



Creative Writing
2019

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NEVER FORGET

Akhila Bandlora, U.S. ARIZONA
Project ID 1655

i.

the girl with sea foam fingers writes letters
on napkins left on beaches like loose change,
words stumbling down staircases of five-seven-five haikus:
i want an ocean,
the one mama whispers of,
when she eats, sleeps, prays.
she ties them to the webbed foot of a seagull,
and sends them to the governor:
“we are the tide and we are coming.”
he laughs, the kind of laugh that corrodes,
and lulls the seagull to sleep with plastic wrappers and bottles,
throws the napkins away to land up exactly where the girl found them, and dips his pen into the seagull’s carcass to sign a bill
for a factory to dump their industrial waste into the ocean
— man-made trash can.
The girl’s eyes are seismic; the world shifts.

ii.

It’s 1972,
the year oysters pearl, fish jump, and crabs claw;
the girl trades her haikus for ballads, her flat chest
for fruit cup breasts, their apathy for her unrest
the sailors; they call her a woman.
she gargles the sea in her mouth to remember why she’s fighting, pulls trash left on beaches and from washed up animal carnage,
dumps it on the governor’s desk—
“the tide is here”—
chants reduce, reuse, recycle outside the homes of oil-guzzling men, she leaks into classrooms; salt water ferments the walls,
and teaches her children how to protect;
the world watches her,
until its eyes cataract,
teeth chip,
lips parch,
and ears burst.
And finally, it listens—
births the Marine Mammal Protection Act,
MPRSA, the ocean dumping act,
holds the UN Convention on the law of the sea—
All promises to defend.
she smiles,
whistles to the whoosh of the waves,
and shows her children how to protest; The fight is not over.

iii.

It’s 2019,
where climate change is an alternative fact,
the ocean an afterthought instead of a forethought; but it’s still her first thought.
her bones soft like coral,
hair long like coast and gray like gravel,
voice throaty as a frog’s;
her battle ending,
the war still raging.
her children, we revolt
when our president pulls out of the Paris Agreement, elects a denialist to run the EPA,
cuts its budget by thirty percent,
we grab conch shells and march on—
“the ocean is rising and so are we”—
the woman braids kelp through her hair,
washes her body with the sea,
tells us to never forget,
and we say we never will.

YOUR TIME IS HERE SHORT

Raveed Dewan, BANGLADESH
Project ID 1682

Although your time is here short,
You make it even shorter, Human!
Ruining all and not thinking about that
You and your children will have to live in it.
Stop and think for a moment, please
What the world is like in which we live
"The world is big," – your answer will be.
"What will happen, if there is no beauty?"
"It won't make the people fewer."
And can you be sure of your answer?
You say that a common thing is deforestation.
Think about the future of another generation.
Will they see "endangered" lives?
Will they be living peacefully in their homeland?
What is to come for humankind?
"Hell" or "paradise" until the end of the century?
The problem will only be resolved
If we together care for the nature.

100 YEARS LATER

Mohamed Hossam Fekry, EGYPT
Project ID 1689

I am here after a 100 years,
I see nothing but tears,
Getting confused, where am I?
The disaster is in front of my eye!
I am suffering, I can't breathe!
I can feel the earthquake underneath,
Folks are running all over the place,
What I am watching, is other than the human race,
Wondering about what happened! what is the case?
Trees are burning all over the ground,
Greenness is nowhere to be found,
What I am watching can't be our land,
For overcoming it I need a helping hand,
This isn't anymore the scent of our sand,
And for all of this I'm outrageously mad,
Am I hallucinating! or what I'm seeing is true!
For what I am going to do I have no clue!
I can't differentiate between a friend and a foe,
For what's going to come, I don't know!
Changes that have happened are unfavorably massive,
I don't want to do nothing! I don't want to be passive,
Open air is full of contamination,
Breathing without a mask is giving death a confirmation,
Men are suffering in every nation,
Our civilization is getting destructed,
The environment got brutally humiliated,
I envy our ancestors who lived in the past,
They haven't witnessed it being abominable as fast,
People are panicking, people are scared,
They all think that, soon they will be dead.

SUN KISSED THE NATURE

Marija Brajkovska, MACEDONIA
Project ID 1744

We wonder where the sun will set,
But we never ask on what it'll happen upon that day.

Will it caress the timid lake waters,
Once glistening and blue?
Or will it shine on the leaves of green,
That once cast a shadow as heavy as the moon?
Will it warm the wind carrying pollen in bunches,
From fields now turned to houses and buildings in the dozens?
Or will it tell all the animals that it is day,
But what of those that have long since gone away?

The sun will always set on the horizon in front,
But if nothing is done,
There won't be any flowers to smell,
No animals, fields to graze,
No water clean enough to drink,
No trees or any of nature's entities.

We must think of how to reduce our footprint of carbon,
Our polluted waters,
Our desolate forests,
Our only planet.
This is the only way we can still enjoy,
The wonders the sun can show.

NATURE WILL PREVAIL

Baruc Elimelec Castillo, MEXICO
Project ID 1908

The mountains rose beyond the lands we see,
the mounts where beasts could wander ever free;
the forests filled their kingdoms vast with tree
 beloved by waters clean from all the sea,
 and few could ever touch the grasses green
that once restored the hearts of hollowed mien
as they remember days that none has seen,
that once enjoyed the valiant, daring teen.

Have we forgotten times when hurting need
was cured by herbs and crops with running speed?
Have we forgotten days when all agreed
that valleys seemed designed for glorious deed?
I do recall when friends would show their grin
while stirring boats in wars of row and spin,
below ravines pronounced by Nature's kin.
I do recall what lakes of joy could pin.

We loved the nights of splendor trapped around,
but why have trees of old concealed their sound?
The mountains now are lost within the ground,
and rivers die in olden memoirs drowned.
I lost their sight to cities built with stone,
to draining sewers made with Nature's throne;
we traded moments full of loving tone
for lights of lust that look like Devil's own.

When treetops fell to mines of burning coal,
when freedom lost its will to working toll,
the clouds above could usher only soul
of kindness far beyond the lands of prole,
and nations tried to tame the winds that ruled
the sky and dreams of little birds had cooled;
they ran towards their end by hatred fooled
and followed dark delusions cruelly tooled.

By trying vainly still to stand and thrive,
insane became the men that could not shrive
what pains he caused to Nature's aching strive,
to plants that fought to grow and stay alive.
Unending lakes would men in need defile,
would spoiling children fill with actions vile,
and streets would all surviving meadows tile
and mark with oil the fish they would exile.

The problem stands as one: the people sleep.
The many wish their rulers worked to keep
the world as safe as it had been when sheep
could run and all their food in silent reep.
The many, thinking they remain beneath,
have covered, hid their words behind their teeth,
for they believe their hopes can just bequeath
and fall below the strained and shattered heath.

Delivered truth should be that we must work,
together, free from those above that smirk

against what change in us may live and lurk;
delivered truth may say we crash this cirque
and lift our hammers high to stop this doom,
that we renounce to waiting, light the gloom
that covered mounts we shared in young perfume.
Delivered truth may say we rise and bloom.

Are we but nails for coffins made to bury
what nature gave us hoping we were merry?
Are we but slaves that die in march unwary,
that slowly follow evil masters "scary"?
We are the many: sure to lift the weary,
to carry the feeble and sick beyond the dreary,
to follow the mountains, go against the theory
that binds us to death, against the eerie.

The trees and plants that bravely give us fruit,
and die unable still to brake their mute
enchantment, wait for us to raise dispute
and wait to see us fight to save their root.
So we must thrive to build the tools that shall
transform their future, tools that build the hall
of Nature once anew, for not a fall
will stop the warriors always standing tall.

The rivers shall return with morning smell,
with more adventures we will live and tell,
because we can achieve ourselves as well
as worlds entire, even to march in hell.
Against the tides of time and deathly veil,
the grasses green will heal with strong avail;
the power we possess can turn the tale,
so let us say that Nature will prevail!

ENVIRONMENTAL STATE OF MIND

Victoria Candice Silkiluwasha, TANZANIA

Project ID 2044

Created this world became from the very beginning by the Most High,
Theory after theory, from the Big Bang to endless night tales of the galaxies beyond the skies,
But still I only recall a perfect world in the sense that there was blue light above us and green grass and vegetation under our feet,
Where the weather could not be foretold but still managed to be amazing.
Where'd the issues begin before or after humans came?
Did we truly change things for the better or the worse?
Did we come to damage and clam it as to innovate?
If were saying orange is the new black, are we trying to make black the new green?

Pollutants travel like air where the birds called home, but can no longer fly,
We are the humans
We made a device that can help someone communicate with another 100miles away
But we still can't pick a piece of paper on the street,
We're just simply too busy.
The earth is a truly patient place
It gave us everything it had
But we squandered it all cutting down trees in claim of development.
What? Who? Where are we developing?
Let's break it down,
Look back and see what you've done:
Is it you who made us live in this state?
Or did you try to make the earth a better place?
When it reaches the end, who's truly to blame?
Actually,
No one!

I know it's hard to believe but you can be the one who changes everything.
You don't have to be rich or powerful
You don't have to have a monument for your sake,
All you simply need is the purest of intentions,
The clearest of thoughts,
The environmental state of mind,
To change what we've done,
To turn the wrongs to right, it's time to fight.

No more extinction for petty wealth,
No more having to go to Google to get a pretty pic to fulfill your feed needs.
It's about time we make this world what we want it to be,
Stop dreaming and let's wake up to achieve.
Let's be the space makers,
Creators
And innovators
Let's make this world greater than what God designed it to be.

A DROWNING WORLD

Ivana Matoska, MACEDONIA
Project ID 2083

A drowning world,
Stroll down pavements,
feel the air turn heavy.
See how headlights,
grow bolder than the sun.
Chug some water,
feel chlorine dissolving,
lungs pledge for greenery
but have nowhere to run.

Worlds turn into Tumblr posts,
screens twist our mind,
pierce through our pupils
Till our wild eyes burn blind.

And we fail to cherish
sunrises and sunsets
whose colors we don't meet,
or constellations blocked by fake lights,
twinkling to our defeat.
We know little
of what isn't concrete.

And now rays melt our Junes
and ices numb our Decembers.
We come home on evenings,
and carry smell of embers.

Our water tastes like acids.
our air pierces through our ribs.
Fish are swimming upside down
Through all the waste we've missed.
We've stretched our hand toward our skies
And gifted them with smoke.
Now hope of new horizons lures
Because our world's hope broke.

Because that world slipped my parent's palm,
made peace with their defeat.
And now its bubble cracks beyond us
And sinks below our feet.

Wildfire,
Screams of the forest,
spread through firestorms.
Spread like black smoke
Spread with the heat.

Interlacing the whispers of the wind
as it grieves the fury of the flames
but then follows their footsteps
and sways them through terrains.

The wildfire takes shapes.
and glares at distant ranges.
To perceive the forest
and its moods and its changes.
It becomes the cry and rasping roar.
Becomes a bird cutting through embers
And the wolf's shadow tracing his flee,

because a spark made a choice to be free.
Becomes the lullaby of a wounded eagle's cry,
Sinking its feathers in pools of chestnut gloss
It becomes the jumpy skip of young fawns,
their glazed eyes seeking what they've lost.
It becomes the whisper beneath the ashes
that mimics the heartbeats of hollow wood.
It becomes the shame of defeated oaks
crumbling hasty where their fathers stood.
Becomes the smoke of the mist as it passes
To never reveal the smell of fresh grasses.
It lives in the hope before the riots of foxes
It feeds from the moment of a painful cry,
and the burning sensation of a fire
and its red reflection against the sky.
It is in the whips of piercing flames
Cutting through the mountain tops.
It is in the pull of a rising fire
who kills before it knows its stops.

It lives in the morning after destruction
to seek joy in what we failed to suspire.
Lures in the souls of life among the woods
exhaling death rattles under the wildfire.

The Badlands,

Set your glance at a painted reality
try to make sense, in shades we can't invent.
Answer why we butcher what gives us life
and drown it in destruction's scent?

Picture our Earth before we took it for granted,
Before it started sliding off the tip of our hands.
Before our Earth had to fear it's atoms.
Before we engulfed our mistakes below its lands.

Dare to look at what frames our horizons, Imagine
it in tints growing endlessly green.
A single speck is more majestic by a thousand
than all the paved city squares we've ever seen.

We were born in the nib of time when Earth is forlorn.
Threatened by the sharpness of piercing iron boxes.
In a world where waste dissolves in our oceans
and the air that fills our beings chains to toxins.

We fail to see what slits our home by its scars,
to see what drags it from within and around.
We remain blind to our own undoing
we remain deaf to our own sound.

All we do is meet more hurdles, with dead ends ahead.
and pray for the kind mercy of distant raging suns.
pray on the hopes of homes to claim as our own.
When gloomy smoke spreads through our fragile lungs.

But once we hear the wilderness cry hopelessly,
when we find trace of chemicals sinking in the sand.
And scents of our favorite fruits become bland.
When we scream in extraordinary voices
at a lifeless atmosphere stretching above our lands,
know we drowned our seas in acids
and buried Earth with our own hands.

THEY ARE NOT HERE ANYMORE

Dosali Bopoev, BANGLADESH

Project ID 2178

The day will come and most of us will ask:
‘Where are the trees that used to give a shade, to give us fruit?
Where are the flowers that used to bloom?
Where are the ants that used to be hard-working days and nights?’
They are not here anymore...

‘Where are the cows that used to give us milk, to nourish us with meat?
Where are the swallows that used to bring the spring?
Where is the grass that used to make all food?’
They are not here anymore...

It’s time to make us realize that all we’ve done is wrong.
What if we ask at last?
‘Where is the Earth that used to suffer from our mistakes and bad attitude?’
We did not value the resources that Mother-Nature gave,
We did not save the planet, the only our planet
We did not wish to leave it for our children and grandchildren
If we could change this state while it is not too late
Or maybe late already...

DYING WORLD

Kemal Atajanov, TURKMENISTAN
Project ID 2194

I wonder if it is our destiny to witness a dying world
While it still whirls, please do not ignore the Earth
And try to give global pollution a wide berth
Let all of us cherish and protect our dwindling legacy
By stressing the value of environmental integrity

Pollution is ubiquitous, when are at home or we are homesick
These lights are so bright, though the world is asleep
Where is the night? That the soothing darkness we need
Notion of the sky full of stars sounds obsolete
We are losing natural beauties and it is deeply saddening
Knowing the fact that the celestial sight is a victim of artificial lightening

This world is our realm we have to defend
Why do we destroy something that we sorely depend
On everything it includes, from fertile soil to invaluable air
Why be hostile and defile the world that is so dear

Don't you think we are being unfair?
By letting smoke to choke the atmosphere
No air to inhale, fill your lungs with despair
Once healthy, unsullied, and tranquil globe
Is dying because it is on the polluted slippery slope

Dark and grey clouds are covering the sky
We are in need of more trees that no one can deny
Deforestation does not mollify global issues, rather intensifies
So, why do we cut forests down, opening environmental wounds
I can almost hear greenwoods' wailing sounds

An aquamarine vastness diluted with trash
Tons of garbage piled up as waves constantly splash
On shores, we witness an unbearable sight
By throwing more rubbish, we are rubbing salt to world's gash

Construction, transportation engines and their traffic
Create enough sound to deafen the Earth, it is so real and tragic
Plus this noise is driving people into state of manic
And all these pollutions are causing rise of panic

So please, my dear friend, add your voice to mine
Share my pain and let our powers intertwine
In order to make the idea of "Revival of the World" real
We are not giving up because we are the shields of the realm

THE LAST BREATH

Anadya Hill, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 2226

Nights of dreams
Nights of nightmares
Outlets sparks
Burning curtains
Children sleep
Parents unaware
Flames burning
Smoke and ashes.

Cries for help in the attic
Where nobody can hear
Parents too late.
Sirens red and blue flashes of light
Fear of losing there life.
Children slowly fading away
Firefighters fighting.
Flames nonperishable.
Mothers and fathers,
Haunted screams,
Names repeated.

Breath being taken away.
Fire stealing memories
Locked in but not forgotten.
Flames growing wilder and wilder.
Families praying for protection ladders unable to reach.
Whispers of help.
Last words spoken
I love you.
The last breath.

NOTHING

Jamirah Tookes Muhammad, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 2230

The fires are spreading quickly,
thanks to the wind.
Flames jump the freeway,
just to get to the other side.
You can see the flames spread all through the hills.
Smoke filling the California air.
So toxic, people have to wear masks.
I have no time for particles in my lungs.
My nose can't handle it.
They are getting out of control.
They can not be stopped.
Causing destruction,
Anywhere that they reach
People getting evacuated from their homes.
People losing their jobs.
People losing their businesses.
People losing their lives.

We care more and grieve
for whom don't have much.
You never know,
Their house could have been all they had.
Thanks to these fires,
they now have absolutely...
Nothing.
Death toll has grown
while the flames grow.
Burning forest all through Southern California.
Poor Calabasas and Malibu.
Poor Paradise.
Poor People, who have all lost their lives,
family members, homes, and jobs.
Because now, they feel
that they have absolutely
Nothing.

WHAT A SUNNY DAY

Huda Ali, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 2232

You go outside, feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin.
The sun is so bright that you can barely keep your eyes open.
You hear laughter of kids as you stroll on by,
followed by a faint smell of something burning.
But you shake your head, willing it away.
“What a beautiful, sunny day,” you think.

You smile as you see a flock of birds flying overhead.
Wondering where they’re going,
you notice something weird.
The discolored grass cracking with every step you took.
“Strange....” you think
*Sniff *Sniff*
A sudden heavy smell of burning wood overcomes you.
You slowly look up....
You fall back flabbergasted at the sight before your eyes.

Fire
E V E R Y W H E R E
The air is thick with smoke that you almost choke.
Children you thought was laughing screaming for dear life.
Birds that you thought were happily chirping were desperately trying to flee.
Feeling an itch on your arm you scratch it carelessly.
Petrified you look at the peeled skin underneath your fingernails
“RUN” you tell yourself, but your feet are left planted to the ground.
“RUN NOW!”
You start to feel hot.
Burning hot.
Your skin more red then the color itself.
As if you’re melting into the earth.
You then realize it’s too late.
What a sunny day indeed.

RED UNIFORMITY

*Yhadia Wilson, U.S. NEW YORK***Project ID 2234**

I'm right around the corner when I stop in fright.
It's the same loud sounds,
The same flashing blue lights.
My heart starts to race
and now I see the storm.
Cause these men will take my life
and hide behind their uniform.

He stops me and asks for my ID.
Then all sudden,
I hear my neighbors scream,
"Shut up, I don't wanna hear a sound!"
I comply cus' I'm not tryna die on this ground.
He pulls out his gun and says put ya hands high
I freeze right there, it's getting harder not to cry.

This is normal, it happens all the time.
They say all lives matter,
But does that include mine?
I know the simple fact is...
The people we are supposed to trust,
Are the same people who are killing us.
They don't care about us
We are nothing more than an epilogue.
We put all these "killers" in high positions
Like wearing the latest Jordan's, I guess this is a trend
But ask yourself one question, "when is this going to end?"

PEN STROKES

Yahshona Jackson, U.S. NEW YORK

Project ID 2236

Class clown, underlined frown
Make it out?
Will I?
Making wonders with a pen?
Never expected to win.
Motivation running slow
I'll only make it if I pick up a pen.
Ready,
Set,
Go!

Off to a slow start
Will I win the race?
I'm at a disadvantage already.
Drugs and alcohol mislead with no trace
I am strong, fighting the temptations
Throwing me almost equal with the white race
No room for hesitations

Being black with no pen is rough.
Being black with a pen is never enough.
We are looked at as dollar sign
Looked at as a threat through thicker lines

I will make it out with every written assignment.
Spending the most time alone in my room.
Solitary confinement.

I write the future and about the past.
My pen strokes will never run out of ink.
I won't ever finish last.

SUMMER DAY

Brenden Reilly, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 2237

Clean water everywhere.
Fish jumping for joy like kids over a jump rope.
On this blue skies, sunny summer day.
Waves crashing onto the beach.
“Splash, Splash” in the water from the families swimming and splashing.
Sights of children laughing and playing, and parents reading every where.
Smells of barbecue and flowers blooming everywhere.
Fathers fishing with their sons, catching all types of fish.
Place where family and friends have a place to cool down.

Little know of the death to come,
Oxygen from the water depriving,
Mercury seeping in,
Pollution sneaking into the water,
Factories, factories over there.

Polluted water everywhere,
Waves crashing on the shore that was a beach,
No more kids splashing in the water,
Shores filled with dead animals not families and friends.
Smells of chemicals and dead fish everywhere.
Toxins, toxins everywhere.
Two headed fish caught over there.

People remembering of what this lake was
not what it is.
Grandparents telling stories and showing photos
Because they know no one will experience a nice summer day again,
Cleaning every day
But this is one mistake humanity made,
That can not be fixed,
On this summer day.

IF HE WOULD HAVE STAYED

Zyreeanah Shepard, U.S. NEW YORK

Project ID 2238

He should have stayed in school,
But he dropped out and joined a gang.
He should have stayed home that night,
But instead he went to that house.
If he had just listened to his mother
He would not have pulled that gun out,
But he did and that is the point.
But he did not stay in school,
And he did not stay home that night,
So he dropped out school, and went into that girls house.
Pointed that gun,
and let it run through her head.
Instead of making a his point he took someone's life.
If he just stopped to think about his actions, and who he would hurt.
Maybe there would have been a different reaction.
He took away someone's daughter.
He should have come to his senses,
And thought about the consequences of his actions.
I could have been a different story.
One where the girl could live another day
rather than leaving in a body bag.
And the boy could have finished school and not living the life of felon.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Kenedee Romer, BAHAMAS
Project ID 2294

Enough is enough
When will we realise, enough is enough?
The tears of Mother Earth fill the empty void that we are nothing without.
Vibrant color paint the aesthetic canvas that we so easily destroy.
Crisp breezes flow through the air,
Pleading for help, yet no one listens.
We cry out to our planet Earth,
Yet have a silent ear to her disconsolate cries.
We throw trash in our seas,
Fishes who once danced and happily lived
Lurk gloomily underwater- decreasing in population.
Our forests are dying.
With the bellow of each towering tree hitting the ground
Critters and creatures dependent on the forests fearfully flee.,
The temperature of our globe is rising, ascending, soaring
Like a sick child with a dreadful fever.
We are all fighting the same battle,
But we are so oblivious to the war cry.
When will we realise?
Enough is enough.

What If?
What if the earth could speak?
Then would we act differently?
Odious pieces of trash wanderessly floating
Catching the eye of innocent sea animals.
What if the ravishing blue dolphin
Suddenly sinks down, never popping up again,
The burdensome weight of the plastic dragging it down.
What if the trees could talk?
Screaming in agonizing pain
As their rings fade and they hit the ground-
Never to stand tall again.
What if we could understand the air's whisper?
With each breeze that flows, allowing us to hear
Horror stories of toxins and molecules conquering its space.
Yet, what if we took a stand?
For the birds, the trees, the water, the air-
For our dearest mother Earth.
What if we took the challenge one step at a time
And fought for everything worth fighting for?
What if we listened more closely to the earth's shout?
And not only try to help, but also shout so that others may hear.
What if we thought less and acted more
And give our planet a small token back for her generosity.
We would hate to see the blue and green flame
That sparks a light and hope in so many go out.
I could make a change.
You could make a change.
We could make a change.
What if?

ENCHANTING SHADE

Ayzat Bekmurzaeva, KYRGYZSTAN
Project ID 2371

The world outside is a marvelous place
The peaceful aura for you to embrace
Step outside and take a deep breathe
Stop living with concrete face to face
Being part of the world of grace
Feel how small you are in this space

In the deep blue sky the sun hung up high
Spreads heat and light, source of delight
The glowing stars and the crescent moon at night
Starlight, sunlight, twilight are so bright
Makes everything look clear and white
But, there are still many miracles out of your sight

From tiny seed to the giant tree
Small big creatures on the land and sea
Blooming flowers: red, yellow and green
The nectar source for the honey bee
In small proportions of miracle you just see
You are blessed no pay, no fee, for free

Yes, the outside is a wondrous place
Mercy is gently blowing on your face
Every small detail deserves more praise
It is paradise's enchanting shade
Being part of the world of grace
Feel how blessed you are in this space

UNIQUE DESIGN

Aruujan Marat Kyzy, KYRGYZSTAN
Project ID 2417

Nature is Creature's grand design
It is perfect, it is profound, it is divine
Majestic rivers, lakes and seas look so fine
The sun, the stars and moon unceasingly shine
All harmonious perfections do combine
Don't dare to call all these marvels mine.

How peaceful is this living space
Mankind always had something to chase
Deface, break, ruin and graze
Drastic changes are taking place
Not only human being going to face
That impending dangerous disgrace

Open your ice and look around for once
Blurred rubies and fading diamonds
All you see is blankness, all you hear is silence
Drying lakes, disappearing Islands
Neglected rules, not followed guidance
Why do you use your wisdom for violence?

You fail to understand the obvious sign
The universe, galaxies are so unique in design
The sun is settled fine, around the planets aligned
You are blind and you are far behind,
The divine truth is not so hard to find
Stop being out of your mind, treat the nature kind.

RESURRECTING ENVIRONMENT

Engge Adel Ibrahim Afify Mohammed, EGYPT

Project ID 2442

White, blue, green, and brown.
What we built over the years has drown.
Constructions for future got knocked down.
Do you want to turn it into demons' town?
Your actions are dressed with an Evil grown.
Why do you want everyone to frown?
Why are you trying to demolish our world?
Don't you have morals? Or they have been sold!
Why are you shaking? It isn't even cold!
Didn't see it? Dear it was in bold!
It's our mother! For who else would we bother?
Don't be a chameleon and change back your leather.
We have to stay by her, we have got to stick together.
We aren't cuffed, we can do better.
You aren't paralyzed, show the spirit of the fighter.
I every day think that tomorrow is brighter.
It wasn't only you? Start with yourself.
Don't take others for you as a shelf.
This isn't a fairy tail! You won't get saved by an Elf.
Be cautious! That's us you pushing off the cliff.

WELCOME TO SYRACUSE

Sabrin Doka, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 2460

Welcome to Syracuse,
Where teenage violence has taken over.
Sixteen year olds being charged for strangling others
What was going through your mind when you beat that women up?
Or when you drove that stolen car?
Or when you stole sixty dollars from the old man?
It's your third felony you can serve serious time if convicted
Did you ever realize you're in the big league?
Your whole basketball career and future is gone!
All of the opportunities you could have is gone!
Still thirteen year olds are stabbing each other.
What were you even thinking stabbing that girl?
Did you even think of the thought of her dying?
Now she's gone and your life is ruined.
Children as young as twelve are dying.
Mothers are out here crying.
People are affected by this violence everyday,
Not just physically but in every way possible.
Teenage violence is caused by race.
Even by gangs as well
Just drop your weapons
Fun and games come second
Family and friends come first
People walk these streets not knowing if they'll see tomorrow.
It's not fair at all
We can come together as one
Let's end all of this teenage violence.

DETERGENT WATER POLLUTION

Nur Azmina Luthfia Hanifa Putri, INDONESIA

Project ID 2475

Water is the source of life on this earth, we all depend on water. For this reason, water must be used properly. But lately, quality and quantity of water has been reduced due to water pollution.

Today, water pollution becomes a main problem. To get good water quality in accordance with certain standards is difficult because water has been heavily polluted by various kinds of waste from various human activities. Likewise in terms of quantity of good water, which has been unable to meet the ever-increasing needs since water pollution occurs everywhere.

The water crisis also occurs in almost all regions of Indonesia as in Java and parts of Sumatra, especially at large cities both due to pollution of industrial, household waste, and agricultural wastewater. The cause of water quality deterioration is due to pollution of chemical waste from soap or detergents from households and the cause of the water crisis is from reduced water availability and erosion due to upstream deforestation and changes in upstream and downstream land use.

The normal water standard for a life is pH of 6.5 - 7.5. If water is below normal water standard, then the water is acidic, while water is above the normal water standard is alkaline. Waste water and industrial waste material will change the pH of water standard less or more which will eventually disrupt the life of aquatic biota. Most aquatic biota are sensitive to changes in pH and favor pH between 7 - 8.5.

Today, almost 10 million chemicals are created by humans, and nearly 100,000 chemicals have been used commercially. For example, pesticides are commonly used in agriculture, industry or household, detergents commonly used in households or PCBs commonly used in electronic devices. Most of the remaining chemicals are dumped into rivers or gutters.

Chemical waste is varied including excessive chemical waste in the form of soap (detergent, shampoo and other cleaning agents) in the water characterized by soap bubbles on the surface of the water. Detergent pollution causes from households that dispose of their detergent water through this sewer channel without filtration.

The most obvious effects caused by household detergent waste are the occurrence of eutrophication (the rapid growth of algae and water hyacinth). Detergent waste which is thrown into ponds or swamps will trigger an explosion of algae and water hyacinth growth so that the sunlight cannot be penetrated by water. Oxygen levels are drastically reduced, the life of aquatic biota is degraded, and nutrients increase very rapidly. The ecosystem will be disrupted. For example the environment of the sewer ditch and canal which there are so many water hyacinths that live at very large population.

The decomposition process of detergent will produce residual benzene which when reacting with chlorine will form a very dangerous chlorobenzene compound. Drinking water that has been contaminated with detergent waste has the potential to be one of the causes of cancer (carcinogenic). Benzene and chlorine are very likely into considering the water pollution of detergent and use of chlorine (which contains chlorine). Detergent does have a negative impact on our various living environments and human health.

Therefore, a solution is needed for the effects of using detergent waste. The first alternative is to use a detergent waste filter that is installed in the washing machine to be able to reduce harmful chemical substances. Another alternative is to make detergent innovations made from natural ingredients such as teak leaves, lerak, Guava leaves, and other organic ingredients. So that the waste produced does not pollute water.

FOR YOU A SYMPHONY OF COLORS

Victoria Chung, U.S. GEORGIA
Project ID 2482

For You

The leaves twirl and glitter like green glass on the branches for you
The birds sing soft melodies for you
The sky swirls in cotton candy wisps on a soft, blue quilt for you
The river runs through the ground like an elusive, jeweled dream for you
And you come and say

I will cut down the strong arms of the trees on which the leaves dance for me
I will destroy the home of the birds' songs for me
I will paint the pastel skies with my grays and blacks for me
I will dump my waste into the river and taint it with chemicals and deadly pesticides
For me

Now the leaves crumble into ashes and dust for you
Now the birds have gone and the air is filled with a deafening silence for you
Now the sky is dark and smells of death and destruction for you
Now the river is cloudy and dark and poisonous
For you

Symphony

I hear the sunshine sing
And it is beautiful
The rays glitter in a symphony
With the pure blue sky in harmony
I am surrounded by glorious melodies that fill the heavens
And then I hear the slightest dissonance
Cacophony that pierces my eyes
A fog, not like the sweet mist of dawn
But of a dark gray
Filled with greed and destruction
I run until I see
A monster
And I beg,
"Please, let nature sing her song!"
And he sneers and says
"One note will not destroy the whole composition.
It is only one, and one will not do any harm."
And just as he said
The notes disappeared
One
By one
Until the only thing left was a rest
Fermata, fermata, fermata

Colors

I see red, I see blue, I see green
The ruby red of the autumn leaves
The crystal clear of the rivers
The vibrant blades of grass

The blood of dead animals
The sickening artificial blue of chemicals
The withered plants on the ground
I see red, I see blue, I see green

THE HERB'S FALL OUT, I AM EARTH, THE WILDFIRE'S REVOLT

Siti Halimah Indrani Anwar, INDONESIA

Project ID 2549

The Herb's Fall-Out

I've once ruled the earth, long before the human race,
 Existed peacefully without the agony
 That I will someday perish, withered, uprooted,
 By them, who, at first, showed tender loving care
 Now, to grow a single seed, who dares?

