

Listen to the Dreamers

Where would I go? I'm sitting at my computer, staring at this year's prompt. *Where would I go?*

It's a simple question. I would travel back in time, back to when pollution came from natural forest fires rather than coal and when industrialization was just a far-off thought.

I laugh—time travel? For an academic essay? *Pah!* And then I think about it some more and decide to discard my caution and write this essay with my gut. It's not remotely scientific. And you know what? *That's okay.* We need more artists recruited in this fight. We need painters and poets and dreamers just as much as we need engineers and chemists. As a society, we don't view climate change as the danger it is, especially when it comes to public health. We overlook the increased rates of asthma and heat stroke and focus on the corruption of natural aesthetic—certainly a problem, but not the only one (Patterson). To fight climate change and its toll on our health, we need cultural change, and cultural change starts with the arts.

So I ask you to suspend your disbelief and get ready for me to try and change the world with a little bit of creative writing, a whole lot of caffeine, and a heart that cares so much about the planet that I swear it's powered by the same sap that pumps life through the trees.

I'm not sure how my time traveling adventure begins. Maybe I'm walking down the street when I trip over a trapdoor that leads to a machine. Maybe I stumble upon a natural rift in time during a romp through the woods. Either way, it happens, and I'm falling into rippling wind as eons rush by.

When the time machine spits me out, the first thing that strikes me is the air. It's so fresh it stings, so pure my eyes water. It tastes like honey, like pine and wet soil and sunlight and

wind. I thought the air I breathed while camping was clean, but no—that was nothing, *nothing* compared to this.

Trees stand like sentries around me, thorny and crawling with life. The entire world seems to stretch on forever—rivers of lapis lazuli and still-forested mountains. In the clean air, I feel five years younger. This is what I'm fighting for.

My phone still works, so I record as much of this world as I can, and then, dragging my feet, I return to my world. As much as I want to stay in this forest and breathe this air, I have to return. I have to return because I must try and save the remnants of the planet that we have smothered with gas and ash. I have to return because, between 1980 and 2013, it is estimated that climate change caused 2.52 million deaths, and that is not okay (Achakulwisut). I have to return because I have proof of what we are losing—our planet and our people. I have concrete proof of drastic change, and that is what we need to alter our worldview and pull the emergency brake on this climate change train that's hurtling toward an abyss.

Back in 2019, I cough on the gritty air and rub my eyes. My throat is tight and my lungs hurt and I can barely breathe, but I set my shoulders and take off down the street, feet pounding on the scummy pavement.

I begin with social media, with posters, with essays and pamphlets. I write poems and songs and share my photos with my family, my friends, my school, and my representatives.

My future, and the futures of my children and their children, depends on change. If left alone, climate change will displace countless people and promote a rapid and unprecedented spread of heat waves, storms, and infectious diseases (Lewis). So no, a small change will not do. We need revolutionary change. Change in every aspect in society, in every aspect of our being. I want to fight the mindset that centuries of wasteful consumption has bred—the mindset that

excuses preventable deaths as necessities for cheap energy. Too often do we place the responsibility of saving the world on the shoulders of the scientists. It's time we all took some of that weight. We all need to take arms against climate change and its deadly impacts. All of us. The children, the singers, the lawyers, the painters, the students... all of us.

I am no scientist, no genius. And so I'm fighting this with what I know best—words and stories. I challenge you to join me. To remember what climate change does. Like the four horsemen, it brings famine as it decimates farmland with drought, death as it chokes out water and calls forth storms, war as civilizations turn on each other to obtain scarce resources, and conquest as it eats up this planet one degree at a time. Look around and speak up, whether you are an engineer or a sculptor. No matter who we are, we all can and *must* bring forth a revolution. We can vote, we can take to the streets and protest, we can strike, we can trade our cars for bikes and our meat for vegetables. We can write letters to our representatives, write speeches and songs, do research and pay attention to new sustainable products. If we act now, we can protect the security and health of generations to come, but we must act *now*, all of us.

Remember the feel of a clear stream against your skin, the smell of lavender and the soft humming of nearby bees. Remember all of the lives that have ended and will end too early due to the unintended consequences of industrialization. Above all, listen to the dreamers. Listen to the dreamers, and dream up a revolution.

Works Cited

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