But I kept at it and John was as diligent as ever. But outside interest began to wane. It was becoming frustrating.

There was another function that the Transformational Politics Section virtually invented for any kind of "professional conference." As many readers have experienced, these annual professional conferences can not only be a bit boring, but also emotionally draining. Having to sit through a series of "academic" papers is tiring all by itself, even if every once in a while, one engages your interest. Then there is all that self-promotion that characterizes these conferences. And finally, there is "the meat market," where young wannabees are interviewed for tenure track positions. Many who attend these meetings have to serve as interviewers at the meat market when their department is on the prowl for a newly minted Ph.D. These interview sessions are more or less depressing by themselves. However, just being part of the larger process of mass rejection stimulates even greater depression.

Now, I don't know whose idea it was...but I'm sure that John Rensenbrink, along with Jeff Fishel (American University, DC) and Betty Zisk (Boston University) were among the main movers to set up at least one, if not more, "Support Groups" during each APSA annual conference. These sessions were held in the evenings, after dinner, and could go on for hours. Attendance was voluntary, but over the years there were several people, including the trio mentioned above, who were "regulars." I, too, was a regular attendee. The average size was somewhere between 25-30.

At these sessions, we'd sit in a circle and there was no one in charge and no rules. People were free to talk about their "emotions" concerning not only the dreary nature

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## Friend, Mentor, Role Model

BY CHARLES BROWN

I first met John in Warsaw, Poland where we attended an environmental conference hosted by the Polish Senate. We met again at the bi-annual conferences of the International Society for Universal Dialogue—a society dedicated to philosophical dialogue across differing cultural traditions. John was later elected president of that organization; his impact was strong and lasting. In his professional life, his love for constructive political dialogue is matched only by his love and commitment to Green politics.

I got to know John better when he visited my university to lecture on the positive role of third parties. We found time to drive across the last great stand of never-plowed tall grass prairie in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Plenty of time to talk about politics and ecology.

I was honored when John asked me to review and comment on his manuscript; subsequently published (2017) as *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*.

Like many timely books, *Ecological Politics* reminds us of what we already know while shaping a new vision of *how to make better sense* of what we already know. John argues that "big action" is needed to change the current direction and destiny of our species

of the conference, but how tough life had become in their own departments of political science. It was easy for every participant to empathize with them, because it became pretty apparent that Academe was no longer the beloved “Ivory Tower” that had lured us into the professoriat. It had become a fund-starved, hierarchical nightmare for one and all, whether at a top state university, a low-level state university, a huge prestigious private university or small liberal arts college.

And then there was life itself! The horrors multiplied and affected one’s work as a researcher and teacher. Being so universal, no one was ashamed to reveal any of the pitfalls of life which had befallen them. Everyone became a “good listener” and “friendly suggestor.” Among the most regular of the regulars was John Rensenbrink. He was also among the best listeners and the most friendly and empathetic counsellors. It was at these Support Groups that John and I really became friends and my respect for him went way beyond political science. It was through this that my respect for Green Party values also grew. In fact, to me, the U.S. Green Party was John Rensenbrink.

This “Transformational Politics” dream ended as the APSA hoped. We could not get enough members to survive and disbanded in the early 2000s. However, to me, the best things to come out of the entire experience were (a) to treasure the heart-warming experience of the Support Groups at professional conferences, and (b) to get to know and appreciate the friendship I have developed with that “Grand Old Man of Transformational Politics”—John Rensenbrink.

*Ted Becker (J.D., Rutgers Law School; Ph.D., Northwestern University) is the author of fifteen books on law, American government and conflict resolution. He was the first Walter Meyer Professor of Law at New York University School of Law; chair and professor of Political Science Emeritus at the University of Hawaii; and chair and Alma Holladay Professor of Civic Engagement Emeritus at Auburn University. Ted serves on the Board of the Green Horizon Foundation.*

(and planet). This sort of “big action” requires politics, i.e., a communal deliberation for the common good.

Tragically, the current state of politics, now degraded into competition for private self-interest, is not up for this task as it has pushed aside, bullied any shared concern for the public good. *Too many mad bulls have lost their way.*

The promise of politics continues to fall into cynicism and hopelessness by ever more jaded sections of the people. Rather than a noble and shared pursuit of the common good, politics has become a tragic source of conflict.

John reminds us of the cultural and ecological consequences of this form of (degraded) politics—a politics that glorifies and magnifies our individuality, our uniqueness, and our separateness at the cost of concealing our communal nature, our sameness, and our togetherness. The glorification of competition, conflict, struggle, winner take all economics, radical individualism (all underwritten by the ontologies of separation) too often appear as virtues rather than the social pathologies they are. Our degraded political world increasingly matches our degraded ecological world as the state of each is continually “normalized” in rhetoric and practice.

The “big action” needed to change the direction and destiny of our species requires an overcoming of this tragedy of politics. Serious reflection on the great issues of our time,

*(continued on next page)*

Although I may have met him at a Green meeting sometime during the early 1990s, I otherwise only knew John from our mutual participation on conference calls. I had linked up with a small group who called themselves the Green Politics Network.

John was deeply involved in establishing the Committees of Correspondence, beginning in 1984, and helped establish the clearinghouse in Kansas City. All this early work helped push the Green movement forward, but it was stuck on the question of electoralism. Eventually, a disparate group of like-minded people—John, Linda Martin, Tony Affigne, Dee Berry (and I’m sure I’m forgetting a few)—sought to link state-qualified Green parties that were not represented in the CoCs. This small group came to connect a number of state parties, organize the “Third Parties 96” event in Washington DC in 1995, and recruit Ralph Nader to the California ballot line to run for president in 1996. Though Ralph eventually qualified for 22 state ballots, California was the first. I remember how John’s sage advice on the telephone led the effort.

*Hank Chapot is a San Francisco native with a degree in plant biology. He worked primarily as a gardener, recently retired from the UC Berkeley grounds department. In 1989 he was recruited to the San Francisco Greens and dedicated himself to building the California Green Party. Hank ran for the 14th Assembly District three times and has been notable for collecting party archival materials, which are deposited at Stanford’s Hoover Archives.*

Blessings, John, for your years of service to Life in all its myriad forms and to a Greener Horizon.

*Ellen LaConte is a retired memoirist, former homesteader, and editor of Farmstead magazine. She’s the author of the widely endorsed Life Rules: Nature’s Blueprint for Surviving Economic and Environmental Collapse (2012) and the novel Afton (2015). After 23 years living in mid-coast Maine, she moved to North Carolina in 2001. To her great joy, she was introduced to John Rensenbrink in the early days of Green Horizon.*



I consider John an icon of Green Values. I first met him in the mid-2000s at a Green Party Annual National Meeting, and through conversations and attending workshops he conducted I found myself becoming highly motivated to learn more. Over the years I've developed a deep admiration for his wisdom, tenacity, intelligence, knowledge and kindness.

John has taken concepts beyond the parameters of just ideas and implemented them into his communities. Through his ecological work he has provided educational opportunities for people of all ages. Through his political activism we now have the Green Party of the United States. Through his sharing of expertise, we have a body of publications that have influenced his readers to become more engaged in the political and environmental processes.

I feel honored to have had my life influenced by John Rensenbrink. As I continue to grow I hope to achieve just a fraction of what John has achieved for the protection of life on our planet.

*Dee Taylor is co-founder of the educational non-profit Blue Sky Institute and also serves as Secretary of her Community Council. She's a member of the Green Party of Utah, the Green Party National Women's Caucus, the Green Party Annual National Meeting Committee, and the forming Green Party Elders Caucus.*

our resources, and abilities to constructively deal with these issues leads many to pessimism and even hopelessness. Ubiquitous pollution, mass extinction, rising seas, climate disaster, not to mention growing economic inequality, pernicious forms of ethnic and exclusionary nationalism too often lead to despair and the withdrawal from public life.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the dismal reality of the current state of things, John argues that we must overcome the tragedy of politics. Unlike some others, John expresses no great sense of despair or anxiety but rather a confident optimism that a new and transformed politics can be cultivated and nurtured as an instrument of healing and thriving: a politics built on community, care, cooperation, and a shared sense that we are all in it together is still within our reach.

This is the radical possibility inspired by an ecological way of looking at the world; a way of seeing the world that has the power to teach us that our constant pursuit of self-interest depends on a world already structured by shared, interrelated, and mutually beneficial cooperation. An ecological way of looking at the world teaches us that our pursuit of private self-interest is only possible (and sustainable) when our shared interests, the common good of all, is recognized, respected, and cultivated. An ecological way of looking at the world has the power to overcome and replace the Hobbesian roots of our current ecological, cultural, and political condition.

The great promise of a Green Party lies in the recognition that an ecological way of looking at the world ultimately offers a framework for wise policy concerning pollution, extinction, habitat loss, and climate upheaval, but also for economic inequality, gender equity, and social justice.

We live in dark and uncertain times for sure. It's time to recognize those few among us who are able to shed light on a path forward that has the potential to drive a new and revolutionary politics—a life-affirming politics.

Thank you, John!

*Charles S. Brown, a longtime member of the Kansas Green Party, is Professor of Philosophy at Emporia State University. He's written many essays in environmental philosophy and intercultural dialogue and has co-edited two volumes: Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself and Nature's Edge: Boundary Explorations in Ecological Theory and Practice. Charles has been a colleague of John's in the International Society for Universal Dialogue.*

I am continually amazed at the energy and passion that John still brings to organizing for the Maine Greens. You would think that founding the party, growing the party, and presently guiding the party as we enter a race for the US Senate seat of Susan Collins would have him resting on his laurels. *Au contraire!* John reached out to me early in the exploratory period of my campaign to express support and to hook me up with key Maine Green Independent Party folks, including David Gibson who eventually decided not to run himself but to join the Lisa for Maine (LfM) team as an energy adviser. John was present at our first campaign house party back



PHOTO CREDIT: MARK ROMAN

in September (see picture at left), and he and Carla hosted one in January. He has made numerous other appearances at MGIP and/or campaign events, has written a good analysis piece about our chances under ranked choice voting, and he continues to offer the wisdom of experience in many LfM team decisions. It is hard to imagine that I would even be a US Senate candidate today were it not for John's decades of hard work to elect candidates who uphold Green values.

*Lisa Savage is a teacher, antiwar organizer, and grandmother currently running for the US Senate under ranked choice voting in Maine. For years she has led the Conversion Campaign aimed at tackling the climate crisis by turning Bath Iron Works to building renewable energy solutions rather than weapons systems. To learn more about her positions on Green issues visit [www.lisaformaine.org](http://www.lisaformaine.org).*

# John Rensenbrink Played Key Role in Early U.S. Green Electoral Strategy

BY MIKE FEINSTEIN

The Green Party exists today as an organized political party fielding candidates for office in most states and for national office. On the national level, the state parties have come together to form the Green Party of the United States.

But it was not always so. Over thirty years ago, there were no state Green Parties—and no indication nor plans in the wings for a national Green Party. Instead, the nascent Green movement was in its early stages of self-definition and self-discovery, including if, when and how the movement should become involved in electoral politics. John Rensenbrink played a key role in those debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s, leading to Greens diving into electoral politics.

John co-convened the founding of the first state Green Party in the U.S. in January 1984—the Maine Green Party. In 1987 he co-initiated and co-coordinated a project to develop the first national Green electoral platform in order to create a policy identity for the Greens. Then he played a strong role at the June 1989 Green National Gathering in Eugene, Oregon, advocating participation in electoral politics. There were two daytime workshops on electoral strategy, and nightly Left Green-sponsored discussions and debates. The daytime strategy sessions were oriented toward building state political parties, while the Left Green marathons were oriented toward building a politically organized movement. In those sessions Rensenbrink was a strong and consistent voice for an electoral commitment by U.S. Greens.

After Eugene, the Politics Working Group of the Green Committees of Correspondence issued a first-time statement encouraging Green electoral activity. It recommended that “Greens begin running candidates at the local level and only proceed to the state and then to the national level when there were a substantial number of Green officeholders at the level immediately below.”

This was followed by a successful proposal John co-sponsored with fellow Maine Green Matt Tilly at the October 1989 Inter-regional Committee (IC) meeting in Washington, D.C. to form a Working Group on Electoral Action. Reflecting the diversity of opinions about electoral strategy at the time, discussion was very tense, but ultimately the proposal passed with 90% support.

Months later, even more boldly and controversially, the Working Group on Electoral Action proceeded at the March 1990 IC meeting in San Diego to form a national Green Party Organizing Committee. There the 15 founding co-signers, including John, stated: “The relationship of this new group to the IC and the GCoC was discussed and the following points were agreed upon: (1) That we consider ourselves a cooperating organization but autonomous from the IC and the GCoC and (2) We consider ourselves morally accountable to not only the GCoC but the entire Green Movement.”

The Green Party Organizing Committee (GPOC) met in Boston in February 1991 at a meeting that John organized. Convinced that the growing energy for a Green political party necessitated organizational structures that embraced it, they sought a new national structure balancing electoral and non-electoral movement work and strategies. This meant altering the power structure of the Green Committees of Correspondence by providing direct representation for the growing number of state Green Parties.

I first tried to connect with John by postcard in Topsham in the 1980s in response to an ad he ran in a local newspaper about the Green Party forming in Maine. Unfortunately, we didn't connect then. My loss!

Months later I was able to find the Greens through a member of Veterans for Peace. Then later, in helping organize Jonathan Carter's Cross-Maine Caravan in his bid for Maine's governorship, one of our overnight stops was at John and Carla's rambling home overlooking the Cathance River. We have since developed a warm friendship with John and his family, sharing weddings, lunches, and parties. That friendship continues to this day, though we're becoming a bit less frisky. John's dedication to the Greens and tenacity to environmental causes still inspires me...and I'm 95 years old!

It has been an honor and one of life's pleasures to have known John as a friend.

*Bob Dale was a representative of the National Science Foundation on various international scientific expeditions, mostly aboard icebreakers and research ships. He's been a longtime member of the Maine Green Independent Party, having served as treasurer of the Merrymeeting Greens local group.*

In our personal experience learning from John Rensenbrink over three decades, we recognize in him a wise, generous and persevering progressive mentor who has inspired thousands to awaken, to self-educate, and to welcome opportunities to serve others right down to the grassroots community level in America's long quest to develop compassionate, equitable and sustainable self-governance. Thank you, John, for your indefatigable enthusiasm for creating a greener and more just society.

*Rich and Debra Csege used to live near John in Topsham, Maine. Now they reside in Kanab, Utah. While in Maine Debra obtained her BFA in Fine Art from the University of Southern Maine. Rich continues to enjoy his lifetime career as a self-employed custom furniture craftsman creating beautiful hardwood furniture to order and restoring antiques. They both work at the grassroots level to pursue their dreams for a sustainable future for the Earth and all its inhabitants.*

In 1999 I was one of the fortunate Bowdoin College students to be part of a course John taught. I don't recall the exact title of the course, but it covered environmental and women's studies, along with looking at and grappling with humanity's struggle to focus on collaboration instead of competition; on review instead of dismissal of ideas. Thank you, John.

We were encouraged to be cognizant of the sources and current realities of our disregard of nature—plant and animal. We were encouraged to acknowledge and yet move beyond the survival instinct of all flora and fauna. Can humans share an existence with nature? Can humans exist without nature? Much of our inquiry did not lead to answers—more questions were raised, fewer answers appeared. Since then, even more questions continue to be raised. Thank you, John.

One concept stands out among John's lectures and in-class conversations:

"It's not about either/or,  
but about both/and."

It is this sentence that continues to be both guide and challenge in my shared life with all of humanity and nature. Thank you, John.

*Christine A. DeTroy, born in Germany in the late 1920s, came to the US after World War II. She has lived in Brunswick, Maine since 1989. Along with being a confirmed Green, she has been an active member of the Peace and Justice community for years.*

John Rensenbrink is a steady and constant inspiration towards a better future for all. He understands not just the problem but the kind of solutions that will enhance human and community development while restoring our ecology.

*Howard Switzer is an ecological architect and student of monetary science. He is a former co-chair of the Green Party of Tennessee and has served a number of terms as a TN delegate to the Green Party National Committee. He initiated the 'Moving the Money to Main Street Campaign,' adopted by GPUS in 2007 (which has since been taken up by other groups as well).*

The struggle over national Green structure—and how state parties should be represented within it—would play out for years, leading in 1996 to the formation of the Association of State Green Parties (which John helped co-found) and ultimately to the formation of the Green Party of the United States in 2001.

After the 1991 Greens Gathering in West Virginia, many former GPOC members—including Rensenbrink—gathered in March 1992 to establish a new entity called the Green Politics Network (GPN). GPN founders vowed to facilitate as rapidly as possible the creation of a citizen/voter-based Green Party of autonomous state parties (calling it "The Confederation of Independent State Green Parties"); and to pioneer a Third Party Coalition Project (or "Third Force"), a goal that stemmed from the presence during the last two days of the conference of many kindred groups and organizations which had been invited to attend.

1992 was also the first year Greens ran in large numbers across the U.S., with 93 candidates in 13 states. Twenty Greens were elected. In 1993 two post-election conferences were held to debrief, featuring multiple Green candidates and campaign teams. In Santa Monica, California local Green Mike Feinstein organized the "Green Parties of the West" conference featuring Green campaigns from five western states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawai'i, New Mexico) and also Rhode Island. This was followed by "Doing It the Grassroots Way" at Bowdoin College in Maine, coordinated by John Rensenbrink in concert with the GPN. It featured Green candidates and campaigns from Alaska, Florida, Hawai'i, Maine, Missouri and Rhode Island.