Homo sapiens – the most intelligent but not worthy of my trust
 With geography and biology they are aghast
 To live without me is a truth they can't bear
 A time to reduce, reuse and recycle will they spare?
 The future generation must be alarmed, must be aware!

But a greater knowledge they seemed to have forgotten
 To live longer, healthier lives on earth they can be mistaken
 Where is the love in furnishing the shores with tons of trash?
 Illegally cutting down trees to steal animals' homes and earn cash?
 Hear the people's prayers, beliefs and actions clash!

Each morning as the sun's rays pave their way through the clouds,
 It reawakens my spirit, helps me give birth to new sprouts,
 To live by your side, hear us shout,
 Let's make Mother Earth proud,
 It's not the herbs' fall out!

I am Earth

Of all the planets in the solar system I've been chosen
 To be your home, your provider and protection
 I have what you need to live and to survive
 Your sorrows and doubts, you cannot hide.
 Stay here with me, don't take a flight.

Like a parent, I love seeing you grow each day,
 How you make something out of clay
 And decorate the walls with a paint spray,
 Show your religiousness as you pray
 Reach all your dreams till your hair turns to grey.

I'm in awe of your wit and perseverance, that was before,
 Now, you have changed, you care no more
 You used to lend me a hand, not left me deserted
 Where have you taken my trees? Where are my gems?
 What else have I not shared, every piece of me you have collected.

Have you forgotten that no man is an island?
 When did you stop believing that our lives are entwined?
 When can I stop hearing your apologies?
 Too many questions, you had no answers
 Perhaps, it's about time that I'm the one to say sorry.

Wildfire's Revolt

I found myself grasping for air, for clean fresh air,
 I was hopeless finding my way out of this thick black smoke
 The panic it caused made me realize it's the end of the world
 This wildfire's breath is nothing but a sword
 That took the lives of the weak and the bold.

The bright morning suddenly turned into a dark night
 Causing terror and health problems among our people
 Wear a mask for protection from the killer smoke
 Sorry for the animals for they will surely get choked
 No more chirping sounds, no more frogs that croak.

Investigation started trying to find out
 What caused the fire or who to be blamed
 For no surprise, a conclusion was made
 There was no accident, they were not scared

To admit their mistake, turn the wilds into a blaze.

Humans are so powerful but indeed so careless
In making wise decisions they should know it matters
What always comes first is greed and selfishness
Share your knowledge, think of the others,
Help save the Earth and we will be blessed.

REALITY, I AM HURTING

Reyna Kamila Arifin, INDONESIA
Project ID 2551

Waves crashing softly onto the light coloured sand,
The hot sun creating crystal-like reflections on the water surface,
Small islands from the far distance,
Silhouettes of fishermen's boats floating by the horizon,
A truly heavenly sight, only if... only if they were real.

Only if I could make a sandcastle with my bare hands,
Only if I could hear woodpeckers peck in the woods,
Only if the beach remains bluish as the sky,
I would not be left hoping for the good things to come back,
Now, I'm down on my knees finding serenity.

Today, those waves are not alone crashing itself to the oil-stained sands,
Tons of rubbish mockingly accompany them on its way to our shores,
Has anyone heard people and animals cry for help?
Has anyone seen the blood our waters shed?
Has anyone dared to save Mother Earth?

My fears are starting to take over my consciousness
Sharks and dolphins being slaughtered, people swim with plastics,
Denuded mountains, sea bombings, nuclear powerplants,
If this is now my world, I beg you,
Please wake me up.

I Am Hurting

I never looked this horrible
My skin's turning grey and peeling off
My pores are as big as an eyeball
And my cheeks used to be so soft.

My hair falls rapidly
I wish that it grows back
Don't want to lose my best asset
And grow old being bald!

Like lice on the head, everything feels itchy
Can't blame those creatures, I let them free
I shared with them everything in me
They took advantage of my generosity.

I'm getting old, weaker and dependent
To whom should I entrust the wealth I have neglected?
To them whose hearts with greed I have detected?
Or to the innocent whose future is clearly unprotected?

Like you, humans, my life will come to an end
Sooner than the glaciers' melting and the polar bears' begging
You have to reconsider and start disciplining
For, I, Earth, am hurting.

TO THE PAST

Diva Gabriela Prawiro, INDONESIA

Project ID 2555

„Twas midnight...
Yet my eyes remained wide
For I knew a terrible fright:
Maybe in tomorrow’s morning, I had died
Whispers of the wind kept on laughing...
Haunting, mocking and forcing me to stay awake
Asking me to be burned at the stake
Just like the forest that I’ve set ablaze
I remember...
Always woken up by its radiant fair stare
But, the sun’s smile is no longer there
Covered by smog that filled the air
No rooster will say, “Rise and shine!”
Only the death bells of crows are left behind
Even I don’t know what those animals are
Just mythical creatures of a fairy tale from the past that is so far
Look at what we’ve done!
Look at what we’ve made!
Now the earth is gone
And it is time for us to pay
I’ve pleaded and begged for forgiveness
However, time tells that it’s too late to be a peacemaker
For we have been cruel and merciless
To mother nature
This is my last letter
To you who have caused innocent lives to suffer
To you who still have got the time to save us...
Safe us! Safe us! Safe us!
Betrayed
My child...
I acted as your parent
I ensured you that you can survive Now, I am barren...
And no longer alive
In my arms...
I cradled you
With the finest water of the mountain spring...
I breastfed you
When the sun rose up,
I asked the morning glory to greet you
When the moon rose up,
I asked the fireflies to dance with you
But now...
What are the sparkles of the sea comparing to diamonds...
So you’ve defiled it with your oil?
Stacking up your cash into castles...
But can your wealth measure the worth of my soil?
Thus I know...
That the love that you had for me had wilted
Just like the dead flowers at the meadow
Thus I know...
That your memories of me had faded
Just like the polar caps that had melted
My child...
You’ve killed me
Now, I am barren...
And no longer alive

That is I
 Frail and little...
 That is I
 Young, powerless and weak...
 That is also I

 How can I stand up...
 Against those with an iron fist?
 Against those that are blinded by their wealth?
 Against those who see our world dying as another normal tragedy on their list?

 So I stood there...
 As the sea turns red
 The stench of blood is everywhere
 While whales and dolphins are seen nowhere

 I just watched...
 As seagulls fell down
 Intoxicated...
 By the air that is turning brown

 Frail and little...
 That is I
 Yet the ants had taught me...
 That the smallest species should not be belittled

 Young, powerless and weak...
 That is also I
 Yet the water lilies had taught me...
 To reach for the light even though it seems bleak

 Strong, powerful and brave...
 That is I
 I will not stand by
 I will not let this world die

 Silenced

 Shh... Listen!
 The spirit of the wind is passing by
 Rustling the trees...
 As the nightingales sing their lullaby

 It wasn't a joyful march
 Nor a romantic waltz
 „Twas a requiem that they sing endlessly...
 Until they're parched

 How lonely...
 Nobody could understand their cries of help
 How the heat was too intense...
 That it turned a paradise into burning hell

 But who is there to be their advocate?
 Who is willing to help them communicate?
 No one

 No one is willing to speak up...
 About their feathered brothers that have faltered
 No one wants to stand up...
 When trees are used up for more paper

 Have you gone silent?
 Should we be silent?
 Nobody knows the answer...
 Until the forest and jungles are eternally silenced

ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN DEEDS

Mahmud Marupov, TAJIKISTAN
Project ID 1471

A human is the greatest creation of God. All the existences of the Earth have relationships with human beings. Humans have rights to use all the natural sources and conditions created in the Earth. It is difficult to imagine a human's life without impact on the environment. As a human grows within the surrounding by using its pure water and fresh air and the greatest natural sources of it, he is responsible to preserve the environment.

Unfortunately, most of the time we witness how people as they don't recognize the value of our nature land, they don't value the environment. They harm the places where they live with all their unpleasant behaviors and manners. Even though in the environmental law of our country that was passed in 2003 where it is stated that "Individuals who contaminate the environment and with these deeds harm the health of people, animals and plants, will be penalized for breaching the environmental legislation", people still intentionally breaking and not following the simple rules of our community about the environment. Also, pollution has become a serious problem endangering human life and the environment. Water, air and other forms of pollution are mostly man-made. There are several issues that our community are supposed to be attentive.

I remember one of my classmates who travelled to European countries told me that there are fines for dropping litter on the streets. Even for the little trash one can get fine. He told me about how the streets are so clean and pleasant to walk that you can't see any rubbish outside. It is so clean that one doesn't want to drop any litter on the streets. It seems so pleasant to live in such places. I think the laws controlling the environment are strict in those countries. Moreover, he told me that people's attitudes towards environmental preservation are approving. I recognized that compared to the place I live the state of human society is more developed there. They care much about the surrounding by keeping it clean. However, some people here in my city don't pay attention to environmental harms. They can easily dirty the environment by dropping litter and polluting the air and water.

I live with my family in an apartment. Before moving to city, we were living in the quite village located in the south part of the city. Our village was covered with beautiful scenery of green lively forests. I grew up there. I spent the best moments and pleasant years of my childhood there. For many people living in the city has a lot of advantages compared to villages but for me I love the nature and fresh air that the countryside has. In 2015, after my father got a new job we moved to the city. We were all unhappy about leaving our village. I was so sad to move out. But also I was wondering the life of the city. I remember the first day of the city life. I woke up and opened my window, hoping that fresh cold air would enter my room as I did in the village. Instead of clean oxygen that I was expecting smoke and unpleasant smell entered my room. I was really felt unpleasant about moving to the city. I was used to taking the fresh air of the nature, consuming the organic foods and living within the nature. Besides, getting used to new environment and meeting new people I realized that It would be difficult for me to get used to living in this place.

There are different causes of air pollution and all big cities undergo the problem. The main cause is vehicles emissions that have become the leading source today. However, in my situation that grabbed my attention is different. I recognized that the issue that I feel uncomfortable about air pollution is burning of leaves. I observed that people who are responsible for cleaning and gathering tree leaves in front of the apartments, burn leaves. They sweep and gather the leaves together and burn them. They do this to avoid taking them from one place to another; however, they don't know that burning leaves cause a lot of health issues for people. According to an article that I read the moisture that is usually trapped within leaves, they tend to burn slowly and thus produce large amounts of airborne particulates like fine bits of dust, soot and other solid materials. These particulates can reach deep into lung tissue and cause coughing, wheezing, chest pain, shortness of breath and sometimes long-term respiratory issues. Furthermore, one of my classmates told me about when he was a child, yard sweepers gather the leaves and burn them in their yard. Children used to jump over the these burning leaves without knowing the harms of that smoke coming from leaves. After moving to our new flat I witness myself that yard cleaners do the same methods to get rid of leaves. Children still play the same game jumping over leaves and get the smoke hazards unintentionally. Therefore, the first day in the morning when I opened the window to get some fresh air, it was the smoke of leaves and the garbage that was close to our apartment.

Some countries try to reuse waste materials efficiently. Making a new product needs a lot of materials and energy. Raw materials must be extracted from the earth, and the product have to be manufactured then transported to wherever it will be sold. In my opinion instead of burning the leaves, they can be used for different purposes. I remembered the idea that once our chemistry teacher told us about using fallen leaves of trees by pressing and sticking them together can be made wood. We can use these fallen leaves in this effective way instead of wasting them by burning which causes a lot of troubles like health problem and air pollution. As a result, reusing and not wasting are the most effective ways one can save natural resources, protect the environment and save money.

Another circumstance I and my family were disappointed about the new place was the garbage location which is in the middle of apartments. There are some rubbish cans that people have to throw their trash. The way people use it to get rid of the garbage and waste are so dangerously harmful to the dwellers and the environment. Some just throw their rubbish around the garbage cans instead of throwing it inside or they dump their rubbish by the road. I don't understand why people behave in such ways. Maybe they are so lazy, not aware of harms or they don't care about keeping the environment clean. Also, in summer days, the smell of the trash is thousand times worse than other seasons. One can't stay around that place. The smell comes to the flats as well. Mosquitos and different insects which can bring variety types of illnesses can enter the apartments. I consider about these types of situations a lot. Why don't we have more hygienic ways of dwelling? Why don't we encourage people to live in the pleasant and pure environment? Why doesn't the government take some steps?

Then, we decided to move to another place. My family was displeased with the issues as well. We rent a house that is lovely. It is close to my school. The teachers are nice to students. I met new classmates and friends. There is a river in our city which passes beside our school and close to our house. Its name is Jayka River. It passes across the city. The houses along the river use the water of it. I learnt from my uncle who grew up there and spent his entire childhood told me that along the river there used to be

trees and beautiful environment. He used to go fishing almost every day with his grandfather. He used to go with his friends and spend some time there. But nowadays the conditions of Jayka is really heartbreaking compared to what my uncle told and described me. I realized after seeing it myself. The water is really in terrible and life-threatening condition. Furthermore, what made me feel upset was dumping domestic wastewater into river. As the houses and industrial factories which are along the river don't have proper facilities for the disposal of waste water, they dump it into the river. Industrial factories don't filter the waste as well. The main causes of diseases that many people and animals suffer from health issues after using the water of the river is due to settlements' and industrial factories dumped waste.

In addition, our school organizes the cleaning the surroundings of school every month. The same river that passes near our house passes beside our school too. Our instructor and we go to collect the trashes. We collect tashes and clean our environment. While collecting the trashes I found that people throw plastic bottles, cans, pots and other trashes into rivers and outside on the streets. Water which carries the plastic bottles, cans, pots to the place will also cause the gradually damage of ecological balance very soon. People should stop throwing plastic bottles and cans into seas, rivers and lakes. In fact, we can recycle plastic, paper and glass instead of throwing them into the water or other improper places. As a result, water pollution is another problem that affects man's life and wildlife. Dumping wastes and sewage water into rivers and lakes as well as oil slicks are the most dangerous effects on water. Water becomes contaminated and this will cause many serious problems to people and marine life.

If we want to live in the clean and pleasant environment, we should be with the nature and treat it humanely. Compared to other days and years the environment is in need of taking care. If we think from different point of view these deeds and worries are again for our own benefits. To build a better living environment is up to a person himself or herself. This is the true responsibility of every person.

BITTER HAPPINESS

Jiratchaya Nuchmee, THAILAND
Project ID 1536

We, Bangkokians, were exposed to a very serious threat in our lovely country, namely “The land of Smiles”. Hope of the youth in Bangkok was severely damaged in early 2019 like glass shattering and any possible treatment would be slow and painful. Many residents learned new words like pm2.5, AQI, or N95. Pm 2.5 value for air pollution hit above 200 which means time to play monopoly at home wearing a N95 mask. Sales figures of air purifiers made a leap during this period.

This reminds me a video that I watched before. In the video, a frog was put in boiling water. As soon as it touched the water it jumped out. However, when they put the frog in warm water and slowly heated up till it was boiling the frog reacted differently. Surprisingly, not even a single action from the frog can be observed and the video ends. We are like this frog. The city and the world we are living in is starting to boil and we don’t do anything about it, just keep going happily as ever with our famous smile. Some people call it ignorance, some class it a blessing in disguise. But, I call it “Bitter Happiness”. Because, we always find a way to become happy. However, we also know from inside that something going wrong and it will end with a huge disaster.

We have so much in common with that frog. Through the years I have been studying, it comes step by step. First thing I remember, I used to put my mask on with the help of my mom. Then, the type of mask changed. In later years, I got respiratory problems. It is followed by restricted outdoor activities around these certain period of times. Imagine that as a kid you are having PE class in the classroom and just chatting instead of playing some games. Finally, this threat has an effect over the city and my school gave a break to education. All in all, it made sense when I thought about these things during this break. I was still happy and didn’t see this coming.

Nowadays, we all know that it is not going well, there will be a time when taking action will be a must. I hope that time will not be too late. Because, it was really terrifying when you see a firetruck just spraying water into air for an artificial precipitation. It may sound like fiction but this is the fact. Bangkok Metropolitan Area did that and many other things such as shutting down the schools temporarily. Now, it is time to ask yourselves, “Have your schools ever closed due to the air pollution?” When it happens, what would you do or what can you do? You can do like me and start composing an essay to warn others. It will be too late when you also see fire trucks trying to make an artificial rain or a fellow resident with an astronaut outfit.

Finally, I wish no one will ever feel the same feeling as me while looking at the sun blocked behind the brown color smog during broad daylight through the window. Somehow as human beings, we will manage to become happy. This bitter happiness is the thing posing a threat. It makes us ignore the facts, not hear what scientists say. However, this disaster also made people to search and discuss about the pollution and health issues related to it. More people get concerned about it. This period hit the highest medical product sale such as masks, purifiers etc. in the last decade. Moreover, the government took solid steps about it with new regulations to prevent irregular urbanization or removing old cars from traffic. Who knows maybe the frog is jumping out of the boiling water! I hope I would also participate Genius Olympiad 2019 to tell my story and the problems that we faced in the last decade.

COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR THE BETTER PRESENT, ONE CLASSROOM AT THE TIME!

Yasemin Dungal, TURKEY
Project ID 1607

My name is Yasemin, I am a student in Trabzon, Turkey, and I am passionate about sustainable living. Global climate change is increasingly making tangible impacts on everyday lives of people. Glaciers are melting, entire seas are drying out, animals are getting extinct, and the weather is 'acting' more unpredictably and harshly. At the same time, in spite of these tangible processes, some people are still in denial about climate change. This is especially tragic when such denial comes from the people who are elected to make policy and whose decisions can indeed have global impacts. Nevertheless, the number of people living on our planet is growing rapidly and action must be taken now in order to educate people to live in harmony with the nature. I propose the inclusion of respective curriculum on sustainable living in schools, colleges and universities, as a mandatory part of the educational process.

At the moment I live in Turkey, but I was born in Uzbekistan, a country where the Aral Sea was once a source of sturgeon fish and provided jobs to tens of thousands of people. In fact, the Aral Sea is a lake, it was once the fourth largest lake in the world. Because of its size, which was 68,000 square kilometers in the 1960s, it was called the sea. Today, due to the heavy misuse of water, the Aral Sea is nearly gone. Once flourishing fishing towns, are abandoned. People are left without jobs. The sand and salt from the Sea's basin cause lung problems far beyond the boundaries of Uzbekistan. Such an environmental catastrophe is an example of human negligence. We cannot allow another such case to happen. We cannot be in denial.

Of course, there are many steps that must be taken in order to live more responsibly and sustainably. Some countries have adapted strict policies on the use of plastic bags. In Rwanda, for instance, the use of plastic bags is illegal. Other countries find energy in renewable ways, from wind (like in the Netherlands), sun (Honduras), water (United States), etc. These are wonderful steps. At the same time, enormous amounts of garbage are being produced still. Agriculture puts high demands on the earth's capacities to produce and people continue to cut wood, which leads to deforestation and eradication of animals. We are as progressive as we are backwards in our approached to sustainability.

What I see is lack of cohesion between different approaches. Despite of my young age, I have lived in Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. I noticed that the same mistakes are being made in different countries when it comes to the abuse of nature. And very different approaches are being taken when it comes to trying to solve problems. This has led me to think that people should coordinate their activities and share best practices while learning on the mistakes. How can this be achieved? We cannot gather the entire planet in one room! I believe that the solution is in the classroom. By addressing these important issues in every classroom around the world, we can transform the world, one classroom at the time.

When we lived on Mongolia, the problems related to the Aral Sea seemed very distant, although the sand and salt from the Sea's basin are carried by wind as far as the glaciers of the Himalaya. Our world is interconnected. The boundaries between countries are only made by people. The nature does not know such boundaries. Human impacts on the environment have no boundaries. We only have one planet. Curriculum on sustainability should include examples from around the world. Our mutual problems need to be made visible to each other. With the available internet technology, this should be relatively easy to do. School children all over the world can learn from each other about the environmental problems that they face and about the solutions that they come up with. We can learn from each other. We can inspire each other to live more sustainably, to come up with alternative sources of energy and to use resources sparingly and responsibly. We can share technology with each other and make respective school projects and exchanges.

I personally see great potential in such educational curriculum and connectivity. The element of global exchange and connectivity is a very important one here. Our environmental concerns should not be treated as domestic concerns of a particular country. We have shared problems, as once again, we live on one planet. By having the process of sharing of experiences and approaches, we can make the world truly closer and come up with collective solutions. We are a generation of people who grew up with the internet. We need to use this opportunity, we need to use this resource to truly connect. Sharing funny videos is a good time, but we can do something more constructive and beneficial. I suggest that we need a platform, an application for a global classroom on sustainability and environment. We could share videos of our projects and instructions for some technological solutions.

Such a system would really work both ways, I think. On the one hand, with the shared experiences and approaches we can come up with better local solutions, on the other hand, with such solutions we can really have a global impact. This should be done with the involvement of the United Nations. There should be a special department established for the global education on sustainability and environment. The curriculum should be available in many different languages, ideally, in the languages of all 193 UN member countries and more.

When we talk about the environment, we tend to project to the future. This is great, we need to be forward-looking, but at the same time it wipes off the responsibility in the moment. The future seems distant and it seems like someone else will be in charge. I titled my essay with the focus on the present, as I believe that real action begins in the moment. We cannot change everything overnight,

but we need to start somewhere. Probably in many different areas at once. But, I firmly believe that education is an important and result-oriented step. We all learn how to read, write and count in schools. We also need to learn how to live responsibly and sustainably. Such knowledge must be inherent to our thinking, to our consciousness. This way, we will avoid denial of the obvious. There was a time when people denied that the Earth is a sphere and that it circles around the sun and not the other way around. Education solved such ignorance. Sustainable living education can help us become more responsible and truly global citizens.

I hope that I will be able to contribute to such a global classroom. I am ready to share what I know. I can make reports on Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. I also want to learn from others. I want to hear from other places around the world, and I want to take actions. I view the Genius Olympiads to be a wonderful platform and an opportunity to spotlight my own idea and to connect with others. I really hope to have the opportunity to come to the United States and connect with other progressive people. I look forward to connecting with my peers from all over the world and share our passions and ideas, inspire each other and collectively develop and deliver important projects for the better present!

MICROPLASTIC CAMPAIGN

Seyun Bang, U.S. CONNECTICUT
Project ID 1622

According to the English Oxford Dictionary, microplastic is defined as extremely small pieces of plastic debris in the environment resulting from the disposal and breakdown of consumer products and industrial waste. As most people are aware, plastics are widespread in oceans, but plastics that are broken down by the ultraviolet rays and tough waves and become smaller plastics, less than five millimeters in length receive a special appellation “microplastics”. Microplastics also come from health products and cosmetics and this specific type of plastic is called microbeads. These microbeads are too small to be filtered by the water filtration system and go straight to the ocean.

According to one research, 80% of the plastics that were collected throughout the North Pacific Ocean included toxic substances. Not only do plastics have a detrimental effect on the environment, but the main problem microplastics in the sea is that it threatens the marine sea life. What makes it worse is that we are the ones on top of the food chain and we would be consuming the aquatic life, thus the plastics that we throw away would come back to our tables. Consuming microplastics lead to autism, ADHD, respiratory disease, cardiac disorder, and many others that harm the human health.

Inspired from how the harmful effects that microplastics have on human body is solely caused by the human ourselves, a group of students including myself gathered to form a campaign to reduce the use of plastic. We made shapes that resemble food out of plastic, conveying the message that plastics that we use up irresponsibly eventually come back to our table for us to eat. Putting up big posters with simple messages for people to see, we went to one of the most densely populated places, Gangnam Station on August 4, 2018 for people to sign petitions to reduce plastic usage.

For those people who signed the petition we explained the purpose of the signing and provided them with eco bags to encourage them to stop using plastic bags and to carry their belongings in eco bags. In 2 hours, 34 people signed the petition and promised to reduce the usage of plastic. Although 34 people seems like a small number, it was surprising to see how some people in the busy city dedicated their time to get to know more about microplastics and learn what they can do to prevent further damage in the environment. We were also hoping that the 34 people would inform their friends and families about the campaign so that more than 34 people would be aware of the microplastic issue. After we got their names and email address, we sent them out an email to sponsor for the WWF and Greenpeace organization for the decrease of plastic usage.

FOR US, MORE THAN FOR US!

Sin Kai Ieng, Kristine, MACAU
Project ID 1622

“Sis, what color is the sky?” asked a pretty girl, tugging at my sleeve.

“Oh, absolutely, blue!” I answered the question without thinking twice.

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Once I went to the central park in Macao with my little sister. She wanted to take a photo with some birds walking, flying up and swooping around the lawn. There was about 10 meters between my sister and those birds. However, the birds suddenly flew away like a sword. “Oh, they probably don’t like me, do they?” my little sister asked rather disappointedly with a frown. Then I comforted her and said, “That’s fine, birds never stay at one spot.”

I almost forget the time I stopped doubting the color of the sky. Yet even when time flies, I am still that confident, and never questioned myself whether my thinking about why the sky is blue or even why birds never stay at one spot is right or not, until a year later.

That was the day by chance I found out the color of sky, to my disbelief, wasn’t blue but was grey! But why? I asked myself. I have been taught that there are white clouds in the blue sky since I was in kindergarten. Words in my textbooks also tell me the color of sky is light blue. What’s more, there’s even a word called “azure” specifically depicting the kind of blue: sky blue, the sky blue that turns into dark blue in the evening. But where is blue now? I can’t even find any trace of that blue in the sky. Oh, what remained was all the detestable fog and haze! They have covered the sky and also blinded us from a clear vision and a fresher breath.

It shocked me to find out from some reports in China that only less than 1% of China’s 500 largest cities meet the air quality standards recommended by the World Health Organization, and yet, 7 of the 10 most polluted cities in the world are in China. We can easily know that factory emissions, automobile exhaust, atmosphere pollutants..., they are not the only culprit of the grey sky, but more, we human beings! Finally, I realized, the sky is no longer blue, the blue is just a literal word rooted in people’s mind, in TV documentaries, and in our beautiful fantasy. How discouraging the scene is! How tragic the environment is! How miserable we human beings are!

In fact, haze weather leads to traffic congestion, business suspension, airport closure, port shutdown, and has a great impact on the work and life of citizens. Not only that, in many hospitals, the number of patients suffering from respiratory diseases has increased dramatically, and some primary and secondary schools in Beijing have even changed to indoor physical education classes. See, we human beings have no way but to elude the extreme weather, but how about our dear animals and plants? They have nowhere to go! Is it finally the relationship we human beings want to build with the environment?

Two years ago, I went to Coquitlam, Canada, to visit my uncle there. The most impressive and unimaginable thing is, I took a photo with a deer! It was a wild deer from the forest. I was so surprised that animals in Coquitlam were so surprisingly ‘dull’, so dull that I panicked they don’t even have the consciousness of self-preservation. I was so astonished that I asked my uncle, “Is it common here?” “Oh, sure, nothing is more common than that, sometimes I am even curious myself why they are so dauntless!” answered my uncle with a chuckle. Birds there won’t fly away so quickly when there is someone trying to approach them—pigeons cross the street in an orderly queue, deer will gnaw the trees in front of the villa, bears will sometimes ransack the garbage cans if they are free, wolves will swap positions with cocks to wake children up in the morning. Animals are extremely friendly with people. It seems that I was the only one ignorant about the fact. After all these ‘discoveries’, I eventually realized that animals in Macao swiftly escape not out of their instinct, but out of their fear of people. On the contrary, animals in Canada are not indeed ‘dull’, they are pampered to be friendlier and get along well with people. Have we ever thought about why animals and humans react so differently to their counterparts in different corners of the globe? The only things that came to my mind: in Macau, they might be scared to be pets and get caught by a greedy butcher, land on a ground full of trash, or risk crossing the street where even the fastest leopards may get knocked down by the pack of ‘four-wheeled’ species—the species that is known as ‘vehicles’.

I am always curious about what nature really is: such an abstract word. And now, I know that sky, ocean, animals, flowers and every wonderful thing that appears in the world is a part of nature, and they are all from the nature.

But indeed, our nature is suffering. Deforestation is one of the most serious problems now, with humans continuously cutting down forests, for more wood to make papers, for more logs to build the furnitures, and for more flat lands to build buildings. It seems that we are always doing something profitable and good for us human beings. There is a natural island in China, with forest coverage of 25.7% in 1965, later, shrunk to 18.7% in 1964, and shockingly, only 8.53% remained in 1981. We can easily see it has led to the endangering of rare tree species such as slope ramparts and some precious medicinal plants. It should be well recognized that lots of resources are not inexhaustible, and the destruction of nature will produce a lot of after-effects. It’s just like a chain: animals become homeless, air no more pure, then, sky turns grey, landslip happens more frequently and so on. A series of phenomena eventually, lead to harms that target us. And, can you believe that all of these are caused by we human beings?

Nature has granted us so much, and in return, we should be grateful to nature, and give her back what she deserves—the natural beauty of her. But, it is not what we are doing now! What went wrong then? Why can’t nature and humans be friends? Nowadays, more and more natural disasters are coming—horrible haze and smog shrouds northern China, destructive super typhoons sweep the US at least once a year, and heatwaves prevail in most parts of the world. Are all these occurrences simply natural disasters? Are these nature’s punishments to human beings? Can we human beings still survive for another century? Probably.

I can’t imagine that someday, my little sister will grow up to be the same age as me now and she would suddenly find that, the sky is really covered with a disgusting rag, skyscrapers soaring into the sky, the bubbles in the park changed into clouds of smoke

from chimneys, pungent smell filling the nasal cavities, while cities become wastelands of garbage, with no birds singing, no places for playing, mothers are soothing kids, babies are crying... Stop! I dare not picture the scene anymore! We can't let these things happen!

Fortunately, people seem to start to realize the threats of pollution and try to make some new ideas to solve the corresponding problems. They have also thought of ways to preserve animals, especially the endangered species. Yet my worry is, will all the efforts be enough to deal with the severe issue fundamentally?

On one hand, there are constant reports that people are maltreating and slaughtering animals, leaving the number of endangered animals dramatically increasing. On the other hand, we are setting up more and more wild animal reserves and protected areas. It seems that we are doing the right things to help protect the animals. However, while people are racking their brilliant brains to come up with ideas to protect the animals, why don't they just give back to the animals their natural habitats? Why not leave them some free space? Why not spread the information about how to protect animals? Different species of animals await our immediate action!

