

## **Humanists of Greater Portland**

Where Do I Belong in all this?

By Josephine Lauck-Dorsey

Growing up in the world today, my generation faces seemingly insurmountable challenges including an overheating planet, income disparity, economic hardships, incurable diseases born of toxic pollution, the migration of populations, and a frenzied news media bent on stirring readers into a froth of fear rather than providing clear and rational information geared to solving problems. Most, if not all of these challenges were created by the current and previous generations who refuse to take responsibility or to alter patterns of gross consumption that have brought our planet to the current conditions. Our leaders, particularly here in the United States, tell us that none of what is going on now will matter to them because they'll be gone and it won't be their problem. Worse, those same leaders say it's up to the younger generations to get to work, and that we are wasting time by complaining about our inheritance and our plight. One of our world's favorite young political activists, Greta Thunberg responds to this insult in a way that reflects how it feels to be a member of my generation: "If you still say that we are wasting valuable lesson time, then let me remind you, our political leaders, have wasted decades through denial and inaction." (European Parliament, Brussels, April 2019).

Many in my generation find themselves asking the question: Where do I belong in all of this? It seems there is no time to mourn the fact that our childhoods have ended prematurely or to face the sense of betrayal that comes from being lied to by our elders. Rather, we are being asked to show awesome capacities of innovation and maturity during our twenties, a time when we

were supposed to try to find our ourselves, continue our educations, and finish forming our brains.

When I think of my own life, my goals and future aspiration, I must accept, even embrace the fact that climate justice will be at the forefront of my thinking. Initially, I planned to pursue an artistic career within fashion, but after taking an IB Environmental Systems and Societies course, my junior year of high school, I learned the trillion dollar is also one of the largest global polluters due to fast fashion corporations, such as Forever 21, H&M, and Zara, profiting off mass producing hyper trendy clothes made from intensive fibers including polyester, nylon, cotton, and rayon. These fibers disproportionately gobble up precious natural resources such as water and fossil fuels. For example, over 2,700 liters of water is used to make a single cotton tee shirt. (Curiosity.com). While I wasn't going to give up on fashion, I realized that I wasn't morally capable of participating in that industry based on that model of production and profit.

The summer of my junior year, I interned at a local boutique specializing in sourcing and making eco-friendly and sustainable garments. This allowed me to work with materials like bamboo, hemp, and coconut fibers and turn them into bags, hats, socks, belts, tops, pants, and jackets. Post production, we educated the public about the sustainability of the materials, and the items sold quickly because consumers were eager to be part of the solution rather than the problem. That lesson came with me to my current internship, where I work with a startup creating alternative sustainable home goods like reusable tissue boxes: there is a market as long as you educate your buyer because people, deep down, want to do good for the planet.

I've now channeled this understanding into my own creations. For example, I took a pile of old aprons that were about to be thrown out, cut them down, seamed them together to make several yards of new fabric and then made a jacket, oversized, inspired by an artist I like who alters proportions as an exploration of identity. My jacket, with a huge collar and sleeves, makes the wearer seem small in comparison. It's art, it's a statement about what it is to be human, and it's renewing a current resource. A lot of people, including my teacher, want that jacket. I've gone on to recycle jeans, turning them into works of art too, and these have sold on my own site through De-Pop. I'm experimenting with dying fabrics with vegetables and retooling materials found at vintage and re-sale shops. New ideas are flowing and every one of them are planet friendly. I'll be going to college for textile design now and with an eco-friendly portfolio, I have been accepted at some of the finest schools in the United States including the Fashion Institute of Technology, The New School, FIDM in Los Angeles, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Where do I belong in all this? The daunting realities of a planet in peril remain, brought on by the short sightedness and greed of previous generations, but I feel less helplessness, anxiety, and grief because I have a clearer understanding of my place in the whole. I'm learning that my place is to make small but necessary environmental decisions in my life, and in my creations. I have to be flexible and inventive. I have to think about the future (and the past). And I have to push myself beyond my capacities. The planet needs me to think this way, to learn this way, to work this way, and to educate as I go along. That's where I belong.