Between 1994 and 1996 GPN members would help organize an additional series of conferences designed to lead to a 1996 presidential candidacy: "Third Parties '94" (Oakland, June 1994), "Third Parties '96" (Boulder, June 1995) and a follow-up "Third Parties '96" (Washington, DC January 1996). They also played key organizing roles that year in the establishment of the Draft Nader Clearinghouse and then in the Nader for President campaign.

John Rensenbrink was involved with all of these, helping to shepherd US Greens into the electoral arena. With that commitment ingrained as part of Green strategy, in 1996 he ran for US Senate himself, garnering a respectable 4% (23,441 votes). In doing so he helped to establish the Green Party as a force in his home state of Maine.

*Mike Feinstein, a former Santa Monica, CA Green Mayor and City Councilmember, was a 1990 co-founder of the Green Party of California. He first met John Rensenbrink during the 1989 National Green Gathering and was personally involved in many of John's contributions to the party listed above.*



Mike and John



# Letter to the Green Parties of the World

This is the official Letter sent in November 2019 to the Green Parties of the World by the International Committee of the US Green Party. As of the date of this writing (January 2020), there have been favorable comments and commitments to Global Green dialogue from Green Party leaders in Algeria, Nepal, Uganda, Egypt, West Africa, Jordan, Bangladesh, and the Asia-Pacific Green Party Federation's Council. The latter is about to commence discussion of the first of the Five Key Ideas in the Letter. It calls for the enfranchisement (granting voting power to) each and all of the 100-plus national Green Parties. It is at the crux of the other four Key Ideas presented in the Letter.

— John Rensenbrink, *Correspondent*

November 7, 2019

To: The Green Parties of the World  
Cc: US Green Party; Keli Yen, Convener, Global Greens;  
and Amy Tyler, Secretary, Global Greens

*Greetings from the International Committee of the United States Green Party to the Green Parties of the World.*

Dear planetary Green colleagues,

We present here FIVE KEY IDEAS—they are developed in more detail as you scroll down. As you scroll down farther you will find in boldface the person to respond to with your comments and suggested changes.

## THE FIVE IDEAS

1. Let's enfranchise the Green Parties throughout the world to create a full unity of Global Greens.
2. Let's revive the Global Green Network as the logical institutional home of the world's Green Parties.
3. Let's become more aware of the structural imbalance and consequent tilt of the Global Greens away from the Global Charter's six foundation principles: ecological wisdom, social justice, participatory democracy, non-violence, sustainability, and respect for diversity.
4. Let's follow up on the idea of decentralization contained in the Global Green Coordination's four awkward "continental" entities but replacing them with a suitable alternative such as bio-regions, each composed of contiguous Green Parties.
5. Let's begin now to prepare for a Next Step at the upcoming Global Congress in South Korea.

## FIRST, SOME RELEVANT BACKGROUND

Who we are. We are members of the International Committee of the Green Party of the United States. We have appended a

brief description of our Committee's structure and processes at the end of this Letter. We are keen to get to know each and all of you throughout the planet.

We Greens from around the world came together in Canberra in 2001 to create a Global Green Charter and a Global Green Structure. But after 18 years, we know little about you and can take it as probable fact that you know just as little about us.

We feel that something is missing. There has been no direct contact nor effective means through which we could by now have been in direct contact. We want conversation! We need it on a regular basis. We need a global structure that does not impede conversation, debate and discussion, but evokes and stimulates it!

As we know, the world has changed greatly in the past two decades. We face new situations and new and powerful threats to the survival and livelihoods of the peoples of the planet and the planet's integrity on which our survival and our livelihoods depend. The Green Parties of the World must now fully unite to resist the threats and to strive for the full realization of the promise and world ringing resolves contained in the Global Green Charter. The Charter stands like a beacon in the chaos of a world in pain and confusion.

## KELI YEN AND AMY TYLER

We have spoken with Keli Yen, until recently Global Secretary of the Global Greens and now a Convener. We are also now in contact with her deputy, the newly appointed Secretary, Amy Tyler. Amy participated very effectively in a Workshop on Global Greens Restructuring at the recent Annual National Meeting of the Green Party of the United States in Salem, Massachusetts; and gave a very informative and well received speech to the gathering as a whole about Global Greens activities.

For several years Keli has been and continues to be a tower of strength in holding the Global Greens together and in facilitating ways in and through which a measure of contact has started up. She, together with Amy, have kindly provided assistance in enabling further elements of direct contact of Green-to-Green and of Green Party to Green Party. Sending this Letter to you is an important example.

## RE-VISITING THE FIRST GLOBAL CONGRESS AND THE BERLIN AGREEMENT

We believe that the global institutions that were created in 2001, the Global Green Coordination (GGC) and the Global Green Network (GGN), were a viable organizational beginning for a global body. The Reference Group and the Australian Green Party that had called the gathering of the first Global Green Congress in Canberra presented the Congress with a confederated structure they named the Global Green Coordination. The structure would

be composed of four continental Federations, each Federation having three representatives delegated to serve as a coordinating group. These 12 in turn have in recent years created a body of four from among themselves, one from each Federation. They now serve as the Executive of the Global Greens as a whole.

There was a measure of concern in Canberra that such a structure did not base the Global Greens on a strong footing with the individual Green Parties of the World. Direct representation was advocated by many delegates. After debate and discussion it was decided to include a modified form of a Global Green Network as earlier proposed by delegates from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Its function would be to foster communication among all the Green Parties and to provide consultative advisory assistance to the Global Green Coordination. The two bodies—GGC and GGN—were unanimously approved together in a single document by the Canberra assembly. But the rapprochement did not sit well with influential members of each body.

The following year the organizers of both bodies met in Berlin and after hard bargaining they produced the Berlin Agreement. The side-by-side cooperation of each group, with the GGC having the executive authority, was affirmed. The Agreement included the vital expectation that the Global Green Network will “evolve”. This presumably meant that as the Network evolved, the Green Parties of the world would be enfranchised.

But in the ensuing years, the GGC, wielding its Executive Authority, overshadowed the GGN. They did not seek consultation with GGN on issues, as directed in the documents. They denied the GGN a place on the agenda and even on the microphone in the Global Congresses (Sao Paulo 2008, Dakar 2012, and Liverpool, 2017). Then in Statutes and Rules newly adopted in 2012, they summarily removed the GGN from its side-by-side position with the Global Green Coordination and demoted it to an obscure part of the Statutes, a lengthy document, where it was only mentioned in the same breath with other possible networks the GGC might form from time to time. In fact, the GGN was thought to have disappeared altogether by newly appointed staff members.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE FIVE KEY IDEAS EXPRESSED IN THE OPENING WORDS OF THIS LETTER**

The First Key Idea is that each and every Green Party be given direct voting power and that together they shall constitute the institutional authority of the Global Greens.

The Second Key Idea is that enfranchising the Green Parties requires an institutional home, and must be a home of, by, and for the Green Parties. The Global Green Network is available to be that home. It has its origins in the founding of the Global Greens at the first Global Congress in Canberra in 2001. There it was charged with enabling, nurturing and facilitating communication among the Green Parties—and be in a consultative relation with the Global Green Coordination with whom it was founded. And in the Berlin Agreement of the following year, it was anticipated that the Global Green Network will evolve. But these provisions

have not been honored, as described above, and the GGN has been sidestepped and expunged from view in recent documents.

The Third Key Idea is that the exclusion of the Global Green Network has created a severe structural imbalance in the Global Greens and has led to a dangerous political tilt of the Global Green Coordination. The tilt is away from the principles and policy approaches of the Global Green Charter. Instead the emphasis now is on accommodation—accommodation to a capitalist economic system dominated by mega-corporations driving unlimited growth-addicted policies that destroy earth’s life supporting capacities; accommodation to military organizations such as NATO that feature imperialism; to attitudes and actions perpetuating colonialism; and to mega-corporate domination of governments. This goes hand in hand with a downplaying of social justice, grass roots democracy, community integrity, and non-violent values. A claimed concern for climate change has been advanced, blurring and setting aside the older commitment to the integral interrelation of ecological crises with social, political, and economic crises. The Global Green Charter which expressly calls for that integration has been put on the shelf.

A Fourth Key Idea is that the idea of having a layer between the center institutions and the individual Green Parties is a good one. As you know, the Global Green Coordination features continental federations, four of them. But some Federations have more than one continent and some do not embrace whole parts of the world, making the Global Greens unrepresentative of the world as a whole. We believe that having regional entities, each of which embraces a degree of ecological and social unity, is more fitting and more do-able. So instead of federations imposed from above we urge the formation of regions from below. We think of them as bio-regions, some larger some smaller. They are much more viable in size than continents. The regional bodies will advise their member Green Parties and be an opportunity for communication, discussion and debate among them and will in turn be in a close consultative relationship with the Global Green Network. The GGC as such would be transcended but its decentralist idea would live on and flourish in and through the bio-regions.

The Fifth Key Idea is to take a Next Step. Our immediate focus is to remind and alert you and all the other Green Parties of the World to think about and act on what we can do in our preparations for the next Global Green Congress in South Korea. Consider what would most effectively help to bring about voting power for Green Parties, build a renewed Global Green Network, and help to find structural options to the continental Federations such as our notion of bio-regions to replace the Federations.

#### **SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS**

The following are some ideas/considerations to bear in mind for achieving greater and deeper communication among us as well as taking action in common as a united world of Green Parties.

Effective communication is essential for the smooth functioning of democratic organization. One idea is that if and

when a renewed Global Green Network comes about, hopefully at the next Global Greens Congress in South Korea, we can move to the establishment of three email listservs. One is for general discussion among all delegates from the Green Parties to the Global Green Network. A second listserv will be for decision-making among the GGN delegates. A third listserv will be to enable and promote discussion among all members of all Green Parties in the world. The regions would have their own means of email communication and appropriate listservs.

A renewed Global Green Network would form various working committees to work on specific tasks. This way work is done and decisions are made directly by delegates of the member parties through different committees in the GGN, rather than by a fixed small group of people who are not directly elected by the member Parties as is now the case with the GGC. The transformed Global Greens working through and with the Secretariat would define the scope of responsibility and decision-making power of each committee, and would make decisions on important things not delegated to a committee. This would be done through proposals coming from the Parties requiring a minimum number of co-sponsors which would then be put to a vote by the transformed Global Greens.

Both the renewed Global Green Network and the regions, being as they will be foremost institutions of the transformed Global Greens, shall be based on the principles and purposes laid forth in the Global Green Charter.

We select these quotes from the Charter to alert us of the need for the Global Greens and its regions to take to heart the need to be at the same time ecologically planet based and committed to social justice and economic equality.

“Protect and restore the integrity of the Earth’s ecosystems, with special concern for biodiversity and the natural processes that sustain life. Acknowledge the interrelatedness of all ecological, social, and economic processes...The key to social justice is the equitable distribution of social and natural resources, both locally and globally, to meet basic human needs unconditionally, and to ensure that all people have full opportunities for personal and social development. We declare that there is no social justice without environmental justice, and no environmental justice without social justice.”

Solidarity! Our warmest greetings,

*The International Committee of the United States Green Party Co-Chairs Babram Zandi and Romi Elnagar, and the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring: Correspondents John Rensenbrink and Maggie Zhou; and Jaqui Deveneau, Dean Murville, Romi Elnagar, and Babram Zandi.*

When you write back to us, please respond via our correspondent John Rensenbrink, who, with Maggie Zhou, did the drafting and research for this Letter.

## A NOTE ON OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Our International Committee is one of the regular Committees of the Green Party of the United States, responsible for our Party’s contact and relationship with the Global Greens. The general Committee of the Party is the National Committee which is headed by a nine-person Steering Committee. Internally, the International Committee is led by our two Co-Chairs, elected by the Committee members for two year terms, and conducts its business via discussion, debate, and consensus-seeking. In seeking consensus there is a continuing round of testing for agreement. Questions are explained, comments are appreciated, and recommendations for improving the text are accepted and incorporated in most cases. If after several iterations, there are no more objections or requested changes, consensus is declared. If objections continue, the matter goes to a vote, majority prevails. Our Committee has had over the years sub-groups for the affairs of the Federation of the Americas, for the Global Green Network and, until recently, a sub-group for the African Federation of Green Parties.

John is a source of tremendous positive energy—and it all comes straight from his heart!

I quickly discovered this when I worked with him to draft a letter from the GPUS International Committee to Green Parties around the world. Chatting on Skype, I felt like I’d known John for a long time. I could feel his kindness through his voice, I could see his wisdom in his eyes, I could sense his vibrance in his laughter...What an amazing elder, who is still tirelessly working to better this world!

In fact, this love of the world, and this selfless service to others, is most probably why he’s still so sharp and healthy at 91. If there’s one thing that impresses me the most about John, besides his huge positive heart, that would undoubtedly be his massive skill of working with people. Coming from a place of love, John always knows what to say or write to anyone, in a way that always nurtures, always encourages, always inspires.

And working with Green Parties around the world to figure out how to save our planet—that’s the vision John has dedicated much of his energy for. We’re so lucky to have his untiring dedication to pursue this important work. The world needs many more like John. If more of us could learn to be like him, we’d be able to solve so many of the world’s problems . . .

*Originally from China, Maggie Zhou attended graduate school in the biology program at Georgetown University and then completed a Ph.D. in the genetics program of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After becoming concerned about the threat of climate change she got active with the non-profit organization that was founded by Jill Stein and John Andrews, Massachusetts Coalition for Healthy Communities. That led to her involvement with the Green-Rainbow Party, of which she became a State Committee member. Maggie was privileged to meet in-person with some of the global Greens during the 2015 Paris climate conference. While there she assisted Jill Stein with her activities and interactions with global Green leaders. After residing in Massachusetts for many years, Maggie moved to Switzerland in 2013. She still has US citizenship and currently serves on the GPUS International Committee.*



I first met John when I was an undergraduate at Williams College and he was in the Political Science Department. I, a mediocre undergraduate on my best days, never dared step into one of his classes, fully intimidated! But, later, I began to know him in Kenya, when my wife, Margy, and I and our six-week-old Wendy flew from Lebanon, where I was teaching, to visit John and Carla and their six-week-old Katherine (then "Trink") in Nairobi. Margy and Carla are sisters. Years later, when Margy and I decided to move our family back to the States, we were attracted to Maine, having visited John and Carla in Topsham one summer.

Since then I've come to know and respect John as I've watched him evolve. I think he has led and is leading a near-perfect life. I believe he was destined to help found and lead the Green Party long before he or anyone else knew or dreamed it. I believe he was and still is an extraordinary teacher. I believe he has grown to respect, trust and nurture far more people than he can imagine. And I believe he and Carla and their three daughters have made a loving, challenging, and happy family. I'm relieved that I overcame my young, thumb-in-the-mouth fear of this Lincoln-esque, gangly, intellectual fellow to get to know and love this remarkable friend and brother-in-law.

*Al Miller graduated—just barely—from Williams College in 1960. After teaching for several years in Lebanon, he and Margaret Miller moved to Brunswick, ME where they raised five young'uns. In 1972 Al founded what is now The Theater Project, where he has been a clown, mime, storyteller, teacher, director and playwright—and is still at it!*

All of us early Greens will treasure John's courage and wise heart forever.

*After a career as a nurse, Abhi Hudson turned to activism and Green politics. Recently she was a leading member of the Occupy St. Petersburg elders working group.*

# Notes from a Long-Ago Meeting of the Merrymeeting Greens

BY ROSALIE PAUL

In thinking about my experiences working with John at the local level, I looked back at my earliest notes of what was then called the Merrymeeting Greens. It was our regional group. Members lived in Brunswick, Topsham, Bowdoinham, Freeport, Pownal, and Durham, Maine.

The first meeting notes in my records are dated January 22, 2007. I'll copy a few bits below hoping to give you a jolt like the one I felt when reminded of the issues that were then most noteworthy.

Here's the context: By 2007 the Merrymeeting Greens already had a long and active history, but there had been a temporary hiatus of activity. I believe this was the first meeting of the newly energized group. We met monthly, first at Hersch Sternlieb's house and later at the local public library. As is typical of John Rensenbrink (sadly not typical of most political leaders) he offered this small, local group the same dedication and passionate support he gave to state, national and international Greens. John has a way of making everyone in the room feel like a vital and valued member of the endeavor, bringing out the best each of us has to offer.

