

CAN BIODIESEL SAVE US FROM EGOTISM?

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It all began in the summer of 2006 with the research proposal of an Augsburg sophomore, Brian Krohn.

The journey ends with a mass of brilliant possibilities, both realized and unrealized—the production of clean inexpensive biofuel from nearly inexhaustible, renewable sources, the operation of a full commercial scale plant with a capacity of three million gallons of biofuel per year, and as co-creator of the McGyan Process and author of *The Green Miracle*, Clayton McNeff, repeatedly states, perhaps a world of renewable energy that is not derived from food and that uses no water.

Early on McNeff makes sure that his readers are aware of such impacting consequences: “This is not a political story, but it is a story that unites all humanity in a common goal of clean energy and environmentalism.”

The Green Miracle tells the story of the development of a process that efficiently converts waste oils to biodiesel, and in the future hopes to open the door to using algae in the production of biodiesel. The creators of the McGyan Process, analytical chemist McNeff, Augsburg chemistry professor Arlin Gyberg, and scientist Ben Yan combined their names to coin the method that brought publicity for Augsburg and the state of Minnesota as movers and shakers in green research.

So what actually is the McGyan Process? McNeff is able to give a smooth, clean explanation of the science behind biodiesel production so that the book does not only have the purpose of informing the community how the discovery has evolved through our world of media and politics, but also allowing readers who aren't chemists understand the process itself.

McNeff is able to explain it in such a way that a person as non-science oriented as they get would feel confident in using the word “simply” to describe the process. Here I go: the McGyan Process began with “simply” using a stainless steel reactor filled with catalyst through which the reactants, methanol and soybean oil, could pass at an elevated temperature and pressure.

Also essential to the understanding of biofuel synthesis is the understanding of the catalyst. McNeff puts it into perspective: “A catalyst can be thought of like a store where you are standing in line to buy something. All of a sudden the store puts up a sign for 99 percent off of everything and opens up 1,000 times more checkout lanes, making it much cheaper and easier to buy the item.”

His easygoing tone throughout does not make the audience feel as if they are reading *Science for Dummies* but rather accredits the discovery as being what McNeff believes it to have been: a “miracle,” spontaneous and inexplicable. The inadvertent way in which these men stumbled upon this scientific discovery, a discovery that began with the curiosity of a college sophomore, does indeed cause it to resemble a “miracle.”

“When I use the term ‘miracle’ what I mean is an event that is so inexplicable and wondrous that its only explanation can be derived from the divine,” McNeff said. “Miracles are spontaneous and cannot be summoned or willed into existence.”

What isn't a miracle (and I'm sure our author would agree) is how us humans got ourselves in this mess, how we have turned our environmental reality into a “crude truth” of consumption, as McNeff puts it.

"Pulling up to a 'gas' station and pumping fossil fuels into your tank is depressing on many levels," McNeff said. "You feel guilty about the pollution it causes, angry that it is being supplied by dictators, and worried that you are breathing the carcinogenic vapors coming from it. How can we be so brainwashed to think this is acceptable?"

My question is, do we really feel guilt, anger and worry during our daily exploitation of fossil fuels? Have we really been brainwashed into acceptance of our "crudeness," or is it something else?

We don't feel guilty or angry or worried when we pump gas into our tanks, and we haven't been brainwashed; we've only become selfish. Our love for ourselves greatly outweighs our love for our land.

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