

By-election results hardly meaningful

In 1969, just down the road from where Green Party Leader Elizabeth May recently captured political attention by finishing second in a federal by-election, a soft-spoken Anglican preacher, Rev. Kenneth Bolton, stunned Ontario's political class by winning a provincial by-election for the NDP in what was then the Conservative heartland.

Bolton's shocking win in Middlesex-South came in a riding which not only had a virtually unbroken record of voting Tory, but came against a popular premier John Robarts, and an entrenched party regime which had held power without interruption since 1943.

Much to the delight of the NDP, the media was literally flooded with features and predictions (and public opinion polls) about what Bolton's upset victory meant for the next election. The end of the Tory dynasty was at hand. A new era of left-leaning politics was just around the corner at Queen's Park.

To meet this emerging force for change, veteran NDP leader Donald MacDonald quit and was replaced by the energetic, articulate and impressive, 32-year-old Stephen Lewis.

Things were looking up for the party.

Until, that is, new Tory leader Bill Davis called the 1971 general election.

Not only did Bolton get tossed out - when a Tory was re-instated - but the NDP dropped two seats overall, and Davis captured one of the largest majorities in Ontario history, the ninth consecutive Conservative win in this country's largest province. It would be another 14 years before the Tories finally lost.

History should teach us things. Bolton's 1969 win - and 1971 drubbing - underscores the point that by-election results often have little to do with general election results. Yet the political class, including the media, can't resist extrapolating the results from one single riding - where nothing is at stake except the fate of one seat - into something deeply meaningful for the entire body politic.

As a result, the aforementioned May - whose party has never won a single seat in Canada - is currently enjoying the same sort of media coverage normally reserved for politicians who have won something. There she was, pictured in Saturday's Toronto Star, holding an election sign and waving at passing motorists, as the illustration of a story on how the supposed growth of the Green Party - and Stephane Dion's victory - is squeezing the NDP out of the picture.

It is one thing for a party to finish second in a by-election by running the only real high-profile candidate it has - although she still lost - and quite another to make a meaningful impact in a general election, where limited resources and a lack of an electoral success works against them.

A recent EKOS poll, taken in the wake of the aforementioned London by-election - a sure way to skew results - gave the Green party 7.6 per cent support, up from the 4.5 per cent in the last federal election.

Even if that could be translated into a general election scenario - which it can't - it still makes Green a fringe party at best. Yet because of May's strong by-election showing, and the party's purported growth in the polls, the media now teems with stories about how Canadians have suddenly set aside their more traditional concerns and embraced the tree-huggers in a national hysteria over the environment.

Never mind that public opinion polls tend to inflate real public interest in the motherhood issues, the environment among them. That's because people often view poll questions as akin to a test in school. They don't want to fail. So if they're asked about the environment, they're unlikely to say they don't give a damn, whether they do or not.

Several years ago, based on readership surveys showing that readers wanted more environmental news, the Ottawa Citizen launched an entirely new daily section on the environment. It didn't last.

Why? Because all those people who told the pollsters they wanted it weren't reading it, and with nobody reading it, advertisers weren't keen on putting their money into it.

This is not to suggest that the environment isn't a legitimate political issue. Of course it is. But even those who see it as an issue don't all agree on the specifics and don't all vote the same way.

There is no doubt that Dion cleverly capitalized on his role as former environment minister in signing the Kyoto Accord to help him win the recent Liberal leadership convention. (Funny how little coverage there's been on the fact that having signed Kyoto, Dion and his Liberals subsequently failed to live up to its' promises.) And Dion's ploy, combined with May's by-election showing, have prompted the other party leaders, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to take more interest in the environmental file.

Fair enough. It's just that before you get too excited by the supposed impact of a single by-election result, and an opposition leader waving green scarves for the television cameras, just keep in mind that it rarely, if ever, means as much as the political class likes to think.



**National
Affairs**

**Claire
Hoy**

On a mission to self-awareness

We're all on a mission, according to many.

That may not come as a surprise to many of us who believe in a higher purpose, a destiny of sorts.

Religious doctrine notwithstanding, it seems silly to assume we're all here just to take up space, please ourselves and be faithful consumers. There has to be something bigger, a much larger scheme of things. That could mean we're guided by the hand of God or we're all intricate pieces in some huge cosmic puzzle.

Whatever the case, maybe we should all give it some thought from time to time. Instead of chasing the dollar like a dog chases its own tail, perhaps we need to concentrate on some insightful, meaningful existence. I'm not suggesting we all adopt lifestyles similar to the Dalai Lama or Mother Teresa, or we all embark on a soul-searching religious pilgrimage. No, simply by being more aware; expanding our perspective, and trying to be "one" with the power that surrounds us, we may be able to truly see.

The Celestine Prophecy, a world-wide best-selling novel, and movie on DVD, offers just that perspective.

The novel by James Redfield in 1994 (who was one of the most successful do-it-yourselfers ever), may be a unique secular view of reinventing ourselves, but it's still interesting nonetheless.

It speaks to our own sense of purpose and perhaps how we should all view the world. It could be summed up rather simply - we should all strive to evolve spiritually and become one with our world so we are able to connect on a level we never before dreamed of.

I've listed the nine "insights" for you to enjoy and digest. Some, in themselves, have interesting messages to impart.

1. We are discovering again that we live in a deeply mysterious world, full of sudden coincidences and synchronistic encounters that seem destined.