Below, with interspersed commentary, are excerpts from the minutes of that meeting in January 2007:

## 1. IRV (INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING) – JOHN RENSENBRINK REPORTING

Hersch will contact Stan Gerzovsky to set up a meeting with interested state legislators including John Hinck and Seth Berry. Jon Bartholemew of Common Cause will also be invited. Discussion will center on possible legislation introducing Instant Runoff Voting in Maine. *[And today we have Ranked Choice Voting in place and an excellent candidate for US Senate, Lisa Savage, running against Susan Collins with no spoiler effect to intimidate voters!]*

## 2) BUY LOCAL CAMPAIGN – DAVID FRANS REPORTING

The Brunswick Downtown Association is in favor of a Buy Local Campaign similar to one in Portland. David will get the Portland "packet" for us to share with Brunswick businesses. We also want to have a handout—a fact sheet with a positive spin on how buying local can save a downtown. Stacey Mitchell of ILSR [Institute for Local Self-Reliance] is a good source for that kind of information. David Frans will be our point person for this project. He sees it as a good step for his upcoming political campaign to get to know the Brunswick business community. Bob Dale will take David on a tour of introductions to locally owned businesses in Brunswick. A meeting of those business owners would then be set up asking them to make a presentation to the Downtown Association. Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility may be willing to offer some funding and support for getting things started. *[Still, the big box stores take too much away from locally owned businesses. Easy parking and the assumption of lower prices (not always the case) keep this imbalance in place.]*

### 3) GARDEN PROJECT REPORT – HERSCH STERNLIEB REPORTING

A groundswell of enthusiasm and familiarity with the project is building. We are looking for political support. There are 2000 petition signers, 700 in the database so far. Bob Lezer will talk with Beth Edmonds. A meeting with Gov. Baldacci should happen at some point to make him familiar with the planning and to get him on board. Zoning is vital. Everything west and south of the runway must be zoned “passive recreation”. *[As the Brunswick Navy Base began plans to close, Hersch Sternlieb came up with a beautiful plan for community use of the land—or those parts safe from military pollutants—and was met with enthusiastic response from many in the community. The well-funded alternative Boothbay Botanical Gardens ultimately took center stage and our Garden Project was denied Town and Base re-vitalization support.]*

### 5) STEP IT UP CAMPAIGN – BOB LEZER REPORTING

April 14 National Day of Rallies on Climate Change via Bill McKibben. We don't know enough about this yet but will keep our ears open for the details needed to get a big group to gather in local support and to raise awareness of the importance this issue demands. *[This is a stark reminder of how much more could have been done, given all the intervening years.]*

### 6) NEXT CONTRADANCE FUNDRAISING/PARTY BUILDING PLAN? – BOB DALE REPORTING

Bob has spoken with Doug Protsik of Old Gray Goose who is willing to play for two dances a year for half his usual price. Bob will put our ad in the contradance bulletin. Doug will announce our dances to his elist of 500 contradancers. As the dates draw closer, we will do a press release. Thanks to Bob Dale for all this legwork.

Those notes speak to the energy we had back then for building the membership and celebrating together. Today we're excited by the possibilities of the Lisa for Maine campaign (lisaformaine.org) and the candidacy of lawyer and environmentalist Fred Horch for the state legislature. And John Rensenbrink is still very much involved!

*Rosalie Paul, artist and retired teacher, is a social justice/non-violence activist and organizer. She has worked with Peace Action Maine, The American Friends Service Committee, the Maine Green Independent Party and the local group PeaceWorks. She is currently active with the Lisa Savage for US Senate campaign.*

Pat LaMarche and John at the 2004 presidential nominating convention.

When I think about what to write about John Rensenbrink—of course I think politics. He's a political animal. A maverick, a pioneer, a guardian of our democratic trust. But when I think of what to say about John Rensenbrink that I admire above all else it's father, husband, friend. So let me back up.

I met John live on the air in the WGAN studios in Portland, Maine. I was the liberal on a staged liberal/conservative talk radio program. I say staged because—while our content was supposed to have a point/counter-point atmosphere—the points that were supposed to be best made and ultimately victorious were the conservative points.

The day John Rensenbrink walked into the studio for his interview while running for the United States Senate, the left had a strong unwavering voice that eviscerated all other arguments brought forward during the show. I sat there, headphones on my head, slack jawed and attentive, as I heard John pronounce his values—green values—as a way forward. Little did I know that this man I admired as a guest on the radio would become my mentor, my campaign manager, my friend.

I was a young single mom when I met John. He became a surrogate grandfather to my kids. He took us to ball games. I called him for guidance. I called him when I returned from dangerous or frightening assignments in Guatemala or on the campaign trail. I called him when my mom died.

John openly shared his talents—whether they were his clear-minded intelligence, his ethical leadership or his deep compassion—with me. He gave me advice, courage and a compass with which to steer my own hopes and dreams.

I was going to write about John—and I notice I've written about myself instead. Because John is what he means to us. The great thing about a man who speaks the truth and believes in others is that each person comes away from knowing him a bit better than when they first met. It staggers my imagination to wonder how many people John inspired the way he has me.

Thank you, John Rensenbrink.

*Pat LaMarche was the Green Party candidate for Governor of Maine in 1998. John Rensenbrink was the manager of her campaign that year and he also worked closely with Pat when she ran for Vice President in 2004. Because of draconian ballot access laws, Pat was the last Green on the ballot for Governor of Maine when she ran again in 2006 (no Green has made the gubernatorial ballot since).*



I have known John since I was about six years old, over half a century. After moving to Maine, he and Carla became friends with my parents, who were involved in the civil rights and anti-war movements. As children, John delighted his daughters and me with his made-up stories of Joe the Woodsman. He always had time for young people and carried on being very supportive of *my* daughters. Although a serious and accomplished academic, John has a penchant for the simple joys of life. He's always ready to engage with others. I have fond memories of John and my youngest waltzing around the kitchen laughing—and of he and I having a leaf fight when John was in his eighties! Since I have known him, he has always been active in Green politics and is such a star in all he has contributed to the cause.

*Susan Freelove Dolloff is an artist and activist living and working in Ireland for 33 years. She was originally from Brunswick, Maine.*

I don't know if many Greens would link John with a love of poetry, but I know that one of his favorites (mine too) is by the late Mary Oliver. John asked that I send him a copy after I had quoted it to him:

#### Poem of the One World

This morning  
the beautiful white heron  
was floating along above the water

and then into the sky of this  
the one world  
we all belong to

where everything  
sooner or later  
is a part of everything else

which thought made me feel  
for a little while  
quite beautiful myself.

*David Tilton was a high school social studies teacher before becoming a Teacher Corps Team Leader, Career Opportunities Program Coordinator, and Maine Department of Education Director of Teacher Education Field Services. As an activist, he was the treasurer for John's US Senate campaign in 1996. Dave has a son and daughter who now live, respectively, in Portland, Maine and Portland, Oregon!*



PHOTO CREDIT: MICHELE STAPLETON

## Finding a “Larger Growth”

*The following interview with John appeared in Bowdoin Magazine (spring/summer 2018).*

### Your formal schooling almost ended at age fourteen in Pease, Minnesota.

That's right. My mother did not want me to go to the public high school in town because it was not Christian. My father thought I should work on our hardscrabble farm. But then he passed away. So my older brother and I managed the farm, and my mother allowed me to take correspondence courses from the American School in Chicago. And later, my amazing mother, with her limited formal education, wrote a personal appeal to Calvin College to accept me as a student.

### You succeeded in college and then pursued your doctorate at the University of Chicago.

Yes, I studied under Leo Strauss, who thundered against the behaviorists who were attempting, in the 1950s, to turn political philosophy into a mechanistic science. He introduced me to all of the greats—Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes.

### And you then introduced countless Bowdoin students to the same.

One lesson I appropriated from Strauss was the importance of learning alongside my students. For me, the purpose of the classroom is to advance the knowledge of all who participate, including the professor.



**You were considered a bit of a firebrand.**

I began my career at Bowdoin in the 1960s, when the campus was aflame over controversial issues such as Vietnam, civil rights, and coeducation. One year, I offered a seminar on Africa for freshmen. That was a breakthrough. “A seminar for freshmen?” and, secondly, “non-Western studies? Are you kidding? It’s not acceptable.” But fortunately, I was supported by President James “Stacey” Coles. And then with one of my students at the time, Barry Mills ’72, we started a student-taught course, which was truly inflammatory!

**In 1984, in addition to teaching, you became one of the principal founders of the Green Party—nationally and in Maine.**

That’s the hardest thing I’ve ever tried to accomplish—to create a new political party. For me, the Green Party and its Ten Key Values offer the possibility of creating a new economy rooted in the land and a grassroots, ecologically tuned political culture. For years, achieving this vision became my passion.

**In your new book, you state: “In contemplating the fact that I will not live forever, I feel life’s call. It’s not only the trees that need help. But life itself is severely threatened. Not just in me or in those dear to me. But life itself may be extinguished in the human species as a whole, my species, the one I belong to.”**

Woo, that’s a good statement. Did I write that? It brings tears to my eyes because it reminds me of the challenge we face. Wow.

**During these politically divisive times, it is tempting to retreat to the fringes, to focus on ourselves and our families, and to stay aloof from politics and the public square. What’s your response to those who are inclined to follow that path?**

Read my book! In it, I recount a story from Plato’s *Politics*. Plato is aware of the darkness of his times exemplified by the trial and execution of his teacher, Socrates, by dishonest political authorities. He puts words in Socrates’ mouth and has Socrates describe a man who sees the wickedness of humankind and chooses to protect himself under a shelter. The man lives his own life, pure from evil and unrighteousness, and departs in peace and good will, with bright hopes. Plato has a young observer, Adeimantus, state that such a man had done a great work. To which Socrates replies, “A great work, yes, but not the greatest, unless he finds a polis which is suitable to him—where he will have a larger growth and be savior to his country, as well as of himself.” That passage has been an inspiration to me throughout my life for its refusal to abandon politics. It is in interacting with others, Plato reminds us, that we find “a larger growth.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The bio accompanying the interview read: John Rensenbrink is one of seven children of Dutch-American farmers. His mother, Effie, was born in the Netherlands, and his father, John, was the son of immigrants. A highly admired professor of government and environmental studies, he taught at Bowdoin for more than thirty years, beginning in 1961. He and his wife, Carla, a former teacher and university professor, live in Topsham, where they raised three daughters and spearheaded the Cathance River Education Alliance. The paperback edition of his newest book, *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy* (Lexington Books), will be published this summer [2018]. He is a lifelong fan of the St. Louis Cardinals.

*Tom Putnam conducted this interview and obtained reprint permission. Tom is a former student of John’s and they have maintained a friendship ever since.*

I can never thank John enough for giving me a platform from which to express my thoughts and studies on what I consider some of the most pressing social and environmental challenges we face today. John encouraged and guided me over the years as I wrote articles for *Green Horizon* about nuclear power (including the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station), Native Americans, Islam, and other issues which the Green Party in its wisdom addresses. It’s been a deeply satisfying experience for me to see my ideas in print and reaching an audience.

I am a student of history, and for me, to incorporate modern Third World history from a Green perspective into my articles was a precious chance to contribute what I have learned in my rather disorganized life. I could not have done that without John’s unwavering support.

Right now, John is engaged in an expansion of his lifework for creating and inspiring the Green Party, this time on the international stage. As a longtime member and former co-chair of the International Committee, John, along with Maggie Zhou, is working to re-create and infuse the international organization of Greens, the Global Greens, with a new vision of democracy within the international movement. Reference the text of their “Letter to the Green Parties of the World” [printed elsewhere in this issue], a magnificent testimony to John’s continuing dedication.

*Romi Elnagar is a retired teacher-librarian who lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is a founding member of the Green Party of Louisiana and is currently co-chair. She also co-chairs the International Committee of GPUS and is a regular contributor to Green Horizon Magazine.*

My work with John goes all the way back to the beginning of Green (Movement) Time and the SPAKA process—our attempt to fill in the issues behind the Ten Key Values. It was his idea, I think, in 1985 and I and many others jumped on it. John has been our pre-eminent leader for over 40 years, even though he has never served on the Steering Committee. He led the way to forming GPUS after the split in G/GPUSA and he still leads with his work on the International Committee.

*Budd Dickinson was Secretary of the Green Party of the United States for four years (2012-2015) and from 2006 to 2009 was one of the seven co-chairs of the organization. He was one of the founders of the California Green Party in 1991.*

It was John who got me interested in the Greens. I can remember sitting with him over coffee as he talked about Green philosophy and how it was grounded in ecology. Like many others, I found him to be thoughtful, intelligent, well-spoken and very good at putting his thoughts to paper. The most important things I learned about John came from our trips to Green meetings, where I had the opportunity to talk with him about all kinds of topics. Some were not your typical "Green" topics, yet they somehow became related. He encouraged me to get involved with developing the party. John's nicest quality was that when we traveled he always made sure we had time for coffee/tea and something delicious to go with it.

John is known for his intellectual ability and all he has done for the Green Party, but I also will remember him for his kindness. He is a good and decent man.

*Tom Fusco has worked in the substance abuse, mental health and organization development fields since 1970. He was active with the gubernatorial campaigns of Jonathan Carter and Pat LaMarche in Maine, as well as the Ralph Nader and David Cobb presidential campaigns. Tom has served as Maine's representative to the GPUS National Committee and co-chair of the Maine Green Independent Party. He had the honor of being appointed by Governor Angus King as a member of the Maine Environmental Priorities Project.*

# Building a Party of a Different Kind From Green Pages, Volume 2 (1997)

BY JOHN RENSENBRINK

The eyes of the Green world will be on Maine the weekend of October 3 to 5 [1997]. Delegates from 19 member state parties of the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) will assemble in the Grange Hall in Topsham, a coastal town "down east" thirty miles from Portland. Additional state Green parties are at the point of joining and will be sending delegates. Non-member state Green Parties and kindred organizations will have observers at the meeting.

The theme is "Building a Party of a Different Kind." It will be the third meeting of the ASGP, whose stated purpose is to work for the creation of a national Green Party based on autonomous state Green Parties, and whose companion purpose is to assist in the development of Green Parties in all 50 states. The ASGP was launched in Middleburg, Virginia shortly after the election in November 1996 and was formally founded at Portland, Oregon in early April.

The keynote speaker on Saturday morning will be Madelyn Hoffman, Green Party candidate for governor of New Jersey in this fall's election. [Update: Madelyn joined the Board of the Green Horizon Foundation in 2019.] The conference, alternating small group discussions and plenary sessions, will take up in separate sections "Growing Green Parties in 50 States," "Building Towards a National Green Party," and "Organizational Affairs of ASGP." These three are slated for Saturday. Dinner that night will be an old-fashioned Maine clam bake with all the trimmings, followed by music and dance.

On Sunday, after electing officers, the group will take up "Making Green Waves in the Wide World." They will deal with cooperation with other third parties, relations with organizations of people of color, the development of a national platform, and the Presidency 2000.

The ASGP conference comes on the heels of a national meeting of the G/GPUSA in Lawrence, Massachusetts August 27 to September 2. Though the Lawrence meeting authorized the formation of a team of three to negotiate with ASGP on the preferred structure of a national Green Party, it did not veer from its own attachment to a locals-based, dues paying, national body. However, it did accept an amendment by Howie Hawkins, veteran Green organizer, which if implemented by G/GPUSA's Green Council, would modify the composition of G/GPUSA's Congress. By its terms, starting in 1999, one half the delegates would represent members of locals who pay dues to the national party and one half would be representatives of state Green Parties chosen by some form of proportional representation. Dues paying considerations could play a role in state party representation, but might be voluntary, according to this proposal.

Representatives to the Lawrence gathering from California, Minnesota, Colorado and New Mexico, who were among those seeking to reform the G/GPUSA structure, have expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome in Lawrence. They are consequently turning to ASGP as a more likely vehicle through which to achieve a national Green Party rooted in state Green Parties and organizations.

The ASGP is dedicated to a non-dues paying, state-based national Green Party and will take up in Maine ways to achieve diversity in the composition of delegates from each member state to its Coordinating Committee and to a future presidential nominating convention. It will also, therefore, discuss its relation to the events in Lawrence and the question of negotiation with G/GPUSA.

# Reflections Upon Reading John's *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*

BY ELIE YARDEN

Living the active life advocated by Hannah Arendt, it had never occurred to me that a political party embodying that particular practice might arise in a country whose very existence is founded on a dehumanizing exploitation of necessary labor and the work of minimizing that through technological invention.

And finding head space when John Rensenbrink's statement in the section of his *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy* whose originality I value most—"How Being Related is Transforming Economic, Social and Cultural Life"—I read that...

The Massachusetts Green-Rainbow Party [my party] has taken a step that is a model for all Green Parties and for all people in all lands. The rainbow goes significantly beyond "people of color," "E Pluribus Unum," or "the melting pot" to describe the kind of society that is emerging and which, as it emerges, shows the way to a post-racist world.

Will whites ever forgive themselves for enslaving blacks? Will blacks ever be able to forgive? The hope and the chance of that happening is greater when and as we take into ourselves the validity and beauty of an ontology of being related. This is the revolution in race relations that the world is waiting for. It is this revolution, when translated to politics, that enlivens politics, and enables politics to be a healing force.

For the past two months, I have been immersed in a bitterly fought internal battle between two camps, about whose names should appear on the Green-Rainbow Presidential Primary ballot. This was preceded more than a year ago by the appointment of a committee to study the possibility of eliminating the "Rainbow" from the name of the Massachusetts party; for GPUS conformity, and to reduce the need for explanations when canvassing for votes. In the midst of this we received the news of Chuck Turner's death. It was he, as an elected member of the City Council, with the guidance of Mel King gave the City of Boston a model of the practice of the new politics. His District Seven office became a center of political activism. Relating of theory and practice in the initiatives whose success depended on the activities of the residents who developed them. An ecological politics in practice such as has rarely been seen in any city presented a genuine threat to the status quo that had to be stopped by an FBI operation.

