



# CLIMATE CHANGE ON FOR YOUNG & OLD

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## A Moral Crisis

Holly Mowbray

I am not a scientist or a meteorologist. I do not have a PhD, and for that matter, I have never even been to university. I am 16 years old and still trying to grasp the looming reality of entering into the complex adult world. All I know about the scientific aspect of climate change and the enhanced greenhouse effect is what I have been told at school and on the six o'clock news. However, I must admit, to me it means nothing. My jaw doesn't drop in horror when I read about 'the re-radiation of long wave infrared radiation'. It doesn't make me angry and I don't feel sick in my stomach. However, something else does have this effect on me. Every summer for the past three years, I have been a part of adventure sailing expeditions, run by my father, to the Antarctic Peninsula and around the fjords and glaciers of South American Patagonia. It was during these trips that the condition of the earth's biophysical environment really hit home. It became tangible. It became obvious. It became sickening. I clearly remember flicking through a travel book one day when we were tied up in a beautiful little anchorage that boasts one of the most well-known glaciers in the region, the Upsala Glacier. I came across a picture of what simply looked like an expanse of ice and snow, only the peaks of the mountains could be seen.

I had almost turned the page when the caption underneath the photograph caught my eye: Upsala Glacier, December 1928. I thought it must be some sort of a mistake. Outside was a cool, still, beautiful blue lake, surrounded by monstrous mountains only topped

with a dusting of snow, with the famous Upsala Glacier over to the right in the distance.

Standing on the deck, I held the book at eye level and compared the peaks of the mountains in the photo to the real ones several kilometres away. I was surprised to find that they matched perfectly. I was looking at a photo of this very place just a little under 80 years ago. But according to the photo the whole yacht should be sitting on a thick sheet of ice right now. How could this massive glacier that had once dominated the area retreat to such a miniscule little snowflake in comparison? What had happened to the world? At the time I had no idea that people all over the world were desperately trying to answer this question. Well, in the period from 1928 to 2006, the world's population increased more dramatically than ever before, and urbanisation and materialism in the developed world exploded in a need for new technology, transport, heating and cooling, oil, and so on. Basically, mankind demanded that the earth be stripped, exploited and put to 'good use'. It was an age of environmental imperialism and greed. It was a time of taking and taking and never looking back. 'Nature provides a free lunch, but only if we control our appetites' (William Ruckelshaus, *Business Week*, 18 June 1990). The generation before mine refused to stop eating. And now, that trait has become hereditary and has been passed down to my generation. Today we are still eating and eating and eating. When I stood looking at that glacier, I realised that we have eaten so much we are making ourselves sick.

I sit in class while we learn about the deterioration of the planet and how we can sustainably manage the degradation. I look around at the class, kids listening earnestly and frantically scribbling notes and think to myself: we are being trained, like soldiers, as if our future holds some great battle. We are being taught about the mistakes mankind has made and encouraged to write extended responses on how we are going to fix them. Sometimes I am sour and angry at the job my peers and I have been left with. Why didn't our parents think of us? But then when I go home and turn on the television and click the central-heating remote I am not thinking of my children. I am not thinking of the loss and embarrassment I will feel when reading them bedtime stories that describe magical creatures known as polar bears that have since become extinct, or when I remember the

pleasure I derived from watching a whale spurt water from its blow-hole. I do not think about the future droughts, floods, heat waves, cyclones and intense storms my family and friends will suffer through. Even as I sit here typing at this computer, I am a hypocrite. I realise that although I completely understand the importance of changing our lifestyle to change the planet, I still can't force myself to consciously alter my own life. It takes more than news reports and documentaries to change a culture of consumerism. I am one of the few individuals who have been able to grasp the reality of global warming. I needed a massive shock to my system, which came in the form of that photograph, to make me wake up. That is mankind. We all need a huge crisis, a tipping point, before we take notice. Unfortunately, by then it will be far too late.

I don't bother writing letters to local council and I don't lecture everyone I can on environmental issues. There is no point to all this statement-making, no point to all of this talking. I am tired of talking, I am tired of conferences and clipboards and management plans and agreements. My entire life, all people have done is talk about the problems. I will put in energy-saving light bulbs and I have started a compost bin and I always take the bus instead of driving. We are told every little bit makes a difference. But it is simply not good enough. Drastic measures need to be implemented to save our planet. People do not respond to kind pleading, they respond to legislation. It is as simple and as sad as that.

My dad once said, 'All I want is for my children to see an iceberg'. All I want is for my children to grow up in a world where icebergs exist. He got his wish, I can only pray that I will get mine.



**Holly Mowbray** wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 11 at Newcastle Grammar School in New South Wales.