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HALI JAMA: From Wisconsin Sea Grant, I'm Hali.

BONNIE

WILLISON:

HALI JAMA: And you're listening to *The Water We Swim In*, stories about the Great Lakes and the people working towards equity.

BONNIE

WILLISON: Wisconsin Sea Grant is based at UW Madison, which occupies the traditional land of the Ho-Chunk people. The stories on this podcast band the area we now know as Wisconsin, where the lands and waters are cared for by the 12 native nations that call Wisconsin home.

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CJ Koeppe grew up in what she describes as the middle of nowhere, in the Driftless Area of Western Wisconsin. Her hometown might have been rural, but it allowed her to spend a lot of time outside.

CJ KOEPP: There was this abandoned lot near my house and I think we literally called it butterfly park or butterfly lot or something because it was like such a big part of my childhood. Was going there when I was little within that and catching all the butterflies.

BONNIE

WILLISON: I was talking to CJ because she became a climate activist in college. I asked her about how environmentalism first came on her radar. For CJ, it was these monarchs. She has vivid childhood memories of going to the magical butterfly park.

CJ KOEPP: I feel like that was a lot of my childhood was doing that and being enchanted by it, and then coming back as an adult and having that magic be absent. By the time I started going back, visiting from college, they were basically gone. I have an older friend who was telling me that is what happened with fireflies too where she grew up, where they used to be everywhere and then now it's like a very rare sighting to see one.

We ignore the fact that we are so dependent on the environment because it's not as good of a story as the idea that nature is something to be conquered or protected, but not something that we are intricately tied up with and dependent upon. And especially in terms of how it's going to affect future generations, I think one of the biggest difficulties is that future generations are not here to defend themselves. Their closest representatives are younger people who are going to have to grow up facing the consequences of the mistakes that older generations have made.

HALI JAMA: Today we're crisscrossing Wisconsin to talk to 10 young people about the future. We'll visit areas around Green Bay, the Driftless region, Madison, and Milwaukee. We wanted to talk to other young people because, one, we're the ones who will have to deal with the problems that were caused in the past. And two, we have to live through climate change, but many of us don't have a voice in policy or government. And lastly, because we live in the Great Lakes region. And the Great Lakes are an incredible resource that only become more relevant in a world where water is less certain.

BONNIE

So Hali, we asked all of our interviewees this question, but I wanted to ask you too. How did you get involved in environmentalism, environmental justice?

WILLISON:

HALI JAMA:

So how I got into environmental justice. So I'm going to tell you-- for some background, for a fraction of my life, I lived in this very, very small town in the middle of nowhere in Somaliland, and it's called Bela Eeday. My time there was nice. I really enjoyed it. I would wake up in the morning, eat breakfast, and I would leave our little house and all I would see was grass and trees and mountains for miles and miles and miles.

And we had our own animals that we would raise. We had chickens. We had sheep. We had cows that we would get milk from. We had this huge little farm where we would plant all our food. Although I don't have too many memories of this time, just because I was so young, I do remember never worrying about food, never worrying about any of those things that a lot of other people did.

In general, how I got into environmental justice, once I was much older, my uncles and my aunts would always call my mom and tell us about what drought or dust storm or fire or flood was happening. And I began to look into why this was happening. At first, I was a little confused because I was like, what do you mean there's a drought every other day? Wasn't there a drought yesterday? What do you mean there's a flood now? It just didn't really make sense to me.

Especially in random countries like East Africa that literally rely on agriculture, it just didn't make sense. I would expect it to be nice there since they aren't burning nearly as much toxic waste and people are not wasting food every second. Anyways, long story short, after researching an obvious realization hit me, we literally all live on Earth so our actions here in the US, or any other country, have an impact everywhere, if not a worse impact.

So then I started researching developed countries and their contributions to the drastic change in the climate. In high school, I joined a club called the Tree Huggers Club, and I expanded my knowledge on the subject there and met some passionate people. And those people also shared a really similar story like they were like, yeah, my uncles and aunts and grandparents always call my mom and tell them all these natural disasters are happening. And yeah, they're struggling to get food and raise their animals because they don't even have food to feed themselves at some points.