Just as animals require our preservation, our next generation requires our delicate attention too! Every baby is like a plain paper when they first come to the world. They all have beautiful minds, and they are willing to trust every niceness passing to them. We all know the sky used to be blue, but how about the children younger than us or unborn babies? Think about it—if they find out the sky is not actually blue, I fear that they won't believe anything we say to them anymore. My little sister is still young, it always makes me lose my heart and feel ashamed to have lied and, to continue lying to such a cute girl. Can we stop ourselves from telling more lies? Come on, never let the color 'blue' become the 'blue' that saddens our emotion.

We all say: children are our future. So, please be aware of the significance of the protection of nature. Take a Herculean effort to protect the environment: all we are doing is not only for us, but also for our children, grandchildren and those coming afterwards. If we want to sustain life of our upcoming generations, we have to take action now: go out by public transport instead of driving your own car, and walk to the supermarkets instead of calling for taxis. Let's treat animals kindly, and do not treat them as sources of entertainment... we should at least take a small step and try from the very beginning. There is a quote from Albert Einstein, "it is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it." Thousands of advertising slogans tell us to save the environment, and be friends with nature, as this is just saving our homeland. But I want to say, we should know, we can't destroy something that doesn't belong to us, and we can't irresponsibly pass an unsustainable environment to our future generations. Undoubtedly, holding a good relationship with nature is beneficial for us, but indeed, it is more than for us!

I look forward to the day when every new generation looks up at the sky, what they see is the same azure, sky-blue from any corner of the globe. I know we are on the way, and as long as we strive for it, we will achieve this dream.

SOLVE THE UNSOLVABLE QUESTION: GET RID OF OUR SELFISHNESS PEN

Li Tong, Suki, MACAU
Project ID 1698

“The sky is blue.” I was told.

“The sky is gray.” I believe so.

It’s always the question that has lingered in my mind ever since I could draw: why do everyone pretend that the sky is blue when it’s actually gray? Are they pretending? Or are they lying or simply playing a trick on me?

A memory in my primary school life has kept haunting and troubling me: I was about to paint a picture in my comic book, yet I forgot to bring my color pens. I turned to my best friend for a pen to color the sky. Then what annoyed me the most happened—she gave me a blue pen. I was a bit irritated and gave her a huh, yet she still reacted by stuffing a blue pen in my palm. I impatiently asked her to give me a gray pen. “But you need a blue pen to paint the sky, don’t you, and the sky is blue, isn’t it?” She answered back. I looked out of the window to make sure I was right. The sky was indeed, as gray as a huge curtain over my head. I didn’t want to paint the pictures anymore. I was eager to find out the answer to the everlasting question in my mind. I wanted someone to prove me right, but everyone turned out telling me the same tedious clause: the sky is blue. It was still the same question that I kept in mind: why did everyone tell me the sky was blue when it was filled with gloomy dusty mist?

Last year, my family took me to Tibet to escape a bit from the hustle and bustle of the city. I can still remember my excitement about going to the 4000- meter-high plateau, a place so high that I dreamed I could touch the sky. When the airplane was about to land, I was only miles away from the ground, yet what came into my eyes already surprised me. I could see the trees, the houses and even the goats running down there, and I had never imagined that I could see these views through the clouds. It was fascinating! The instant I stepped off the airplane, what ahead of me struck me: BLUE SKY! The question preying on my mind for years got its answer, blue sky does exist! It was blue, it was clear, and it was exactly like what I imagined from others’ lies’. In contrast, hours ago, from the same aerial view, why couldn’t I see a clear view through the clouds in the sky of Macau? What I saw was a cloud of dust, a shroud of mist and a layer of fog; not trees, not houses and even not the ground. I suddenly realized: did Zeus only remember to paint a part of his demesne with the blue color? Or the whole sky was initially painted blue? If so, then what has covered my eyes from the blue?

As a matter of fact, human beings are gradually painting the sky gray with their ‘selfishness pen’ as the pace of industrialization speeds up, meaning that everyone in my city has been brought into the war against pollution. It can best be exemplified by the increasing number of factories in the mainland cities neighboring Macau. In China, air pollution from burning fossils fuels, principally coal, has contributed greatly to the greenhouse gas emission, causing health problems to the residents. It is to blame for the premature death equivalent to an average of 5.5 years sooner than the average lifespan. It’s true that the economic growth of China in recent years has increased rapidly, and so rapidly is the severity of air pollution! How can these ‘smart’ businessmen see these when they have already filled the sky with gray coins using their ‘selfishness pen’?

The blue sky is not a lie, but the gray one is—a euphemistic language that those paying no attention to the environment say about the sky. Pollution in Macau successfully got me by making fun of me, but it was not at all laughable or funny. Now when the ‘fun’ has turned severe to become what putting human’s life at risk, the Chinese government decided to ‘prank back’: the environment-protection scheme has taken its steps to dismantle coal-fired plants, plant trees and encourage citizens to ride sharing bikes to enhance the air quality, with the intention of improving the environment of the whole country. With this ‘prank’, will human beings be willing to put their ‘selfishness pens’ aside?

To be honest, I am both worried and glad to see the air-pollution issue has become so serious: on the one hand, the air pollution has reached its record- threatening level, but on the other, the severity is alarming enough to have alerted us: action has been taken now as thousands of factories which produce greenhouse gases and heavy metal have been shut down. There might be businessmen taking it as a worry, since they have to pay extra tax as a cost of their damage to the air quality, and they also need to improve their manufacturing lines to meet the standard. This is where their ‘selfishness pen’ takes over their conscience: when they all care about the economic outcome of industrialization, the downside—pollution, is ignored. By looking at the ‘money’ side, everything seems promising; everything can be overlooked; everything has been beautified by the economic growth. People are always concerned about the visible, yet are still not aware of the warning that our mom—the earth, has been trying to alarm us, but have they ever thought about when their next generation ask them why the history book tells them the sky was blue while it is gray now, and who causes it, will they answer that they are the disruptive painter to Zeus’ masterpiece?

Air pollution is always a serious topic worth discussing. The air we breathe in every second is a life-and-death matter: it means we must care about the environment we are living in; it means we must love our mother earth; it means we must not hesitate for an action! Air pollution is not only a regional issue, but also the issue of the globe. With the same purpose to take good care of our mom’s respiratory system, the Paris Agreement has come forth to bring all nations into a common course to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects. I hope the blue sky will not only be described in history books in the future.

I was dreaming of the change while waiting for the sunrise on the Tibet Plateau. The bright sunlight woke me up, and when I looked up to the sky, the sky was filtered with the blue color and the bright sunshine. I felt like I was in an illustrated comic book, the comic book that once my friend told me to paint the sky blue. Indeed, we are living under the same sky, but we, human beings have painted it differently.

It seems my everlasting question is unsolvable: Is there a painter in Tibet specially and artistically painting the sky blue every day? Common sense gives us a "No". The real answer is that Tibet stops people from taking their 'selfishness pen' there. When I was there, I was asked not to leave any garbage nor to hire any automobiles, to prevent trash-burning haze and automobile exhaust. It is obvious that they don't paint the blue sky, but the blue is the sky's initial appearance. Won't the situation in my city get much better when people all throw away their 'selfishness pen'?

Instead of waiting for a miracle, I wonder: what can I do to erase the gray filter covering my city's sky?

It is undeniable that we have already hurt our mother earth with the air- pollution weapons. It is about time that we woke up to take some actions, and our land savaged with pollution requires our awareness and immediate cooperative reaction. Can't we get up a bit earlier to ride a bike to work instead of driving the car? Can't we buy coffee with our own reusable flask? Can't we use more recyclable products to avoid trash-burning haze? Can't we go out of the room with all lights and air-conditioners off for a fresh break outdoor? Why can't we make a little change to change the world?

Now when I get back to the same question that has been lingering my mind: "Why do everyone pretend that the sky is blue when it's actually gray?" I know it is no more an unsolvable question. We can solve it, by throwing our 'selfishness pen' right away! What we need to pick up is our 'selflessness eraser' and Zeus' masterpiece of the blue sky shall return to the sky of the entire globe.

THE COUNTRY I USED TO LOVE

Daniela Miloseska, MACEDONIA
Project ID 1741

I never thought that going out could become a danger. That all the places I had felt safest would become a dangerous health hazard by simply breathing. That every stroll taken down the streets on a chilly day could give me the lungs of a smoker, even though I've spent my whole life staying as far away from cigarettes as possible. I never thought I would look at my country this way. Never thought that I would despise my home town and all the careless people, including me, who have let the entire situation out of control. I have always looked at this place with love and adoration, and relished in everything it had to offer. Key word being HAD. It seems as though all the beauty that once existed is gone, like it simply dissolved in the polluted air and the new skyscrapers that are blocking every view. But through the mist, one thing is becoming more clear to me: if no measures are taken, we are all doomed.

North Macedonia is a small country located in southeastern Europe. Not truly known to the world and full of small secrets and pleasures that only a few have actually known, North Macedonia is a beautiful tiny treasure that deserves to be explored. All my life my parents have tried to show me all the beauty there is to see here, yet it always feels as if there is more. It always feels as though there is another alley to explore and another street performer left unheard. From the sunny city center of Skopje and the alluring Stone Bridge, to the mountain Bistra and the canyon Matka, it seems like there is a story left untold in every crack of the pavement. Tales about how people lived in Samoil's Fortress, or the merchants that stepped foot in Skopje's Old Bazaar remain a secret that can only be revealed by the locals, at least if they deem you worthy of knowing.

I have been going out a lot lately. But going out means observing every single thing around you, and in my case, that was not a very positive thing. The beautiful places I once knew had wilted, all the color drained and dull. The city center that was once blooming with joy and unknown adventure, had become a gray patch of land, its beautiful sights drowned out by the horrible, toxic fog. The Stone Bridge which used to draw everyone in with its strong structures and mysterious aura, now stood weak and lifeless, reminding everyone of all there is to lose in this world. My favorite hiking spots, the places of inner peace, were being disrupted by buildings and machines. And the rivers seemed a little smaller, the lakes more soulless than ever and the people... Oh the people appeared to be drowning in a constant state of denial and misery, yet could not find anyone to blame except themselves.

And that is exactly where the problem arises. You see, by not blaming ourselves, by not taking responsibility for our actions, we are unable to truly see the issues. When we start looking at the drawback from a point of view where we are responsible for our actions, we start seeing the world for what it truly is. When we take note that every time we use the car, we contribute to the 75% of carbon monoxide pollution, we consider riding our bike. When we realize that every single piece of paper we use, used to be a tree giving us the oxygen we desperately need, we feel our lungs tighten with the notion that someone could be lacking air at the moment. Every time we forget to take reusable bags when we go to the grocery store, we need to remember that the only other option are the plastic bags that take about five hundred years to degrade. That piece of garbage that happened to miss the trash can? If it stays on the ground, you might see it in the river when you're running tomorrow morning. The week after you might see some dead fish as well. Too bad you didn't have the time to pick it up, right?

And just like that, you become the most polluted country in the world. After years of believing that the worst is yet to come, you finally reach the point where there is no more worst. You break the odds, you get your time to shine. Only no one can see your shine, because the fog is too thick. But hey, it was a team effort after all right? We couldn't have made it without each other! Yet we managed to prove that we can work together. So let's work together, let's make a change before the doors close on us. Through the mist, I still see hope. I see the hope that lives deep into the marrow of our human bones, the hope that holds a candle in the dark, that offers you a hand when you fall. I see the hope in the eyes of my friends, the eyes of the youth. I see the hope in the people around me, the uncertainty in their words when they express their ideas and concerns about the future and the small smiles that grace their faces when you tell them you support their objective. All those people who pick up the trash after somebody else dropped it are making a small change that might go unnoticed. The people that are recycling? They're helping too, as are all the people who decide to leave their car in the parking lot, at least for the day. I firmly believe that every change, no matter how small, is still a change. So let's do every little thing we can to make this world the amazing place it used to be, because even if it takes years, at least we'll know we have done everything we could, and changed the world as much as we could. This is our future, now all we have to do is take responsibility and fix it.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAKE

Elma Dema, ALBANIA
Project ID 1901

I am a 16 year old girl from Albania , a small country with a really old history . I have visited a lot of countries and seen a lot of magnificent places which symbolize the tradition of their country , but no matter how beautiful or gorgeous they are , nothing calms my soul like my country does .

Whenever I am sad or had a bad day , just the thought of the green valleys where fresh rivers flow makes me happy and grateful of my hometown .

As a kid I have the best memories . During the winter the snow would fall , covering everything and making them look magical as if it was a scenery from Wonderland . The birds chirping while I sip my hot chocolate unbothered , fascinated by the way nature works and asking my parents a thousand questions about it . Then I would go out and play with my brother . Even though my hands would be frozen I would keep playing with the snow just because I felt like I was part of the nature.

During the summer and spring even though many things would change , my love for the nature would be the same . I would help my grandparents plant the seeds from which vegetables and lovely flowers would grow . But more beautiful than that is showing patience and commitment to something so delicate and in the end you get the unforgettable feeling when you see the grown plant .

Every time that I think of the nature I feel happy . I have always been connected to it and I was taught to embrace it . I learnt how to love the nature and soon I was unable to be separated from her . I like the idea of the big city and the skyscrapers but there is nothing I could trade the breathtaking sceneries with . But it seems like not everybody shares the same idea with me .

With the development of the technology and globalization many decisions have been taken by the people in order to make our lives better and all these things have brought big changes in our lifestyle . However , even though our lives got easier , we have caused big damages to the nature just so we please ourselves . I am happy that people are working on new things and inventing new machines which before would seem impossible , but the fact that many of these things are slowly destroying our planet makes me feel disappointed .

What hurts me the most is seeing these changes happening right in front our eyes , especially when a beloved place is being destroyed . As I mentioned before all my memories from the childhood remind me of the divine habitat of my home town and I have grown up seeing everywhere the greenery of the plants but the most unforgettable memories were the weekends by the lake . Every Saturday our parents would get up early in the morning and together with us would walk until we would arrive at the Lake of Shkodra . As we would walk near the lake me and my brother would count the number of birds over the lake and would beg mom to go and swim in the lake . I remember the lake was always crowded by the birds that tried to catch the fish that was swimming under the water .As we were walking near the lake my father would tell us different stories and facts about the lake which all of them would show the importance of the Lake of Shkodra to us . Our father would always tell us how our great grandparents were represented by the lake , they knew the value of this treasure more then we do nowadays . At the end of our walk my family would choose to drink a cup of tea in the oldest café near the lake . Maybe I have tasted the best tea of my life there but I believe that the true taste of the tea it is not in the cup , but at the incredible view of the lake .

As I grew up many more people started visiting the Lake of Shkodra . The lake had always been popular since it is the largest lake in Balkan and is known for its endemic species such as the freshwater snails , but the last years a flock of tourists started over visiting the lake . In the pedestrian near the lake which the only spoken language was Albanian , you would hear different languages starting from Serbian , Italian, German , English and many more others . At first I thought this was amazing news and since more people knew about the lake now maybe people would be more careful with it , but things didn't go like that , in fact things took a turn for the worse . Many more restaurants opened to serve the new customers and blocked most of the beautiful coast , but that isn't all . Even though many of the restaurants were really fancy and luxurious they would still throw their trash in the lake . That broke my heart into pieces . The pelicans that used to live near the shore now stay far away from it , afraid of the humans which have destroyed their homes . I didn't want this to happen , nor did all the other people that enjoyed the love of the lake in its most beautiful days , but it seems like the undone has already been done .

Even though I am devastated by the state of this lovely place which I share a lot of memories with , I am still optimistic about the future . If we start working , no matter how small our acts are , with patience and commitment we can bring the lake to its best conditions , just like I did with the plants in the garden when I was a little kid . I showed patience and took good care of the seed until the flowers bloomed . The same way I took care of the seed , now we should take care of the lake . The story of the lake shouldn't be a story with a sad ending , we should take the fate in our hands .

We shouldn't wait for the government to do all the work , we should start from ourselves . If we are more sensible with our actions maybe we could see the Lake of Shkodra become a national park and that would be e dream come true , but as the old saying is "never say never" .

I shared the story of my home town , but that is not the only story to be shared . There are a lot of beautiful places that have been polluted just because of the carelessness just like the Pacific Ocean , Pripyat , Aral Sea and many others but I will not let my home town be a victim of human ego .

There is another reason that I shared the story of the Lake of Shkodra , not only to raise the awareness of the habitats being destroyed but also because it is a story of triumph . Even though there is a lot to be done to clean the Lake , the love for our nature has made many young environmentalists come and volunteer in helping the lake . One of the volunteering organizations is “Eko-Mendje” (translated in English Eco-Mind) which with the help of the Albanian youth has done a lot of things in order to help the lake.

The story of the Lake of Shkodra is a proof that with work and passion we can fix our mistakes and save the nature . Let’s all learn our lesson and not repeat our mistakes .Nature is our only home and we are the only ones that can protect her . I don’t want the nature any different than this , I just love it as it is .

BREATHING REMINISCENCE

Rana Yildirim, VIET NAM
Project ID 2017

“The environment is the natural world that surrounds us. It is very important to keep it clean in order to live healthy and obtain a peaceful life. However, the environmental pollution has become one of the biggest threats for Earth. It may affect our future. People suffer from their own actions. Pollution threatens our existence and destroys our living environment. The future will either be green or not at all.”

As a person who has been living in Vietnam for over eight years, I can profoundly say that I got used to its pleasant atmosphere and friendly people. But what caught my attention is the polluted air in the city where I live. And I knew from the beginning, pollution would undoubtedly affect the quality of life in this country. This nature loving beautiful nation is facing a serious problem day in and day out. Yet we take it for granted and neglect the consequences that it can bring to us in the near future. In fact, we are the ones who should be responsible to take care of it.

I vividly recall in one of my memories, how exciting and fun to be with my parents scooting on a motorbike while sightseeing, mesmerizing the beautiful scenery of the city. I felt thrilled when I saw street vendors selling their traditional and exotic foods such as spring rolls, jellyfishes, frogs and variety of desserts. Since I was a kid, I never really thought about the lethal effects of those supposed to be fun-motorbike rides and appetizing scents coming from various food stalls would greatly contaminate the quality of air that we breathe every day. The repercussion and consequence might be irreversible.

I always hang out with my friends and ask what they think is very admiring about their country, they would often praise how lotus creates an image of a nature loving citizen. That being said, special occasions such as Vietnam Women’s day, Teachers’ day, and Tet holidays, I would bring them those valuable bouquets, making them happy and placing a smile on their faces. But when they asked me what I loved the most, I really wanted to say that I loved the fresh air and the fragrant flowers in the road edges. But that would just be a sweet lie coming out from me.

There was this moment when my family decided to go to Ha Long Bay, I was just ten. We went there during October, the weather was cool and fresh at that time. It was a great experience to realize that Vietnam has its beauty painted on this heavenly bay with a lot of bright and charming colors. The magnificent view portrayed crystal clear water flowing down the stream. The way sun shined through the caves, making a wonderful sunset that buried every shade of yellow and orange. Unlike the city I live in, Ha Long Bay had a fresh and cool weather that indulges me to stay there for a long time. This wonderful scene of Ha Long Bay could be the Mecca of the nature beauty if only Vietnam War did not happened at all.

Nearly forty years after the Vietnam War, a chemical weapon was used by the US troops called “agent orange”. It still plays a hideous toll on each new generation. The symptoms could be felt even after a long period of time had gone by. The display of power by the US had led to mass destruction of forest and farmland. The dioxins in the “agent orange” - a highly toxic chemical compound, is a precarious material to the ecosystem. It harmed the ozone layer that caused people to suffer from respiratory and skin problems.

With the passage of time after the war, the nature itself is not changing at all. It is getting harder to breathe every time I go outdoor to fill my lungs with fresh air. But I couldn’t. Even local people especially kids that would want to play outside are affected by it. We have to use face masks to cover our faces while riding motorbike because the air is polluted. People faces clearly reflect deep disappointment. My emotions felt like a lump on the throat, feeling like I had to do something in order to make a better life for Vietnam and its people including me. Unable to take an action make me feel such a human being without a heart and soul. Everyone wants to smell fresh air and flowers on top of their lungs. This motivation can inspire youth like me for further action to make this world a better place to live, and for the years to come.

Based on the article that I have read, people in Vietnam had started promoting a clean-green environment. To act and unite for the same goal will make breathing enjoyable. Neither desperate nor impatient to wait at this moment, I strongly believe the most crucial and urgent matter is to raise people’s awareness about the impact of air pollution. Have them realized if everyone cooperates and work together we can breathe in a healthy environment. So we should do our best in order to accomplish such goal.

Everything we’re going through, still paying back all the harsh times and the tears we shed on this beautiful untold story. Taking important steps to make Vietnam a livable place. And I believe that one day, a healthy environment will ensue. So we shall start making actions to find best practices to lessen pollution. Indeed, we can turn this into a reality. We all tried to defend our ideas to make Vietnam a breathable country. For me, the most valuable part of this journey is that, I knew I couldn’t change the past, but I could always try my best to make this world a better home for the next generation.

“Nature is a miracle we depend upon”.

- Anonymous

PLASTIC POLLUTION

Sedky Ahmed Sedky Elsaid, EGYPT
Project ID 2047

In the last decade, plastic has affected the health and life of human beings very badly. Some incidents have attracted the attention of the whole world and put a question mark about the use of plastic in daily life.

First, let's get real: Not all plastic is bad. Bike helmets, car airbags, and many medical supplies made with plastic save lives. Plastic water bottles can bring clean drinking water to people who don't have it, and plastic straws can help people with disabilities drink.

The problem is that most of us use and then toss away more plastic than we need: things like grocery bags, drink bottles, straws, food wrappers, and plastic packaging around toys. This kind of plastic that's used only once before being thrown away is called single-use plastic, and it makes up more than 40 percent of all plastic trash.

That's a lot of trash. Scientists think that 8.8 million tons of plastic winds up in the ocean every year—that's as if you stacked up five plastic grocery bags full of trash on top of each other on every foot of coastline in the world.

How does it get into the sea? Plastic left on the ground as litter often blows into creeks and rivers, eventually ending up in the ocean. And because plastic trash is different from other types of waste—it doesn't decompose back into nature like an apple core or a piece of paper—it stays in the ocean forever. That means discarded fishing nets and six-pack rings can entangle animals; harmful straws and grocery bags can be mistaken as food.

Since the development of plastic earlier this century, it has become a popular material used in a wide variety of ways. Today plastic is used to make, or wrap around, many of the items we buy or use. The problem arises when we no longer want these items and we have to dispose of them, particularly the throwaway plastic material used in wrapping or packaging.

This plastic can affect marine wildlife in two important ways; by entangling creatures, and by being swallowed.

The bodies of almost all marine species, ranging in size from plankton to marine mammals, and including some of the wildest and most vulnerable species on the planet – animals that make nearly their entire living far from human beings – now contain plastic.

Turtles are particularly badly affected by plastic pollution, and all seven of the world's turtle species are already either endangered or threatened for a number of reasons. Turtles get entangled in fishing nets, and many sea turtles have been found dead with plastic bags in their stomachs.

It is believed that they mistake these floating semi-transparent bags for jellyfish and eat them. The turtles die from choking or from being unable to eat. One dead turtle found off Hawaii in the Pacific was found to have more than 100 pieces of plastic in its stomach including part of a comb, a toy truck wheel and nylon rope.

Nerin

whose name means 'someone from the sea'

was my turtle.it was my best friend

when I was 14 I have read an article talking about the importance of jellyfish for turtles and as I loved Nerin so much I decided not to deprive her from things she loves so I decided to let her in the sea. I went with my family to the red sea to spend the summer holiday then I let Nerin in the middle of the sea watching her from the yacht but I realized that she came across a whole swarm of jellyfish, bobbing about in the water.

Nerin rushed towards them and started hoovering them up like jelly off a plate.

In her haste, Nerin didn't notice that one of the floating white blobs wasn't a jellyfish at all but a plastic shopping bag, the kind you see at

The plastic bag in her tummy made her feel full up and was stopping the food from being digested. I was depressed for a long time and from that time I decided to do anything to stop plastic pollution.

For a while now, the issue has always been in someone else's river, someone else's beach, and someone else's ocean. Now with the fact that it has gone full circle, that micro plastic are in the fish we are eating. I think people realize that it is their problem. It is everyone's problem. It doesn't matter where you live.

PLASTIC WASTE IN INDONESIA SEAS

Rakha Danuja Abisatya, INDONESIA
Project ID 2275

Plastic waste is a type of wastes that contributes to sea waste. Plastic characters that are lightweight, strong and durable make plastic widely used for various products, especially packaging products. However, the characteristics of hard-to-decompose, plastic can damage the environment, especially the sea.

According to Jambeck Jean R's research entitled "Plastic Inputs from Land to Sea Waste In 2015", which states that Indonesia is the biggest contributor to plastic waste in the world after China for about 187.2 million tons per year to seas. The trigger factor of the high pollution of plastic in the Indonesia seas according to the results of the study is because 83 % plastic waste that is not managed on land (mismanaged plastic waste). Plastic waste can cause marine biota to experience metabolic disorders, digestive system irritation, and death. Plastic is difficult to be decomposed which allow it to stay longer in the body of marine biota and if it is consumed by human, it will be dangerous.

The problem of plastic waste in Indonesian sea from day to day is increasingly unstoppable. This has a tremendous impact on marine life beside it pollutes sea. Plastic waste poisons marine animals.

One solution to this problem is to reduce the use of plastic waste and not to dispose garbage in the river. If not, the sea will become a giant garbage dump for the inhabitants of the earth. The use of plastic in various human activities has led to the increasing usage of plastic and plastic production. Lately, marine-biota that has been negatively affected by the presence of plastic waste is also increasing.

In the 2017 Sea Summit, the Indonesian government with the ministry of maritime coordinator allocates 13 trillion rupiah per year to reduce 70% of marine waste. In addition, research on marine and micro-plastic waste in Indonesia is currently an important issue. The Oceanographic Research Center, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, conducted a study of 18 beaches in Indonesia which revealed that the dominant waste in the sea came from plastic (36-38%) and it is found micro-plastic in all study locations both on the surface of the water, sediments, and fish bodies. This condition is very alarming since the use of plastic for long term can affect the number of micro-plastic in marine biota body, the environment, and human health.

The efforts to overcome plastic waste problem in the sea includes developing waste management in coastal areas, bringing about waste to energy program like encouraging the use of plastic waste as a mixture of asphalt, upgrading commitment to reduce plastic waste, using biodegradable plastic materials, developing waste banks, and waste management on land.

ST(OP)RAWS

Aqila Rizika Arrahma, INDONESIA
Project ID 2370

Plastic Pollution.

Two words. One event. Many disasters.

Plastic waste pollution has been a topic of discussion for years now. More than five trillion pieces of plastic are already in the oceans, and by 2050 there will be more plastic in the sea than fish. 8 million tons of plastic trash leak into the ocean annually, and it's getting worse every year. (NNC, 2018) This problem caused by the simplest yet complicated invention by humans. Straws. Have you ever thought about how many straws you used since the first time you know about it? If you could collect all of them, how many sacks could you make? Why should we start with straws?

Let's see from the point of view of straws. They were made in different length and sizes, and used for us to drink. But they were made from the same material, plastic, which was made from long carbon chain which made it difficult to decompose and took thousands of years to do it. These short-lived tools are usually dropped into a garbage can with no further thought, instantly becoming a source of plastic pollution.

Many straws ended up in a small river, lake, and ocean that could cause the danger of marine lives. Fishes and turtles could have the straws stuck at the body or nostrils that made them hard to breathe and move, and with no help from humans, they could die with plastic still stuck in their bodies. Now imagine if one straw could kill one animal each day, what about the 700 straws each person could cause each year?

A question popped in my mind as I was drinking, where are the straws come from?

Places such as restaurants, stalls, stands, and cafes use straws to serve with the beverages as in they were in pair. People who come and order get used to this kind of serving, if not they didn't get it they will unintentionally ask for it. Also, the production for straws will grow wider as the request got bigger with stores were opened. Food packaging such as sanitary straws which straws that are wrapped separately to avoid contamination were also used for many people.

With 268 million lives live in Indonesia, how many straws do Indonesian use? Based on research data, Divers Clean Action estimates the use of plastic straws in Indonesia has reached 93.2 million items every day, which in total is the same length as five times round trip from Jakarta to Papua. Plastic straws are always included in the top 10 rubbish that pollutes the ocean (Followed by cigarettes butts with plastic filter, food wrappers, plastic beverage bottles, plastic bags, take-out, lids, and foams) Facts had said 187,2 million tonnes of waste contributed by Indonesia alone. It took second place after China that dumped 292,6 million tonnes to the ocean. I won't be surprised if some years later, Indonesia will be placed at first. And that could be caused by the smallest straw. (NNC, 2018) This is alarming, and we must do something.

One of the ways to prevent it is by stop taking straws from stores. If the waiters or the seller gave the straws, politely refuse the offer. You might feel uncomfortable doing it at first but it was for the sake of minimize the garbage. Not only stop taking straws from the stores, we can also do zero waste campaign by using stainless steel straw. This campaign can be started from people around us, like what my school done. With one of the programmes using stainless steel straw as another way to replace plastic straws. This programme encouraged the students' awareness to reduce the trash to be sent to landfills, incinerators, or the ocean. The process is similar to the way that resources are reused in nature.

That is also something that my brother has been doing. He once told me and my parents to not take the straws from some restaurants. Although I know Indonesia is one of the biggest plastic contributors, I am still shocked how he casually said Indonesia is the destroyer of the world because of the amount of waste we had each year. I could agree with his statement because even now there have been posters and videos showing about pollutions, and charities for cleaning, people would still use small thing such as straws that will lead to wasting it and make it as garbage just because they think it is a small thing that will not do much damage. I often found my friends using straws for drinking and then throw it together with the plastic cup they were using. I have been preventing myself for using it and every time I get straws for my drinks, I will immediately refuse it.

I don't want to pollute the world with more straws. I have seen enough garbage in my year, and I don't want the future to see the worse. I won't hesitate to tell the people near me not to use straws or use a lot of plastic bags, and I hope others would do the same.

"Karena nila setitik, rusak susu sebelanga."

"Small mistakes that appear to be nothing, could become the biggest problem"

- Indonesian proverb

MIND YOUR FOOTPRINTS

Adea Koci, ALBANIA
Project ID 2373

Global population growth leads to many problems such as water shortages, pollution, deforestation and famine. As we know, one of the main problems in the world is the destruction of nature as a result of our footprints on earth. Unlike many other apocalyptic, climate change is a present reality rather than a predicted predicament. There is a scientific consensus that our footprint, in particular the emission of greenhouse gases is causing earth's climate to change at a frightening rate. It is estimated that unless we dramatically cut the emission of greenhouse gasses in the next twenty years, average global temperatures will increase by more than 2 C, resulting in expanding deserts, disappearing ice caps, rising oceans and more frequent extreme weather events such as hurricanes and typhoons. All these changes will, in turn, bring more devastating results. The agricultural production will be disrupted, cities will be inundated, and hundreds of millions of refugees will be in search of new homes.

