



ELIZABETH MAY

MAKING THE GRASS GREEN ON THE HILL

By Crystal Luxmore

Like the train she took to campaign across the country during the 2008 federal election, Elizabeth May has always sped along a single track. “The entire reason [I] became a politician was to stop the Harper government from derailing [my] years of hard

work on climate change,” says May. Running for Prime Minister was simply an extension of May’s lifelong work to protect the environment. At 23, a fact-wielding, sharp-tongued May led a successful one-woman campaign to keep pulp companies from spraying insecticide on Nova Scotia’s forests.

In 2003, she took time out from being executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada to go on a 17-day hunger strike on Parliament Hill, protesting contamination of homes around the Sydney Tar Ponds. The government’s promise to take action never materialized.

With some of her campaigns taking 14 years to win, she says she keeps going because the issues are too important to her to ignore. May’s mother was a prominent anti-nuclear weapons campaigner in the U.S. during the 1960s and May’s daughter, Victoria Cate, is on the Green Party’s youth council.

“Seeing one generation’s work gives the next generation faith that activism really can effect change,” says May.

Her strength comes from other places too. A devout Christian, she is studying theology part-time.

“If I weren’t an activist-politician, I’d either be a full-time writer or a parish priest of the Anglican Church,” both of which she could see herself doing in the future.

“I couldn’t have run in the election without my daughter’s support,” says the single mom.

Family friend, Farley Mowat, added that May was “a dedicated goddamn visionary.”

May’s strength of conviction means she takes risks and does things her own way. After the Green Party failed to pick up a seat in the election, some party members blamed May, saying she plugged the message that defeating Stephen Harper was more important than voting for the Greens. May dismisses the criticism but says she dislikes Canada’s partisan political system.

Says the Green party leader, “I guess I’m an un-politician politician.”