

00:06

I grew up in Australia's Tropical North Queensland, fishing frogs from the toilet and dodging snakes that hung from the ceiling. Wetting down old sea turtles stranded at low tide outside our house. I spent more time outside than in, delighting in the wonders of nature. By age 11, I wasn't allowed to watch horror films, so I turned to documentaries instead. "The Cove," "Food, Inc.," "An Inconvenient Truth."

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The first time I experienced heartbreak was when I sat glued to my computer screen, staring at mass dolphin hunts that turned the shoreline red. Staring as million-year-old forests were bulldozed to produce Big Macs, staring as Al Gore projected graphs that showed how quickly we were devouring the Earth. And how good we were at pretending otherwise. The second time I experienced heartbreak was in November of 2019, as I watched my country go up in flames. As one billion animals were incinerated by the inferno. As friends tried to rescue their homes, poised on tin roofs, armed with hoses until the smoke and embers clung to their clothes. I felt despair. Grief. Frustration. Fury. And staring at that wall of fire higher and more ferocious than any I'd seen before, I felt helpless, small, powerless to stop the flames, powerless to protect the place I love.

02:16

Australia's black summer was soon followed by the firestorm in California as their summer rolled around, as well as flooding in Jakarta that displaced 100,000 people. More violent hurricanes along the east coast of America and biblical plagues of locusts that threaten the food supply for millions of people in East Africa.

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Young people today have not created this reality. We've inherited it. Yet we're told where the last generation with a chance to save the fate of humanity. Is it any wonder that there is an epidemic of mental health problems? Eco-anxiety is on the rise and young people seem to be some of the worst affected. Research from 2019 showed that in the UK, 70 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds were feeling eco-anxious, feeling helpless, grief, panic, insomnia, even guilt around climate change. Environmental disaster is the biggest mental health issue of our lifetimes and in our war against nature young minds are the collateral damage.

03:43

At my own organization, Force of Nature, we've witnessed the same on a global scale. We've been talking to students in over 50 countries from Tel Aviv through Jakarta, New York to Managua. All of them have shared this existential dread that keeps them up at night. Dread not only fueled by doom scrolling, but by the belief that adults, especially adults in power, do not care.

04:16

When I first discovered documentaries, I decided the world was run by people who were selfish and greedy, that the rest of society didn't care. That we humans were a plague on our own planet. I've since spent the past 10 years lobbying decision makers across business, policy and civil society, working with students in the classroom and chief executives in the boardroom, and I can tell you that my bleak outlook, while in some ways right, was in more ways very, very wrong.

04:55

Picture yourself as a senior executive at a big multinational. In the 25 years you've been climbing that corporate ladder, you've been told your job is to make money and maintain the status quo, to deliver value to shareholders, to avoid the kind of risks that could cost you your job. You recycle. You share climate change articles on LinkedIn. You even went vegetarian two years ago, after watching a documentary on mass farming. Yet when you come home at the end of the day, you get the sense that your kids see you as the problem. They wish you were the climate change protester gluing themselves to the glass tower, not the person sat inside the building.

05:49

When I first started working with people in power, I was surprised to realize that they often felt the least powerful of all, and most of these leaders perform mental gymnastics to get away from those uncomfortable feelings. Young people today are falling into despair while the adults in our lives are making sense of the situation through denial. When I ask leaders to describe the future they envision, it's something of a techno utopia. Flying cars in a world where deadly diseases are eradicated. Yet when I asked eight and nine-year-olds in the classroom the same question, the future they describe is a dystopian blockbuster. Empty supermarket shelves. Cities underwater. The kind of place no one wants to find waiting for them when they grow up.

06:54

You might find comfort in denial. Numbing yourself to our hyper-consumptive culture, sleepwalking, even though the science tells us that we're hurtling toward the cliff. You might feel

despair, like so many of my generation. Because while feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, can wake us up to the issues, they can crush us if we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. Neither despair nor denial help anyone. They cause us to shut down, to remove ourselves from the picture. Denial erases our responsibility. Despair lumps us with all of it. The story of denial sounds something like, "It's not up to me, because someone else will fix it." The story of despair sounds like, "It's not up to me because it's too big to fix." Do you hear the similarity? Despair and denial might appear to exist on polar ends of the generational spectrum, yet they stem from the same place. How powerless we feel. All of us. I believe that the threat, even greater than climate change, is how powerless we feel in the face of it, concerned moms and dads, cautious corporate leaders, anxious 11-year-olds. And I don't believe we will solve this crisis or act on the many opportunities it presents us with until we've mobilized mindsets.

08:47

So how do we shift out of despair, out of denial, towards something radically different? There's a quote in "Spider-Man": "With great power comes great responsibility." Yet what if the opposite is true? What if it's really "with great responsibility comes great power?" This is something that all of the world's movers and shakers have known to be true. They weren't born leaders. They simply decided to make themselves personally responsible. Now, solving climate change is not your responsibility because it's outside of your control. What you are responsible for is the thing inside your control, indeed, the only thing that has ever been inside your control. Your mindset. We all have stories running on repeat, stories that immobilize us, stories the world impresses upon us in boardrooms and classrooms alike. "I'm just one in 7.8 billion people, I'm too small to make a difference." "I'm not smart enough." "I don't have the experience." "I'm not the expert." "The system is too broken, our leaders too shortsighted, our society too shackled to the status quo." These stories paralyze us. Rewriting them is the single most powerful thing anyone of us can do for the planet and for ourselves.

10:33

Now ask yourself. Which story gets in the way of you taking action? Then think of the one thing you could do to challenge that story. If your story is that you're not smart enough, you could challenge it by focusing on the skills and talents and gifts that you bring to the table. If fashion is your passion, how do we reimagine our relationship with clothes to be fully circular? If you love making food, how do we stop a third of it from being wasted every single day? If you're a talented musician, how do we communicate the urgency of climate action through a universal language? If your story is that the system is too broken, the problem is too big to fix, visualize what it would look like for you to focus on a single problem. The climate crisis is the symptom of many interconnected problems, from food waste to fast fashion, social inequality to how we've divorced ourselves from nature. Every problem requires a solution. A solution delivered by a someone, like you.

12:02

When you look back on your own life, what do you want to see? Will you have chosen despair, denial, or something different? Will you have been a spectator to our planet's problems or the person who did something to fix them? What will your story be?