

ADVANCE PRAISE

“Never say that today’s young people are apathetic—as Emily Hunter makes absolutely clear in this great volume, youth are out there in force, trying every creative tactic they can think of to safeguard the planet on which they will live out their lives. The only question is if the rest of us will follow their lead. I know I’m inspired!”

—BILL MCKIBBEN, AUTHOR OF EAARTH, CREATOR OF 350.ORG

“More and more young people are having to give up ‘youthful innocence’ in pursuit of saving their very future from the hands and decision-makers of those who are destroying it. It is a profoundly powerful testament to these same young people that not only are they willing to do this but that they are doing so with such clarity, commitment, and creativity. This book will break your heart, then inspire you, and hopefully move you into looking at how you can use your life to make a positive difference for the planet and all the life it sustains—now and for future generations.”

—JULIA BUTTERFLY HILL, TREE SITTER, ACTIVIST,
AUTHOR OF THE LEGACY OF LUNA

“Seeing all these brilliant activists and reading about the work they are doing on so many fronts has had an enormous impact on me. Together, their stories make this abundantly clear: No matter what your passion or calling, no matter your resources or circumstances, you can get out there and DO SOMETHING to effect change. So, what are you waiting for? Go do something to save our planet. Now!”

—JOHN ROBBINS, AUTHOR OF THE FOOD REVOLUTION,
DIET FOR A NEW AMERICA, AND THE NEW GOOD LIFE

“We’ve arrived at a point in time when being an activist is no longer enough, it’s about being an actionist! Emily Hunter’s The Next Eco-Warriors is a rich and compelling read that provides insight into the world of today’s real planet 2.0 heroes. Any young aspiring actionist really can’t afford not to have this brilliant book front and center in their library.”

—DAVID DE ROTHSCHILD, AUTHOR OF
THE LIVE EARTH GLOBAL WARMING SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

“A persuasive collection of personal stories by the next generation of environmental activists. Although some might not agree with all of the methods advocated, the different points of view make this book very much worth the read.”

—KUMI NAIDOO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GREENPEACE INTERNATIONAL

THE NEXT
ECO
WARRIORS

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22 Young Women and men Who are Saving the Planet

Editor **Emily Hunter**



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*To all eco-warriors—
yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's—
you are my hope.*

At its heart, this movement sought to give political form to an awareness that predates Buddhism but is at the same time as new as the science of interdisciplinary ecology. It grew out of a flickering awareness that all our relationships are political, and that the crucial political relationships with which we must concern ourselves now have almost nothing to do with the man's relation to man, but with man's relation to the Earth itself. It is our relationship to our planetary environment, which is the most important issue of all. All human structures inevitably rest upon it.

The time has arrived when we must begin to examine the underlying realities of our relationship to all life around us. . . . Otherwise, in our lifetimes, we shall suffer the enactment of the saga of Genesis: our expulsion from paradise and the fall of nature itself.

—ROBERT HUNTER, *WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW* (1979)

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THE WORD *ECO-WARRIOR* WAS COINED BY MY FATHER, Robert Hunter, after a Cree Indigenous prophecy called the Warriors of the Rainbow. It is because of original eco-warriors like him that this next generation could exist.

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Many thanks to my mother, Bobbi Hunter, who empowers me every day and whose love made it all possible. This world would not be what it is today without you.

And thanks to all the next eco-warriors who submitted writing for this book; you are my hope!

FOREWORD

Farley Mowat

WE ARE CURRENTLY WITNESSING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT conflict ever to engage the human species. It is the conflict between those who possess the means and the will to exploit the living world to destruction and those who are banding together in a desperate and last-ditch attempt to prevent the New Juggernaut from trashing our small planet.

If the right side wins, this combat may become known to future generations as the crusade that rescued the Earth. If the wrong side wins, there will be *no* future generations of humankind, or of innumerable other animals.

But let's make no mistake, the living world as we know it is dying in our time, and dying quickly.

The struggle is an unequal one. The Big Battalions belong to and are commanded by some of the most powerful individuals and cabals history has ever recorded. Their battle cry is "Progress!" Their arsenals are supplied by Commerce and Industry, misusing Science and Technology. Politics is their handmaiden.

They are now the effective masters of our destiny. They believe they can and will become masters of the planet, if not the universe. Since it is so dominant, this master class is all too well-known to us. However, we know all too little about the forces that oppose it. These are so new, so diverse in character and composition, and present such a confused and kaleidoscopic set

of images that we bemusedly lump them into one amorphous aggregation, which we vaguely refer to as the environmental movement.

These opposing forces are in fact the leaders and the rank and file of an army of eco-warriors who are taking it upon themselves to defend our world from despoliation, destruction, and dissolution. Unfortunately, they are almost invisible to the generality of humankind because of the overwhelming communication control exercised by the vested interests, which have the power to literally destroy our living world.

So it is vitally imperative that we become acquainted with the 21st-century eco-activists who are devoting themselves to winning the struggle. We need to sing their praises, celebrate their courage and dedication, make them the icons of our age . . . and support and follow where they lead.