So that's when I guess I really got interested in climate change and just the environment in general. And now I'm continuing my work with climate change through this internship. I've learned so much from this job alone and just researching these different topics that we're learning and expanding my knowledge. So I really do want to make a difference with this, especially because I know it's just only downhill from here, unless we do something.

The past has led us to where we are now, where our water and wildlife is struggling, the air we breathe is slowly becoming poisonous, natural disasters are erupting left and right, and so our Earth is clearly hurting. Who's left to deal with the poor choices of the past? In this episode, we would like to introduce just a few young people throughout Wisconsin who are hoping to make a difference.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

BONNIE WILLISON: So in the beginning, we heard from CJ, and we'll hear more from her later. But first, we're going to travel North from where we are in Madison to a town called Pulaski right outside Green Bay. We were looking for young people to interview. And a coworker put me in contact with a teacher there, Mr. Landers. He runs this cool program called the Great Lakes Explorers Program, which I thought was a great place to start. Mr. Landers recommended Henry.

HENRY WALTERS: So I'm Henry Walters. And I was raised to protect and enjoy the environment around me. I'm addicted to breathing and all that.

HALI JAMA: Although he's battling with his breathing addiction, Henry's interest with the Great Lakes and the environment in general comes from where he grew up.

HENRY WALTERS: I guess living right next to the Green Bay and just Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes in general is part of what sparked my interest. It's a very important place. And keeping it clean and safe and healthy in general, I thought that was just cool.

When I was in seventh grade, I asked if I could start my own club to reduce the plastic use like Styrofoam trays and plastic utensils. Mr. Landers said that he was already starting a club called the Great Lakes Explorers, which I thought, OK, I'll just join that. The club itself is all about cleaning the Great Lakes, learning about everything in the Great Lakes, learning about our area, the place that we live. We've been doing a lot of wild rice planting and we've been checking up on it.

HALI JAMA: Henry was in the Great Lakes Explorers Club when he was in middle school. Now he's in high school and waste is still something he thinks about a lot.

HENRY WALTERS: It's just the amount of garbage I see getting thrown away at the school. We have multiple garbage cans in the lunchroom that you can throw away any scraps you have at the end of lunch. And the amount of waste that goes into those is pretty sad. And a lot of it could be recycled. I've once or twice actively seen someone sadly throw trash out their window onto the road. I've seen plastic bags hanging from trees. It's pretty sad to see this. I think that some people do their part and then there's others that think that the world is their trash can.

BONNIE WILLISON: This was interesting for me to hear actually because I see a lot of similarities with Henry here because trash and litter was probably how I got interested in the environment too. I remember when I was around like fifth grade, I was driving to school with my parents. And we were behind this garbage truck and I was just watching all of this trash fly out of it onto the sides of the roads, and it made me super angry.

And we had a class assignment to write a letter to a senator and so I wrote to Tammy Baldwin about trash and litter on the sides of the roads. And later in high school, I remember the waste as well because when you're in that school environment, you're just surrounded by a lot of waste and a lot of food being thrown away and paper and stuff like that. Me and my friends didn't think that anything from our school was really being recycled, and that really bothered us. And that's really why I joined the New Environmental Club at the school.

HALI JAMA: We're going to leave Henry for a second and make our way down to Madison to visit with Charlotte. Charlotte was also recommended to us by a local teacher. Like Henry, Charlotte's childhood was also filled with the outdoors.

CHARLOTTE In the summer, we take day trips or we spend like a week or so by Lake Michigan, Lake Superior usually. And we
EISENBERGER: stayed at cabins and, yeah, just gone to beaches and swimming. So I'm Charlotte Eisenberger, and I am an eighth grade student. I live in Madison, Wisconsin. And I just really have a passion for the Great Lakes and bodies of water in general.

So I've always been a big reader and I think just reading about the environment and some environmentalists sparked my interest. And in particular, I'm very inspired by Sylvia Earle and Rachel Carson. And I've wanted to be a marine or aquatic biologist for a long time. And I think I became interested in the Great Lakes in particular just by having the opportunities to be around them and to see their beauty and power. And hearing about climate change, I realized how lucky I am to live in a region with enormous bodies of accessible freshwater.

