

## A Choice for the Future

by Madeleine Levac

A guest I heard on the radio last May suggested that we would have to take every car off the road in order to meet Canada's Kyoto requirements. He then proceeded to say that this would be impossible. I was shocked when I heard this, but later realized it is just a variation on a theme. A theme which discourages people from taking action by making the problem of climate change seem insurmountable. So many politicians, big corporations and even average people are buying into this counterproductive way of thinking. It's hard to take action when you're paralyzed with fear.

The radio guest did two things with his statement. He made it seem like we will have to make drastic changes in order to meet Kyoto, let alone reverse climate change. And he lied. It would not be impossible to take every car off the road. It would just be hard. If everyone realizes what is at stake, it might even be easy. Besides, we would not need to completely give up driving to stop climate change. We do not all have to live in little huts in the forest in order to have a safe, healthy earth. It is possible to live comfortably with technology and cars in a sustainable way. Alternative, clean and safe sources of energy, such as solar and wind power could become very affordable with government subsidies and can run everything from lights to cars. With very little greenhouse gases being produced, our forests could naturally clean up those pollutants. Yet we continue to destroy green spaces of all kinds at an alarming rate.

The problem with society right now is that we want to have so much of everything. Huge houses, incredible amounts of clothes, toys, and electronics. I've noticed that having two cars is becoming the norm, when we should be walking, biking

and using public transportation more than ever before. All we really need to do is make small changes to our lifestyles. You might be getting tired of always hearing about the same little ways to help the earth, such as using fluorescent light bulbs, buying locally, in season and organically, and conserving water. However, when you really think about it, have you made all of those changes? They are so simple, and have a huge impact. For example, if one billion regular incandescent light bulbs were changed to fluorescent bulbs, it would save enough electricity to light tens of millions of homes for a whole year. Even going inside Tim Horton's for your morning coffee as opposed to letting your car idle in the drive-thru would eliminate a lot of pollution. It can be difficult to stay motivated to help the environment because you can't always see the effects of these changes immediately. If you feel like doing something more concrete, you could plant a tree or volunteer for an environmental group.

Climate change scares me. I think it scares most people. I hate the fact that my life is in the hands of everyone else in the world. We all breathe the same polluted air. If a few people dump toxins into the ocean, none of us can eat the fish. However, this doesn't mean that the situation is hopeless and that there is no point in trying to make things better. *We can* stop climate change. But each of us as individuals needs to do our part. It's not always going to be convenient, but you can't just think of yourself in this kind of situation. You have to think of the impact it will have on others. Others, who do not have voices, are unable to tell you that you have to stop. Little children and animals can't come up to you and beg you to be careful. It's hard to think of a time when you and I will be gone and someone else will be living. But put yourself in the place of future generations,

and think of how you would feel if you were stuck in a horrible world because of someone else's preventable mistakes.

Obviously, not everyone is born really wanting to help the earth. But no matter who you are, where you come from, or what your interests and values are, you should care. You have a reason to care. There is simply nothing more important than our earth. It's a special planet. The way that we are putting things like convenience and temporary pleasure before health, life and real happiness is sad and unfair. We all need to learn as much as we can about this important issue. Don't automatically believe everything that big corporations, politicians and other people say. The government may not be pulling its weight where climate change is concerned, but that doesn't let us off the hook. In a democracy like Canada, what the people want, the people will get, whether you are voting with your dollar by choosing earth-friendly products or voting at the polls.

Next time you are going to buy something, or drive somewhere, choose the earth over yourself. This quote by David Suzuki says it all: "The human brain now holds the key to our future. We have to recall the image of the planet from outer space: a single entity in which air, water, and continents are interconnected. That is our home."