

I can see a future...
creative ways to talk about climate change

by Georgia Young

With Gratitude

This project was conceived as a final project for the Master of Environmental Science and Management program at the University of Rhode Island. It is the culmination of years of work as a science communicator and two years of transformative learning.

I'm a musician, writer, theater maker, hiker, avid reader, cultivator of plants, newshound, crafter, anarchist, and environmentalist. But I was once a toddler, wandering my dad's garden. I've tried to bring my full self to this work, including the little girl who spent much of her early years outside with chickens, tomatoes, and a big orange cat named Arnold.

As someone who cares about climate change, I've read extensively about how we discuss and address the issue, learning from others how to celebrate our wins, mourn our losses, get involved, and expand my vision for a fossil fuel-free future.

Thank you to the wonderful faculty and students of the MESM program, and especially to my advisor, Sunshine Menezes, and my writing and rhetoric professor, Madison Jones, whose DWELL Lab provided a mini-grant to cover the cost of printing and web hosting of this project. You have changed my life. Here's hoping we can change the world for the benefit of all beings.



The author in Duxbury, MA, summer 1982.

Georgia Young
Woonsocket, RI
April 2025

* You'll find references and recommendations for further reading on the last page of this zine. Use the QR code on the back cover to access a free digital copy of the zine, as well as an accompanying research paper and full reference list.

We know climate change is real

Hey. Climate change is real.

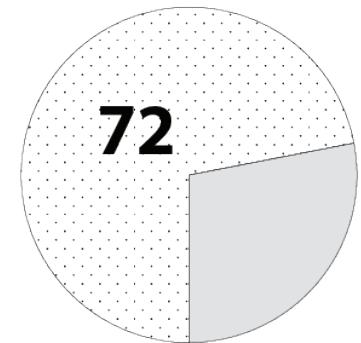
I know you know that.

But right now? In 2025 America?

It's pretty easy to feel like you're the only one.

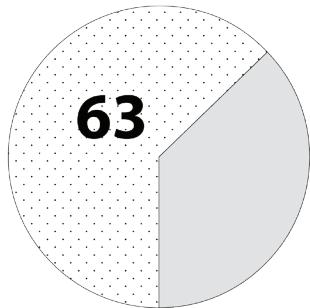
(But you're not! And as you'll learn, feeling like you're in the minority is part of the problem.)

% of adults who think global warming is happening



This zine is meant to help you to take one simple action: start talking about climate change. "That's it?" you may be thinking. Yes. That's it. Think about it: when was the last time you talked about climate change in a way that felt effective, creative, inspiring, or just plain good?

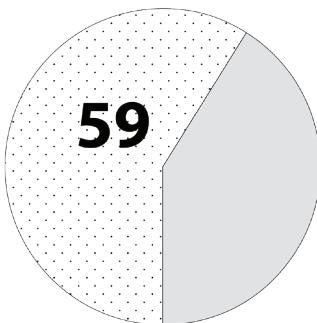
% of adults who are somewhat or very worried about global warming



Whether we talk about it has a massive impact on whether we take other climate change action. It also affects our and others' perceptions about how popular action to oppose climate change really is. It has a cascading effect, and whether that effect improves or worsens the situation is up to us.

That sounds like a pretty big responsibility. So let's get started! Throughout this booklet, you'll find space where you can write your own thoughts, and even some spaces for art, if you're so inclined. I'm here to share examples from my own life and from my research in this area, but this is work that needs you as much as it needs climate scientists and communication pros. So please, scribble all over this thing! You might even want to work through the zine with friends, classmates, or family.

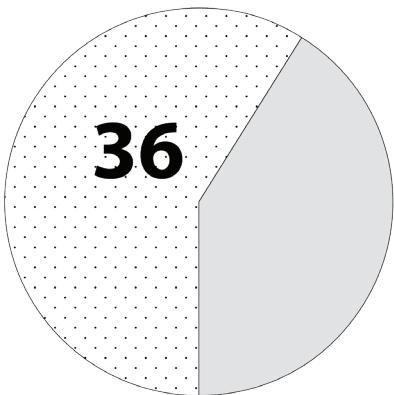
% of adults who think global warming is mostly caused by human activities



But we don't talk about it!

It turns out, most people don't talk about climate change, and even the most committed climate activists are likely to stick to less impactful topics, like purchasing more environmentally friendly products, rather than bringing up big structural issues, like food security, climate change-driven human migration, or how to make massive cuts to fossil fuel production and use.