HALI JAMA: Charlotte has also been working on her own project to help the environment.

CHARLOTTE My sister, who's 11, and I are currently in the planning stages of some projects about protecting the Great Lakes
EISENBERGER: and freshwater biology conservation. So we're just working that out and seeing what we could do. And I also wrote a grant at my school that was funded with the goal of lowering carbon emissions and planting an apple orchard at my school. We would just hope to find ways to educate others about the Great Lakes and the importance of fresh water and maybe organizing beach cleanups or just spreading information.

BONNIE Like Charlotte, Henry is trying to find a way to stay involved in environmentalism at his school. Plastics are still a
WILLISON: big issue for him ever since he did a report about microplastics for the Great Lakes Explorers Club.

HENRY If we were to take care of the environment and restore it, for future generations, it could mean that they have a
WALTERS: cleaner, safer, and healthier place to grow up in. And if we don't take care of it, the future generation might end up being severely affected by that, by climate change. They might not be able to do some activities that I can.

CHARLOTTE The biggest thing is that there is no planet B and this is it. There's no other planets in the universe that's like
EISENBERGER: Earth. And so we just need to protect it and protect the environment today so that in the future, we have a place to live basically.

HENRY I think if anyone should take away anything from this, is that they should be mindful of how they do things and
WALTERS: how they impact the environment because it's not just going to take one small group of people that care, it's going to take everyone around the world.

[MUSIC - TRUE SKOOL, "LIQUID GOLD"]

Do they got water on the North side? Do they got water on the East side? Tell me. Do they got water on the West side? Do they got water on the South side? Let the water flow to the North side. Let the water flow to the East side. Let the water flow to the West side. West side. Let the water flow to the South side.

Love is a lot like the water. People just can't live without it. Water been here since we started. Started. Now they been charging for bottles. Worldwide thirst trying to grind for survival. Pollution and the droughts been hurting us to swallow. Got to start saving up for the kids of tomorrow. Going to cherish every drop. No waste, that's the motto. What? Save that water.

BONNIE WILLISON: That song you're hearing right now was written and produced by students from Milwaukee who are part of an organization called TRUE Skool. TRUE Skool is a program for middle schoolers and high schoolers. They call themselves Milwaukee's Center for Transformative Creative Arts and Hip-hop Culture.

I sat down with four students. They introduced themselves and told me what they want to do in the future.

ELI: My name is Eli. I want to be an inspiration to the world no matter how or what I do to my art or my music. I just want to be inspirational, that whatever I do could touch and uplift people.

JADA: My name is Jada. I either want to do something with visual arts or something with the social sciences or social justice or something along those lines.

CHASSIDY: My name is Chassidy. I also do visual arts. I want to be a midwife and help with, I guess, special needs kids.

STEPHANIE: Oh, I'm Stephanie. Personally, I think there are a lot of creative fields that I could pursue, but what I really want-- have always really wanted to do is be a business owner to a sustainable manufacturing company, so just have natural biodegradable products.

BONNIE WILLISON: These students are all artists. As she said, Chassidy does visual arts. Jada does art and DJing. Eli makes music. And Stephanie has gotten into spray painting and break dancing. But TRUE Skool isn't just about art. The instructors often merge art and the environment like the "Liquid Gold" song, which is about water. Another example is that TRUE Skool has their own aquaponics system, so students can grow plants and fish together.

STEPHANIE: We have two fish tanks right now. I think we have about five fish. And we've had thriving systems sporadically, but right now we're really in a planning stage. Last semester was more of thinking about the direction that we wanted to go in.

ELI: We were talking about what should we grow? We were thinking about maybe some vegetables or certainly certain stuff.

STEPHANIE: Yeah. And I think efforts like that are the most important to have creative ideas. Even though people are not graduated PhD scientists, they're still willing to come clean up the mess and give ideas and support in that way.

I think it becomes a lot more personal when you see it happen right in our little backyard back there of how all that we did to get to this point, we had to feed the fish and water them and make sure that their levels are correct. So people just start to care a little bit more about the process and not think of it as something so easily attainable that you get at the grocery store. Like there was a huge process behind that.

