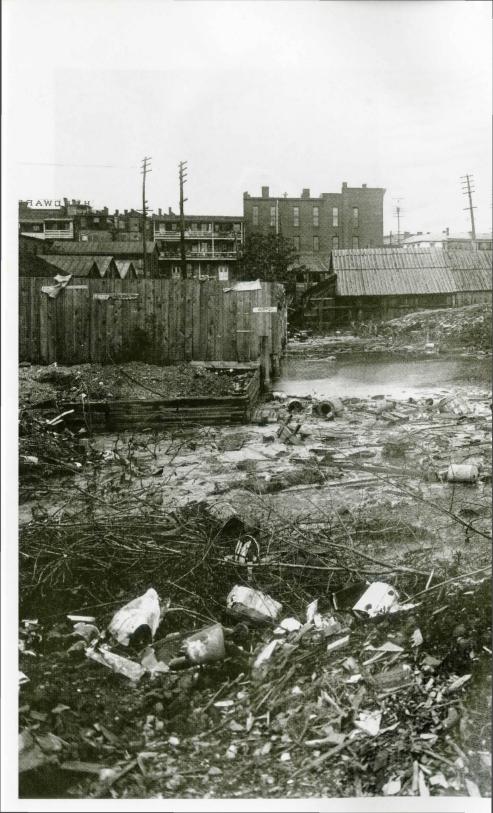


# Seneval3 a zine of the local



Geneva 13.9: Fall 2009

"The Garbage Issue"



## Editor's Note

Yesterday I was at a "Star Party" in Potter County, Pennsylvania, which reader's of my Punkastronomy column or blog may know is a gathering of nerds (aka "my people"), on a dark field to look at the stars with telescopes. (These dark fields are becoming rarer and rarer, which is discussed in this month's Punkastronomy.) Anyway, as I was about to throw something into a garbage bag, I paused and said to my friend Peter:

"You know, Peter, it doesn't really matter if I throw this away or bring it home with me. Either way it'll end up within 13 miles of my house."

Geneva13 covers an area spanning a 13-mile radius around Geneva. Within that relatively small area, there are two "mega-landfills." You will be introduced to Seneca Meadows and Ontario County Landfill in the coming pages, but a good figure to start with is 9,000 tons, or 18 million pounds. That's the average amount of garbage that is driven to the Geneva13 area every day, from throughout the Northeast US and Canada, and deposited in our back yard.

The issues surrounding these giant modern pyramids are as complex as the miasma of waste that goes into them. In Geneva13.9, we have pulled together a variety of perspectives on the human tendency to do what most animals won't: deposit our waste where we sleep.

Darrin Magee, who studies the geography of trash, introduces us to some of the terms that get used around a modern, "high-tech" landfill, necessary information that we'll all be hearing a lot more about in the coming years.

Regular contributor John Marks pairs with a newcomer to our pages, Gwen Wheatley, to give us a historical perspective on Geneva's relationship to trash. Needless to say, we didn't build this city on Rock & Roll.

## Details, Details

Edited by Doug Reilly and Kevin Dunn
Cover by Doug Reilly
Overleaf photo of the back of Exchange Street, circa 1930, courtesy Geneva Historical Society
Photographs by Doug Reilly (except attributed)
Published by Geneva13 Press
Contact us at geneva13@gmail.com
Or write us at: PO Box 13, Geneva, NY 14456
Or visit us virtually at www.geneva13press.com

Just as Lake Street is built on top of garbage, so too is the consumer "freedom" we cherish so much, the Genevan reminds us. Most of the garbage that goes into our mega-landfills doesn't come from Geneva, yet we're all complicit in a the system that generates the waste.

While many readers might find the title "garbage captial of New York State" anathema to their vision of the Finger Lakes as an East Coast version of California's Sonoma and Napa Valleys, the reality is that tourism alone will not save Geneva from the rust belt woes. Quite a few families, like my next-door neighbors, rely on the mega-landfills for their daily bread. Mark Rozell, of Feher Rubbish, provides us an inside view of a small and local company made up of people we may know, trying to compete in a difficult industry.

Katie Bennett Roll lives near one of the mega-landfills and is one of the first effected by their underregulated growth. Recently, Katie joined the Finger Lakes Zero Waste Coaltion, a grass-roots organization with the goal of getting people to rethink our relationship with trash. Katie's story is about having a garbage dump as your neightbor, yes, but really it's about a political awakening. Katie used to "follow" politics, but now she's part of the process. She used to think the important issues were discussed in Washington by others, now she thinks they are discussed at County Supervisor Meetings that almost no citizens attend, and Katie, and the rest of the Finger Lakes Zero Waste Coaltion aim to change that.

Large corporations have a history concerning the public good that we should heed. They often locate their most dangerous operations in poorer areas where people are less likely to protest and where the millions of dollars they bring to county and municipal budgets are especially welcome. They take advantage of the fact that people struggling economically often don't get very involved in local politics, so they have greater freedom to do what they want. Corporations always tell us that what they want (in this case, to make profit from landfills) is perfectly safe. And they pay millions in lawyers fees to protect themselves from being proven wrong on this point. Few things should make our blood run as cold as a large corporation promising something is safe, clean, or leakproof. Large corporations come when money can be made and leave when it can't. The mega-landfills will be with us forever, however.

We hope this issue inspires a response. Start reading about mega-landfills, Google the letter that the Mayor of Saco, Maine wrote about his town's decade of dealings with a familiar waste company, and what other communities have experienced when they have been similarly entranced by promises of big injections of regular revenues into their struggling budgets and believed the corporation line: "It's perfectly safe!" Drive out and see the dumps. Go to meetings. Ask questions. Start composting.

Most of all, realize that politics is local, and you have enormous power. If you don't use it, someone else will have that enormous power but will not have the same commitment to the local good that you might.

## Seneca Meadows Landfill

Operator: IESI

Daily Intake: 6,000 tons

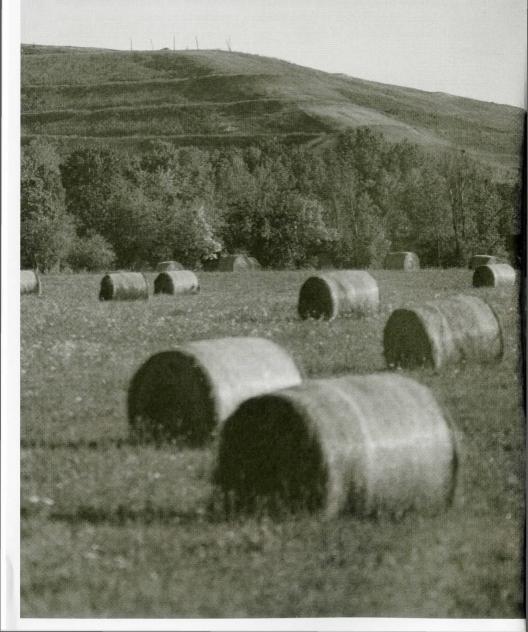
Yearly Intake: 2 million tons

In the ground already: We don't know.

Current Capacity Remaining: 37.5 million tons

Year the Current Capacity Will Be Reached: 2023

Total Gallons of Leachate Drained and Treated Each Year: 26 million



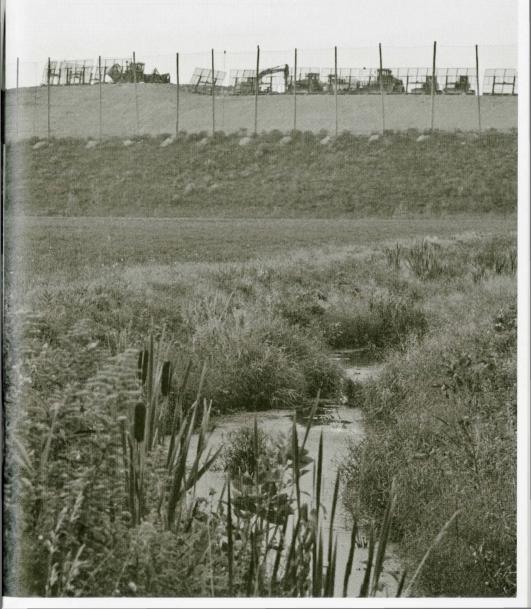
## Ontario County Landfill Operator: Casella Waste Systems, Inc.

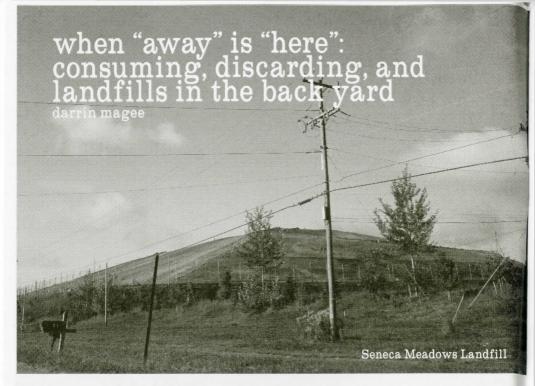
Daily Intake: 3,000 tons Yearly Intake: 1 million tons

In the ground already: 8 million tons

Current Capacity Remaining: 7.6 million tons Year the Current Capacity Will Be Reached: 2013

Total Gallons of Leachate Drained and Treated Each Year: 10.5 million





This article begins with a simple question: Where is "away"? John Marks asks the same question in this issue (see page 17). More specifically, where is the "away" where all our discarded garbage goes? The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that each American discards approximately four pounds of waste daily. All that waste goes somewhere; as individuals and communities, we usually hope it goes somewhere else. But this can't always be so, and at certain points in space and time, we find that the chickens (and all the other things we threw out yesterday, last week, or last year) may, so to speak, come home to roost. "Near" and "far," as Sesame Street's Grover so eloquently demonstrates, are fundamentally different. When "away" becomes "here" for garbage, the harmony of our world is disturbed, and we are forced to see, smell, confront what we generally hope to ignore. Garbage doesn't really go away.

### What is Garbage?

It is perhaps useful to begin with a definition. Garbage is unneeded, out of fashion, broken, or putrefying. It's matter that doesn't matter anymore. It's dirty diapers; the dewatered sludge from municipal wastewater treatment plants that treat the poop that doesn't fill diapers; the leftover green peas whose digested colleagues gave rise to the poop in the diapers; the plastic packaging that housed those green peas, and so forth. Garbage is broken and unloved Barbies, laptop computers built when Windows 98 was fast, broken concrete and old shingles, lawn clippings and worn-out shoes. It's news that's no longer new, single-use containers that have been singly used, overstocks and old sofas. The list goes on.

While it doesn't take much imagination to guess what comprises our waste stream, the relative contributions of various types of garbage in the US might themselves be surprising. According to the EPA, paper, cardboard, and other easily recyclable fibers are the primary component by weight, accounting for roughly one-third of all waste generated in the US in 2006, and a similar proportion in the country's 10,000-odd landfills. Things such as construction debris, yard trimmings, food scraps, and plastics each make up approximately one-third to one-half that amount, with the remainder consisting of, well, everything else. Due to fairly widespread and effective scrap metal recycling programs, the proportion of aluminum and other metals is relatively small at around 5%, but still not insignificant. Diapers, as it turns out, make up somewhere around one or two percent.

Much of garbage is, by marketing definitions at least, "disposable." But then again, what isn't? People of industrialized countries, and Americans in particular, throw away a startling amount of garbage each day, yet this wasn't always the case. Our fascination with disposability, and with the ideals of convenience, hygiene, and leisure that the makers and sellers of disposable objects promised, came about only after the end of the Second World War. At that time, national pride, economic growth, technological innovations (especially in plastics), and yes, marketing, all combined to corrupt pre-War American household virtues of thrift and reuse - not that these were ubiquitous, of course - with imperatives of convenience and fashion. As Susan Strasser says in her 1999 book Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash, gone were the days of "stewardship of objects," where anything that could possibly have any useful life left in it was kept alive through careful mending, repairing, reusing, or bartering. Newly arrived was the era of slick and hygienic packaging, plastic cups and paper plates, processed foods, and freedom from household drudgery. Concomitantly, of course, backyard burn barrels and town dumps across the country began to swell with a new breed of nonbiodegradable discards.

