

Called to Green Activism

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Today, considering our monthly theme, we are considering the Earth itself as a STRUCTURE. The largest and most important structure of all. The only shelter and home of every living being of all kinds: plants and animals, including humans.

There is no doubt that our planet is in grave danger because many things that humans do. Including increasing the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which has led to warming of the entire planet – creating global climate change. Climate change is already having a drastic effect on sea level rise, weather and many natural cycles. Our nonstop pollution of all kinds – waste and toxic substances going into the land, the air and the water.

We all need to make big changes in our own lives and collectively, all humans need to make big changes as communities, states and nations. And the huge size of all the changes that need to be made can feel overwhelming. And as individuals, we can feel helpless in the face of that.

What can inspire us to Green Activism on behalf of the planet?

Right in front of us today, literally this very minute, we have people who have come together to make change in our country and they are making a huge difference – a nationwide difference that I expect will have far-reaching effects.

I'm speaking of Cameron Kasky, Jaclyn Corin, David Hogg, Emma Gonzalez and Alex Wind. Former President Barack Obama has just nominated them to be named to the list of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2018. These are the youth from Parkland, Florida who have taken on the issue of gun control reform and have become such powerful national advocates that many changes have already taken place – in legislation at the state and local level; in nationwide youth activism – including the million+ students who walked out of their schools on March 14 and yesterday, April 20 and in hundreds of thousands of young adults registering to vote.

I am hopeful that the Parkland students' activism, plus the activism they have ignited in so many people of all ages, will continue to be successful.

From the beginning of the Parkland students' activism, people wrote and spoke about how the Parkland students were living up to the deeds of the person for whom their high school is named: Marjory Stoneman Douglas. And she is the person whose story of Green Activism I am telling today. As you can see, she lived to be 108 years old! And was an activist until she was about 100.

Marjory Stoneman was born in 1890 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her parents divorced when she was six and she and her mother moved in with her mother's family in Massachusetts. Her father moved to Florida, where he became the founder of the Miami Herald newspaper.

As a child, Marjory found comfort in doing lots of reading and also found that she had a love of and gift for writing. As a teenager, she had stories and puzzles printed in major newspapers and national magazines, winning several writing awards.

At 18, she went to Wellesley College in Massachusetts with the help of her aunt and both her grandmothers. There she became known for her writing and public speaking abilities. She graduated in 1912 with a degree in English and a very uncertain future. Back then, it was still unusual for a woman to have a college degree, let alone a career of any kind.

She soon met a man named Kenneth Douglas and married him in three months. The marriage was brief and disastrous. Marjory got in touch with her father in Florida, whom she had not seen since she was six years old. With her father's help, she ended her marriage and moved to Florida, where she found her true home.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas worked for the Miami Herald as an editor and writer, eventually having her own newspaper column that became very popular. She wrote on many subjects, including women's right to vote, because women weren't allowed to vote in the US until 1920. Marjory also went to Europe with the Red Cross during World War I and worked with refugees in France.

She quit the newspaper in 1923 and supported herself as a freelance writer. She wrote over a hundred published short stories and five novels in the next 70 years, wrote plays that were performed around the US and wrote advertising copy and any other kind of writing work she could get.

During this time, she came to love Florida's natural environment more and more. In the early 1940s Marjory was asked to write a chapter on the Miami River in a book on American rivers. She was not impressed with the Miami River, calling it ***about an inch long***, but as part of her research, she learned more about the Everglades and its ecosystem that surrounded Miami. And she wrote her chapter in the book about the Everglades, ***not*** the Miami River, calling the Everglades a *River of Grass*.

Since Florida was settled beginning in the 1880s, the Everglades had come under threat from people who wanted to drain it, take its water and develop the land. And indeed, over 50% of the original Everglades has been lost to farming and other development.

The Everglades is still 2 million acres, most of it protected in state and national parks. It is a subtropical wetland wilderness, and it is a one of a kind environment. There is no other place like it in the world. It has at least 7 different types of ecosystems, including prairie, marshes, hardwood forests, and lakes, rivers and ocean bays.

It is the home of thousands of species of plant and animal life, including endangered species such as the Florida panther, the manatee, and the American alligator.

In 1947, Marjory published a book on the Everglades, titled *River of Grass*. It sold out in a month and has gone through many editions, selling over a half-million copies. The book is an amazingly detailed book about the Everglades, and beautifully written. But most of all, Marjory made it clear that the Everglades were completely connected to Florida's people and cultures. That it is a treasure beyond imagining. And she made it clear that the Everglades were under serious threat of destruction.

This one book was the inspiration for thousands of people in Florida to organize to protect and preserve the Everglades. Along with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, it is considered to be one of the most influential books on the American environment ever written.

For the next 40 years after the book was written, and until she was well into her 90s, Marjory was a champion of the Everglades. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Everglades National Park and that several state parks that protect what is left of the Everglades. She founded the Friends of the Everglades, an advocacy group and traveled the state, giving hundreds of speeches over decades about Everglades protection. And the threats to the Everglades have never stopped, up to today.

Marjory was described by a Miami reporter as having: *a tongue like a [switchblade](#) and the moral authority to embarrass bureaucrats and politicians and make things happen*. She received many awards in her lifetime, including the US Medal of Freedom in 1993, the highest honor that can be given to a civilian, at the age of 103. It is truly accurate to say that without Marjory Stoneman Douglas, there would be no Everglades.

I close this story with these words on activism from Marjory. Let's read them together:

Be a nuisance where it counts; do your part to stimulate the public to join your action. Be depressed, discouraged, and disappointed at failure and the disheartening effects of ignorance, greed, corruption, and bad politics – but never give up.