ELI: It gives you a deeper perspective like you'll never think all the work that you have to put just to do all this. It's just like it's really a blessing to see that side of it.

BONNIE WILLISON: Jada is interested in food. She said that three years ago, she started doing some of her own research into food production. It's how she started learning about the ties between racial justice and environmental justice.

JADA: So I first started out with my interest in food and healthy foods and how accessible food can be for certain communities. So then I just got farther and farther down that whole learning where it comes from and stuff. So then I run into farms, pesticide runoffs and things like that, and learned about how that's hurting the environment. So then I just go farther and farther from that and you just start to see more about the racial part of it as well, like how healthier foods are less accessible within neighborhoods of color.

So seeing it in my community, within my own life, so there's dumps less than two miles from my house for the North and one is for the South. But when I go out to another suburb, they don't have one right near them, but mine is like just walk a little bit farther down the street and then you'll find one, which I do happen to live in a more diverse neighborhood.

STEPHANIE: We obviously understand how the city of Milwaukee works and the segregation but that has been in place through law since before our time. So I think it's just important to understand that this has been an issue.

BONNIE WILLISON: An issue that they've been learning about is lead in drinking water. And we've talked about lead pipes with some of our interview guests before, in our first episode with Dr. Manny Teodoro and with Brenda Coley. And basically in Milwaukee, as well as many other cities, a history and legacy of racial discrimination and redlining has led to cities that are still very segregated today.

In the white suburbs and the outskirts of the cities, those populations have been able to replace lead pipes or just build new houses. But the central cities, the houses are getting older and they still have a lot of lead pipes. And this is where poor communities of color are forced to live because of that segregation. Currently in Milwaukee, there are more than 65,000 lead laterals that still need to be replaced. And these are mostly located in these poor communities of color.

ELI: So I used to be in Mississippi a lot. I grew up Mississippi. And down there, the water was so lead-filled that it looked like soda. Like that's how lead-filled it was. Whereas at my auntie, we complained about was like, well, there's nothing that we can do. It was really bad.

So that's why when I came through school and I thought I would learn about this stuff, I think it's really important, especially at my house. So we have like a filter. That way, we can stop the lead and everything from getting into our water so we can drink it safely.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

BONNIE WILLISON: So we talked a lot about societal problems and then we started talking about solutions.

JADA: Well first, of course, I say stop targeting minority communities when deciding to put farms in certain spaces and letting runoff just go down in certain directions and dumps in the middle of Black neighborhoods and things of that sort. Second of all, we don't need to use so many chemicals to start with. So maybe start with reducing those things. If we do need them, let's think about why we now need them. Like did we cause something that is now the reason why we need these pesticides and chemicals and everything?

STEPHANIE: Something that we really care about here at TRUE Skool is circulate. So circulate local dollars and creating a strong sense of environment and having local business owners. And I think it's important to encourage people to take charge in their environments because it's theirs.

ELI: I just want to say to have a conversation which is like kids I guess just in certain neighborhoods because I think it's really important that they know what's going on, not only in their neighborhood but in the environment as a whole because not only does it affect us and affect the animals and everything else too because life is about balance.

BONNIE WILLISON: After the break, we talked to some college age students and young graduates who are finding their own place in environmental justice.

[MUSIC - TRUE SKOOL, "LIQUID GOLD"]

Sipping liquid gold got me feeling good. Flowing through my body rushing down like a river do. Wash away my sins, Holy water please forgive my soul. Really need your blessing spread your healing all around the world. I got one question. Hey. Do they got one on the North side? Do they got one on the East side? Tell me. Do they got water on the West side? Do they got water on the South side? Let the water flow to the North side. Let the water flow through the East side. Let the water flow to the West side. Let the water flow to the South Side.

HALI JAMA: Now we are going to turn back around toward the capital of Wisconsin, Madison. Here we explore what water means to different communities. Now you might hear some familiar voices.

