

Ulysses fundraiser: in celebration of home rule and support of the amicus brief to defend New York towns from lawsuits by the gas industry; sponsored by Concerned Citizens of Ulysses. Rongovian Embassy, Trumansburg, NY, January 29, 2012.

transcript of remarks by Sandra Steingraber

Hi, everybody. I've been fasting all day and so feel a little wobbly. I'd like to say that's because I'm in solidarity with anti-fracking activist Patrick McElligton who is on an extended hunger strike to draw attention to the refusal of his pro-fracking senator, Tom Libous, to meet with him.

But in fact it's because I have a colonoscopy scheduled tomorrow morning.

Which also means I have a fun night of colonoscopy prep in front me, involving a box of laxatives and a bottle of Miralex. So I'm making a cameo appearance here.

The word *colonoscopy* is kind of a party killer but I mention it for two reasons.

One: I love you all, and we need every single one of you in the anti-fracking orchestra. If you are over 50, and haven't had a colonoscopy, go sign up for one tomorrow. The experience is not as bad as you imagine—I've had ten of them already—and, in the world of cancer prevention, it's a truly lifesaving procedure.

Driving to radiation and chemotherapy appointments is a big time suck. And that's the best thing you can say about cancer.

Cancer is also expensive. And that's the second reason I'm bringing all this up. On a macro-economic level, cancer is the third most costly medical condition. For an individual level, cancer is the most costly.

I had cancer young. As a result, I've never enjoyed financial security and likely never will. Medical bills are the reason Jeff and I were nearly denied a mortgage on our little house just up the hill on Bradley Street.

So, when I found out last summer that I was one of the lucky recipients of the Heinz Award, for my research and writing on environmental health, it was an amazing thing. The award comes with a \$100,000 cash prize. The check far exceeded my bank balance.

Nevertheless, I didn't really have to think twice about how to invest it. This community is my home. I didn't grow up here, but I chose to raise my children here. In my view, Ulysses is the best small town in America. I feel truly lucky to live here.

My son walks down this street to school every day. If fracking trucks hauling haz mat fill up Route 96, his lungs will fill up with diesel exhaust, which is a carcinogen. If the heavy metal-laden, radioactive brine from fracked wells is spread on this road to de-ice it—which is part of the plan—Elijah will track it home on his shoes.

My children are 65 percent water by weight. If chemical contaminants leak into our drinking water wells along the banks of Cayuga Lake—which is downhill from everything else that goes on here in Ulysses—then chemical contaminants will fill up their blood plasma, their cerebral spinal fluid, their tears, the steam of the exhaled breath.

My kids' muscles, bones, and nerve fibers are constructed from the crops of Sweetland Farm, located a mile up this road. My kids are made out from the meat and eggs of Highland Farm. They are pasted together with the bread of Wide Awake Bakery, which is milled right here in Trumansburg. You poison those things, you poison my kids.

So, as far as I can see, investing in the campaign to allow small towns to prevent carcinogen-dependent industries from running them over is an investment in my children's safety and future. It's what I am called as a parent to do.

Which is why the town of Ulysses—and this amicus brief—is one of the recipients of the Heinz Award money—along with Gas Free Seneca, Toxics Targeting, the Finger Lakes Cleanwaters Initiative, and the Community Environmental Defense Council. (With a couple more announcements in the weeks to come.)

So I have a message for Philip Anschutz, the owner of the Denver-based Anschutz Exploration Corporation, which is suing our sister community across the lake for its own ban on fracking. Philip Anschutz is the 34<sup>th</sup> richest person in the United States. He has a net worth of \$7 billion. Philip Anschutz is the line of tanks in Tianamen Square that we now stand before.

Hey, Mr. Anschutz. You've outlawyered and outbankrolled us. But here's what I bring to the struggle. I have the ability to undergo a colonoscopy without sedation or anesthesia. Tomorrow morning, I'll just do a little deep breathing, and then, when it's all over, I'll get up off the table, strip off the backless blue cotton gown, take a cab home from Cayuga Medical Center and get back to work fighting the plans that you have for us.

Here's something else I bring. I know how to work when I'm tired. I know how to work when I'm scared. I know how to stay up all night. I know how to work while waiting for news from the pathology lab about the result of the last biopsy. I know that I'm the daughter of a man who was shipped off to fight Hitler at age 18 and who taught me words, "we shall fight them on the beaches and we shall fight them on the streets and we shall never surrender." I know that I'm the daughter of a woman who had metastatic breast cancer by the time she was 46 and who taught me the words, "Don't let them bury you until you are dead." I know that I am the mother of two children who sometimes ask me, "Mama, we are rich in love. Right?"