My own hopes for a revival and continuance of life on Earth now turn to this newfound resolution to reassert our indivisibility with life, recognize the obligations incumbent upon us as the most powerful and deadly species ever to exist, and begin making amends for the havoc we have wrought. If we preserve in this new way, we may succeed in making humans humane . . . at last.

This book introduces us to some of these new crusaders, young men and women risking it all for seals, whales, you, and even invisible particles in the atmosphere. Transcending the boundaries of a world conceived as only resources and exploitation to a world streaming with life and vulnerability. They fight for nonhuman animals and elements as if life depended on it—because, in truth, it does. And in the age of despair and apathy, they shake the ground beneath the dominant class, flaunting glimmers of hope to the masses of another world possible.

But let's make no mistake, the living world as we know it is dying in our time, and dying quickly. From my Nova Scotian home, I look over the convergence of sea and land where the North Atlantic heaves against the eastern

seaboard of the continent, and in my mind's eye I see it as it was before the arrival of Western humanity:

Pod after pod of spouting whales, the great ones together with the lesser kinds, surge through waters aripple with living tides of fishes. Wheeling multitudes of gannets, kittiwakes, and others such becloud the sky. The stony finger marking the end of the long beach is clustered with resting seals. The beach itself flickers with a restless drift of shorebirds as thick as blowing sand. In the bight of the bay, whose bottom is a metropolis of clams, mussels, and lobsters, a concourse of massive heads emerges among floating islands of eider ducks. The walrus tusks gleam like lambent flames . . .

And then the vision fails, and I behold the world as it is now. In all the vast expanse of sea and sky and fringing land, one gull soars in lonely flight—a single, drifting mote of life upon an enormous and empty stage.

When our forebears commenced their exploitation of this continent, they believed its animate resources were infinite and inexhaustible. The vulnerability of the living fabric that clothes the world—the intricacy and fragility of its all-too-finite parts—was beyond their comprehension. So it can at least be said in their defense that they were mostly ignorant of the inevitable results of their dreadful depredations.

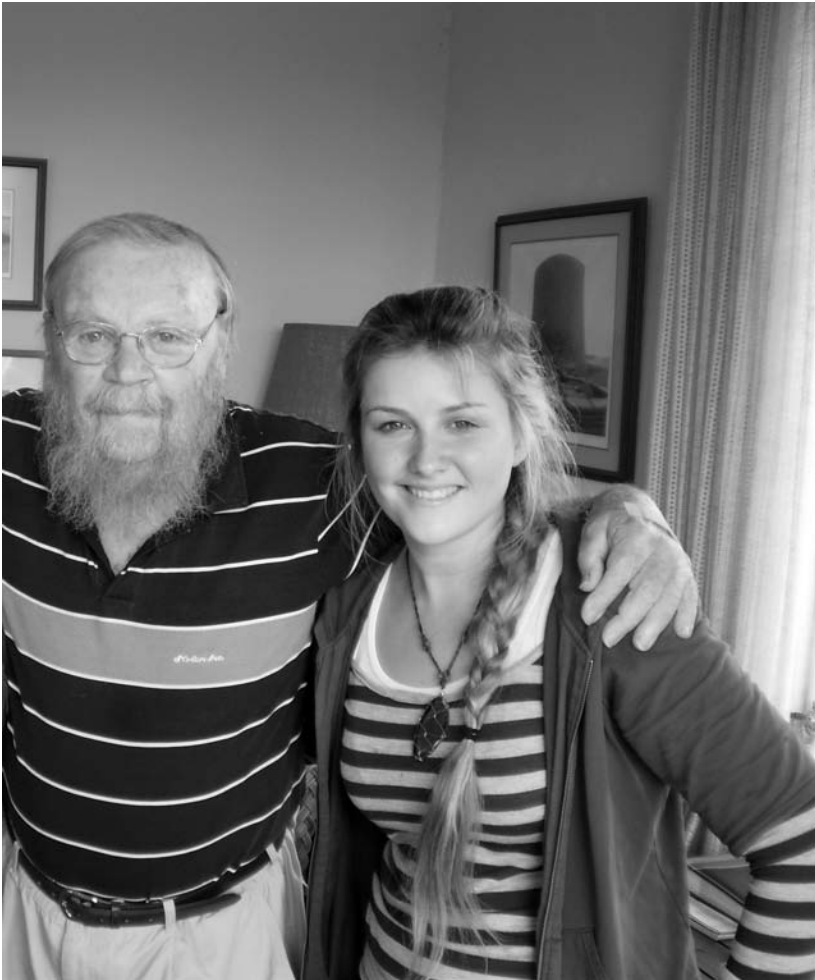
We who are alive today can claim no such exculpation for our biocidal actions and their dire consequences. Modern humanity now has every opportunity to be aware of the complexity and interrelationships of the living world. If ignorance is to serve now as an excuse, then it can only be willful, murderous ignorance.

The hideous results of five centuries of death dealing on this content are not to be gainsaid, but there are at least some indications that we at last are developing the will, and the conscience, to look beyond our own immediate gratification and desires. Belatedly, some part of humankind is trying to rejoin the community of living beings from which we have for so long been alienating ourselves—and of which we have for so long been the mortal enemy.