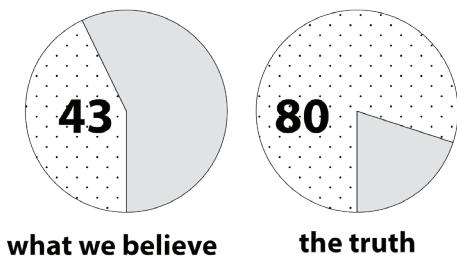
% of adults who discuss global warming occasionally or often with family and friends



Our silence is a problem

Remember how I said you probably think you're one of the only people who care about climate change? Research shows there's a big problem here:

% of adults who support action to stop climate change



This problem of having inaccurate perceptions of others' opinions has a name: "**pluralistic ignorance**." And it has cascading effects: it is associated with shifting one's stance on a topic toward what one thinks is the norm. It also goes hand in hand with being less willing to discuss the issue, known as climate silence.

The root causes of climate silence

Let's take a closer look at what's behind climate silence. One study found that people expect to be less respected if they discuss climate change with somebody who doesn't share their views.

Research in a small town in Norway revealed a community whose strong collective identity and suspicion of behavior out of step with the group extended to their reaction to climate change. The local ski resort was suffering from low levels of snowfall, and everybody noticed. Locals admitted that climate change was causing the decrease in snow. But they still treated it as a national issue over which they had no power.



My best friend Michelle at a protest against the
Patriot Act, Boston, MA, 2003.
Nancy Lane / Boston Herald

Feeling powerless, it turns out, is a big conversation killer.

Climate change is such a massive issue that it can feel like there's no solution. That makes people feel uncomfortable and frustrated.

Fortunately, research has found that simply correcting a person's incorrect assumptions about others' support for climate change action (like I did, a moment ago) increases that person's willingness to discuss climate change. As we move forward, we will come up with ideas for confronting these root causes and breaking through to climate change conversations that feel productive, and even enjoyable.

What about you?

Do you talk about climate change? If not, why not? If you do, what, specifically, do you talk about? Who introduced the topic? How did others react? How did talking about climate change make you feel? How did others' reactions make you feel?

Note: Look back at this page when you've finished working through this booklet. I bet it will feel good to compare where you started with where you end up.

What are other reasons people keep quiet about climate change?

Think about a time when you wanted to bring climate change into a conversation, but didn't. Why did you make that choice? What about a time when climate change was the conversation, but you decided to omit or censor your opinion? Why?

Climate change is a polycrisis

Right now, there are multiple crises happening worldwide. Though they are independent, they bleed into each other and make each other worse. If climate change is (as I see it) the biggest threat to life on Earth, other crises interconnect with and amplify the climate crisis, including immigration from the Global South to the Global North, worldwide health threats, and conflicts over resources.

That's part of why the climate crisis feels so overwhelming: rising seas and temperatures influence immigration, warmer weather can increase the prevalence of disease spread by mosquitos and ticks, and both fossil-fuel extraction and materials for renewable energy sources like electric car batteries can drive international conflict.



Confronting a polycrisis can feel like being buried in the sand... but not fun. Me at the beach, buried by my little sister, 1989.

The situation is dire. **But with so many connected conflicts, there's no shortage of solutions to work towards, and no matter your skill set or interests, you have a role to play.** That's why I prioritize helping and advocating for homeless community members; it is an act of climate care.

What if we get it right? Visions of climate futures by oceanographer Ayana Elizabeth Johnson includes the work and words of poets, farmers, journalists, architects, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, young activists, lawyers, fishermen, and policy experts – all people finding ways to work on the climate crisis through their vocations.

Later in this zine, there's space to explore who you are and the communities you move in. This will help you start to identify what aspects of the polycrisis you might want to discuss with others.

Imagining opposites

A writing exercise in one of my graduate courses inspired this activity, which is meant to help you stretch your imagination as you think about entry points to talking about climate change. Below is a series of phrases that are likely drivers or possible consequences of climate change. As simply as you can, write down the opposite concept. If you feel stuck, cast aside any need for the result to be a useful phrase and simply write the opposite of each word. For example, if the phrase were “more dangerous storms,” I might write “calmer weather patterns.” But if I’m stuck, I could write “less safe stillness.” That second version might confuse somebody peeking at your writing, but it could inspire your next idea.