### Landfilling Garbage: Managing or mummifying?

In American English, the term "landfill" – at its most basic a hole in the ground into which waste is deposited – has become a part of common discourse, and for many the idea that garbage should be put in a landfill is, ironically, "natural." As one student opined in my "Geography of Garbage" class in spring 2009, surely it must be a fundamental part of human nature to expect the garbage man to show up on our doorstep once a week and wheel away our waste. A student from a rural area in a developing country quickly countered with a decidedly different perspective; most of the garbage her village produced was agricultural waste, compostable and locally managed. In the United States, a common perception is that once in a landfill, garbage (including the laptops and Barbies) will decompose, magically becoming benign. While this may be true to an extent over geologic time (i.e., millennia), research has shown that such is not the case over time periods that matter to humans. Scientists, spearheaded by William Rathje at the University of Arizona, have used archaeological techniques to study

landfill contents, and from those inquiries have been able to make certain observations about American society. Far from a rich, wholesome compost, their digs unearthed some rather disturbing results: after decades in landfills, hot dogs still looked like hot dogs and newspapers were still legible. Needless to say, Barbies and old furniture were a long way from becoming compost.

Landfills are big, and garbage is big business. Each day, 9000 tons of garbage is buried in two landfills near Geneva, New York. Seneca Meadows, operated by Fort Worth, Texas-based IESI (part of BFI-Canada) and located in the town of Waterloo about eight miles east of Geneva, has permits allowing up to 6000 tons per day (TPD) of waste to be deposited there. On all but the dreariest days, Seneca Meadows' two mounds can be clearly seen from Geneva, towering above the surrounding farmland and the modest town of Waterloo. Meanwhile, five miles to the west of Geneva lies the Ontario County Landfill, operated by Rutland, Vermont-based Casella Waste Systems, with permits for 3000 TPD. Unlike Seneca Meadows, which is privately owned, a public entity (Ontario County) still owns the Ontario County landfill; Casella is the private contractor who operates it. With tipping fees (i.e., the amount trash haulers pay to "tip" their load into the landfill) ranging from \$80 to \$150 in most places in the northeast, revenues rise with the mounds of garbage.

Daily tonnage figures, however, don't include the truckloads of waste or contaminated materials put to so-called beneficial use as daily cover in these and other landfills – that is, things such as chipped tires, sewage sludge, or contaminated soil that are used to cover up the daily deposits of garbage in order to reduce odors and minimize scavenging by rodents and birds. Nor do the numbers account for the tons of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere annually from the diesel-burning trucks hauling the garbage from cities and towns across New England and southeastern Canada, much less the emissions of carbon dioxide and other solid, liquid, and airborne waste that resulted from the manufacturing, transport, and operation of the goods before they became garbage. Landfills and other waste processing facilities are really just the tip of the garbage iceberg.

It should be noted here that there is much more engineering to today's "sanitary" land-fills than simply digging a hole in the ground and covering it up once it's full. Federal regulations in the late 1980s and early 1990s mandated, among other things, standards regarding landfill siting, design, construction, operation, and closure. Many of these provisions no doubt were motivated by a real desire on the part of well-intentioned people to limit the negative impact of landfills on communities, water resources, the atmosphere, and ecosystems. Included in the stricter standards were requirements that methane be either flared or captured; that landfills be lined and capped with impermeable liners to reduce rainwater infiltration and prevent leachate ("garbage juice") from contaminating groundwater resources; that operators set up insurance policies or "trust funds" to deal with potential future problems; and that operators monitor a landfill 30 years after closure. Moreover, in addition to the impermeable liners and caps, landfills are now required to have leachate collection systems in place, which generally consist

of a double-layered system of pipes lying on top of the liner and under the garbage. Leachate pools at the bottom of the landfill, and is collected and removed through the pipe system.

For all their technological safeguards, though, modern landfills such as the two mentioned here still fall short of doing the miraculous; that is, they don't really make the garbage go away. In fact, they are much better at preserving garbage for future generations than they are at processing it. How is it possible, one might ask, that the garbage archaeologists found recognizable hot dogs and readable newspapers in the landfills they studied? The answer is quite simple. For all the things they're full of, landfills are short on four key ingredients: moisture, oxygen, microbes, and ultraviolet light from the sun.

The first, moisture, is a well-known aid in decomposition, yet despite the "ick" that accumulates in the bottom of our kitchen trash cans, garbage in landfills is overall rather dry, inhibiting decomposition. This is great for loaves of bread in the pantry, bad for crusts in the landfill. At the same time, landfills are oxygen-poor environments, since the trash is compacted repeatedly from the moment it becomes trash to the moment it arrives in the landfill, first by a kitchen compactor (when present), next by the packer truck that collects our trash cans, and finally by the armada of compacting tractors that receive and pack down every load tipped into the landfill. From an operator's perspective, maximum compaction is vital to the useful (from an economic standpoint) lifespan of a landfill; while daily limits are set in tons, overall design and construction permits are issued based on volume of the landfill, not by the mass or weight of the material inside. Maximizing density, therefore, ensures maximal use of the permitted three-dimensional airspace allotted for a particular landfill.

The third ingredient, microbes, are vital players in the breakdown of organic material, and while they're present in large amounts in a landfill, they function much less efficiently in low-oxygen, low-moisture environments. Moreover, the principal by-product of the anaerobic decomposition that does occur in a landfill is methane, a greenhouse gas with 20-something times the heat-trapping power of carbon dioxide when present in the atmosphere. Fortunately, many landfills (including both the Geneva-area ones) capture that methane (it is, after all, the primary component of natural gas), "scrub" the impurities from it, and burn it in generators, often producing enough electricity to power hundreds, even thousands, of homes. Yet to label that energy as "green" or "renewable" seems misleading, since combustion of landfill methane depends on the existence of landfills and on our continued willingness to deal with our waste by burying it in those landfills.

The final ingredient vital to decomposition but essentially absent from landfills is ultraviolet light. Furniture fades, skin burns, car paint becomes powdery, and shingles crumble thanks to the mercilessness of the sun's ultraviolet rays. Not surprisingly, sun-

<sup>1.</sup> US Climate Change Science Program (2006), "Methane as a Greenhouse Gas", available at http://www.climatescience.gov/infosheets/highlight1/default.htm (Accessed Sept. 11, 2009).

light doesn't have much time to work that same magic on materials in a landfill. As certain areas (cells) of a landfill are filled, they are usually capped with an intermediate sandwich of liners, soil, and other materials until the final cap on the entire landfill is completed. UV light is out of the picture.

Some qualification regarding the dryness of landfill contents is merited here, especially since a major concern of Geneva residents in recent months has been a proposal to install a pipeline that would funnel leachate from the Ontario County/Casella landfill directly to the Geneva Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant. If landfills are relatively dry, why the concern? First, even though the overall moisture content of most landfills is too low to permit microbes to thrive, the sheer volumes of waste deposited in a large landfill ensures that the absolute quantities of garbage juice produced will be significant. Additionally, in a climate with ample precipitation in summer and winter such as upstate New York, leachate happens on a fairly grand scale. According to Casella's 2007 Annual Report on the Ontario County Landfill, approximately 10 million gallons of leachate was collected from the three phases of the landfill, with over 8 million gallons coming from Phase III (the newest). Somewhat troubling is the fact that more than 600,000 gallons (not quite ten percent) was collected from the secondary system in Phase III (i.e., the network of collection pipes lying below one theoretically impermeable liner). Possible explanations for this include the obvious (that the liner suffers some leakage) and the less obvious (that moisture from the outside environment is somehow wicking into the space between the two liners). Most likely it is due to a combination of both processes.

A second argument in support of the pipeline favors it due to the potential reductions in carbon released into the atmosphere by the tank trucks' exhausts. According to proponents of this line of reasoning, if the landfill leachate is already taken to the Geneva Wastewater Treatment Plant by tank truck (it is), wouldn't a pipeline help reduce the amount of truck traffic on Geneva's roads, as well as the amount of carbon being released into the atmosphere from those truck, and from all the other vehicles moving more inefficiently through Geneva due to heavy truck traffic? There is indeed merit to this argument; truck traffic through town increases the likelihood of accidents, negatively impacts air quality, and creates bottlenecks. The greatest potential concern to many seems to be the "what if" scenario in which the flow through the pipeline to the wastewater treatment plant is blocked or interrupted. What would happen to the leachate then? Skeptics would argue that it might get dumped directly into Seneca Lake (where we get our drinking water) through a bypass valve, without having been treated. The current situation allows for a few days storage in on-site tanks at the wastewater treatment plant, in order to allow chemists to check for high levels of certain indicator chemicals or other signs that the leachate might be harmful or particularly laden with certain chemicals.

#### Globalization of Garbage

To close, let us return to the question "Where is away?" for a moment. Rendered "grumpy" by garbage, Mr. Marks muses that perhaps Seneca and Ontario counties are, in fact, "away" for many whose trash ends up in the Seneca Meadows or Ontario County landfills. As an occasionally grumpy geographer, I'm by definition interested in questions of place, and would suggest "scaling up" our inquiry to look further afield at places where "away" becomes "here." In 2002, nearly 1.5 million 40-foot shipping containers arrived in the US through the Port of Tacoma, Washington alone.<sup>2</sup> Many of those carried manufactured goods from countries such as China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Yet what does the United States export that needs to be packaged in containers? Grain is shipped in bulk, expertise travels in emails. Old computers, on the other hand, destined to be demanufactured by migrant laborers in China using fire, acid, and hammers so that small amounts of precious and semi-precious metals can be recovered travel nicely in containers. Occasionally they even make the round-trip voyage, as was the case of a recent shipment of old CRT monitors shipped illegally from the US to Hong Kong.<sup>3</sup> The shipment was intercepted by Hong Kong customs authorities - apparently with some prodding from Greenpeace activists - and later returned to the United States.

Less headline-grabbing are the containers bound for China and elsewhere filled with other "recyclables" such as waste paper, plastic, and metal. From 2000 to 2005, California's exports of waste and scrap to China alone totaled approximately \$1.2 billion.4 New York ranked a distant second at \$423 million. Recyclable or not, it's still our garbage, bound for someone else's back yard. In the United States, decisions about the siting of landfills and other LULUs (locally unwanted land uses) are often scrutinized against a backdrop of environmental justice. Recognizing that we still have a long way to go within the US borders to achieve environmental justice for all, might it nevertheless be reasonable to apply the same criteria to the flows of our garbage as it moves through the local, national, and global economy? After all, we all in some sense share the same back yard.

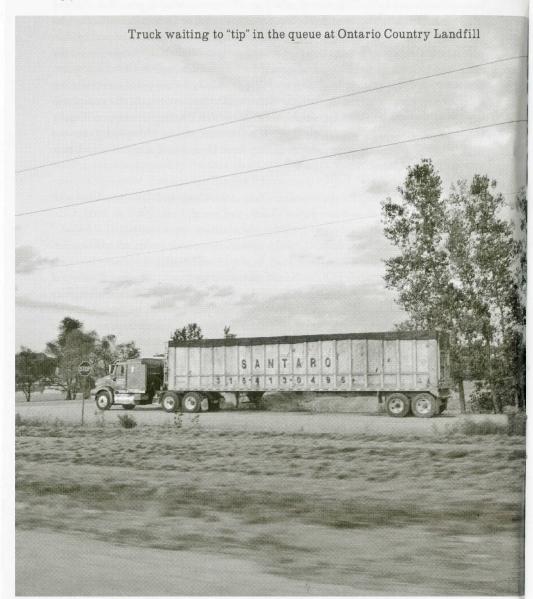
Due to space limitations, I have not discussed recycling in this article, but will touch upon it here only long enough to say that we must not be lured into thinking it's the answer. Yes, recycling many materials (glass and metal, for instance) means that new raw materials do not have to be discovered, extracted, and refined; setting aside questions of energy intensity, this is probably a good thing. Other materials, however (plastics

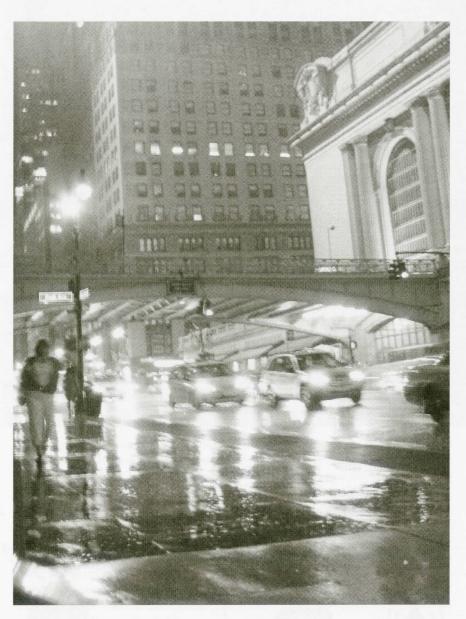
<sup>2.</sup> Port of Tacoma, "Cargo Handling: Handling Capabilities," Available at http://www.portoftacoma.com/Page.aspx?nid=116 (Accessed September 11, 2009).

