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## Ed Begley Jr. speaks in Goleta

by Neil Hartstein | October 10, 2022 | 0 comment

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### Actor speaks about his career and the environment at Congregation B'nai B'rith



KENNETH SONG / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Barbara Greenleaf and Ed Begley Jr., also shown below, engage in a talk at the Congregation B'nai B'rith in Santa Barbara on Sunday.

One of actor Ed Begley Jr.'s first efforts to help the environment occurred back in 1970, when he found it hard to compost while living in an apartment.

So he filled a diaper pail with food leftovers he normally would toss, let it "ripen" for four or five days and dumped it in a hole on the side of some railroad tracks.

"Tomatoes started growing!" he told a packed audience during a Sunday interview at a Goleta synagogue. "It was the most neglectful garden you've ever heard of." He's grown vegetable gardens ever since.

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The audience laughed and applauded, two reactions he received often while telling stories about his twin passions of acting and environmental work during the interview at Congregation B'nai B'rith with ECO Team founder and author Barbara Greenleaf.



Bad news about the environment tends to dominate the headlines, focusing on such things as climate change, the loss of the polar regions, the growing frequency/strength of hurricanes and wildfires and seemingly never-ending drought.

But it's just as important to celebrate environmental gains over the years, he said, such as fewer major oil spills off the coast, a major reduction in "horrible," choking smog despite four times the number of vehicles on the road and millions more people living in Los Angeles, elimination of CFS use in air conditioners and refrigerators that increased the ozone hole, and increased use of solar panels and wind turbines.

"We all did this together," he said. "We've had great successes. It's kind of amazing." And more can be done, he said, promising "We can do this without going broke. But it must be a bipartisan effort."

He credited his father, actor Ed Begley Sr., with steering him not just into acting but also into protecting the environment. "He was an environmentalist without using the word," turning off lights and water when they weren't needed.

"He inspired me. He was a good man in so many ways."

Mr. Begley said he knew as a child that he wanted to be an actor just like his father, but noted that he would have followed in his father's footsteps no matter what he did. "If my dad was a plumber, I'd be fitting pipe right now."

Ms. Greenleaf went back and forth between asking Mr. Begley about his acting career and his passion to protect the environment.



Barbara Greenleaf interviews Ed Begley Jr. at Congregation B'nai B'rith in Santa Barbara on Sunday.

She asked him about his breakthrough role in the '80s on the hit show, "St. Elsewhere." He said he and his wife were struggling to make the mortgage when the phone rang. It was his agent urging him to audition for the show.

He didn't land the role, but accepted another that had just one or two lines in the pilot episode. That role blossomed into a six-year stint on the show, which ignited his full-time acting career.

Since then, he's worked on many television shows, movies and stage productions. His movies included "Going South" with Jack Nicholson and "She-devil" with Meryl Streep.

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Now 73 and still acting, Mr. Begley confessed that he was ready to retire at age 60 and take early Social Security, but then he was cast by director Christopher Guest in several of his movies. And his career took off again.

"I'm at the biggest point of my career, and have no desire to retire," he said. "I'm blessed to keep working at this age. I'll keep working till they stop me."

Asked if he was an actor who happens to be an environmentalist or an environmentalist who happens to be an actor, he said he's an actor who also happens to be good at carpentry.

But environmentalism, he stressed, is in his blood, and has been since he was a child who "hated to see waste."

He noted that way back in 1965, he got started as an environmentalist after returnable soda bottles with deposits he got to collect gave way to no-return, no-deposit bottles.

"You can always get somebody's attention when you take their money away," he said.

After the formal interview, it was audience members' turn to ask questions.

One asked if he pushed for environment-related changes while on set. He said he urged the placement of recycling bins, turning off car engines to stop pollution and opening the window instead of relying on air conditioning, and using recyclable paper for scripts or using digital PDFs.

He said he prefers the carrot to the stick when it comes to getting people to address environmental concerns.

"I don't like to do a lot of finger-wagging. I really don't. I try to offer suggestions if they're open to it. I try to encourage people to do the kinds of things I find are successful."

A second person asked his view on population growth. "We don't need a larger human population at this point than we already have," he said. "But I'm very hesitant to dictate how many children a person has."

And asked to pick between recycling dirty jars and bottles and using precious water to wash them out, he said if it's easy to wash he'll do the latter. Otherwise he'll throw out things like "dirty peanut butter" jars.

"We have to do our best to save water at every turn," he said. "It's something we all can agree on."

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