Fossil fuel dependence

Climate change denialism

Endless consumption of resources

Limitless growth

Massive divide between rich and poor

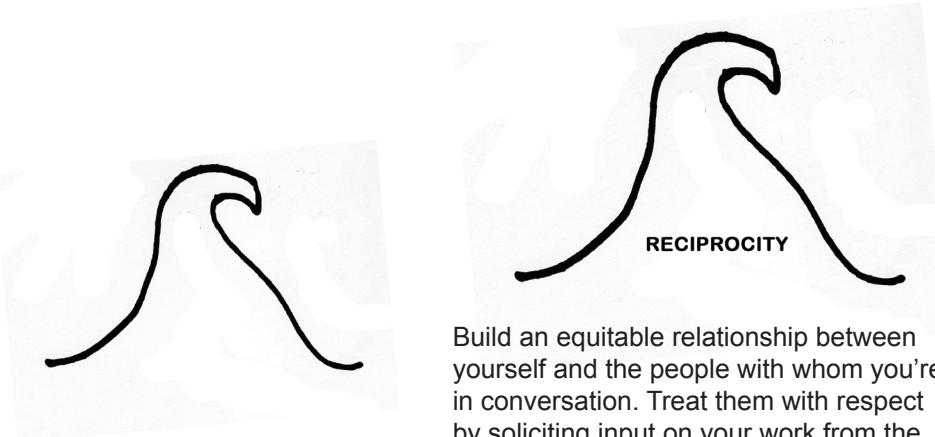
Authoritarian government

Hopeless people

Global weirding

Inclusive science

Science communication is the practice of sharing scientific information with others (scientists and academics sometimes refer to their audiences as “publics”). Inclusive science communication (ISC) is an effort to take that important work a step further by centering inclusion, equity, and intersectionality in our approach to communicating about science. In other words,



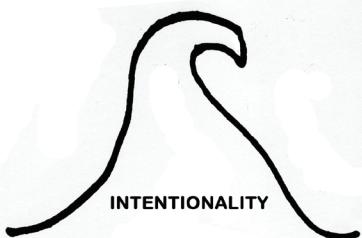
Build an equitable relationship between yourself and the people with whom you're in conversation. Treat them with respect by soliciting input on your work from the community you want to reach or giving back by highlighting community-driven efforts related to your subject.

ISC and your clin

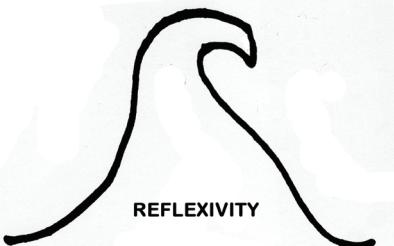
I chose the zine format because it is easy to offer for low or no cost, making it easier to access than costly books. Zines are generally written in simpler language than a peer-reviewed journal article, so I am able to share important scientific findings in ways that are easier for my intended readers to un-

communication

those of us who practice ISC approach our work with care in order to ensure that marginalized groups – who are often not considered in science communication work – are considered, represented, and celebrated in our work. This zine is a science communication tool, and I created it with the three key aspects of ISC in mind. They are:



Approach your work with care! Think about your goal, consider where your conversation partner is coming from, and practice approaching conversations in a way that represents and supports a broader array of identities, cultures, and experiences.



Carefully and systematically examine both your practices and the outcomes of your work, making room for revisions.

have conversations

derstand. And I selected a workbook format because I wanted to balance my expertise with a flexible way for you, my reader, to talk back, to bring your own knowledge, experience, and style to your learning process.

Who

A significant inspiration for this zine is Katharine Hayhoe's *Saving Us*: A climate scientist's guide for hope and healing in a divided world. Katharine and I are very different: she's a Christian climate scientist from Canada. I'm a Buddhist with a degree in theater. But she taught me so

Where do you live? What are some things that define where you live and could be, or already are, affected by climate change?

I live in Rhode Island close to a river. We've had heavier rains in the past few years, attributable to climate change, and that has caused flooding in areas close to the river.

What do you like to do? How might your pastimes be affected by climate change?

Who are your communities?

Now that you've taken an inventory of who you are, think about your communities. Are you a student, activist, gamer, artist, hiker (see me, to the right), engineer, or part of a parenting group or faith community? List your communities here, and think about how you might connect that shared interest, value, or work to climate change. For example, I want to get back into cycling. I could ask friends who are local cycling advocates for tips on getting back in the saddle, and mention that one of my motivations is to use less fossil fuels by driving less.

are you?

much about how to meet other people where they are when talking about climate change. She suggests starting by thinking about **who you are**. Try answering these questions about yourself. I've included my own answer, in case you need help getting started.

Where are you from? How is it being affected by climate change? Moving beyond place, are you from an ethnic group or community at higher risk of health issues related to climate change?

Who do you love? Are you a parent? Caregiver to an older family member?

What do you believe? Are you religious? Does your faith or your values encourage stewardship of Earth?