PAIGE SKENADORE: My name is Paige Morningstar Skenadore. I am Oneida. I am Turtle Clan. My parents are Jody and David Skenadore, and my grandpa my mom's side is Baptist Stevens. And my dad's side, my grandma is Beverly Skenadore.

JUMANA TANNER: My name is Jumana Tanner, and I am currently in school for zoology. I'm towards the end of my spring semester, my sophomore year.

BONNIE WILLISON: Yeah, we had the honor of welcoming back Jumana Tanner who was a Wisconsin Sea Grant intern and beach ambassador in Milwaukee. You can hear more about her work in our episode Hidden Currents. And Paige, she was also an intern at Wisconsin Sea Grant in the past. First, we asked Jumana what sparked her interest in the environment.

JUMANA TANNER: Being close to one of the largest Great Lakes in Wisconsin was just a great opportunity for me to be able to connect with the public to get an understanding how people respond to environmental issues.

BONNIE WILLISON: For Paige, she felt a connection with water through her community.

PAIGE SKENADORE: Well, water is very important. The Water is Life movement has been very prominent and it's been gaining all types of audiences in the last 10 years, ever since all of the pipelines have been getting backlash and no dapple. And so I think it's very important in my life because I know lots of people, lots of native friends and family who live in places that rely on specific water from specific places on their land. So I can see the detrimental effects of when a pipeline is put in to water on their land and there's an oil leak and then there's no water for them to safely use.

For my community, water has just always been important for indigenous people in general. We see water as its own living, breathing thing. And that's why there's such a big push for water rights because there shouldn't be one person or one thing dictating the rights of water and what gets to interfere with it because we need water. We need water to be sustainable collectively.

HALI JAMA: Paige explained that taking care of our water is important because if we take care of it, it takes care of us. I never thought about it like this so I asked her to elaborate. It is a simple, but powerful message.

PAIGE
SKENADORE: If you take care of something, it will take care of you back. So that's kind of the mindset that I had with it. So when we're looking at all of the water and we're testing the water to make sure it's clean and it's good and it's safe, we're taking care of it so that hopefully it will take care of the soil and the grass and the plants because it's all connected.

JUMANA
TANNER: Our environment is our home. People think, oh, the environment's like Antarctica or somewhere that's not close to them, but our environment is very much right next door. It's our backyards. It's our local pools. It's our local beach. It is our local park. Our environment is all around us. So whether or not it's five feet away from us or if it's 20,000 feet away from us, we should still be able to care about it and be able to connect with people who are closer to areas that are probably in more distress.

HALI JAMA: Speaking of the environment in our backyard, Paige has a lot of concerns about water in the Great Lakes, and specifically because--

PAIGE
SKENADORE: Populations are rising. There are more people moving. There are more people wanting to live by those lakes. And I see that as a big concern as more people in houses taking over those spaces. I can see that as being, in a way, detrimental to the future of that water just because people are harming the water, whether they realize it or not.

HALI JAMA: Yeah, that was really well said. And Jumana urges the youth to incorporate the environment into our daily lives, and for older generations to not give up.

JUMANA
TANNER: No matter what field you're interested in as a young person, whether it's business or whether it's environmentalists, whatever it is, water is going to be included one way or another. It's literally our life, so look into how it's affecting other people and how it's affecting you.

And then our older generation, those who get older tend to be like, OK, I'm settling down. I'm more very focused on my life and my family. That doesn't mean that you should forget your connection to your community and connection to the environment and connection to our water resources and everything like that, and how to be able to help people or get involved.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

HALI JAMA: We've decided we're going to stick around in Madison just because we met a few more really inspiring recent grads here. I was researching different environmental groups in UW Madison and I came across the Wisconsin Student Climate Action Coalition. I had reached out to student leaders who started the club, and one of the people I reached out to recommended Natalie Brunner. Natalie Brunner got her bachelor's in political science and environmental studies, and got a certificate in gender and women's studies.

NATALIE BRUNNER: The reason that I chose those three areas is that the intersection really focuses on environmental justice, and that's the issue that I'm most passionate about.

BONNIE WILLISON: Yeah, so like we said, Natalie helped start an organization called the Wisconsin Student Climate Action Coalition, where she, and four other students, felt the need to create something new.

