Hi lovelies!

I know it's been a long time since I sent my last update. The first three weeks of the year involved a lot of travelling and instability, and since arriving in Barcelona three weeks ago I've been trying to spend less time on the computer. Here's a meme I made as I arrived in Barcelona:

I am falling in love with Barcelona—so much so that I've decided to change my plans. Instead of continuing to travel around Europe, I intend to stay in this city to learn Spanish and hopefully get involved in the thriving activist scene here. Barcelona is a city that shows that positive change is possible (the present mayor is an ex-squatter and activist!), and many people bring a lot of hope when they come to live here.

Here's a few pics from my first few weeks in Barcelona. And here's a few from Sweden and København.

Hope you're all well, and I've love to hear from you. My latest blog post is below (I've switched from blogspot to medium.com).

xo
Stu

You Have More Power Than You Know

I'll be honest: I sometimes feel powerless in the face the enormous, looming threat of the climate’s destruction and I struggle to know what to do. Sometimes my hope wears thin, and sometimes it seems to disappear entirely. And I know I’m not alone. If you’re feeling this, I offer this article in the hope you might find some hope, as I have, in the simple fact that a few people working together can make a huge difference.

Three years ago I was part of a group of around a dozen people who decided to try to convince the University of Toronto to sell its investments in fossil fuel companies, aka “divest”. Part of that process involved writing up "case for divestment", through which
we laid out the arguments as to why this is an appropriate, wise and moral decision for UofT to take.

Milan Ilnykyj, the primary author of the brief when he received it hot off the press. I just gave a copy of the Brief to my parents for Xmas. :)

Over a few months we worked collaboratively to write the ‘Brief’, which ended up being a not-so-brief 190 pages. Personally I spent much of my free time in the spring of 2013 reading through tedious economic reports from internationally respected economic institutions in order to write about the economic case for divestment (which even then was strongly supported).
The 'brief' presentation, spring 2014. Of the people in this photo, only one member is still directly and actively involved in the UofT Fossil Free campaign — a stunning example of why working in a group has its benefits, allowing individuals to move on while the campaign continues.

The group of us at Toronto350.org then sort the support of faculty, staff, students and alumni, and continued the campaign to get UofT to divest from fossil fuels. I personally stepped back from the campaign over a year ago, as others had stepped forward to continue the work — one of the benefits of collaborating as a group. A committee created by the university administration to consider our proposal advised the university to divest, although the final decision is yet to be made. As of February 2016 the campaign continues, with promising signs (get involved here).
Some highlights from the UofT Fossil Free campaign. Our early actions (right) only saw a few of us take part, yet the campaign has grown and built power, bringing out hundreds for the two Fossil Free marches. The campaign also attracted top lawyer Dimitri Lascaris (left), who presented the Brief to the UofT administration in spring 2014.

However, the text has also created wider ripples. One of the people who helped to write the brief took the text to the University of Glasgow. Their fledgling campaign leapt at the chance to use an already-written document, and so modified the brief to be appropriate to their context. After a year of campaigning the University of Glasgow showed leadership by being the first university in Europe to divest from fossil fuels.

The same divestment brief was passed around other British universities, modified, and used as part of their campaigns. I’m aware that it was used in the successful Glasgow, LSE and Edinburgh campaigns, and is also being used in the ongoing UCL, Manchester U, King’s College London, Bristol U, SOAS and Lancaster U campaigns. It’s likely that every UK divestment campaign came across our brief at some point, and many of them that I’m not aware of probably used it. As of November 2015 twenty UK universities had agreed to divest, collectively moving tens of millions of pounds away from the fossil fuel industry.
Now granted, the dozen of us who wrote the initial brief didn’t directly cause all of those other universities to divest—those campaigns were run by other dedicated people—but I believe it can be said that our work contributed to their successes. We created ripples that have now influenced organizations to move tens of millions of pounds away from the fossil fuel sector. Furthermore, these divestment commitments continue to strengthen the moral case for fossil fuel divestment, while simultaneously increasing the investment risk of fossil fuels.

Globally as of December 2015, organizations with a combined value of $3.4 trillion have made some form of commitment to divest from fossil fuels. The risk of fossil fuel investments continues to increase, and likewise the momentum to divest also increases. This has created a global conversation that nation states and major oil companies are no longer able to ignore. The people who continue the campaign through Toronto350.org are still influencing that conversation, and thereby continue to influence these mammoth investments. We are changing the future of this planet!

Climate change is a really big challenge. Sometimes it seems overwhelming. I sometimes feel powerless to be able to do anything about it. Yet when I think about the influence our small group has already had I realize the enormity of the effects we’re still creating. This enables me to authentically hold onto just a little more hope.

So if you’re struggling to know what to do I want to encourage you to get active and do something. Maybe get involved with an existing local climate group (e.g. Toronto350.org or wherever you are), or get a few concerned friends together for dinner and discuss ideas of what you might be able to do. You have more power than you know, yet to fully wield your power takes time, dedication and teamwork. There is hope out there—so go create some more!

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