3. Greenpeace intercepts illegal US e-waste shipment to Hong Kong". Available at http://ewasteguide.info/greenpeace-intercept (Accessed September 11, 2009).

and paper, for instance) lose some of their integrity each time they are recycled. Thus a plastic water bottle may have a second life as fill in a car seat or as a fleece vest; high-quality (long-fiber) stationery may come back as low quality (short-fiber) newsprint or packaging material. Address the garbage question in a truly meaningful way means consuming less; demanding less packaging and fewer disposables; and fundamentally rethinking how we manufacture things, with a new eye toward things such as biomimicry and modular design so that products can be produced in less harmful fashions and reused more efficiently.

 $4.\ US-China\ Business\ Council\ (2006), "US\ Exports\ to\ China\ by\ State,"\ Available\ at\ http://www.uschina.org/public/documents/2006/06/us-state-exports-china.pdf\ (Accessed\ Sept.\ 11,\ 2009).$ 



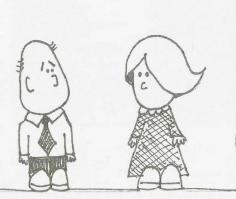


Grand Central Station, New York City by Kathy Collins

## Tales of 9 led: the Swansons

K-d-9/09

i love you. My love for lived, now there it once lived, now there is nothing but dust go away.



Wait.
i love you.
i need you.





## "easily solved by those who follow us"

john marks

Garbage has made me grumpy. I think Kevin and Doug expect me to kick in a witty (or half-witty), off-beat historical perspective on each issue's theme. For garbage, I got nothing. Most of the time, history comforts me because I know things aren't getting worse – they've always been bad. Greed, deceit, violence, and political backstabbing have all held their own for centuries. (If you doubt me, trot down to the public library and read any issue of a 19th century Geneva newspaper on microfilm.) Garbage is different. We've always had a cavalier, manifest destiny attitude about trash, but waste is cumulative. At some point, the equations – chemical, biological, environmental – are going to add up against us, then things will get ugly. I know some folks believe in the ability of future technology to conquer all ills and would agree with Geneva Mayor Reuben Gulvin's 1915 comment that these waste issues "can be easily solved by those who follow us." I'm not buying it.

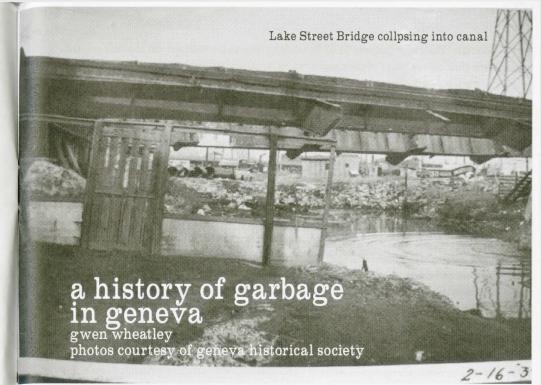
I have to digress for a moment to comment on semantics. "I threw it away" – where is "away"? (Seneca and Ontario Counties, apparently.) I remember around the late 1960s when "dump" was replaced by "landfill." Did the land need filling? Were giant craters discovered into which small children were falling? "Waste disposal" is very au courant around here. It sounds legitimate (and pretty – "Seneca Meadows"), it's a valued member of the business community, it provides scholarships to area students – we should be

happy about waste disposal. Oh, male bovine manure. Garbage haulers collect tons of disposable razors, diapers, tampons, take-out containers, Styrofoam coffee cups, etc., Etc. ETC. and concentrate it into tall hills that will never go away. Ever.

Before someone can scream, "enviro-Nazi!" (dang, too late), let me state that I'm a middle-age, lazy man who uses dozens of disposable razor blades a year, accepts Styrofoam take-out boxes at restaurants, and doesn't compost his organic waste. I'm not preaching, I'm working through my role in the waste stream and wondering what I'm going to do about it.

Gwen Wheatley's article (see opposite page) on the history of lakefront dumping establishes historic attitudes toward land and water: "It's mine, I'm going to use it." Property along Exchange Street had west, north and south lot lines, with the eastern boundary being Seneca Lake. Owners assumed they owned the water within their bounds and filled it in if they needed more space. When the new canal towpath was built in 1900, residents were encouraged to dump their trash in the resulting stagnant pools of water. City engineer Charles D. Church stated in 1906 that "since [the towpath was completed] teams carrying public refuse have been in the habit of hauling it down to this land...I know that some property owners emptied ashes and refuse in along there and the city hauled debris and dirt of all kinds down there for filling purposes."

I could understand, but not agree with, the "use it 'til we use it up" mentality during the city's industrial era. Now we've positioned ourselves as a service economy centered on out-of-region tourism. Land and water are what we sell: cottage sales and rentals, wine tastings (bounty of the land and views of the lakes), fishing and boating, and a general "Finger Lakes experience." Waste issues directly impact this type of economy, but I'm not reading anything from the business organizations that should have an opinion. (I haven't scoured the papers but I checked some websites; if you buy the hype, a website should present an org's identity.) The tourism promotion agencies (TPAs) and Chamber of Commerces are sticking to their game plan of "Visit the Beautiful Finger Lakes!", "Geneva - Sensational By Nature!", and unshackling upstate businesses from high taxes and fees. That's all well and good, but we're surrounded by garbage. Go to a satellite map of Ontario and Seneca Counties and check out the view; a topographic map would really do the landfills justice, but the flat aerial image shows large dead acreage in the midst of farm fields and trees. If your immediate response is, "look at the whole map, it's not that much land," remember the best way to boil a frog. You don't toss it in boiling water or he'll hop out; you start out cold and turn up the heat slowly - his last frog thoughts are, "this isn't so bad...".



Upstate New York is notorious for its relationship with garbage. Even as I sit here writing this paper the Geneva locals around me are locked in discussion dumbfounded as to how this could have come to pass here—how has such a beautiful region as the Finger Lakes come to be known as the "Garbage Capital of the Northeast?" Geneva is located on the northwest shoreline of Seneca Lake, the deepest and largest (in area) finger lake. With a population of fewer than 5,000 in 1860 and over 11,000 at the turn of the century, the city of Geneva needed to do something with its garbage. In the midst of the Industrial era Geneva was creating a lot of waste and without knowledge about the polluting effects of garbage dumping. All of the trash from the city and surrounding areas was thrown in what were essentially giant holes in the ground.

### Seneca-Cayuga Canal

According to Kathryn Grover's book, Geneva's Changing Waterfront, several of the leading businesses from Geneva frequently requested state aid in the creation of a canal connecting Seneca Lake to Montezuma where the Erie Canal was eventually going to run. The state expressed no interest in a canal until the undeniable profits of the Erie Canal, and being able to connect with it, were made apparent. In 1813 locks and canals were constructed to make the outlets of the Cayuga and Seneca Lake outlets negotiable. Opening of a new barge canal led to the abandonment of the Cayuga and Seneca canal as early as 1911 which readied it for the use as a dump. Beginning at the western end the canal bed was filled in, largely with discarded city rubbish. Temporary pavement was placed on top of the abandoned Lake Street Bridge, which had fallen into the canal bed itself, to allow the heavy fill to settle before providing a permanent

solution. The canal bed was filled in at that point and a roadway on top was created. This shut off the water of the canal from its usual outlet, and left two areas of standing water. Concerns about the health and environmental implications associated with the closing off of the abandoned section of the canal were apparent by 1923 when the state was invited to come examine the repercussions of the filling. In March of 1932 Marsh Creek was extended across Lake Street because of the use of the canal bed for a public dump site clogged its outlet to the lake via the canal.

On November 14, 1933, plans were made for several projects to improve the condition of the lakefront and to create a new route for Routes 5 & 20, the arterial roadway. The plans included the eradication of what was referred to as an eyesore on the city's naturally beautiful lakefront by filling in the Old canal. Several projects were presented at a civil works meeting. The most important of which included the filling of 1,600 feet of the abandoned canal with materials, "accumulated debris," from Seneca Lake harbor, and extending Castle Creek under the fill into the lake. Filling of the Old canal extended well into the 1950s when it was recorded that the demolition of the Andes Range and Furnace Corp. was merely pushed into the abandoned channel. Today, the only visible portion of the Old Cayuga-Seneca canal is the eastern most section which connects to Seneca river.

#### Standing Water Dumping Grounds

In 1900 the canal towpath was extended from Lake Street to the long pier. This project did not include filling in between the new towpath and the old lakeshore and therefore created a large stagnant pond of water which was deemed suitable for dumping trash. The editor of the *Geneva Advertiser-Gazette* noted that, "Those pools are good dumping grounds for old stuff from the cellars and back alleys, and all should be carried there." The public of Geneva was encouraged to bring their garbage to these stagnant pools. The same article also reported that areas within the towpath were being filled in by the owners to increase their property size. Several companies had already been filling in their properties with ashes and claimed that if the rate of filling remained the same then the area within the towpath would be completely filled within the year. The *Geneva Daily Times* reported in 1903 that, "the stagnant pool is one of the few discreditable features connected with the city and I believe that the board of public works is obligated to alleviate the nuisance."

#### Sewage

In addition to the flagrant dumping observed in the area, there were other waste issues as well—sewage and industrial pollutants. After the construction of the tow path, raw sewage which was formerly emptying into the lake was now being emptied into the pools of stagnant water. The *Advertiser* pointed out that four sewers that had formerly emptied into the lake had not been extended beyond the towpath and are now emptying into dead water. At least two creeks – Marsh and Castle – required extensions to empty into Seneca Lake after filling was complete. They were then not only dumping

raw sewage into the lake but water seeping through the garbage fill entered the stream and ultimately the lake as well.

Seneca Lake State Park and Trash

It is no secret that the shoreline of the north end of Seneca Lake has been altered and that filling also took place all along the shoreline as well. In the 25th Annual Report of the Board of Public Works of the City of Geneva in 1923, the Mayor's Annual Address did not directly mention that the park was constructed atop a large quantity of garbage but rather the park's entire discussion was held under the heading of "Garbage Collection." The western end of the canal was the first area which was filled with discarded materials from the city of Geneva and as fast as it could be filled with trash it was leveled off at the surface; this process continued all the way to the east until all that remained was a large flat area where the canal had once been. Chief editor of the Geneva Daily Times, E. Thayles Emmons, observed that, "One has to realize the fact that a considerable portion of the present park has a curious assortment of material discarded from Geneva households beneath it." A Geneva local, Bob Fitzgerald, recalled visiting the canal dump site as a boy with his father who worked there. He has vivid memories of burning tires, especially, and the burning of other garbage as well, in addition to the commercial dumping he claimed went on for years and recollects trucks upon trucks coming to dump their garbage cargo into the abandoned canal. Postulating that there must be leachate from all of these waste disposal sites leaking into the lake, he expressed an aversion to the dumping which had taken place so long ago by referring to the entire situation as a "miniature Love Canal."

#### Waste Management in Geneva

In the 12th Annual Report of the Board of Public Works it is clear that as early as 1909 there was recognition of the city's waste problem. In the Mayor's Annual Address, Patrick O'Malley claimed that the lack of funding for the waste problem was due to the inability for a "satisfactory" plan to be presented to the Common Council and instructed the Geneva public to take care of their own garbage, "each householder is left to make such arrangements on his own account as convenience may suggest." A few years later Mayor Reuben H. Gulvin took a special interest in the waste problem, and in the 18th Annual Report still lacked a sufficient plan for waste abatement but recognized the additional problem of sewage polluting Seneca Lake declaring that it is a problem of the future—a problem "which can be easily solved by those who follow us." Later, in 1922, Mayor Robert A. Catchpole put the issue of trash collection to the taxpayers because any system of collection would be at the public's expense.