One of the questions we constantly ask ourselves is how can we change this problem. We think that we are not the main reason for this negative phenomenon and we tend to close our eyes to what actually is happening. No one of us is able to face it alone and to change alone this actual hurdle which is worsening day-by-day.

We need to understand the importance of being united by having common interests and fighting for one purpose; stop climate change. We think that the extinct of many living species have occurred because of the natural reasons. But actually we are those who have taken their homes and their natural habitat. Why is this happening? Because of our greed to gain more materials by cutting trees and captivating wild areas.

It is obvious that this issue is worsening every day. Have you ever wondered how we would feel if someone would ruin the environment where we live. We never think about how they live without having their natural habitat and how they cope with adapting to terrible natural conditions. And what do we do for it? Moreover we will continue doing the same until we quench our thirst.

When I was a small child, I loved out to nature where there were of 7 wonderful lakes and each had its own characteristics. This place in Albania is called "The 7 lakes of Lures". I liked to go out and enjoy those natural wonders, to see fish, green forests and flowers on the lake. It was one of the places where I always felt good. To be honest, it has been long since I visited that place, until this summer when I decided to visit it again with my family. To my dismay, I couldn't see anything but dark lakes where a gloomy silence overwhelmed the whole surrounding environment. We could not hear birds but we could only see the cut woods and some dead fish on the lake. It made me realize that people were in a big mistake. I wished that my kids would have the opportunity to feel and enjoy the nature as I did when I was a little girl. They would be happy to see the lakes with green flowers, green forests and different animals. But I know that this is not going to happen, at least not in the near future.

Albania, in my opinion, now needs 50 years to recover to become just like it was before. This is because of the negligence on the part of governments and because of people's ignorance. This example did not only bring about my decision but I am sure that the same problem is happening in many other places in the world. We forget that we are the cause of hurting ourselves by abusing the things that nature has given to us.

There are many things that governments, corporations and individuals can do to avoid climate change. But to be effective they must be done on a global level. When it comes to climate, countries are not sovereign. Furthermore we should also take action on personal perspectives and stop destroying our children's future.

WASTE BANK IS A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION OF FLOOD IN INDONESIA

Rr Lintang Niwanggegni, INDONESIA
Project ID 2385

In Indonesia, flood occurs in rainy season. Rainy season with high frequency and intensity of showers will lead to flood if the water absorption channel and soil are damaged or clogged by waste.

Normally, flood occurs when the amount of rainwater exceeds the capacity of soil or water channel that absorb rain water. Jakarta and several big cities in Indonesia experience flood almost every rainy season for each year. Flood that happen in Indonesia is not only caused by high rainfall, but there are several other causes, including poor environmental management systems which is especially related to waste management problems in urban areas, the increasing population which results in widespread settlements and reduced water catchment areas, and as well as littering behavior.

Flood that hit several cities and regions of Indonesia every year impacts to physical damage to casualties. Floods can damage buildings such as houses, buildings, highways, and bridges. Flood causes transportation lines were cut off and emergency aid shipments were hampered. Clean water can be contaminated with unclean flood water. Flood brings diseases such as diarrhea and skin diseases. Indonesian government provides early flood warning systems, logistical assistance, health services, public kitchens, infrastructure repairing, and cleaning up flood-affected areas. Yet, those are not enough because the involvement of all community members is needed in helping in such situation. This flood problem requires a sustainable solution considering the serious impact of flood caused by waste.

Poor waste management and those residents who still dispose garbage in rivers or water sewage will cause flood. Other cause is population growth considers the housing needs in several cities in Indonesia leads to the decreasing of water catchment areas because the soil surface is coated with concrete and asphalt that cannot absorb air. This is compounded by building arrangements and land conversion functions that do not consider air transfer and storage systems.

A waste bank is a collective waste management system that encourages citizens to play an active role in it. This system will sort and distribute economically valuable waste to the market so that people get economic benefits and save garbage. The waste bank system is like a common bank system. There is a bank account for each person who deposit regularly his waste and he will receive payment for the waste that he delivers to the waste bank.

In several regions of Indonesia, the waste bank system has been able to run and bring goodness to the surrounding area and also for flood prevention. Waste bank is an effective solution of waste management for environment. By doing waste socialization including waste sorting information to people, it is expected that more people can contributes to the better environment. People awareness of clean and healthy environment is the key success for waste banks. Waste bank must be conducted in all cities in Indonesia as a way of managing waste. So, the garbage will be reduced, sewers will not be clogged, the environment will be clean, and flood problems will be reduced to a better life and environment.

THE OCEAN IS CRYING

Abdulsalam Rajab Ali, TANZANIA
Project ID 2403

I was very shocked after seeing tears of the Indian Ocean along our small islands of Zanzibar-Tanzania. Yes, our Islands are very small as both two of them (Unguja with 1666 km² and Pemba with km²) makes a total of 70.56 km². My fear increased after trying to think the fate of our islands and life in general in case if the surrounding giant ocean, the Indian Ocean with the size of 988 km² if it is going to cry seriously and just only one over sixteen of its water flows towards our islands as tears. Indeed, I didn't get sleep the day that I visited the soil mining areas so called KAMA in Unguja and KANGAGAN in PEMBA and seeing the signs of the ocean tears.

Soil mining simply means extraction of the sand and the rocks from the soil for construction activities. The demand for sand and rocks for construction purposes are dramatically keeping on increase due to increase in population, per capital income and the number of visitors in our islands which forced the need to construct many and big buildings as well as infrastructures such as tarmacked roads.

The government through the ministries of land, agriculture and natural resources is trying to monitor the soil mining activity but it is very difficult. They allocated specific areas of soil mining but now have depleted and left with numerous big trenches where the soil and biodiversity in general have completely killed. The government has now stopped the activity and having headache about where next or what to be done. The government is providing licenses for serious cases of construction to some companies and individuals to extract soil small scale in specific areas. The society is now in conflict with the government as peoples need to keep on extracting the soil as they real need to construct but they are being punished.

Oh! My people, I real know that you are in need, but "the soil is crying, the cause is your soil mining". You are breaking the rocks along the ocean banks and you excessive extract the soil along the ocean. You should remember and think about the next within the present by tracing the past.

There are many effects of soil mining that I saw myself after visiting those victim areas where the process has taken place. Specifically in our islands, I saw the land for cultivation is no longer there. Local peoples who are farmers were given little amount of money and allow their portions of land to extracted. They have left with trenches right now; their perennial crops such as cloves and banana do no longer exist. They can no longer cultivate annual crops such as maize, beans and rice most of which used to help them as food.

I saw the loss of biodiversity (plants, arthropods, annelids, birds, reptiles, amphibians few to mention among all living organisms) in mining sites. I couldn't hold it, I started weeping terribly. It is real shocking for any person who will visit them and trying to look at those environments in three dimensions.

Another shocking look is the tears of the ocean. I saw the sea water flowing to the continental soil and killing all of the plants and terrestrial organisms very slowly. It is slow but sure; sea water is coming slowly and killing the continents of our small islands. It is now slow but has just started. If people will keep on exploiting the soli; the speed of ocean tears will increase. By that time, the effects will be vivid to everyone and it will not be possible to control or prevent. The life in our beloved islands is going to be terminated. It is very likely that the same ocean that is supporting us by providing fishes and aiding rainfall formation; is going to cover all the islands and kill us or make us refugees.

I do have headache. Ooh! My people and the world in general, may we come and sit together to find the solution for this problem. I do believe that, everything in this world has its solution. I tried to think myself but I couldn't reach the conclusion. I believe on the collective power. I thought very meaningless solutions like importing soil from the mainland by using ships and aircrafts but finally I looked at the economic status of the community. Yes, some can afford but most of them are very poor. It will be too expensive for them to afford as even currently most people fail to own houses due to soil expenses.

I tried to recall the time of grandfathers of our grandfathers. They lived very simple, interesting and environmentally friendly life. They built very simple houses using simple abundant trees and covering them by using prepared coconut leaves. It is currently difficult to convince people stop constructing stores and other big buildings with very strong fences due to crimes and status. In mind of an educated and rich person living in such so called poor houses of our history will be either an offense or comedy.

I don't know what to do; I would like to insist the world once again to discuss this topic of mine. It is obvious that no soil no construction no infrastructures. The negative effects of soil mining are very obvious also especially in our islands. How can we solve this problem?

THE ENVIRONMENT, AN ACCIDENTAL TABOO

Stephania Cobos Sosa, MEXICO

Project ID 2428

While sitting in family meals, all you hear about is politics or economy, you listen to your parents talk about the bills they have to pay, or about the president we have, or about his actions, but, have you ever heard them talk about ecology? Or global warming? Even though these things are important, climate assets control over almost every environmental event that occurs, nobody talks about how global warming's impact has been increasing every year or how the consequences of it can be catastrophic.

How much have we heard about global warming and the greenhouse effect? We live in a world that is constantly changing, science and technology keep moving forward, and the mankind is left behind, no matter how many times we have heard it, we ignore it. We ignore the bad scenery where we live and we continue our life like it is nothing, like we live on a perfect world. Resources are running out faster than we thought, everything we thought would last centuries, will just last years. When those run out, what will it be for us to take? Since we need them, when we finally reach their breaking point, what are we going to do? What will be our sources?

I think of myself as a skeptical person, I find it hard to believe that there's going to be a change, that people might actually step up. All the damage that has been accumulated for years cannot be changed in a week or in a year, to see a true change, we need to change our mind, we need to open our minds, to really work for a change. People only do good things when someone important does them or acknowledges them, and this is depressing. Why do they need someone else's example for them to do something? Why depend on the mind of somebody else?

We hear the need of stopping polluting in order to stop global warming, but is this enough? We need a whole lot more to actually stop it; but once again, I'm skeptical, so I don't think that our hegemonic idea about us being the masters of the world will somehow disappear. Because it will not be enough with this planet, we have gone to the moon and now we wish to conquer space, we may destroy ourselves before we even have the possibility to reach such dream, and that would be such an experience, imagine, learning how life works in different parts of the universe and all its majestic elements, but are we even going to be alive to enjoy that moment?

What is happening to the world? Snow is falling in Hawaii, Australia gets heat waves with temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius, a humpback whale shows up dead in Amazon River when it should have migrated thousands of miles to Antarctica, winds shake a plane because of how strong they were, Polar bears get to interact with grizzly bears, Is this common? Is this how things should be?

According to the United Nations, there's still a chance to keep global warming under control, but just if NDC commitments are put into action before 2030, otherwise there's no way we can reach the goal.

I remember that in my city, winter arrived in December, now December is not one of the coldest months, December is like August for us now and cold temperatures are reached around February. I remember seeing pictures of before and after of my hometown as well, old pictures seem to be more vivid than the ones of how it is now, all green areas were replaced by buildings, parks that were once full with trees and flowers are now packed with concrete. Fish were abundant. Now when I ask my grandpa how is fishing going right now, he says that all he gets is plastic, restaurant waste, cigarettes or bags of chips.

I only see innocence in my little sister, I look at her like a person that has dreams, dreams that are in this world, so far everything has been a fairytale for her, Danna loves the sea, loves the soothing sound of the waves, loves how smooth the sand is, she loves the Mexican Caribbean. She doesn't know that the life expectancy of the planet is on its verge, she doesn't know that Earth has now become so narrow that Polar bears don't precisely live in the North Pole anymore, or that all the catastrophes are not induced by a god.

I see my generation playing video games, entertained in their fake world where everything is happiness, where they try to be accepted by everyone, where they feel the need to fit in the world of social media, I see them only knowing how a forest is just by pictures on internet, I see the new generations wondering how would the city look like if it had green areas, if it wasn't all covered in smog or how the city would look like if trash wasn't in every step they take or how they might consider wearing a gas mask just to go to school or to the store.

Why is it so hard to talk about a topic that affects all of us, why do only a few people actually do something to change it, why can't we talk about it more? We aren't comfortable talking about it because we don't want to admit it that our future is not as bright as we thought, how odd we are, we call ourselves humans and what we have the least is humanity, how weird understanding of the concept of evolution and change of our environment we have, when all of it is turn into destruction, same that turns against us, and is then when the question arises: What did we do wrong?

WASTE DISPOSAL MANAGEMENT

Marshall Raihan Sahirman, INDONESIA
Project ID 2467

TPA is a land area of waste disposal. In Indonesia, TPA causes several problems including water, soil and air pollution since urban waste is only collected, transported and disposed of to TPA.

Slowly but sure, waste becomes a big problem for Indonesia. Unfortunately, the people awareness of managing their waste is lacking. In fact, each house should sort out the waste before throwing it away. Sorting out waste is not yet a culture.

In Indonesia, each house usually has one trash can in the kitchen section, where all leftovers, used plastic, household product packaging, are thrown into one. On the front page, there is also only one large trash can. In the large trash can, kitchen waste will be put together with garbage from other parts of the house. All kinds of waste are put together.

According to data from the official website of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), Indonesia produced 65 million tons of waste in 2016 and increased for about 1 million tons from the previous year. Around 15 million tons of waste pollutes the ecosystem and the environment because they are not being managed well. 7 % of the waste is recycled and 69 percent of the waste ends up in the Final Disposal Site (TPA). In Indonesia there are more than 400 landfills but only 10 percent operate optimally. That's because there are a number of problems in terms of management.

Disposal of mixed waste damages and reduces the value of material that may still be To deal with garbage problems, the management alternatives are needed. The final disposal site (TPA) is not a suitable and it leads environmental problems. In addition, another alternative solution must be able to deal with all the problems of waste disposal by recycling all waste. In my opinion, good waste management (sort waste according to the kinds of material) must involve the community. It is impossible to succeed waste management without the participation of every citizen.

Disposable waste should be sorted first. It is to make them easy to be composted and recycled optimally. It is to avoid of being discharged into a mixed waste disposal system as it is now. Industries must redesign their packaging products to facilitate the recycling packaging products.

The Malang City Environment Agency implements a district program which is recycling compost management. This helps reducing waste disposed to landfill. In addition, there is also called 4R (replace, reduce, reuse, recycle) method which can also be done to reduce the amount of waste that will go to the landfill. Reduce can be done by reducing the material we use. Reuse can be practiced by extending the usage time of goods before becoming garbage by not using disposable items. Recycle is to recycle waste to make compost or crafts made from plastic waste. Replace can be replacing the plastic garbage bag with a cloth bag or basket to reduce the usage of plastics

If waste management can be done well, then we can get the benefits of waste management, including saving landfill land, making beautiful environment (clean, healthy and comfortable), and reducing pollution.

STYROFOAM WASTE SOLUTION

Febriani Nur Amalia, INDONESIA
Project ID 2470

At this time, waste needs to be managed wisely. If waste is not managed well for its processing, it will pollute the environment due to unwise handling of waste. There are many types of waste as plastic waste, food leftover, used cans, used bottles, used food and beverage packages, Styrofoam, and others.

Styrofoam is a type of plastic of group 6 made from polystyrene and gas. The biggest contributor of Styrofoam waste is Indonesia which contributes 11.9 tons Styrofoam waste per month. Meanwhile, Indonesia houses contribute 9.8 tons per month from 11.9 tons. The percentage of Styrofoam waste reaches 1.14% of the 12% plastic waste collected every month.

Styrofoam waste is used packages of electronic items, food, and others. The waste will only be disposed and being buried in the ground. This is because Styrofoam waste is still considered as noneconomic waste unlike plastic waste that can be recycled so it has economic value.

Uncontrolled disposal of Styrofoam poisons the soil because plastic particle will potentially kill decomposing animals in the soil like worms. Plastic particle from Styrofoam or PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) cannot be decomposed even though they have been eaten by animals and plants and it will create toxic food chains. Styrofoam waste will disrupt the absorption of water into the soil and can also reduce soil fertility because Styrofoam can block air circulation in the soil and block space for underground creatures to play a role in the process of soil enrichment.

In addition, Styrofoam is hazardous for health since it contains benzene components which causes of cancer. The unmanaged disposal of styrofoam will be dangerous for the environment such as it can clog waterways and cause flooding. Styrofoam contains Cloro flouro carbon (CFC) which is the cause of the greenhouse effect. Styrofoam also contributes to the emergence of the greenhouse effect.

The solution to the problem of styrofoam waste to the environment is this waste must be sorted and recycled into a more useful product in certain ways such as brick, tile or handicraft, and other products. On the other hand, styrofoam production can be made by environmentally friendly materials (bio styrofoam) made from organic wastes (rice straw, palm oil waste, sugar cane waste, corn waste) so that they can decompose by nature.

DO NOT HURT THE OLD LADY!

Henry Shi, CANADA
Project ID 314

It was early in the morning, and most of the passengers were still in a deep sleep. The downpour of rain had started last night, quite uncharacteristic of the region the cruise was sailing through. The little girl, Adya, being only 10, and the youngest, had a special relationship with the old lady, and therefore was placed in the same room. The old lady was a true global citizen. Among her countless children, born or adopted, were people of all countries. Some had strayed quite far, but for her 100th birthday, most of her family from all around the world had agreed to come join her on a Caribbean cruise, booked for them only. Despite her elderly age, no one knew of a more resilient human being, and her eyes still shone with the light of deep wisdom and sincere kindness. She seemed perfectly healthy, like someone 50 years younger. Hence, when Adya woke up to find her great grandma in a coma on the ground, wrapped in her blankets, and bruised from the fall, everyone was genuinely surprised - and understandably terrified. Among the attendees, there was one doctor, who diagnosed her as poisoned, but could not determine the exact cause without more medical equipment that would require returning to the mainland. Naturally, everyone agreed that it would be best for the ship to return to shore promptly. After that singular moment of harmony however, the corridors became chaos.

Adya was in disbelief. Her ayeeyo weyn was in a coma! She roamed the boat in a daze, not knowing what to do, since all the adults ignored her. Only Liam seemed to care about her at all, an old professor from Canada, son of the old lady. He comforted her as she stumbled along the halls, listening to the bickering family members towering above her, blaming each other of poisoning the old lady. Adya was horrified. Where she was from, back in Djibouti, people believe that their ayeeyo weyn was a gift not to be abused, but respected and cherished. She is a source of wisdom and life, birthing all of one's parents and elders. She needs to be protected and loved. If possible, her stories should be shared to future generations, on and on. How could anyone poison her?

Several were accusing Wang, one of the old lady's adopted son's son. From what Adya knew, he was one of the youngest successful businessmen from China. Pedro, from Brazil, was shouting: "Wang, what were you thinking? If it wasn't for her initial funding, you wouldn't have been able to get anything started!"

"It wasn't me! I didn't do it!"

"We all know how much poison China produces each year. They're the largest culprit in the world! And for the sake of your company you probably have been blindly pushing plans forward, totally ignoring everything else. Your so greedy." The last sentence was spoken with much contempt.

"Pedro, you are being irrational. You said it yourself, why would I poison her? I should thank her for everything. No, no, my company is not to blame, I haven't produced any more poison than everyone else. In fact, we have even been implementing mass amounts of solar panels into our factories. And it's sick that you should think I poisoned her. Look at yourself. Your company has cut down numberless swaths of the Amazon. You produce waste, limit rainfall, and reduce trees that reduce carbon dioxide. You probably have produced more poison than any of us, just so you can sell more of that stupid wood."

Pedro looked disgusted. He walked off red-faced, clearly angry at the accusation.

Adya continued down the corridors, numb, half-listening to the conversations above her head.

Arjun, the old lady's adopted son, ran a large textile manufacturing company back in India. He was yelling at Boris. "It's you. I knew it. You are probably the most distant relative here. You are the only one with a family that's been in Russia for several generations. If anyone, you would poison her for your own sick benefits. Plus, your power plant is so noxious, there is no way you don't produce excess and uncontrolled chemicals. You are probably happy about the horribly loose legislature in Russia. That way, you can avoid consequences for all the damage you are undoubtedly doing."

Boris stiffened his neck. "Look at yourself! You accuse me of abusing the loose legislature in Russia? Ok, well, you're probably abusing the fast fashion trends all around the world right now to sell mass amounts of clothing, disregarding all the wasted textiles that have become trash everywhere. You stain the rivers with dye, blot the sun with your smoke, and condemn every man and woman back in India to a life of breathing your garbage!"

The two of them stared at each other for several seconds before each marching off. Before marching past a clearly disturbed Riku, Arjun mumbled, "and you too, you're just as much of a suspect."

Riku, a man in his 40's, stood in the hall in confusion. He ran a very humble whaling and fishing corporation: one of many back in Japan. Arjun, despised the pollution and overfishing that many such companies are guilty of. Riku didn't understand that in a fit of rage, what he had thought of as his newfound friend as of the cruise Arjun had just lumped him with every other fishing business.

As Boris walked down the hall in the opposite direction, Hans from Germany saw him. He opened his mouth as if to say something, but Boris shut him up quickly, before pacing past: "Your country is the third largest economy in the world. Your car manufacturing plants... hmph. You know full well what they've done."

Adya passed the bar on the ship, noticing that many of the British members had gone there to seemingly mull their worries over a pint or two. In there, a few were quite self-conscious. "Hey Richard... what if it was us? What if we all unwillingly poisoned her? We're pretty wealthy... We each have several cars... we all adore luxury, and live with few worries. Sometimes, I keep my lights and TV on and say that it's so robbers don't come... but really that's just a poor excuse for my own carelessness. Some of my friends live farther from the city, where they have gardens. But I feel like every time I visit the sprinklers, they are always on. They do seem to use a great deal of water..."

Some Arabs were in discussion when Liam and Adya passed by. Liam gave them a look, but not quick enough for them to not notice. Perhaps they had just been in an argument with some others, for they seemed very on edge. One of them, Amir, was obviously resentful: "What are you looking at? Are you going to say that we are at fault? Would you like to blame us? Because we have oil? Because oil spills damage the oceans? Because burning oil creates harmful gasses and heats the earth? Because oil is the root of all evils as some seem to want to say? Well, let me tell you, Canadian, your people have it too, and you don't seem to hold back from selling or using any of it. You claim to be loving of the environment, and you seem to want to help the world, but you are all hypocrites! Your use of hydropower cannot cover the fact that you still use fossil fuels and natural gas. Your lifestyle sickens us. You dare blame the US and China, when you live such lavish lives, and waste so many resources? This is a mockery!"

Adya looked up at Liam. No one had ever talked to him like that. For all she knew, as a professor, all that he heard were respectful and civilized comments. Likewise, Adya had never heard Canada called out in such a way. Canada had a good

reputation — it was good... or so she thought. But what she did not know is that everyone was responsible. Everyone had a hand in poisoning the old lady. For the old lady is the Earth, and the passengers are all its inhabitants. There is substantial scientific evidence which supports the idea that humans are primarily responsible for much of the global warming that has been observed since 1950. By now, it is quite clear that many changes in the planet's climate is driven by our actions. Undoubtedly, intensive farming, deforestation, the use of fossil fuels, and many other human activities are the primary source of such change. Industries, as well as the public, must share the blame.

It is the responsibility of us all to stop climate change. Perhaps not everyone is equally at fault, but the sad and undeniable fact is that everyone will be equally affected. It is a truly extensive issue that could be the single most devastating crisis in human history: worse than any war, disease, or natural disaster. It must be dealt with, lest future generation bear the dire consequences of their elders' mistakes. It must be solved soon, or it may have irreversible ramifications. It cannot wait any longer. Everyone can blame each other and suffer the results, or everyone can work cohesively to overcome man's hardest obstacle yet.

REMEMBER THE TIDES

Iris Xia, U.S. CALIFORNIA
Project ID 381

They tell me that I ought to remember more, that I am fortunate to be one of the few citizens to have known the times of water. Fortunate, indeed. Fortunate that I had watched everyone I knew perish, and yet I had remained alive. And now, when the memory flows in, I have to remember and record. For my story is like an ocean, the memories drifting in and out, the tides bringing in and pushing out the treasures of the past.

My conscious memory begins at age three, when my sister was born. That day, I had fallen into a bathtub, tasting for the first time the terror and awe of being inside the vast expanse of liquid, the miniature waves awakening me from my deep sleep. After that day, my family entered our golden age. This was the time when my parents were still young and I carefree, and we would sail up and down the street hauling my baby sister in a big red wagon for all the blue sky to see. Back then, I had shone like a star, always so full of energy and youth: singing for my parents, playing the piano, painting pictures for my baby sister to point and laugh at. And now, as I grow older and dimmer, these beloved memories continue to seep into my mind and I begin to imagine that I am once again in that golden age, back when the water had been plentiful and cool, flowing into the hours and bearing me ever forward.

Sometimes, as I lie resting in my hospital bed, a wave of memory begins to take form, the current of water absorbing vapor, building on, and finally launching into the sky when—I am ten years old again. The wave crashes onto the wet sand a meter away from my feet, quickly spreading into a layer of gentle white foam that tickles my toes and sends a cold jolt up my leg. Ever since I had experienced my powerful epiphany in the bathtub, the water had become my place to think, to feel, to remember. I had many happy memories standing there on that beach with my sister and my parents, watching the tide wash over my toes, then back, then over again. I had once thought that it was a silly thing to do, watching the water move back and forth when it made no progress at all. But I still did it, year after year, staring and wondering at the changing horizon.

As the tides usher in the recollections of my childhood, the great unlocked doors of memory also bring forward the days that I had tried so hard to forget. I close my eyes, trying to stop them from coming, but I cannot. How peculiar it is, then, that in a heartbeat, one's life could change forever? Who could have known that in a mere moment, so many things could go so horribly wrong? It is like reading tragic stories in the news, then realizing that you are no different from those unfortunate victims of shootings and disasters, that no matter how kind or hardworking you were, nothing stood in your way of being on those papers too. By sixteen, much of the resources were gone, and people were getting desperate. My baby sister had been one of the first to disappear. I had simply come home one day to find that she was no longer there. To hear that she had never even made it home from school. That it had been but an accident, simply an accident. The tides bring in my memories of grief, but it does not stop there. It brings me my mother and my father, our considerable sorrow and loss of hope, the great fire that no one was supposed to survive. I open my eyes, but outside the window, the smoke is still there.

Sometimes, when I am drifting between the glassy realms of dreams and reality, I can hear the doctors talking quietly about new discoveries—of a planet named Earth where some forms of life had been found, of the possibility of transporting some of the oldest, who still remembered what water and nature were like, to start a new colony there. This frightens me, and one thought crystallizes in my hazy, disoriented mind: I cannot leave this planet, not where my family had come and gone, and so many before them. I desperately cling to the land where I was born, just as I cling to the memories of our golden age, and so, they let me be.

When I had been a little younger and still able to move around, I had hobbled back to the beach of my childhood. It had long become a barren crater, a scar on the face of the dry landscape. Yet in my mind's eye, the ghost of water flows through it still, the tide rising and falling as my family plays at the ocean's edge, their laughter reaching my ears. "Hannah..." they call to me, "our oldest, our legacy..." But in the blink of an eye, they are gone, borne back to the night sky as twinkling stars that I can still see as I gaze from the seclusion of my bed. They are always there, never leaving, never gone. And one day, when the tide comes in to take me too, the waves will envelop me into their arms, and carry me up to the sky. Only there could I again shine bright as a star and watch the tide tickle my toes, back and forth, back and forth, forever.

A QUIET APOCALYPSE

Karen Jackson, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 1411

Walking alone through formerly busy places is a very strange thing.

Downtown is empty, even though it's a sunny afternoon and by all accounts it should be packed at this hour. Normally, there's everything you would expect from a rural small town on a Saturday: the farmer's market, the unruly children at the playground, the gossipy PTA moms casting judgmental glances at the teenagers, the elderly folks from across the way discussing their grandkids under the gazebo. Nothing dangerous, nothing life-threatening, just the average bits and pieces of small-town life.

It's still like that, almost. Old music still plays on a loop from a speaker underneath the awning of a bakery, a repetitive, lazily written track by a long-dead pop sensation whose voice I vaguely recognize but whose name I can't remember. The posters for last year's school play still flutter in the afternoon breeze; I guess nobody ever bothered to take them down. On the corner next to the florists' there's a Girl Scout cookie booth, one opened, empty cardboard box of Thin Mints sitting sadly in the center amongst the dying rose petals from the Valentine's Day decorations. It's just like it's always been, except different.

I don't think I've ever really visualized this town changing. It's always seemed so stagnant to me. Everything pretty much stays the same in places like these, which I feel is kind of their appeal. It's quaint and quiet and archaic and cute, and people don't have to worry about changing politics or a rapidly approaching future. That's why they find places like these charming. The past still lives in small towns, while the rest of society moves too fast to keep up with. So while I knew, logically, that this town is just as real and present in the world as any other, I never really took that to heart. I preferred to pretend that this place is just a separate little bubble from the rest of America, sealed off and special, immune to any outside influence.

I wish that were true. If any bad thing was to happen to anyone, I assumed it would happen some place far away from my little slice of Arcadia. I guess that was kind of idealistic, in retrospect.

Beyond the bakery is a convenience store that's been looted too many times to count, but sometimes if you really scavenge around you can get lucky. Most of the useful stuff—cough drops, cold medicine, all the drugs in the pharmacy—have been gone for a while, but the other things, like beauty supplies and children's toys, are strewn about the shelves, displaced but not stolen yet. I take what I can, just because you never know when something will come in handy. Then I notice a bright pink roll of Hubba Bubba bubblegum lying underneath the price-check kiosk. I brush the dust off with my jacket and tuck it into my pocket. My brother used to really like this stuff, so I'd always get some for him when I went here. He's been gone for a while now, but it feels wrong to just leave it here, so I've taken to collecting bubblegum.

There's nobody in the store to scan anything anymore, and even if there were, it isn't like money means anything anyway. Funnily enough, I still feel kind of guilty about just pocketing the stuff. I've done a lot of awful things in the past few years, but stealing gum from an abandoned drugstore still weirds me out. Go figure.

I return to the street again, loot in hand, and continue wandering aimlessly through the remnants of downtown. I still look two ways before crossing the street, even though I don't think there's anyone left to hit me, and even if by some miracle they were still alive, they wouldn't have the gasoline to drive a car. I stop to read the community events flyers, even though the dates are in what may as well be the distant past, and even if things were still the same, I'd have no interest in the free yoga classes at the Rec or the Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser at the local elementary school. I browse the magazine rack in the hairdresser's, look at the pamphlets tacked up to the church's bulletin board, pretend like I care about all this even though there's nobody really left to see me. It's more the principle of the thing. Then I come across the graveyard completely by accident, even though that's where I meant to go in the first place.

The graves aren't very well made. It all happened so quickly that no one really had the chance to make funeral arrangements, and near the very end of it all, there was almost nobody left to even care about the dead. I tried to remember where each person was buried, but that got too complicated, so now the only graves I really remember are those of my own friends and family.

My brother lies at rest in between my father and my mother, who went before him. I've left his stuff on his grave, mostly because I don't want him to haunt me if his presence somehow finds out that I touched his PS4 after his death. Those last few days of his life, that's pretty much all he told me: "Don't touch my stuff when I'm gone!" I think he knew he was dying; they all did, except for me apparently.

