

imagination, used materials can be made into totally new items. For instance, tires can be remade into playground flooring or a footstool can be made out of juice cans. By doing those things and thinking before we throw something away, we can help make our future look brighter.

There are many ways we can help the environment. If people would just pay attention to things that seem insignificant, like not leaving the water running when they are not using it, the world would be a better place. If everyone learns to follow the three R's, together we can do a better job of improving our environment so that it will last longer. That is what being green means to me!

I've been hearing about the environment since I was in diapers: the ravaging of the ozone layer by greenhouse gasses, pollution of the oceans, and deforestation of the rainforest. It always puzzled me that we had these problems since everyone was in favor of protecting the Earth. As I grew older, I began to grasp that, despite all the talk, most people were doing nothing to save the environment. I realized that being green is a lot more than just wanting to help the Earth. It means being willing to make actual changes in your life.

One change I needed to make was how I took showers. I luxuriated in the warm water gently caressing my skin, enveloping me in a steamy cocoon. My mother screaming for me to get ready for school was the only thing that could draw me out of this paradise. It never occurred to me that there was anything to worry about. This was before I learned that almost all South Carolina counties are on voluntary water use restrictions, and some are on mandatory restrictions. Also, I found out that an average shower can use up to five gallons per minute. By reducing my shower time by a mere two minutes, I'd be saving over 300 gallons every month.

Another significant problem for me was leaving lights on. That changed when I read that most electricity in the U.S. is produced by coal-fired power plants. The problem is that for every kilowatt hour of electricity generated by a coal-fired plant, the EPA estimates that 1.43 lbs of greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere. Not only do I now turn out all of the lights whenever I leave rooms, but my family also has an enchanting dinner by candlelight every other night. However, this isn't the only way to conserve electricity. Insulating your walls and ceilings can reduce CO₂ emissions by up to 2.1 tons each year. Replacing ordinary windows with argon filled, double-glazed windows saves 2.4 tons of CO₂ per year for homes with gas heat, 3.9 tons for oil heat, and 9.8 tons for electrical heat. Simple, common-sense actions like these are all that is needed to significantly reduce electricity consumption.

Finally, one of the biggest green problems I needed to address was my diet. In the back of my mind, I recalled people warning me that overconsumption of meat was damaging to the environment, but I always thought of hamburgers and chicken as just basic American foods. I was therefore alarmed to learn that over the past 50 years, meat consumption has risen 50 percent. This has resulted in an increased need for land to graze cattle, causing deforestation to soar in places like the Amazon. In fact, the Amazon rainforest has lost over 600,000 square kilometers of forest since 1970—about the size of 140 million football fields. All this meat consumption is not necessary to feed the world's population. Instead, it contributes to world hunger because cattle consume around 40 percent of the world's grain. This is extremely wasteful considering that each animal must eat six kilograms of plant protein to produce one kilogram of animal protein. I haven't completely given up meat, but fewer trees must now go down in the rainforest to sustain my diet.

Being green means examining your own life and seeing what changes you can make to help ensure a brighter future for both us and the environment. Many people are satisfied by merely being in favor of protecting the environment, regardless of whether or not they actually act upon this ideal. Hollow words won't prevent global warming and deforestation, but actions can. If every American household replaced just one of its standard light bulbs with an energy efficient compact fluorescent bulb, we would save the same amount of energy as a large nuclear power plant produces in one year. We have the knowledge and the technology to save the Earth. The power to be green is there; now it's time for each of us to act.