Finally, to be commenced on the first of March in 1938, the City of Geneva signed a contract for the collection of garbage with John P. & James E. Deane for the price of \$5,300. The contract was temporary and for a period of three years. To establish a common understanding about what exactly the collectors would be dealing with, the term "Class A garbage" was coined and was considered "all waste animal or vegetable matter, decayed or subject to decay, and all kitchen refuse." The contract stipulated only

that the trash be taken outside of the city limits and in such a way "as to promote the health, cleanliness and neatness of the City and of any locality to which such garbage is transported or in which it may be disposed of," and that the carriers complied with the regulations of the Board of Health.

While the collection of "Class A garbage" was a step in the right direction towards abating Geneva's waste problem, there are remaining problems that failed to be addressed—where was all of this waste going, what was happening to it once it was there, and what about everything else that did not qualify as "Class A" garbage? There is no mention of the exact location where the Deane Brothers dumped the garbage; it was only specified that they take the garbage somewhere outside of the city limits in a manner that would not degrade the location in which it was dumped. This presents somewhat of an enigma—placing garbage in anywhere cannot do anything but degrade the area.

Almost at the end of the temporary three year contract period the City of Geneva made with the Deane Brothers, the City Attorney started receiving complaints from the public about "Skips" and other issues pertaining to garbage collection. At another meeting in 1941 it was made apparent that Geneva had been using an additional means of dealing with waste—feeding garbage to pigs. The council asserted that this practice was becoming outmoded due to the fact that pigs which had been fed garbage were being linked to Trichinosis. Placing a garbage disposal plant in Geneva was also proposed during this meeting and a special committee was formed to investigate this option, as well as the potential for the disposal of garbage by an incinerator. After a visit to the incinerator that had just been opened in Fairport, the special committee reported to the Common Council that they felt that Geneva would prove to be an even

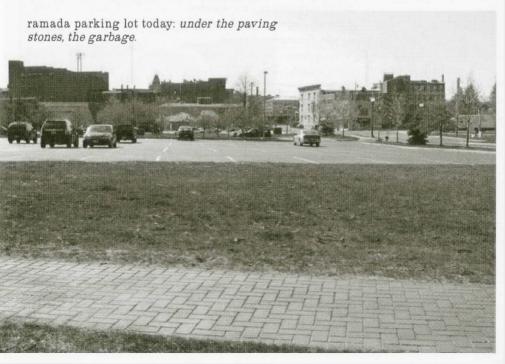


more advantageous site for a Garbage Incinerator Plant because they would have fuel provided to them from the Sewage Disposal Plant rather than using coal which was the case in Fairport.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

During a time when people were ignorant to the adverse effects of carelessly dealing with waste, and perhaps a time when government and business leaders had more freedom to do their own will, there was nothing stopping the deliberate and unashamed dumping of the city's waste on the beautiful shoreline of Seneca Lake. It was clear that there were two different forms of dumping going on during Geneva's early history. One was the filling in of large pools of stagnant water. This form of dumping was occurring primarily on the southern—and western—most portions of the lakefront in the region of what is currently the Ramada Inn property. The other form of dumping that was happening was the filling in of the Old canal and this took place from Lake Street, which was approximately where the canal outlet to the lake was located, over the entire north end of the lake.

The actual effects of the dumping that took place in the abandoned canal and the numerous pools of stagnant water in the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries on the ecosystem of Seneca have never been investigated. Hypotheses have been made that there must be negative impacts on the environment, and the filling seems to be portrayed in a negative light by the various articles pertaining to the situation in the Geneva Daily Times and the Geneva Advertiser-Gazette, but nothing concrete has ever been established.



## chicago streets

The Hawk hovers over the lake, whistling, and scours bones to the marrow

The sound of a rope snapping against an empty flagpole - a hollow death knell for your dreams and aspirations.

Your feet hurt..
The garbage cans were not kind today..
Somedays people don't throw out aluminum cans for the recycle center - and for you.
Those days you don't eat - except maybe from the garbage cansif you can stomach it.

After a while you pretend it isn't so bad. You can get used to anything. You're supposed to - it's expected. After all, if you live on the street - do you deserve any better?

"It's your own choice" they say. After a while, you may even believe them.

Sometimes I look at you and wonder....
You were a cute little kid with a happy grin
Red hair and freckles..
Your mother called you "the Imp"
and she had a smile in her voice.

Do you remember?

(Judy Brown)

## Tales of 9 lee

K-d-9/09

I have trouble sleeping at night. The bed has become my enemy.

I've tried a hundred different sleep aids. Over-the-counter, illicit, and prescription. None of them ever work.



Every night it is the same. The worst is the one My body craves the rest, but my brain is scared of What it will unleash on itself.

with the bears in tuxedos. God, I hate a bear in a tux.





#### The Genevan #6: We are all Garbage

Or stardust. You decide.

But what's the difference? A star is a machine that makes energy, the byproducts of that process are the basic components of the universe. Or perhaps, a star is a machine making the components of the universe thats byproduct is energy.

Either way, the byproduct- the refuse, is the integral component for life and structure in the universe. Look to the universe and you will not find garcage. Look to man- there, garbage abounds. Why? Currently, the following paradigm reigns:

Man makes stuff. Man gets sicks of stuff. Man digs nole. Man puts stuff in hole. Man makes more stuff to get sick of.

Now, in the grand scheme of things, this equation still balances out (but what doesn't) In billions of years the cycle of all is intact- all the landfills and toxic waste will do what all things do and obey the natural rules of the universe. They will be the core of some other process. So, it is not the case that man makes garbage and the universe does not. The case is that we operate like there is such a thing as garbage.

Are we talking about saving the planet?

What's at stake here is not the fate of the planet, or the universe, or the halance of things. they will, per force, take care of themselves. They are unstoppable.

What's at stake is humanity's place in all that. We are stoppable. As iestructive as we've become (and WILL become) it is doubtful that humanity will ever whall the power to destroy (or save) all life on Earth. What IS inevitable, is that on the current course, we will renter the Earth uninhabitable to the human race long enough for the human race to fade out. The Earth will heal. We may not.

That is the way of things, Reality, Nature, - do not reward waste and innefficiency. If we are not in harmony with the machine of existence, it will grind us up and use us as folder. We offer our ignorance and hubris as consent.

So- Garbage.

Garbage is that stuff left over. Garbage is the stuff that we sweep under the surface of the Earth and forget. Garbage is that stuff we see as useless and to be cast aside.

We are not garbage. Because: THERE IS NO GARBAGE.

Garbage is a false concept that exists only in the mind of man. We become garbage only if we believe in it.

We are struggling to solve the problem of garbage, and the reason that it is so difficult to solve is that we are approaching it brong.

There is no stuff left over.

A given process produces multiple outpus. We choose to see some as useful and some as use-less. Because we believe it is garbage, then garbage, it becomes.

Until all the human processes flow together like the processes of the universe, we will be the embodiment of the false concept of garbage. Until we remove the concept of guaranteed obsolescence from our planning, recycling will be just small hands up against an avalanche.

Man likes to famoy himself more than an animal.

Unitl we can put the interests or our species and our universe ahead of our own personal interests, we will remain animals. We will remain temporary.

So.

Are you stardust?

Are you garbage?

You decide.

Until next time,



## geneva branch manager feher rubbish removal

k-d-

How did you get into this business in the first place?

I was actually in car sales for 13 years. The economy was in a dive and the car business was kind of weak. I started looking elsewhere to change my career. I didn't really change my career much since I've been in management and sales since I was 18 and that's still what I'm doing. But I went to Larry Feher and I interviewed with Larry. He is the owner of this company. And he said, "Mark, there is one thing. The economy does not affect my business. People still make trash." And he was right. I've been here almost two years now, and to be honest with you, I love every minute of it. It's challenging and interesting.

#### Did Larry Feher found this business?

His father did. The company has been in existence for over 50 years. His father started it when I think Larry was about 12 years old. It is kind of neat working for Larry because he has done it all. Anything he asks me to do, or we ask a driver or a thrower to do, he's done it. He started right on the back of a garbage truck for his dad. So when Larry took over the business from his father, he really expanded it. He opened up a

division in Watertown. He opened up a division in Utica. And he opened up this division in Geneva about 8 years ago.

#### Where was it originally?

Syracuse. And now he is one of the largest independently owned trash companies in the state.

## How many people work for you here in Geneva?

I've got about 18 employees right here.

## Does that mean you've got 18 trucks on the road?

No, I've got about a dozen trucks on the road, but 18 employees. Because some are throwers, office help, and mechanics.

#### How many people does it take to operate a truck? Can one person take care of a whole route?

It all depends on what job they are doing. My residential trucks, I put two people on it: a driver and a thrower. For commercial, which is doing the dumpsters behind the businesses and things like that, that is a one man operation. My recycling truck is also a one man operation. And roll-off is one man. So the only trucks that I put two people on are the residential.

## So what is a typical day like for these guys? What time do they start?

We get here at 6 o'clock in the morning. They've got to check their trucks out. We start rolling out of here around 6:30 in the morning. They head to their first stop and then they just go from stop to stop. Every day is a little different, but our typi-

cal day ends probably anywhere between 3 and 6 pm. But when you're in the trucking business there are issues. I don't think I get too many days that don't have issues: weather, a break-down, or road construction detours. You never know what the next day is going to bring. Something is going to slow you down. That is the constant battle: making sure everything gets done that day. Because the next day we've got a whole other area to go to.

## You've got 12 trucks. Is that 12 residential trucks?

No. I've got three roll-offs. One is recycling. Three of them do commercial dumpsters. I have one little truck, it is a little split-body. It's kind of a unique truck. We call it the satellite truck. They do the outskirts. When you get way down to the southern Seneca County, I might have a stop here, but my next stop is five miles away. There is no sense paying two people on a big truck to do that, so I have a little truck with one guy and he does all those scattered stops. So every truck is actually a little bit different.

## Are they all on the road, or do you have any back-up trucks?

I do have two spare trucks. And that is something I didn't have when I came here. I've been trying to bring this company to a new level. We now have two back-ups, which is nice. Now if somebody breaks down, I run them a truck. The mechanic fixes theirs while they are continuing. Before I got the extra, we could have a pretty devastating day if a truck broke down.

## And with the mechanics, is everything done in-house here?

Yes, everything is done in-house. Absolutely.

I notice that a lot of your guys throw the trash in by hand. Do you have the trucks with the automatic lifters?

Pretty much all my trucks have it. Some of my throwers don't choose to use it because they feel that they can do it quicker. And to be totally honest with you, they are quicker doing it that way. We tell them that they should use it because we don't want to see anybody get hurt. That is my concern. I don't want to see them throwing their back out trying to lift the heavy stuff. But at the same time, they are doing it to get the job done quick so they can go home at the end of the day. I've been in management a long time, but this is the first time I'm managing people

who aren't right in front of me. They are all out there, spread out between Cayuga County, Yates County, Ontario County, Wayne County and Seneca County. We're all over the place today. There is no way for me to tell what they are actually doing at the moment. So, to try and enforce a policy of using the toter-tipper is almost impossible.

## You don't have little GPS units in all the trucks?

[Laughs] Not yet. We're toying with that idea. But not so much to check up on the driver, but they have GPS units now that will tie into our software and chart the route for you. It'll tell you every single stop.

How many people do you serve in



#### Geneva?

In the Geneva area, we probably have about six hundred customers. But for residential trash, we cover Penn Yan, Geneva, Auburn, Waterloo, Seneca Falls. We cover all that area out of this office. When it comes to commercial, we go even farther. I go as far as Skaneateles, Moravia, and Eastview Mall, all the way up to Lake Ontario, and as far south as Ithaca. So, commercial we have a huge territory.

So, I am assuming there is a designated route and the driver knows the route like the back of their hand.

Yes.

How long has your oldest employee been here?

Eight years. I've one employee who has been here for eight years. And he knows every stop, on everybody's route. Which is great because he is my GPS guy. [Laughs] If I need to know where a spot is, I call him.

How does that work for your residential customers? Do they pay a flat rate or by weekly pick-up?

