

My name is Connor Young, I am from Chester County, Pennsylvania, and fossil fuel development has cut my street, my town, my community in half. In 2017 I became aware of the Mariner East 2 construction project. An offshoot of the US shale gas boom that started while I was still in elementary school, this 300+ mile project was slated to take gas from the Western half of the state, the Eastern parts of Ohio, the Marcellus shale fracking fields, and transfer Highly Volatile Organic Liquids all the way across the state to the Marcus Hook export facility ultimately for sale overseas. In its completion and proposed operation, it would transport 1 billion water bottles worth of plastics feedstock each day. Despite the sponsoring company's name, Energy Transfer Partners, they were not moving fossil fuels for energy.

No, Great Britain and some of our neighbors across the ocean had decided, in light of evidence of fracking's great environmental and human health costs, that they were unwilling to bear those costs. They said, we might not actually want to be poisoning our water, land and people like this.

America, ever the entrepreneur, said that it was perfectly willing to poison its people, instead. Or rather, a Texas-based, Delaware organized, 95 billion dollar corporation run by billionaire Texas oilmen said that they were perfectly willing to make PA bear the costs of their cancerous, poisonous drilling, and their poisonous, cancerous plastics productions, in the Pittsburgh cracker plant, and the proposed LNG processing plant in Chester, Pennsylvania.

They said they were fine building a pipe-bomb, a 300 mile long explosive with a blast radius of half a mile in the most conservative estimate. 1.5 in the independent estimate.

This might have missed me, they did a really great job keeping their project under wraps, burying its real purpose and dangers, multiple times being sued for their failure to disclose.

But folks, they were going to cut through the street less than half a mile down from me. This home, that I've known, now for 27 of my 28 years, then 21 of my 22, was liable to go up in a roar of odorless, colorless, heavier than air, highly flammable ethanes, butanes, pentanes, all kind of -anes, just not the kind of -anes you and me might use to heat their homes, cook a dinner or an egg. These were going to make plastics. You know, those things found in every one of our filter feeding fish species, those bits of dust found blowing in the wind of every national park, those contaminants in your water, my water. PA residents drink a credit card a week. They're in your bloodstream right now, really small ones. It's our generation's lead. What isn't lost to the environment as nurdles gets passed to landfills or incinerators, leaching to the water, or spilling poison to the sky. For a forever material, a legacy pollutant, if you would, we sure do use a lot of it for single use things.

This was less well known in 2017, but it was pretty well documented. A documented problem since long before I could vote. Before I could walk, talk, or get born to this burning world. My family in Canada fled from wildfires three months ago! The flames so hot they jumped the lake. They didn't lose their home, but Kelowna was unlivable for a week.

And these business suits from the south wanted to pump 1 billion bottles a day of this legacy pollutant under my feet while I take this risk for them. While my family, my neighbors, my mom and dad, my friends, my parks and trees and birds and worms takes this threat of annihilation. Just a chance that it's explosive and quick. ETP has a terrible safety record, their Revolution pipeline blew up just a week into its operation, but even its "safe" operation carries that eye to extinction.

So a direct threat to my life limb and immediate waters, and a short walk down the street to the global fight on climate change.

Someone knocked on my door, and then after I got educated, I went on to knock on several hundred myself. This was self-defense. It does begin with a smile. I canvassed, and phonebanked and lobbied, and when politicians weren't willing to defend my community, I worked with my community to depose them and install leaders who better held our visions. Democracy at work!

And the pipe was still getting built. In fits and starts with injunctions and stays and eventually over 100 notices of violation from the DEP, this creeping threat to clean waterways and air and land, our constitutional rights as Pennsylvanians, continued to advance. We never stopped knocking on doors, but this wasn't working and we needed more direct action. And I was new to it and I followed and did what I could and minute by minute we held them up. Hour by hour, every second stolen from their installation was another second free from the rush of fluids that means cancer everywhere and fire and floods everywhere else.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and these business men shook their own hands and told the government that we would sorely need that pound of cure. And then they spent billions depriving us of our ounces of prevention.

So we made 16 minutes worth of work take 4 hours and 46 minutes here, and we were arrested for holding a bake sale next to one of the 40 schools and nursing homes within the blast radius, and we took our fight to the halls of Harrisburg, to the offices and homes of politicians. And our voices were loud, and they were wide awake, and yet even as they enabled harm to us, we saw no harm to them.