NATALIE BRUNNER: Because at UW, at least when I was there, there weren't any avenues for students to directly advocate from a more political lens, voice their opinions about climate change and how the university itself is complicit in perpetuating climate change. Our approach was to hone in on accountability of the university and the platform that students themselves had to have a voice on climate change.

HALI JAMA: One of the four students working alongside Natalie was CJ. CJ is who we talked to at the beginning of the episode who told us the story of the disappearing butterflies at the park. CJ went on to attend UW Madison as well. She was actually at a climate rally when she heard that WSCAC was looking for a new leadership. So she decided to join and help unite all of the environmental and sustainability clubs on a huge campus. CJ has since graduated and works for a group called Fossil Free California. She also has a big platform on TikTok.

BONNIE WILLISON: So Natalie told us about your TikTok.

CJ KOEPP: Oh, no.

BONNIE WILLISON: Yeah, so you talk a lot about climate on there.

CJ KOEPP: Yeah, for sure. I accidentally stumbled into the realm of microinfluence. I don't know what you would call it, but it is important to me that I'm able to use that to share the things that I've learned as a climate activist, also somebody who got to study these things in college, which a lot of people can't have access to or are younger and just haven't been yet for whatever reason.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I was raised that you have to do everything yourself and independently. And if you even think of like the way the school system is set up, it's very like, you do your test. You don't collaborate with other people to work on it. And you're competing with them in terms of grades and everything, which is not an approach a lot of the time that ends up working in the real world. And it feels uncomfortable at first.

There's all of these memes about how group projects are so bad because you have to rely on other people and, a lot of times, other people do not do the job the way you would have done it or at all or on time, or whatever it ends up being. And I feel like it's something that, in general, at least in American culture, is something that we don't get a lot of practice with of really, really collaborating with other people in a space where you have to set aside your own ego and your own way of doing things and be really receptive to what other people think.

NATALIE BRUNNER: I mean, I think we're all aware that the effects of climate change are-- they're here. They're happening now. We're already seeing it play out in floods and droughts. And we live in a-- we live in a capitalist society and I don't think people consider enough how much climate change is going to impact the economy.

If we can't rely on our climate to grow food, we're not going to be able to get food on the shelves. People aren't going to be able to get the things they need. If we don't transition to fossil fuels in time, if we don't start making a transition to something that's more sustainable, we're really going to be-- we're really going to be screwed. And we're not running out of time necessarily, but we are definitely in a moment of crisis. It's not really climate change anymore, it is a climate crisis.

HALI JAMA: Droughts, fossil fuels, and the impact of capitalism all have a huge effect on how bad our environment has gotten. And it can be easy to blame the people that came before us, but CJ actually brings a different perspective.

CJ KOEPP: Personally, I've worked with a lot of older climate activists and older people who are really, really passionate about saving the environment. I don't think it's useful to dismiss boomers and say, you guys poked a hole in the ozone and I don't want to work with you, because a lot of the spaces that I have organized in are really, really intergenerational.

And I think there's a lot of wisdom and experience that you can get with working from older people, especially people who have been doing this their whole lives that you might not necessarily get if you're only working with younger people. Again, I think the blame lies more with our systems, the fossil fuel industry, rather than a specific generation. I do think there's a role for every generation in this. I think that the younger you are, the worse the predicament you are in with this specific-- with these circumstances.

NATALIE BRUNNER: I would really like to tell adults and shake into them, if I could, is to listen to young people, to listen to youth and to not write off their fear, their panic, and their frustration with them as something that they'll grow out of, as something that they're going to wake up one day and not feel anymore because the environment that they grew up in has changed enormously and much quicker in the past 10, 15 years than ever before. And in a lot of ways, the frustration that young people feel is that feeling of being stuck, of not having the money, the time, or the resources to tackle a problem that is out of their control for right now.

CJ KOEPP: Honestly, I feel like my biggest source of hope and joy has been the communities that I'm organizing with, which a lot of the times ends up being climate activist groups or individual environmental activists, people who share in that heartbreak and that grief. But also, it's really wonderful to be in a space where we're all together with the same goal.