But about the book: Tracing the development of ecological politics in the Europe of the nineteenth century makes complete sense. That is when European science turned its new investigative methods on the subject, *man*, making him an object of his own knowledge. Among the humanists who anticipated this was the Englishman, Alexander Pope, whose work was admired by the continental eighteenth century enlightenment. Replacing theology by anthropology, he wrote, in the rhymed couplets of classical English poetry:

My idea had been to take a break from the authoritarianism of the student rebellion in Germany and make up my mind. Preferably in Berkeley or Chicago. NYC would have been okay. Then Fulbright came up with a scholarship for Bowdoin in Brunswick, Maine—a place I could hardly find on a map. Against all (internal) odds, I went and started there as something like a forward observer of the SDS. I met John Rensenbrink, their gentle adviser, if I remember correctly. He became my teacher of Government and Legal Studies. More precisely: political theory—all German fellow countrymen: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Marcuse and, well, Sartre (nobody is perfect)—and the politics of development. Unforgettable... not only the learning experience but, in particular, the introduction to the politics of development: a 45-minute lecture on (actually a harangue against) colonialism, after which Professor Rensenbrink left the classroom to give us time to think and discuss. We were in awe. I had found my teacher.

Nevertheless, at the end of that semester I wanted to return home. Too much snow, very tired of fraternity life, Bowdoin terribly mono-ed. No charismatic teacher can compensate those deficits, I thought. It was then that he intervened, fatherly, gently and as always combining concern with wit. You should stay here, he told me, and work on an honor's project – what will it be? I suggested Camus, *The Rebel* (at the time, oh, so hopelessly bourgeois). He had expected, I assume, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* or Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. At least some work on the young Marx. But John Rensenbrink went along with my choice sensing that this was what I had to do to make up my mind. I think I did, even though I did not quite understand *The Rebel*. Not only that: In addition, I developed the idea that I wanted to become a teacher like John. Helping students to make up their mind. The genuine authoritative but anti-authoritarian Green-Rensenbrink lesson we, his students, learned in '68/'69. I have cherished our friendship ever since.

*Günter Frankenberg graduated from Bowdoin College in 1969. He went on to study law and political science in Munich. Today he's a Senior Professor of legal philosophy and comparative law at Goethe University in Frankfurt.*



Argument of the Second Epistle Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to Himself, as an Individual.

The business of Man not to pry into God, but to study himself.  
Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of Mankind is Man.  
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:  
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,  
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;  
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer,  
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:  
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;  
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;  
Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

But the real work of studying the place, in nature, of the fully bipedal primate endowed with, and dependent on, symbolic speech for its proliferation became a 'scientific' and philosophical project for Comte, Darwin, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and Weber. Rensenbrink, placing the work and thought of Nietzsche at the center is a rare recognition of his influence on the European women's movement, the freeing of the individual from his birth status, on Socialist and Anarchist thought. It was he who asserted that every philosophical system concealed a set of values that could not be ignored. He recognized the importance of history by denying the possibility of its objectivity. The 'meditation' on *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, is rich; its anticipation of Arendt's *vita activa* as the only response to individual mortality. The prologue begins:

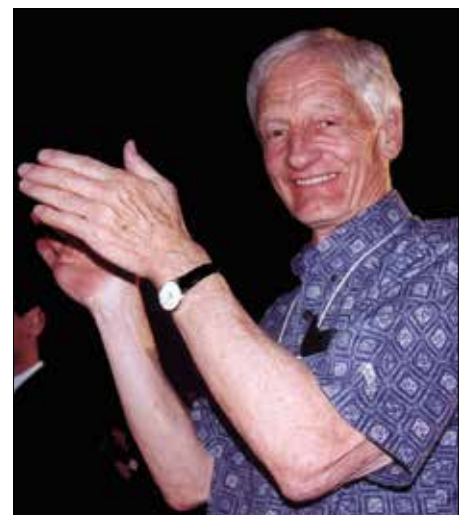
John Rensenbrink came to my kitchen table in 2002 when I was thinking about running for the Maine state legislature and gifted me with a copy of his book *Against All Odds*. A fitting beginning for our friendship. He had inscribed it: "To Heather, companion and compatriot on the frontier for a green and just world. Very best wishes!" He door-knocked with me through that campaign and was a steady source of support during my tenure as co-chair of the state party. Since that day my respect for John has grown and grown. It is rare to say that you count among your friends the founder of a party and a movement who has walked side by side with you in the continuing struggle for a transformation of American politics. Not to say that the way has always been smooth, but even when we disagreed about tactics we were always in sync about where we were headed. John's persistence and resilience has continually inspired me to keep plowing ahead. Knowing that I have John's respect and friendship is truly one of the great treasures of my life.

*Betsy Garrold is president of the Board of Directors of Food for Maine's Future. She's a former Green Party candidate for the Maine state legislature, former state party co-chair, and in 2016 had the honor of running the ground campaign in New England for the Jill Stein campaign. She first met John in 2002 and has loved him ever since.*

"I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity." These words of Goethe, like a sincere *ceterum censeo*, may well stand at the head of my thoughts on the worth and the worthlessness of history. I will show in them why instruction that does not "quicken," knowledge that slackens the rein of activity, why in fact history, in Goethe's phrase, must be seriously "hated," as a costly and superfluous luxury of the understanding: for we are still in want of the necessities of life, and the superfluous is an enemy to the necessary. We do need history, but quite differently from the jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge, however grandly they may look down on our rude and unpicturesque requirements. In other words, we need it for life and action, not as a convenient way to avoid life and action, or to excuse a selfish life and a cowardly or base action. We would serve history only so far as it serves life; but to value its study beyond a certain point mutilates and degrades life: and this is a fact that certain marked symptoms of our time make it as necessary as it may be painful to bring to the test of experience.

Reading John Rensenbrink's *Ecological Politics* offers an alternative to the pathos of individual finitude by showing a political practice rooted in the self-governing town, the only institution that can withstand the onslaught of the neoliberal attack on the Demos. It offers, as well, a refuge—from the waste of American capitalism where all values are determined by unregulated and competitive markets—in the truly political.

*Elie Yarden, Professor of Music Emeritus at Bard College, has been a longtime member of the Massachusetts Green-Rainbow Party. He moved to Cambridge almost 40 years ago, often expressed his views at city council meetings, and then ran for a seat on the council in 2013 at the age of 90! Elie joined the Mystic River Greens local in 1997. He has served on the State Committee of the Green-Rainbow Party and the Platform Committee of GPUS.*



# A Leader for Our Times

BY LINDA CREE

Greens take pride in our decentralized form of leadership, a style that encourages every individual Green to be a nexus of change. Yet, even with such a diffused leadership, there are people who cannot help but stand out by virtue of their intellect, personality, integrity, and the role they've played in the struggle and dream we call the Green Party. John Rensenbrink is such a leader.

Although circumstances kept me from attending earlier national Green gatherings and I didn't have the honor of meeting John until we were into the 21st Century, I've known of him since the 1980s. As one of the founders of the Green Party in the United States, John's involvement has been pivotal. He rapidly saw that the dominant political parties were too reliant on moneyed and corporate interests to provide the transformative kind of leadership that's needed today. He was equally quick to realize that only by rooting our political ideology in ecological wisdom would we be able to adequately address the multiple and interconnected social/political/ecological crises we face. In a recent interview for *Bowdoin Magazine*, John is quoted as saying: "For me, the Green Party and its Ten Key Values offer the possibility of creating a new economy rooted in the land and a grassroots, ecologically attuned political culture."

John's Green visioning helped guide the infant party through the exciting early years of wide-ranging political discussions, activism, and strategic planning. When others hesitated, he was fearless in urging Greens to become the political arm of the peace, anti-nuclear, environmental, and social justice movements. As any front-line activist can tell you, it can make all the difference in the world to have a legislator on the same wavelength when you are trying to get something done politically. And politics is where so much can happen, for better or for worse, something John fully understands. It's impossible to imagine a Green Party in our country without him!

Over the decades, and despite the buffetings Greens have been subjected to by the political and corporate interests whose hegemony

we challenge, John's rock-like commitment to the potential of Green to transform the world has never wavered. Through it all, he's stayed deeply and loyally involved, serving on committees at various Green Party levels, running as a Green Party candidate, mentoring new and young Greens, and—yes—pushing us to do more and be more than we may have thought we were capable of.

John Rensenbrink's influence on my own life has been considerable. His ideas and perseverance are a source of inspiration. Also, the wisdom, humor, and kindness he brings to any Green Party committee lucky to have him as a member provides a great example of how to work effectively within a group.

Additionally, as co-editor of *Green Horizon*, a magazine he established with another Green visionary, Steve Welzer, he opened up opportunities for me to share my passion for Green with a wider audience. *Green Horizon* also introduced me to various writers on the cutting edge of evolving Green thinking. I'm forever deeply grateful for both opportunities.

It's been said that there's no pain like the pain of a new idea, and also that there's no stopping an idea whose time has come. John's dedication to realizing the idea of "Green," no matter how rough the seas become, is evident in his life and writings. During these stormy days, when the rising tides of fascism, ecocide and militarism threaten our world, John's visionary leadership continues to guide his fellow Greens as surely and steadily as the powerful beacons of the lighthouses along the rugged coast of his home state of Maine.

*A Green since the mid-80s, Linda Cree served as a Michigan delegate to the GP-US National Committee for some years, and is a former co-chair of the party's Eco-Action Committee and later, its Platform Committee. Now retired from teaching, she greatly enjoys her family, drawing, folk art painting, writing, and the woods, waters, and wildlife of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.*

We should really appreciate the fact that John Rensenbrink has stuck with the cause of the Greens all these years. It hasn't been easy. For 35 years now, we've been swimming against the current of the entrenched two-corporate-party system as well as most peace, justice, and environmental movements, which have been resigned to trying to lobby and elect the "lesser evil." We've had to live sometimes uncomfortably with our own differences within the party. Yet John is still here fighting—perhaps in spite of me, with whom he has had his differences on program and strategy! But John has never let the controversies of the moment discourage and stray him from the long-term goal of building the independent Green political alternative. While half a dozen progressive third parties have come and gone over these years, only the Green Party has lived on to fight another day. John is a big reason why. For that we should all be thankful.

*Howie Hawkins is a retired Teamster in Syracuse, New York, who has been active with the Green Party since its first national organizing meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1984. He was the first US candidate to campaign for a Green New Deal in the first of three runs for New York governor that won ballot status for the Green Party in 2010, 2014, and 2018. He is currently seeking the 2020 Green nomination for president.*

John has been an inspiration to me and my family for his vision, wisdom, kindness, and endurance. His writings have and will continue to guide me throughout my life.

*Brie Welzer is currently an environmental scientist at Green Seal Inc. She has provided mission and research support to the US Environmental Protection Agency and managed innovative programs in partnership with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

# Some Thoughts About John Rensenbrink

BY SCOTT McLARTY

After moving to Maine, one of the first things I did was to join the Maine Green Independent Party. At one of the first conventions I attended, I met John Rensenbrink. That conversation was the first of many we've had over the ensuing years. Those conversations have broached subjects from growing vegetables to strategizing about advancing our Ten Key Values. Having been politically active for as long as I can remember, with a decidedly left-leaning bent, becoming co-chair of the Maine Green Independent Party proved to be different than having my own opinions and voice. It wasn't long before I had John's number embedded in my speed dial. Among Greens, there are many views, those with a concentration on environmental issues, others who want to end the capitalist system, and many focuses betwixt. The Green Party is a collaboration of members and views. We don't all have the same motivation and agenda. Though I have my own leanings, I realized that I had been elected by all of the Maine Greens. I also realized that my position required counsel to be an effective party leader. Hence the speed dial with John's number. John has been a resource, an inspiration, a confidant and most importantly, a friend. Thank you, John, for all you have done for me and for Greens around this globe we are trying to save.

*Gil Harris is a past co-chair of the Maine Green Independent Party. He currently serves as a selectman in Limerick and as chair of the York County Greens. When not politicking, he spends time homesteading and growing organic veggies.*

John Rensenbrink has been dedicated to the Green Party in a way few can imagine. It has been a life's work. Through up and down John has remained faithful to the notion that our nation needs an alternative vision and an alternative political party. I congratulate him for his stick-to-it-iveness. We need more people willing to dedicate their lives to ensuring that future generations will have a chance for life on our Mother Earth.

*Bruce K. Gagnon, of Brunswick, Maine, has been serving as coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space. Over the winter he took an unpaid leave of absence from that position in order to help with the successful petition drive to get US Senate candidate Lisa Savage on the ballot in that state.*

It's time to leave behind 19th- and 20th-century political ideologies that shoehorn human history and behavior into single-model formulas, impose orthodoxy and conformity, and establish coercive institutions (the state, corporations, police and armed forces, clergy).

Ideologies that call themselves 'scientific' have all too easily been employed to suppress human rights and in some cases commit mass murder. Marxism remains useful for analyzing economic and class relations. We can heave its pretenses of scientific determinism overboard.

Faced with the global climate crisis, we can't afford to waste time on mythologies. The end of capitalism isn't right around the corner. Neoliberalism, which replaced Keynesian economics beginning in the late 1970s, began failing with post-9/11 nationalism and the Wall Street bailouts of 2008. The idea that "Big Government must never interfere with the Market" was exposed as a fairy tale for suckers. But capitalism is endlessly adaptable and, in the wake of its latest crisis, we can count on a new mythology to replace neoliberalism.

The emergence of Trump, Bolsonaro, Johnson, and other right-wing radical heads of state tells us that the replacement might be something more brutal and less apologetic about greed and power. The GOP has abandoned its old country-club conservatism and enthusiastically signed on to the new reactionary populism with hardly the blink of an eye.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party in the US, along with the UK's Labour Party and centrist parties in other democratic countries, is clinging to neoliberalism. The Democratic Party establishment, including Obama, Clinton, and Biden, has embraced neocon foreign policy doctrines and a new Cold War mentality and is trying to hold the fort against a left insurrection led by Bernie Sanders and a few others.

The Bernie contingent deserves a lot of credit, but it's not enough just to invoke the usual leftist pieties and programs, even though we desperately need reforms like universal health care, free college, livable wages, and other progressive agenda items.

We're dealing with the merger of the corporate sector and the state in a way that makes Big Gummint a wholly owned subsidiary of Big Business, and it's happening at a time when humanity is facing an existential crisis as the planet heats up.

The Green New Deal—introduced in the US by Greens and adopted in watered-down form by some Democrats—is a serious attempt to address this new situation and overturn the dangerous doctrine of endless growth. But it's not enough. We need to reorient the way we think about politics and governance.

Instead of ideology as a basis for authority, privilege, and coercion, we need a 21st-century kind of ideology that's dedicated to humane values, democracy, ecological wisdom, the quest for solutions in the midst of the climate crisis, nonviolence and sharing instead of competition and hoarding of resources, and an acceptance of complexity. The natural world is endlessly complex. Humans are part of the natural world.

Even among Greens, there are very few people who grasp the urgent necessity of shedding the political philosophies of previous centuries. John Rensenbrink is one of them. I've known John for a little over twenty years. I've conversed with him occasionally at national Green Party meetings, but I began to understand him a lot more in 2017 after he sent me a copy of his newly published book *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*.

He wrote it before the advent of a horror called President Trump and the descent of Democrats into anti-Russia paranoia and blame-casting over their humiliating election



defeats. (And let's not forget that a Hillary Clinton administration would have increased fossil-fuel drilling and consumption and would have authorized the same kind of bloated military budgets that Congress is passing now with bipartisan enthusiasm.) In a recent essay, "Deep Green Declaration," which effectively functions as a Trump-Era update to his book, John joined Green Party colleagues Linda Cree, Greg Gerritt, Howard Switzer and Steve Welzer in demolishing the myths that endless growth is possible and that entrenched ideologies and power structures are going to save us.

The idea of a politics based on ecology isn't entirely new. In the late 1800s, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, anarchist Peter Kropotkin, who was also a biologist, observed the role of cooperation between species (mutual aid) in contrast to Darwin's theory of competition and suggested that mutual cooperation would be useful for human society as well.

Sartre and other existential humanists of the mid-twentieth century talked about freedom and responsibility, especially when confronted by oppressive power and threats to survival, which are surely among the foundations of ecological politics.

In an ideal world, John would be widely recognized as a successor to political philosophers like Kropotkin and Sartre. Although I suppose that in an ideal world, we also wouldn't have Trump in the White House or a global climate catastrophe waiting for our children and grandchildren. And the political field wouldn't be limited to the two parties of war and Wall Street.

*Scott McLarty is former media director for the Green Party of the United States. He lives in Washington, DC. After joining the Greens in 1996 Scott ran for the Ward 1 seat on the DC City Council in 1998.*

I met John Rensenbrink in February 1984 at the second meeting of the Maine Greens. John had gone with Alan Philbrook to Canada for a meeting of Canadian Greens and came back to Maine and called a meeting. I did not hear of the January 1984 meeting until after the fact, but friends who had gone invited me to accompany them to the February meeting. We started writing procedures and fleshing out green policies, but within 18 months the group blew apart in a fight between the vegetarians and the biodynamic farmers who raise animals for the manure and need some way to dispose of the animals that exceed the carrying capacity of the farm. After the explosion, which drove away nearly everyone, the next meeting consisted of just John, Matt Tilley, and me.

I worked with John a lot after that, and he was expert at putting one foot in front of the other to move us along. It took a while, but we four kept the Maine Greens moving forward and in the public eye. We also shared a perspective in the internecine warfare of the national Green collaborations that have been a part and parcel of the Green Party since its very earliest days. We believed in grassroots democracy, decentralization, and peace, and we used an ecological lens in our analysis. We were both prolific writers as well. I have not read everything John has written, but quite a bit of it, and some of it is as good an explanation of sectors of Green politics as you will see. His support of my work designing the Association of State Green Parties, which eventually morphed into the Green Party of the United States, was critical to moving the Green Party into its understanding of itself as a political party and not just a movement.

