

Despair is a Reality, Inaction is Not an Option

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A political change must happen **now** if we hope to slow ecological collapse.

For over three decades, I have conducted scientific and conservation research on wild marine mammals in different parts of the world. Over the years, with thousands of hours at sea in the company of dolphins and whales under my belt, I've grown increasingly worried about these creatures and their ecosystems.

As a scientist, I know that stopping climate change must be at the top of my priorities because it is the most pressing threat our Planet is facing today.

The hard question is: *What can I do about it?*

In the midst of a pandemic, I find myself thinking a lot about this.

My concerns about the extent and depth of the ecological crisis we are now witnessing brought me to become more creative with my life, breaking free from the “regular” chores of a field marine biologist to embrace other things that I thought would have a bigger and more measurable impact on environmental issues.

But I still have the gnawing feeling that I am not doing enough for the oceans and the animals I came to study and love. I think I should be out there, wherever *out there* is, doing more; something more action-oriented than just doing field research, running an environmental nonprofit, writing books and articles about animals and the need to preserve nature.

I know I am not alone in asking *what I can do?* especially given that now in America we find ourselves choked in a pandemic and a political system that is destroying our environment piece by piece. My husband, an environmentalist and a writer like myself, asks this question. Most of my friends do too, except those who cannot bear to think about it because it’s overwhelming and only the mention of the topic upsets and depresses them.

There is a newly coined word for how many people currently feel about climate change: eco-anxiety, defined as “the chronic fear of environmental doom.” This is a modern phenomenon that creates a great sense of worry, inhibiting our ability to fight climate change.

Feeling despair is certainly a reality, particularly in the last few months. According to a recent but still pre-pandemic [survey](#), almost 70% of people in the United States are concerned about climate change, and around 51% feel helpless. So, add to this a hefty dose of Covid-19 and a deceitful White House and *voilà*, you wake up in the morning hoping that today’s bad news won’t surpass yesterday’s. But it usually does.

I don’t believe there is anything wrong with *feeling* worried. I do, for sure! But honestly, I don’t think that hiding my head under the sand and not addressing these issues is an option.

It’s the *what can I do* part that I still struggle with...

To feel like we are making a difference for our Planet, many of us recycle, ride bicycles, clean up a beach, plant a garden, avoid plastic, go vegetarian, click to support a campaign, sign a petition and vent on the social media channel of choice. And then life goes on.

But is this really enough to bring about the *immediate* changes needed?

On a personal level, my husband and I spend hours reading and discussing environmental and political issues. We are so frustrated that both of us, every day, try to do something, anything to make even a crumb of a difference.

My husband believes in being ruthlessly self-critical with one's actions so if I am truthful with myself, I am still doing close to nothing to address the elephant in the room.

The main problem is that the ecological crisis we are seeing *is* a political crisis.

The present, greatest danger to nature in America today is a political system that is slipping toward autocracy, as is well explained by Timothy Snyder in his book [The Road to Unfreedom](#). If we don't stop Mr. Trump in the upcoming elections, there is little hope for retaining the freedom we take for granted, reversing the environmental damage exacerbated by the current administration, and ultimately stopping climate change.

I never paid too much attention to politics. I don't particularly like politics.

I grew up in Italy where the government has been so deeply corrupt and rotten for such a long time that any attempt at fixing it seemed hopeless to most everyone. This is not an excuse for not being participatory in bringing the change that my country needed, and still needs, to get out of its grimy *status quo*. Then again, I never thought that Italy's actions or policies threatened anyone on a global scale as America's actions do.

I've lived in the States for over twenty-five years now. I became a citizen of the most powerful country in the world. Sadly, caring about the future as I do does not afford me the luxury of steering clear of politics anymore.

Trump *is* the elephant in the room; not only because he is completely downplaying the dangers of Covid-19 in favor of economic gain and personal fame, but more because climate change is not an issue that he or his administration cares about at all. The president (can't use capital P here, sorry!) has called climate change "an expensive hoax", "mythical", "nonexistent" or "created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive". Trump and his weak-willed *trumpettes* are clearly more preoccupied about the stock markets than the well-being of the Planet, or its people for that matter.

Right now, the main goal of this president is to retain power. At any cost.

That's why there is an urgent and crucial need to change our political course and reinstate trust and balance in our government. That's why, if I have to focus my efforts on *what I can do* today to help the Planet and preserve our freedom, I must choose to work to make sure that Trump does not get re-elected in November. Further, I must work to ensure that he does not suppress

open and fair elections or find a way to linger at the White House by questioning the results of the coming election. This is where I believe I need to concentrate my energies in the immediate future, as a biologist, an environmentalist and a responsible citizen of this country.

There is a lot of work to do to unseat Trump and his gang, and little time left to do it. I cannot make a difference alone and I don't think that preaching to the choir will help change outcomes. To get out of this political mess, I need to work with others in an efficient, united, action-oriented, systematic manner. My goal, as an individual with no special super-powers, is to figure out what my strengths are, and volunteer with one or more established organizations and/or campaigns that will promote *union* and a return to rational governance by November 2020 and beyond. Whatever I do, whatever I have, I should offer my help to groups that can bring change and derail a Trump dictatorship in the years to come.

Today is Sunday and it's a beautiful day. I am finishing this piece while in the next room my husband is hand-writing personalized letters to citizens in swing states asking them to vote. Concentrating on swing state voters that democrats failed to connect with in the past is one of the many ways to help move the needle on the scale toward a saner government. This is part of an effort organized by [Vote Forward](#). As of yesterday, he's written 260 letters, paying for stamps too. The other day, he wrote an op-ed on the creepy resemblance between Chad F. Wolf, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security and Paul Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda. We are not wealthy but we donate money to many organizations working to stop Trump, like [The Lincoln Project](#). This is not an organization of leftists. On the contrary, it is comprised of mostly republicans whose primary goal is to hold accountable those who violate their oaths to the Constitution.

Feeling despair is a reality and I don't have all the solutions on how to fix things, but I do know that inaction is *not* an option at this critical time in history. Otherwise, we become a part of the problem, with no right to complain about the outcomes.

Today, I am writing this article but I am already wondering if my time might be more effectively spent in doing what my husband is doing. Perhaps, now that I am done, I will write some letters.

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