And even though a lot of people might have different ideas for how we can achieve that goal, everybody is able to work on what they have the capacity to work on, and that is how a movement gets made. I don't know. It's just like beautiful seeing how many people and how many really smart and devoted and experienced people are working to mitigate this issue.

BONNIE WILLISON: I was really excited for this episode because I feel like young people are in such a unique position and they're not really listened to. All of the natural resources people and government officials, they're all older. They're all in different generations. And yeah, so it was really cool to hear from these 10 people. What did you take away, Hali? What does it make you think about?

HALI JAMA: Yeah. I think with this day and age and the fact that everybody is experiencing what it's like to live with climate change, you no longer need to be this scientist who went to grad school to figure out climate change. You know it because you're literally experiencing it. So it was really inspiring to hear everybody's story and the fact that they're taking their time to try and create change, not for just our generation but for everybody in the future and now too.

But at the same time, it was a bit disheartening and a little sad just because at the end of the day, these are children. Like a 13-year-old shouldn't be trying to change the world, or I guess she shouldn't be trying to take on the burden of saving the Earth. That's a good time where you should be enjoying your youth and, I don't know, going to little school dance parties or something, not this kind of work. But at the end of the day, they're still doing it, and that's what's amazing.

If you're an elder person, I hope learning the perspective of the younger generations allowed you to understand what they're going through, their frustrations, and also the ambition that they have to try and create change. And if you are a younger person, I hope that their inspiring stories were able to inspire you to maybe do something in your community or try and just learn. Like you don't have to be this huge activist. You don't have to make change. You can just simply learn and be a knowledgeable human and know what's going on in your Earth, and then maybe create change, but first learn.

PAIGE SKENADORE: I hope the future of water means giving water the rights that it deserves, seeing it as a living, breathing entity, just like we have our rights. I mean, I hope for cleaner water. I hope for less overfishing and just over exhausting the resources that the Great Lakes provide.

CHARLOTTE EISENBERGER: I think that environmental justice means all people having equal access to important necessities like clean water, clean air, healthy food, and safe housing. And the one that sticks out to me the most is probably clean water.

CJ KOEPP: I think the environmental movement, at least in the US, or as I'm familiar with it, is predicated on this idea that we have to protect the world for future generations, which is true, but I think that also doesn't take into account all of the people who are being affected by climate change right now. People who live near fossil fuel extraction operations, who are affected by the air and water pollutants that are being produced by that, obviously the fossil fuel company is not paying people's medical bills when they're suffering from asthma or birth defects or cancer from living near there.

People right now who are experiencing drought and wildfires, obviously I care very deeply about the biosphere and ecosystems, but one of my biggest priorities is what can we do to help the people who are experiencing the effects of climate change right now? And typically, that ends up being the most marginalized of society.

So globally, just the global South, people who live in really low income countries, people who live in island nations, people who don't have sufficient economic and political representation to really be able to do anything about this situation, often it's the people who have contributed at least to the climate crisis who suffer the most from it.

NATALIE BRUNNER: I still really fervently believe that community power is where it's at. We are individuals in communities when we organize, when we get out there and vote when we take a stand, when we unionize. Those things make a difference. When you put pressure on people in power from the bottom up, it really does make a difference.

JADA: I also think that isn't wanting to have hope while talking about these sorts of things because sometimes you're just like, well, what can I do about it? Or if you're someone who's a minority a lot of times, you'll be like, I can't do anything about this. We're so far down on the ladder that is like just giving up and having to just correlate whatever was set up with. So I think it's important to still have hope despite that, hope that these things are fixable.

Like sometimes you'll see just an insane statistics, like hearing about how we're losing fresh water so it's going to be harder and harder to access and more and more expensive. But I will admit that sometimes it's not as much me having hope, but having spite. Like being in spite of these things and wanting to solve these just because I'm so upset about them.

And why would someone think that this is all right to do? Why someone all right with this, and why is it not shown that this should be more be cared about? So sometimes it's definitely more spite and hope, but I do try and maintain a decent sense of positivity towards the future. That's motivational. I think we give each other hope.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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