

To be alive
in the world
right now

four métissage poems about grief
by young organizers

by
Alison, Alyssa, Carter, Gabrielle,
Juan, Laura, Mónica, & Yara

What does it feel like to be alive in the world right now?

Nine months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and three years after the release of the IPCC report giving the world just over a decade to limit the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, eight young climate organizers gathered on Zoom to answer this question.

What does it feel like to be alive in the world right now?

The collaborative poems below talk about loss—the loss of people and places, of security, the loss of the way things used to be, the loss of a certain kind of future that we imagined for ourselves and our community.

Weaving together fragments of our individual pain and joy and longing, these poems say something universal about what it means to look into the future, coming face to face with the reality of unprecedented loss and guaranteed suffering, and instead of turning away in denial or fear, choosing to let grief transform you.

Loss shows us the world as it is

and

dares us to love it anyway.

Alyssa and Alison

I didn't ask for this.

I have many types of grief. Grief over lost things. Dead pets. Friendships.

It might sound childish, but I don't think I would choose this if I had a choice.

Places and nostalgia all wrapped in one like a favorite old comforting blanket now filled with snot.

And yet—

It's my snot. I'm crying on your shirt again for the thousandth time. "It'll be okay"... Eventually? I don't know.

here I am.

I've been here and not here for as long as I can remember.

I can't remember a time before anxiety, but I can remember a time before climate anxiety.

I did not suffer less when I worried about other things.

So why does it hurt still I thought I was over this the clock runs out but I have so much more to say so much more to do and the clock keeps ticking ticking ticking it's going to run out and I'm trapped staring into the abyss of sand in this fragile hourglass that contains all the time in the universe I spent... ignoring its march forward.

I feel like I – we – live on a precipice. Like we're all on a boat at the top of the wave, hovering nearer or farther to a tipping point that will see us crashing down into the trough.

I can't erase it but maybe I can... shift it, next time? Is that arrogance, to think I can be something bigger than myself? We are connected in more ways than one. Isn't climate change connected to everything else too?

The way things are is not the way they had to be.

What was the question?

Yes. I am alive.

Being alive in the world right now feels like a call to action.
Being alive in the world right now feels like a tremendous opportunity to build the world I do actually want to live in.
Being alive in the world right now makes me feel angry and sad. Being alive in the world right now is all that I have.

It feels... overall? It's good to be alive.

Mónica and Juan

Being alive in this world is like

I want to do more. But I can't do it all. Maybe this is what it means to be an imposter—

sailing down a river that will eventually reach a precipice. Most

people haven't figured out that you're just as lost as they are.

people don't want to accept the fact that we all will die at the end of this river. Older people tell me: "this river has been flowing all my life, and it will continue flowing forever." But this, of course, is not true. In school I learned about rivers, they do not flow forever. I try to tell the other

People back home are being murdered daily for work I haven't even come close to achieving.

people in the boat about this. I try to tell them

Pats on the back go right through me. I haunt the halls of my insecurity.

that the river we are in right now leads to the greatest waterfall they can ever imagine, but they have decided to ignore the existence of waterfalls all together.

I wish I could haunt Kenney, Chevron, BarrickGold. Goblins, ghouls, poltergeists of the world destroying for fun and profit.

Two years ago, I met some people who also saw what lies ahead of us.
We got together

*Quarter me and pull me apart,
each one of me will come back to do what one couldn't.*

in a canoe and we rowed together. We rowed hard, persistently. We invited other people to row with us and they listened. It felt like

The scariest part of grief is knowing that maybe you'd feel different had you changed one action.

we could change the tide by changing ourselves. Suddenly, the world did change, but in a way we never expected.

*Leave one day earlier,
Leave one day later,*

Now, only one or two people could be in a canoe at once,

Stay on the phone one more minute,

or we all would sink. So, we split up, and kept rowing. But rowing alone isn't easy. And I often get tired.

Death becomes not a celebration of life, but an autopsy of your actions.

I didn't know I was the coroner until I found myself dissecting my failures.

I did my own research, and it turns out the river deviates ahead of us. There is a way to shift our course, and arrive at a beautiful lake. Unlike the river, this lake does not flow constantly, and we can just stay there, peacefully, steadily. I shout to everyone around me.

I am the unjust one.

The opening lies just a few kilometers ahead of us, and the river flows strong and fast.

I eat an avocado. I would kill for more. I have.

This opening is also narrow, and we have a lot of canoes to get through. If we don't act right now,

Green gold for gringos cuts down people,

all the water around us will collapse into a spectacular splash.

palma, loro, for some multinational chance to mine oro.

And I already hear the sound of the water clashing with the rock.

Agua pasó por aquí, cate que no te vi.

...

There is a way to shift our course,
and arrive at a beautiful lake.

—

Laura, Carter, and Yara

When I was a little girl, I was obsessed with Kratts' Creatures, a kids show about animals, their habitat, climate change.