Evidence of such a return to sanity is not yet to be looked for in attitudes and actions of exploiters who dominate the human world. Rather, the emerging

signs of sanity are seen in individuals who, revolted by the frightful excesses to which we have subjected animate creation, are beginning to reject the killer beast that humanity has become.

Banding together with ever-increasing potency, they are challenging the vested interests' self-granted license to continue plundering and savaging the living world for policy, profit, and pleasure. Although they are being furiously opposed by the old order, they may be slowly gaining ground.



Farley Mowat (left) with Emily Hunter.

PHOTO BY BOBBI HUNTER

My own hopes for a revival and continuance of life on Earth now turn to this newfound resolution to reassert our indivisibility with life, recognize the obligations incumbent upon us as the most powerful and deadly species ever to exist, and begin making amends for the havoc we have wrought. If we preserve in this new way, we may succeed in making humans humane . . . at last.

INTRODUCTION

IT'S AS IF WE'RE IN A CAR THAT IS BLAZING ALONG. We are on cruise control as we hit a crossroads. We desperately need to make a turn. But instead of slowing down or turning the wheel, we're going full-speed ahead. The passengers are a diverse and knowledgeable bunch, but all we're doing is talking, arguing, and fighting amongst ourselves—no one is making the turn. As we barrel straight forward, what lies ahead of us is the edge of a cliff.

Those of us not in the driver's seat yet bear the most responsibility, for we are the last generations to make any significant change in the direction we take. It's a crippling feeling for many of us. Just as we become conscious of the state of our world, that world is stampeding toward a demise of our own making. It's not that we're apathetic, despite being told that we are. Rather, it's simply that we do not know what to do.

Many believe they don't even exist. Al Gore said to The New York Times in 2007, "I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants."

Our parents before us tried to steer humanity away from the edge decades ago, but here we are ever closer to it. It's certainly not for a lack of trying on their part. They did, after all, create an environmental revolution in the 20th century, full of civil disobedience and consciousness changing that shifted Westerners' relationship to the planet.

But their movement dwindled and grew old as they did. Their tactics rarely work anymore; their faces and voices rarely connect with us; and their stories, though still inspiring, are not our own.

We need revolutionaries now more desperately than ever. With the tipping point we face from climate change, as well as an assortment of global issues, the world is calling out for the next eco-warriors.

Many believe they don't even exist. Al Gore said to *The New York Times* in 2007, "I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants."

It's a disappointing sentiment, shared by many. Yet it's also the inspiration for this book: because I know the doubters are wrong. For at the same time when Gore made that comment, a group of young people had already started blocking bulldozers, and many more would follow. The next eco-warriors are here. They are alive and kicking.

This war is being fought against the misinformers, denialists, and old guard of the fossil fuel regime that care only about profit, even at the expense of shortening our time here on Earth.

There is little dialogue about them, however, so it's no surprise few seem to know of their existence. This must change. For as a collective, they represent a new movement in the 21st century. It's a global movement, not just a Western green movement. It is a movement that is evolving beyond banner waving into a colorful mosaic of change. And it is a movement that is redefining the word *activism*.

The word activist is no longer held hostage to mean only a protester or an "eco-terrorist" (though these forms of activism still have their place). Instead, the next eco-warriors embrace a technicolor rainbow of strategic tactics. They use an assortment of their own talents, skills, and abilities (in some cases, paid work) to stimulate the engines of social change.

Furthermore, instead of adopting the limited notion that only those on top of the power pyramid can change the world—leaders such as president

Barack Obama—this new movement reminds us that the world of revolution is open to anyone and everyone who wants to make a substantial difference. After all, it's usually people at the bottom who make the greatest change.

It is also a movement that is as diverse as nature itself. It is people from around the world who are shifting minds, policies, and the axes of old tyrannies. No longer is this movement owned and operated by the global North. Instead, it's pushing boundaries, becoming a movement for all of us, managed by multifaceted cultures and peoples from the farthest corners of the Earth.

The faces of this movement include people like Enei Begaye, a Diné woman who is changing what is possible for her Navajo community in Arizona, from coal jobs to green jobs; Wen Bo, a Chinese student who dared to become an eco-activist just after the Tiananmen Square massacre; American Elizabeth Redmond, who is reinventing renewable technology by using our feet to generate power; Kevin Ochieng, a Kenyan youth who is leading a climate movement with underprivileged youth across Africa; and New York City native Tanya Fields, who resists oppression through guerilla gardening.

Together they fight an eco-war. But let's not be shy about it—it is a war.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can turn away from that edge. There is still time left—though precious little, and less every day. Some of us are trying to do this by pledging to be this new generation of eco-warriors, fighting for something better.

It is a war for the last of the Amazon rainforest. It is a war to end our own grave digging in coal and oil mining. It is a war to defend the people caught in the cross fires of industrial pulverization. It is a war to defend the rights to life for nonhumans. And it is a war for the creation of a new world, one with renewable energy and a sustainable economy.

This war is being fought against the misinformers, denialists, and old guard of the fossil fuel regime that care only about profit, even at the expense of shortening our time here on Earth.

In short, it is a war for survival.