When I moved to Rhode Island my work with the Green Party of Rhode Island kept me connected to the Green universe and for many years I worked with John on the Green Party National Committee where he brought his wisdom and willingness to get things done. He continues to keep his hand on the tiller when called upon and help negotiate and avoid the pitfalls. On account of John's efforts, the Green Party—in Maine, in the US, and in the world—is more effective and truer to its cause. (And he and his family throw great parties!)

*Since the first Earth Day, Greg Gerritt has been an activist focused on ecological healing and economic justice. He helped found the Green Party as well as many other organizations and currently focuses on Climate Justice, amphibians, creating nature videos, forests and advocating for economic development in Rhode Island that is based on green values. His day job is serving as the Administrator of the Environment Council of Rhode Island.*

John Rensenbrink's was among the names I encountered when I first became interested in the Green Party in the late 1990s. At that time there was some confusion surrounding an organization that claimed to represent all Green and Green Parties around the country, its history, etc. I was one of the few individuals to have tracked down independent corroboration of various details to better determine a factual history.

In that way I learned more about the work John did to bring Green politics into play in the United States and was honored to meet him in person at one of the national meetings. Since then we have been in touch off and on, and I have always found his presentations and writings insightful and enlightening. His vision, writings and general presentation of "green politics" has been very educational; also, importantly, his open friendliness is especially welcoming. This is the kind of inspiration we need more of. Thanks to his work, I and others in my state party joined the Green Politics Network and have found John's books and the magazine *Green Horizon* very valuable.

We Greens throughout the US, indeed throughout the world, owe a great debt to John's thought and work.

*Holly Hart became interested in the Green Party in 1996 after reading about the New Mexico Greens in The Nation. She coordinated the 2000 Nader for President petition drive in Iowa, ran for Lt. Governor in 2002, and has held various state and local party positions, including past co-chair and current secretary of the Iowa Green Party. She was the first delegate from the national Women's Caucus to the Green National Committee, served three terms as National Secretary, and is currently a co-chair of the GPUS Media Committee and a member of the Coordinated Campaign Committee.*



ODE to JR:  
*A Ballad for John Rensenbrink*

I procrastinated getting my contribution submitted, to the very last minute, probably because this is one of the hardest things to write. What can you say to or for a person who has dedicated a lifetime to the improvement of others? As a scholar and writer John has continually challenged both conventional knowledge and the wisdom of the ages. He has been the conscience of Green scholarship and politics. His insights serve to push debate and spur action. When others sit around think-tanks chattering, John moves the conversation past tables and white pages (“green pages”) to the hearts and minds of people who will act on a powerful Green Agenda. While he is not superhuman, he is a Green Superhero!

John has a keen eye for spotting good writers who are also good thinkers. He may not always agree with the perspectives posed, but he always pushes for good journalism and sound reasoning. He holds the highest of ethical standards and operates with the greatest of integrity. Personally, he has supported me—but also challenged me to explore ideas, to consider perspectives, and think deeply and passionately about the issues. In so many ways he has been like a father to me and I am so proud to offer these words in tribute to him and to his legacy of scholarship and service to humanity and the Green spectrum of philosophy and activism.

Thank you, John Rensenbrink, for all you have given, sacrificed, and done to make possible a new world and a new Green future. You are a shining light and we salute you. I salute you, and I thank you. You are loved and appreciated.

*Darryl! LC Moch is a former co-chair of the Green Party of the United States. He was chair of the DC Statehood Green Party and currently serves as co-chair of the National Black Caucus. Darryl! has been a consultant, activist, advocate, performance artist, psychotherapist/life coach, and minister. In addition to having run for office, he has served as an adviser to campaigns and candidates in various parts of the country—locally, regionally, and nationally. Darryl! is currently on the Board of the Green Horizon Foundation.*



John and Carla dedicating Rensenbrink Way

PHOTO CREDIT: JIM MCCARTHY

## Home Ground

THOUGHTS FROM CARLA, KATHRYN, GRETA AND LIZ RENSENBRINK, AND JON McMILLAN

### DAUGHTER KATHRYN

In 1973, when I was eleven, my dad helped me acquire my heart’s desire—a pony, who required a fence. Dad purchased the supplies: 50 white ceramic insulators and a giant wooden spool of wire to carry the electric current. Dad cut the posts from our woods, borrowed a post hole digger, and we set to work, he and I, to build the fence in a day.

We spent the long morning planting posts. Dad’s strong hands created deep holes in the earth. I held each pole in place while he filled in the dirt. Then we both stomped together tamping the earth into place. He shared stories of his childhood on a farm, riding his horse Beauty through miles of fields to collect the mail. Stories from a time when his family depended on well-built fences. The sun fell hot on our backs, the mosquitos plagued our sticky skin, but we worked on, propelled by the growing row of posts and the rhythm of the work: dig, plant, tamp.

Next, we spent hours carefully attaching the insulators, one per post. Dad showed me how to hang them so they could support the wire but not hold it too close to the wood. At last we were ready for the grand final moment, the running of the wire. In my childhood memory it was dusk, and we were wanted for dinner but unified in our determination to finish. We admired our sturdy rows of posts, enclosing the acre field. We looked at the great spool. We looked at the posts again.

I don’t remember who saw it first, but soon we were laughing, crying, gesticulating. It would not be possible to pull the wire though each of the eyelets. In short order the



wire would become too heavy and too cumbersome. We invented a dozen impossible solutions before we accepted our fate. We would have to take down each insulator, lay the wire around the perimeter, and then reattach the insulators around the wire. Which we did. Eventually.

“PonyFence” became my dad’s code word for an important missed detail that, with better planning or knowledge, one might have seen sooner. It is a lighthearted term full of his intelligent humor. For me the pony fence episode captures his energy and enthusiasm, and genuine delight in human endeavor, be it the glory and absurdity of hubris, the inevitability of setback, the thrill of tenacity, or the sweet pleasure of shared work.

### DAUGHTER LIZ

I was bored, bored, bored. I was a 6-year-old on a 9.6-mile hike from South Branch to Russell Pond in Baxter State Park. And back. I was limping a little because I had stubbed my big toe on a tree root running after my big sisters barefoot even though I wasn’t supposed to. In order to make room for my giant swollen toe, Dad had cut a perfect round hole in the white rubber tip with a camping knife. He made it possible for me to start the long hike back, but it ruined my favorite sneakers and just looking at them made me sad. I wasn’t just bored, I was hot, sticky, tired, achy, sad and starting to whine.

“How about a Joe the Woodsman story, Lizzie?” Dad interrupted my whine before it reached its zenith.

“Yes!” declared Trink, the oldest and bossiest.

“Yes!!” declared Greta, even though she usually disagreed with Trink as a matter of principle.

“Ye..ah?!” I sniffed, excited but reluctant to change course.

“Thanks, John!” cried Mum in grateful relief. Whining made her teeth hurt.

“Who’s John?” asked my Dad in the booming bass voice we had long ago learned was Joe’s.

My memories of Joe the Woodsman and his sidekick Snaky are fragmented. Dad used a distinct voice for each character and usually the characters were chasing after the mystical but melancholy Great Golden Galoomph who showed up at the right moment, but always in shadowy unearthly ways. Joe joined us for many a family hike and sidelined sibling arguments, epic whines, aches real and imagined, and dragging feet.

The stories of Joe, Snaky, and the Great Golden Galoomph were invitations to enjoy the natural world; the great green canopy of trees over my head and the burble of a stream passing me by on its race from the mountains to the sea. If I looked carefully and paid attention, according to Joe/Dad, I could see the magical glimpse of a moose, antlers hung with tangled leaves, or a bear mama beckoning her cubs, and just there, a flicker of the Great Golden Galoomph who led us to this moment and this place.

To this day I go to the woods because it is a tranquil, centering place. But I still get sad on hikes. Today’s sadness is from the knowledge that comes from growing up with John Rensenbrink, knowing that despite his prodigious efforts, his life’s work, and his great passion, the survival of our great green Earth is not secure. He understands better than most of us that the resolution isn’t as simple as cutting a hole in your shoe. And the story will not be finished with the capture of the Great Golden Galoomph.

### SON-IN-LAW JON

If you fell in with a certain cadre of students at Bowdoin College in the ’80s—or ’70s or ’90s, for that matter—it would not have been long before you heard the name John Rensenbrink, or “The Brink” as he was sometimes known. In my case, it was imparted by a group of strident young idealistic anarchists (possibly anarchistic idealists, they weren’t exactly sure) who had found in Professor Rensenbrink something exciting, rare and extraordinarily compelling. One eager comrade took me aside to drive the point

John Rensenbrink has had such an impact on my life that I can’t even remember meeting him. Although I feel like I’ve always known him, there was a time when I did not. I clearly remember moving to Brunswick and learning that one of the founders of the Green Party in the United States lived close by. That was a person I wanted to get to know!

Perhaps I can’t recall our first meeting because there is absolutely nothing false or pretentious about John. I can see his warm smile and feel his hearty handshake from dozens if not hundreds of political and organizing events. I’ve seen his sincere enthusiasm win over rooms of jaded and cantankerous activists, filling them with hope and shared purpose. No matter who you are and how outlandish your ideas, John is willing to listen to you without judgment and give you the benefit of thoughtful consideration.

One of the lasting monuments to John’s wisdom and power of persuasion is the Cathance River nature preserve. The fact that generations can enjoy the trails around the Cathance River is impressive, but I’m personally even more impressed that John was able to persuade my wife, Hadley, to serve on the board of the Cathance River Education Alliance.

I think John’s success in getting people to do good things has to do with the empathy he has for people who don’t like to be told what to do. On one of the many long drives to Green Party events around Maine, John shared a story about what a dean at Williams College told him. “John,” the dean said. “Your problem is you can’t run in harness.”

That’s an attribute shared by virtually every Green I know. John’s wisdom and spirit has helped our political party of independent spirits persist and even grow for decades. His life’s work proves that you don’t need to keep a team in harness to achieve great things; instead, you can inspire them by example with love.

*Fred Horch lives in Brunswick, Maine, where he’s been inspired by John to run for office as a Green four times (including an upcoming 2020 campaign for the Maine House of Representatives in District 49).*



John has always been a pleasure to work with. As the former co-chair of the Annual National Meeting Committee, I was always impressed with John's desire to not just attend, even after travel became difficult for him, but to present. And I'm so glad he did! Hearing the wisdom from our party elders in real time is a great honor.

*Hillary Kane is the Director of the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development. Since becoming active with the Green Party in 2000 she's held numerous leadership positions at all levels, as well as various roles on candidate campaigns. Currently she serves as Treasurer of the Green Party of the United States and is a member of the Coordinated Campaign Committee.*

As another of the US Green Party founders, I want to express my gratitude to John Rensenbrink for all he has done over the years for the party. We should be especially proud of the very fine periodical he has been publishing for all these years. It clearly expresses the values of the GP in every edition. And its graphics are first rate.

I am also grateful for the positive tone he brings to his online forum posts. They encourage, inform, and express peace and nonviolence whatever the topic. In my opinion, he represents the key values in human form.

Here's to a bright future for *Green Horizon!*

*Genevieve Marcus is a co-founder of the California Green Party. She and her husband, Bob Smith, formed Experimental Cities, Inc. as a nonprofit research and educational institution to seek positive solutions to social and environmental problems afflicting all large cities. She is also a Musicologist, a university lecturer, a Relationships Counselor, an author, and an editor of journals in several fields. Genevieve lives in Los Angeles.*

home: "There are three things you must do at Bowdoin, but the most important is take a course with John Rensenbrink..." Such was his reputation. Of course, I signed up for a class with him the next semester. (I have since forgotten what the other two things were...)

My friends were right, at least about John. I was immediately enthralled. He was, and is, a rare and compelling teacher, thinker, activist and human being. It's difficult to characterize his role at Bowdoin at that time without hyperbole. He didn't "teach" so much as draw his students into the battle of ideas at the root of political philosophy. We were expected to join the fray—he never imagined we couldn't or that we weren't as fascinated and passionate as he was.

I kept taking courses with John, as many as I could. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that you could "major" in John Rensenbrink at that time—lots of us did! He was a pivotal figure at a pivotal time for hundreds—or thousands!—of young minds exploring new ways of thinking.

(Full disclosure: I never really left his class. John became a good friend and eventually my father-in-law. But he was my "father-in-ideas" long before—and he will always be that to me, and much more.)

### DAUGHTER GRETA

My father retired in the early 1990s while I was busy attempting adulthood and more distant from my parents than at any other time in my life. (Or anyway I thought I was; it would take years for me to see how much of them I always carry with me.) Because of this I discovered late that my parents had taken half of Dad's retirement funds to purchase 40-odd acres of cut-over land abutting their property. Living paycheck to paycheck, I was pretty sure beggaring oneself to protect a bunch of stumps from development was taking this whole commitment to the earth thing a little far.

When I was a kid, those 40 acres had been a mature pine forest, thickly carpeted with needles and airy underneath its high, fragrant roof. We walked there infrequently, because it was far for little legs. But I remember the anticipation of climbing out of the little gully along our property up to the magnificent woods. Dad striding along, telling stories, exploring, encouraging us to discover. The only place of worship that ever felt sacred to me was the Church in the Wildwood, long logs connecting four squared trees named by my Dad. He could never remember exactly where it was, so coming upon it added to its mysteries.

In the early seventies we spent a summer listening to the growls and screams of saws as the place was leveled. I remember my parents' misery and my own sense of shock that this destruction could be allowed to happen. Creeping back on the property afterwards, we were startled by the sun, troubled that none of our familiar paths were visible. But quickly we found a new beauty in that land, watching the desolation replaced by grasses, then shrubs. Finding young saplings growing out of the base of stumps, new varieties of trees claiming space from the pines, new trails connecting to the spot where we discovered the cat had followed us and the place where we cut an astonishingly sparse Christmas tree. We never could agree on where the Church in the Wildwood had been. But over the years, we watched that land fight its way back.

When Dad told me about his purchase, defiant and excited and proud, I was worried. But I didn't argue. I understood the big hope in that small gesture.

### SPOUSE CARLA

When John and I bought our first and last house in 1965, the lot that came with it backed onto the Cathance River. Gradually we got to know the river—winding, changing, undeveloped, and unpolluted. For years we walked along it and paddled and skated on it and assumed we always would. But in 1999 we were alarmed when we heard of a large



PHOTO CREDIT: JAN SMITH

retirement community with an 18-hole golf course going in upriver from us. We formed a group, led by John, to oppose the development, and then—when that didn't work—our group proposed an alternative plan, reducing the size of the golf course and moving it away from the river. We presented our plan to the developer, John Wasileski, who didn't quite laugh. The negotiations began. John Rensenbrink and John Wasileski went at it for months. The developer wanted to proceed with his project; the local leader wanted to preserve the river and its banks. "You are NOT going to spoil my swimming in the Cathance River!" he said. They traded stories about growing up in this country with unspellable foreign names. And eventually, remarkably, they reached a compromise.

The developer proceeded with a 9-hole golf course and houses, but he moved them all away from the river to make room for the 230-acre Cathance River Nature Preserve with trails that would be open to the public and protected by a conservation easement with the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust. A victory! But John Rensenbrink wanted more—to provide for future stewards of the Preserve (and our earth). He negotiated with John W. for seed money to start the Cathance River Education Alliance (CREAmaine.org).

That was twenty years ago. CREA built an Ecology Center and began programs to get kids out on the Preserve for summer camp or elementary school field trips or high school research projects. Those programs have now expanded—taking outdoor programs into schools, helping schools set up nature trails on their playgrounds, training teachers to take outdoor fieldtrips with their students, encouraging hands-on learning, providing a variety of programs and fieldtrips and walks for adults. Thousands of local people—and even some from away—encounter CREA and visit the Preserve throughout the year.

There's a road that leads from the development into the Preserve. At a recent dedication it was officially named Rensenbrink Way. John was delighted—a way that leads from the world of traffic and business into the heart of nature, back to yourself, back to a quiet place where you can notice the ferns uncurling, the call of a crow, a deer print, as you walk along the river. And maybe also the way—creative, collaborative, dedicated—that has led to the preservation of this small bit of the planet.

I'm always happy when writing something for *Green Horizon Magazine* because the door is wide open and a wonderful range of strategies for a Green future will keep me company. I've never heard a discouraging word from John Rensenbrink, the "senior somebody" who seems to share my respect for the OM principles: Originating Mystery; Old Mother nature; Open Mind. In fact, John has taken care to respond with an article of his own to anything I've sent in that needed an "answer" or an enhancement or expansion of some kind. Because this magazine now has a character of its own that is always influenced but not defined or determined by John's character, I am very confident that it will continue to be an important reference point for the Green movement USA, and world-wide, into the long-term future. If there is one?

I am also very grateful and hopeful about the coincidence [December 2019] of Greta Thunberg's presence on our shores along with the beginnings of an impeachment process that must include some Preamble and Ninth Amendment Articles on the Green Basics in addition to the 12 Articles crafted so far by Ralph Nader's colleagues and the 25 developed (so far, another work in progress) by David Swanson at *Roots Action and World Beyond War*. I am collecting Poetic Articles or Particles of People's Impeachment if any reader has some handy. (Send to Box 511, 06039).