We charge a monthly fee for our service. And we bill them quarterly, every three month period. That includes their weekly pick-up of trash and recycling.

Once the trash is picked up in the truck, where is it taken?

We utilize several different landfills. We have the option of using Ontario Land-



fill, which is in Flint, NY and operated by Casella. We have the option of going to Seneca Meadows, which is on 414 in Waterloo and operated by IESI. And Auburn Landfill in the city of Auburn. So, it all depends on where we are.

You say they are operated by. Do they own those landfills? Does Casella own that landfill?

Ontario County owns it. Casella operates it.

When your trucks go there, do they have to pay to dump there? Is there a fee each time? How does that work?

We get billed for it. The weight is all kept track of. They go over the scales when they are full. They dump off. They go over the scale when they are empty. Obviously the weight difference is what we get billed for. We get a monthly bill. And that is probably the biggest expense of this business: the tipping fees at the landfills.

That was going to be my next question: what is your biggest expense? Tipping fees? Fuel? Labor?

Yeah. There are some big ones. Honestly, if I was thinking about starting up a business, it wouldn't be this one. [Laughs] Between maintaining the twelve trucks, spending probably ten thousand dollars on fuel per month. And then you've got your tipping fees. And our trucks hold anywhere from eight to fifteen tons. And everyone of my trucks is dumping every day.

For the typical truck, do they have to dump several times a day, or do they usually dump at the end of the day? Right now that is the way it has been. We can usually get through a whole day, and then dump it at the end of the day or first thing in the morning at the start of the next day. We are in the process of expanding. As a matter of fact, we haven't tapped into Wayne County much for residential. So we are going to have a promotion going out to Clyde, Lyons, Newark, and Clifton Springs in a couple of weeks. So our days are going to be getting a little bit longer. We're going to be picking up more things and we may find that we do have to dump off more often.

How much does a typical truck carry in terms of garbage?

Probably right around 12 tons would be the average.

Wow. That's a lot of garbage.

It is. It is. You know, before I took this job I never thought much about it. I'd bring my toter to the edge of the road once a week, somebody takes it away, and then I bring my toter back. Most people don't give this business a lot of thought and it really is quite an industry. I think Seneca Meadows is the largest landfill in the Northeast. It is quite an operation over there. Not that too many people might be interested in going over there and seeing how they do it, but it is pretty darn interesting what they go through over there. What they do to make it the best they can for the environment.

What about recycling? Do they pick it up and take it to those places or someplace else?

Yeah, well Ontario Landfill has a division called FCR and they take all my commin-

gle recycling. And what I mean by that is your glass, plastic, tin, and cardboard all mixed together. That goes there. There's ALPCO Recycling out in Macedon. I bring all my cardboard there. I have a lot of dumpsters that are cardboard only. When I fill a truck up with just cardboard, I bring it to ALPCO.

## So commingle stuff, you just dump it and they sort it?

Yes, they do. They have sorters there that separates the glass from the tin and so on. And then they distribute it, or sell it, to people who can use it. You know, they can shred corrugated cardboard and recycle it into new corrugated cardboard about four or five times. And once it is recycled so many times that the fiber count drops below a certain level, they can then make cereal boxes out of it. So it is pretty amazing how much you can get out of recycling.

## What is the biggest challenge of the business?

The biggest challenge I think in any business is the customer. When I started this job, it took me about a month, but I'm coming into this business thinking about trash because I don't know a lot about trash. But it is no different than anything else I've ever done, because it is all about people. Whether your managing them, whether your selling to them, whether your servicing them. That is what dictates whether your company is going to exist or not. That is the bottom line. I'm not going to sit here and bad mouth any competitor, but because this is a privately-owned company, I myself can pay attention to customer service a lot better than a bigger company can. So that is our focus. If the customer is happy, we are getting paid. Same thing when I'm managing the guys that work for me. If I were to treat them all the same, my results would not be as effective as knowing each and everybody's individual character and treating them knowing how to motivate them.

#### Have you been out on the drives before? Throwing the trash?

Absolutely. I have. Don't get me wrong, it is not something I want to do a lot, but I've done what needs to be done. There's been times, well, just a few weeks ago. We service Belhurst Castle and it is quite a busy business over there. We usually work until noon on Saturday. It is about one o'clock and me and the wife are home making some plans to go out for the rest of the afternoon. I get a call from Belhurst. They had a banquet and they overfilled their trash dumpster, and they had two more banquets that day. "What can you do for me?" Well, all my guys are gone home for the weekend and, of course, when the boss calls on the cell phone after noon on Saturday, none of them are going to answer it. And none of them did. I got in the pick-up truck and went down there. I don't have a CDL [commercial drivers license, so I don't have the option of jumping into one of these garbage trucks. I went down there and got into the dumpster and hand-picked the dumpster and threw it in the back of the pick-up truck to make sure they were going to be satisfied and get through the weekend. It's not something I wanted to do, but hey, it's got to get done.

What is the strangest, funniest, weirdest story that has come out since you've been here?

Oh boy. Unfortunately, the weirdest things that happen here in terms of picking up trash are probably not things that I want to be in this interview. [Laughs]

I understand.

[Laughing] These are the things that have to be off-record.

[Hilarious stories ensue that I simply cannot share with you.]

OK, back on record, are there any stories that you can actually share with me that we could put in the interview? Like opening up a dumpster and there is somebody in it?

Oh yeah, yeah. In the Syracuse division, you get a lot more of that. Bums like to live in cardboard dumpsters, the cardboard provides a lot of insulation for them. And yes, they in Syracuse have dumped people. They do front-load dumpsters there, so they've lifted these people up and dumped them right into the back of the truck before. You hear somebody yelling as the boxes are going up. But I've never come across that yet because I don't think Geneva is the type of city where you have to worry about anyone living in a dumpster. We've had some interesting animals jump out of people's toters when you go to open the lids. You know, rats, raccoons, snakes, you name it, things like that. Of course there is always a good dog chase story in there somewhere. You know, when the thrower is trying to get a can of trash and he is being chased by a Doberman or something. But then there are other things, things that have to be off the record again [more funny stories ensue]. But there isn't a lot of comedy in this job. There really isn't. Our job is pretty hard and the average person doesn't really think about what a company like this really goes through day-to-day. And so it should be.

Every company out there is going to make a mistake, because people aren't perfect. I find that good service is about how you are going to react to it. So if I get a call in the morning from a customer who has a problem, and I can solve it by the end of the day, I'll still have a happy customer on my hands. If I let this problem simmer, then I'm going to lose a customer. And that is going to hurt my reputation.



What's your name?

My name is Katie Bennet-Roll.

Where are you from?

Originally I'm from Hornell. Down in the Southern Tier.

How did you come to move to Flint?

My address is actually Geneva, but I live closer to Flint and Stanley. When I got out of school, I went to college in Buffalo, then I moved back down to the Southern Tier for quite a while. Then I ended up going to Rochester, where I met my current husband. We lived there for twelve years. So I went back to school, again and again. [Laughs]

### How many careers have you had?

I don't know. I don't know how I could count them all. But I have a degree in English, from UB, and I taught school for a while. And then I worked in mental health as a case manager and a therapist for years, and then I got my BSN degree and started do-

ing nursing in the ICU in Rochester. And then I went back to school for my masters in anesthesia. I worked in Buffalo and Syracuse, and then a job came up right here in Geneva, which was great because we lived in Flint by then.

#### How did you come to move to Flint?

We were living in Rochester. It was a nice neighborhood and everything, but it was just...people were just too close together. You could hear people yelling and screaming, and we had some neighbors that kinda had a couple of rowdy kids and, we just didn't want to bring our child up in that sort of situation. I had grown up on my grandparents' farms, and my aunt and uncles, so I always wanted to go out into the country to live. This friend told us about this house that had been up for sale for quite a while, and it was a cobblestone house, out in the country. It just happened to be very fortuitous that we found this perfect place. The first time I saw that house, I just knew...that was my house, where I was going to live for the rest of my life. We moved there in 2001.

It had a really nice shop for my husband and it was just perfectly situated. Three acres of land. It was just absolutely beautiful. It was a diamond in the rough, but... [Laughs] We're still doing a lot of renovations in the inside, but the outside we've got pretty well landscaped.

#### What kind of shop was it?

It was just a big, 1800 square foot building and my husband does antique refinishing and restoration.

#### Is that his primary job?

It's his second career. He was a machinist. We have a son, and he takes care of our son, too. Takes him back and forth to school, does all that stay at home father stuff. Works out really well...

You guys are all about reincarnations and second chances.

Yeah. Definitely.

How far is your house from the Ontario County Landfill?

It's a half mile.

## When you moved in, you knew about that?

Yeah, we knew about it. And we talked to some neighbors that lived right across the road from us, and we said, you know, "Are there any problems with the dump? Do you ever have odors or anything like that?" and the neighbors were like, "No, a couple of times of year you might smell something," and so, we didn't really have any reservations about that. And for years, like our neighbor said, we hardly ever smelled anything, other than the cow manure.

And then it was just this last year, that it's been really, really bad. I've smelled something almost every single day. And it's just been crazy.

#### Are you downwind of the dump?

Yeah, we're downwind. And we're very close to 5 & 20, so we are really in a direct line with the dump and the wind blows a lot from the west. So that's where it comes from.

Even when Casella was taking over the dump in 2003, I didn't really have any reservations, but I call that my 'Naïve Period'. I was not politically active, I did not really pay enough attention to what was going on in my community to really understand what could happen. I kinda just thought, well, my elected officials are protecting me! Just naively let it go through. That was really a big mistake. If I had known then what I know now... it would be a different story.

# What changed in the last year or so of Casella's management that made it so much worse for you?

They applied for a 49% expansion of the dump in 2007. It's all this extra trash coming through that's making the problem. There are several different odors coming from over there.

# The expansion meant that the daily intake went up from 2000 to 3000 tons a day?

They can bring in 2,999 tons a day. But that's just an average. If they're down for part of the year, they can bring in more. I think there's still a limit of what they can bring in per day, according to the permit. Any one day they could bring in 5,000 tons, or not. It just depends.

## Why did they expand the dump by such an odd number as 49%?

The DEC says that if you expand a dump's intake by 50%, you need a new environmental impact statement. So we believe they did the 49% to avoid having to do the environmental impact statement. It was legal for them to do that. It's just not ethical.



Sure, well, it's kind of an arbitrary rule, right. Nature doesn't know the difference between 49% and 50%, and it's not like there's research that shows that a 49% percent expansion of a dump is fine while 50% might present problems.

The DEC rules, especially the State Environmental Quality Review process, are weighted in favor of industry.

## At what point did you decide to start learning about this issue?

Well, I'm a big newspaper reader, I read it every day, and I had read about the gasification plan, and I said to my husband, "Hey, they are going to try build this plant that makes fuel." I said: "That sounds like something really neat." And I really thought, gee, if somebody could do that, that would be great. However, a few weeks later I read a guest editorial in the paper by Ken Camera, and when I read what he had written about the county appointing itself as lead agency for this 49% expansion, and circumventing this 50% rule of the DEC and all of the possible environmental effects of this kind of extraction of gas from waste, I just got really...I just got really mad, you know. And I said, I'm going to do something about this. I'm not just going to sit here and watch Hardball and all these political programs that I would be constantly watching and so I got up and went to the computer and I started to do research on Casella Waste. so I could write a letter to the editor. I did research for three or four weeks, a few hours a day, on the computer.

### What did you find?

What I found was very, very disturbing. I went to one organization's website, called

the Toxics Action Center, and they had a paper, written as a dissertation by some college students, and it was all about Casella Waste, and how they had come to take over the Northeast garbage industry, and about all the lawsuits and problems that communities have had with them. It was very scary. Then I realized what I might be up against. I didn't think one person could make a difference.

But I wrote the letter, and it just so happened that that night, Dr Paul Connett was coming to Hobart and William Smith Colleges. That's where I first encountered the Finger Lakes Zero Waste Coalition. I signed up. What I heard from Dr. Connett was very disturbing as well. And the next evening I went to Finger Lakes Community College where Dr. Connett met with Jim Bolig [a VP of Casella] and they had a debate, or something similar to that. There were a few supervisors there from the county.

I met Ken Camera there that night, too. And I started going to meetings of the Finger Lakes Zero Waste Coaltion.