I believe it is appropriate to think of it as a war. Climate change alone is probably the greatest challenge humans have ever faced throughout our entire existence. The challenge is so great because the battle is not with external enemies but a war within ourselves. It is a war where we must stop ourselves in time to survive ourselves, with the planet as we know it hanging in the balance.

Our weapons for this battle are *not* daggers, firearms, or nukes but tools for social change, such as “mind bombs” of consciousness raising, energy alternatives, creativity to breed new solutions, and our fiery spirits for justice that brings humanity to new horizons. And the warriors themselves are not unwilling conscripts but willing participants who want to make a better world even in the face of great personal sacrifice, risks, and even at times personal endangerment.

This eco-war I speak of may seem of mythic proportions, yet it is the stark reality we must face, that we are in time of a war—a war for the planet and a war for ourselves. I think many of us know this ugly reality one way or another: we can feel the crumbling of the edge beneath our feet. We feel it with almost daily news of “weird” weather events like the flooding of Pakistan, the raging



PHOTO BY EMILY HUNTER

fires of Russia or the vanishing poles. It can make you feel as if the show is already over (for some of us, over before it even really began).

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can turn away from that edge. There is still time left—though precious little, and less every day. Some of us are trying to do this by pledging to be this new generation of eco-warriors, fighting for something better.

Therefore, in this book, I share with you the stories of men and women who have taken up this battle. This is by no means a *how-to guide* to save the planet: social change was never brought about through manuals or step-by-steps. Activism is a deeply personal journey and cannot be condensed into something so simplistic. Instead, many before me and many after me will note that the x factor for social change is storytelling. Stories are what have shaped our world and continue to shape it, whether through books, movies, or folktelling. And in continuing this effort of storytelling, this book provides just that: Stories from the next eco-warriors. Stories that attempt to reclaim hope in a world that seems to have very little.

These are the stories of the next eco-warriors. Read it, and know that this is your revolution too.

—EMILY HUNTER

THE NEXT
ECO
WARRIORS

EMILY HUNTER

▶ Twenty-six ▶ Canada ▶ Media Frontliner



PHOTO BY VANESSA LARKEY

Not the End, Just the Beginning!

Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have.

—MARGARET MEAD

THE CLOCK HAD JUST STRUCK MIDNIGHT. I stood in an empty warehouse. The lights were flickering, telling me to leave. A cleaning crew began sweeping up around me, from the mess of thousands of people before. Chairs and tables were being packed in. And a winter's breeze flew in, chilling my skin.

It was over.

I could hardly believe it. I couldn't accept the end. My body began trembling, and my heart ached. A friend tried showing me the exit door, but I didn't want to leave. I couldn't mentally grapple with it all. I kept looking up at a TV screen showcasing an empty room that held the negotiations. Hoping someone would come up to the podium and tell me the happy ending of this story.

But the happy ending wasn't coming.

It was a cold winter's night in 2009, the last day of the Copenhagen Climate Summit, an event that had been pitted as our "best and last chance" in the battle against climate change. Nearly two hundred heads of state had converged to finally tackle our impending *thermageddon*, with the United States leading the march.

There were forty-six thousand delegates from around the world participating in the summit to influence the leaders' decision, thousands more on the streets to protest if they made the wrong decision. Maybe even more important, the world was watching. All eyes were on Copenhagen and how it would unfold our climate's future. This was the *it* moment . . . and we lost it.

As I stood there in an activist convergence house on that final hour, I was grasping for hope. Hope that what became secret negotiations of a few individuals deciding the fate of the planet would spark something more than pure failure. But with silence in the room, I was beginning to know better. Hope was nothing more than a distant dream.

THINKING BACK TO MY FATHER, I felt as if I had failed him most of all. Five years earlier, I was in a hospital, staring death in the face—my dad’s face. He was sweating bullets, just lying there, not moving an inch in the hospital bed. I couldn’t seem to wet the cloth and wipe his forehead fast enough. These were the last moments I had with him. He was dying from a terminal cancer.

I had so much that I wanted to ask him before he left us. I wanted to carry on his eco-crusade into the next generation, but I needed to know how. Yet he couldn’t say a word to me; he was unconscious and slipping by the second. I kept asking myself: Why him? Why now?

His name was Robert Hunter, and he was nothing short of a visionary and a leader. As a cofounder and the first president of Greenpeace, he was an unsung hero who was part of a band of individuals that began the modern-day environmental movement in the 1970s.

But to me, he was Dad. I used to skip school to hang around him in his cabin as he typed away, writing his books and articles outdoors. We would chat, with our heads lying on the grass, eyes wide open and staring at the sky, contemplating the cosmos, the meaning of life, and just how damn fucking lucky we were to be on this beautiful blue planet. He was my teacher, my guru, my best friend. And it seemed as if he was going away now when the Earth needed him most . . . when I needed him most.

Then there it was, his last breath. A last exhale, and it was all over. It was the end of him, the end of our relationship, and the end of an era.

AROUND THE TIME OF MY DAD’S ILLNESS, he had sent me on my first environmental campaign. I had traveled the world on my own and was sickened

with what I had seen. It was the same old story anywhere I went: rapid development for the pursuit of jumping on an economic steam engine headed nowhere but to a mystical “progress” land, all at the cost of hacking the planet and killing people.

