

## **AWARE's 30th ANNIVERSARY**

April 22, 2019

Tina Symko



At the far end of town  
Where the Grickle-grass grows  
Lives an organization that everyone knows

Describe this group? That's hard, I don't know if I can.  
But I'll tell you what I do know about how it began.

It popped out of a beer can that was thrown in the trash,  
And pushed for a recycling program that took off like a flash.  
It came to rescue a planet in need of repair  
And this group is now known (and loved) as AWARE.

This group was small-ish and cool-ish  
And green-ish and mossy.  
And it spoke with a voice that was loud-ish but not bossy.

It spoke for the trees and the bears and the toads.  
It spoke for the wetlands being squished by our roads.  
It spoke about composting and about climate change  
It spoke out about hosting the greenest of Games.  
AWARE was a group that made everyone notice.  
AWARE was a group that made us feel much less hopeless.

When I first met AWARE, I was full of surprise  
To find a room full of grown-ups, not a dreadlock in sight.  
A short-haired accountant, a realtor and communications professionals  
Talking strategy at a level that I found incredibly sensible.

You see, I came from the land of the underground  
Where patchouli and Birkenstocks were all around.  
Hippies with long hair everywhere  
Climbing trees and chanting their hippie prayers.

It was the summer of summers out there in the forest,  
When the War in the Woods sounded a desperate chorus.  
Way way up there in the Elaho  
An old growth paradise where only the brave would go  
Because tensions with the loggers were way high-ho  
And the warriors yelled “Hell No, We Won’t Go!”

I hung from my tree, hoping the loggers would leave  
When I saw a sight my eyes just couldn’t believe.  
The short-haired boardroom environmentalists from Whistler  
Came to support their tree-hugging brothers and sisters.  
They brought food and shelter and other supplies  
And the hippies were grateful, their troops fortified.

This was the start of saving the beautiful Elaho Valley  
A quest that AWARE fought for strongly and madly.  
It was also the beginning of my love affair with AWARE.  
I was so glad to find a group in Whistler to share  
My care for the wild and its creatures everywhere.

As a group we grew tight, a big friendly green posse.  
And we were slick, like Team Canada playing save-the-wilderness hockey.  
Our meetings were plenty, mostly informal at Brad’s  
Over wine and music, many great conversations were had.  
We planned wetland protection, car sharing cop-ops and more  
We planned Earth Day and composting -  
We were pretty hard core!

AWARE was part of the crew who brought sustainability to town  
And made Whistler even more globally-renowned.  
AWARE worked hard on Whistler 2020, our vision for the future.  
At least 10 of those Task Forces our members did nurture.

Remember 2001 when Whistler. It’s Our Nature was unveiled?  
The 6 Early Early Adopters of The Natural Step set sail  
And began an adventure that continues to this day,  
One where the 4 system conditions help guide how we play.  
We made toolkits for schools, households and businesses alike.  
We talked about “backcasting” until all hours of the night.

The Sustainability Speaker Series was one of AWARE's biggest wins  
Hosted with our partners, it truly sparked a light within.

I remember years later as I swam in Green Lake off the dock  
Two local women were talking as they sat nearby on a rock.  
They were reminiscing about that awesome Speaker Series  
And handsome Wade Davis with his biosphere theories.  
I recall how Wade spoke with such eloquence and grace  
About our beautiful planet in the velvety void of space.

Were you there in 2004 when David Suzuki performed?  
With his brilliance and charisma, the audience was transformed.  
That event was one of the best nights for AWARE  
We filled up the conference centre, with chair after chair  
And a lineup that went past Citta's (back when it was still there).  
David Suzuki, the eco-rockstar that he is,  
He spoke from his soul, right into our hearts, from his.

AWARE had a big role, as big as could be  
In gaining wilderness protection through the Sea to Sky LRMP.  
With pro Johnny Mikes at the table, representing AWARE and more  
He debated and bargained and he hardly ever swore.

AWARE worked hard to be part of all the big conversations,  
Always driving toward the most sustainable solutions.  
AWARE has walked the line between radical and mainstream  
Which is partly why it's still rockin' in 2019.

Now, this may shock you a little but AWARE had a dark side too.  
A double identity to do things that AWARE couldn't do.  
If you promise to stay quiet, this secret I might share  
About a rogue little spin-off group called UNDERWARE.  
Monkey-wrenching and blockades? No, no! Nothing like that!  
But I've said too much already, I'd better leave it at that.

Always asking the tough questions, keeping our direction on track  
This earth-loving cartel has always had nature's back.  
We're all better off because of this gang,  
From which so many good things have sprouted and sprang.

In this little big town where AWARE got it's start  
Where balancing politics and reputation is an art  
Lasting this long calls for a real celebration  
So let's raise a glass to AWARE - congratulations!

We've all come together to say THANK YOU  
To this group that's connected me and you and you and you

Thank you, AWARE, for carrying on this huge task  
No one said that saving the earth would be fast!

And it's hard to believe how quickly time goes  
As you watch something you love just grow and grow.  
Happy Birthday AWARE!  
It's been 30 years now.  
That's longer than most,  
And I think I know how.

It's the people who make AWARE what it is  
They're so full of passion and ideas and dreams.  
AWARE just keeps growing to help us achieve  
That future in which we all deeply believe.

A future with clean water and fresh mountain air  
A future with Truffula trees everywhere  
A future where where everyone cares a whole awful lot  
A future even better than we could ever have thought.

Now I'll leave you tonight with one word - AWARE.  
It's living proof that our community really does care.

