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On December 24th, 1968, Astronaut William Anders looked out the window of the Apollo 8 spacecraft to see the earth rising over the moon. His excitement was captured while asking fellow astronauts to hand him the “color film.”

People on earth saw this and realized how vulnerable we really are.

On another mission to the moon on December 7, 1972, astronauts of Apollo 17 captured an image known as the blue marble. It shows the first image of the full planet including the north pole.

It is hard to imagine the excitement and awe they experienced.

During that time, pollution was thick in the air and rivers were on fire. After seeing how thin our atmosphere really is, we knew some things had to change.

In between the time these two photos were taken, activists created the first Earth Day on April 22nd, 1970. It is known as the birth of the modern environmental movement.

Thanks to that activism we were able to set policies to help clean up our air and our water. The EPA was established in 1970 and the clean water act was signed in 1972.

While the clean air act was first signed into law in 1963, it has been updated several times since. I mean, how long can you live without clean air?

Seven to nine million people die each year from air pollution – more than any modern pandemic.

Prior to these two photos, it was an out of sight out of mind issue. Pictures truly do speak a thousand words.

In 1990, Hollywood got involved for the 20th anniversary of earth day. There was a special show on television where Bette Midler played Mother Earth. Wayne and I watched as they explored the various effects of pollution, showing recycling as one of the solutions.

At the time we were living in a very small town in norther Utah with 1,600 residents. The next day we put a small ad in the weekly local newspaper announcing a meeting of anyone interested in starting a recycling center. 40 people showed up and soon we had a volunteer recycling center managed by parents and members of the local High School band.



I knew that being involved in the environmental movement was my passion. It led to a degree in Environmental studies, managing a landfill, serving on the National Recycling Coalition board of directors in Washington, DC, serving as the pollution prevention coordinator in western Colorado, teaching teachers how to teach environmental programs, earning a masters in Adult Education, and now as a mentor in former Vice President Al Gore's Climate Reality Project.

And oh yeah, writing a book about how families can take empowering actions against climate change.

But let's go back to how powerful images can be.

In 2000, Wayne and I bought a 19 foot travel trailer, sold off most of our belongings, and drove from Colorado to Alaska. That is where I was to earn my Masters in Education with a focus on distance education. Because I knew it made more sense to develop training programs online than driving or flying to trainings.

We ended up staying in Alaska for 12 years. It was long enough to witness our changing climate first hand.

Images are still burned into my memory along with stories of people who experience climate tragedies.

One day we were driving on the road going east into the Matanuska Valley which runs along the Matanuska River. The river is formed from the Glacier of the same name, a few miles up the road.

Each summer was getting warmer, wetter, and smokier. If it wasn't raining all summer, it was smoky. On this particular drive it was a summer where our temps reached into the 80's. Normal temps were usually in the 60s or low 70s in this region.

I looked over and saw a house leaning into the river. The melting glacier had made the braided river an unbeatable beast. It eroded the banks where people had built their homes and lived for decades.

I imagined the family gathering in the summer along the riverbank, the holidays spent in that living room, and the beautiful views they had each morning.

Then it cracked in half and fell into the river.

Glaciers are melting even faster now, and the number of families are growing who have a similar story.

Wayne and I left Alaska in 2012 and by the time we sold that trailer we had put over 300,000 miles on it and two vehicles.

On a trip along the AlCan highway, which is the route from the western US to Alaska, we experienced more than one wildfire.

While parked in a popular pullout along the Yukon River, a Canadian Mounty knocked on our door around 11 pm and said we had to leave. We can go north, or we can go south, but we had to go. Since it was summer it was still light out. When we stepped outside, we saw the large billowing wildfire smoke rising like a huge thunder storm.

We decided to head south since we were headed to the lower 48.

As we drove the smoke got more intense. We had flames all round us. At some points we saw low flames in the underbrush as we drove through.

But what we experienced next still makes me weep.

In thick smoke, we saw Mounties directing traffic for local residents so they could escape -with us. This was in a rural area with sparse low income population living in small wooden homes hidden among the spruce and birch.

We were stopped to allow a family to get in front of us as they left their driveway. Their small pickup was loaded with as many belongings as they could fit. Mom was holding on to her small children in the front of the truck. I will never forget the look of fear on her face as she tried to comfort her kids.

They knew that their home would not be there in the morning.

This was not the only wildfire we experienced and were evacuated from over the past 15 years. Wayne and I are now full time in an RV and travel every 3-4 months to new locations.

While in Oregon this past year, we experienced the devastation of wildfires that destroyed entire communities. Since the fires were only 10 miles away, many of the refugees were in their RVs in our same RV park, parked in various parking lots, or staying in local hotels. Tent cities were set up in gravel parking lots. I felt their pain and confusion. What will they do now? Their home and their jobs are ash.

As we pulled out of that space, refugees that were in the hotel were given a tent and some money. In the middle of a pandemic. My heart cried once again.

These are images that drive me to action.

While we lived in Alaska we saw glaciers disappear. Yes, glaciers melt. But it should take hundreds of years, not less than a decade.

We also experienced disappearing sea ice. One August our work took us up to Barrow where I was to teach faculty at the local college methods of teaching online. It is a different world up there than most of us are used to. It is an environment where you will see Polar bears, hopefully at a distance because you are food to them.

The Polar bears are reliant on the sea ice to come in so they can travel back out to sea - where they find their main food sources. But in the fall the ice was not returning. A teacher that was in my training explained how a polar bear had decided to hold up under her dorm at the college. You see, the buildings were up on stilts to accommodate the winter snows and ice.

She spoke of how fear ruled her life because she was not able to leave the building. This was not a stay at home mandate due to a pandemic. It was a real life fear of getting eaten by a polar bear.

Many of the fish that native Alaskans rely on for subsistence were not returning. Protein in the villages is harvested, not picked up at the local store. In fact, when we were there in August, the barge that comes once per year was out at the dock. Actually, soap for our hotel room was out there so we had to

improvise. Some people order a year's worth of household goods that arrives on that barge. Having fish and caribou is an important part of keeping their culture alive and the people within it.

Images of ignorance are also seen everywhere.

In the southwest, heat is rising, and reservoirs are going dry. Water in the largest dams, like Hoover and Glen Canyon, which supplies water to over 40 million people, are in danger of being so low that they can no longer supply electricity.

Yet new construction can't keep up with demand.

I suspect that this first wave of migration are those people of affluence that can afford to leave areas plagued with recurring wildfires and floods as the climate crisis accelerates. But they are moving into an area that is projected to be unlivable by 2050 if we do nothing to stop it.

Using more resources is not a way to stop it.

Those images of earth from the Apollo missions mobilized a billion people in 1970. Each year we "celebrate" Earth Day. We need more than an Earth Day. We need to know how to take individual action that makes a big difference.

The book is an answer to people who know there is a climate crisis, but are unsure how they can make a difference, or if their individual actions would make a difference.

I am here to tell you that they do.