I had seen a man on a bicycle run over by a speeding truck in Guangzhou, China, because he literally couldn’t keep up with development. I had seen one of the most beautiful places on Earth: heaven with waterfalls, crystal-clear water and life in all forms streaming from the island of Phi Phi, Thailand, and at the same time, its rape by mass-market tourism. I had seen a perpetual sunset in the sky in Irkutsk, Russia, from impenetrable smog. And I had seen enough; I knew I didn’t want to just watch it any longer.

Knowing I was pulsing with a desire to fight, my father bought me a one-way ticket to the west end of Canada to jump on the ship belonging to his old pal Paul Watson. Paul’s vessel was called the *M/V Farley Mowat*, and he ran his organization the Sea Shepherd out of the nuts-and-bolts boat. The *Farley*, as I came to call her, looked as if it was falling apart, but yet it was this ship that helped build the organization’s reputation for being pirates for the oceans. Known for ramming other vessels and being taken hostages by their opposers, Sea Shepherd’s members had saved countless marine lives, from whales and dolphins to tuna. But Sea Shepherd hadn’t had much “action” in a couple of years, and I wasn’t expecting much. I certainly wasn’t expecting much as a member of the crew.

Growing up, I was surrounded by older hippie friends of my parents, recounting their “glory days” of the ’70s environmental movement, as if it were some phenomenal event in history that was never to happen again. I was expecting nothing short of the same old hippies in these Sea Shepherd activists. Yet to my great surprise, I found exactly the opposite: young, courageous, spirited, risk takers that had so much passion and conviction it would make Gandhi weep.

One of the first people I met aboard the vessel was Peter Hammarstedt, a Swede who probably inspired me most of all. He was younger than me (and I was nineteen at the time), yet he had already fought on the frontlines to protect wild buffalo, would later come to be arrested (numerous times), was

eventually exiled from Canada for his fight for seals, and worked his way to being the youngest first mate for Sea Shepherd in his efforts to save whales. Despite his tough-guy stance and militant veganism that might scare off some, he was more humane than anyone I had ever met in my generation. He was a warrior, but he had a deep core about him and a beautiful heart. He showed me the potential our generation really has within itself.

During that campaign, we sailed from Canada to the Galapagos Islands, and after several puke buckets later, I arrived on the majestic islands. The Galapagos Islands are one of the last places on Earth that are still mostly intact, with high numbers of endemic species found nowhere else in the world, both on land and in the ocean. It was Captain Watson's wish to try to keep the islands safe from humans' destructive nature.

I remember staring out at the volcanic island for the first time, lush with green vegetation and beaming with life in its waters. Yet, there I was, feeling unsure of myself and of what I was doing there. I had a burning urge inside me to do something, but I wasn't sure what I could do here in the Galapagos and what I could do with Sea Shepherd. I wasn't a sailor, as the puke buckets proved, and I had no seaman skills whatsoever. But I was soon put to work anyway.

We carried out precious cargo of spay and neuter medicine for veterinarians on the islands, as the foreign species like dogs were annihilating the Indigenous ones. We then patrolled the islands for weeks, arresting three illegal fishing vessels by spotting their location and calling in the navy. And, just when the campaign seemed to be winding down, that's when things got heated.

There had always been tensions between the fishermen and the conservationists on the islands, but the new demands by the fishermen were beyond obscene. There was a "gold rush" on the sea cucumbers in the Galapagos, as a pretty dollar was being earned from Asian markets for each one caught. While before there had been restrictions by the Galapagos National Park on allotted catch numbers, now the fishermen wanted full exploitation of the sea cucumbers. And who knows what would be next. It seemed few were fighting back, so we decided to intervene.

I jumped with five male crewmembers on a Zodiac, a type high-speed boat that activists often use, to the outer edge of the research station where the fishermen were holding their protest. They had barbed-wired the place and were surrounding every entrance but one, our landing strip. We jumped off the Zodiac and walked right into the midst of a battle between the navy with their guns and the fishermen with their Molotov cocktails and iron bats. No weapons had been used, but tension was mounting, and we certainly didn't make things any better.

We immediately stood our ground, holding a frontline just ahead of the navy and in front of the research station where scientists and park rangers were being held. I remember standing there as the only female activist; it was exhilarating but a bit scary. Men approached me within inches of my face and body, making sexually suggestive maneuvers and putting weapons in my face. Alex Cornelissen, the head of our pack, told me not to say a word and just hold my ground. Even with much desire to give a piece of my mind, I remembered the words my father used to say: "Always hold the moral high ground."

In that moment, a lot of what my father had told me over the years started to crystallize. Yet what heightened my heart rate, quickened my pulse, and made my head sweat wasn't just the adrenaline from the high of the action, but also the realization that what I was experiencing wasn't just those old stories anymore. This was a new narrative: my generation's story that we were writing. It was the sparks of a new movement. The idea alone made me want to squeal with delight right there and then, but I knew I needed to shut up, hold my ground, and look tough. Trying not to smile was the hardest thing I had to do in that moment.