*Along with the above blurb about John, Charlie Keil also sent in some very good suggestions for thematic pages for future issues of Green Horizon...thank! Charlie is author of Urban Blues (1966); Tiv Song (1979); Polka Happiness with A.V. Keil and Dick Blau (1992); My Music with S. Crafts and D. Cavicchi (1993); Music Grooves with S. Feld (1994); Bright Balkan Morning with A.V. Keil, R. Blau and S. Feld (2002); Born to Groove with Pat Campbell on the web (2006). Charlie retired from teaching in 1999 and has been morphing into an instrument-playing poet who gardens sloppily.*

Celebrating John Rensenbrink is one of the easiest things ever asked of me. A quarter century ago, wearing my hat as head of the main national group supporting proportional representation and ranked choice voting in the United States, I read an article about a national Green Party gathering and said to myself, "I really have to get to know that guy." Little did I know that John would become such a wonderful ally at *Green Horizon*.

John's energy is infectious. Countless times he has received an email blast from FairVote about a promising development and asked if I'd be willing to turn it into an article. I've been grateful for his patience in receiving the final product and believe that his persistence is one of the reasons we've developed such strong support among *Green Horizon* readers—support that has played out with increasing success on the ground for fairer election systems around the country.

It's particularly apt that Maine is leading the way. This November, ranked choice voting (RCV) will be used in John's home state for electing the president, Susan Collins' U.S. Senate seat, and two congressional seats—and the races very likely will be decided in "instant runoffs" where Independent, Green and Libertarian candidates will have run vigorously and fully free of the "spoiler" tag. Already RCV in Maine has flipped one congressional race outcome, allowed its non-major party vote in 2018 to be among the largest in the nation, and given a Democrat a chance to run an aggressive campaign against incumbent independent senator Angus King while also free of the "spoiler" tag.

RCV is now in place in more than 20 cities, and that number is growing rapidly as public support grows and the ever-frustrating barrier of antiquated voting equipment and software has largely been removed—with voter-verifiable, auditable paper ballot systems ready to run RCV soon to be the national norm. Expect more statewide ballot measures this year (including in Maine), a new wave of city adoptions, growing calls of support for the Ranked Choice Voting Act in Congress, and expanded use of RCV in presidential primaries.

John has always stood with me in knowing that the most powerful

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# "That's All Right, Sam..."

BY SAM SMITH

When I was invited to my first Green meeting in 1993, my instant reaction was, "But I'm not good enough to be a Green." The host, John Rensenbrink, replied like a Tammany Hall pro, "That's all right Sam, there'll be a libertarian there, too."

Later, I would describe myself as the chair of the Big Mac caucus of the Green Party because, even with my participation in the birthing, I didn't always feel up to the cause. But, as with other students he had taught over the years, Rensenbrink saw me as just another challenge to make better.

John had come to this place with a life that was far from easy. His father died when he was 15, leaving him and his brother to run the family's Minnesota dairy farm. With no time for high school, he took a correspondence course for several years and then went to Calvin College in Michigan, got a master's degree from the University of Michigan, a Fulbright Scholarship in Amsterdam, and a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago.

The man who would become a professor, philosopher, political scientist and activist had gotten there living a hard life of reality rather than theory.

Two years after John called me, I joined a number of other Greens in hosting a conference of third party activists. Over a hundred showed up, ranging from one of the founders of the American Labor Party to Greens, Libertarians, Ross Perot backers, Democratic Socialists of America, and followers of Lenora Fulani, whose 1988 presidential campaign made her the first woman and the first African American to gain ballot access in all fifty states.

It was a recklessly dangerous idea for a Washington weekend, but John Rensenbrink, Linda Martin, and Tony Affigne seemed to know what they were doing, and I was happy to go along.

We established two basic rules:

- We would only discuss issues on which we might find some agreement.
- We would reach that agreement by consensus.

I was one of the kickoff speakers and said:

"This then is our task. Let's embrace it not as sectarians or as prigs but as happy fellow members of a new mainstream. Not as radicals permanently in exile but as moderates of an age that has not quite arrived. Let's laugh and make new friends and be gentle with one another. Let's remember Camus' dictum that the only sin we are not permitted is despair. And above all, let's keep in our mind's eye the place where the sun hits the front stoop on a pleasant morning and makes us feel that this is how good everything else should be as well."

We broke the meeting into tables of ten or so, each dealing with a different topic. All policies that were proposed were written on newsprint posters. Then participants were given three color stick-on dots with their names on them. Everyone then went up to the board and placed their dots on their favorite issues (cumulative voting style, so that all three dots could, if desired, be placed on one issue). After the vote, those with only their dots on a particular issue were allowed to move them to their second choice (à la instant run-off voting) and so forth until a clear consensus of three issues emerged. This scheme not only produced a consensus, but one that was physical and visual as well as intellectual and fun to watch.

When the various groups produced their recommendations, they were turned over to what was known as a "fishbowl negotiation." Each small group selected a representative to negotiate for it. The representatives sat in a circle with those they represented behind them. Anyone could stop their representative and request a small group conference but only the representative could speak in the larger assembly. It worked remarkably well.



Despite the wide range of views present, despite the near total absence of Robert's Rules of Order, the final document, with full consensus, called for nothing less than a major transformation. The group unanimously agreed to support proportional representation; campaign finance reform "to provide a level playing field in elections;" initiative, referendum and recall; better ballot access; the end of corporate welfare; strong environmental policies; sexual and reproductive freedom; an end to the war on drugs and treatment of addiction as a health matter rather than as a crime; a dramatic cut in military expenditures; workplace democracy and the maximum empowerment of people in their communities "consistent with fairness, social responsibilities and human rights." Not bad for a meeting at which nobody yelled at anyone.

The handwriting of John Rensenbrink was on this event, and as it wound down I told myself that I needed to follow this guy more closely.

I learned that Rensenbrink had observed change not only in our land. He had spent some time in Poland as a research professor, became interested in the country's new Solidarity movement and wrote a book that described the change this group was helping to cause, eventually aiding such things as the demolition of the Berlin Wall. As Polish activist Rafał Rogulski, noted, "Many members of the East German opposition still say that Solidarity was a kind of university for them, because it showed them how things could be done. The East German leadership was so afraid of these changes that the advent of Solidarity led it to close its borders with Poland. The 1989 free elections encouraged East Germans to take to the streets."

At the heart of the Solidarity achievement was something with which the Internet has since made us familiar—a form of politics that spread not by the precise decisions of a small number of leaders but by the aggregated tiny and vaguer decisions of a mass of citizens. In a sense, Solidarity was an early and unwired flash mob or internet meetup.

The variety of techniques used by Poles in their search for freedom was impressive. For example, Rensenbrink in his contemporaneous book, *Poland Challenges a Divided World*, described how kissing women's hands became popular primarily because it annoyed the Soviets.

And his description of Poland's dilemma in the 1980s seems strikingly applicable to our own situation: "It is the struggle of a state in ludicrous pursuit of a nation that it cannot seem to find. And, it is the struggle of a nation trying to find a way to meet the state, not in the posture of supplicant or avenger, but in the posture of free citizen."

John told me that some of Solidarity's early organizing took place on the trains that many of the workers rode to the shipyards, where they had time to drink coffee and talk. In our own history, there are innumerable examples of change owing a debt to the simple serendipity of people of like values and sensibilities being together. For example, the rise of Irish political power in this country was aided considerably by the Irish bar's role as an ethnic DMZ and a center for the exchange of information.

Green thinker John Rensenbrink describes the politics of transformation as "a non-violent evolutionary method of seeking fundamental change. The change sought is in the direction of a consensus-building democracy, a community-based and ecologically sustainable economy and a person-centered social policy."

Such a social policy insists that the "freedom, mutual responsibility, and identities of all citizens are nurtured, respected, and celebrated." In Rensenbrink's view:

Transformation can be conserving, reform-minded or revolutionary, depending on the context in which action is considered and taken. Transformation means reinvigorating citizens with a sense of personal worth and responsibility, it means reviving grass roots both in business and in government, it means choosing communities and the environment over the profits and power of mega-corporations and big government. . . Transformation requires

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voting reform change is proportional representation—embodied nationally in the Fair Representation Act (HR 4000) and recently earning new adoptions in Eastpointe (MI) and Palm Desert (CA).

So, thank you, John! Together we all can create that more perfect union envisioned in our Constitution's preamble—one that each successive generation must strive to achieve so that the arc of the universe truly does keep bending toward justice.

*Rob Richie has directed FairVote since 1992 and FairVote Action since 1999. He has played a key role in advancing, winning and implementing electoral reforms at a local and state level, including ranked choice voting in Maine and in more than 20 cities and the National Popular Vote plan in 16 states. Through the years he's written over a dozen articles for Green Horizon Magazine.*

When I think about John Rensenbrink, what strikes me most is the courage of his convictions. He's gentle, curious and soft, and yet when needed can be strong and vocal. He doesn't hold punches! I am currently working on a documentary film about him ("Connected in St. Louis") where these qualities are on display and which I am going to share with you later. The film was shot in St. Louis in 2015 during the Green Party Annual National Meeting, but what also jumps out of my memory is a scene from a conference in Japan. Together, with a group of conference participants, we were sightseeing and casually discussing things. At one point I voiced a shallow and limited opinion about something socially important. Instantaneously I felt a rather strong whack on my shoulder. Surprised, I stopped and turned toward John. He was agitated. His physical reaction was followed by a rapid explanation why my thinking was wrong (which it was!). That's John: a friend who doesn't mince words, a constant teacher in small and big. Thank you, John, for your guidance.

*Pawel Kuczynski is a filmmaker (directing.com) who for the last twenty-five years has been documenting the International Society for Universal Dialogue, a philosophical society of which John was a former president.*

In Maine we have been blessed with the presence of one unifying constant: John Rensenbrink. From that day when the seed corn first sprouted at a small meeting in Augusta on January 8, 1984, at which our state party—and the vision of a national party—were born, to the present day, there has been one individual witness, participant and advisor to the party's growth over that tenure: John Rensenbrink.

In 1994, when I first became involved with the Greens, having been an apathetic, non-political and disenfranchised voter with no attraction to either major party, John inspired the development of my own lifelong commitment to this eco-focused political party. His 1996 campaign for US Senate, with the slogan, "Don't eat the seed corn," enlightened me that political participation does not need to be confined to simplistic dichotomies of left/right and liberal/conservative oppositions.

Centrist, conservative, liberal, libertarian, moderate, socialist—none of these labels mattered. If you believed in the Green Party's Ten Key Values, you were a Green. Green values surpassed all other political designations; people from any political persuasion could relate to our values—and were welcome to. After all, trees and oceans are not liberal or conservative. These labels are constructs of humankind. John taught me to try to perceive the world outside of my perspective as one human—to be aware of my interconnection with an environment larger than myself.

Both major political parties in the US have been, and continue to, "eat the seed corn." Whether the seed corn is eaten from the right or the left matters not if the seed corn is eaten and the policies of each "side" unsustainable. Escaping the polarity embedded into the American political subconscious is no easy task. Rensenbrink has always realized the gravity of this task. This duality of oppositions continuously surfaces to thwart the momentum of new ideas.

Internally, both nationally and in Maine, we have at times contended with the emergence of two opposing factions fighting for the identity of the party. In all cases, when the dust had settled and the party again unified itself around a common, instead of divided, identity, one

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both a sturdy defense of communities and persons and a resolute will to fundamentally alter the power structures of society at all levels.

This is a big order and one that not only breaks with elite political thought but goes well beyond that of traditional radical left politics. It also goes beyond conventional politics, for it blends the political with the personal.

Says Rensenbrink, "The goal is not just to replace existing power with another power but to alter the way power is exercised." Political transformers, therefore, believe that not only must political power change, but the politician and the citizen as well—those exercising power and those affected by it. As in the decades before the American revolution—and during the civil rights, environmental, and women's movements—the catalytic legislative body must be the congress of our own hearts and minds.

In the end, knowing John Rensenbrink has been an experience of purposeful perception rather than pretentious pedagogy. And the experience he has projected has helped many of us to move towards a future not only more rational and ecologically sound, but far more decent and pleasant.

*Sam Smith covered Washington under nine presidents, has edited the Progressive Review and its predecessors since 1964, wrote four books, been published in five anthologies, helped to start five organizations (including the Green Party, DC Humanities Council, and the DC Statehood Party), was a plaintiff in three successful class action suits, served as a Coast Guard officer, and played in jazz bands for four decades.*

I simply cannot say enough good things about John Rensenbrink, nor over-emphasize his importance to the creation of the Green Party in the United States. I remember first meeting John in November of 1996 in Middleburg, VA at the meeting that created the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP). In 2001, the ASGP would evolve into the Green Party of the United States. I was struck by his knowledge, his kindness, his sincerity, and his humility. Over the course of the next two decades John seemed to be at every national Green Party gathering, actively participating without ever becoming domineering. It is a leadership trait I struggle to replicate. If you have not yet read his seminal work *Against All Odds, the Green Transformation of American Politics*, I strongly recommend that you do so. That book helped convince me to invest my time and energy in helping to create the Green Party of Texas. I am proud to have worked alongside John for the last few decades. I am fortunate to have him as a friend. And Greens everywhere owe him a debt of gratitude for the work he has done.

*David Cobb helped co-found the GP Texas, managed the Texas Nader 2000 campaign, ran for Attorney General in Texas in 2002, was the presidential nominee in 2004, and managed Stein/Baraka in 2016. He helped popularize the concept of "corporate personhood" as a principal with the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD), was a co-founder of Move To Amend, and currently works with Cooperation Humboldt. David serves on the Board of Directors for the US Solidarity Economy Network and on the Collaborative Design Council for Transition US.*



John on a panel with David Cobb at the 2014 Annual National Meeting

# Mentor and Friend

BY LINDA MARTIN

It wasn't until my husband Mike and I moved to Hawai'i in the '90s that I became aware of a robust Green presence that was collecting signatures for ballot position. Previously, in San Diego, I'd worked with like-minded activists from up and down the coast from Chula Vista to Santa Cruz. Our goal was to grow a *grassroots party* with the major objective of challenging the rubber-stamp politicians who were allowing large residential developments to go forward without suitable infrastructure. San Diego's residential housing was creeping into the far reaches of the county, and the big developers were getting everything they wanted, despite inadequate water, roads, fire protection and schools. The locals called it the Los Angelization of San Diego. It was enough to turn a pro-choice obsessed cancer survivor into a land-use advocate.

Through numerous meetings with slow-growth leaders throughout the coastal cities of CA, it became obvious that starting a California-based alternative party was beyond my pay grade, so I joined the Sierra Club Executive Board and started an "Open Space" committee to focus on the land-use issue. But it was through Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra, authors of *Green Politics*, that I discovered the Green objectives and the fit between "slow growth" efforts and the Green Movement (not yet a party). Soon, John Rensenbrink's *The Greens and the Politics of Transformation* was on my nightstand, too. I was hooked. The Greens' platform (Ten Key Values) would form the foundation for our initiative measures in CA. Soon there were 30 ballot measures addressing the rampant residential growth up and down the CA coast. The developers were determined to scare the electorate into believing our objectives were based on socialist ideals. (Actually, we were labeled Communists at the time.) Their strategy worked, much as our current leadership attracts fans by scaring them with visions of socialist regulators who will destroy our "marvelous" capitalist democracy. After the major developers spent more than \$4 billion, often using their own employees to canvass as *volunteers*, all our measures lost at the polls. My role was pivotal in the slow growth movement and I was ordered to testify before the state legislative committee on land use planning. It backfired and our groups got lots of good press from the bullying I took in Sacramento.

While we were still in CA, I was becoming aware of a group of Green advocates spread from the Midwest to Maine—hard core activists who were planning an entity that would work to acquire ballot status and run candidates in the states. John was at the heart of this effort and we began meeting in different regions of the country to organize and make our Green Party dream a reality. We were trying to stay friendly with the Green Movement folks, but they didn't make it easy.

Meanwhile, my husband's work took us back to Hawai'i where I began attending Green meetings and was soon elected co-chair of the state party. The late Ira Rohter, my co-chair, was on the UH Manoa faculty. His state employment prevented him from participating in partisan politics. So, with encouragement from John and good friend Sam Smith, editor of *Progressive Review* and active with DC's Statehood Party, I was ready to jump into politics in a big way. After we qualified for the ballot in 1992, the party persuaded me to run for the US Senate. John, along with others in our intergenerational Green group supported the move. Although I had the endorsement of the state Reform Party (remember Ross Perot?), Senator Dan Inouye kept his seat but lost nearly 50,000 votes to my campaign. That was more than 13%, spending less than \$10k. The total vote entitled the Greens a place on the ballot for another election cycle. Green activist Keiko Bonk was elected to a non-partisan seat on the Big Island County Council. She was named chair with four Dems and four Reps. Keiko accomplished

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person was always present, a critical contributor to refocus the party on its shared purpose: John Rensenbrink.

For me, John has most shaped my political philosophy that humans can do better than to succumb to the convenience of duality. We are capable of being smarter than perpetuating a two-party mode that cedes control of our government to wealthy corporate interests. Rensenbrink individually shaped my political belief that the very duality that America readily adopts, is in itself, contrived, fabricated and incapable of representing people wholesale.

I have never seen John shun a new Green for having come from a conservative, libertarian or Republican background. We are all humans, after all, and capable of changing our views over time. If you want to preserve, conserve—save—the planet, you are a Green and welcome in our party. Time and time again, I have seen him relate in a positive way with people of all political dispositions and backgrounds.

