

Growing up with climate change

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I was so nervous when I first arrived at the Christian Aid office. I don't know why. A week at an office is not a scary thing. I don't know what it was: maybe I could sense something. Somehow I knew that I was going to have to leave the comfort of my usual thought processes. I was right. Over four days, my eyes were prised open and I was forced to look at a truth which we have been avoiding for far too long. I was forced to confront the issue of climate change.

I knew about it, of course. It's impossible to go to school in 21st century Britain without colouring in countless posters about melting ice-caps, singing songs about recycling and having it drummed into you that a polar bear will die if you don't turn the lights out when you leave the room. I knew about climate change. In fact, perhaps I knew about it a little too well.

If you hear something time and time again, it fades into the background. Shouting sounds like silence. My generation has heard about the plight of our planet so many times. And what happens then? It dissolves. It's always there, always in a corner, just slightly out of focus. Climate change is happening, and it is relevant to everybody. It doesn't matter if you don't care much about science, or ecology, or moral issues, or current affairs in general. It's going to happen whether you're interested or not.

And it should not be like that. We cannot leave climate change behind in our childhood.

This is real. This is an emergency. This is going to happen.

We know this. We like to think we are doing something about it too. But are we actually making changes?

I used to think, naively, that the right things will always just happen. At the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, I learned to let that thinking go. Passionate speaker after passionate speaker set out to us the situation our planet is in. But they weren't just repeating facts learnt in a primary school classroom. They were talking about the real human impact, the fact that every year 300,000 people die due to climate change. Suddenly I understood what all the colouring in and recycling songs had been really about. That moment was a bittersweet eye-opener for me because, while the passionate speeches had changed the mind-set of one teenage girl, it didn't work on everyone.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted not to divest from fossil fuel companies. I don't really know what divestment is, but I know it's a big deal. These adults not only set the precedent that no-one should be expected to act against climate change, they also gave the companies who are contributing to the Earth's destruction both a positive message and the funding to carry on.

I realised that the right things will not happen just because we assume they will.

If the people in power won't work with us, we'll have to do something ourselves. It's not going to be easy. We are, after all, a planet addicted to the fossil fuels which threaten its destruction. But we can heal the addiction.

Teenagers are infamous for rebellion and for not conforming to society's standards. Maybe this time we should show what a positive thing that can be. If it's up to us to swim against the tide of opposition and save our planet, ourselves, each other, our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren... we'd better start doing it. It's worth being a bit scared, or having a few bittersweet moments. We'd better start now.