Just then, Alex gave me the order to head inside the research station. I thought we were just regrouping. Instead I was told that the navy didn't want us in front anymore. They thought we were provoking the fishermen. We, who had no weapons and were standing peacefully, were provoking? Huh! Why is it that activists are always treated like criminals when the real criminals get the VIP treatment? Sure, I didn't think the fishermen themselves were the real criminals—more so were the multinational corporations for

which they worked—but they were agents in this war, and they had picked a side nonetheless. A side I would fight against, whatever was to happen.

Within minutes, hanging low inside the research station turned into a hostage situation. The fishermen had the place surrounded, even with the navy around, and none of us could get out: the scientists, the park rangers, and us. I knew, sitting on the floor of the station and staring at the miserable people around me, that nobody in the world knew what was happening in our corner of the world. And I was of the belief that when a tree falls and nobody hears it, it hasn't really fallen. So with only being able to make one phone call, similar to being in jail, I made the one call that would get this story in the news: I called my dad. As he was the leading environmental journalist in Canada after his Greenpeace days and hosted his own hour talk show that night, I knew he would love the story. So I called him and said:

“Hey, Dad . . . I'm a hostage,” starting off the conversation on a high note.

“What? What the fuck is going on?” he replied.

I explained the mess we were in. As a journalist and eco-media savant, he was jumping out of his seat for the story. But as my father, he was petrified for his “little girl.”

“Now, but seriously, are you okay?” he said, with a slight panic in his throat.

I told him all was well, even though with the Molotov cocktails outside, I had no idea myself. We did the interview live on his show twenty minutes later. I got Paul on the show, Alex, and myself. The news began to spread, and after the interview we spoke again. He was bursting with pride, he told me, but the dad in him wanted me to call every chance I got.

“Your mother is going to be so pissed with me,” he said, ending the conversation.

A couple of hours later, all of us were free and unharmed.

I remember looking at myself in the mirror the next morning, looking long and hard at my face. It looked a bit different. After nineteen years of not knowing what the hell I was doing with my life, I suddenly had a purpose and I could see it in my eyes. I knew I wanted to be an eco-shit-disturber till the day I die. We may not have won the battle for the sea

cucumbers—victories in this eco-war are seldom, after all—but the beginning of a new movement was starting. It was right there with that young crew of Sea Shepherd activists.

YEARS LATER, I COULD SEE THE GROWTH of the movement and the growth in myself as an activist. I joined Sea Shepherd in the Antarctic to help save whales. Over several years, I was a part of a mission with many young activists from around the world that saved more than a thousand whales. Later, I fought against the Canadian tar sands, a carbon-intensive oil project that is Canada's scar on the planet. I met many new activist contingents, including First Nations communities downstream of the project, who are confronting a slow industrial genocide and give a face to this fight. And as I traveled, meeting and greeting this movement's next generation, my own personal activism took on a new shape as an eco-media warrior of sorts.

Everywhere I went, I worked with mainstream media, shooting any and all environmental stories I could and exposing the movement's fight to the masses. There was a revolution in the camera. I had begun to understand that in the Galapagos but grew more passionate about it over the years. I believed that capturing environmental news from inside the battle exposed people to a world many didn't even know existed. To me, it was simply good journalism and effective activism—the two went hand in hand. So I was heading to Copenhagen, to cover the biggest story of them all, for it was sure to be this generation's biggest battle yet. But would it be enough?

Bouncing off the plane in Denmark, I was beaming. The airport was packed down the corridor with posters from Greenpeace and WWF alike, reminding us all what was at stake. A contrasting mosaic of individuals bustled out onto the subways, from habit-wearing nuns to Indigenous Peruvians in traditional wear, from cowboys to hippies, from corporate sellouts to top-tier negotiators. In the center of the city was a sixty-five-foot (19.8-meter) green globe you couldn't miss for miles, on which images of the Earth were projected, and a concert called "Hopenhagen Live,"

where companies like Coca-Cola sold “hope” in bottle form and the ignorant masses danced. It was a climate circus, and the feeling of being utterly alone began to sink in for the first time.

Everyone there had a purpose, everyone there had a mission, everyone there had a group of people they were with. Either you were affiliated with a nonprofit organization, a science body, or a governance of some sort, or you were in the way. Or at least that’s the way it felt. Having lost a media gig and media partner just days before my flight, I was determined to still be in Copenhagen for this crucial moment in the *saga to save the planet*, and I was equally if not more determined to have an actual reason to be there, even if this all meant doing it by myself.

Desperate to find any job I could, I latched on to a volunteer correspondent opportunity for MTV News Canada. I would cover the Copenhagen summit, engaging youth back home in one of the most important issues of our time, maybe even inspiring others to get involved. This coverage would be a window into a world otherwise unrelatable to young people. I couldn’t have asked for a better gig.

The only catch was I had to do it all alone: be my own camerawomen, reporter, editor, and techie, sending my clips through cyberspace and back in time for the six o’clock show in Toronto that day. Long days and little sleep were ahead, but I had done this before and I knew I could do it again. Yet what I was not ready for was what was about to happen inside the summit.