I leave the bubblegum against the poorly-made wooden cross with his name written on it in Sharpie. Then I pick some dandelions and leave them there, too, just because putting flowers on a grave seems like the right thing to do. I wouldn't know. I've never been good at this type of thing, but maybe it's better now that there's no grieving family to awkwardly talk to except for myself.

It doesn't really get easier. I try to pretend it does, but it doesn't. The deaths of everyone you've ever known in a matter of weeks isn't something that can ever be dealt with, especially when their manner of death was so violent and painful and utterly preventable. It still makes me angry to think about, because it's such a stupid way for an apocalypse to happen that it all feels like some type of cosmic joke.

I remember reading about it the newspapers when it first started happening. I forget the name of the disease, it was some long Latin-y thing like pretty much every name we had to memorize in Bio class. Everyone I knew pretty much just called it the disease; we all knew what it meant. And it began in the most ridiculous way possible—a bat. Someone destroyed the bat's habitat, they were forced to live closer to humans, a bat bit a human, and... well, the story writes itself from there, doesn't it?

I still find it astronomically unlikely and kind of insane, in truth. Such a simple thing led to such graphic consequences. What are the odds that cutting down one stretch of forest causes a butterfly effect that ends in an apocalypse in a matter of months? I used to think nothing bad could ever happen here in this town, and now everyone and everything I've ever loved about it is dead all because someone got too careless with a bat on the other side of the world. It's like one of those awful time travel movies where going back in time messes up the future, except this isn't our dystopian future nightmare. It's just my disappointing reality.

I just wish there's something I could do about it, but the truth is that the mistakes that caused this to happen weren't my fault, and they happened so long ago that there's nothing anyone today can really do about them, anyway. It wasn't really just one guy cutting down a tree where he wasn't supposed to. It was something bigger than that. And I think the biggest problem is that none of our forefathers, none of the people responsible for the mistakes that led to the death of most of civilization, had any idea

what they were doing until it was too late to change it. They weren't the ones who felt the ramifications of their irresponsible policies and ecologically dangerous practices... the consequences of their actions fell to the next generation.

So here I am, eternally trapped in the remnants of a town that died years ago, surrounded by innocent people who suffered because of their ancestors' mistakes, watching the world around me slowly rot away in the absence of the people who made it great. I'd love to say we can still change it, but the time for change is long gone. Now it's not a matter of changing the world, it's a matter of trying to live through its collapse.

I rise slowly from the ground near my brother's gravestone. I take another look around the churchyard, at the names on the tombs. Then I gather my bag again and walk back through the streets, still empty, still lonely, stuck in a snapshot of last February before reality hit and we could all still pretend nothing bad ever happened in our little town.

I walk alone, the last person left in the end of the world.

THE WASTING

Eileen Reilly, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 1414

I remember getting the call.

It was from a hospital and they had said Jen's name and I couldn't help but ask myself:

"How long has it been?"

I didn't... have an answer? I knew it had been a long time, we just drifted apart after I went off to college and she decided to stay there. Something felt wrong about leaving, but I wasn't going to get another opportunity like that. It was once in a lifetime, not everyone gets accepted to an ivy league and what was I supposed to do? Throw my future away for a friend?

It was a call from the hospital and they said one word that felt like a knife had been twisted in me.

Cancer.

I... I don't remember which cancer, I don't think it matters either. I remember I sunk. I remember I dropped the phone. I remember feeling like I had just been shot.

Jen? Cancer? No, that can't be true

They had said she wanted to see me, that the chemo wasn't working and she had set herself aside for dying and I just... how do you say no to that? It felt unreal. Like a dream? Its cliché, but you don't really know why a cliché is a cliché until you are in that situation. You can laugh at it, and dismiss it until you become the cliché. Then you understand. Then you feel it and the weight of it... it's suffocating. Like something compressing your chest it just pushes on you until you can't take it anymore.

I got on the first plane back home. I had to go back to see her, I couldn't just hurt her like that.

Hospitals are strange. They feel like the ultimate dystopia. You walk in surrounded by white, but it's usually a bit dirty so it's not perfectly white, but this unnatural off white? It never feels real.

No matter how many times you're in a hospital you only ever feel two things while you're there, at least I have. You either feel a hyper presence where you can hear and feel everything going on around you and feel just totally imprisoned by your surroundings or you feel detached. It's either the sliding glass doors become prison bars or oxygen and I can't decide which a worse feeling is.

It all felt like some dream, none of it real just some story written by some idiot somewhere to make someone feel misery. None of it felt real, that is until I saw her. When I saw Jen, I knew it was all real. The glass shattered and the shards flew in every direction, not a care in the world for whose flesh they were slicing through on their way past. It just so happened it was mine.

She was thin. Rail thin. Her skin looked tight, tightly stretched around her bones and every breath looked like a feat of strength. My first thought when I walked in was:

Where's Jen?

You always think you will notice the baldness first. You prepare for that. Ready yourself to see the person without hair, no matter how alien it may seem. But when I saw Jen... when she looked up at me the first thing I noticed were her eyes. They were weary. Like she had been up for days straight, but they were present. She was here, God was she here.

It was the same old Jen. The same girl who'd talk about rain water on tent roofs or her latest environmental escapade. It felt almost like a prank. Like any minute now she would rip off the bald cap and jump out of bed and yell "surprise!" That would have been like her, she always had a good sense of humor like that. But there were no cameras except for hospital security. No crew except the nurses behind the desk. It wasn't some elaborate joke. Her eyes said that much. This odd... hope? It looked like love, if that makes sense.

"You came!" She said. Her tone was weak, shaky even, but excited. As if she didn't sound like she needed a glass of water in the worst way. As if she wasn't the one in a hospital bed.

"What? Did you think I was just going to ignore my friend dying?" I said, jokingly. I immediately hated myself.

"What? No flowers?" She said. "Can't you see I'm dying over here?" She said shortly before her laughter turned to a coughing fit.

All hospital rooms are the same when you get down to it. There's always a few chairs in the corner and you're always a bit scared to go near the person. It's this primal thing and you feel horrible for it, but there's just something deep within you that rejects all of it at first. You feel so painfully awkward when visiting someone who's sick and you don't know what to do so you force yourself close.

"I'm so sorry for all of this, I..."

"What are you apologize for, Ev? It's not like you gave me cancer." She said casually.

"I just... it's something you do, y'know?" I said, awkwardly. God, I hate myself. She didn't think anything of it. Something Jen always did. She always understood you, no matter what you did, it was who she was. She always understood what you meant and even if she teased you there was always this silent acknowledgment that she knew what you meant, like she could feel what you were thinking.

We sat there for a while. Silent. We didn't know what to say. What do you say? Your best friend who you abandoned is in a hospital bed, dying and you can't do shit. What do you say to the person you've been friends with since sixth grade who left you for some college? It's not like we even had coffee. Hospital food is a poor substitute for brunch.

"I... I managed to convince them to let me go out today." She said quietly.

"That's good." I said, not really there.

"They offered it a bit ago, but I told them that I wanted to wait, I wanted to go on one last walk." She said to me.

Before I left, before I decided that college was more important we would go on things she called "walks." They were more like hikes and it was always just me, her, the woods and whatever snacks we brought along the way.

She loved the woods, anything and everything about it. It was her passion, she never wanted to leave and you had to pull her out of the woods if you wanted to go home at a reasonable time otherwise a two hour long hike would turn into a three day camping trip. She always kept the tent in her car, she was always prepared. She loved the smell of pine.

There was this one spot we'd go, it was just a little ways outside of town and it was a decent clearing. Away from everything. It was the most beautiful place on earth and she only made it better. You can't tangibly describe the way the sun rose gently above the pine trees, tinting everything a bright shade of orange and yellow that only the rising sun has. The way birds chirped as it rose. Even in the night it was beautiful. Darkness covered the ground like a blanket, the light emanating from

everywhere in that odd way night light does. This pale blue coming, rising up from the ground. The bright white coming down from the moon. The way the pine trees looked comfortably formidable as you looked and they seemed to continue infinitely upwards in a race to the sky.

I can spend pages writing about just the pure beauty of that spot, but I would never do it justice.

It was my responsibility, no, my pleasure to take her to that spot one last time. Maybe, just maybe her last moments could be filled with that beauty, that serenity, the majesty. Maybe her last sights can be the brook, the pines, maybe she could see one more sunrise there and I can make up for abandoning her. Maybe it'll all work out in the end?

It never works out in the end.

The car ride was this quiet, scary, and sort of emotional. We both wanted to say everything, but we couldn't think of anything at all so we settled for a somber silence to let our feelings stir.

Have you ever gone somewhere and it had changed? Because I hadn't before then. We got to our spot and found out the woods weren't there anymore. It wasn't a little grotto in the dense forest of beautifully ambitious and formidable pine trees charitably letting birds nest in their dense hearts. It was a Walmart.

Our spot was the electronics section of a department store.

I had failed.

Jen had one wish. She wanted to see it again, to be there and I couldn't take her there because it wasn't it anymore. When we arrived I parked the car and walked around the parking lot as if I was expecting the huge building to dissipate into trees and grass. When I walked up to it finally struck me.

It's gone.

I sunk to the curb, sat down and just looked forward, staring blindly.

I don't want to cry.

"Y'know what's funny?" Jen says, coming to sit on the curb next to me. "When you left, I... I was upset..." she was getting choked up. I couldn't look at her because then we'd both start crying, but I could tell from her voice she was on the verge of tears. "I didn't go camping for a while, like a really long time and apparently the tent just rotted? I found that out last year, it's just... gone." She said.

"A bit like our spot." I said, keeping my eyes forward, resting my chin in the palm of my hands.

"It was never about the spot, Evan. That place, it was just trees and grass, this store is proof of how things like that disappear. But you and me? Us? We're still here and even when I'm gone you'll still be here." She said, leaning in and hugging me from the side.

I broke then. I started tearing up, like I was the one who was dying. I wanted to speak but I couldn't. I knew then what I had always known. The only thing I could think of were three words and I so desperately wanted to tell her those three words. Words I knew would change our relationship, but words we always should have said to each other. Words that I had to leave because I couldn't say them. I wanted to tell Jen right then that I love her, but I couldn't. I went over in my head again and again how it would go, how it didn't matter what she said back, I just needed her to know, more than anything, that I love her.

But nothing ever goes to plan.

I didn't tell Jen I love her. I never could. I wanted to, I can't tell you how much I needed to say it, but I couldn't force the words out of my mouth. After a while we both decided we should get back to the hospital. I stopped crying somewhere along the way, just past the corner of Thomas Street and Lionel Road.

There's only so many tears you can cry.

I wouldn't leave until I told her. I couldn't leave until I told her. I couldn't say anything else either. I stayed in the room with her the entire time.

I held her hand until she got cold.

SERENITY

Ditte Isak, U.S. NEW YORK
Project ID 1421

There was never peace.

No matter what I said or did, no matter how many different ways I tried to resolve the problem, there was never quiet for long. There was always shouting, always fighting. Even in ceasefire, the silence was deafening. Dense. A hard to breathe, heaving air in and out kind of dense. The tension hung in the air, lingering, contaminating the cool, clear summer night air of the hotel rooms we stayed in, invading dreams and making nightmares of them.

It was two weeks of tumult, two weeks of unrest. Sometimes the car shook so much from the impact of the shouts from inside that you easily could have mistaken it for the rumblings of the San Andreas Fault. Sometimes we swerved so violently I thought we were going to crash. Sometimes my mother's face got so close to mine I could feel the force of her words make contact with my face like a slap. Sometimes her outstretched palm ended up in the same place.

Somehow, it was worse when it wasn't directed at me. When it was my fault, it was easier to bear. I could take it. But when I couldn't do anything – when I just had to sit there and listen – that was more than I knew how to deal with. Their voices echoed in my head day and night, bouncing around the inside of my skull like rubber, leaving tiny fractures in their wake that compounded every day. My ears would ring, my head would pound, my body would become jello. It was all just...too much.

We were all lying in bed one night in what must have been the fifth hotel on this road trip of ours, and I realized I couldn't move. It was like the air had suddenly turned to lead. I couldn't move a single muscle, not even a finger. Not even my lips. I was trapped under the weight of it all, unmoving, unthinking, consumed entirely by the panic that was so quickly setting in. It felt like I was being hurled through the air at one hundred miles per hour, despite my cognizance of the fact that I wasn't moving at all. I could see my chest thumping with the beating of my heart, could hear it pounding in my ears. My breath was fast, and my limbs were numb; my face was prickling with pins and needles. Any and all composure I had been clinging to vanished. Darkness crept into the corners of my vision, threatening to consume me. I was stuck like that most of the night, and not until rays of morning sunshine started to make their way through the blinds did I finally fall asleep.

The next day was more of the same. Nobody noticed what had happened the night before, and they went about their business as usual. It was strange to me, how little had changed. It was like the conflict had reached a crisis point, but there was no resolution. Nobody learned their lesson. Nobody changed. They just kept doing what they were doing, not even noticing the damage they were inflicting, or if they did, not caring.

Our car rattled on down the road, engine roaring in contempt, exhaust fuming, and the physical embodiment of the anger being shot like bullets from a gun inside its chambers. It was almost ridiculous how perfect the representation was. How unbelievably, miserably perfect. At some point the buildings and back streets on either side of us gave way to trees, although we were all too occupied to notice. We came to a stop in a clearing, quite obviously man-made, which was the site of a parking lot. Upon our exiting the vehicle, all yelling stopped, and with it went speech altogether. Another temporary armistice to tide us over until we once again had the privacy of our car to conduct our battles. We pulled out all other stops when we fought, but the one thing we wouldn't do, the one thing we couldn't do, was embarrass ourselves.

And so there was silence, at least verbally, and with it came again the deafening roar it so often incurs, drowning out the woodpeckers hacking away at the trunks of trees that got taller with each row we passed and the squirrels rustling the leaves in their ever higher boughs. I focused on my feet, trying to just get through the hike, as the noise consumed me. We trekked miles into the forest, passing hundreds of other people along the way. They were laughing, talking, and enjoying themselves. Why couldn't we have that? Why were we like this? As we walked, I slowly grew ever more resentful of the smiling faces we passed. I was angry. The kind of angry where you just want – no, you need – to punch something, or else you will surely explode. My fists clenched and my pace got steadily faster until I was practically running and everyone was far behind me and the roaring got louder and tears pushed at the back of my eyes and I just let them fall and –

And I looked up, and I was alone. The kind of alone where you could scream at the top of your lungs and no one would hear you. I had come to a small clearing at the end of the trail. Trees – great, big redwoods – stretched into the sky all around me. Their limbs extended into each other, intertwining to blanket the sky in green, casting the ground into shadow, a singular circle of light illuminating the center like a ray from heaven. The air was cool and damp, soothing compared to the unforgiving heat of summer. And everything was quiet. There were no woodpeckers flitting or squirrels scuttling about. The only sound was the whistling of a soft breeze coming in from the west. I stepped forward, and slowly, cautiously, trying not to disturb anything, I centered myself in the light.

I looked around. I was surrounded by these towering giants of the earth. I thought about how long they must have been there. They had seen decades, maybe even centuries of history. Their existence was rich and storied, a relic of times past and present. Their massive trunks had laid roots in the ground lifetimes ago, and they were still here. Through forest fires and earthquakes, these trees had stood their ground.

There, that day, standing in a single ray of sunshine in the middle of a dimly lit clearing where not a sound was heard for what felt like miles in either direction, I was finally at peace. The serenity of this place seeped into me, permeated my very soul, my very being. It healed me. I forgot about the fighting and the roar and the car and everything fell away. All that mattered was right here, right now, this time, this place, this peace. I stood there for what felt like hours, just taking in the sunshine and the silence.

But nothing gold can stay. Everything has an end, and this one came all too soon. The tourists caught up and my family followed, and soon the small clearing was bustling. I turned around and walked away.

The rest of that road trip went as it had been going, but everything was just a little bit more bearable. Whenever it got to be too much, I thought of that clearing. I let myself be consumed by it once more.

I think about it a lot. I think about the forest fires in California. I think about all of the trees that burn down. Every day is more of the same. Nobody notices what's happening to the Earth, and they go about their business as usual. It's strange to me, how quickly people forget about the natural disasters happening all over the globe. It's like the conflict has reached a crisis point, but there is no resolution. Nobody learns their lesson. Nobody changes. They just keep doing what they're doing, not even noticing the damage they're inflicting, or if they do, not caring. I think about how one day that clearing, that forest, might no longer be there. Someday, that peace might be gone. And no one will ever again partake in its serenity.

SYNTHETIC HOME

Samia Samer Jalal, JORDAN
Project ID 1505

"This is revolting, I had no idea the situation was this inferior to the extent they had to evacuate a whole population! If only we were given a chance to go back in time..."

'A few hours ago'

Like any other boring, stereotypical day I wandered around my ginormous home, the ESC49E spaceship, looking for any source of entertainment besides sitting in front of a glowing screen for hours. It has always been like this ever since I was born, technology; the solution to all your problems and I really wished if there was something else useful in our unreal lives.

As I was roaming around in the hallways, I bid a good morning to my cousins who were sitting as still as stone playing on the gaming console. They greeted me back with a nod and I sighed in exasperation; even the little children are addicted to these unhealthy habits. But I don't really blame them for what they're doing. You see, the spaceship I live in is home to a whole population of human beings who were forced to evacuate from a 'secret' planet which I'm not supposed to know about. It is home to several generations worth of people who were raised in the age of technology which was passed down to all their descendants to continue evolving and never die.

It's crazy to know how people managed to save technology and keep it alive while they couldn't save their own 'mysterious' planet and continue living in it. What circulated my mind even more, was the question as to why am I not supposed to know anything about this planet or its history? Whenever I asked my mom, she would always tell me I'm too young to know anything about it and wouldn't understand. She always used to end the conversation with, "It's best to never bring up this topic again." and I would leave the room in complete confusion and curiosity.

I continued strolling around until I reached the community hall which was almost identical to a café except with no food or drinks; it was just a gathering place. Sofas, coffee tables, and T.V screens were spanning the whole area and a rather large group of people were huddled closely, in one corner, around several screens mumbling incoherent words and gasping every now and then. I watched from afar as they all pushed around to watch what's on the news and I've never seen them any more excited to watch it.

A few minutes later, my desire to know got the best of me, and I couldn't hold back myself from approaching the crowd, wiggling my way through them to reach one of the screens and read the headlines. I pushed around, causing a few people to tumble back as I made my way through.

Red titles flashed around on the projection screens, "After decades, traces of life were found on planet Earth." I read, "A new species found living and surviving off undegradable debris."

"Earth? What's planet Earth?" I mumbled to myself as I left the group of people after the channel was switched. All I could think about now was what is this planet and why was everyone talking about it everywhere I go? What's so special about it?

The only answer I could find to my questionings was to go and ask my mom, she surely must have an idea. I ran back to our dorm as fast as my legs could carry me and hastily barged into the room to find her ironing some clothes.

"Timothy?" She asked as she put down the iron and faced me, slightly tilting her head in the process. "Is something wrong?"

I closed the door behind me and plopped myself on the couch. I grabbed the T.V remote and she continued watching my every move, baffled. The screen flickered open and I switched to the news. As soon as she heard the news reporter speaking, she swiftly darted her head in that direction. Her eyes widened in horror and I could tell something was wrong.

"Did you know about this?" I asked a while later after she sat down. "What's this planet Earth?" I continued bombarding her with questions, but she refused to face me or speak, she was far too overwhelmed to do anything.

"Mom, why aren't you saying anything?" I lightly tapped on her shoulder and she snapped in my direction.

"How did you find out about this?" She asked in a low tone and I gulped in fear.

"It was literally everywhere I went in this ship. Everyone was talking about this." I answered back in terror; I never saw her this furious. She diverted her sight to the hardwood floor, suddenly gaining interest in it. I examined her facial expressions and they seemed to lightly soften so I mustered up all my courage to ask her the dreaded question. "Is this the planet you didn't want me to know about?"

Her expression hardened once more. "How many times have I told you not to bring this topic up, Timothy?" She shot up from her seat and pointed at the door. "Leave."

"Why don't you want to talk about this planet, what are you hiding?" I answered back in irritation.

"Because no one was ever supposed to mention anything about this planet after it was practically destroyed by us! Us the shameful humans!" She exploded at me and I stood in place taken aback by her response. "I'm not saying anything more, now leave!" She pushed me to the door and shut it in my face leaving me outside, perplexed as usual.

I shook my head in frustration. "Why is no one telling me anything in this place?" I paced back and forth trying to find a way to expose everything about this planet; my patience was running out, and after this incident, I wanted to know exactly what happened to it.

After a while worth of thinking a genius idea popped in my head. "What if I sneak into the captain's control room? Isn't it the place where all the hidden archives are?" A devious smirk plastered on my face as I started patrolling my way to the room. "I'm pretty sure there is at least one file about Earth."

When I reached, I carefully inspected my surroundings to make sure no one saw me and pulled down on the cold, metal knob pushing the door to the control room open. I walked in, quietly closing the door behind me and tiptoed towards the large control panel where on the screen every camera recording was displayed. I ignored all the colorful buttons and flashing screens and went straight to the drawers to search for any file I could find about Earth.

I rummaged through tons of brown files until my hands fell on a red one. Warily, I picked it up and inspected all its sides. On one side, the words "DO NOT OPEN" were written in big bold letters. "This must be it." I whispered to myself as I ripped the package open and stuck my hand inside only to take out a silver USB stick.

I ran to the nearest computer and plugged the stick in when suddenly the large screen displayed a video which immediately started playing. I diverted my sight to the video and watched intently.

“Archive number 147, Planet Earth.” The narrator spoke. “It is the third planet from the Sun and the only one known to harbor life. This planet that was once 71% made of water and 29% land was home to the 7.53 billion people living on it until human beings started becoming reckless with their habits and products.” A picture of a spherical blue and green body popped up on the screen and I depicted it was the planet. “Of the harmful habits they used to do on daily basis was producing smoke, which resulted from smoking cigarettes, factories, car engines and more. It contained toxic substances like carbon monoxide which is damaging to the health of humans. Smoke contributed to global warming too, which drastically affected seasons and climates. Moreover, the increased production of non-biodegradable polymers and plastics caused massive pollution and landfills that now cover more than 80% of the land. Plastics killed many aquatic life and animals too because it accumulated in their stomach and couldn’t get digested.”

Several pictures of animals who were stuck in plastic debris were on display and I couldn’t help but feel bad for all the innocent lives killed because of this.

“The rapid expansion in the hole in the ozone layer was the main reason for the urgent evacuation of the planet. The ozone layer is the region of Earth’s stratosphere that absorbs most of the Sun’s ultraviolet radiation and due to many harmful chemicals, like chlorofluorocarbons and halons, reacting with it, it started to breakdown. What started off as a small hole, gradually turned into a bigger and bigger one barely protecting humans from the harmful ultraviolet radiation. Scientists calculated it would take a few years only until the ozone layer was completely broken down and all of humanity would then cease to exist because of the vanished barrier.” I stared in horror as the video showed the breaking down of the layer and humans dying, hurdling to extinction right before my eyes.

“So, a plan was made to construct a spaceship that could fit most of the population of the humans and provide them with an everlasting supply of all their basic needs; water, shelter, food, clothes. The plan was set straight into action and with the help of advanced technology was ready in 2 years’ time. Project ‘ESCAPE’ (ESC49E) was born and after a few days of evacuation and final checks the project was launched into space, never to return back to the dead planet again.”

I slumped back in my seat, several thoughts running around in my mind. I was too busy in my own thoughts I forgot the video was still playing. “This is revolting, I had no idea the situation was this inferior to the extent they had to evacuate a whole population! If only we were given a chance to go back in time and undo our mistakes rather than live in this synthetic place with no escape. No wonder my mom never wanted to tell me about this, it’s because of the shameful, reckless actions our race has done. We truly never deserved such a place like Earth. We inhabited it and yet instead of taking care of it, we slowly destroyed it piece by piece.”

The unlocking of the door snapped me from my daydreaming session. “Hey, you’re not supposed to be here!” The deep voice of the security rendered in my head as I quickly came back to my senses. Too overwhelmed to even think, I pulled the USB drive in alarm from its place, stuffed it in my pocket and ran past the security guard in a hurry.

A SNAPSHOT OF CIGARETTES AND COFFEE, DUST AND DOLPHINS

Do Hoon Kim, U.S. MASSACHUSETTS

Project ID 1617

His phone blared a warning from the National Weather Service:

Avoid going outside. it's going to be a heavy dust day.

After making some fresh ground steaming coffee, he added a dollop of cream and carried it to the veranda. He walked quickly, almost juggling the mug. He sipped and slurped the foam along the way, quickly placing it on the glass table. After raising his imported Venetian blinds, he grunted as he pulled open the sliding glass door. He slid into his wicker chair and took a sip of his coffee.

Outside, the floating flakes of yellow micro-dust shimmered into haze, yellow-tinting the air and diluting the sky grey-green. It almost looked like rain, the soft misty kind. People scurried below the veranda, wearing white surgical masks to filter the dust. They looked blurry as they hurried to find relief. Cars passed in the street streaked and tinted by yellow tinge. A dog sat on the corner, oblivious, perhaps waiting for its master. He found the view oddly serene.

He coughed as he pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and inhaled deeply.

He enjoyed his peccadillo. Like most people, he had started smoking because his friends did. During parties and after meals when he began. Now, over a pack a day. He reveled in defying social convention. There were half-hearted attempts to quit before, but he gave up after a few hours. He could quit anytime he often told himself. So often that it became a mantra, but not a reality.

BZZZZZZZ.

Cursing his forgetfulness, he walked over to see who it was. It was Harry.

"Yo, a bit early isn't it? I'm not even done with coffee. Couldn't shoot me a message on chat?"

"Dude, I just saw a freaking awesome documentary and had to tell you about it."

"Oh, what was so good about it?"

"It's called The Cove."

"Sounds scary."

"Not in the way you think."

"Hmm, now I'm curious."

"It's about dolphin killing in Japan."

"Oh, you mean the tuna thing? I told you. I don't care about that. I love my tuna fish sandwiches swimming in mayo, of course."

"It's way worse."

"Spoiler alert."

"Don't worry about that. Just watch it. It's on YouTube."

"Umm, I'm pretty busy."

"Make time. It'll change how you think."

"I like how I think."

"Just watch it, dumbass. Or at least try."

"O.K., but no guarantees."

"Let's have coffee and discuss after."

"Coffee? Now you're talking."

He hung up and wondered why the call? This could have been accomplished on chat. Maybe there was something to this documentary. But documentaries were usually boring, so he put it off.

The day passed without much fanfare. He chatted with a few friends and watched a movie, smoked more cigarettes and drank more coffee, as he watched the world from his veranda.

BZZZZZZZ.

It was Harry but this time a chat message: "Did you watch it yet?"

"N"

"K Lemme kno."

He tossed the phone on the sofa and returned to the veranda for a cigarette. The window was peppered with yellow spots, which convinced him to watch that movie. He searched it up on YouTube and hit play.

An hour and a half later, he headed to the kitchen to find something to eat. "That was some weird stuff," he thought as he reached for a bag of chips and considered mashing some tuna. But the images of the bloody dolphins, of the lone dolphin swimming like hell to escape from its would be murderers, of the tears of the woman describing the dolphin replayed in a loop. He could not get the bloody dolphins and the woman out of his head.

The chips were tasty, a bit spicy, but now he needed more. Some fast food was in order.

When the doors opened, the invisible lady apologized to him for the elevator's tardiness. He smirked as he rode down the elevator wondering whose voice that was.

As he left the building, he lit a cigarette for the walk. As he walked past the dog, he tried to relax. The dog seemed to watch him and thoughts of that cove in Japan swirling with crimson dolphin blood and screaming dolphins haunted him. The cigarette grew bitter and he threw it on the sidewalk as he neared his destination. He thought about quitting again, but the fast food joint was in front of him. Its smell dulled the unpleasant smell of dust and cigarette and his thoughts. Inhaling, he walked in and ordered a double cheeseburger and extra-large fries to go. He could have eaten there, but he loved his veranda. As he exited the restaurant, the cigarette butt glared at him from the sidewalk, but he stepped on it and walked past it. When he arrived home, he shredded the bag open and tore into his meal.

BZZZZZZZ.

He picked the worst moments to chat.

"U watch it? I hv 1 mo fo u"

"Not gonna 2bz"

"Cmon"

"U get on my nerves"

"K sorry"

"NP"

And that was that. But that night he tossed and turned. His stomach grumbled and he dreamed of dolphins and dust with the ladies' voices in the background, crying and apologizing.

He awoke unrefreshed and stressed. As he splashed cold water on his face and began to wake up, he heard a voice. It was a researcher from the documentary:

"It's about consciousness. They are self-aware, like humans are self-aware."

He peered at the mirror as the water ran. He felt disgusted without a coffee and cigarette. After repeating his morning ritual, he looked out the yellow window, now streaked in yellow from last night's rain, and ruminated about his life. Looking at his cigarette, he thought about quitting one day. One day for sure.

BZZZZZZZ.

He decided to ignore Harry and watch the streaky, hazy yellow world. He shut off his phone and threw his butt out the window of his veranda. As he leaned over the rail to watch the butt drift down through the dust, he noticed the dog still sitting on the corner. He wished that the dolphins and ladies would shut up and that the damn dog would leave.

GENERATION RESTORE

James Cristopher Talens, THAILAND
Project ID 1676

The Earth is slowly turning into a ball inflated with gas from greasy fumes of decayed debris of technology and wrapped in wastes humans considered product of intelligence. All those things they created that have made their lives easy has now patched the earth's surface with things that are destructive. How ironic it is to think that the natural resources we get from Earth are also part of the elements that make up what destroys it. The Earth's crust is rusted as metals, plastics, and iron became so widely used in the era called Techvolution, which lasted for about 1000 years since year 5000 AD. The once greeneries are now barren wasteland of millions of barrels creating towers of chemical containers, most of which are labeled Vioxin-X, a toxic waste left by human remains, when Enigma B6 wiped 65 percent of the Earth's population.

The intricately designed buildings are now home to giant vines which fruits produce toxic that explodes when exposed to heat. This vine called Gravolla has flowers that spray harmful gas. This dangerous vine which roots are entwined underneath the earth has adapted to the toxic nutrients it gets from the soil.

Today's era, Quaios, is the age where survivors were left no choice but to embrace the cruelty of Mother Earth. The year is 6200 AD. Rivers have high concentration of zinc, lead, and mercury discharged from factories. Liquid from these rivers flows through the oceans and develops a fatal chemical called Extrillin, an element present in Vioxin-X. This is now the ocean that surrounds the ruins of S.T.A.R. Labs.

Scientists from S.T.A.R. Labs developed Vioxin to enhance the intellectual capacity and DNA of newborns. They tested Vioxin in human clones and some animals. It had a great impact to humans. They became more intelligent in the fields of engineering, agriculture, and science. Domesticated animals can understand words and became more useful. The success of Vioxin during the Techvolution Era has brought humanity a comfortable life.