*To hunt grouse was to build connection,
with my father, with the foothills.*

I was obsessed with littering. I got so mad at my dad when he threw a candy wrapper out of the window. He was smoking with us in the car, and my mom got mad at him when we came home and she kissed our heads and could smell the smoke. Those were always fun trips.

*But what do you do when
your father and your foothills
are poisoned by the same men?*

**2021. Approximately 9 years
before the 2030 agenda is here.**

Every night, my dad would lay beside my little twin bed and read a book to me and we would play a game where I would draw a picture on his back and he would guess what it was. My dad read me a Berenstain Bears book about jobs you could have. There was one about being “an environmentalist” which entailed leaning out of a helicopter with a megaphone, yelling

*To be alive in the world right now feels like being stuck at a buffet line
in a gas station in Nevada,*

at people littering. This was going to be MY job. I held my breath

knowing oblivion is near.

by idling cars. I turned off the taps. When we would drive by a manufacturing plant, I would get so upset, watching the smoke curl out of the stack.

*There are vast amounts of choices, directions, temptations available
but each one of them is predicated on the fact that*

**More than being scared, angry, sad or
grieving, just BE until the end. There is
no feeling of being alive.**

you ignore the world collapsing around you.

**There only is BEING alive. The feeling is
secondary, especially when it's not up to
you.**

I remember reading a little field book with those beautiful scientific illustrations with the Latin names under them, "Animals in North America." I told my dad, "I wish we lived in North America."

**You can live, you can die, you can do
whatever you want, but in the end, it will
only happen as you chose your destiny to
be before coming here.**

He said we did, and I didn't believe him until he pulled out a globe and showed me the continents.

I've lived only eighteen years.

I asked my dad why we didn't just use wind energy. It didn't make sense to use oil.

I don't think human existence is that important to Earth.

My dad tried to explain, but I guess

Instead of being depressed, the world has its phases and

children don't understand lobbying.

it's the end of one right as we write.

...

What does it feel like to be alive right now?

It feels like being at my dad's wake. Other people were crying, and I couldn't feel anything.

The climate crisis is happening whether we want it or not.

I couldn't cry for months.

The world is having a heart attack and

*I can muster nothing more than blurring images of my nieces
smiling, or playing. It is hard,*

**there's nothing much we can do other
than slowing down the process and
making things softer, easier,**

to imagine a kind future.

**but at the same time, how is that going to
help the final outcome? Everything will
happen because it has to happen.**

To fight a fight that feels as if it has been lost hurts.

As my dad was in the hospital in his final moments, I stood outside
the emergency room and had a cigarette.

To grow in compassion is to hurt more.

I wonder if my mom could smell it in my hair when she hugged me.

Gabrielle

How it feels to be alive right now.

Right now, it is 1:57 PM on Friday, January 15, 2021. Six days ago, I turned thirty. Nine days ago, my grandpa died. Today, in few minutes, they are going to bury him. It's called the 'interment,' which is a word I just learned because I've never had a close family member die before even though I'm thirty which I know makes me very lucky.

*a heavy burden for the
young of the world.
told to save it but never
given any stories as to how.*

*a weight on their shoulders,
a great anger,
that sunken feeling.*

I can't go to the burial because of covid but it's ok because I spent a lot of time with my grandpa this past year. I was helping my grandma care for him so he could stay living on the farm with her. I helped him sit down and stand up. I helped him move from room to room. I helped him eat and drink and shave. I helped him put on his coat and cap and to go out on the deck to watch the birds and the fields and the big, big sky.

He knew he was dying; he would talk about it sometimes. Sometimes he was worried. Like would there even be enough room in heaven for him? So many people had already died right? I mean, it could be full.

Sometimes he asked what will happen to the next generations. What will become of the world? He wanted a good life for us but seemed worried.

God I am angry for them I am

*so angry and
very badly I want to promise
it will get better, not the world of course,
but their sorrow for it. can I ?*

That spring the fields all flooded. My uncle hardly got anything off them in the fall, the worst harvest I ever saw he said. Excessive rainfall is a climate impact for the aspen parkland region I write in my journal but don't say out loud to my uncle who thinks the climate has always been changing or my grandma who thinks the rain is God punishing humanity for all the abortions or my grandpa who just thinks I should come sit next to him by the window and watch the fields and the trees and the big, big sky.

*you'll get better at sorrow,
I tell her through Zoom,
you'll have to. but know this too...*

*one morning soon
you'll
wake up to find—*

In October we went out on the deck to watch the migrating birds high above the fields—cranes, snow geese. My grandpa could still see them; his eyes were so sharp! Even the cranes who fly up very high in thin winding ribbons, he could see them. We watched them float up in those slow spirals, riding warm updrafts of air. I liked the thought of our air down here, warmed by the earth, by our breath,

helping them get back home.

*you have
more comrades
and
more kin
than you ever*

dared

imagine

*will you listen to them?
they are here to teach you sorrow*

*in other words,
how to live*

It's 2:23 pm now. God, I hope they are all doing okay, wherever they are.

—