WITHIN THE FIRST FEW DAYS, a leaked document called the “Danish Text” exposed the inequalities of the summit before it had even really begun. The text was a draft climate proposal between the Group of Eight nations that virtually backroomed the negotiations, making a mockery of the multilateral United Nations process. It was also the quintessential blueprint for the negotiation procedures, dotting the lines for effectively excluding the most vulnerable countries, such as island states and developing nations. Those that will be most severely impacted, those that are the least responsible, and those pushing the most ambitious targets.

In response to the “Danish Text,” the Group of Seventy-Seven leader, Lumumba Stanislaus Di-Aping, walked out of the conference in that first week in protest. Representing more than a hundred developing nations that felt sidelined, he temporarily shut down the negotiations. Despite this, the exclusivity continued into the second week. As security ramped up with heads of state beginning to arrive to the summit, thousands of members of accredited civil societies were closed off from the negotiations. By the end of the week, only three hundred of the twenty-four thousand civilians present were allowed to participate.

Being literally shut out of the gates myself, I knew it was more than just a security measure, but an attempt to stifle public involvement. As a friend of mine, Clive Tesar, who was working with WWF told me, “excluding civil society essentially strips the process of its passion and grounding.”

Media too was being excluded. Orwellian “red zones” were established, restricting where, what, and who reporters could cover. The summit was essentially being censored, while the deal itself desperately needed questioning. In the final days, a leaked UN document showed that the climate deal on the table would mean a three-Celsius-degrees (5.4 Fahrenheit degrees) temperature rise—a far cry from the two Celsius degrees (3.6 Fahrenheit degrees) scientists say is safe and world leaders had agreed to. It was a deal that virtually guaranteed cooking the planet.

Then came the final day, the Obama day, the day the United States would pronounce its climate providence to the world. This was the sink-or-swim moment. It seemed as if all were holding their breaths. This could have been a defining time that changed the direction of the negotiations, if only politics back in the States weren’t gridlocked by a few select senators. Instead, it was another well-written speech that fell empty.

For some, President Obama then attempted to salvage the pieces of a broken summit by holding a closed meeting with China, India, Brazil, and South Africa—which became known as the BASIC Group—to hash out an agreement among some of the world’s biggest polluters in secret. For others, it was nothing more than that “Danish Text” realized, a well-orchestrated dress rehearsal that had finally come to its stage with its main actors: excluding

most of the world leaders and the majority of people from having a say to instead allow the biggest polluters and their self-interests to decide the fate of our world. For me, the only thing worse would have been if a black hole had sucked up the universe in that instant.

I found myself at the activist convergence space, shaking, trembling, and defeated. I knew the summit was a wash at this point, but didn't want to say it out loud. Instead, just suicidal fantasies fogged my mind. I know that may sound overly dramatic, but I had made no difference whatsoever, none of us had. Despite all the best intentions, all the hard work, and years upon years of sacrificing for this moment—*poof*—it was all gone. Vanished with two words: Copenhagen Accord, the so-called climate deal that only added injury to an insulting failure of a conference.

After two years of intense negotiations to establish this treaty—some would say even twelve years' work with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997—it all ended in a few hours of a secret meeting with a few heads of state that created an alternative text. A noncommittal draft that circumnavigated the UN multilateral process and fell far below scientific demands. We didn't get any of our requests for a “binding, fair, and ambitious” deal. Civil society's message was so clear and yet we got none of it. If anything, this Accord had now created a path for climate tyranny, doing away with the shaping of a global treaty and putting most at the mercy of those few that predominantly created the problem.

Some might say that the only way to accomplish a climate deal is to negotiate strictly with the biggest polluters, and that the world is too divergent to unite on any single issue. Maybe there is some merit in that, but one thing I do know is that if I have ever seen one thing unite us, it is our very basic need to survive. In the last few years, people have crossed boundaries, divides, and oceans for the purposes of uniting on one issue. What many say is impossible may be impossible for the elites and politicians but is very probable for us, the masses. Despite all our differences, single issues, and criticism of one another, we are uniting, uniting in the face of climate change. It is the umbrella issue of our generation.

To testify to this, four thousand cities, in 128 countries, with nearly one billion people—that's nearly one-sixth the Earth's population—participated

in Earth Hour in 2010, turning off their lights to support the fight against the climate crisis. In its first year, the *350.org* movement synchronized more than 5,200 events in more than 180 countries to perform climate rallies. CNN later called it “the most widespread day of political action in the planet’s history.”

In my home country of Canada, where I felt the environmental movement was in its grave, nearly five thousand individuals showed up in the nation’s capital for Power Shift 2009, a youth-oriented demand for an energy shift. The reality is the movement was widespread and growing—from social justice spectrums to environmental justice spectrums to apathetic spectrums—all because climate change was uniting us, in a way that people like my father had only dreamed possible.

If I have ever seen one thing unite us, it is our very basic need to survive. In the last few years, people have crossed boundaries, divides, and oceans for the purposes of uniting in the face of climate change. It is the umbrella issue of our generation.

So to say that the world cannot unite on one issue and that therefore only the elites should make the decisions for us is simply not true. The elite power structures have created the problem, not the solution. The only question is, can the masses defeat an elite tyranny in a time when the clock is ticking against our own self-made apocalypse? I guess only time will tell, and only the growth of this revolution—and I mean *revolution*—will save us.