### Did your letter get published?

Oh yeah, the same day that Dr. Connett came. And it was funny, because the Finger Lakes Zero Waste people kept saying "Did you see this letter? Who's this Katie Bennett Roll?" And then I went to a meeting and they realized that I was the one who wrote the letter. I was...actually going to start my own group. I didn't think there was anyone else out there. But it was just that there hadn't yet been that much publicity, I think, for the group.

Is there anything in your own past that you can point to, where you acted in a

similar way? That you got so involved in something that you contemplated starting your own group?

No, it's completely out of character for me. I'm a stay-at-home person. I like to work in the garden. I like to read. My son doesn't go to five million sports or different activities, I mean, we like to just make our home a haven and then we just like to stay there. [Laughs] This was totally out of character for me, which is why I just don't understand what made me do that. It was scary. I had never done anything before like that, and I didn't know what was going to happen. But I realized that if I just sit here...people are just going to run over me. Over everything. Even if I can't do something, as one person, at least I can live with myself.

In thinking about how you got involved in this issue, it seems like "they" pushed the one button that you had, that could be pushed, which is the idea of your home as your castle.

It was like all of a sudden, every plan that I ever worked for...I mean, I attended college for twelve years, and everything that I had ever worked for that was now within my grasp, was about to be snatched away from me. I'll tell you, I'm not going to let anybody snatch it away from me. You're going to have to pry it out of my cold dead hands. [Laughs]

Are you a member of the NRA?

Ummm.

You don't have to answer that.

I do shoot sport rifle. It's just something my husband and I have been doing at the Waterloo Rifle and Pistol Club. But I haven't been that active in it recently because of all of this other stuff. We're not members of the NRA, but we do believe that people have a right to have guns. I am classified as a marksmen by the NRA.

### Don't mess with Katie Bennett Roll.

Anyway! [Laughs] This gasification thing, that's what pushed my button. Once I got into Zero Waste, I realized that there was this much bigger picture about garbage and about how we deal with it, and what a money making industry it is, and how hazardous it is. I learned, for example, that every garbage dump liner will eventually leak. Even Casella admits that. I realized, however, that we can get rid of our waste in an environmentally conscious way. Win or lose on the gasification plant, I'm committed to Zero Waste. And I'll keep working towards that goal. It's become a life-time comitment for me. I know I'm saying that only having been doing this for a few months, but I really am that committed to it.

## Why should people in Geneva care about this issue? How does it affect them?

This is my personal theory: When you have a big huge mound of garbage, and you have rain and snow and all that water going through the trash, it comes out the bottom, and all that is collected is called leachate. That leachate is deposited in our waterways.

### They collect it?

Its pumped out, and they try to prevent it from getting into the watershed in that form.

But they send it to Geneva?

Right now it's being trucked from the landfill to Geneva. In 2008, I believe it was 13 million gallons of leachate.

### What happens to it here?

It's treated at the Waste Water Treatment Plant. They treat it for biological waste, such as e. coli, and our wastewater treatment plants are very capable of getting that stuff out. The problem is that there are other things in there. A lot of chemicals go to the dump. Paint cans. Cans of hair spray. Whatever else you have in your house. There are hundreds of thousands of chemicals used in everyday products, and only 43% of them do we know anything about, in terms of how they effect human health. And about 250 of those chemicals are actually tested for in our drinking water according to the Clean Water Act of 1972. There a lot of things going through there that aren't being tested for. There are many chemicals that have been invented since 1972.

And it's a fact that pregnant women and children with developing nervous systems are much more susceptible to harm from chemicals.

I truly believe we are poisoning ourselves. I was reading about cancer research the other day, they were saying "Maybe we can cure this" and I thought, maybe if we stop putting chemicals in our water, we won't have to worry about that some day, in the future. That's my personal belief. I don't have any proof of that. But I do know that there are hundreds of thousands of chemicals and that the EPA laws are not stringent enough to protect us from these things. When you think about those numbers, and what we are ingesting over time, it makes you wonder if the species will even survive.

## How receptive are people when you talk to them about the issue?

I talk to people a lot...people I know



and work with are probably sick of hearing it, when I tell them "Oh, come to this meeting," they are always like "Yeah, yeah, yeah," but then never do it. People are dealing with their own issues all the time. You don't know what people have in their lives that prevent them from doing things, but I just feel like I don't have anything preventing me right now, and I'm just going to do everything I possibly can. I think that if you get a group together, and speak loudly enough, and speak the truth, then people will listen to you, eventually, but it takes time and a lot of work. A lot of people aren't really willing to put in the effort that it takes. Because even though we have nearly 100 members in this group, it's still not enough for all that needs to be done. And there's always stuff that has to go by the wayside, that you really want to do, but you can't always do everything you want. If something isn't getting done, I'll always think, "well, I should do it." But I have to think now if I can. I just can't do everything. We could use all the help

we can get.

It seems like a general truth. You don't find people that are a little bit active. You have people who do nothing and people who are really, really busy.

Yeah. That's how it seems. There are people that are interested, but whether or not they can put the time into it...and there are some people who can't give their time but they give money instead, which is helpful too.

You said earlier that you were committed to Zero Waste. What is that?

The three principles are Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. There are all kinds of research and ideas that businesses, communities and individuals can use to change the way our society works. But that's a difficult task. You want people who produce packaging to realize that that big plastic container that just holds one little



thing, that that package is a waste, it takes petroleum to make, and energy, and then when it's done it's going to go to a dump and poison you. The gift that keeps on giving. [Laughs]

So Zero Waste challenges us to rethink the whole way we think of consumption. What are the obtainable goals? Are there success stories?

San Fransciso is one community that has gone a long way. They have reduced their landfill waste by 75%. By 2010 they want to divert 80% of the waste and by 2020 they want to divert 90-95%. They've developed recycling industries, special collection boxes for paper, plastic and food waste and that all is taken to either be recycled or composted. The thing that really blew my mind is that 50% of the waste stream consists of food, paper and organic waste that can be composted. That's 50% of your waste stream that you can get rid of just by composting. That's a goal we should all have.

### Do you compost at home?

Not yet. I'm researching the best system for us to use. But I definitely want to do it. I want to get one of those containers that you turn. It's small scale, but at least it's better than dumping it. On a large scale, I would really like to start something in this area. I know Ken Camera from the Green Committee in Geneva is working on a composting proposal on a small scale that could hopefully be later expanded to the whole area. If every municipality and county had these goals, then we could start investing in businesses that compost and recycle, in centers for reuse. There are all kind of green businesses opening, like deconstruction, instead of tearing down houses and sending it all to the dump, you take it apart and then it is sold or given Geneval3.9

to people who need it. So there are things that we can be doing. But it's the way our society is organized now that has to be changed.

### Long term, is recycling a solution?

Recycling, if you look at zero-waste principles, is really a stop-gap measure. A lot of people say that plastic is okay because it can be recycled. Most plastics can only be recycled once. And some are not even recycled at all in this country, because they're not economically viable. If you recycle something only once, well then what do you do with it? So we want to eliminate certain things from the waste stream entirely, and unnecessary plastic is one of them. I wrote down some figures from the EPA if you want to hear them.

#### Sure.

These numbers were from 2007. Of the 254 million tons of waste produced annually, 12% or 30 million tons is plastic. Out of that, only 7% was recycled or recovered. That's 2 million tons out of 30 million tons. You can see why Casella is interested in gasification. They can try to extract some of the energy they've buried in these petroleum products. The only problem is that it's dangerous. The county paid a consultant to write a study about the feasibility of the gasification plan and the study was in three phases. Parts one and two have come out, but part three, the environmental part, hasn't come out yet. But there are hints. I can remember Jim Bolig being quoted in the Daily Messenger saying that the plant would produce"Zero Emissions. Period." I can show you the article. But the report says that there will be emissions. [Mockingly] But they won't be bad emissions, they'll be good emissions! They're saying "Well, it won't be carbon dioxide." No, it'll be carbon monoxide. And hydrogen. And nitrous oxide. Those things contribute to ozone formation which creates smog. They'll be other things. [Pulls a list from her portfolio of papers.] Principle discharges: mechanical processing residue—landfill. Gasification ash and char, which is a solid residue landfill. Scrubber waste water will go to a Waste Water Treatement Plant. Tar and ash-landfill. And then during the pilot project, they'll be temporary combustion of the syngas [synthetic gas] plume, until they decide what process they're going to use to make the fuel. Eventually, if they do use the Fischer-Tropsch process to make the fuel, they'll be a tail gas....so despite the fact that it was going to be all self-contained...it doesn't really turn out that way.

Some people might read to this point, and say, well, this is a NIMBY issue: "Not In My Back Yard," that you're simply upset that you live near this. How would you respond to that?

I know people will say that. What I would say is that it affects every one of us. We're all drinking water, and all the waterways of the United States are having wastewater dumped into them. And I'd say that although I might live near it now, even if I someday move away, I won't give up on this issue. I really think that Zero Waste is doable. We just have to get everybody on board. Ten times the jobs could be created with a green economy than we have now. I would just say to people: look around. Even if you don't smell it or see it, it's there. I was eating on Hamilton Street last week, and in 15 minutes I saw four 18-wheelers full of trash going by. It won't be easy, but we can do it if we band together. This country is known for that. Like civil rights. I don't want to sound melodramatic, like we're going to change the course of history, but I think we are.

We have to, or we're doomed.

What does the word *politics* mean to you now, and how is that different than what it used to mean to you?

I used to follow politics. I would follow national politics very closely, and I would vote. I might write a letter, and I might email the President, but I wasn't very active. I was brought up...my mother was the chairwoman of the Democratic Party in the county where I grew up, Steuben county, so she kind of made us to be pretty politically aware, but now it's totally different. My husband it still there—on the national politics. But I'm not there anymore. I'm in local politics. And I think what it really means to me-and I never realized this before, I just thought of itthat local politics is how you really change things. It has to come from the bottomup, from the people, up. You can't change it by just voting for one guy or another from a huge party in or out of office. You have to change local politics and make people accountable...to you. Once you do that, I can see that blossoming into a movement that has to go upwards, to the county, to the state, to the national level. I feel like I'm more involved now-I don't enjoy going to all those meetings and listening to this...nonsense, sometimes, but I think it's good for our elected officials to see people there, and to see that someone is paying attention.

Do a lot of people go to things like County Supervisors meetings?

In general, no. The county meetings get fifteen or twenty, maybe.

And these folks make decisions for the whole county.

Exactly, and they usually outnumber the Autumn 2009 43

audience. Even the other night when the Ontario County Board of Supervisors met in Geneva at the Smith Opera House, there were very few people there.

### If so few people go to these meetings, then you must have an opportunity to be heard?

For sure. It's easy to do. Everyone gets to speak at the beginning. They do listen. They seem interested. Whether it's really going to make a difference... If they saw more and more people, that might change things. If they had to move to a larger room because there weren't enough seats for everyone, yeah, I think that would make a difference. It's going to take decades to change the system but it has to start somewhere!

### What does your son think about all this?

Well, I'm kinda a liberal, or well, a moderate. But my husband is very, very conservative. And my son, he's 12, has listened for years to all of our "discussions" about politics, especially in the last couple of years with things like the Iraq War-and my husband gets very very worked up about things like that. We were watching John McCain and he said "The United States should not torture prisoners," and my son said, "Yeah, tell it to the CIA, bub!" So he's very politically savvy. But he's not real comfortable with me doing all these things because it used to be I'd be sitting at home with him every evening. Now I'm not there as much. I think he's a little bit jealous of my time. There have been times I've had to say 'no' to things so I can spend time at home. But he doesn't want to seem to be too outwardly supportive of me, and neither does my husband, but I think secretly they are.

### Has he gone to any of the meetings?

I've asked him, and I think eventually he will. He's kind of shy. He's at that age where he doesn't want to stand out. I do think I'm setting a good example for him.

## What does your husband think about the garbage issue?

He agrees with me on this. He and my son, they don't want to be outwardly supportive of me because they have this thing about...being nice to me. [Laughs] But a gentleman who was running for town council came to our home. He was running on the Republican ticket and my husband is a registered Republican. So my husband started asking him "What do you think about the Zero Waste issue?" and the guy started responding and my husband said "Well, my wife is the secretary of the Finger Lake Zero Waste Coalition, and you don't know what you're talking about. Do you even read the newspaper? How do expect anyone to vote for you if you don't even understand the issues? I'm not signing your petition." That's the first time I knew that he was supportive.