You understand, these people were, are, doing violence to us. They stole an aquifer to drill this pipe through it. They stole tens of thousands of gallons of water from beneath the hill I live on, and carted it off and dumped it in fields while their frackouts flooded people's first floors. They were driving in from Georgia and Texas and Louisiana and dumping mud into our waters.

I was on Marsh Creek the day after they spilled 10,000 gallons of proprietary-chemicals laced drilling mud into its Ranger Arm.

I saw the fish floating to the surface dead like a damn Simpsons cartoon.

I watched them gently bobbing to the edge of the lake where their bodies lined up pale and shiny and choked with horizontal directional drilling fluid.

For the last 4 years, we had been pulling every lever of power available to us, in a desperate search of self-defense. 11 of us were arrested in Harrisburg delivering the voices of thousands to then Governor Tom Wolf, telling him in explicit and detailed terms that this disaster, this spoiling of a drinking reservoir for 1.4 million people, would happen if the Mariner project was allowed to continue.

I thought that this might be where the powers that be come to their senses. I am a less naive man now.

I watched them plan a reroute while a friend of mine watched her parents fall ill from a contaminated well.

They lived along the route side, and we have known HDD activity and the Mariner project specifically to disrupt water tables and introduce contaminants into otherwise safe systems.

The nearest drilling site to them was in a cow pasture, and their wells were infected with a toxic organism commonly found in cow dung.

So there is all this threat, from explosion or slow death by plastic. Real and present harms to the essence of life, water, and their current operation was causing illness to people who had never consented to this project passing through their lives and their watershed.

So we did what any sensible group of humans would do, we gathered up around 2 dozen of our closest friends and marched onto their active construction site in the early hours of the morning one cold January day in 2022, and me and my buddy P.K. locked our arms together and sat in the bucket of an excavator. And we live streamed it, because folks if a cop arrests a protester in the woods and no one's around to hear it, does it make a difference?

Sometimes it does, but often it helps to have an audience.

And we got arrested and dragged out of that bucket and issued a summary citation.

And we stopped their work for one night, another few hours, minutes, seconds won.

And less than a week later the pipeline was in the ground.

So we lost that fight.

But we won the next one.

Because when we went to court, me and PK, with our team and our community and our crack lawyer Jack, and the County accused us of breaking the law, we said not guilty.

And we said not guilty cause we had to.

We said not guilty cause we needed to.

We said not guilty because what else were we supposed to do?

We said not guilty because what would you have done that we hadn't?

What door would you have knocked, what power would you have used, what length would you have stopped at?

And the judge smacked the gavel and she said not guilty.

So this is a testimonial about a harm done to me and mine and a threat that we are still living under, the threat that is Mariner East 2 and Energy Transfer.

And it is a testimonial of what you can do, and what can be done to you.

So for me it starts again right here, where I'm up on my soap box, when next I'm getting to the ballot box, and let me give you a how to about getting past the jury box.

We argued a defense through necessity, and you can too.

What I learned in that courtroom that day, was that there is a way for a person, two persons, to shed charges like a corporation.

We needed to demonstrate these 4 things

1. There must be an immediate danger of harm
2. What you are accused of doing must be of a lesser magnitude of harm than the immediate, identifiable harm you are attempting to prevent
3. You have exhausted all other reasonable, legal strategies available to you
4. Is the kicker, what you are attempting has to work, you must be successful, in at least some way, of preventing the danger from becoming actualized.

We found a threat, learned it well, exhausted every lever of power available to us, and then, when it became necessary, acted in a fashion that exposed us to legal consequences in order to keep our communities safe.

And after that judge pronounced us Not Guilty, she thanked us for our peace, that when we were threatened with real bodily injury, the only ones we chose to risk further were ourselves.

That is all I feel I can justifiable risk. Just myself.

But I can ask you to, too.

Because Ecology without systemic change is gardening, and it will take much more than just me, just me and PK, just me and PK and 20 of our closest friends, much more than just the people here in this room to make those changes we need to survive fruitfully and without desolation as a species.

I can ask you to eat vegetarian at least 5 days a week, I do.

I can ask you to reduce the amount you drive, I do.

I can ask you to fly less, I do.

I can ask these things and still forgive you not, so long as you join me in working to fundamentally alter these systems that allow endangerment and exploitation of this delicate cradle of life we call our planet.

Fossil fuels cut my town in two, and it will need much more than two hands to heal the wounds these dirty feedstocks tear wide open.

Can the world have yours?

Thank you for your time.