JUST DAYS BEFORE THE MISERABLE END TO THE SUMMIT, I decided to do something. Instead of just watching complacently the slow death of the negotiations, I wanted to stand up against the climate tyranny. I took my camera to document the action I was about to be a part of and a chocolate bar to keep me happy. What can I say, I’m an emotional eater.

It was a usual rainy, bone-chilling morning in Copenhagen. But this morning, I was looking for trouble. In the wee hours, I searched for convergence

spots in the city that had masses of activists and less cops, as I knew there were going to be takedowns. I met up with a guy named Dave Vasey, a Canadian anti-tar sands activist I had met in Copenhagen, and we decided to buddy up that day so at least one person would know if either one of us got caught and jailed.

Waiting outside at a subway station for a critical mass of activists, we could see that all of a sudden the police were getting ready to pounce. Letting other activists know as we skimmed our way past onlookers, we booked it for an empty highway. Just escaping arrest, we got completely lost on the stretch of cement that went as far as the eye could see, and we didn't know where else to go. Making the rounds of calls on his mobile, Dave soon found the location of a successful contingent of activists making their way to the summit grounds. We jumped a fence and ran for it.

Before I knew it, Dave and I arm-linked ourselves to strangers, connecting to more than four thousands activists in one block. The police had taken down the three other activist blocks already. But by noon, our block had made its way close to the summit grounds; we just had to get past a fortress of riot cops. We did. Pushing and squeezing, with some getting arrested, we broke past the police barricade and onto a bridge in front of the summit.

We were exactly where we wanted to be, the place some among us didn't believe we would reach. There we were, standing in front of the summit. To keep ourselves there, we had to hold our ground. We all became a wall holding the cops out to keep ourselves in. Dave and I were in the middle of it all. At first it was exhilarating. When push came to shove, we pushed back, and pushed back, and pushed back to keep our lines. Except soon the space between us activists became less and less and less. My body, my rib cage, my lungs felt as if they were being pressed, even flattened, until I almost couldn't inhale and couldn't see the top of anyone's head. I felt like a teenage girl in the mosh pit of a rock concert. Dave saw me and picked me out.

We moved, but we just happened to move to the frontlines. Standing there, catching my breath and bearings, I was arm-linked again to people from around the world, people who fought on diverse issues but were united

in this one moment, people who were the faces of a new movement, and people I was proud to stand beside. But as I stood there on the frontlines, yet again staying quiet, holding my position, and trying to look tough in front of snarling guys (this time cops), I couldn't help but think about how in war, this is usually where the soldiers get killed.

I won't lie; I was petrified. I had already seen the police wrath firsthand in the push and shove, as they beat young and old with batons till they were bludgeoned, pepper-sprayed people directly in the eyes, and herded us like cattle. It was one of the scariest moments of my life when a cop riot van came up toward me looking as if it was going to run me over.

But I stood my ground; so did we all. In response to their attempt to silence our opposition on the streets and kill our future on the negotiating table, our generation finally stood up and said, "No more." We took a world stage in front of the conference center, with all the world's media paying attention to our fight. Creating a circle, activists held off the cops. Inside the circle, we began our own dialogue, a dialogue on the future we wanted, not that of a select few elites who would never come to see the consequences of their actions.

I knew right there and then this was the beginning of a new era. It wasn't just that the sparks were flying, as in my Sea Shepherd days, but that the fire was burning, and brightly.

There was a lot of things said—*an end to neoliberalism, down with capitalism, Copenhagen was an orchestrated failure, we need to make the movement accessible to all*—and then all of a sudden, I heard it:

"This is the dawning of a new movement," an anonymous activist yelled out on a megaphone.

After a week of being stepped on and beaten to the ground—at least that's what I felt had happened to my soul—I had the first genuine reason to have hope again. Why? Because I knew these words were true. As I stared at the brave faces of the women and men around me, who were fighting and constructing a new narrative, I knew right there and then this was the

beginning of a new era. It wasn't just that the sparks were flying, as in my Sea Shepherd days, but that the fire was now burning, and brightly.

Possibly for the first time on a global scale, all movements, all issues, and all struggles were put in the same room together, or at least on the same street. Even outside of this one action on that rainy day, a dialogue had been stirring since the start of the Copenhagen summit that unified us in one movement. The young and old; the Indigenous, marginalized, elite, disempowered, and empowered; Africans, small Islanders, and Europeans; farmers, doctors, cyclists, white-collar and green-collar—we were all here, fighting for the most important thing of all: the battle for life itself.

On my travels back home, I came to realize that with the failure of Copenhagen came an opportunity. An opportunity to build a movement that was not just focused on events like this summit, but also on a generation's actions. An opportunity for a movement that is more global, inclusive, and stronger than ever before. An opportunity to be a movement whose fire burns within us all. Copenhagen was not the end, only the beginning.



PHOTO BY EMILY HUNTER

The movement is here. This is our moment.

Emily Hunter continues to work as a freelance eco-journalist. She is the eco-correspondent for MTV News Canada, occasionally hosting a TV-documentary series called Impact, covering such issues as the Canadian tar sands and the G20 Toronto protests. Currently, she is finding more ways to get herself in trouble and plans to eco-shit-disturb till the day she dies.