



CLIMATE CHANGE ON FOR YOUNG & OLD

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A Crash Course

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I don't give two hoots about climate change. Well, I didn't use to anyway. During a conversation with a friend last year who is a self-confessed 'greenie', I admitted to her that I felt guilty for not taking more of an interest in the growing global epidemic that is climate change. At the risk of having to endure yet another of her spiels, I held my breath and braced myself for the karate-blow. Her response came somewhat to the tune of 'That's OK, I don't share your passion for gallivanting around on a stage either and would certainly never frequent a golf course'. Slightly harsh I thought, but I took it in my stride.

However, the conversation made me step back and reassess the situation — if she didn't embrace the opportunity with open arms to chase a little white ball around a paddock then that was one thing, but why didn't I care that deforestation is responsible for 25% of all carbon-dioxide emissions entering the atmosphere? The answer was simple — I had become completely numb to the situation. As the threat of climate change grows to become one of the most critical global challenges of our time, it is almost impossible to escape the dark cloud (noctilucent, of course) looming over the heads of society. Experts are even stating that climate change is becoming an even more serious threat than that of terrorism. After hearing so much about climate change and its threat to the existence of life on Earth, I felt it had almost lost its meaning. Terrible, I know — but it's true.

I was severely guilty of giving climate change the 'It won't happen to me — not in my lifetime' treatment, which in retrospect was

ridiculously naïve and foolish. However, Al Gore has hit the nail on the head — climate change is an inconvenient truth that most of us would prefer to stash away in a corner or run over with our petrol-guzzling Hummers. Comedian Lenny Henry also struck a cord with me — ‘The global warming scenario is pretty grim. I’m not sure I like the idea of polar bears under a palm tree’. After years of turning a blind eye to global warming and thinking El Nino was some Spanish popstar, I have finally woken up to myself and realised the serious threat climate change poses in relation to rising sea levels, melting polar caps and the mitigation of endangered species.

As Australians, we are proving to be one of the countries primarily responsible for this self-inflicted global crisis. In 2004, Australia released the equivalent of 564.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; that’s close to 30 tonnes per person — the most, per capita, of any country on Earth. This figure is alarming, given our relatively small population in comparison to other First World countries. What’s even scarier is that I am partly responsible. During a geography lesson last year we were required to calculate our ecological footprint using an online computer program. I watched in horror as the little pig on my screen exploded and told me that the extent of my resources and energy expenditure meant that I should have died at the ripe old age of 15. Additionally, if everyone lived like me, we would require 3.8 Planet Earths to facilitate enough resource. This came as quite a wake-up call, to say the least. There is good news, however. More and more Australians are beginning to jump on the bandwagon and following the efforts of others to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions by converting to ‘carbon neutral’ policies and practices.

Brad Pitt has one in Bhutan. Jake Gyllenhaal owns one in Mozambique. Leonardo DiCaprio has even purchased himself one in Leipzig, Germany. It seems that a private forest is the new ‘must-have’ among Hollywood’s finest A-listers. This is true — but not in terms of exotic getaways designed to dodge the paparazzi. Rather, Pitt, Gyllenhaal and DiCaprio are all doing their bit to offset their carbon emissions, and planting trees is the key to their quest. The jet-setting lifestyles of the rich and famous undoubtedly generate huge amounts of climate-changing greenhouse gases, but it is not just celebrities who need to curb their carbon emissions. Australians are being encouraged to follow a three-step formula in the effort to combat climate change. This

involves: reducing energy consumption through efficiency measures and low carbon fuels, converting to renewable energy and offsetting the emissions that you can't get rid of. There is a non-profit organisation in Victoria called 'Greenfleet', which is a company that aims to neutralise vehicle emissions through tree planting. The key to this is planting a mixture of native species in order to create complex ecosystems and increase biodiversity. For between \$10 and \$30 per tonne, you can invest in a wide range of tree planting projects to offset your carbon emissions without having to drastically alter your lifestyle.

Even closer to home, nestled in the heart of the CBD of Adelaide, is a remarkable example of individuals doing their bit to combat climate change. Last year I had the opportunity to visit Christie Walk — a medium-density community housing development based on ecologically sustainable living practices. Situated within a few minutes walk of shops, parks, theatres and the Adelaide Central Market, the transport energy demand of Christie Walk has been heavily reduced relative to suburban development. Vegetation and outdoor space are integral to the design space, and on-site water recycling that maintains minimal overall water consumption supports native plants with low water requirements. Additionally, the roof garden is enormously popular among residents and adds considerably to the site's aesthetic delight and biological productivity. In an era of rapid climate change, it remains to be seen whether this initiative can be repeated by political and business interest, in order to generate a sustainable future.

As a proud Australian, I don't want our reputation as a premier country to be masked by the fact that we are one of the frontrunners when it comes to contributing to the dangerous warming of our Earth's surface. Nor do I want my children or grandchildren to have to bear the burden of the self-imposed global crisis created by those before them. So even if you are just starting to get your head around the concept like me — we are all in the same boat when it comes to combating climate change. To quote the great Lord Alfred Tennyson — 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world'.



Jessica Burns wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 12 at Walford Anglican School For Girls in South Australia.