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Fork in the Road: All in after the lights went off in Glasgow

Consuming our way to change is no COP-out—if we act politically, too

Glenda Bartosh
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Do what you can personally to fight climate change, but also go big and fight on the political stage. | Getty Images

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They're sweeping up and dumping the garbage bins at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, now emptied of the 40,000-some delegates there for the latest UN climate conference—along with even more protestors and the 10,000-odd cops brought in to keep things steady. All told, that's more than double the number of folks living in the entire West Vancouver-Sea to Sky electoral district, which includes everyone in West Van, Whistler, Squamish, Pemberton and beyond. All there. For a single conference. And using fossil fuel-based transportation to get there.

If you'd deemed you had to be in Glasgow and flew from YVR, it would have taken you 12 or so hours, and maybe \$1,500. Hopefully, you would have also thought to at least buy carbon offsets for the trip, estimated at 2.28 tonnes of CO2 equivalents by [Offsetters](#), which is certified by [Gold Standard](#), one [the David Suzuki Foundation](#) recommends.

Yes, yes, we know carbon offsets for flights aren't ideal, much like the COP26 conclusion. (It was the intrepid U.K. enviro journalist George Monbiot who cheekily likened them to the old Catholic church practice of selling "[indulgences](#)." Pay now to sin later.)

Still, buying carbon offsets is something tangible and beneficial in view of a) climate reality; b) human weakness; and c) widespread suffering. (Hope you weren't one of the poor souls stuck in your flooded home or car on the side of a cold highway this week with yet another weather fury pummeling us.)

That's twice already I've used a form of the word "hope." But I think we're way beyond that—hope, crossing our fingers, wishing ourselves luck—as a viable strategy for coping not only with the climate disaster, but all the other forms of degradation we've suffered upon our poor beleaguered planet: huge [biodiversity and ecosystem loss](#). [Extinction rates](#) hundreds or thousands of times higher than usual. What UBC's brilliant fisheries scientist, and one of my personal heroes, [Daniel Pauly](#), calls "fishing down the marine food web" to the point where some 90 per cent of the large ocean-based fish populations are already gone, giving rise to his caution we'd better like eating jellyfish—and plankton.

"Shifting baselines" is another concept Pauly and his Sea Around Us Project team originated. You know, where we've had a tornado, countless mudslides and as much rain in the Fraser Valley in 36 hours as we normally would in all of November, so when we get "only" a few mudslides next November, we'll say, hey, not so bad. Last year we had blah, blah, blah.

On it goes: Shifting baselines. Dire circumstances. Buying indulgences. Human frailties. And a flawed COP agreement so we're on track for a world-wide temperature increase of maybe 1.8 Celsius, maybe 2.4 C, maybe more.

What to do, what to do?

I, and I think many others, were touched by the way COP 26 president, Alok Sharma, deeply apologized to those 40,000 delegates "for the way this process has unfolded." Sharma then stopped to compose himself while delegates applauded for over half a minute—a huge, consequential period of time, as anyone who's written speeches or worked in a live radio or TV news studio will tell you.

He also noted it's vital that we protect the final COP agreement. As flawed as it is (you'll find scads of online references to it), it does embody strengths, like stipulating world leaders will meet again in a year to determine climate progress, and, despite the watery language, it's still the first climate deal to explicitly reduce coal use—the nastiest of fossil-fuel nasties.

As for we the people who didn't fly to Glasgow to meet or protest, but who care deeply about what happened there and what it means for this glorious but ever-deteriorating world, a deterioration both mourned and caused by us, there are two main things to do, both of them hinging on the verb "act."

No more hope-y, hope-y. No more ignore, turn your back, leave it to others, or even follow the boyish dream we'll get out of this all by leaving the planet. Sorry Elon. And Jeff. And Sir

Richard, who came all the way to Vancouver/Whistler during the 2010 Winter Olympics to join the Carbon War Room but didn't even know he could actually drive an emissions-free vehicle powered by Ballard's hydrogen fuel cells. (Hubbie drove the hydrogen-fuelled vehicle. I was co-pilot, and we cornered Branson at his hotel parking lot. Sir Richard, to his credit, was excited. But his handlers, sadly, moved him along before he could take the wheel.)

We don't inherit the world from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children, goes the old adage. To that end, I took special note of two recent CBC radio interviews, one with Pauly on [North by Northwest](#); the other on [The Current](#) with Christiana Figueres, former UN Climate Convention executive secretary, who oversaw the 2015 Paris Agreement, and whose brother, former Costa Rican president José María Figueres, actually did ride in the Ballard-powered vehicle during those Winter Games.

Both Pauly and Figueres are clear. We aren't going to get out of the mess we're in by changing our consumption habits alone—eating greener, travelling greener. That's good, solid action, but we also need to act on bigger levels, and push, push, push leaders, political and otherwise, and/or join other activists—maybe 350.org, Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future to get the systemic and policy changes needed.

Think of how women got the vote. Think of how the war in Vietnam ended. Think of gay rights and how we tackled AIDS. It all happened because people pushed from the bottom up.

Many vehicles for change. One path—action. And all of it carbon-free.

HOW TO LIGHTEN YOUR OWN CARBON LOAD

Never mind buying carbon offsets when you fly. Check out [Gold Standard](#) for helpful ways to go climate-positive with your daily consumption—how you eat, how you drink water, and more—and the difference you can make through carbon-lite action.

Other resources abound:

- Try Mike Berners-Lee's *How Bad are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything* that you can read about in my [2012 Pique column](#).
- [George Monbiot](#) reaches far and always has good ideas.
- CBC News' [Our Changing Planet](#) initiative is great. Ditto books like [Living the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle](#) and [The Day the World Stops Shopping](#).
- Check out local initiatives, like Whistler pro skier/climate advocate Mike Douglas's film, [Sam & Me — Lessons from a Life on Snow](#), about his connection with one of Sea to Sky's youngest climate activists, Sam Tierney. Part of VIMFF (Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival), on-line ticket sales have been extended to November 30. And the Whistler Institute is hosting a [climate emergency action event](#) on line and at Rainbow

Theatre December 9, featuring SFU enviro/resource expert, Marc Jaccard. Pique is a proud sponsor.

<https://vimff.org/film/sam-me-lessons-from-a-life-on-snow/>

<https://whistlerinstitute.com/course/gp-mark-jaccard/>

Glenda Bartosh is an award-winning journalist who's been working on the climate file since the early 1990s.

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