

## Genest spreads environmental message

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**Many Westmounters saw him in action at the Aug. 27 Meet the Candidates evening, and many more have seen his face on election posters throughout the riding. But just who is this Claude William Genest? And what motivated him to be so passionate about sustaining the environment that led to him becoming the Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Canada?**

Genest's roots are entrenched in Quebec, although he was born in Hollywood, California and he owns a home in Vermont, where he teaches at the University of Vermont as well as produces and hosts an Emmy-nominated TV show.

### Growing up in a big shadow

Genest's father was actor Emile Genest, one of the first French Canadians to make it in Hollywood. Emile got his start during the 1950s, when he was a leading character on the French Canadian television show *Les Plouffe*, a satire on life in Quebec. He was also a broadcaster in both languages for CBC radio, before the call of Hollywood, specifically a contract with Disney Studios, beckoned him west. There Emile and wife Anita became a family with the addition of their sons Claude William and Eric.

When the family returned to Montreal in 1969, Emile leveraged his *Mon Oncle Emile* persona to become a much-beloved morning radio talk show host. The family lived on Nun's Island and Claude William attended high school at St. George's in Westmount, from which he graduated in 1980. In those years too, on Nun's Island, Anita founded the first school, was president of first resident's association where Claude would later be the editor of the community paper.



**Green Party candidate Claude William Genest**

But in 1980 too, the referendum was playing out. Emile's stand with his life-long friend Claude Ryan was a very unpopular one, and Claude William's home life was changed forever with the arrival of a live-in bodyguard.

"My dad's stand cost him his career," he says. "A lot of French Canadians felt betrayed by his federalist stand, and the acting contracts dried up. But his stand for what he believed in, no matter what the cost, helped make me who I am today."

In addition to his father's passion for doing the right thing, Claude William also received his father's penchant for acting. When he returned to Canada, he focused on developing an acting career that led to starring in the Canadian police drama *Sirens*, which was syndicated to 52 countries, and hosting *Travel*, *Travel* on CTV.

But ever-present in his mind was the environment and learning how to sustain it. His heart and his talents started focusing on those issues. Last year, he was one of only 230 Canadians chosen to be trained by environmentalist and former politician Al Gore to deliver his *An Inconvenient Truth* slide show. ***"Al Gore really lit a fire under me"***

During that weekend of concentrated training, Claude William had another life-changing experience. "Al Gore really lit a fire under me, and I knew that was what I was called to do. At the end of the intense weekend, Gore told the participants the three most important changes we can make in our fight to sustaining the environment: policy, policy, policy. The way to accomplish that is to change laws. The way to change the laws is by getting into a place where you can change them. And so I turned my focus to politics."

#### **The art of sustainable living**

As his father, who stood for his beliefs no matter the cost, Claude William has invested his own resources, including his own money, in getting to a place where he can have a voice in policy making. He created, produced and hosts the PBS Vermont television show *Regeneration: the Art of Sustainable Living*. He has also developed a university level Permaculture course, the pioneering system of ecological design that led him to be recruited by the University of Vermont.

"This year we took 20 kids to the land in Vermont and worked hands-on with them, teaching them about how to sustain the food source through responsible agriculture. It was a life-changing experience for them and for us, their teachers, as we saw it is possible to teach the upcoming generation about sustaining the environment."