Year 5335 AD, S.T.A.R. Labs started constructing its underwater site in the North Atlantic Ocean between Newfoundland and Portugal. A star-shaped building with the height of about nine Burj Khalifa, eight starting from its base below sea level and one above sea level, has about 1,600 floors and houses scientists, doctors and other jobs related to improve human life. The United Nations has moved its centre from Geneva to the 214th floor below sea level, the WHO on the 220th, Pentagon on the 257th, and other known organizations around the world. The 30,000 feet high of about 9 million square feet area on the seafloor is made of solid base which serves as the foundation of S.T.A.R. Labs.

Twenty years after the completion of S.T.A.R. Labs in 6170 AD, it continued cloning humans to test the full potential of Vioxin. Dr. Berks and his assistant, Dr. Liv, are working consistently on developing Vioxin to treat diseases caused by viruses that weaken the immune system. They didn't know that their colleague, Dr. Harv felt jealous of Dr. Berks, because he isn't recognized the way the company honors Dr. Berks. Secretly, Dr. Harv developed a type of bacteria which is immune to any antibiotics. Before the day of Berks' presentation of the enhanced Vioxin, Dr. Harv injected his engineered bacteria to one of the clones, and set it up to be used in Berks' presentation. During the presentation, Dr. Berks injected the clone with a virus that causes blood infection. Medical technologists tested the clone's blood. Dr. Berks injected the new Vioxin to the clone. After it took effect, they tested his blood again. The infection in his blood has subsided from 98% to 0.5 percent. With a low dosage of antibiotics, it can be cured.

Three days later, the clone got sick again. The blood infection worsened. Dr. Berks couldn't understand why Vioxin didn't work. He re-examined the blood of the clone and discovered an Enigma B6 bacteria in it. Enigma B6 is immune to Vioxin and also contagious. He worked all night to find a vaccine for it, but nothing worked. The next day, one of the workers felt migraine. The veins in his face were swelling and his eyes were reddish. Two doctors in the lab tried to help him. But he fought them instead. Suddenly, he froze and died. Dr. Berks and Dr. Liv were nervous when they heard about it. Unfortunately, the two doctors, Vistina and Gareth, got scratches and were slightly injured. Both were sent to the recovery center immediately. On the monitors, Dr. Berks checked their condition. He somehow controlled the flow of infection and isolated them. Then the news came that the clone died. Now, they needed to observe Vistina and Gareth, if they will show the same symptoms as the worker who got infected with Enigma B6. Somehow, they didn't show any manifestations.

Meanwhile, Dr. Harv and his computer geek intern, Fakiv were watching everything in CCTV monitors in their office. They were certain that the bacteria injected into the clone multiplied quickly and reached its nervous system. It can duplicate in milliseconds causing paralysis and death. Dr. Harv didn't realize that Enigma B6 can reverse the effect of Vioxin, turning it into a toxic chemical, causing its victims to decay within few hours, and leaving a contagious brownish liquid substance called Vioxin-X.

In the morgue on the fifth level above the seafloor, the diener, heard a hiss coming from the cold chambers where the clone's and the worker's corpse are kept. The hiss lasted for few minutes. Out of curiosity, he pressed his ear closer to the chamber. He opened the door and found the chamber empty. Confused, he didn't notice the brownish liquid leaking through the chamber's door. A little amount dropped on his shoes. He checked his laptop to see if the chamber is occupied. He couldn't be wrong. There's supposed to be a corpse in that chamber! He checked the other one, and it's also empty! He was about to report it to Dr. Berks, but he felt burning itch on his toes. He dropped the phone and reached out to his foot. He saw his shoes turned brittle, and purple lines of swollen veins appeared in his hands. He felt terrible headache, until he collapsed dead.

The contagious bacteria started to spread throughout the entire floor, and slowly reached the upper levels of S.T.A.R. Labs. Same fate were experienced by others who got infected inside the Lab. As Dr. Harv and Fakiv watched these scenes like a horror movie, they recorded it and sent a copy to WHO. Harv informed them that Dr. Berks' experiment on Vioxin was a total failure and caused a worldwide emergency.

S.T.A.R. Labs officials surrendered Dr. Berks and Dr. Liv to the FBI. They sealed all passages from the infected areas of the building, and announced through a worldwide news channel that the situation has been secured, and they'll find a way to stop the outbreak of Enigma B6. Families of those infected reached out to the U.S. President to find cure. But Enigma B6 exponentially multiplied so fast. They sprayed Vioxin through ventilation system, but it worsened the hosts. U.S. President admitted, they cannot stop it immediately, but they'll try to control it from spreading outside the building. They evacuated all people from S.T.A.R. Labs. The robots barricaded the building with heavy metal walls. The whole world blamed Dr. Berks and Liv.

The two scientists, Vistina and Gareth, were sent to a hospital for treatment. To prove to the world that Harv is better than Berks, he kept an antidote for Enigma B6. He called it Anti-Enigma. He injected it to the patients, and within three days, the

scratches and redness in their eyes were healing. After another three days, they were completely healed and reunited with their families.

The organization congratulated Harv. The amazing effect of Anti-Enigma gave people hope. Harv was awarded for his contribution. Him and Fakiv celebrated their success.

The next day, after they woke up, Fakiv saw a shadow of a man behind the translucent door. It was Gareth, wearing a black hooded jacket. He doesn't look well. His voice was harsh. He removed the hood from his head revealing a swollen veins on his bald head. Realizing he is infected, Fakiv closed the door, locking it from the inside. Harv, who was standing behind him run to reach his gun and shot through the glass door, hitting Gareth. Harv knows the police will investigate so they escaped and headed to cross the border.

Meanwhile, Vistina who was eating breakfast with her family, felt a terrible migraine. Her husband called 911, but as he explained the situation, Vistina froze and fell down on the floor. Her children panicked and came closer to help her.

After few hours, the police were outside Harv's house, and found Gareth's body decaying slowly. They couldn't identify the body so they came closer. They heard the hissing sound as if an air is escaping from a balloon. Then the body disintegrates and left a brownish liquid. Police knew it was Enigma B6. One of them called for an emergency, but when he looked behind him, everyone were running towards the cars and drove away. He got infected, as he inhaled the gas hissing when the body disintegrated. He walked down the street disoriented and mumbling. People who saw him tried to help. When he collapsed, another person gave him CPR.

911 came to Vistina's address. They took her corpse leaving her family puzzled. One person after another collapsed and died instantly. The bacteria spread quickly to those places. That was the start of the great wipe out, throughout the six continents.

Somehow, it was controlled after almost 65% of the world's population died. The Vioxin-X left by disintegrated bodies were collected safely by the S.T.A.R. robots, and sealed them in containers, and placed in a land area surrounded by heavy metal walls.

Abandoned factories continued leaking chemicals to the rivers. Most of the land became barren, and plants have either died or adapted to survive. A big part of the ocean became polluted.

Dr. Berks, Liv, and other survivors, found refuge in Dujong Village. In the mountains, they continued to find cure to the dying Earth. As scientists, they understand the advantages and negative effects of innovation and technology. They also know that there should be a formula to bring back the balance in nature. From the remaining plants and minerals in the mountains, Berks developed medicines. Liv and the others helped him in producing healthy soil. They collected the remaining species of plants and animals. They made compost and grown saplings of different plants and trees which will grow back the forest. After years, the trees and animals will bring back a healthy ecosystem. This method was shared to other survivors in different villages all over the world through robot communication.

One rainy day, as survivors were collecting rainwater, strangers arrogantly approached. They were looking for Dr. Berks. They threatened them with Gravolla bomb if Dr. Berks would not show up.

Koda, the one wearing Gravolla necklace, found Berks in a cabin where he works. Koda asked for the Vioxin formula. Outside, other men were destroying the plants, the storehouse, and the tank of clean water they filtered from the rain. Afraid that the strangers would hurt anyone, he gave his thumb drive that contains his formula to Koda.

After the strangers left, Dr. Berks felt how hopeless everyone is. Liv assured everyone that everything will be back to normal again. This gave them courage, and like a bamboo that bent down on a strong wind, they stood up again, this time more determined to save the Earth. Everyday, they worked hard composting, growing seedlings, and tending plants and animals. They rebuilt the water tank with the help of the robots and continued sharing kindness to other villages.

In a hidden cave infested with Gravolla vines and mutated rodents, miles away from Dujong and other safe villages, is where Dr. Harv and Fakiv hide. After what happened to Gareth and Vistina, they are now both considered most wanted by the FBI. Koda gave them the thumb drive. Fakiv started to decode it with his malfunctioning computer. Harv gave Koda a black crystal as a payment. The algorithm will show Harv how Berks formulated Vioxin. He plans to inject it to himself, so he will become the most intelligent of the remaining race in humanity. Then he will rule the world.

Koda signals his men to extract more Extrillin from the sewers. A great amount is needful in creating weapons. It also served as gasoline for their machines, but the smoke it emits pollutes the air. Moreover, it is present in Vioxin-X, and acts as an agent that paralyzes a living cell when injected to the blood. However, it doesn't harm the human skin, unless there's an open wound.

Harv and his people have eventually learned how to cultivate and avoid the poisons of Gravolla. Actually, they have used it to create explosives, thus making it necessary in their survival. Its vines snaked the chambers and ceilings of the cave and serve as an ornament in Harv's cave.

As soon as Fakiv decoded the formula, Harv worked on formulating one. For weeks, he worked for the perfect mixture. He was about to finish it, but he was furious that there was a missing element. Only Berks knows what it is. So, they planned on returning to Dujong to find it out.

Robots on Dujong were busy rolling big rocks. Other robots from nearby villages were helping them. The survivors were formulating a gas that causes drowsiness. One of them accidentally inhaled it and fell asleep. His pet dog licked his face to wake him up, but the dog felt dizzy and dozed off snoring. One of the women let him smell some kind of scent, then he was back to his consciousness.

On an evening of the full moon, Harv and his men marched their way to Dujong. When they reached the place, he started calling out Berks. No one answered back, so they started to throw Gravolla bombs to the houses. Still no one came out. They heard a noise getting closer. As soon as they realized what's going to happen, they were enclosed in a wall of big rocks pushed by robots. One of them, hit it with Gravolla, but it didn't damage the rock. Then smokey balls began raining inside the enclosure. Upon hitting the ground, everyone fell down and after few seconds, all were fast asleep. Then the FBI went through with gas masks and their robots handcuffed Harv and all his men.

The FBI director apologetically approached Berks for accusing him before and for believing in Harv's twisted mind, the real culprit. There will always be evil whenever there is goodness. It is an unbreakable cycle. But goodness will prevail. That's why he believes, after knowing about Berks' works, that the world will become new again, soon.

Year 6250, the Era of Quaios ended. Liv gave Dr. Berks his last goodbye. He died at 156. After injecting Vioxin, he lived long and healthy. But no one escapes death. Everything has an end. Dr. Liv, now 121 years old, is renowned for reviving a healthy and balanced ecosystem. Berks will be remembered for healing our home planet, for spending the last 50 years of his life

eliminating Vioxin-X, and creating a natural vaccine for Enigma B6. S.T.A.R. Labs was reconstructed and reopened. Its purpose is to protect Mother Earth. Robots continued to clean the land and oceans. They found a safe way to pluck the roots of Gravolla.

This is the beginning of the Navoux Era, a period where people started restoring the environment. Robots are widely used to monitor and improve the quality of soil, air, and water.

Earth is our home, and humans should enrich it and use the resources wisely, afar from their selfish ambitions and hunger for power. Today is the best time to think over what our actions and compulsiveness might cause. To live happens only once, but our life continues with our children. Ironically, it seems we are also living forever although we will die and be a part of the nature's cycle. Let's make sure the children of the future will live in a place where it is clean, safe, and healthy. So life will go on and Mother Earth will be generous to every living things. God bless us.

At the prison, Koda now 76 years old, crazily looked at the black crystal which Harv gave him. Harv, who painfully died of bone cancer 32 years ago has asked Koda to take good care of that black crystal, as it holds the key that unlocks a great treasure. He laughed when he heard that. There is no more treasure left on Earth, but the toxics in all parts of the world. He ignored Harv. Just now, it came to his mind to examine it closely. He went to see the 68 year-old Fakiv during lunch. Together, they spotted a tube in the middle of the crystal. It puzzled them. Whatever is in that tube, it is what they need to find out.

THE END

WICK, THE TINY RAINDROP

Bianka Forgacs, HUNGARY
Project ID 1842

From a dawn dew a tiny drop of water was born. It was called Wick. Its story started at the edge of a forest at a clearing, surrounded by all kinds of animals, beautiful plants and a huge waterfall. The day just started, everyone was busy with their work, one of them was looking for something to eat, the other one was making its nest. The water drop was thinking about what its task was. Wick was trying to say „hi” to the little humming bee, but she did not even notice it, nor did the angry gopher.

„Why does nobody want to hear my voice?” it asked itself.

Wick kept wondering about the meaning of its life, it wanted to know where it belonged to, wanted to become a useful member of the world. While it was thinking about this the sun started shining, and the weather got hotter. The waterdrop felt lighter and lighter, until it completely evaporated.

„Am I the air now?” it asked itself.

It enjoyed being above the trees and the buildings. After a while everything slowed down, got darker, the air got colder and the little drop found itself in the middle of a dark black cloud. Wick did not really understand what was happening around, but it did not even have time to think about it too long, because it started falling down. The waterdrop was extremely scared at first, then it kind of enjoyed the feeling of the free fall.

„I am the rain!” Wick thought.

With the lots of rain the waterdrop reached a small underground creek, which initially slowed down, then it came to the surface, it flowed unstopably, until it reached a river. Fish were frolicking, people were swimming and playing in it, animals were drinking from it.

„Am I the river now? Do I give life?”

It finally reached the sea. Wick felt enormous and powerful. It met amazing creatures that were swimming and also huge boats that were swimming on it. It was so thrilled, that Wick made bigger and bigger waves.

One day Wick was swimming along a village. It had already heard awful things about it, but it saw it for the first time. It was scary for Wick. It could hardly see the children playing, because of the dark smoke, which was coming out of the chimneys of strange buildings. Oil tankers were in bad condition, they were extremely old, so oil was leaking into the seas. Factories poured chemicals into water as well, but humans caused a lot of problems as they threw litter into the water. The men were cutting trees down by the coast, many-many cars were rushing on the roads, people were smoking cigarettes. A great many of livestock were drinking from the nearest river.

Wick headed north and reached colder and colder areas. During its journey it made new friends. They were from different parts of the world. While they were drifting with the flow they were sharing their most interesting stories. Ricky, the funniest one talked about its best experience, when the creek it had been part of had expanded into a river. Some of the fish rode its waves. Ricky was amazed by his power. Meanwhile they were heading towards the North Pole Wick shared its experience about the village. They were surprised, because they thought they were the only ones who had seen such a terrible view.

At the North Pole they froze into a giant iceberg. Wick did not feel anything, it could not think about anything anymore. Years had passed, possibly decades. But a tiny bubble was frozen in the berg. One day the ice cracked and the little bubble started growing. Melted water was flowing out through cracks, the space got bigger and bigger inside. It seemed the waterdrop could not hide until the end of time, it could not escape from the rotation.

Months later, Wick saw a huge piece of ice breaking down, with its friends in it.

„Do not leave me alone here!” it was rippling in fright.

They were drifting helplessly and desperately.

Wick did not feel safe at all, it was shaking from fear. It tried its best to make that huge gap above it wider and wider, because it could not bear that place. Only a few days passed, when the iceberg—much to its surprise—broke down, just like its friends. There was a huge smile on its face, nothing could wipe it off. The tiny waterdrop was flowing really fast—at some parts it was even scary.

As it was swimming to the Southern regions the warm rays of the Sun started to warm Wick up and defrost it. It saw no more ice-capped landscapes around it. Our waterdrop glanced at a familiar view, which filled its heart full of sadness. It looked around terrified. Wick did not see the houses only the chimneys, plastic bags on the trees, bottles in the water. Not even a soul was on the road, only water, water, water... as far as it could see. Wick felt itself highly lonely.

It could not even imagine that the water could do such a big destruction. Nothing remained now from those days when there had been those huge fields with their grass and trees. All the beautiful and colourful nature with its plants, flowers and butterflies had gone. All the creatures that used to live happily without the devastating work of people. Everyone who had had their place in the circle of life, everything that had happened according to its order had been destroyed. While Wick was resting frozen as a part of an iceberg the work of people who did not consider the circle of nature, which had been working well for millions of years and reached its peak and caused the decay of its own and the decay of nature around itself in that particular part of the world.

Wick got extremely angry, and thought with full of anger: „People, you should all remember that you are parts of the big circle of life and you cannot always take without giving. You humans are so blind to see the consequences of your own doing. Are you really going to destroy every single part of nature?! Do you honestly believe you can go on like this forever without paying the most horrible price—your own existence on the Earth? I truly hope that a huge miracle will come and help, but the question is, „When?”—hopefully it will not be too late for you.

But for that, you should take nature, which is around you, into account and you should do the following against pollution: use public transport, instead of using your cars, use filters on the factories’ chimneys, do not throw litter anywhere, especially into water, because birds and fish can die. You also should not cut down trees. Not only do animals need them, but also everyone on this planet, because they release oxygen, and forests are the home to many animals. It would also be important to plant new trees after you cut down one. If you take areas from nature, you have to pay attention replacing them somehow.”

The list is endless, but we have to try our best, for the sake of future generations and for the sake of the tiny little waterdrop.

I REMEMBER...

Faatimah Ahmed Asmal, SOUTH AFRICA
Project ID 1903

The incessant sound of my alarm clock jolted me awake. I pulled off my feathery, soft duvet and let the cool air of the air conditioned room engulf me. It took me a minute to remember where I was, I took a look around, I missed the warm sun kissing my cheeks every morning and the humming of the birds which made my day so melodious. These symphonic tunes were now replaced by the whirring of the air con above me and the slight buzz of the florescent globe. I quickly grabbed my assigned navy blue sweater and pulled it over my messy hair.

As I walked across the immaculate pearly white floors of my residence, I contemplated whether or not to press the button that would reveal to me the heinous destruction caused by the human race. Against my better judgement I pressed it. Almost immediately the white wall in front of me was transformed into a transparent glass. A cold shiver ran down my spine and my hairs all stood on end as I looked down. I had to look away as I couldn't stand the sight of it anymore but more than that I think it was the overwhelming guilt flowing through every vessel and crevice in my body that made me look away. What had humanity done? What had I done to stop it?

There was mother earth, she was once the most beautiful thing ever known to man. But now as I looked upon the eye-sore which we had created, I was distraught; I could no longer see the crystal blue seas that shimmered when the sun shone on it and the forest green continents had turned into tiny brown blotches. The water was no longer iridescent but it was now a dull grey and the continents looked like piles of debris floating and a thick copper coloured layer of smog hung stubbornly around the earth. We had contaminated our world to the point where it had become uninhabitable. I closed my eyes and tried to salvage what I could remember of this magnificent planet. I never ever wanted to forget it; it was my home until I destroyed it.

I recalled the first summer I spent at the sea side, I remembered the strong breeze that whipped through my hair and the salty sea air that stung my lips and the warm golden sands that moulded to the shape of my feet every time I took a step and as I got closer to the water I could feel the gentle sprays of water land on my face. This memory would never be re-lived, I would never see the beach again and never again would the sound of the waves crashing put me to sleep. I remembered how blissful nature was; all in harmony with one another.

I remembered how, over the next few summers the weather had gone from being warm and sunny to being blistering hot and unmanageable, the heat had become excessive almost overnight. The sweltering temperatures made it seemingly impossible to breathe; it was almost as if the sticky air was choking me at times. Sweat pooled in damp masses around my lower back on a daily basis. Scientists constantly preached about global warming, about how the earth's temperature was increasing at an alarming rate, they told us that one day the ice caps would melt and soon the continents would be submerged in water, they told us to take precautions, they told us to conserve our resources. But we never took heed of their perpetual warnings; we were all too busy usurping earth's invaluable resources to satisfy our greed for wealth.

A few years later the scientists were proven correct. The summer of 2009 was different. I had gone to the sea side, it was something I looked forward to and longed for the whole year. As usual I was bursting with excitement, the sea had some kind of rejuvenating effect on me and I couldn't wait to get there. I remember that day vividly; the golden sands scorched my feet as I ran towards the sea with the oppressive sun beating down upon me, its unrelenting rays not stopping for even a second. The moderately cool water felt strange. All around me I could hear sounds of joy and the laughter of children resonate in the air. Then without any warning the sea level began to rise at a distressing rate, the swells of water grew larger each second. The sounds of laughter and joy that resonated in the air was now replaced with cries of panic and confusion, agitated mothers ran towards their children and in hysterical shrieks called for their children to come back. Then it came unannounced and forceful, a colossal wave emerged from the restless sea, nothing like I had ever seen before and nothing I could even begin to imagine. People ran for their lives, turmoil and chaos clung onto the air as a stampede threatened to take place. Then as the force of gravity took its toll, the wave came down upon us. It felt as if every bone in my body was being broken at the same time, all the air was knocked out of my lungs, my head was spinning, confusion got the better of me and I struggled to keep afloat. I tried furiously to swim but my arm would not obey any of my commands and searing shots of pain soared through it. However I was fortunate to be one of the few survivors. That day millions died and millions more were injured. Homes were demolished and families were torn apart. A few days later whilst my broken arm was being treated by a doctor in a massive super dome, a hologram flickered on and the clear voice of the news reporter began "Scientists have confirmed that a large ice cap has liquefied and islands as far as Asia are underwater and many coastal cities have also been submerged in water." Our continents were being devoured by the water and all we could do was watch as it happened. We had not only destroyed our homes but the homes of polar bears, arctic foxes, seals and walrus as well. All these splendid creatures had been eradicated of the face of the earth because of our doing.

Thinking back to that time it almost seems as if we were being warned; it was as if earth was telling us "Change your ways!" Yet still, we did not take any action to save our planet, yes, talks increased but we failed to make any considerable changes. We continued to ignore the cries of the trees as they fell to the ground, we continued to build skyscrapers, we continued to burn fossil fuels and the hole in the ozone layer was no longer concentrated over Antarctica and it continued to get larger every day. Just as we were recovering from the cataclysm that sent us into blue ruin, another catastrophe wiped us of the face of our planet forever and we had no one else to blame other than ourselves.

It was like any other day, as I stepped outside, the few withered plants that still remained stared blankly at me, their silent cries pleading for some fresh air and water. The sweltering heat was making it impossible for them to survive, for us to survive. The smog that consumed the air sent me into a coughing frenzy and as I gasped for air all I got was a chest full of thick poisoned air. It burned my air passages as it travelled down into my lungs. My eyes stung as I looked up into the dull sky in which clouds of toxic gases had long ago replaced the soft cotton candy like clouds which I remembered. The fresh, crisp air that was once welcomed had vanished, I longed for it. But that longing would never be fulfilled; we had cut down our trees and ignored their silent cries.

As I bent down to pick up the remains of a plant that had been trampled on, a vibration thrummed through the ground, I grabbed the nearest light pole as fear ripped through my heart. Then without any warning, a shockwave knocked me to the ground. I felt warm blood trickle down my left eye and the metallic taste entered my mouth. Whilst willing myself back to my feet a heat pulse accelerated through the air, it felt as if I was on fire and my body was being scorched. People all around me were

gripped with panic; everyone was running in a different direction. The atmosphere was frightening; it felt as if it was doomsday. Just as everyone had marginally calmed down, the real catastrophe hit us; nuclear power plants blew up. They couldn't keep their reactors cool enough. A loud bang reverberated through my ears and then I couldn't hear at all, the explosion had momentarily deafened me, I looked up and a blinding light allowed me to see every bone and blood vessel in the bodies of the people who stood before me, it was as if I was looking at an x-ray. I saw people evaporate before my eyes others lay dead in the streets. The sky had turned black with smoke and falling debris was becoming tomb stones.

As I lay there on the floor watching earth get destroyed before my eyes, I turned my head and standing before me was a dandelion. A gust of wind blew its petals and they danced through the black sky. They were seeds of life and hope. There was hope of regaining earth and returning it to its former glory. Seconds later beams of bright xenon lights illuminated the atmosphere and I saw drones fly above me, they were picking up people. My body went limp and I no longer felt anything, my eyes closed and then I didn't remember. I woke up in an operating theatre, my lower body was numbed and my upper body was throbbing. We had to leave earth and as I looked down from my window I remembered the dandelion and all that it represented, we shall return earth to its former glory.

I have hope that humanity will change their ways so that one day I won't only remember but I will be able to watch sunsets smitten into a scarlet gold and watch the sky above me turn into a faded rose. Let us come together and bring about a change, let us unite and save our planet because I have hope that we can. Let us make sure our memories become experiences for our children. The future is ours, let us not destroy it!

THE LIGHT WHICH DARKENS THE NIGHT

Nesibe Deliktas, MACEDONIA
Project ID 1933

"I left my phone at home" Marko said.

"I'm not surprised, as usual" said Elena.

Marko quickly went to the apartment. He heard the birds' sounds coming from the balcony when he picked up his phone from the table and then he remembered that they had to buy food for the pigeons which nested on their balconies a short time ago. He put his phone in his pocket and went to the car, his sister had started the car and was waiting for him. First they stopped by a grocery store and bought bird seed for the pigeons; the mother, father and baby pigeon, the baby pigeon hatched out a week ago, it was so tiny and unguarded, Mother Pigeon was always taking care of her little baby. Elena and Marko enjoyed watching them and were attached to them in a short time.

They went to city square, the largest celebration place of the city, to celebrate New Year's Eve after buying the bird seeds. The whole place was decorated with colorful lights and everyone was looking so happy. Children were running and playing around and people were singing. Marko and Elena used to spend New Year's Eve at home, but they made a change this year. Two siblings took a lot of pictures under the big Christmas tree, toured the square and ate cotton candy. The time passed very quickly, fireworks started exploding everywhere seven minutes before 2019, everyone was applauding with enthusiasm. A few minutes later Marko felt a hand on his shoulder and took his eyes off the fireworks and looked back, he realized that Elena's face was pale, eyes were filled with tears, hand was in the rib cage, and she began to cough violently. She couldn't breathe and clung to her brother not to fall feeling dizzy, she tried to talk but it was too hard to talk.

"Asthma" she said with difficulty.

"Breathe!" she added after.

Marko's eyes opened with fear, he quickly grabbed his sister, he was supposed to take Elena to the hospital right away, but there were so many people so it took him five minutes to get past them all. Elena had fainted when they came up to the car. Marko got into panic and was afraid of losing the most precious person in this world and tried to wake her up but Elena didn't hear him. Marko quickly put his sister in the back seat, drove her to the hospital carefully. They immediately gave an oxygen mask and serum in the hospital.

"Does she have frequent asthma attacks?" The doctor asked.

"No, she hasn't even had it for months, I don't know why" Marko said.

"Did she eat anything unusual or go to a smoking place where she normally didn't?" The doctor asked.

"We were in the city square for the celebration, but there wasn't anyone who smoked." Marko said.

"I understand why" the doctor said.

"but how? I haven't told anything yet" Marko expressed his astonishment.

"I have a question" the doctor said.

"Did they explode fireworks in the celebration area?"

Marko was surprised, he didn't understand why the doctor was asking.

"Yes, they blew it off, but what does this have to do with my sister's asthma?"

Doctor looked sadly at Marko's face

"I will tell," he said quietly, "I will tell ..."

Marko eagerly was waiting for the doctor to say.

Not only your brother, but also many asthma patients came here tonight because of the fireworks.

The metallic particles in the smoke emitted by fireworks pose a health risk, particularly to people who suffer from asthma. People who live in cities already inhale significant amounts of contaminant particles stemming from traffic emissions, chimneys and cigarettes, and the dense smoke caused by fireworks only worsens this situation. We live in Skopje, the second dirtiest city in Europe, but we still use fireworks to celebrate.

Seeing Marko looking at him in a confused manner, the Doctor explained it from the very beginning.

"Fireworks cause extensive air pollution in a short amount of time, leaving metal particles, dangerous toxins, harmful chemicals and smoke in the air for hours and days. Some of the toxins never fully decompose or disintegrate, but rather hang around in the environment. Exposure to fine particles, like those found in smoke and haze, is linked to negative health implications, such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, asthma attacks and even heart attacks. People at greatest risk are those with heart or lung disease, the old and children.

There are even death-related cases but don't worry, your sister is fine, she's recovered with oxygen mask and medication, of course, we want to keep her here tonight to make sure everything goes well.

There were cases that resulted in deaths, the words of doctor were echoing in Marko's head, he could lose his sister because of the fireworks that are totally useless. Marko immediately went to his sister;

"You scared me so much, Elena, how are you? "

"I'm better, brother, I was too scared when I couldn't breathe a moment"

"Don't be afraid, my beautiful sister, the doctor said that you are getting well, but you will stay here tonight for precaution"

Elena: "Okay, the attack?"

Marko: "because of the fireworks."

Marko told Elena about what the doctor told him, and Elena was very bewildered, if the fireworks had such bad side effects, why were they still being blasted? Both couldn't find the answer to this question.

Since Elena was going to stay at the hospital that night, Marko had to go home to bring some things. When he got in the car, he saw pigeon bait and "I hope you're not hungry, my little friends" said quietly.

When he came home, he went out to the balcony and emptied the food into the nest, the baby pigeon was alone and there was a smoke smell. He turned on the light and was struck by what he saw. The mother pigeon's wings were lying burned out on the balcony floor, Marko immediately put the pigeon on a pillow, found a veterinarian from the internet, drove to Vet immediately. The most intense emotion that Marko felt tonight was fear, and now one of his new friends might die before the fear for his sister

was over. When Marko came to the vet, he was amazed at crowded that he had expected as a quiet place; Come with me” the vet called out to Marko.

“I wasn't at home and I didn't understand how it happened” Marko told the veterinarian.

I know how, wait in the hallway, I'll let you know’ the veterinarian said hastily. Marko was staring at the vet in surprise how he could know without saying anything and sat down in a chair then his phone rang;

“O brother; I wonder where you are?”, Elena asked hastily.

“I'm sorry I didn't have time to tell you” I came to the vet“

“vet? why is that?”

“I don't know how it happened, but the mother pigeon’s wings burned, we've just arrived, the vet still hasn't said anything“

Elena’s astonishment could be recognized from her voice,

“wings? But how and why? Will it be able to fly?”

“I do not know Elena, take care of yourself, I'll call you soon” hung up Marko and looked at the Vet Curiously.

Veterinarian: “Unfortunately, it can't fly anymore and you can't take it home, we will give a lot of vitamins and drugs, and it will need a lot of help”

”But it has a cub, and it is even smaller, it doesn't even know how to fly, what will it do without mother?“ Marko asked.

”There are a lot of animals here tonight, I also would like to take care of its baby, but there are a lot of animals to check and I hope father doesn't have anything similar.”

“I don't understand why something could happen to the father? why were mother’s wings burned? Why so many animals are here tonight?”

“Calm down, I will reply your questions. We know its new year but animals don't, they don't know about the fireworks which are our meaningless entertainment. Probably this pigeon was just out of nest to find food, at the same moment one of your neighbors exploded a firework, it couldn't escape, and the heat caused her wings to burn. Something might happen to the father too because of fireworks, it might be deaf if he flied high at that time, it might be blind because of the light, maybe it might get sacred, shocked and died because of shock. That's why we're open tonight.” The vet said

Marko couldn't believe what he heard, At the same night his sister and pigeons could have died because of the fireworks, this was so horrible, savage and merciless. He had no power to stand, he slowly sat on the chair. Veterinarian brought water to Marko.

