

TOMORROW IS TOO LATE

INTRODUCTION

By

Grace Maddrell

My name is Grace, I'm fifteen at the time of writing (December 2020), and I'm a climate and equality activist from England. I work with the #SaveCongoRainforest campaign and Fridays For Future, as well as speaking up independently. I am one of the co-founders of Solo But Not Alone, a social media group dedicated to supporting and promoting climate activists who have to protest alone. I am also the founder of Queer and Here For You, a support and advocacy group for my fellow LGBTQ+ youth, and I speak up online for all forms of equality and justice.

To some extent, I have been aware of the climate crisis for ages. When I was little, my dad would donate to Greenpeace and so on, and I knew that this was bad, this was dangerous. But I think the difference between knowing on an abstract level, and waking up to the genuine danger that many are facing, that we will all face if this crisis isn't averted, is very different.

When I was thirteen, in February 2019, some classmates were discussing a climate strike. One of them asked me if I wanted to come along. I said I would. After I realized this protest was going on, I started to think a lot more about the climate crisis. By the time the strike came along, in March 2019, this emergency was at the front and centre of my mind, a lot of the time. For the entire month that elapsed between hearing about the strike and it actually happening, I had been

thinking about it, preparing for it, and watching speeches by Greta Thunberg, the founder of the Fridays For Future movement. She started activism in August 2018, and kicked off youth strikes around the world. Although the media tries to focus solely on Greta, there are millions of young people all over the world who are standing up for the climate. On 20 and 27 September 2019, around seven million people marched for the climate, all over the world. Some of those who marched were veterans in this fight, activists who had long been part of Greenpeace, or Indigenous elders who had been advocating for decades. Others were first-timers, only just realizing the power their voice could have. But no matter who, where, or how many times they'd protested before, everyone who struck on that day helped make it what it was - one of the largest mass mobilizations ever. And although it was a general strike, attended by people of all ages, youth were the ones leading the calls for change.

But back to March 2019, and my first nervous foray into activism. That first march that I attended felt like I had finally found where I belonged - in a group of passionate young people shouting for change. I wish every moment in activism could be that empowering. Shouting "What do we want?" "CLIMATE JUSTICE!" as we marched along the street, waving banners and yelling ourselves hoarse, felt like... it felt like I was actually doing something for once, rather than just stumbling through my life. It felt like maybe there was a point to my existence after all. And it felt like I was finally able to let out my anger at all the corruption, at the world leaders and at corporations, at our corrupt, capitalist, unequal society.

Since then, it has been a huge journey to get to where I am now. I don't mean in terms of fame or even campaigning, but to where I am in my life. I started activism as a closeted, doubt-filled thirteen-year-old with no real friends who merely dreamed of being an author and was desperate for my name to be known.

Now I am soon to be published, friends with the most incredible people in the world, out and proud as LGBTQ+, and I know that there are far more important things than being known, not to mention that there are so many others on the front lines of this crisis who need to be heard more than I do.

I struggle still, of course. Activism is hard. I've been doing a lot less during the Covid-19 pandemic, but even organizing calls and book editing can be tiring, and mental health can suddenly go out of the window for no reason at all. But what keeps me going is knowing about all the wonderful people fighting with me – and so many of them are incredible.

This book was inspired by *Resisters*, a book by Lauren Sharkey, which collected the voices of young female activists from around the world. After reading that, I thought that I would love to put together one specifically focused on climate activists. And I decided to open it up to youth of all genders, too.

I started this book simply with a Twitter post, in November 2019. Within hours, messages were flooding in from interested people. I also reached out to a lot of young activists myself. Of course, not everyone who I messaged or who expressed interest ended up in this book. Many people never got round to writing an essay at all. Those you read here are those who did. But the whole process was really amazing. Around five months after I first started work on the book, The Indigo Press accepted it, and I realized that this was really, really happening. Working on it hasn't always been easy. The hardest part has been having to pressurize people to get in their essays, edits, etc., to meet a deadline. Pressure is definitely among my least favourite things! The loveliest experiences that I gained through this were mostly about bringing together these young people from across the world, hearing their stories and journeys and being able to (hopefully) amplify their voices. Some of the essays are really sad, of course, but they're all so beautiful.

I've learned a lot through this. My essayists have taught me so many things about how the climate crisis affects them, their country, their demographic. The actual publishing process has also been extremely educational for me. All of it has been something that not many people of my age would get to experience, and I am so, so grateful that I have.

