

ACP-CAN member, Clinical Psychologist

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Under the expanse of the stars, that huge night sky above me and the cold air stinging my skin, I stood in an Oxfordshire field waiting for the end of the world. High above, F1-11 fighter jets ripped through the darkness: The bombing of Libya. The next day, the papers would carry the faces of innocent victims, far away. It was 1986, Thatcher's Britain and the Cold War, with the threat of nuclear annihilation all around me. I remember the sadness and rage, the injustice. I remember my chest aching for the stillness of the woods, and the dank smell of leaves underfoot. And my tiny place in it all under that sky.

Through that love and grief, my 17-year-old Self found her way to activism and protest. That was a long time ago, and in-between has come a career as a psychologist. Lately, the call to action on the climate has grown louder and I have felt the need to step forward again.

Then, the threat was clearer, an existential terror, the focus more immediate. Now, the immense threats of climate change and the loss of our natural world can seem unimaginably huge, and less immediately palpable. For too many years it was easier to ignore the climate threat and I feel I have been too slow to wake up. But gradually, I see that another Spring has come early, I realise that I have not heard the cuckoo, and my garden, once buzzing with insects, is deathly quiet. Now, the worldwide images on my screen are of environmental destruction, famine, drought, flood, storms and suffering beyond my wildest nightmares. It seems that action is about survival itself.

Being a Clinical and Community Psychologist has offered me the vehicle to try to live by my core values including those of compassion, courage, social justice, and my desire to make a positive difference in the world. It has afforded me the privilege of continued opportunities to learn and more access to resources and influence than many people have. I am conscious that as psychologists we carry an ethical responsibility to apply our knowledge to reduce distress and promote well-being. I am minded of Paul Gilbert's definition of compassion as "...a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it." For me, it is therefore a moral and professional imperative that I do what I can to foster positive change on the climate and ecological fronts.

I understand that there will be no single solution and that there are many ways that we can all act in whatever small ways we can. I am excited to be learning and exploring how I can bring to bear the skills that I have practiced as a psychologist in facilitating change to these critical issues.

Like many, some days I grapple with the overwhelm of it all, the urgency drowned out by relentless pressures of everyday life. At these times, it is my practice as a psychologist that helps me to understand how natural it is to want to turn away, how difficult it is to lean into what is painful. As I recognise this in myself it helps me to turn back towards the issues.

My own actions at home are incremental shifts in diet, transport, and energy. It's never enough it seems, but each conversation and small transition sparks another. In one quiet action, going back to my roots in community psychology and based on the links between mental health, climate action and our connection with local nature, I decided to plant wildflowers on a local roundabout, in collaboration with a Veteran's group and local residents. I have been astounded to find how many conversations with strangers from all walks of life have been seeded, from business managers to passers by. I am enjoying learning more about how to apply psychology in influencing behaviours and supporting communications around the climate emergency with the ACP-CAN. I gather psychological resources to share and am excited to find new ways of applying psychology in this field, learning how I can better communicate and support other people with making changes from local to national levels.

I find my hope growing as I meet like-minded others. And on those days when I want to turn away, I gently lead myself back to those Oxfordshire stars and my core values. I look at my son, a teenager himself now, and I share in his love of the woods and his delight at the huge night sky.

A member of ACP-CAN