And I know the answer to that question. And the answer is YES.

Right? The answer is yes. Fellow Ulysseans, we are rich in love. Which is why we are going to prevail. It is also why we all have to help defend this beloved community against those who seek to blow up its bedrock.

I have a poem for you. It seems like a night for poetry. Biology and poetry have a lot in common, you know. They are both about the mystery of being alive. But whereas biology wants to solve the mystery, poetry simply says, *behold*.

Here are some biological mysteries: the Marcellus shale below our feet is oceanic graveyard. Those bubbles of methane trapped inside represent the bodies of marine animals, sea lilies and squids, that died 400 million years ago. But the Marcellus shale is also alive. It's an ecosystem, teeming with colonies of relic organisms—bacteria and archaea—that microgeologists call *deep life*. These creatures live on the radioactivity and the carbon and the sulfur dioxide, and they send nanowires out into the surrounding rock to conduct electron transfer. Deep life organisms may make up more than half of the total biomass on Earth. They play a role in the carbon cycle and therefore may therefore play a role in climate stability. To get gas out of the shale, you have to kill them. That's one reason that fracking fluid is so toxic. It contains biocides. The Marcellus is a kind of subterranean coral reef, and to get the gas to flow out of it, you have to poison it.

Now here are some poetic mysteries. The name *Marcellus*, like the name Ulysses and Ithaca and Syracuse and Marathon, is a word with classical references. Marcellus was a Roman general who fought and died on the battlefield. William Shakespeare was so impressed with the story of General Marcellus that he borrowed his name for one of the characters in *Hamlet*. Marcellus is the guy who utters the words, “There is something rotten in the state of Denmark.”

Here's my valentine to the Marcellus.

Marcellus

*hades moloch charon's boat*  
*hades moloch ransom note*

I.

Marcellus below us. Marcellus below us.  
 Marcellus, tell us, who named you?  
 Older than fishes. Older than spinal cord and bone  
 and the green day of trees.  
 Older than atmosphere, than pollen dust,  
 than seeds. Bedrock of grief.  
 Subterreanean coral reef  
 alive with microbes and nanowires.  
 Electrically conductive. Hypersaline fire.

II.

Marcellus our cellar. Marcellus unlike us.  
 Fissured and fossilled sarcophagus  
 of sea lilies and squid, ego and id.  
 The whole periodic table in you:  
 uranium radium strontium barium lead.  
 Marcellus, home of the dead:  
 toluene mercury benzene brine

arsenic

the River Styx

five hundred million years thick.

In you Euridice.

*hades moloch charon's boat*  
*hades moloch ransom note*

## III.

Marcellus deserved the name  
 given him who waged war and gained fame  
 for the sacking of Syracuse, for the battle of Gaul,  
 only to lose to the enemy and fall  
 at home. No exit plan.  
 Some say your success was embellished,  
 General Marcellus, tell us:  
 who called you the *Sword of Rome*?

A private Saudi Arabia below our feet.  
 A prolific monster, says Wall Street.  
 A sure thing. A shale play. So play, play,  
 place your bet.

Marcellus is a minor character who leads Hamlet  
 away from his father's ghost.  
*Something is rotten in the state of. . . .*  
 Here, sign this lease and let's make the most of it.  
*O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,*  
*that I am meek and gentle with these butchers.*  
 Enters now Marc Antony breaking bread  
 with Bobby Kennedy for what it's worth,  
 for what it's worth.  
 Jealous?

Et tu, Marcellus.

## IV.

*hades moloch charon's boat*  
*hades moloch ransom note*

Marcellus, who are we?  
 Drill, syringe, derrick, vein.  
 Two junkies argue how many atoms  
 of carbon dance on the head of a pin.

Marcellus, tell us who we are. Quick.  
 I hear the trucks coming. They're not far.  
 The plan is reduce you to rubble.  
 There is no Hubble telescope for you, Marcellus,

and no 24-hour spill cam for us.  
Marcellus, tell us. Are you  
a box inscribed with name Pandora? Or a  
scroll on which is written the names of us all?

V.

Holy the rock and the fissure, the salt and the diatom's fall.  
Holy the unfractured. Holy the wall between you and us,  
Marcellus, holy the passageway. Holy the hall.  
Holy the 58,000 unmapped and abandoned wells.

Hell

I know you're down there.

Are you an augur?  
Are you a voodoo doll?

Mom always said, don't blow up the basement

*hades moloch charon's boat*  
*hades moloch ransom note*

Marcellus, please. I don't want you  
in my blood. I don't want your disease.  
Let me love you from a long way up.

Holy the water. Holy the cup.

--Sandra Steingraber, copyright 2012