

## **I'll Take an IPA, Hold the CO2**

*By Mikey Abela*

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It's 8pm on an October Wednesday night in Gowanus, Brooklyn. It recently rained, but the general dampness doesn't hamper the mood of the weeknight crowd in Threes Brewing's tent-covered backyard. At two neighboring picnic-style tables, a collection of about 12 young adults, each wearing a name tag, some with a sweating glass of beer in hand, type away at their computers. They're emailing local representatives from their hometowns, college towns, and any other place they have some connection to, urging them to apply for climate pollution reduction grants, a form of federal funding unlocked as part of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. It's a unique form of climate action, notably more subdued than the soup-throwing and tree-chaining that often makes headlines, but climate action nonetheless.

Since 1995, world leaders have converged annually at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, referred to colloquially as COP. At the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the COP in Paris, these leaders agreed to take action to limit global temperature rise to 1.5C above the pre-industrial average by 2100, as per the COP28 website published ahead of this year's session in Dubai. To reach this goal, global greenhouse gas emissions must reach net zero by 2050, according to the UN. The Climate Action Tracker assesses the climate policies of 40 countries; these assessments conclude that none of these countries have plans which are compatible with the Paris Agreement.

In the private sector, companies have also failed to take meaningful action. Greenhouse gas emissions are a major contributor to the climate crisis, trapping solar radiation and warming the planet. According to NASA, carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for 300 to 1,000 years, meaning that carbon released from burning a chunk of coal today will impact the planetary temperature far beyond the lifetime of anyone currently alive. A 2017 report by the Carbon Disclosure Project, an emissions accounting non-profit, found that just 100 companies were responsible for 71% of these emissions between 1988 and 2015. And of the Fortune Global 500 companies, only 6.2% of them are committed to reaching net zero emissions across all operations by 2050 according to Speed & Scale, a climate action initiative led by John Doerr.

These sobering facts might best be coped with through drink, which is exactly what Danny DeBare thought, too.

Danny is a volunteer organizer with Climate Changemakers, a group that helps anyone get involved with climate action. He runs their Brooklyn meetups, called Hours of Action, which take place every Wednesday evening at Threes Brewing in Gowanus.

The Brooklyn chapter was the first to organize in person Hours of Action. While seeking a venue for these meet ups, Danny says he considered "what is a space that will not charge us for weekly attendance? What is a space that people will want to show up to? My options were a

synagogue social hall or a brewery-esque bar space. Given New York's obsession with alcohol, I thought why not play to our audience." And Threes Brewing answered the call.

The brewery, a self-described "little local empire" with four other locations according to their website, started in Gowanus in 2014. The venue aligns well with Climate Changemakers' goals, Danny says. "A lot of people want to engage in climate activism, but they don't know how or they're too busy. We make it as simple and easy as possible to get more people in the fold."

The location of the brewery, two blocks from the Gowanus Canal, is a reminder of the ill-effects of the sort of environmental degradation that Climate Changemakers is seeking to prevent. The canal is a former commercial channel that fell victim to waste dumping from heavy industry. Today, NOAA categorizes it as a hazardous waste site and warns that "skin contact with the water poses a health hazard for humans." This, and other local climate issues are on the minds of attendees at the Hour of Action.

For their next campaign, the Brooklyn chapter of Climate Changemakers have decided to focus on building support for the NY Heat Act, Danny says. Environmental Advocates NY, an environmental non-profit, describes the act as a state bill that seeks to regulate gas utilities in the state, decrease gas reliance, and, where possible, decommission these high-emitting gas systems; all of this while reducing energy bill burden on low low-income residents. Danny says that this initiative will allow for Hour of Action attendees to engage with state government and, hopefully, contribute to a major environmental win for the state. "Generally speaking, decarbonization through building emissions is best in NYC," Danny says. Local Law 97 is a prime example. This 2019 landmark legislation out of New York City placed strict energy efficiency and emissions standards on buildings.

Climate fatalism says that humanity cannot avert climate disaster and climate defeatism says that humanity will not avert climate disaster even though it can. Both perspectives enable inaction in much the same way as climate denialism. And both are on the rise. According to a study by IPSOS in 2021, 20% of those under 35 across 27 countries were climate defeatists, 11% fatalists, and only 4% deniers.

"We need people like us to move the needle even just a little bit," Danny says. "The clock really is ticking."