# How has your involvement in this issue changed your relationship to the community?

I used to feel really isolated out there living in the country. I'm not a real social butterfly. But now I know people from all over and when I come downtown to a store I see all kinds of people that I know, where it used to be I didn't know anybody, even though I've lived here for eight years. I like that. I think basically we are a social species. We need each other.

# PUGILIST SPECIALIST

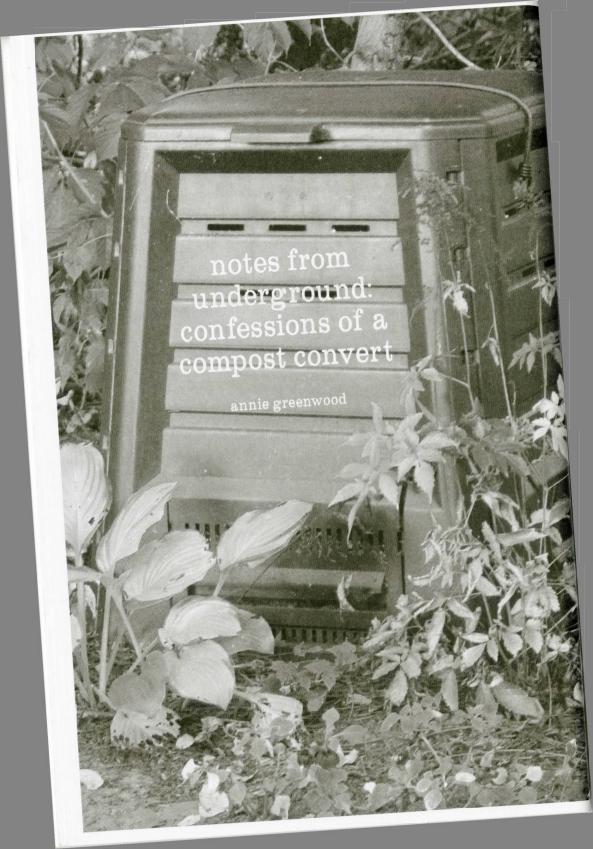
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It's actually illegal to compost in Geneva. I'll just open with that.

Okay, maybe not illegal, per se, but it's a violation of Chapter 273 of the City's Municipal Code. Article 273-7A of the "Sanitary Code" reads, in part, "No animal or <u>vegetable substance</u>, <u>garbage</u> [according to another Code clause, "garbage" includes "organic matter"], house refuse, nor any materials which are offensive, or <u>tend to decay</u> or become putrid, or to render the atmosphere impure or unwholesome, shall be thrown, placed or permitted to remain <u>in or upon</u> any street, stream, <u>yard</u>, <u>lawn</u>, <u>garden</u>, ash heap or other place within the city [...]." Now, I'm no lawyer, but that sounds like composting to me.

The penalty for "knowingly and willingly" violating this policy "or assisting in violating" this policy (which I guess means I'm busted) is \$25 or "imprisonment not exceeding 15 days" for the first violation. But guess what? People are doing it anyway. People like me.

I used to be opposed to composting. I had this theory:

Him: "We should compost."

Me: "Why would I prevent the ONLY thing that is actually biodegradable from ending up in the landfills? I want to help the decomposition process out!"

Him: "Mumble mumble, it doesn't work that way, grumble, grumble."

Me: "Humph."

But after a spring spent living abroad, in another house where the people recycled loyally and also composted in a clever and tidy covered container in their tidy back garden, I changed my mind, and bought Him a clever and tidy covered compost bin (for about \$80 at the Geneva Tractor Store—at the corner of 5&20 and Pre-Emption), and now it's tucked neatly and inconspicuously in *our* back garden. I'm a Compost Convert, and I'm here to testify.

### TOP 6 REASONS PEOPLE OUGHTA COMPOST:

- 1: I noticed that, by composting, we produce a lot less garbage—which means we have to take out the trash a lot less frequently (yay), which means less bagged garbage heading to the landfill (pat self on back). For the record, compostables are not small potatoes: yard trimmings and food scraps make up roughly 1/4 of all the trash generated in this country.
  - 2: With less food waste, our kitchen garbage is not as smelly.
- 3: As for my "theory" above, turns out composty things can't biodegrade in landfills, silly, because they are wrapped up with all the other trash in thick plastic garbage bags that take hundreds of years to break down. Duh.
- 4: We are making real, organic fertilizer for our flower beds. That feels much better than all those weird chemical fertilizers and pellets and sprays and all that other crapola that comes in plastic bags at Home and Garden Centers.
- 5. Watching all those bugs and slugs do their thing is actually a pretty cool science lesson for your kids, not to mention a lesson in environmental ethics: instead of just

throwing stuff "away" (wherever that means), they learn about how to keep a natural cycle of decay and replenishment going.

6. You get to walk outside a few times a day and commune with nature in all its buggy, wormy, dirty, stinky, grassy, leafy, sticky, sluggy, twiggy, gurgly glory.

So why aren't we all composting, then? Well ...

TOP 6 REASONS PEOPLE DON'T WANNA COMPOST (and why they're wrong)

### 1: It's a pain.

Not really. I promise. It's not that hard. And it requires you to walk outside to the back yard/garden a couple times a day. Fresh air, stretch your legs. That's just a winwin situation. But if you still think it's a pain, you can always ask Him to do it. In the urban context where it's not at all okay for Him to pee outside, taking the compost out is kind of close.

### 2. It will smell.

Actually, surprisingly, no. If it smells, it's for the same reason that your garbage smells: it's way past time to take it out. So the smelliness is really your fault, not the compost's.

### 3. There will be gnats in my kitchen.

Okay, yes, there sometimes will be gnats visiting your inside compost container (and aren't there gnats in your kitchen anyway?). But there are ways to keep them at bay. First, keep the compost container covered till you take it out: we use a big coffee can, but there are all kinds of options, including fancy ceramic crocks with carbon filters. Second, take it out several times per day. Oh, and you could always keep it under the cabinet. Or if you're extremely annoyed by gnats, you might even keep your little covered compost container in the fridge.

4. There will be vermin in my yard.

Not if you do it right. Build or buy a good, critter-proof bin, and they may visit, but they won't be able to get any free snacks.

### 5. It's illegal.

I'll get back to this, but what, you don't break laws all the damn time? Ever break the speed limit? Smoke within 100 feet of the entrance to a building? Talk on the cell while driving? Skateboard in the street? Bike on the sidewalk?

6. I rent and/or I have no yard: composting is for farmers or urban granola-eating, landowning elites with the leisure time to do it.

Okay, ouch, that's fair. The pressure to compost comes with a few class assumptions: it presumes you own your own back yard, and that you have time to keep a garden. Perhaps composting is not for everyone. But until we start seeing door-to-door compost pickup—I shit you not: they are actually doing that in Vermont—renters or apartment-dwellers who are inclined to compost might consider the following:

BLENDER COMPOSTING: Save your day's worth of fresh fruit and veggie peelings, tea leaves and coffee grounds, eggshells and houseplant droppings in a little bowl

on your counter. At the end of the day, dump them in a blender or food processor, add a little water, and pulverize. Pour the goo into holes in your flowerbeds or houseplants. Rumor has it this liquid compost is better than miracle-gro.

Converted yet? If so, here's a few tips on getting started:

\*CHOOSING A BIN: For the DIY-minded, you can build your own compost heap: there are build-your-own-bin instructions on the web—wire mesh ones, and wooden box-style ones. For the I Want It Now crowd (like me), you can buy a bin. There are horizontal barrel-style ones with a door for dropping in stuff, mounted on a spit with a handle to "rotate" it till the compost is all cooked: these are completely self-contained and probably don't even violate Municipal Code. Then there are the more vertical plastic versions, like the one we got. There are stacking style ones, cones, upside-down garbage can-looking ones. Something for everyone.

\*WHERE TO PLACE IT: On the ground (so worms can get in), near enough to the kitchen to be convenient, far enough not to be unsightly, out of excessive sunlight, and sheltered from the wind.

\* WHAT TO PUT IN: Compost works best with alternating "green" and "brown" materials: GREEN = nitrogen-rich "wet" materials such as fresh food scraps (peels, cores, leaves, etc.), used tea leaves/bags, coffee grounds, and green lawn scraps (grass clippings, garden/house plants and young weeds, cut flowers). BROWN = carbonrich "dry"/aerating materials such as egg shells; dried, mulched leaves or other shredded branches and twigs (everything composts faster if you mow/mulch/chop it up first); hedge trimmings, paper items like scrunched up cardboard, egg cartons, toilet roll tubes, shredded letters and mail; straw and hay. Start with about 6 inches of BROWN mate-



rials first, to help aeration, and then just try to keep a 50/50 combination of GREEN and BROWN materials added as they become available.

\*WHAT <u>NOT</u> TO PUT IN: Though farm-dwellers can get away with it, urban composters should NOT put bread, meats, dairy, or cooked foods in the bin. The break down at a slower rate, smell, and attract vermin.

\*NOW WHAT? As long as you're alternating brown and green matter, just wait for the muck at the bottom of your bin to turn to compost: crumbly, dry, chocolaty brown earthy-smelling stuff that your plants yearn for. You don't really need to turn or stir your compost bin, as long as it has air vents to "breathe." The brown matter (eggshells, twigs, dried leaves, shredded paper) also helps with aeration. If you do stir/tumble the compost, however, it will speed up the decomposition process. Compost usually takes between 6 and 18 months to be produced. Once you have it, you can

- Mulch with it, to encourage prettier garden plants
- Mix into your soil to improve its condition, and up the nutrient levels
- Mix with sand and sieve it over your lawn for happier grass
- Mix with equal parts soil and use as a potting mixture for seeds and houseplants.

### TROUBLESHOOTING:

\*If you're worried about or seeing raccoons or other critters, be sure you're not putting any cooked food, dairy, meat, or fish in the bin. Also, get a covered bin, and use a bungee cord for more security, to prevent the lid from opening. One neighbor told me she had seen raccoons in her (open, wire) compost heap, but all they did was fish out the eggshells and lick them clean, then leave them neatly stacked next to the heap. Really rather polite, I think.

\*If the compost is getting **gnatty**, there's too much green waste: put a layer of newspaper or scatter a thin layer of soil over the top.

\*If the compost is getting slimy/stinky, again: too much green waste or not enough air. Add some brown matter (twigs, shredded paper, etc.), or give the bin a stir with a pitchfork, shovel, or pole.

\*To **speed** the process you can add some occasional "blender compost" [see above], or dried blood (I know, ick, but they have it at garden stores) or bone meal (ditto with the ick) or something called "compost starter," wherever that's sold. I haven't found it yet.

\*What about all my non-compostible kitchen waste? Well, I felt the same way. I wanted to be able to shove that whole leftover casserole into my compost bin. The best answer is this: try and reduce your kitchen waste. Work on buying less at the grocery store so food doesn't spoil before you can eat it. Work on preparing only as much food as your family will eat, then eat it all, so it doesn't go to waste. The Buy In Bulk and SuperSize culture in the U.S. makes this a tough commitment to keep, but composting has, for us, become a daily reminder not to produce more waste than we can manage.

So that's the dirt on compost. Maybe now we should start talking about making it legal.

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## what's up motherf★cka?

punkastronomy #3 by doug reilly

Ever drive out into the countryside and marveled at the big strip of the Milky Way arching across the sky and thousands of stars shining everywhere, then wondered why you couldn't see that from downtown Geneva or from your own driveway? No, the air is not clearer. There's simply less lights.

The splendor of the night sky is all but invisible from most of the places we tend to live and congregate because of what's called light pollution. Roughly defined, light pollution is too much light in general and light needlessly shining where it is not wanted.

The cause of light pollution is bad lighting design. For the most part, we put lights outdoors to illuminate what's below them: walkways, parking lots, streets, driveways, and doors. Yet most outdoor lighting shines in every direction: out the sides and even up. The sideways light causes glare, which makes it harder to see anything at all at night, and light trespass, light that shines where it's not wanted, like in your bedroom windows at night. The upwards light causes sky glow, an orange haze over heavily lit areas that hides the stars and Milky Way.