Some people might wonder who I'm hoping will take notice of this, who I want to see it, and why. But my answer is: you. Whoever is reading this. All of you. I want you to see it. I want everyone to be able to read the words of these activists, because their stories are so important.

Before you read their words, though, there are a few practical things to say about this book.

Firstly, the ages included here are the ages at which they wrote their essays. By the time you read this, someone who was seventeen when they wrote their essay might be twenty-two. That's why their years of birth are also included in their bios to give you an idea of what sort of era they're writing in and how old they are now.

Secondly, although all these essays stay absolutely true to the fundamental message that their authors are trying to get across, they have all received varying levels of editing to make sure that they make sense and are as good as they can be. Thirdly, the essays for this book were compiled across an eleven-month period. Thus, the perspectives are all different. Some people will discuss the Covid-19 pandemic, while others might talk about 'recent' Australian bush fires, for example.

Fourthly, all names have been included in the format that the essayists preferred. For example, some didn't want their surname to be included, and others only wanted their last initial rather than a full name. Individual wishes have, of course,

been respected as regards all names, pronouns and amounts of information included.

Fifthly, do bear in mind that many of these activists are writing in their second, third or fourth language. So huge props to them for using English for their essays. English is the dominant language of climate activism, which is another form of discrimination against many activists – several of the writers had to seek out information in English because there was so little available in their native language.

Sixthly, all photos included are done so with permission and relevant credits, and where a photo is not included, it is due to the contributor not wishing to have one in the book.

Finally, I would like to make it clear that most of my proceeds from this book will be going either to help those who need it or to organizations working for the climate and/or for equality.

I think that's it for the technicalities.

I compiled this book because I know that youth voices need to be heard. Leaders often try to ignore young people, and to silence us. In the countries on the front lines of the climate crisis, young activists are routinely silenced by either their governments or by the media, which prefers to focus on activists from places like Europe and North America. And for those of us who are lucky enough to not yet be facing the serious effects of this crisis, we will be the ones who are around to experience them.

So, I hope that you will read the messages of these activists, listen to them, and take action. I hope that this anthology has succeeded in bringing together youth from all around the world, and in making sure that their messages can no longer be ignored.

Because we young people are powerful. We deserve to be heard and listened to. We deserve a say in our future. The leaders – you, you leaders – you are selling what was never yours. The lives of millions. Including us, your children. But we are not going to sit by and let this happen. We are acting. I hope this book will inspire everyone to do the same. Across the globe, amazing youth are standing up for their right to a planet. And I am so proud to be working with these people to create change. I am so honoured to be able to share their voices and stories here. The climate crisis is a huge, overwhelming issue that has implications for every aspect of our lives. In *Tomorrow Is Too Late*, youth activists talk about many of these issues, relating the impacts the crisis has already had on their mental health, local communities, food security and childhoods, to mention just a few.

In tackling the climate crisis, we also have to tackle the underlying factors of colonialism, racism, capitalism and inequality that created the issue in the first place. And, of course, including voices for/information from any of the countries and areas in this book does not in any way equal support for their regimes, political status, or current state of existence.

Long before ‘climate change’ was even something people knew anything about, many were suffering every day due to the same things that caused this crisis. We cannot continue in a world like the one we live in today, a toxic world where those who lead are very often those who choose to treat some lives as more important than others. Those living in systems built around prejudice and privilege. Although the climate crisis will exacerbate all these existing problems, it is a symptom of how fundamentally broken our society is, rather than the cause. Everything needs to change, and it needs to change soon, because time is running out, and it’s running out fast.

A better life, a brighter future, an equal world, is possible, but we have to work for it. And that’s what all the young people in this book are doing. From

Palestine to Kenya, from Argentina to Australia, and from Germany to Canada, these activists are changing things, one word, one step, one march, one call, one article, one lesson at a time. No matter what form their activism takes – from founding movements to picking up plastic to simply advocating online – the youth of *Tomorrow Is Too Late* are making the world a better place. I hope their stories show you that you can, too. Because every single one of us can make a difference. And you don't need to wait until you're an adult, or until there's an established movement in your area, or until your friends do it first. Even a small action that you take is better than no action. You may think that you're just a drop in the ocean. But without the drops, there is no ocean. So use your voice and become part of the wave of change right now, because tomorrow is too late.