Internal divisions are never easy, but when they potentially threaten the very existence and future of our party, Rensenbrink is there to calibrate us, orient us and help us transcend to a place where we do not hold ourselves to be our own enemies. He sees things from all sides, and as we labor to improve our world, seemingly "against all odds," John is there to keep us from getting in our own way.

As a co-founder of the Green Party of the United States—one of the only co-founders involved continuously to the present day—Rensenbrink deserves recognition as an indisputable influence who has helped make the party what it is. It is an honor to have such an inspiring figure among our ranks in the Maine Green Independent Party. To this day, I still do not know if I would ever have become involved with politics if not for my discovery of the Green Party and John Rensenbrink.

Thank you, John, for a lifetime of service to transforming public policy through political enlightenment.

*Ben Meiklejohn is currently secretary of the Maine Green Independent Party. He served as its co-chair from 2000 to 2004. Ben was an elected member of the Portland School Committee from 2001 to 2007.*



The first thing I must say, is what I say most of the time when I have the honor at one of our Maine Green events to introduce John Rensenbrink, and that is: "Thank you, John, for giving me a reason to bang my head against the wall since I came to the Green Party in 2000!" But I have been very blessed to live in the state where the first meeting of the Greens was held in January of 1984 in Augusta, Maine hosted by John and his friend Alan Philbrook. And to call the founder of the party my dear friend. John and his wife Carla are a wonderful couple and I have had the pleasure on many occasions to spend time at their beautiful home, which is as warm and welcoming as they are.

As I sit here writing this, I can look up at the many pictures hanging near my computer and there is one that is an actual poster of John's run for US Senate in 1996. And below it is a picture of John sitting in a rocking chair in the living room of my old mobile home with my wonderful departed cat, Tigger, sleeping soundly in his lap, which is a testament to the calmness of John's personality. Not that he can't get riled from time to time!

I had the pleasure one year of driving John, in his Prius, to the Green Party's Annual National Meeting (ANM) in Alfred, New York. On the way back I got to see where he and Carla got married. He and I were actually traveling companions to many an ANM and Convention. Now his travels are limited because of his age and health, though at 91, last year, he was able to attend part of the ANM in Salem, Massachusetts.

John has not only been the driving force for the Maine Greens since 1984 but also very much involved in the building of the GPUS International Committee [IC]. Last year I finally was able to find time to join that committee—just in time for John to lead a letter writing effort to all the Green Parties around the world. The letter invited them to join us in making our Global Greens stronger and opening up a dialog between them and the IC. Several countries have already replied.

I am not only happy that John was able to do that in his lifetime, but that he is now also able to be involved in the very first Ranked Choice Voting race for a Green for US Senate, right here in

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much by setting agendas to accommodate the public's participation. Her second win kept the Green Party on the ballot for ten years! Shortly after the campaign, John invited me to address the Maine Green Party convention. It was an honor I won't easily forget as Maine's mosquitoes are much more aggressive than Hawaii's.

John has been my mentor, eventually encouraging me to coordinate the Nader presidential campaign in 1996. Mike's work had relocated us back to DC where John, Sam Smith, Tom Linzey, president of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), and I ran the national campaign as an independent entity with no connection to Nader. (His choice, not ours.) By taking this work-around, Nader was not required to report his expenses or reveal his taxes to the feds and received no donations. He was also prohibited from having any connection or communications with the Greens. Nader also refused to join the party. This very awkward situation meant I needed a lot of help, especially since we were running the entire show in a tiny Dupont Circle office with a handful of loyal volunteers. I've recorded this experience in *Driving Mr. Nader: The Greens Grow Up*. It's not in print but is still available online.

After we moved back to San Diego, John visited, and we were delighted to show him the sights. The land-use fights of the '90s had accomplished little and San Diego was still growing at rates that were not sustainable. We were living on the coast during the 2003 fires and prepared to evacuate if necessary, especially after the fire jumped Highway 15 and headed toward the coast. Since then, CA has experienced more severe brushfires that have obliterated towns and whole communities. But the real reason we had to get out of SoCal was the traffic.

In 2006, Mike and I left California and retired to Port Townsend, WA on the Olympic Peninsula, a small Victorian seaport of 10,000 very green inhabitants, although they mostly vote for green Democrats. In 2016, those of us who still considered ourselves Green voted for Jill Stein, of course. Unfortunately, we haven't tempted John to come to the end of the world here but have managed to visit him in Portland and Topsham several times lately. He and Carla are still living in the house they bought when John joined the Bowdoin faculty where he has kept his emeritus status. We saw them last in the spring of 2019 and John was still collecting honors for his writing and recognition for his work on ecological issues. We wouldn't have known this, as John never blows his own horn, but happened to see the latest book on his coffee table. At 91, he's not as nimble as he once was, but he showed us the Bowdoin campus and treated us to a lobster dinner. John was delighted to hear of Port Townsend's resistance group—*PTIndivisible*—and the actions we've taken to educate the electorate to the disasters Trump's policies are creating. Our country is not only losing our own democracy but is reinforcing dictatorships around the globe. We are living in scary times and we worry what our seven grandchildren will be left to deal with after we're gone.

In my view, John was the single individual pasting the Green movement/party dichotomy together, leading to impressive presidential campaigns in both 1996 and 2000. Thank you for dedicating this issue to John Rensenbrink. No one is more deserving.

*Linda Martin was raised in a midwestern Republican family but became disillusioned when Nixon had her surveilled for producing sex education films for a local hospital! After moving to Hawai'i her interest in reproductive health led to a Public Health graduate degree from UH Manoa. In the early 1990s she was recruited by the Green Party of Hawai'i to be their candidate for US Senate. Now, entering her ninth decade, she continues her activism as a docent/interpreter for the Marine Science Center and member of a local "resistance" movement.*

It may seem as if John Rensenbrink has always been a steadfast, convivial presence and a force for good in the Green Party, but it's even better than that. John was involved with the Maine Green Party even before the national Green Party formative organization (the Green Committees of Correspondence) was founded, in August 1984 in St. Paul, MN, six months after the book *Green Politics: The Global Promise* was published. Frankly, it's odd that the Maine Greens (formed in January 1984) were not invited to send two representatives to the founding conference, as were 62 other groups, since the person within the convening committee (Charlene Spretnak, David Haenke, Harry Boyte, Catherine Burton, and Gloria Goldberg) who sent out the letters of invitation lived in Vermont. In any event, John soon jumped in.

The period between the founding and the national gathering at Elkins, WV, in 1991 was rough because a small anti-party group crashed the founding conference and blocked all efforts to form a national Green Party there and in the years that followed. At the Elkins national gathering, that group finally managed to gain control of the Green Committees of Correspondence. At the same time, however, John Rensenbrink was able to negotiate a space in which all members interested in forming state Green Parties could do so. (Unfortunately, the anti-party group reneged on the original agreement John won, insisting at the last minute that they would have oversight over the nascent state Green Party organizing, so the party-building was hindered in several ways.) Immediately there was a mass exodus of Greens who did not want to be under the control of the small group of anti-party Greens in the old organization and who streamed into the work of building state-level parties. It was the state-level party-building that energized the American Greens during the first half of the 1990s after the difficult start-up in the 1980s.

Many people envisioned uniting the state Green Parties in a way that would be entirely free of the old organization. For instance, John Rensenbrink and others founded the Green Politics Network in 1992, which had as one of its goals to link the state Green Parties. Then in 1993 Mike Feinstein convened a conference in Santa Monica of the Green Parties of the West. The unification idea finally came to fruition after the national gathering in New Mexico in 1995 where Steven Schmidt, Mike Feinstein, and Greg Jan presented a strategic plan to arrive at John's vision of the Association of State Green Parties, which was formed the following year. The plan included the 40-State Green Organizing Effort, based on a serious, credible national platform and an energizing national campaign (featuring Ralph Nader).

After Nader's first run as a Green for president, in 1996, the small anti-party group that had gained control of the GCOC in 1991 secretly filed a misleading application with the Federal Elections Commission claiming to be the newly united "Green Party of the USA." Steven Schmidt and others blocked that attempt by filing with the FEC for recognition of the actual unified Green Party and its name: Green Party of the United States. He also led the effort to draft the 2000 national Green Party platform, which was submitted to the FEC.

The Green Party of the United States came to be through these pivotal moments in its history: the founding conference, John's engineering the possibility of building state Green Parties in 1991, and the tireless efforts by John, Mike, Steven, Linda Martin, and countless others to build up the state parties and then to unite them in the mid-1990s, first as an association and then as the national Green Party in our country. Had John not managed to turn crisis into opportunity at the Elkins national gathering, the mass exodus of grassroots Greens out of the original Green organization after the take-over would have resulted in a fruitless dispersal with no state parties or national party to show for it. John cleared a path for all that followed.

*Charlene Spretnak is the author of Green Politics: The Global Promise (1984), which was the catalyst for the founding of the Green Party-building organization in the US, of which she was a cofounder. Following the founding conference, she and two other Greens wrote the Ten Key Values. Her other books on the Green Politics analysis and vision include The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics (1986), The Resurgence of the Real (1997), and Relational Reality (2011).*

I met John Rensenbrink when he invited me to speak on democracy at a conference in Olympia. We met at a restaurant in Portland, Maine, and I was immediately impressed, both by his courtliness and by his passion for what is right. This was the stimulus that led me to write a book on ancient democracy—a subject I had studied for many years but only academically. Through John's eyes I saw the enormous importance of appreciating the ideals toward which we aim in promoting democracy. I will always be grateful to John for that. The very next day I sat down to start the book! (*First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea*)

*Paul Woodruff is a professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. He's well-known for his influential articles on Socrates and Plato and is currently writing a book on the role of higher education in preparing students for leadership.*

*(continued from previous page)*

Maine! You can go to [lisaformaine.org](http://lisaformaine.org) to read all about Lisa Savage and get involved. My wish is that John is able to see a Green sworn into the US Senate in 2020.

It is a long hard journey being a Green, but there is no alternative, as Rosa Clemente (the 2008 vice presidential candidate) said: "The Green Party is not an alternative it is an imperative." And here in the US—among the over 100 countries around the world where the Green Party is active—we have John Rensenbrink to thank for being one of the founders. Thank you, John, for building the party and for your friendship.

*jacqui deveneau has dedicated the past twenty years to the Green Party and saving the world for "People, Peace and Planet." She's a retired hospitality worker, currently living in Portland, Maine. Jacqui ran the Peace Action Maine office from 2010 to 2012, served as chair of the York County Greens and Cumberland County Greens, and was a founder of the Maine Green Women's Caucus. She's worked on every Green presidential campaign since Ralph Nader ran in 2000 ... "with love and compassion for all living things."*



**John in the living room of my old mobile home with my wonderful departed cat, Tigger, sleeping soundly in his lap.**

# Some Notes About Me

BY JOHN RENSENBRINK

Topsham, Maine — January and March 2020

I met John Rensenbrink for the first time in 1997 at the Portland, Oregon meeting of the Association of State Green Parties. My own role at the time was as Secretary General of the European Federation of Green Parties. The Federation, as well as the Green Group in the European Parliament, were keen to learn more about the efforts to create a national Green Party in the US. We also wanted to increase Green contacts between our continents, both politically and in terms of how to organize.

John, of course, had an important role in this from the US side because of his comprehensive understanding of the development of the Greens at the state level and of the issues and conflicts confronting the Green movement in America. I happily connected with John because of his insights and wisdom and his ideas on how to move forward to build a national US Green Party. John and I had many interesting discussions when we met on several occasions in the US and elsewhere.

As a European, I also appreciated John because of his ability to view the US Greens—as well as his own country—from an outside, international perspective, a key asset for international connection and cooperation. He always showed great curiosity about Green parties elsewhere, their different political contexts and various stages of development, as well as what experiences could be useful for the US Greens. John, together with other internationalists like Annie Goeke and Mike Feinstein, therefore played an important role in linking US Greens with Greens worldwide. These international contacts were also useful in very practical cooperation terms; not least as Greens worldwide in the late 1990s issued a number of common statements on climate change—already by then an important Green issue.

*Ralph Monö is former International Secretary for the Swedish Greens and former Secretary General of the European Federation of Green Parties.*

It has been a pleasure working with John on the International Committee. His innovation, poise, and diplomacy have been a true inspiration. We are lucky to have him and hope his leadership stays with us for years to come. A true Green blessing.

*Ahmed Eltoumy*



Candidate for Maine State Senate 1978

The assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy in the 1960's grieved all of us who cared about our county and the world. It hit me deeply. I had been a farm kid for the first 20 years of my life in Minnesota and then a university student and then a college professor. But more than aching grief, their murders focused and sharpened my political understanding of how things had come to be or were coming to be in the country of my immigrant grandparents' choice. It pushed me into looking for serious political action on behalf of serious alternative politics.

I had always had a hankering for politics, having written my first Letter-to-the-Editor at the age of 14 to the *Minneapolis Star Journal*. But with the evil murders of these progressive leaders, I knew in my gut that the Republic I had nurtured such strong hopes for and identified with in the formative years of my life was in deep trouble—trouble from deadly internal enemies. I more and more realized in the '60s and '70s that reform was not going to be enough. But in contrast to most activists who agreed that fundamental change was imperative, I believed that fundamental change, if it was ever going to come about effectively, had to be through electoral politics.

I balanced my involvement with progressive causes with intense interactive engagement with my students at Bowdoin College, for whom I initiated several new courses including a freshman seminar on black Africa. I had to fight, albeit successfully, to avoid being fired. Through it and because of it, I secured a tenure spot. This eventually made it possible to concentrate more and more on political action.

In the '80s I chaired Bowdoin's Department of Government and Legal Studies and, having spent a risky semester in Poland with my family in the days of Solidarity's eventually successful struggle to break free from Communist Russian oppression, I sought and achieved amicable disengagement from Bowdoin.

Thus, in January 1984, Alan Philbrook, a fellow Maine anti-nuclear activist, and I called a meeting to create what we later learned was the first Green Party to be founded in the United States. Seventeen people came to the state capital, Augusta, in the wake of a huge snowstorm the day before. Most were people with whom we had worked in three successive campaigns to bring Maine's only nuclear power plant to its knees. We formed what we called the Green Party/Green Movement of Maine. Two things stood out in our discussions about our purpose: (1) Values and (2) Independent Green Party building.

By Party we meant a body of men and women who directly compete with the major parties for public office. By Values we meant nature-awareness, ecological economics, social responsibility, grass roots politics, peace, racial and gender equality—many of them parallel with what Charlene Spretnak et alia came up with later that year as the Ten Key Values. A few months later, Greg Gerritt joined us and ran as our first, and



the nation's first, Green candidate for state legislature. He later moved to Rhode Island to help create the Green Party there.

But the Maine idea of blending/balancing Party and Movement ran into difficulties. The Party side was resisted by the Bio-Regional Movement; by the followers of Murray Bookchin and his Institute for Social Ecology; and by people who forefronted personal life-style change and shied away from party and politics. At the St. Paul meeting in August, 1984—presumably to found a full scale party—there was much talking, but the idea of forming it then and there was set aside. It would take until 2001 to fulfill the promise of its eventuality.

However, on the Values side, the St. Paul meeting initiated the creation of the Ten Key Values, a brilliant umbrella and a historic breakthrough for the perennially fractured left.

As things moved forward, I served as a delegate from New England to the newly formed United States Green Inter-regional Committee, also known as the Green Committees of Correspondence. Dee Berry, its coordinator, and I started, shepherded and helped produce SPAKA: Strategy and Policy Approaches in Key Areas. There were 21 of them, distilled from the contributions of over three hundred local groups. This was our Green Program in our first years and paved the way for our Platform.

In spite of conflict over what kind of entity we were building at the national level, state Green Parties spontaneously began forming all over the country. A Green Politics Network (GPN), which I worked hard to help create, was founded in late March/early April 1992, to give the state parties the beginnings of a nationwide inter-connection. GPN's efforts resulted in the formation of the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) in 1996. Then in 2000, Tony Affigne of the GPN and leaders of other Green-minded groups reached agreement for representatives of oppressed peoples to form caucuses and become part of the overall structure side-by-side with state parties. The way was now open for the achievement at last of a national Green Party centered on state parties, caucuses, ten key values, and on full-scale direct electoral action. The ASGP called a meeting in Santa Barbara in mid-August 2001 to form the Green Party of the United States. This was accomplished amidst much rejoicing.

Howie Hawkins had formed the Left Green Network (LGN) in 1988, favoring a radical socialist agenda. LGN did not favor a state Green Party strategy. It worked instead for a national party with representatives from local groups of activists and dues paying members. The LGN was a springboard for the creation in 1991 (at the University of West Virginia in Elkins) of the Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA). This was more an activist organization than an electorally focused political party. But it gradually dwindled. The focus of most Greens was now fixed on their state parties. Howie remained with G/GPUSA for a while, but when the Green Party of the United States emerged in 2001 in Santa Barbara, he joined. He has since then sought election as a Green Party candidate in many local and statewide campaigns, running three times for Governor of New York. And now he is running



John Rensenbrink has always provided the broad-gauge visions for the Green Party and the practical ways to attain them. He's shown what stamina, perseverance, consistency, and self-renewal are all about with his own personal example.

Now is the time for all good Greens to step up their activism, committing themselves at the local, state, and national levels to expand the party budget by online fundraising to support hundreds of full-time staff.

*Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer, and author. He was the Green Party candidate for president in 1996 and 2000.*

I was initially going to refer to John Rensenbrink as "The George Washington of the Green Party," but I then realized, given the latter's savage racism toward First Nation peoples, that it would actually be an insult! Rather, the more relevant comparisons might be to Simon Bolivar, Jose Marti, or Jose Rizal...

Noticing my dedication to the Green Party, it was John who first nominated me for the Maine Green Steering Committee years ago upon my return from Hawai'i. I've recently been reading his deeply philosophical and erudite book, *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy*, which I recommend to those who want to go deeper than simply electoral or mass mobilization efforts. I appreciate John's thorough integration as a synthesis of individual and collective needs and responsibilities, and his treatment of the "other." He brings new insights, too, regarding "already existing" relationships.

With this tribute I wish to convey that I acknowledge, with great respect and appreciation, John's early and continuing insight, wisdom, and organizational capacity, and that he remains a guiding force for us all. Beyond that, I am proud to call John my friend and colleague. A deep aloha to you, John!

*Jon Olsen was a founding member of the Hawai'i Green Party thirty years ago. Upon his return to Maine in 2001 he joined the Maine Green Independent Party and has served three times on the state steering committee, most recently as co-chair.*

In the early 1970s I had become frustrated with the so-called “progressive” newspaper, the *Maine Times*. I had arguments with the publisher because I believed his vision of a bright future for Maine was one of rolling hills and white board fences. I may have been wrong, but it was not a vision I could imagine for Mechanic Falls or Millinocket. I thought the paper was elitist. Anyway, John Rensenbrink caught wind of my frustration. He invited Lloyd Ferriss and myself and kids to his home to pick blueberries. There was a lovely patch across from the house. The kids picked and we talked. Eventually we wandered into John’s garden. Lloyd and John talked gardening and politics. I was overwhelmed by John’s conversation and his determination that change must happen. I listened. Full disclosure: Lloyd was by this time writing for the *Maine Times*.

The following summer John, Carla, their kids, our kids, Lloyd and I were camping in Baxter State Park. I think it was the summer of 1972. Sitting around the campfire at South Branch Pond, John introduced me to his idea of “The Reform Democrats of Maine.” He volunteered me to be secretary! We talked of the sacrifices a true revolution would involve. I miss those days of trust and belief that we could change the world. I wanted a world without war. John talked of political justice. The ideals expressed then have not changed. For me the sacrifices have been minimal, and John still looms bigger than life, however humble.

*Sue Pastore is an involved grandmother living in Portland, ME. She is an active member of 350.org, the Green Party, Extinction Rebellion Portland, and she supports the Conversion Campaign. Sue volunteers three mornings a week at Florence House shelter for women and in the evening makes quilts for the Linus Project.*

Angela Flynn and I founded the DC Green Party and put Ralph Nader on the DC ballot in 1996. Without John Rensenbrink’s work (in the background) we couldn’t have done it!

*Jenefer Ellingston*

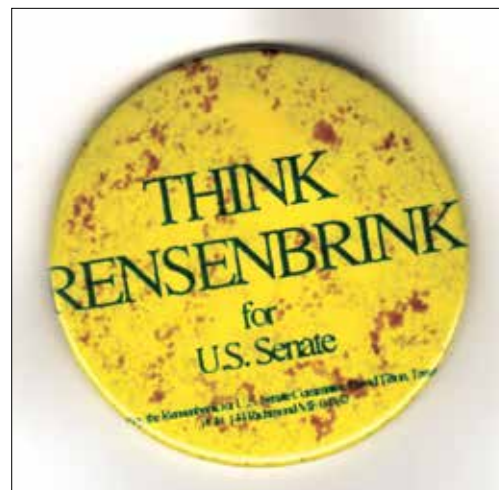
to be the Green Party’s candidate in 2020 for President of the United States! He is an amazing incisive and durable Green Party leader.

His turn to serious electoral politics on behalf of a serious political party is a far cry from the days when he sat at the feet of Murray Bookchin and initially absorbed Murray’s anarchism and anti-party, anti-state and anti-representative government politics. I mention all this here because he and I were at loggerheads, and were seen that way, over the nature and direction of a Green Party/Movement. From the start, I put priority on values and strong electoral politics from citizen-grass roots on up. Howie started with socialist ideology and cadre-run party activity. I feel he has changed in that his socialism is more appealing and his electoral bent is more pragmatic. I also must note that pretty much from the getgo he and I have been and are in complete agreement on the crucial importance of an independent politics.

Moving on about my party work, let me say I have participated in most of the Green Annual National Meetings and have presented workshops at all those I attended. I am a delegate from Maine to the National Committee of the Green Party—an often onerous but interesting and even rewarding experience, as all know who’ve served on it and continue to serve.

I started the International Committee of the US Green Party in 1997, serving first as Chair and then as co-Chair in its early years. I participated as delegate from the US Green Party in the founding meeting of the Global Greens in Canberra, Australia in 2001 and in the follow-up meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2008—doing a workshop in each. In Canberra I worked to create the Global Green Network, an organization to provide representation for, and direct communication among, each of the national Green Parties, of which there are more than 100 now!

I have been working this year, and with the firm solidarity of the International Committee behind me, to compose and send a Letter to the Green Parties of the World. The Letter calls for dialogue among the Parties. First among the Five Ideas recommended for dialogue is granting voting power to each and every Green Party. It was sent out in November, 2019. As of this writing in early January 2020, there have been eight positive responses from six different Parties and from one of the four Federations of the Global Greens. No negatives! It is an engaging work in progress. The call I make to the Green Parties is to work together for truly changing the world—to resist and combat the rape of the earth and its inhabitants by run-a-way and irresponsible governments and behemoth corporations. Not only that, but to offer, promote, and act on programs of resuscitation and well-being for all the populations of our planet—and of the planet itself, our home.



US Senate candidacy 1996

In the first decade of the millennium, it was my good fortune to work closely with several Green candidates for high office in state and nation: Pat LaMarche, Ralph Nader and Jonathan Carter. Knowing them and working with them taught me a lot about the stringencies of seeking high office (which I had experienced myself in a bid for US Senate in 1996). It’s a wild ride. And you only make it in one piece if you are in synch with one another. That doesn’t mean “go along to get along.” It doesn’t mean avoiding any semblance of disagreement. But it means knowing

how to work through with another the often tough-to-manage feelings in the heat of battle. I salute all three for their courage, fortitude, smarts, and friendship.

Several programs/projects in addition to my party work claimed my energies as a new millennium took hold. Cathance River Education Alliance, *Green Horizon Magazine*, the International Society for Universal Dialogue, preserving Topsham's Town Meeting form of government, and a five-day conference at Bowdoin on "Race, Justice, and the Environment."

I feel that one of the chief programs for lasting and fundamental change I have helped found and develop is in education. John Wasileski, a developer, and I, a Professor dedicated to the Environment, working with a citizen group "Topsham's Future," founded the Cathance River Education Alliance in 2001 in Topsham. It is now a ground-breaking and leading example of nature-based, hands-on, and experiment-encouraging education for children and young people—and for their teachers. The unpaved path leading to the Nature Preserve in which this freeing-up education is done was named "Rensenbrink Way" last summer.

More on *Green Horizon* in a moment. The International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD) was founded in the 1990s by Professor Janusz Kuczynski, erudite chief of the Philosophy Department of the University of Warsaw. It is a cross cultural body of philosophers and philosophy-minded thinkers from many nations worldwide who are strongly committed to dialogue across differences. I joined it, eagerly, and became their President in 2007-09. In recent years Charles Brown of Emporia University as President and Malgorzata Czarnocka, editor-in-chief of ISUD's "Dialogue and Universalism," have worked brilliantly to sustain and inspire further growth. During these years, I got to know Pawel Kuczynski, a creator of incisive films. Among the many he has produced, he created one about three philosophic friends, of whom I was one.

The five-day conference on Race, Justice, and the Environment in February 2001 was a milestone in raising issues about class, race, ecological derangement, and social justice. Barry Mills, my former student and in the beginning of his acclaimed 15-year tenure as President of Bowdoin College, strongly supported the conference with funds and his own invigorating presence. Among those I invited as Keynote Speaker was Wangari Maathai of Kenya who, in the following year, received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Currently, I am much involved in the historic Ranked-Choice-Voting-based campaign of Maine colleague Lisa Savage for the US Senate to unseat Susan Collins and add to that body a strong progressive and first-ever Green voice in the Senate. Her race shows the way to greater and greater electoral success for the Green Party. The prospect is fabulous and a fulfillment of the long trek from nothing in 1984 to a viable transformative political party.

Steve Welzer and I founded *Green Horizon Magazine* 2001-2003. It has been a tremendous boon to the spirit for me and Steve—editing and relating with a wide spectrum of authors to speak of matters great and small. It has in its own way been a shield from despair. But far more than that it has been and is on the frontier of closely linking the realms of culture and politics—so as to overcome the insidious separation of the two. The separation—or fissure—has been a major factor in turning away from politics by precisely the people who must get aroused and focused on politics—if democracy, our planet, and our species are to survive.

We have received a rising tide of support for *Green Horizon*. Steve has begun to take on more and more of the work and the multiple daily decisions of producing the Magazine. For almost 20 years we have been a closely knit team, leaning on each other, inspiring each other, raising the money, and sparking/sharing the humor that invariably accompanies a venture such as this. Bravo to you Steve! And best wishes for astounding and growing success!

There are other things I may have missed that might be of interest. Wikipedia has more detail.

For my birthday a few years back, I asked Kristen, my wife, to frame something for me. It's a three-color poster—black, white, and green—created for John Rensenbrink's US Senate campaign of 1996, with John's signature. I bought it for \$20 at a Green Fall Gathering, as part of a donation. On the poster, Rensenbrink stands next to a classic traffic light, with the green light illuminated. As if to say, like we learn in kindergarten, "green means go."

I hung it in my office because I wanted a reminder of the sort of politics I hoped to be a part of: a progressive movement that looks to accomplish something, rather than a battle over personality or ideology. John has always been a doer, whether founding the Green Party here in Maine with Alan Philbrook or publishing *Green Horizon Magazine*. Some people have ideas; others act on them.

Just when I had decided that politics was not for me, with the seeming national turn toward meaningless rhetoric and empty hyperbole, John pulled me back in, reminding me that there is still a place for practicality in politics. There is still a place for getting things done. Sitting across the table from him, sipping coffee, everything seems so simple. How can the Green message not resonate, when it is such a practical and clear-eyed way forward?

In this age of social media and 24-hour news cycles that revolve around what someone tweeted, we must as Greens remember what it is we're trying to accomplish: more peace, less war; more conservation, less waste; more inclusivity, less divisiveness. How do we accomplish these goals at the local, state, and national levels? One step at a time, and with what power we can gather.

Thank you, John, for reminding me to celebrate the victories that get us closer to those goals and to worry less about those things that seem, sometimes, so far out of reach. Whenever I start to forget, I just need to take a look at that poster from 1996, the first election I ever participated in, and remember that "Green means go."

*Sam Pfeifle is the founder of West Gray Creative and the vice chair of the MSAD 15 School Board in Gray, Maine.*



Steve has told me of the 70-plus statements about me that will appear in this issue. Frankly, I never thought or dreamed that this level and quality of tributes would come to me. I am immensely honored and (Yes!, I dare say so) I feel loved! I am 91. Will I continue to see you as these years go by? As I sign off, the earth has suddenly shifted under our feet, the world will never be the same. A contagious corona virus threatens everyone, here and worldwide, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the powerful and the



not powerful. “Social distance” and lock down must now prevail. We know not for how long. Our chance of seeing one another in person ever again recedes. There is a beautiful song beautifully sung by three women in Mozart’s “The Magic Flute.” Their blended voices thrill, haunt, and achingly proclaim farewell, repeated several times: “Auf Wiedersehen.” After the first refrain of “Auf Wiedersehen,” the second is softer, the third softer still, and the last is remote and fades lovingly away. Shakespeare said it well, “Parting is such sweet sorrow.”

*In addition to a book about Poland’s Solidarity in 1988, I have written and published three books about the US Green Party and related Green themes: The Greens and the Politics of Transformation in 1992; Against All Odds: The Green Transformation of American Politics in 1999; and Ecological Politics for Survival and Democracy in 2017.*

I first met John and Carla Rensenbrink in the late 1990s when there was a series of confrontations between conservation and development interests in the town of Topsham. Developers were pushing for big box retail stores and expanded commercial zones that threatened established neighborhoods and open space. John and Carla were the motivating force behind the creation of Topsham’s Future, a citizens’ group that spoke for conservation-minded residents. Through petitions and moratoria, this organization was able to change the conversation in Topsham and contributed to a series of new comprehensive plans that place great emphasis on open space and quality of life. For the first time, Topsham had a Conservation Commission. Town leaders finally recognized that quality of life and open space are economically advantageous in a more environmentally-aware nation, and developers sought ways to identify as “green.”

Part of that watershed change was the creation of the Cathance River Education Alliance in 2000. Rather than engage in confrontation alone, the Rensenbrinks’ approach was to speak calmly and face-to-face with development leaders and persuade them to pursue development in a more balanced and nature-friendly way. By working closely with John Wasileski, the developer who created The Highlands and Highland Green retirement and 55-plus communities, 235 acres of what would have been an expanded golf course was set aside as a nature preserve. While the popular image is of a senior living community centered on an 18-hole golf course, John Wasileski soon found that many more prospective homebuyers were attracted by a nature preserve, so only a nine-hole course was built, leaving a large tract of land near the river to return to its natural state.

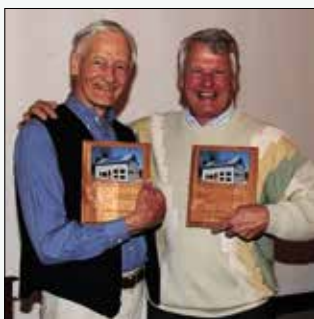


PHOTO CREDIT: JAN SMITH

Out of that cooperative effort, CREA was born. The Preserve was placed in permanent conservation through an easement managed by the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust. Trails were cut to the most scenic features. Through the tireless efforts of first executive

**With John Wasileski**

director Rick Wilson, and with ongoing support from Wasileski, CREA grew and became an important resource for the community.

The frame of a Civil War-era barn, owned by Wasileski’s family, was trucked from upstate New York and was converted into an off-grid ecology learning center, nicknamed “the building that teaches.” CREA made agreements with a dozen local schools to bring students to the Ecology Center and Preserve, and to provide nature-based programs in the classrooms. Spring and summer camps introduced young people to nature for the first time, parents and children discovering a scenic gem and learning opportunity right in their own community. On-premises high school and college research programs followed.

Now in its twentieth year, the vision that John and Carla created is established reality. CREA is extending its reach through teacher programs which encourage on-campus nature education and outdoor learning, using an innovative technique (“exploration before explanation”) that allows a child’s sense of wonder to grow before they learn the details of what they are experiencing.

The mark someone leaves by a life well-lived is change for the better in the place they call home. Topsham is a much better place, in terms of cooperative, constructive dialogue, and through the resources, staff, and volunteers of CREA, thanks to John and Carla. None of this would have been possible without the tenacity, patience, love, and dedication of the Rensenbrinks. We are all honored by their lasting legacy to the community.

For more information about this wonderful organization that John helped to create, go to: [creamaine.org](http://creamaine.org)



*Janvier Smith is a long-time Topsham resident and Navy career retiree who has been associated with Topsham’s Future and CREA since early days and is dedicated to nature education and land preservation. He has served as CREA’s president and is a member of the CREA Advisory Council.*



# GREEN HORIZON

## GREEN HORIZON FOUNDATION SUSTAINERS FOR THE 2019/2020 CYCLE

Tony & Melba Affigne, Rhode Island	Fred & Hadley Horch, Maine	Liz Rensenbrink, Maine
Steve Baker & Katy Dolan, Florida	Clare Howell, Maine	Rob Richie, Maryland
Richard Barringer, Maine	Carol Abhi Hudson, Florida	Barbara Rodgers-Hendricks, Florida
David Bath, Florida	Patricia & Brad Jackson, Maine	Jeanne-Marie Rosenmeier, California
John R. Battista & Justine McCabe, Connecticut	Christopher Jones, New York	David A. Schultz, Minnesota
Ted Becker, Alabama	Maynard Kaufman & Barbara Geisler, Michigan	David Schwartzman, Washington, DC
Glen Bennett, Rhode Island	Charles Keil, Connecticut	Tammy Lacher Scully, Maine
Antonio Blasi, Maine	Robert & Kimberley Kinsey, Colorado	Evelyn Seberry, Michigan
Bowdoin College Library, Maine	Jim Krosschell & Cindy Dockrell, Massachusetts	Brian Setzler, Oregon
Peter Broeksmitt, Illinois	Paul Krumm, Kansas	Mac (Charles) Sexton, Maine
Denise Brush, New Jersey	Ellen La Conte, North Carolina	Wendy & Mark Skinner, Ohio
Lisanne Budwick, New Jersey	Joseph Lacayo, New Mexico	William & Ursula Slavick, Maine
Dana Cary, Maine	Hector Lopez, Connecticut	Sam Smith, Maine
Don Crawford, Illinois	Margie & Bruce MacWilliams, New Jersey	Thom Speidel, Washington
Aimee Cree Dunn, Michigan	Maine State Library, Maine	Charlene Swift, Maine
Rich & Debra Csenge, Utah	Linda Martin, Washington	Steve Swift, Massachusetts
Christine DeTroy, Maine	Brent McMillan, Indiana	Jeff & Shirley Taylor, Iowa
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