“Okay, I understand the birds, but what about the other animals?” Marko asked.

The vet was about to respond man entered with a wounded dog in his hands

“Please help, I didn't understand what happened, it abruptly appeared in front of my car, its injured, help”

“I should go, you can come to visit your pigeon whenever you want, you can find answers to your questions online, goodbye” The vet said to Marko.

Marko got in his car in a stunned way, he thought about the things that he lived today, well he was illiterate about this issue but there were those who knew, why till know they hadn't done anything? Fireworks had no benefits for human health, for the nature, for animals, they were living in the second most polluted city in Europe, they were wearing face masks to protect themselves for pollution and they could still blow fireworks while celebrating. Someone has to stop this and Marko was brave enough to start the change.

A week passed, Elena and Marko were very aware of the damage caused by fireworks to humans, animals and nature. They've come a long way in a week.

First they started a survey on internet, the questions were as follows:

“Did you blow up fireworks at Christmas?”

“If you didn't, did you watched a firework display?”

“Do you think that fireworks are harmful? If yes, how?”

There was an informative article and few questions after it:

“Is the entertainment more important than our life and our animals?”

“Should the fireworks be banned in our country?”

Marko knew that awareness wouldn't be enough that's why he started an online petition to ban the fireworks in the country.

“Brother I am home” said Elena while she was taking off her shoes.

“I delivered all of the brochures” she added

“More signatures mean more hope” said Marko.

“You are right, there will be some people who will see you from the show and participate as well, but you should get ready first of all, hurry up”

Marko was very excited. He had written his contact information on the brochures and a TV presenter who saw this had invited him to his show for talking about the harmful effects of the fireworks.

At the show Marko talked about harmful effects of the fireworks and what happened to Elena and his pigeon on the new year's eve, he talked about the petition he had started and said that they can avoid fireworks if they work all together.

...

They did it.

Exactly a year later, Elena and Marko were standing at the same place as the last year, Marko was frequently taking the baby pigeon to his mother, the father pigeon never came back after that day, he knew that the reason was fireworks, maybe he burnt too, maybe he was blind or deaf, maybe he died. Marko hugged her sister and looked around proudly in the city square, everyone was celebrating the New Year's Eve with enthusiasm, but without fireworks.

GREY FUTURE

Tasneem Ahmed Yaman, EGYPT
Project ID 2032

All national anthems have something in common, which is love, peace, including taking care of their country, which in context is the environment. My grandmother used to sing to me the ones she has memorized. I would let myself sink into the lyrics, and hope to go back to those days. The lyrics would symbolize their love for their country, and that they will always sacrifice themselves for it. I wonder what has led them to change and demolish my childhood along with hundreds of thousands of other people. My most preferred time is when I sat aside my grandmother, and she would tell me how life on Earth was. Obviously, I have grown on the planet Earth on the worst time possible. My grandmother would look at me in the eyes and would start telling me her beautiful stories, and if you focus in her eyes, you could see the whole scene and rewind it. You could see her eyes glow when she mentions those stories, it's possible to realize that she misses it and wish that none of the wastefulness on Earth has happened. My favorite stories are when she would run ahead of her friends and play, start chasing butterflies, pet the animals, and the most surprising of them all, is when they leave their houses, they don't have a specific uniform to wear, nothing to wear on their nose nor their eyes so they could be protected from the toxicity surrounding them. I wouldn't say that I have envied my grandmother for the childhood that she had, but the fact that I wasn't granted to live such a life, is unfair, annoying, and simply made me hate all the human beings for putting me in such a state. Now I truly know what "Old is gold" means.

Throwbacks are a mixture of happiness and sadness, but to me, that is applied differently. Honestly, all my throwbacks are cheerless. To the worst of them all is in the year 2028. It all started slowly, it began with schools and universities locking, people never leaving their houses, and making assumptions such as there is something called aliens and they will be the reason of our evacuation, and that they will kill us, also that people should hide and protect themselves. My family decided that we should continue our lives normally and that there is nothing such as "aliens". After that, really rich people started spending a fortune and immigrating to Jupiter's moons. Everyone started freaking out, during that time to many crimes has happened. People were trying their best to receive money in any way possible, only to leave Earth and save their own sake. My parents started to feel worried; my father stopped leaving for work; my mother stopped going to the grocery store and continue her normal outdoor activities. The death rate suddenly increased, and when you look outside of the window, you could clearly see that the air has turned grey, no more trees nor grass, because of the weather conditions and no ones taking care of it. Suddenly people started wearing specific uniforms that cover their whole body, we were one of them when we realized that wearing the things you desire are actually dangerous for you. There was nothing such as health or even healthy people. Simply everyone's blessings were tinier than ever, food and water were less, basically, they contained too many harmful bacteria, if there was food anyways, but in people's point of view that made them survive more than die. This condition has lasted for a week, then it became worse. Suddenly the weather started containing tiny rocks, including a harmful scent, which was actually the cause of death to many people. The weathers conditions were indescribable, all the electronic things were disabled, you don't know what's happening to the rest of the places. We weren't allowed to leave the houses, just lock yourself inside and you'll be safe, they said.

2 years have passed, or at least this is what I counted in my messed up calculations. Too many people before they immigrated to Jupiter's moons, saying that life there is more advanced, and people could totally live there. They have brought water and food, started planting, and bringing animals. Simply they're bringing the leftovers of Earth and creating a new life on the other planets. If we have caused this on Earth, wouldn't we be able to cause it on other planets? The mood was depressing, the food that we had were from harmed farms, which were actually leftovers, but unfortunately, the toxicity was already implanted in them. We were always sick, medicines and hospitals suddenly disappeared. There was nothing such as jobs. It was really hard to see people walking on the streets anymore. We were always wearing masks, that was supposedly making you inhale cleaner air. We got used to it, it was the thing that was making us survive. The percentage of people living in our neighborhood has dropped, and I think this is how it is everywhere now. While sitting, literally doing nothing due to this crisis, I sat thinking with myself, why have we caused this to Earth, to ruin our home planet. Yes, I haven't grown in the best conditions possible on Earth, but I still want to make a change, I want to bring back the things that I haven't seen or endured, I want to be the start of a better world.

My parents decided that we must leave to Jupiter's moons, so they could possibly grant me a peaceful childhood. At that moment I really didn't have a voice to say my opinion. My parents informed me that I should start packing my bags, and after that, some people will come and pick us up, then we will go with the spaceship. That honestly didn't seem logical to me, the idea of how we start a problem, and instead of solving it, we just let it be. As I was walking in the house, I went towards the kitchen and glanced a tiny seed laying on the counter. I thought to myself if I didn't start with myself, even with the smallest method known, then who would? I took that seed, looked at it with all the hopes in my eyes, slowly went outside, just staring at that seed, thinking if there's a possibility that this tiny seed would change something. That seed was my last hope. I saw dirt that had trees on it previously. I implanted the seed into the dirt and closed my eyes to imagine how it would be when it's all grown and providing us with clean air. Found some water in our house, that clearly isn't clean. Started watering it and placed it on where the sun shines. The unfortunate people who didn't travel saw me and started following my actions. I realized that all the aliens' thing was a lie, it was just a push for a people to leave Earth. Who created this assumption? And for what reason?

2034, where the past has come to present. Where I was granted to see what before was like. The following neighborhoods saw us doing this, and they all followed our actions. Earth slowly started to become better. The pollution was decreasing, the death rate decreased, simply everything bad has decreased from a simple act. People started creating vacuums that clean the air. Turns out that there were people who were intelligent and capable to make a change. I am glad I didn't give up, I am glad I am one of the reasons that will provide a great Earth for the next generations. I was glad that I made a change. To have a better world, start with yourself. A simple action can make a change.

HUMAN, A SELF DESTRUCTIVE SPECIES

Fikri Bary Maruanaya, INDONESIA
Project ID 2085

On a distant star system, the planet Namer revolves peacefully around its star. The planet is home to the Namerians, a race of maroon, red-skinned humanoids with yellow reptilian-like eyes. In a high school classroom on the planet, a class of teenagers are about to learn one of the mysteries that have baffled the Galactic Scientific Society for decades: Humans.

In a classroom, the students sit quietly as the teacher comes into class. "Morning, Class!" the teacher greeted the students with a bright smile on her face. "Morning, Miss Arbandom!", they replied in unison. "All right class, today we will learn about humans, so open your books to page 114."

"Now, Humans are somewhat of a mystery within the galactic society of scientists. We know that they used to exist because of the ancient artificial probe that we encountered drifting through space. On it, a metal plaque dated to be thousands of years old contains detailed carvings of the human's anatomy and what they perceive as math. After much research, scientists were able to decrypt the carvings to get the information contained within it. It revealed that humans had a complex society that, unlike the common planetary wide governments we have, they had separate countries each ruled by its own governments. The plaque also revealed the location of their home planet-- a planet that they called Earth."

A hand raises up from the back of the class, "Miss, if they had the means to send a probe containing detailed information about them all the way here, how come we never saw them?". "Well," Miss Arbandom explains, "that's what has baffled scientist for decades now."

"When the scientists found the probe and decrypted its information, they quickly organized an expedition to the humans' home planet. However, when they arrived they didn't find any Humans there. What they found was a wasteland: the whole planet was deserted. The only thing left living there was a few species of autotrophic organisms that had overtaken the buildings that they presumed the humans had built." The whole class is silent. Everyone's eyes are fixated on Miss Arbandom. She knows this topic will always get her students' attention. "Also, they found a concerning amount of a kind of synthetic material that is when tested took over a thousand years to decompose. Scientist theorized that this material was partly responsible for the humans' absence."

Another student chimes in whilst gesturing to her book "Miss, it says here that the amount of carbon dioxide in their atmosphere is too high to be natural. Why would they put a substance that is toxic to them in their atmosphere?"

"That brings me to the most plausible theory of the humans' absence." Miss Arbandom continues. "See, their machinery depends on the concept of the internal combustion engine. They used fuel that is combustible to power a rotating axle inside the engine. The problem with this is that their engines don't collect the carbon dioxide to be later refined into carbon and oxygen as our engine does. Instead, their engines directly spew out their carbon dioxide to their atmosphere, causing heat from the sun that would normally be reflected back into space, to be trapped inside their atmosphere. This warmed their planet so much that scientists have speculated the planet used to have polar ice caps, which now have melted, causing what is speculated to be a 70-meter rise in their sea level. The humans may have not been able to cope with the change in their planet's climate, and therefore have become extinct."

Mumbles and exasperations can be heard around the classroom as the students learn about this nonsense. "So, they destroyed themselves? Why would they do that?" another student asked. Miss Arbandom smiled as she gave the same answer she gives to her student every year. "That's a good question, why would a species destroy itself?"

THE CURTAIN OF WONDER AND THE AWFUL BEHIND THE SCENES

Ziad Oweis, EGYPT
Project ID 2110

Every night, I lie awake on my bed unable to sleep from the plethora of thoughts that flood my head. To me, life before it happened is a mystery. I have never seen the sunset to know its magnifying beauty; I have read thousands of words and lines about it though. The memory of my mom and the pounding of my heart comes with the thought of its warmth and the light it rays.

As night falls, the memory of my mom doesn't leave me alone and tears start swelling in my eyes. I notice my dad passing by my room as he does every night, pausing for a moment or a glimpse of a moment in front of my door. Due to his tedious work in his laboratory, he usually keeps walking by afterwards. To my surprise, however, my father enters my room tonight. Unsure of what to say or do, I pretend to be asleep as he stands by my bedside. His silent presence compels me to open my eyes. My eyes catch his in a fraction of time. When his concerned face asks me what is wrong, my usually silent tears, became silent no more. He takes me in his arms, resting my head on his chest and rocking me from side to side as if I were a breast-feeding newborn baby.

When I calm down, he asks me in a soft and caring voice, a voice I hadn't heard in six years: "Now my dear, can you tell me why you were crying?" I paused for a moment. Ever since my mother's death, my father has been nothing but cold and distant to me. This sudden change in personality was suspicious. I was tempted to ask him, but I was afraid he would detach again. My father could read me like I was an open book. I looked him deep in the eyes and suddenly I was my nine-year-old self again. "I was thinking of her; I miss her dad," I stuttered in a voice that was so fragile and cracked that I was not sure if my dad heard me. My father's facial expression went blank. I pondered if he was going to go into distant-dad-mode again, but he looked at me with a faint and tired smile and said, "I do too, Layla. I do too." We sat ungainly for what felt like an eternity until my alarm's ringing broke the silence. I didn't know how much more awkwardness I could withstand. Never did I expect to be rescued by the alarm I actively loathed. We, my father and I, looked each other in the eye. I knew we were thinking the same thing: when did it become 6 am?

Unconsciously, we found ourselves at my window, hiding our gaze within the gaze of the gloomy, gray sky. It put the grayscale filter (which is used to give pictures a gray, black, and white color scheme) to shame. On his way out of my room dad asked, "I'm going to make breakfast. What do you want, dear?"

As we were eating breakfast, my dad and I talked about his work. He's a world famous scientist. To me, he seems to be the most intelligent person in the world. His sharp mind helped him become exceptional in his scientific field, consequently, left him somewhat eccentric.

With his vast knowledge, dad invented a cure to Pestilence, the disease mom died from. Sadly, his scientific invention came to life shortly after my dearest mother's passing. My mother's death changed my father. He became distant and reserved. It was like my dad's soul and love for me died with my mom. Two years after her death, the cure was officially launched and endorsed by public authorities. Within hours, the cure was in every hospital worldwide. My father saved billions of lives, but he couldn't save her.

"Layla, I have something amazing to tell you," he said. "Ever since you were born, I started working on this secret project. I knew what I was doing was deranged and absurd—that it was a mere concept of science-fiction—but I proceeded in doing it anyway. I didn't want my daughter to live her life within the realms of a wasted planet, a world engulfed and enchanted by consumption and waste."

"Dad just spill the tea," I told him. He was extremely euphoric, like an excited toddler experiencing his first trip to Disneyland. A wave of nostalgia crashed over me as I watched him articulate every word with eagerness about his new breakthrough. My mother and I used to adore this side of him, before she passed. I smiled at the fond memories. "Layla," he said with a smile, "I have invented a fully functioning time machine!"

It took me a few moments to process this huge revelation. At first, I thought he was just pulling a prank on me. "You're joking," I replied. "No scientist throughout history has ever been able to uncover the secrets of time travel." I wanted him to prove me wrong; I wanted to believe him.

"I can show you," he said gesturing towards his lab. When I witnessed the time machine for the first time, I had no doubt in my mind that his words were truth. What was once thought impossible was, now, going to become possible; we have a chance to remedy the horrors of DMN.

One might ask, "Hey Layla, what's DMN?" Well, DMN stands for the Death of Mother Nature. It occurred a couple of months prior to my birth. Long story short, we humans caused the Earth to get extreme depression, through our increasing acts of pollution. The Earth eventually committed suicide resulting in the extinction of all wildlife, the withering of anything naturally green, and a worldwide drought that has lasted for decades. Now we're left with the post-apocalyptic world that I was born into.

There are no words in any language on this planet to describe what I am feeling right now. I gaped at my father in amazement for a long while; I thought my gaze would burn a whole in his skull. For what seemed like hours, we talked about this marvelous revelation. Hours became days; days became weeks, months, and eventually years.

My father decided that I required mental and physical training in preparation for our retraction to the past. He educated me about the time travel theory and all of its vast branches. To accompany this, I endured years of martial arts training (my father's idea) with a couple of robots my father had made a while back. By the time I was 17, I had mastered a variety of martial arts, including Karate, Taekwondo, Jujutsu, and Bartitsu.

Due to my lifelong home isolation, I was extremely anti-social. To mend this problem, my dad had me converse with various sentient AI holograms he had made for me. I would spend hours a day talking to them. Sure, they weren't as good as actual humans (not that I knew any other humans than my dad), but talking to them kept me from having to talk to my dad.

By my father's standards, I was finally adequate enough to time travel. We carefully devised a plan for months, not leaving any variable out of place. This is what we ended up with: my dad had invented an abundance of drones that we would distribute in specific places across the planet. These drones were programmed to clean up any and all kinds of pollution.

I conducted intensive research on our drones' drop sites. I saw the captivating beauty of China, the United States, England, my own country, Egypt, and the ocean. They all had their own curtains of wonder, that, when opened would reveal the awful behind-the-scenes of human negligence.

During these years, my dad's health started worrying me. He coughed regularly, vomited daily, and lost consciousness periodically. I persuaded him see a doctor, and what I feared most came true; my father was diagnosed with Pestilence. Thankfully,

it was still too early to be deadly, as long as my father took the required medication, his own invention - the cure. That wasn't the case, however. The medication wasn't healing him, it was making his state worse. All the doctors we called upon were dumbfounded by this. In fear for his health, I pleaded him to postpone our trip to the past, but his stubbornness opposed me. I witnessed as Pestilence stole the soul of another one of my parents.

I sat in my father's lab, staring blankly at the time machine. This goal, this mission, this dream, filled the gap that was left by mom in my relationship with my dad. Maybe that's why I cried as much as I did when he took his last breath. I needed to make sure it was fulfilled, only then would I allow myself to grieve.

When I entered the time machine for the first time, I was drenched in fear and worry. I never expected I would have to do this alone. I started up the time machine and set course for 2019. Everything was going smoothly until the date was changed from 2019 to 2029. I no longer had control over the time machine, and that was only the calm before the storm. I was bound to be my seat, unable to move a muscle. Panic washed over me like a tsunami. Why was it taking me to my birth year, the year of DMN?

When I exited the time stream I found myself over my first drop site, China. The drones departed the time machine and started their purpose. I could have never expected the horrors to come. To my surprise, a recording of my father started playing on the console screen. "Hey honey, if you're seeing this then I must be dead," he said. His tone then went from sorrowful and caring, to mocking and insane. "You must have gone through with the mission. Such a sweet girl, trying to fulfill her father's dream. I'm flattered. But honey, that was a very dumb move." he said, laughing manically afterwards. As if on cue, the exact events of DMN played out before my eyes. I watched with horror through the tears that started to overwhelm my eyes.

At the final drop site, Egypt, the time machine landed in my father's lab, with father watching it patiently. His face screamed in derangement and insanity. When the time machine door opened, my father said triumphantly, "I guess my plan works." He looked behind him at the blueprints hanging on the wall. They belong to the time machine. My dad goes on to tell me that I just fulfilled his lifelong dream of killing Earth's environment and how I, his daughter, did just that. I sensed pride in his words, but at that moment I felt nothing but the numbness in my heart as it was stabbed by his words.

"You're stuck in this time loop, forever to experience this pain and sorrow, and there's nothing you can do to stop it. You are helpless, Layla. You're nothing." And that was the final stab my heart could take. "Y-you're a monster!" I managed to say through my vigorous crying. "No Layla, I'm Pestilence." With that, the time machine flies out of the lab and goes into Earth's orbit.

Layla screams as the time machine combusts from the inside can be heard from Earth, as if the Earth itself was screaming.

On a smaller scale, we are causing our own DMN on a daily basis. If we continue as we are, Layla's story could become a reality. No science-fiction element is required for us to start making a change. We need to stop being like Layla's dad and start being like Layla. We need to start forming our own non-post-apocalyptic future today. We need to start creating a different world.

THE END

MANKIND'S GREED

Areebah Oyshe, U.S. TEXAS
Project ID 2244

“There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed.”

Mahatma Gandhi

On the dry plains of Kansas, there lived a poor farmer whose meager income sometimes only came from the milk his cow yield. He had a small yet lovely stall built for her near his own home. It was wintertime, which meant the ground was frozen and the farmer could not plow seeds. He decided to go out that morning to sell the cow, to feed his family, but to no avail. Both farmer and cow begrudgingly walked back to their farm surprised to see a pregnant, frightened, shivering dog in the stall.

“I beg you to let me stay, for fear that I might freeze to death, at least until my puppies are born.” The dog whimpered.

Out of pity the farmer happily agreed and the cow stayed outside in the cold. A few days passed and the dog gave birth to a healthy litter of puppies. The farmer went to see the dog to bid her farewell.

“Please let me and my puppies stay, they too might freeze to death” The dog pleaded. The farmer agreed out of pity although reluctantly. Meanwhile, the cow suffered from the bitter cold yet she did not complain. She too sympathized with the dog and was kind enough to let her stay. A few months pass and the puppies have now grown into young dogs. During those few months, the dog asked for food, water, and a roaring fire to keep warm, the farmer hesitantly agreed to this too despite having little to eat himself. The cow had sickened greatly and died. The farmer grew sorrowful at the passing of the cow but felt too annoyed to stay upset for long. This time, more aggressively, he went to the barn to bid the dog farewell, however, he was meet with a pack of hostile dogs.

“If you try to get rid of us now, you will be attacked”, the dogs growled viciously. Now the farmer no longer pitied the dog and grew furious. The next day he drove a borrowed tractor into the barn, which terrified the dogs and they were forced to run away.

REVENGE OF THE ANIMALS

Zora Gerda Fejes, HUNGARY
Project ID 2424

Four-legged New Friend

I'm Toby. I was born as mommy's only child a month ago. We live on an island, our house is located at the height of the eighth floor.

It's morning and I am starving, I must eat something but where is she? I'll wait for a while and before I'd do anything, I do my morning workout. My mommy says it is very important, so right wing, left wing, head circle, shake the feathers, some flaps with the wings and done.

I'm hearing very strange noises from afar and I'm worried about mommy. It has been like this for a while now. It's not the ordinary chirp that I hear, even the leaves' swish is different. I would describe these new noises which destroy our lives as big burrs and cracks. We had to leave our home and find a new one on a smaller island. Since then unfortunately I haven't seen any of my friends and not surprisingly, the noise came after us. Where's mommy? I'll go to find her.

I love flying. I only have to move my wings and I can see the top of the trees and a little further the ocean. It's beautiful as the sun shines on its surface. I do some small circles searching mommy and indicating her with a whistle. She must have gone very far for breakfast. Wait. What is happening? Uh-oh! A tree has fallen there. Another one! I want to see it closer.

Oh, no, that terrible noise again! I feel a big problem here. Now I know where the noise comes from. This is the reason we had to leave our home. They are cutting the trees down and we are in danger again. By the end of this evening we will have lost our new home. What should I do? I feel alone, I am still hungry and the wind got intensified a little so I had better find a spot. Look! There's a big house nearby and something black is running up and down next to it. It can be dangerous but I have to find out what there is.

It's them! They control those really loud noise-machines! They have really long legs. Only that black furry being next to them does not look like an evil creation. Why does it look different? It does not look like me but it might understand me. I have to try.

"Hey, you! Stop and listen! I am Toby an-"

"Woof-Woof! What do you want? I am busy can't you see?"

"So you understand me! What kind of creature are you?"

"I am a dog obviously, laddie. But would you tell me what you are?"

"I am a Philippine eagle. Why haven't I met anyone like you before?"

"Because we don't live here. We go where our owners go and they almost never move to an island. I heard my owners talking about why we moved here. They say the reason is to populate the island and to make a new country where people put technology in the first place and to-"

"Wait, wait! I do not understand anything from your speech. These beings that are cutting the trees down are the people? What does populate mean? What is technology? And how did you understand anything from their talk?"

"Firstly, yes, they are the people. Secondly, it means that a lot of these creatures like them will be living here soon. Thirdly, it is something that I don't know, I only learnt the word, not the meaning. Finally, I am not as young as you, laddie. I spent a lot of time with learning their language. I cannot speak like them, but I do understand what they say. We have moved to a lot of places, so I had to occupy myself with something."

"I see. What's your name?"

"Should I tell a stranger, who I only spent 1 minute with, what my name is? I don't think so. You might be a predator that was waiting for someone to appear on the island and then capture it immediately."

"Do I really look like that?"

"You're right, you don't. I bet you have never done anything on your own. You are too young and diffident."

"Okay, I don't need you to tell me how timid I am. I don't have time. I need your help."

"You think it works like that, laddie? Why should I help you?"

Crack! A tree has fallen behind us. Crack! Another one.

"I have to find mommy right now."

The Plan

I don't understand. She disappeared just like that...I've come back home but nothing has changed. I wish mommy had left a message.

"Toby? Toby!"

Wait, this voice seems familiar. It's Loki, my best friend!

"Loki! What are you doing here? How? Are you alone?"

"I missed you too buddy. We had to move from our previous home like you did because of the noise and destruction. We found a place not far from here and I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you flying."

"I'm so glad you are here. I went through difficult times in this new place with unknown birds. Are the others still on the other island? Are they okay?"

"I regret to say that, but a few of our friends passed away. Those black-hearted beings are cruel. Nothing is there left. In the last few months I didn't really know what was going on in my life. I lost a lot of friends, as you did. I'm sorry you weren't informed sooner."

"Loki this...this cannot happen. It's better if I don't get to know who was taken from us, but I am extremely broken and angry. They didn't deserve it. We have to act right now, I have no more wasted minutes."

"I totally agree, but Toby, what do you think we can do about this? We are way too young to change the islands' future."

"What if we talk to your parents? I'm sure they would help to figure out how to change this current status. Then they could tell others and they could tell others an-"

"Toby, enough from the words! Let's go!"

"Mom, dad! I have found Toby! I told you I saw hi...wait. They are gone. No, they told me they would wait for me. Toby my parents wouldn't go anywhere without telling me, they disappeared! No this cannot happen to me, no I-"

"Loki, listen. I haven't got a sign from mommy since this morning either. Maybe...something wrong happened to her. We have to be wise and courageous. It is our task now to rewrite our homes' stars. Even if it's only the two of us, I-"

"Do you think I started talking to you so you can disappear just like that and leave me in the garden without knowing why you looked so frightened, laddie?"

"Dog? Did you follow me?"

"My name is Odessa so now that you know, don't call me a dog. Ew. Yes I did, you seemed way too lost to fly away alone."

"I do not need your protection Essa."

"Odessa!"

"Toby! Would you be so kind and enlighten me?"

"I met her before you saw me. She is a creature which is called dog, and I think she could give us a hand in our mission."

"Stop right there! On which planet did you think I would help you? It does not work like that, you have to ask me before and also-"

"Please Essa! We need you. You told me you understand their language. That is a giant first step in order to protect my species from extinction. I don't want to lose more friends and family. I believe this planet needs us on its islands. We are much more valuable than those people think. Moreover, we are not the only ones threatened with extinction. I have seen strange species who may have more need for forests and habitats than we do. I want to help animals, creatures, plants to have a better future."

"I'm blown away. You haven't talked that much at once ever! Who is my best friend? Toby is!"

"Okay, laddie, let's say I'll help you, but what is your plan? It is easy to create the vision of the mission but we're going to need a lot of wise ideas to achieve the happy ending. By the way, it's still Odessa."

"Well, there are a lot of other animals on this island with different appearance. For example snakes, bats, monkeys, geckos or bigger birds like eagles. Right Toby?"

"Wait, so you are saying you know all the species that exists except for us dogs? That's a shame."

"That is not the point, Loki please continue."

"So, we could make strange noises at night and during the day we disguise ourselves to scare and deceive them into thinking there are some kind of dangerous creatures. They will be so frightened they will run home immediately."

"That is the greatest plan I've ever heard! Loki when did you become so smart?"

"You moved away so I finally had a little time for myself too. Just kidding, it was horrible without you."

"Ew, how sentimental. Ok bridie, I like your plan. So then, shall we go tell the others?"

Change of the Future

I can't believe we have a plan. I can't believe Loki's here. I can't believe I made a new friend which came from a totally different universe. Am I in a dream? No, mommy would wake me up. Mommy. I'm worried about her.

"It's done. I talked to them. It was hard because they first thought I am some kind of alien with fur who wants to pull their legs but I convinced them. They are in and we are starting right now."

"Now, now! Monkeys, make the sounds! Snakes, twist yourselves on their legs! Others do the big shadow quick so they will surely be frightened as they are running away!"

We are putting lots of hard work in the mission. More than 100 different animals are helping to get our home back. Moreover, the different species are becoming friends even if some of them were enemies. We are tired but full of hope which might lead us to success. Almost all of the people are gone. Essa said she heard groups talking about how dangerous their life would have been if they had stayed.

Everyone is nervous. All the families, friends came together to hear if we got our island back for good. It is obvious that we all want the same. Success. That would mean we can live without the fear of becoming the next victims, without the big noise which kept us awake and we could be happy again. But there is one thing, that no one talks about. The feeling of the end of our teamwork which strengthened us, gave us new friends and love. Though it ends, we know it was a time we will never forget and here she comes...

"Well, well. I regret to say that...the last people are gone! Be proud of yourselves. We have made it!"

"Yaay!"

"Hurraay!"

"Toby, I met someone while I was searching for the people left. It wasn't hard to recognize her. She kinda looks like you."

"Mommy! Where have you been? I was so worried about you!"

"Oh, Toby! One of those giant aliens captured me, I couldn't escape! When they left, they forgot I was still in the cage in the garden but your friend found me and saved me, thank you again. By the way what or who are you?"

"She's Essa, I mean Odessa an-"

"Call me Essa, I like it now."

"So Essa is a dog and part of our family now."

"That's right. Well, shall we go to save the next island?"

THE PHOTON

Liliana Kincs, HUNGARY
Project ID 2426

First it was all very dark then a light appeared and a moment later the small photon realised that it was coming from her. She has just been born, but was already travelling with all of her siblings. Her huge bright mother who warms the Earth has just sent her on a long journey. She was nervous because it's known that there was a long way ahead them, but was also really excited because forming into pure energy sounded super interesting. Her millions of siblings had told her that they were going to a planet called Earth, where people have solar panels which helps photons to turn into energy.

And so the long journey has started.

In the beginning our friend was delighted by the stars and the planets. Her favourite was the Neptune even if she could barely see it because it was far away. She was amazed by its colours. All the different shades of blue mixed together. Some were really bright almost white but there were some very deep dark tones as well, which were as dark as a black hole. It was marvellous and looked like a magic ball. She was wondering how these beautiful planets were born, even asked her siblings but they also did not know the answer. It was impossible to take her eyes off all the magical stars, asteroids and planets. The little photon wished to see them a little bit closer. Well be careful what you wish for, as the old saying says, because suddenly a lot of small asteroids were rushing towards her. She had to gather all her courage, took a deep breath and started maneuvering to avoid them. Going with the speed of light is not an easy thing to do. She turned left, then turned right, and then even had to jump over one. Our girl knew if she missed only one movement she could easily get in trouble so it was not recommended to slow down because it would have been very dangerous. The asteroids were just coming and coming but she was determined and super deft. Finally, it was the end of the field. She must have been a very skilled little photon because she got away without a scratch. Her heart was beating very fast because of all the adrenalin. The photon was relieved and proud of herself because she just went through her first asteroid field.

"All in all, it wasn't that bad." She said.

"Well, your face showed something different." Laughed one of her brothers.

