

Hoping for a better future

by LAURA CAMPBELL

I try not to write too much about myself, but I want to write from the heart this week. I hope you're okay with that? here it goes:

HOPE. How do we find hope these days? I honestly don't understand how our politicians don't feel the same deep, existential dread that I do, every single day. I'm not trying to say I'm somehow morally superior to them- or that their apparent disinterest in our planetary crisis is evidence that they are somehow less righteous than I. I have no interest in that kind of comparison. No, I'm just genuinely curious how they are un-phased by climate change? It consumes me, this dread.

Life before this worry wasn't entirely peachy, of course. But I could manage a trip to Starbucks without being seeped in guilt. I first learned about the 'Tar sands' in 2007 (prior to it's PR driven rebrand to 'oil sands'). I was home for the summer and had started buying magazines on environmental issues and came across a massive article on what had been happening in Alberta. I was bewildered. Up until that point, environmental problems to me were about deforestation and freshwater contamination, endangered species, whaling etc., and I was only beginning to become aware of the true impacts of climate change. As a young adult, I wondered, how could they let this happen? Why was no one concerned about this? It was because hardly anyone knew. So I decided to join the effort, as a Greenpeace employee, to help make other Canadians aware of the environmental impact of this industry.

If in 2007 no one knew about it, by 2010, many certainly did. Over 500 migratory birds were killed after they had landed in one of the toxic tailings ponds near Fort McMurray. Nearly 10 years later, in 2017, ecologists admitted that there was no way to prevent ongoing deaths, since the tailings ponds are directly underneath the migration corridor of a variety of birds. That latter story is almost more depressing than the first, only because it represents a complete submission to the ecological reality of this industry: it's killing what is natural, and that is just something we're going to have to accept. So says Justin Trudeau, and Andrew Scheer, and Jagmeet Singh. Indeed in the words of our Prime Minister, 'We can't act on climate change, without robust oil sands development.' Southern resident Orcas? Be damned.

EXHAUSTION. I'm exhausted. I'm tired of reading the same old comments that sound like this: 'Oh yeah, well if you don't like OIL, you better ride your bike to work 365 days a year!' I get it. I do. It's frustrating to see environmentalists who don't model a perfect green lifestyle (full disclosure: one of our family vehicles is a small V6 truck, which we need for our business). But then again, when people DO see environmentalists fully committed to low-impact living, their habits seem unrealistic for the majority of us (and sometimes, even a little strange). But still, these arguments don't work; they don't make our need to save the environment any less valid. Imagine I said this to debt-obsessed conservatives: 'Oh yeah, well if you don't like DEBT, why do you have a mortgage and a credit card?? See? It doesn't work that way, and it's unreasonable. We all try our best, but the system we are living in has to change for the truly meaningful impacts to start kicking in. Instead it looks like me this week, convincing my 5 year old that the 4.6KM bike ride to school at 7:30 AM will be a total blast! (He is thrilled? for now.)

FEAR. I fear for my children, and for their children. And the children of the world. If we aren't consumed by resource-warfare in the next three decades, what will their futures look like? Take one look at what the scientists are telling us and you won't sleep well.

ESCAPE. Sometimes it helps to just tune it out for a little while. Earlier this week, my kids gently convinced me that they needed some new sneakers since they had outgrown theirs and riding their scooters is their new favourite past-time. We drove to the good-old-fashioned shopping mall, a place that my green social justice sensibilities doesn't love. We didn't eat a local, organic dinner, but it was yummy, nonetheless, and I was grateful for it, and to my Mom for joining us. The kids were giddy with delight at their bright new shoes?. I was happy for a hot minute until the guilt seeped back in. I used a credit card to pay for those; they weren't made in entirely ethical conditions- and the manufacturer does not monitor the supply chain; they came over to us on a tanker from China; the dyes used probably poisoned water somewhere; and so on and so on. There is no escape. Hence why I ask, if you know all of these things, like I do, and you're in public office, why isn't your worry driving you to action? Why aren't you trying to change our systems? Building a more equitable and sustainable world?

But maybe there is HOPE. There has to be! A few weeks ago, I had the distinct pleasure of joining local high-school students at a #FridaysForFuture climate change strike in front of our local politicians' offices. The group gathered in demand for meaningful action on climate change. It was a lovely group of people, peacefully urging MPP Sylvia Jones to use her power to DO something meaningful to address this issue. Hope also came in the form of our Premier admitting that climate change was truly the cause of the flooding happening across the province. Instead of angrily asking why he hadn't done more to address the crisis, I felt a small ounce of relief. Maybe, just maybe, he will come around. We have to hope. Because we can't lose another three years to inaction. Please call your representatives today.