

# Watt's Happening? #257

Written by Don Pettit  
for Peace Energy Cooperative, Dawson Creek, BC Canada  
www.peaceenergy.ca



## NOT the end of the world!



*We are the first generation to begin to feel the full effects of a changing climate, and we are the last*

*generation that can do something about it. The good news is that we ARE doing something about it!*

If you have been following my articles over the last few years, you know that my message has always been the same: the problems are big, very big, but they are solvable. There are answers everywhere, and around the world we are actually making great progress, progress we seldom hear about from our regular doom-and-gloom media. My job here is to bring forward that good news.

### REQUIRED READING

A new book fits perfectly with this largely positive theme: *Not the End of the World: How we can be*

*the first generation to build a sustainable planet* by Hannah Ritchie.

Ritchie is a Senior Researcher in the Program for Global Development at the University of Oxford, and also Deputy Editor and Lead Researcher at the influential publication *Our World in Data*. In 2022 she was named a Scotland Youth Climate Champion. In other words, she knows what she's talking about.

Like her, I have been obsessed for years by our environmental challenges, especially climate change, now often called climate disruption or even climate chaos. There is no doubt that we are in for a rough ride, along with most of the other living

things we share this planet with and depend on, but is it the end of everything we know and love? Are we a doomed species?

### ECO ANXIETY

It sure feels like it sometimes. Sea level rise, droughts, floods, fires, species extinction, air pollution, over fishing...

A recent survey asked 100,000 people from around the world aged 16 to 25 how they felt about the future. More than ¾ said the future was frightening, and over one half said they thought we were doomed. Pessimism was rampant and everywhere.

I too have struggled with climate anxiety and a deep sense of grief over what we seem to be losing. But how real is the doom and gloom conclusion? How bad it is, really? Am I justified in just giving up, a hopeless and terrible future looming before me?

Thanks to Richie and my core belief, that all problems of our own making can be solved, and usually much more easily than we think, I am feeling inspired hope rising within me again.

### DID YOU KNOW?

As she points out with lots and lots of hard worldwide data, many of these beliefs about our doom are just wrong. Indeed she says, we have made so much progress on these problems that we could be on track to achieve true global sustainability for the first time in history.

Did you know, for instance, that carbon emissions per capita worldwide are actually down and falling?

Did you know that deforestation around the globe actually peaked back in the 1980's?

Did you know that the air we breathe now is vastly improved from centuries ago, and that more

people died from natural disasters a hundred years ago more than they do today?

### ACTIVE OPTIMISM

Richie points out that there are many types of optimism but only some are helpful, while others make things worse. "Passive optimism" relies on wishful thinking and requires no action on our part. I hear that all the time: "Oh don't worry, everything will be fine".

"Active optimism", on the other hand, is a call to action and is based on knowledge, not wishes. She also calls this "urgent optimism" or "impatient optimism." Perfect. Just what we need right now.

Giving up and not caring, she says, is indefensible, and one of the most selfish things anyone can do. I agree.

### MANY LITTLE THINGS

She also adds that zillions of people doing little things from day to day (composting, driving less, walking more, recycling, using a bit less water, wasting less food... She gives a long and excellent list) has a much, much larger effect than a few super dedicated folks doing a few large actions (marching in protests, buying electric cars, etc.).

The little things really do count, and she proves it!

This book shines with practical positivity backed up with mountains of data. It will banish your feelings of doom, help you focus on what is really important, and inspire you to become part of the greatest project humanity has ever faced: ***WE, you and me, will be the generation that will actually create the world's first truly sustainable, livable and prosperous civilization.***

Now that's what I wanna hear!

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