How to listen

Listening shows the person you're connecting with that you value their knowledge and opinions. Even if you believe you have more expertise, remember that listening is observation, a central scientific practice. When you flip the script of one-way communication directed from expert to listener, you are putting **inclusive science communication** into practice. (We'll dig into that more on the next page.)

When I reflect on my own failed attempts at talking with others about climate change, I realize that I was often talking *at* them. I wasn't listening to what they had to say, and I certainly wasn't asking them to share what they thought. Here are some tips for avoiding my mistakes:

- **Listen for what you don't know.** A conversation is an opportunity to learn.
- **Ask questions that show you are listening.** If somebody tells you they remember it was rainier when they were a kid, ask them what else was different back then.
- **Forget your agenda.** When talking about climate change, your goal should be to have an interesting conversation. If you want to invite the person to take action, wait until the conversation seems to be ending. Or follow up with the invitation the next time you talk. You can refer back to something they said last time, showing you're inviting them because you heard them hint at wanting to do more.
- **Active listening** involves nonverbal cues that show you're listening, like eye contact, nodding, reacting with your face (show surprise, excitement, sympathy); rewording what the other person has said and repeating it back to them ("I hate how hot the summers have gotten" - "it sounds like the heat this summer really bothers you"), and questions that encourage further conversation ("would you tell me a little more about x?", "what do you mean by x?")
- **Silence can be golden.** Years ago, I took a class in directing theater, and I remember encouraging a young actor to leave a long moment of silence before saying her first line. I saw how uncomfortable it was for her, but my classmates saw how impactful that moment was for them as an audience. It can be the same in conversation: if somebody tells you something that is clearly painful for them, try waiting for a few breaths before responding. Do the same if somebody asks you a question that takes thought before you answer. Silence can feel very uncomfortable, but it's often exactly what a conversation needs.

Exploring new possibilities for climate conversations

Now it's time to expand on one possibility, one inroad to a conversation about climate change. Try a mind map: write your central topic in 1 or 2 words at the center of the page and circle it. Then add a branch for each idea that expands out from that, expand out from those, and so on. This is an opportunity to push your ideas into the realm of bigger structural issues, as I mentioned earlier. For example, my central idea could be transportation, and I could branch out from that to walking, cycling, public transportation, and cars. From walking I could expand to sidewalks, traffic humps, and more. These are all places you can take a climate conversation. You may want to do more of these on additional pieces of paper.

Why do you care?

In order to have an effective conversation about a big issue, it helps to know your why. Look back at what you've written here so far. What do you see? What matters to you? Who matters to you? Think especially about what you have to lose if we don't stop climate change, and even better, what you have to gain, if we do.