## ***How to Buy Nothing***

*By Mikey Abela*

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The holidays have become increasingly about stuff. Sparkly wrapping paper stuff to go around cardboard stuff that contains plastic wrapped stuff that's made of another kind of plastic stuff and requires two AA batteries (not included), all with a bow around it. Some might not have the money to buy, the space to store, or the interest in owning this stuff.

Buy Nothing, an online gift economy network, offers an alternative to the rampant consumerism of the holiday season. A total of 128 thousand Buy Nothing chapters have emerged around the globe with 7.5 million community members, according to the Buy Nothing Project website. These members find their local chapters most often in the form of a Facebook group. Once they've proven that they live in the neighborhood that the chapter serves, they can list items, services, and more for give away and browse the free offerings of their neighbors.

Santa doesn't live in the North Pole, he's the neighbor across the street whose child has grown tired of her rocking horse and who's looking to rehouse it for free.

Anna Larson von Muehlen is an administrator for the Fort Greene / Clinton Hill / Downtown Brooklyn chapter of Buy Nothing. She says that her role as administrator has given her visibility into the extensive community building capacity of the project, which is on full display around the holidays especially. "I often post: 'Santa is looking for *blank*' and put things that my kids have put on their Christmas lists and get a couple of things that way," Anna says.

It's not just about toys for the kids, though. Someone who is looking to bake a special holiday cookie recipe might ask the group for ingredients, she says. And after they've finished baking, they might post in the group that they have extra cookies to share for anyone who wants to stop by.

One time, a Buy Nothing member who was gifting Anna mason jars threw in a couple of candy canes for her kids as well. "She had gotten a box of 20 for her own kids and said that she didn't need that many. Buy Nothing teaches us not to be excessive. We are breaking that system by saying we're going to share," Anna says.

The group has come to serve as a sort of community center and support network. "Someone came home from surgery and had left their car on the street," Anna says. "They couldn't remember where their car was, so they posted the license plate number, make, and model and asked folks to look around since they weren't able to walk. People came out on foot, scooter and bike and were able to find their car. Someone even moved it for them to avoid a ticket."

Anna thinks of Buy Nothing as akin to an informal church community, minus the religious element. She says that "there is a ritual aspect of taking care of each other through sharing."

## ***The Town Pool***

*By Mikey Abela*

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It was the final step needed to graduate swimming school: the dive into the deep end. Caitlyn stood at the edge of the pier, nervously eyeing the cool, black water. It looks like slippery oil and she can't help but imagine if it's true what the older kids say is down there. A quick glance over at her parents and their encouraging eyes solidify her resolve, though, and she makes the leap. As she plunges down, she awaits the sensation of a bite.

The Easton Town Pool falls somewhere between a pool and a pond, but closer to pond. Other than the two wobbly piers and a few strewn pool noodles, there is very little that looks man made about it.

The sandy bottom of this quasi-natural pool was originally built in 1887. At the time it played a role in purifying water before it was pumped to residences nearby, according to the town recreation website. But in 1960 the town gave it new life as a bathing beach. Each year, well water gets pumped up and chlorinated. It's safe for swimming, but a far cry from crystal clear.

Over the years, rumors of what lurks beneath the pool's murky surface have flourished. One rumor in particular has persisted: that there are snapping turtles in the deep end.

Diann grew up in Easton herself before raising her family there. She lived across the street from the town pool as a little girl, and says that she always thought it was nice. Sure, she says, "the water was kind of brown so it was hard to see." And, yes, it wasn't fenced off so "anything could crawl in" from the nearby natural pond which was known to house snakes and turtles. But she had never seen any of these critters in the town pool itself. "There was chlorine so you'd hope that would kill them," she says.

She was confident enough to enroll her first child, Caitlyn, now 28, in swim lessons there 20 years ago. Caitlyn never saw a turtle herself. Although the rumor alone was enough to have her "going to swim lessons...horrified," she says. "It was the older kids at swim lessons who would scare me about it. I didn't ever want to dive into the deep end...you couldn't see the bottom, she says. Caitlyn's distaste was so strong that Diann enrolled her youngest child in swim lessons at the Holiday Inn's indoor pool instead of at the town pool.

Turtles aren't the only thing to fear about the water. When Diann was a teenager, in the early 1980s, she and her friends would sneak into the town pool after its lifeguards had left. On one unfortunate evening, with beer-induced adrenaline pulsing through his veins, her friend Billy dove head first into the pool, which had been partially drained for the winter. "He broke his neck and became paralyzed," she says.

That fateful bite never materialized for Caitlyn and she graduated from the Easton Town Pool swim school.