



The Survival of the Fittest Fossils

SWAN SONG ON INTERSTATE 95 © Mark Mathew Braunstein

by Mark Mathew Braunstein

Our planet is in peril, and we along with it. If the ecosystem collapses as some scientists predict, we humans will be the first to perish. Just turning off the electricity brings us to our knees. While awaiting our Eco-Armageddon, we bandy around many solutions, some during conversations at our heavily laden dinner tables. According to the pleas of vegans and vegetarians, one solution lurks in the very food upon our tables: ***By being vegetarian, not only do we spare the lives of farm animals, we also save the world!***

That certainly may help, yet being veg is not the most effective step we can take to conserve the Planet Earth. It is perhaps the third most effective step. Second most important would be to eliminate or at least reduce our personal use of combustion engine automobiles.

Fortunate for our consciences, most emissions from our tailpipes are invisible, but emissions are only one small part of the problem. Worse for our complicity in guzzling gas is the environmental toll of oil exploration,

extraction, refinement, and transport. Still more pollution is created and resources exploited in the production of the car itself. And not just one car. In one lifetime, an average American driver consumes more than five cars, which, thank goodness, spend most of their time parked rather than on the road.

Consider also the vast network of roads and parking lots, of the resources needed and pollution produced to pave them, and of the habitat lost when they first are paved and later are

widened. As has been so eloquently expressed by a bumper sticker slogan, The Road to Hell is Paved. Consider the wilderness lost when a new road penetrates it and provides passage to recreational hunters who blast away and snowmobilers who scare away the animals who previously filled the meadows and the forests with song. Consider the continual runoff of salts and tars and asphalt that poisons the vegetation along shoulders, and the animals poisoned by that tainted vegetation.**CONT'D ON P. 48**

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Consider the one million vertebrate animals who are daily driven to their graves upon American roadways. For every lump of dead flesh we see on the roadside, another three or four crippled animals crawl away to die unseen. The very term road kill shifts the blame, as though the road were the lone assailant. We could never call it car kill, because the cars are ours.

Despite all our roads, they still are clogged by all our cars. Ours is a nation of car cripples, who drive even to the local gym or track meet or trailhead. During rush hours, highways turn into long parking lots, our cars spewing exhaust while going nowhere. Next time you are stuck in traffic, keep in mind that you are the traffic in which your neighbor behind you is stuck. And your children will be the traffic in which your neighbor's children behind them will be stuck. Thus the foremost effective measure we can pursue to conserve the Planet Earth is to give birth to only one

child, or to none. Because a No Child consumes far less food and drives far fewer miles than any Veg Child.

Human overconsumption and human overpopulation are the twin terrors that threaten other species and this planet and thereby our own species too. Yet both topics seem too taboo for discussion. Political candidates avoid debating them. Professors only rarely expound upon them. Daytime talk show hosts do not exploit them. The news media occasionally hint at overconsumption, but totally shun the topic of overpopulation.

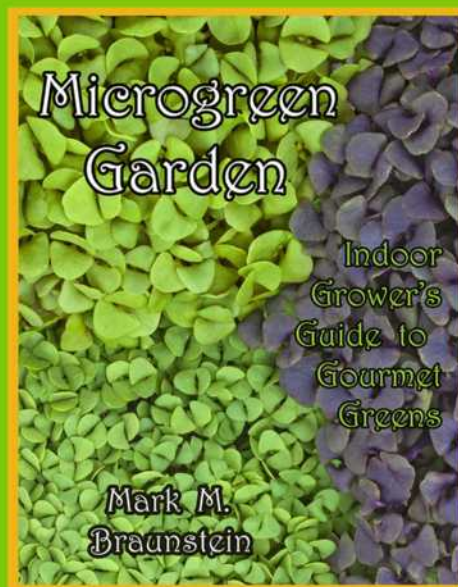
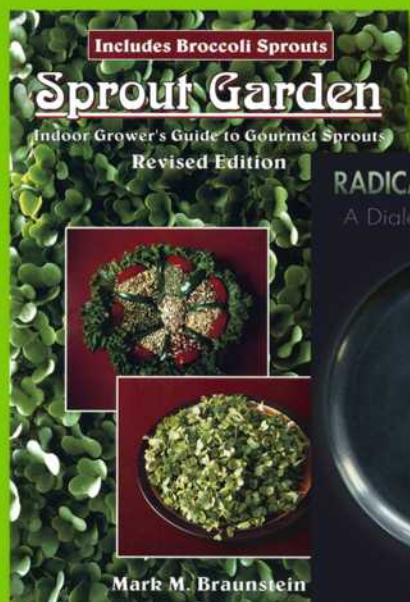
One would think that 310 million Americans among over seven billion humans presently inhabiting this planet are enough. Correction. In the time you took to read this paragraph, mothers and fathers continued to beget sons and daughters, and an additional thousand new humans invaded the planet.

Every newborn child is a political statement. A one child family balances connubial happiness

while acknowledging the human pressure on the planet. A two child family declares that everything is fine just the way it is. A three child family ... oh, never mind.

As our own single species increases its numbers at the cost of driving other species into extinction, perhaps that extinction does not matter. In converting non-human animal biomass into human animal biomass we maintain the same sum total of biomass, and perhaps that is all that matters. And perhaps we humans are all that matter. Perhaps. Yet ours is the credo of the cancer cell, which by killing its host organism in turn destroys itself.

Eons from now, the day will dawn when the only evidence that humans once ruled the Earth will be the buried ruins of our cities and our buried fossilized remains. And several more eons later, we too might become fossil fuels, thereby replenishing what we eons earlier so greedily had consumed. We can only hope. 



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