2. As more of us awaken to this mystery, we will create a completely new world view - redefining the universe as energetic and sacred.

3. We will discover that everything around us, all matter, consists of and stems from a divine energy that we are beginning to see and understand.

4. From this perspective, we can see that humans have always felt insecure and disconnected from this sacred



Mark Pavilons

source, and have tried to take energy by dominating each other. This struggle is responsible for all human conflict.

5. The only solution is to cultivate a personal reconnection with the divine, a mystical transformation that fills us with unlimited energy and love, extends our perception of beauty, and lifts us into a Higher-Self Awareness.

6. In this awareness, we can release our own pattern of controlling, and discover a specific truth, a mission, we are here to share that helps evolve humanity toward this new level of reality.

7. In pursuit of this mission, we can discover an inner intuition that shows us where to go and what to do, and if we make only positive interpretations, brings a flow of coincidences that opens the doors for our mission to unfold.

8. When enough of us enter this evolutionary flow, always giving energy to the higher-self of everyone we meet, we will build a new culture where our bodies evolve to ever higher levels of energy and perception.

9. In this way, we participate in the long journey of evolution from the Big Bang to life's ultimate goal: to energize our bodies, generation by generation, until we walk into a heaven we can finally see.

Like anything we're exposed to, you can take it or leave it. You can take away what you will from all of this.

But Redfield, like many others before him, are not alone in thinking there's much more to this existence than meets the eye. We've likely only scratched the surface of our own tiny lives. After four billion years on earth, humans have not come very far relatively speaking.

If you've ever seen the Grand Canyon or stood at the brink of Niagara Falls, you have a small idea of what this means. If you're still not convinced, view some photos of earth from space on various Web sites.

Then you'll have a different perspective to be sure.

And yes, many will argue that before we start poking around the stars in search of intelligent life, we should likely clean up our own backyards here on earth. We have created a lot of mess in the time we've been in charge, so we have our work cut out for us.

Hopefully it won't take another billion years to turn this place into paradise, a reasonable form of "heaven on earth."

But to do that we all need to become aware, not only of ourselves but everything around us.

We have eyes, but still cannot see. We don't use 100% of our brains. If we could only tap into just some of our mental reserves, there is no telling what we're capable of. I'm not saying

we all have to become mind readers or move objects with mere thoughts. That's too self-serving and disquieting.

What we could do is become more in tune with our own intuition and reconnect ourselves from within.

We are all stuck in our own heads 24/7, listening to our own rants, comments and criticisms. Maybe, just maybe, if we flick on the switch we can actually let the sunshine in, and be warmed all over by newfound insight.

At least, it's worth a try.

Perhaps in the year ahead we should all try to become better acquainted with ourselves, our fellow men and women, and our planet.

We're not given the insight of our own destinies - that we have to discover for ourselves. The only way to do so is to try!

The Three Little Energy Pigs present 'I'm Dreaming of a Green Christmas'

By Richard Griffith
Caledon Clean
Air, Clean Energy

There once were three pigs who lived with their mum in a country far away, 'til the elderly sow said, "Piglets, go now; seek your fortunes where ye may."

So they kissed her goodbye as they left their pigsty, while she wished them plenty of luck. And all agreed next, to hire architects, for houses they had to construct.

For them, sticks and straw didn't cut it at all; they wanted modern subdivisions. And since all the wolves had been hunted to death, they dwelt not on structural decisions.

They cheerfully settled for a deluxe split-level, complete with modern appliances. So the only thing sour was electrical power; that and the necessary finances.

Energy Pig One said, "King Coal for me! It generated the industrial revolution!

There's enough to last a thousand years - we don't need no other solution."

Said the others; "One thought: July was SO hot - do you think there might be a connection? And all these hurricanes one after another ... it worries us, upon reflection. We think, brother piglet, global warming's a warning that somehow our habits must change. Look at your blueprints one more time and your conduits rearrange."

Energy Pig Two said, "It's clear. It's nuclear. I'd rather split atoms than wood. Enough of this bickering, I'm delighted with Pickering, I'd plug in today if I could."

But the others said, "Well ... it's as pricey as hell, and plutonium's a major concern. Nuclear plants are kind of an eyesore, and you'll be much MORE sore if they burn.

"And if that's not enough, where to bury the stuff, when the fuel is, as they say, 'spent.' It's radioactive for 10,000 years - can you tell us, who'll pay THAT rent?"

Our Third Little Pig was a sensible babe: all her faucets had low-flow heads, and she always recycled and grew native plants in her well-cared-for flower beds.

She said; "It looks dicey, with oil getting pricey, and gas'll hit a shocking new mark. I'll try to conserve as much as I can but I don't want to freeze in the dark.

"So I'll go renewable, I think it's quite do-able ... I'll buy up some solar panels. They'll give me light and keep me warm, quite, and I won't spend the winter in flannels.

"And then for the days when the sun's solar rays aren't sufficient for producing the power, I'll stop being a cog, I'll just go whole hog ... and build a magnificent wind tower!"

The moral of this pig tale, as I think you now know, in this year 2006, is that we all need some radical thinking to find a way out of this fix.

That third little swine had her brain working fine and she knew what was in store.

She said; "For your sins, invest in the winds, and don't call me a boar!"

Richard Griffith lives in a straw-bale house in Grey County.