

# A Family Trying to Help Save Humanity

By Joe Vipond, Erin Grier, Sadie Vipond, and Willa Vipond

**I**t's an all-hands on deck kind of moment and the Vipond/Grier family is mobilizing the entire crew. As we see increasing signs of environmental degradation, through species extinction, climate disruption, and the plastics crisis, it's becoming increasingly evident that humanity is a threat, even to itself. Our family is not taking this lying down. We're all engaged, at some level or another, on combatting this degradation. Our backs are to the wall, until we win, and save ourselves and, in turn, save beauty, life, and the planet.

Sound unrealistic? Too ambitious? Not really. We have each picked a small piece of the puzzle (see insets for details of each family member's involvement). By working persistently on each piece, we are confident we will, through a series of small victories, move the needle forward.

Part of the challenge, for many, is the enormity of the problems... and there are so many of them. It can seem so completely overwhelming that some will ask: Where to begin? Or, why even bother starting? The enormity of the challenge is enough to make some curl up in the fetal position and accept fate.

This parable captures the lesson the Vipond/Grier tries to apply: As a family, we've participated in a number of community clean-up efforts from Calgary's Bow River valley to as far away as the Bagmati River running through Nepal's Kathmandu. (Recently, the family was in Nepal, where Joe offered medical education to local emergency trainees). It always seems that the plastic waste and garbage on the ground is horrendous. It's disheartening, hard to believe a

few could clean up these areas. But, in each place, we put our heads down and focused, one piece of plastic at a time, until the land was clean again. What seemed impossible at first glance was accomplished in a matter of hours, with many hands, and persistence.

So we focus on the little objectives, the small victories. We know that many hands, working together, will combine to achieve greater victories. When one victory is achieved, we celebrate, take a day off, and then move on to the next objective.

It's important to realize that we don't equate our work with sacrifice. Although there is duty and responsibility, our work is full of friendship, community, and many laughs. We are exposed to new unique experiences and amazing personalities also working on

changing the world for the better. Some say the purpose of life is to have fun. Some say it is to have meaning. We think it is to have fun while finding meaning.

We immerse ourselves in nature at every opportunity. Whether it is skiing fresh powder in the winter, or multi-day backpacking in the summer, or mountain biking through crisp fallen leaves in the fall, or hunting for dinosaur fossils in the spring, we are always seeking new adventures in our incredible Alberta landscape. We know that all work and no play makes Joe, Erin, Sadie, and Willa dull. We know we only protect and save what we love. So we are always recharging, immersing ourselves in the beauty and bounty of our incredible world.



*The Viponds in Haida Gwaii* PHOTO: © J. VIPOND

Finally, we try to live our values. When it comes to electricity production and use, our home is carbon neutral thanks to our array of eighteen solar panels and its high efficiency features. We live centrally to downtown, which allows us to walk, bike, use transit, and scooter for the majority of our city travel. We grow our own garden vegetables and buy as much food as possible from our local farmers' markets and organic stores. Our weekly garbage total is as small as we can make it and, on very good weeks, we don't have any trash to take to the curb. Although we don't have an electric car yet, we hope to in the very near future.

While we know the changes we need can't be achieved by the efforts of one family, and what we really need is systemic policy change, we also know we need to walk our talk. As things continue to worsen (it will take a while to turn this ship around), we need to be able to look in the mirror and tell ourselves that we are doing all we can to mitigate our impact on the planet. Importantly, we know that behaviour modelling works. Six solar arrays look skyward on our block now – it wasn't very long ago that there weren't any. Where once there was only one kid in the neighbourhood fighting the plastic war, now there are nine. We hope that green changes and actions expand exponentially, until we have societal change.

Societal change is our ultimate objective because our problems are huge and growing. We know our one family can't win this on our own. But we know we're not alone. We believe there are 7.7 billion intelligent, creative, and caring people on this planet. If we can inspire and engage our fellow citizens, we can work together to achieve greatness. You, dear reader, are one of those that can choose to be a part of the solution. It is time to get involved, and start to organize. Have fun, build community, and laugh. And, at the same time, start changing the world.

