

Save the Humans

an article by Hillary Mizia

No more doom and gloom. In college I began pursuing a major in environmental education, and that was lesson number one. And two. And three. For an environmental educator it is imperative that one's audience not feel so overwhelmed by the environmental wrong doings of the day that they shut down, fail to listen, and retreat within themselves. It's not as if students are curling up in the fetal position, but we all feel a level of guilt and depression about the state of the environment, and our relation to that state as humans. While I learned this lesson in the context of the classroom, it is something I have learned to apply to daily life. In so doing, I have come to recognize that what we should be doing is saving the humans, not just the whales.

Some may wonder how I can call myself an environmentalist. Let me clarify: it's not that I don't want to save the whales, but if we can effect change in human behavior to where we don't need to save the whales in the first place, we are all (whales, humans, even baby seals) in a much better place.

When I first entered college in upstate New York I was all about saving the whales. I felt humans were a cancer on this earth; that we would destroy this planet without ever knowing the beauty it really held. After transferring schools, my experiences at Prescott College led me to conclude it was not about saving the things around us, but rather about changing human behavior to be less impactful on the things around us. It was all about saving the humans. I became acutely aware that every choice I made had an impact on the plants and animals (including humans) on this planet.

With this in mind, I began making choices based on respect for everything around me. This act of respect, I came to realize, is really a balancing act. The resources we use in our day-to-day operations at home and work come from rivers, forests, mountains and deserts- the very places where we wish to tread lightly. Yet without acknowledging this somewhat awkward situation, I could never have arrived at truly understanding what it means to be human and to be a *part* of this planet, not above it or removed from it.

Since my time at Prescott College the details of the choices I make have changed (most recently which brand of cloth diapers to use for our new baby boy), but the context remains the same. I am still trying to live in balance and out of respect for all that is around me, human and non-human alike. Other people still see me making these decisions, and leading by example still reveals itself as a powerful tool for change. I know someday soon my son will be making decisions for himself, and I hope he learns this sooner than I did.