All these components of light pollution have real life consequences. That's why we call it pollution. And it's a global problem. In a November 2008 cover story, National Geographic reported that 1/5 of humanity (that's over 1 billion people) live in skies so light polluted that they cannot see the stars and the Milky Way. 2/3 of humanity (that's 3 billion people) suffers some kind of light pollution. It's bound to get worse. Our race just recently turned a corner; just over 50% of all humans alive now live in cities. As these cities grow and develop, they'll get brighter. And the night sky will cease to be a source of visible wonder for most humans.

According to the experts, here's why light pollution is bad:

- It disrupts melatonin production in humans, which messes with our sleep cycles.
- · It makes driving at night way more dangerous because of glare, which makes it



harder to see anything but the bright lights. This problem is worse with older drivers.

- + It disrupts the normal cycle of hormone production in women, which puts them at greater risk of breast and other cancers.
- It kills 100 million birds a year because they collide with lighted buildings and towers.
- It disturbs the reproductive cycles of frogs (kermitus interruptus) who are already dying off worldwide for unknown reasons.
  - · It hurts sea turtles, who can't find dark beaches to lay their delicate eggs.

The American Medical Association (AMA) just declared light pollution a public safety and health hazard, citing the above reasons as well as the 2.2 billion dollars a year we waste on lighting things we don't intend on lighting (like the night sky.)

The solution to the light pollution is unbelievably simple. It's better lighting design. Most outdoor lighting (like the irritating "old fashioned looking" globes that line downtown Geneva or HWS campus) are non- or semi cut-off fixtures. Common streetlights are the latter. They don't shine line up, but they do shine a lot of light sideways.

Full cut-off lighting only shines light down, where we really want it. You can't see the bulb itself (unless you are under it) but you can see what it is supposed to light up. These lights don't need to be as powerful since all the light is going where we want it, so that saves money over time. The city of Calgary, Canada, saved over 1.7 million dollars a year in energy costs when it switched its streetlights to lower-wattage, full cut-off designs.



One of the reasons often cited for not solving the light pollution problem is safety. The more lights, the better, and everywhere, the argument goes. Let's not give crooks and rapists shadows to hide in, the argument goes. Let's light up the roads so that drivers can see.

Bad lighting actually makes the situation worse. Take two flashlights and go outside. Shine one at your face and one at your car. Can you read your license plate number? Now shine both of them at your license plate. That's better, right? That's how full-cut off lighting works to make your nighttime safer and your night sky prettier.

You can help solve the problem yourself. Next time you're changing or adding a light fixture outside, choose a full cut-off design. You'll sleep better at night, perhaps literally.

The problem is also solvable at the municipal level as well. Many cities, like Calgary, Canada, and Flagstaff, Arizona, have enacted dark sky ordinances that essentially call for all newly installed outdoor fixtures to be low-wattage full cut-off designs. Some communities have grandfathered in existing fixtures but stipulated that when they are replaced, full cut-off designs are used.

Having visited Flagstaff this July, I can tell you that it's a pleasure to drive there at night. You see the roads but not the glaring streetlights. And from the middle of the city, you can see the Milky Way!

There are a lot of reasons to solve the light pollution problem: economics, the environ-



Opposite: Students at HWS look through the author's telescope. The Colleges has some of the worst light pollution in the area: note the "glare bombs" in the background. Above: Cherry Springs State Park in Potter County, Pennsylvania. It's rural, and existing lights are full cut-off designs. The vertical cloudiness behind the author and his telescope is the Milky Way, our home galaxy. The only thing in this photo visible from the front of HWS library is Jupiter, the bright spot middle left.

ment, public health and safety. But let's not overlook an important but immeasurable benefit of the night sky. Our window to the universe is critical to the development of the human mind and the cultivation of a far-seeing wisdom. I see the effect of it every time I let someone look through my telescope. I saw it this summer out west, in National Parks that have fought hard to preserve their dark skies. The starry night changes people's behavior; it stops and makes them think, and we need more thinking. It gets people talking in wonder together, and we need more community. We need the natural world—and the night sky represents the part of that world that is most challenging to our understanding—to inspire us and humble us in a way that no computer generated graphic ever can.



You can learn more about light pollution...online, of course. Visit the International Dark Sky Association webpage for lots of information: www.ida.org



Geneva13 and Punkastronomy.com are really happy that Utne Reader, a national magazine that covers the independent press, honored our work by reprinting the first What's Up Motherf\*cka column in their September/October 2009 issue.



Who wants to hear some GARBAGE SONGS? I mean, songs that sort of reference garbage, or reference garbage literally? These are the best songs I could come up with off the top of my head. I didn't include The Cramps'"Garbageman," just because. It felt too easy. But you should check that out, too, if you haven't already. Anyway, behold the rubbish:

### Robin Gibb - "Trash" from Sesame Street Fever (CTW)

It's fun to imagine "Trash" as Robin Gibb's ode to back alley action, exploitation cinema, and porno mags, or, perhaps more accurately, to failure, laziness, life on the margins, and the things that get tossed aside as people move towards what it is they (temporarily) want. Most of the songs on the disco-themed Sesame Street Fever album are sung by the appropriate muppets. Cookie Monster sings about cookies. Ernie sings about his rubber duckie. Bert sings "Doin' The Pigeon." But "Trash," a song clearly meant for Oscar The Grouch, is sung by Robin Gibb alone (well, Robin Gibb plus female back-ups). Why is this? I don't know. "Trash" glides along on gentle discorhythms and professional sheen. Gibb sings about "the busted strings and ragged ends, the broken things that no-one mends" with an old-timey sentimentalism, and the result is sweet, catchy, and weirdly funny. Hardcore discophiles may find it a bit light. It's not coke spoons and pulsing Moroder beats. It's not Bianca Jagger, naked, riding a white horse on her birthday. But you do get to hear Robin Gibb – one-third of the Bee Gees, the seventh best-selling act of all time – singing "Trash / is everything to me".

### Wrangler Brutes - "Garbage Can" from Zulu (Kill Rock Stars)

Wrangler Brutes were here and gone in a flash. They played their first show in Tijuana in June of 2003, and their last show in Tokyo in December of 2004. For followers of '90s hardcore, they were something of a supergroup, featuring former members of Born Against, Men's Recovery Project, Universal Order of Armageddon, and The Monorchid. On "Garbage Can", vocalist Sam McPheeters has some brief choice words for Ariel Sharon, before delivering the twice-repeated line "a garbage can for a garbage man". The song then abruptly ends with what sounds like a sample of people either hollering "YAHOOOO!" or making horse noises. It took dozens of listens for me

to wrap my head around Zulu, but eventually I came to realize: a.) McPheeters' vocal performance and lyrics should be studied, b.) Zulu is a modern hardcore masterpiece, and c.) Wrangler Brutes is the best band name of all time.

## The Starlets - "I Sold My Heart To The Junkman" from One Kiss Can Lead To Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost & Found box set (Rhino)

This isn't a great song, but it's noteworthy for being a hit single for Patti LaBelle & The Bluebelles, after it was intentionally (and wrongly) credited to them instead of the group who actually peformed it, The Starlets. According to the liner notes, "When Patti LaBelle & The Bluebelles were caught lip-syncing The Starlets' version on *American Bandstand*, the Starlets sued, and the other group was forced to record their own version of the track." That must've been really awkward.

If you haven't heard the *Girl Group Sounds* set, you're missing out big time. It's not a complete, definitive collection (licensing problems with Phil Spector's work, nothing by The Crystals), but there are so many great songs and crazy productions. You need to hear Marscha Gee's "Peanut Duck", The Bittersweets' "What A Lonely Way To Start The Summertime", Brenda Lee's "Is It True", The Chiffons' "Nobody Knows What's Going On (In My Mind But Me)." You need to hear songs you probably already know by The Shangri-Las, The Supremes, Carole King, Dolly Parton, etc. etc. And you need to see the packaging – digipak cases made to look like compacts and a mock diary full of production notes/fun facts/context, all housed in a replica hat box. It's all about the details! I don't care if you buy this, borrow it from a library, or download it illegally like a total lowlife – just make sure you have it.

## Beck - "Teenage Wastebasket" from One Foot In The Grave: Deluxe Edition (Iliad/K)

There are two versions of "Teenage Wastebasket" tacked onto the reissue of Beck's One Foot In The Grave — one with a full band, one just Beck by himself; one almost exactly 1 minute longer than the other. Both versions feel correct the way they are, and both contain the same lyrics, which include the lines "her dad is break dancing underneath the bed" and "socks don't matter, teeth are turning green / opinions are forming."

One Foot In The Grave — recorded just prior to Beck's smash hit Mellow Gold, but released just after — feels like it was recorded in the Fall, in sparsely decorated rooms and musty basements, capping a summer of working part-time and getting high a lot. I first heard it when I was sixteen. I kind of worked part-time, and the closest I got to getting high was reading stuff by William S. Burroughs that I didn't necessarily understand, watching Kubrick movies and staying up late, hanging out at Perkins, listening to White Light/White Heat three or four times a day, and going to Russia with a school group, where I bought Sex Pistols nesting dolls, and where my friend Andrew and I would do joke "beat poetry", which usually consisted of just reading the ingredients off Twix wrappers (in Russia, Twix bars are called "Raiders"), but slowly and with dramatic pauses. I also started doing this thing where I would describe soft-core movies

I'd seen, down to the last detail, except I would skip past all the sex parts. I even got to the point where I could make up soft-core stories on the spot, all I needed was some light jazz music playing in the background. There used to be (still might be?) a station that played weather channel jazz 24/7. If a bunch of us were driving around at night, someone would put that station on and say, "Alright, Matt, let's hear it." I was really good at it.

One Foot In The Grave is just as much about that kind of stuff. If you're living in a small-ish town, going crazy, or if you're waiting for some things to happen, this is your album. Beck reworks Skip James and The Carter Family, sings folk and makes it absurd and hilarious, then sings folk and makes it resonate, sometimes makes it crushing. On "Burnt Orange Peel", he sings "I've got a quart of milk / and some sound advice / I've got some fake trees / but they smell so nice / don't give me the flu / nobody knows why we puke." Sometimes if I have to drive long distances in the mail truck (to Romulus, Willard, Ovid, etc.), I sing "Cyanide Breath Mint" to myself just to pass the time. We don't have radios in the truck, or cupholders, or air conditioning. I don't know where I'm going with this. I guess I'm saying: the Post Office is cheap and shitty, small towns are the roughest, but I can deal with it (sometimes). And One Foot In The Grave is one of the greats, the best Beck album, if you ask me, and the 16 bonus tracks included with the reissue essentially make up a companion album that's just as good.

1954 flyer encouraging people to vote "yes" on transferring city land to the state to create the State Park. Courtesy of the Geneva Historical Society.



How beautiful the sky looks when the dump burns at night

## Why Geneval3?

Because 12 and 14 are square and uninteresting. Because 13 is forlorn and melancholy and reminds us of the struggling post-industrial rust belt. Because we have a theory #13 is the most commonly unoccupied PO Box in the US. Because, at one time, we compiled a list of Genevas in the US, and, alphabetically speaking, ours was number 13. We've since found more, but reserve the right to not change the name of our zine.

### Geneval3: End-Matter Manifesto

Geneval3 is a quarterly, do-it-yourself, not-for-profit, independent, collective venture that promotes people's creative expression as they construct their identities and communities. It is a love song to this town of ours, and we want as many people as we can get to work on the lyrics.

Geneval3's goal is to present the community with a variety of points of view. We invite submissions, but we also ask people for interviews. We transcribe those conversations, and we let the interviewees read them over to make sure they are comfortable with what they said and how they said it.

Geneva13 interviews are not short because conversations are not short. You can't learn much from soundbites or quotes taken out of context. The truth is in the details, what people say, and how they say it. Understanding is built on a commitment to really listen to one another.



## Don't Trash This Issue!

We print about 600 copies of each issue. That's not many for a city this big. So please, take it with you, leave it some place public. Demand someone else read it. Help these voices to be heard. Only recycle it when it has so many stains, fingerprints and tattered edges that it poses a threat to public health.

Geneva13 Press PO Box 13 Geneva, NY 14456 mail@geneva13.com