## Willa's actions:

Hello, my name is Willa and I'm 11 years old. I have been working on reducing single-use plastic use for 18 months. I started when I went to do a highway clean-up and the amount of garbage was so gross. So, I



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started to work with Plastic Free YYC and I gave a speech to City Council about it (for more information about Plastic Free YYC visit <https://plasticfreeyyc.com>). A few weeks ago I was interviewed by CBC and was on a panel discussion about what I have done at the zero waste festival. My friends and I have made a club called the Kensington Clean-Up Club (KCC). We are a group of nine young girls who are actively changing things. We have put up a poster at the Mayor's Expo. We made recycled t-shirt bags and other things and sold them at our street sale to raise money for good causes (including AWA!). And we went to our local farmers' market and educated people about climate change, recycling, and composting. I am committed to helping Calgary become more eco-friendly, and you can too!

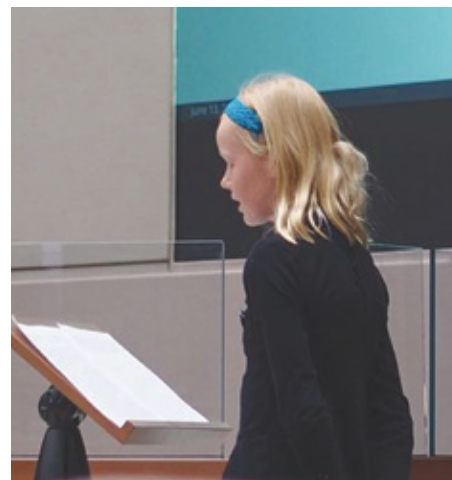
## Sadie's actions:

Hello, my name is Sadie and I'm 13 years old. I was born into a family that noticed the climate crisis and chose to act against it. What our climate used to be is crumbling around us. We have to act fast. Sea levels are rising; polar ice caps are melting. The



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risks of floods and wildfire are growing higher every year. Humans contribute a whole lot to the climate crisis. Here's our chance to turn it around. In June 2018 the Climate resiliency plan was presented to Calgary City Council and I made a speech supporting the plan. I bike and take city transit to reduce my carbon emissions. But I wanted to do more. Then Greta Thunberg raised her voice. I made it to every Fridays For Future school strike that I could and listened to her speeches. Greta is a true inspiration. I fight the climate crisis because I want my future to be a good one. I want a home for humanity and for all of the animals that are and will be on the brink of extinction. So help us. Help our future. Just do what you can.



Sadie Vipond addressing Calgary City Council on the climate change issue.



## Erin's actions:

Hello, my name is Erin and I'm a social worker and mediator working in Alberta for the past 25 years. As well as support-



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ing our budding activists, I have focused my efforts at the neighbourhood and fam-

ily levels. For three years, our local Hillhurst Elementary School partnered with Green Calgary for Giving Day. Each year the students learn about reducing their environmental footprint and that it wasn't always necessary to buy new things from the store. The first year kids traded toys, the second, books, and the third year, kind acts (volunteering at the school, complimenting a friend, etc.) – a most precious gift. After building our own green roof, I've helped to advocate for more policy support in Calgary for further green roofs (for information on green roofs in Calgary see <https://www.calgary.ca/UEP/Water/Pages/Watersheds-and-rivers/Erosion-and-sediment-control/Green-Roofs.aspx>). As a family, we've transitioned to a more plant-based diet and support actively our local farmers' market and natural food stores. We endeavour to procure second hand, either through borrowing, making, or thrift purchases. I'm able to bike and walk to work. It's satisfying to ensure our family's eco-negative impact is as small as possible and our eco-positive impact is massive!

PS – I would have added a link to a City of Edmonton green roof page but it's not as fulsome as Calgary's.

## Joe's actions:

Hello, my name is Joe and I'm an emergency doctor who has worked in Alberta since 2000. I've been concerned about the climate since I can remember, but for a long time I didn't think I had a way to create change. In 2012 I got involved in the Alberta Coal Phase Out campaign and quickly became an organizer and spokesperson. We won that battle in November 2015, securing the government's commitment to eliminate 44 megatonnes of annual GHG emissions. I then became the lead organizer for the Canadian Coal Phase Out campaign. We were victorious in November 2016, eliminating another 22 megatonnes of coal-fired electricity emissions from our future. So in total I've had an impact on nearly 10 percent of Canada's total emissions! More recently, I've focused on the local level. I run the Climate Voices Alberta and Alberta Acts on Climate Change Facebook pages (reaching about 15,000 people per week), co-chair the Calgary Climate Club, and chair the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment Alberta Regional Committee. It's a lot of work, but a lot of fun too, and very satisfying to help change the world. 🌱



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