She just rolled her eyes with a barely noticeable smile.

As they were going towards the Earth our lady decided to see the Moon a little bit closer, so she carefully looked around in case anyone would watch her, but no one was paying too much attention so she could get out of the crowd, and headed towards it. She loved the Moon, but couldn't explain why. It was just so magical. The silver shine amazed her. She has always known that one day she could see this from such a small distance but never thought that it would be such an impressive experience. She was so close that she could have touched the ground. As our hero was flying above the surface, suddenly noticed something. It was something red, white and blue. When she got a closer look on it, she saw that it was a flag with red and white stripes and a blue rectangle with stars on it. The photon liked it and wondered who put it there. Apparently she was watching it for too long because when she wanted to go back to her family, she could not see them anywhere.

It was scary but she knew that bravery was very important. As our friend was just travelling in space she realised that the Earth was not as far as it had been before so it was the right way. She tried to move as fast as it was possible and a moment later she caught a glimpse of her siblings. They were way before her but at least she found them which meant she found the right path.

Also there was a little girl on the planet Earth. Her name was Sarah and she was going to her first audition for a role in the school play, with thousands of butterflies in her stomach. Sarah has always wanted to act but never had enough confidence to try herself.

By the time she got to the audition, it had already started. She quietly went inside and waited. Every second seemed like a year until they called her to the stage. Her heart skipped a beat because she was that nervous. All the worst outcomes flashed through her mind, but deep down the little girl knew that she had to seem very confident because in the audition confidence was the key. Sarah slowly walked up to the stage and greeted the jury. Then started to act and did everything as she could, and put her whole heart in it. After the last line she looked around nervously and tried to decide whether the judges liked it or not. Well, it was an easy decision because she got a standing ovation. Sarah suddenly felt as if a huge boulder had rolled off her heart. She immediately got the role and was overloaded with joy. Everything seemed perfect.

The days were passing and Sarah practiced her role every day.

I still do not know if it was a coincidence or just a funny plot twist of the universe but the school play happened to be on the same day as the arrival of the little photon.

It was a beautiful spring day. The birds were singing and a small breeze was blowing. Sarah woke up with a lot of mixed feelings in her heart. She was afraid, happy and nervous at the same time, but she tried to think positively, although it was not too easy, because of the very little sleep she got last night because of all the thoughts that were flashing through her mind. It was a big day. Her big day.

She got up, got dressed and ran down on the stairs, straight to the kitchen. Her mom had made pancakes that smelled delicious. They calmed her down a little and were amazing because her mother always made the best pancakes in the town. After breakfast she left for school.

At the school everything was a mess. Everyone was practising and running up and down to do the finishing touches on the costumes and on the designs. It felt like time was flying because one second ago everyone was dressing up and then the sun was already setting. The parents started to arrive and the school theatre was filling up. Sarah went backstage and waited for the show to start. Her lines were all mixing up in her head so she repeated them one last time. Her teacher went up to the stage and greeted the parents and the other members of the audience and then started talking about the children's hard work and all the rehearsals and how proud she was. The show was about to start when suddenly all the lights and reflectors went off. The whole theatre became dark. It was a blackout. The show could not go on without lights. Everyone was very sad and disappointed, because they really wanted to see the play. Nobody knew what to do when Sarah got an idea. She ran out of the room and went straight to the solar panels. It was very risky because as I mentioned the sun was setting down. The panels were not too far so they could be found easily, but when she tried to turn their solar energy on they didn't have enough charge on them. They needed a little more. She could not do anything but just wait and hope for the best. The sun was barely visible and there still was not enough charge. Sarah whispered a quiet "Come on!" while counting the seconds. The sun completely set down. Sarah was heartbroken. It would have been her first ever show, but without lights it couldn't be continued. She was about to go back when something appeared. It was extremely bright and was coming very fast. It was the last sunshine of the day. Yes, you guessed it

right. It was our little photon friend, because of her quick visit of the Moon she was late. Sarah knew that everything depended on this last sunshine. Our photon lady saw the whole scene of Sarah and the solar panels so she immediately realised that she herself was the last hope. The photon's decision was to do everything that was possible to help the little girl. The panels were closer and closer. Just before our hero touched a panel she saw how delighted Sarah was, and it made her feel very proud. She smiled and then jumped right in the middle of the solar panel. It was a great but indescribable feeling. The little photon has been waiting for this since the beginning of her story, which might be only eight minutes but for her it felt like forever. Our photon could finally transform into energy and it made her feel amazed.

Of course Sarah could not see the little photon but she could feel that someone very special just helped her. With crossed fingers Sarah was hoping the charge would be enough, and fortunately it was. She immediately turned the solar energy on and could hear the cheering from inside the theatre that the people made when the lights finally came back. The girl ran back to the building up to the stage where everyone was clapping and cheering because they could see from the window what she was doing. This moment could not be better.

The rest of the show went as it was planned, and it was a huge success. Sarah will never forget this day and will always remember that strange feeling when she saw the last sunshine of the day.

The End.

LET IT BURN IN THE WEST

Patrick Lambright, U.S. GEORGIA
Project ID 2480

I dreaded the next two hours of my life. Since getting my bachelors at Santa Clara University about a couple years ago, everyone around me told me that I already carved a path out for myself. I was in a constant turmoil of following the same schedule fearing that I would never follow my dream of being a science major even though I was never my strong suit in grade school.

Right before Labor Day, I decided I wasn't happy and quit on an impulse decision. Instead of feeling relieved of quitting, I was stressed out as I had no backup plan. I was only truly seeking fulfillment.

The constant social nagging of forcing me to be employed as soon as I could lead me to apply to the fire academy which led to me becoming a firefighter. I ended up applying to a station in northern California that same year where I became the newest recruit not realizing the strenuous work, I was about to put myself through.

In the very first week, I got to know Richard and Marcus very well. They have both been in the same fire platoon for a couple of years and Marcus tries to tell stories of how old fires were handled to Richard and new recruits to make himself look smarter as he ended up going straight to the academy from high school. Peshtigo was the first story Marcus told me about where around 1,500 to 2,500 people died due to a cold front that went by Wisconsin in 1871. Even though Richard has heard the same true and factual story repeated over and over he doesn't believe it. The one good thing to ever come out of Marcus's mouth is that the U.S forest service was created in 1905 to try to prevent massive crown fires like Peshtigo to resurface again.

The main chief, Mr. Henry, pulled me aside from time to time. Once he realized the mile runs were not going to kill me, he gave me more extra training that was one to one to get me up to speed on all of the combatants. When dealing with 50-meter flames that are up to 2000 degrees (Fahrenheit), gruesome training ends up being the best thing to ever happen to you. Mr. Henry would make me run extra drills and teach me some rigorous workouts that the academy did not dare to teach me. But, one thing that became apparent to me quick through my first year is that he along with some people did care about my success.

Before the fire season came into effect, our platoon took major precautions. We started by taking hatchets and pulaskis and making lines in the dirt for miles and miles on end called firelines. They were basically supposed to prevent fires spreading along the forest by containing them in a singular area.

One time, I saw Richard intentionally starting fires in his sector when there was no fire previously. I started to yell at him heavily, but he told me that this prevents crown fires. Most fires in dry areas start by naturally burning and we need to release that energy before that time comes when it is at a very low buildup of potential energy. Ground fires seem to also help the soil, but honestly, none of us saw that as our main concern.

Most days I had a chainsaw in my hand due to my role as a sawyer, and therefore my energy was drained by just the sheer amount of work. Every day, Mr. Henry would give me a section in the middle of the woods. I would cut down the small trees or trees that are about to die within that section. I would also make sure the cuts were shaped apart. In theory, the fire would not be able to travel far if there was a lack of trees to spread them. I would never know where to cut exactly even I was told to spatially make the cuts to divert the fire. All I did was my best every day. I was now only using my strength for work as I became a hot head.

After every Friday, we would head up to the local restaurant about a ½ mile away from the station. Every week Mr. Henry would give a speech on how we are "preparing for the day". I ironically wanted that day to happen. All the other departments seem to happen their share of wildfires. The talks of the walls of fire exited me. Even though I never wanted anyone or anything to ever get hurt, I just wanted something different. Mr. Henry on the other hand was celebrating, even to the point of thanking the other departments. I didn't truly understand him.

The Friday after that was different than all the Fridays before. Mr. Henry called off the weekly dinner meeting. Apparently, one of the forest that we treated caught on fire. This was not a ground fire as everyone in the department has been trained to say "Let it Burn in the West" as it turned out to be a crown fire. This has been the opportunity I've been waiting for a year.

We quickly suited up and we left. Thankfully, some part of the \$5 billion U.S budget used on forest fire fighting budget was given to us and the stations around us. When climbing into the helicopter, I finally felt I was part of something important.

Just minutes before our helicopter got there, other helicopters dropped hundreds of gallons of water on the massive area. Jets also dropped a reddish solution of phosphate fertilizer to try to cease the fire. As we became closer, I learned that I would be part of the heliattack crew which would drop from above. Apparently, other departments were joining us in providing more Type 1 Hot-Shots. Even though we had a hotshot crew that was going to be on the ground, it is going to take more than one group of 20 to even keep the firelines where it is rather diminishing it.

My hands were trembling as I grabbed the rope. Before I knew it, I was in one of the hardest places to reach in the forest with fire around me only with a couple of people to help me in the sector which I couldn't hear their commands. I only briefly here the intercom due to the walls of fire muffering the noise; The people on the intercom were trying to explain that they want to deploy another layer of water from the air. Problem is that they cannot spray water or the phosphate fertilizer while our group was down below. They instead started to send more smokejumpers, heliattack crew, and type 1 hotshots. Before I knew it, many different special types of firefighters were helping all of us.

I started to cut down the easy small trees that were spreading the fire. Anything that was deemed as inferior and was heavily burning was gone. I also sprayed down the tall trees with water to try and dim the amount of fire on it. Whatever I did, regardless if Mr. Henry told me or not, the fire seemed to be never-ending.

The radio went off again. Apparently, we brought in bulldozers to make 60 feet firelines. Our half of a foot firelines from earlier were a sign of our lack of knowledge. As the spotter was talking on the radio about the direction of the fire, my radio broke.

Finally, I was able to lower the flames in front of me where I could gaze above them. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be like that for a long time as flames would be engulfed back to the size to the point that it became a lost cause. We needed to be airlifted at that moment so we could add more water and phosphate fertilizer without injuring the people below. I watched where I stepped on the ashy turf and was screaming, "We need to get out of here". The soaring of the flames made me not able to be heard. Before I even grabbed one of the few firefighter's attention I was knocked out.

Some hours later, I started to twitch my eyes only to see I was in a Hospital. I barely got the gist of it, but the crew was able to surround the flame and keep it in one area. Backfire was able to eliminate the last of the flame. Firefighters were able to shuttle me to the hospital then after as it was easy to see my body laying there under a small-size tree. Luckily, it wasn't on fire.

Protocol and scientific reasoning are why I was quickly airlifted to a hospital. I finally saw the path opening as the walls concaved into themselves.

THE RISING TIDE

Chloe Duensing, U.S. GEORGIA
Project ID 2481

The groan of machines echoed through the empty streets; most of them carried coal but one was different. A carriage rumbled down the road, black smoke spewing out behind it and into the faces of the slum people who followed like a pack of coyotes. They yipped as they ran down the street, dogging their prey like starved hunters. The carriage was not drawn by horses but instead was powered by a loud, clanging engine that seemed to scream at each movement. A worn out device, it bore the most valuable commodity in the world.

A harried man driving the carriage stopped in the middle of the road to address the dirty mob behind him. There were maybe thirty in total, but to a boy observing the scene, they all looked the same: dirty, desperate, and dreadfully thirsty. "Alright you lot, line up!" shouted the driver. His manner was pompous and his outfit, a bright blue uniform with spotless white gloves, immaculate.

Even though the boy really did not want to join the ragged crowd, it was in his best interest to do so. The child was forced to dodge pointy elbows and mad hands trying to rip people away from the line, and despite the fancy man's repeated calls for order, none fell over the parched people.

Once he managed to slip closer to the front due to his small size, he was able to see the carriage better. The blinking electronic poster on its smooth metal side featured the soothing face and patronizing smile of Timothy Hydro, the omnipresent figurehead of Hydro Company, the only corporation on Earth that produced clean water for its inhabitants. The man seemed to sparkle standing with a pristine beach and rolling ocean in the background. "Drink more water, dehydration no, no, no!" the poster declared in a crackly voice.

"It's ahnly thanks ta these Hydra lots that we're even in this situation." Hot breath met his ear, and the boy spun around. He came face to face with a short man. More sweat that stank like oil and coal steamed from the man as he continued. "If them rich folks hadn't poisoned every water puddle out there, maybe we wouldn't be beggin' Hydra for a drink every day. We mine and mine and mine 'til we practically breathe coal and then what do we get in return? What do they even do with that stuff?"

The boy opened his mouth to reply, but the man was thrown aside by a larger man who took his place in line. Suddenly he found himself at the front of the line, staring into the bespectacled eyes of the driver who shoved a white-gloved hand in his face. The boy fumbled for the glass vial offered to him. He clutched the vial in his left hand as the driver stamped his right. The bright red H₂O symbol became the cleanest part of him, the crisp symbol cutting its way through the thin layer of dust covering his skin. With the mark, it was impossible to get another water vial until it wore off. He quickly stepped away from the water truck before he could be overcome by the slowly growing mob behind him.

"No more, no more! Out of water, now git you lot of dried idiots! Disperse! Don't make me tell Mr. Hydro that this slum sector was harassing the water carriage, or else good luck trying to get another drink anytime soon!" The boy picked up his pace, disappearing from sight as he maneuvered through the muttering clumps of people, avoiding greedy hands that reached out to clutch him.

Remnants of ancient brick walls divided the shantytown into a confusing maze, but he knew the place well. He slipped into a nearby alleyway, scraping the soles of his worn shoes against the dried dirt that may have once been mud. The boy held up the vial to the light, watching the rainbow that refracted.

"That's a nice bottle of water you have there."

The boy turned around, coming face to face with an old woman. She smiled fondly at him, the action stretching her dried lips until they cracked, blood dripping down her chin. Her tongue darted from her mouth as if to lap up the precious liquid.

"When I was a young girl, they would pay us in bottles. Now they don't pay us at all, do they? You just work in the coal mines, prancing around in polluted puddles, hoping you'll be one of the few chosen to leave this desert town. And the worst part is that they were the ones who poisoned the water in the first place. All of them with their dirty machinery."

His face must have expressed his wariness because her harsh features turned gentle. "Always begging the rich for a drink. Well, don't let me stop you." As he began to drink, she continued her ramble. "Don't you see the cycle? They're keeping us trapped, using our body's needs against us, and only a few can escape. Those lucky sheep are selected because they will obey, not because they work hard."

He looked at her doubtfully. As if sensing his skepticism, she suddenly lurched towards the boy, intense eyes frightening as she loomed over him. "You shouldn't have to work for clean water. Water should be free for all, not a reward. What do you think is beyond that gate, boy?"

The boy shrugged.

"You used to be able to turn on a faucet to get water. They say that the wall protects us from the desert outside, but I'm not so sure." She smiled again. "Then again, don't listen to me. I'm just a dried out relic of the past."

But he did listen.

...

"I told you all, I'm out! No more water! Now get out of the road!"

The boy wondered what it was like to have enough water in one's throat to shout that loudly. He never talked because it was just a waste of water, but he knew that others would talk until they could not anymore. Despite the shouts from the carriage driver, the slum people did not retreat. Clumped in front of the gate that led out of the town, the people stood motionless, surrounding the machine, like a menacing display of dirt-caked mannequins.

Guards by the gate gripped their narrow batons. They radiated tenseness and began making their way toward the water carriage, but the crowd repelled them.

He crept closer, sticking to one side of the street while also seeking a closer look. They were all chanting. "More water!" A few older people were holding up crude signs, but everyone had the same demand. "More water!"

The boy remembered a day when the miners would grovel in front of the water carriage. They used to bow down on their knees, praying in every language they knew, begging to be spared from death by thirst. Unanswered pleas quickly turned to anger. The growing riot in front of him was definitely bad news.

Common sense whispered for him to leave, but morbid curiosity kept his feet rooted to the ground.

"Move! Or I'll run you all over!" It was a useless threat. There was no way the carriage could pick up enough speed to break free of the horde. "I swear, I will!" The man's voice was nearly drowned out by the roar of the mob. The boy did not envy his position. Even though nobody would dare to exit through the gate after the carriage, the man would never make it to the wall unless he managed to convince the mass to clear. The gates began to open slowly with a creaking groan, but they stopped short as the people grew more frenzied.

If anything, his threats only incensed the populace. Their din rose to a crescendo, like a choir of demons chanting for more water. A few shrill but distinct voices managed to reach the boy's ears from his position on the outskirts of the crowd.

"Let me come with you!" someone demanded. Rumor had it that outside of the slums, every working person was paid with water. Nobody ever came back, so nobody knew if it was true.

"Screw Hydro! Poisoning the water, keeping us poor, what right do you have!? Offering us the leftovers!"

One person managed to grab the edge of the electronic poster, tearing the page away from the carriage before ripping the poster into pieces. It incited the crowd, and suddenly they converged on the water carriage as fragments of ocean and beach flew through the wind. Half of Hydro's smile landed close to the boy, leering at him.

The boy slipped towards the gate, eyeing the gap. Not big enough for an adult, but just right for him. The guards had abandoned their post in order to break up the turmoil, but despite mightily swinging their weapons they could not disperse the riot. Leaving behind the carnage, the boy approached the gate still standing ajar.

Unburdened by the fear that the townspeople seemed to have of the outside despite their violent protests, he laid a hand against the cool surface of the doors. The boy was not sure what overtook him in that instant--perhaps a spark of courage ignited by the old woman's tales combined with his lifelong curiosity, or the urge to escape his dreary existence, or simply a desire to escape the mob behind him. With a deep breath of petroleum-scented air, the boy wriggled through the gap and emerged on the other side of the slums.

A blast of hot air buffeted his face. The light blinded him, and the wind blew desert sand into his face. Without the shade of the slum buildings, the sun felt even more unforgiving. He walked forward as the mob's roar in the background fell away, replaced by the hum of great machines. Burning hot sand seeped into his torn shoe, but he felt no pain, for the shock of what he saw overwhelmed him.

The desert was not empty--large, bulbous tanks dotted the open wasteland. Dark smoke emerged from strange cylinders poking out of semicircular buildings, forming clouds of darkness in the clear sky. All of these plants were connected by pipes: gigantic twisting tubes that formed an endless metal maze.

To the left, he could see a caravan of machines plodding away from the slums, towing coal wagons from the mines. No one inside knew where the coal went, but now the boy saw that it was powering the massive complex before him. The conveyances headed into the larger facilities, the ones surrounded by barbed-wire fences.

And in the center of it all, the most precious commodity of all: water, creating an isolated city, an oasis of life. The boy could not believe his eyes; the image swam like a mirage in the desert. But it did not fade--those were real trees, real grass, real people. The pipes from the facilities fed water into the great lake at the edge of the city. Electricity lit up the city in artificial lights, and the citizens seemed to be living in paradise.

He had never been so enraged. Carefree, happy people drank freely everyday while his people, locked in the slums, were trapped only to beg for mercy from the rich. There was so much to spare, yet the city hoarded the lake. All of the people who died in the mines or died crying for water--every cruel sacrifice so needless and pointless. The old woman's stories echoed in his ears, nearly drowned out by the flow of blood rushing in his head as anger turned to cold determination. Water was a right, not a reward to lord over people's heads, nor a punishment in the form of deprivation.

Everybody deserved clean water, and someday, somehow, the boy would make sure everybody would have it.

HUMAN NOBLENESS

Sofia Pina Santoyo, MEXICO
Project ID 2532

I saw her waving at the landscape, she then proceeded to bow and finally dance with the strong wind that was hitting us. The sad thing? I only saw oceans of people and forest of metal. She actually was on this new “toy”, as we called it, created two years ago, in 1860, this was a huge pair of black glasses, what was special about them? since there was no sign of green life and people eventually got bored a little of ridiculously big machines powered by steam, the artefact was made with the purpose of witness, as realistic as possible, through a crystal, clear and gorgeous fields with thousands of bright colours.

My name is Alec, and the girl that waved at that man made landscape that afternoon is my sister. We both grew up in a workshop surrounded by tools, oil, coal and vapour.

When I turned 12 my arm got stuck in an engine and I didn't get it back, instead my sister and I constructed a mechanic arm for me. When she turned 14 her eyesight began to get lousy thanks to the long hours of work in the darkness, and we designed some lenses, with glass as green as my emerald eyes, that helped her see better. Now I'm 19 and she's 17.

-Hey, Alec, we need to return to that, how can we do it?- Clara's voice and her hands shaking my head got me out of my mind.

-What? -I said as I unsuccessfully tried to catch her words and her ideas floating in the air- What are you talking about? Return to what?

-The bright world.

I looked at her in confusion.

-I think the world that those glasses are showing me is stunning, with those big trees and small bugs, and obviously the colourful flowers.

-I think that too, but we can't change everything just like that, what will happen with all those machines? what will happen to us without all the stuff that make our lives easier? How much time the plants will take to grow? What we will do in the meantime?

-You ask too much questions that maybe I can't answer.

The silence didn't last long.

-There are no plants or forests or animals, we have to wear mask all the time we are outside of our houses, we'll be fine without all that metal stuff -she said with anger and despair- we could use such machines to help, we do not have to eradicate them, we should just learn to coexist with other living beings, use and create only what is necessary, no more.

I didn't know what to say.

Days later she came with the address of the one she thought could help her.

-I need to go here, will you go with me? -she told me with her big eyes looking me through her glasses.

-Clara, why are you doing this?

-I've told you.

-Yes, I know, but why are you, specifically, doing this? Why don't you leave this to the authorities or someone else? I don't want anything bad happen to you.

-So come with me. I have to be me the one who do this because no one will do it.

The one person we met was the one who created the glasses that made Clara want to change the world.

-Hi, I'm Dra. Parson, is there something I can help you with? -she said with a big smile on her face.

-I want that green soil and that blue skies back, I need to know why did you make the lenses, Dra. Parson -demanded Clara while plating wither red hair telling me she was nervous.

Doctor Maria Parson was considered one of the biggest pioneer in the technology field, and we were now there, passing through the doors of the place where she created such a successful artefact.

-Take a seat, and please, call me Maria -she told us as we entered in her living room.

Maria went to her kitchen and bring three glasses of water.

-Well, it all started when I was just a kid -she began her story with euphoria- when my grandma used to tell me tales about real animals and green beautiful life, repeating how much she wanted to see that again. One day I promised her I will show to her a beautiful world again.

Maria made a short pause like if she was reliving with nostalgia all that, then she continued her story.

-I tried as much as I could to convince people to help me get back to that clean and healthy world, but I was invisible, no one heard me, no one helped me, so what was a way I could make people notice me? With technology. Society loves new things, so I worked hard for three years and I was at the middle of the project when my grandmother died. -her expression went full dark- I passed one year locked in my room and I barely went out. Finally I finished the lenses after two more year, my grandma wasn't there anymore to see that green world, even if it was artificial, so I sold a pair, and then another pair, and another, I waited for someone to come and tell me they liked what they saw besides they wanted to help me to reconstruct that.

The atmosphere went blurry as the words of both started going rapid, and when I came back to me they were in other part of the house and making plans for something which thread I lost.

-Yeah, we can make a strike but that will only worsen things -Clara's voice came like a whisper.

-No if we make it right.

Clara's charm and good leadership made people join that noble cause and weeks passed by with more and more people gathering in Maria's house. I was always sitting there, just listening and witnessing the things that happened with my sister in the middle of everything, and then in a blink of an eye, everything was finished.

Clara and I woke up before the sun. I stroked my hand through my pink and messy hair, ready to ready to hang and paste environmentalism ads everywhere and close streets.

When we approach the others, I noticed something different, something that I didn't see in the plans, and neither did Clara.

Bombs, weapons, guns.

It looks like Maria was willing to take desperate measures.

-No, this isn't what we planned, this isn't noble, this is destruction and murder -Clara yelled with anger.

-Thank you, for bringing people to the cause and with this, now, if you don't feel comfortable you can walk away -Maria responded.

-This is not the way, Maria, we can shouldn't be killing people and destroying houses, this is not the way.

-This is just the exact way, like this they will be forced to do things right this time.

-I won't let you do this.

-Oh, I don't need your consent.

The chariot of the sun of Apollo was coming out through the sky, that blank space above the world that was being colored right now with everything quiet and still was ripped apart with the noise of a gunshot.

Clara's body went loose and those bright hazel eyes dimmed as I ran to hold was used to be my sister. Maria's steps began to approach me, with madness and despair.

I woke up in a sweltering body but artic hands that burned my face when I cleaned the sweat of my forehead.

-What?- I mumbled to myself in utter misunderstanding of the things that had just happened.

There were no sign of green glass lenses or a false leg, just me and a blue room. My room? Was Clara, Maria and that steam powered world just a dream?

Was it real or just a product of my worried mind, I had work to do. This time I won't step aside, I have to help buried world or a sinking reality.

THE MINDSET CHANGES, THE WORLD GETS BETTER

Rosalina Pedro Da Silva Gomes, ANGOLA
Project ID 2615

Alex is an 18 year old (young) boy, born and raised in Finland in the the capital (Helsinki) a modern country where technology is more advanced than the most countries in the world, there have a beautiful nature and it's a safe country to live.

Alex is a student, and it is his final year in the International School of Helsinki, one of the best schools in the country which has the best students of Finland.

He lives with his parents; Maya, his mum is a florist and Igor is his dad. He doesn't have brothers or sisters, he lives in a small house, his parents love nature and taking care of their little but gorgeous garden.

Alex is an ambitious, futuristic, curious, adventurous and enthusiastic guy and is always finding ways (forms) to be a better person every day. He has a passion for all things related to technology especially robotics. Unlike his parents, he believes the future of the world is on hands of technology.

One beautiful morning, a Saturday, Maya is in her garden again, Alex staring at her mum waiting to be recognised, Maya starts talking while cleaning around of an old tree cautiously:

Maya- This tree is the joy of my garden, it's twigs hang in ringlets like my mum's hair did when she was young.

Alex- I see you adore your garden mum. But how is your vision related to technology?"

And Alex continues to speak persistently without waiting her mum to answer.

Alex- The world is improving every day. Scientists, researchers and designers from all around the world are inventing and discovering something new that will simplify our life and make it more interesting. And without this achievements we would not have progressed so far.

Maya- Technology... is a queer thing. It brings you great gifts with one hand, and it stabs you in the back with the other.

This isn't the first time they're having this kind of conversation. Alex thinks once again her mum is old-fashioned and there is no point in speaking to her.

Alex wants to get scholarship to the best universities in the world like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard but to achieve this he would have to work harder than he thinks he needed to. His dream is using Robotics technology to shape the future.

Mr. Robert, his infomatrix teacher is always proud to listen to him talking about his ideas and plans.

Alex- You love technology, right Mr. Robert? And you don't see anything negative about it...

Mr. Robert- Technology is such a broad kind of term, it really applies to so many things, from an electric light to running cars on oil. I have a kind of love-hate relationship with it, as I expect most people do. Who would love to sit in front of a screen for hours Alex?

He laughed long and loud.

Mr. Robert-- It has negative effects as much as anything.

Alex- When you compare with its benefits it is ignorable Mr. Robert!

In Alex's voice Mr Robert feels the compassion and power needs to be guided and he decides to give Alex an assignment.

To complete this assignment Alex has to interview with people have different jobs search the technology they use and consequences people confront with.

After completing his task (5 months later) Alex is very excited to talk to his favorite teacher.

Alex- I am ready to change the world Mr. Robert!

Mr. Robert- Change the world? Still, with the robots you will invent?

Laughs and hugs Alex tightly.

Alex- Sure Mr. Robert! With my robots! Finding ways to decrease harms of technology ... Arranging ways and forms to use modern technology to solve environmental issues.

Mr. Robert- The mindset changes, the World gets better...

BEING NICE TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Rasulov Sherlan, KYRGYZSTAN
Project ID 2742

As I was maturing, I started contemplating more about the life puzzles; things like the battle between the good and the bad, and the victory of the good. Growing up I realized that the older you get the more problems you are faced with, and this happens continuously. It turns out that human beings are always being tested; every event that happens in one's life is a lesson. In my opinion, those kinds of lessons help us to learn something useful, come to better decisions, and in the end, have a better understanding of what the life is. Most likely, my friendly attitude towards both animal and plant world shaped after a lesson that one event has taught me.

I grew up in Issyk-Kul, located between the haunts of Terskey Ala-Too and Kungei Ala-Too. Since the village where I grew up is located at the foot of the mountain, I grew up in the embrace of nature. Maybe because I have treated nature as a friend, the story that my grandmother told me left a strong impression on me and until now it is still stuck in my head. I believe that every happening has consequences; even if a branch breaks, it will lead to consequences, and most probably not the most pleasant ones...

Once upon a time a skilled hunter and his wife lived in my village; his name was Karamergen. For many years they could not have children. They have been asking for a child from God, and one day their dream of being parents came true. Their son's name was Baisal. Ever since Baisal was little, his father dreamt that his son would become a hunter like him. Baisal was a lovely, friendly boy; he befriended almost every living creature. There were even times when he talked to rocks. Baisal had a song that he never got tired of singing:

Different flowers, butterflies
They are my friends
Ants and bunnies
I will play with you.
I am embraced with sunshine,
I play with the wind
In my dreams, I wander around the clouds
With all of the birds
I play and fly
I always spend my time with them

One day, when Baisal was spending time outside, his father came from the hunt and brought him the haul. Karamergen killed a deer's baby. The haul did not make Baisal happy, it was other way around, all the way back home he cried. "Why did you kill it!" he asked over and over again from his dad.

Karamergen greeted his wife and asked her to cook something from the deer's meat, and sew a fur coat. Karamergen's wife got shocked to see the deer's body; she looked at her son and the dead body, and asked: "Darling why have you done this? This little deer is also some animal's child". Karamergen replied to her saying: "Just do what I asked you to do!".

The hunter continued to go hunting, without even thinking of the harm that he caused to animals and the nature. One day, Karamergen went hunting somewhere far away from his home. Tired, he sat down near a river; somewhere near to it he spotted a deer. Karamergen shot a gun into a deer, but it was his son Baisal. That day, all night long the voice of a crying man was heard...

I have no idea of what I did
I will never forgive myself
I did not understand in time
Even I do understand it now, it's late
Forgive me son, forgive me
Animals and the whole galaxy
Forgive me son, forgive me

Karamergen cried and sang this song all night long. His son's death was not his only punishment. After this incident the hunter and his wife never had children.

Just look at the importance of the nature; nature can continue existing without human beings, but people cannot live without nature. It turns out that human beings are a constituent of the nature. After hearing this story, I am always worried about nature and its condition. I hope that nature will be at its best condition and everything will be fine; and even up till now my motto is: "People, let's be nice to the environment".

I believe that every happening has consequences; even if a branch breaks, I am scared that it will lead to certain consequences...

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Thank you