LOSE

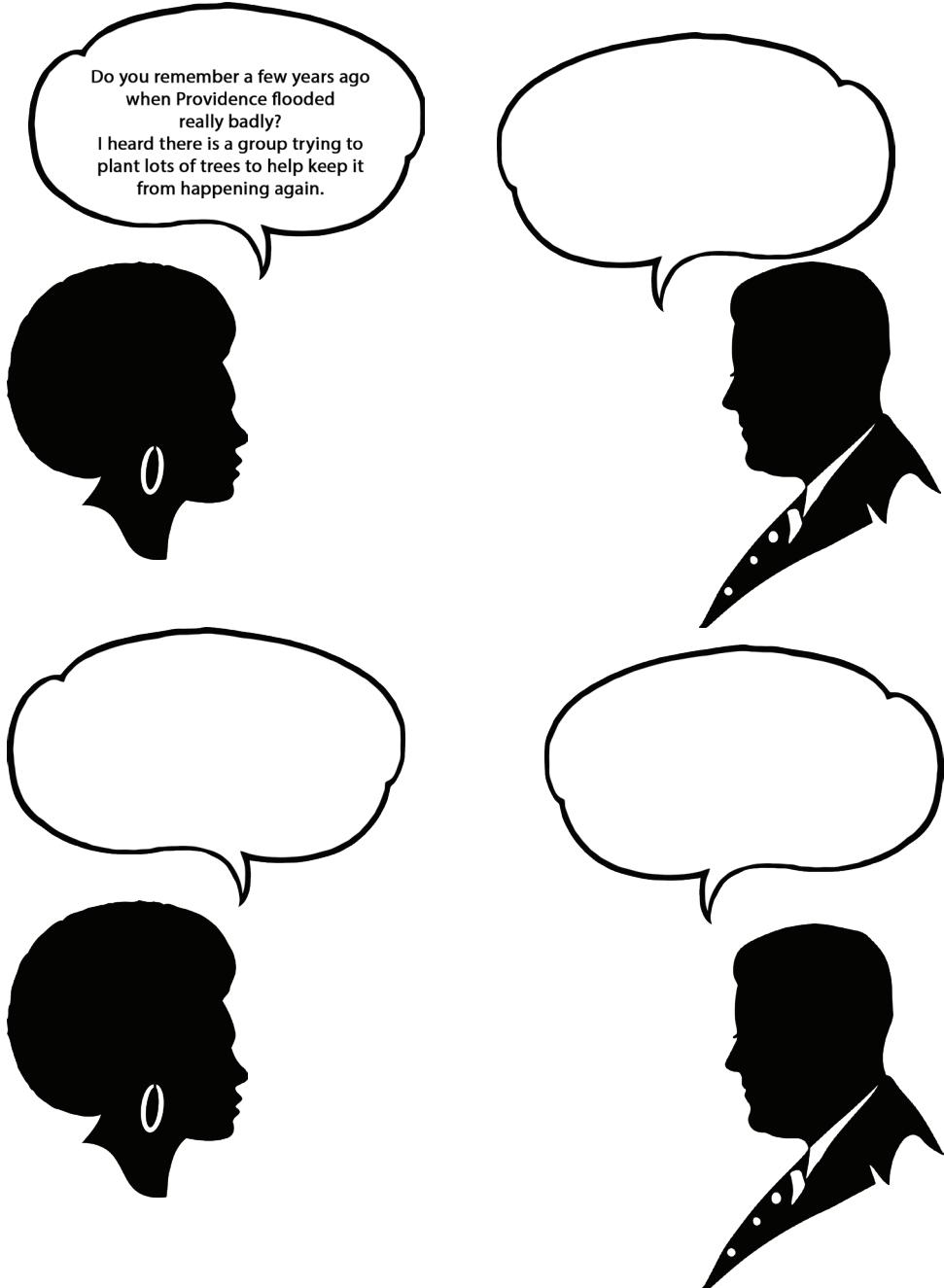
GAIN

Conversation isn't limited to words

On this page, think more broadly about climate “conversation.” Write, draw, or collage here. In what other ways could you communicate your concerns, hopes, fears, and dreams about climate change? As I wrote this zine, I was inspired by Lessons from the Climate Anxiety Counseling Booth: How to live with care and purpose in an endangered world, by my pal Kate Schapira, who offers lots of ways to get active around climate change, and some are pretty communication focused. Consider songwriting, poetry, quilting or other crafts, serving friends a meal of low-carbon food, writing a letter to the editor, painting or photography. Maybe you’ll even want to make a zine, says the zinester, hint, hint.

Modeling climate

As with many forms of communication, it helps to practice your climate change conversations. I recommend practicing with a friend who is game to participate, but you can start right here on the page! I've provided the



change conversations

beginning of a sample conversation. Use the rest of the talking heads to practice: you could continue my conversation, test out a few other openers, or imagine the first few exchanges of a single conversation.



Mapping new

This is your space to expand your possibilities for a future free of fossil fuels and for climate change conversation starters through mapping. You could draw a map of your community, marking changes to the landscape, adding bike lanes to the streets, and replacing parking lots with community gardens and solar farms. Or you could do a mind map, placing yourself at the center and creating connections to and between the different com-

possibilities

munities, activities, and identities that make you who you are, and jotting down ideas for discussing climate change in those contexts. Or maybe you want to map your climate change conversation journey, starting where you are today and planning out the next topic you'll bring up, the next person you'll talk with, and an area where you might want to build more knowledge to inform your conversations. The sky's the limit!

No time for silence

I made this zine in the first half of 2025. When Donald Trump was reelected, I knew we could expect him to pull the U.S. out of the Paris climate agreement (again), to increase domestic fossil fuel production (again), and to demonize scientists, lie about widely-supported scientific positions, and elevate pseudoscience.

I didn't expect to see tens of thousands of federal workers laid off or to see science agencies and rules decimated, defunded, and turned into machines of state propaganda. It's a grim time to care about our planet.

I can't predict the future, but I believe it will take decades to fix the ways this administration is harming our planet.

And yet, the science doesn't lie. There's overwhelming evidence that climate change is real and caused by us.

In this zine, you've learned it's critical to talk with each other about climate change. You've added your voice here, and hopefully been inspired and had fun doing it. This is preparatory work that I hope will help (and please, scan the QR code on the back of this book to reach out with any feedback you have).

Be brave. Know you're not alone in wanting to stop climate change. And don't stop speaking up. Talk about climate change with everyone you know. Experiment with conversation topics and approaches with the people you trust most.

Earth's future – and ours – is in every person's hand. Thank you for taking a risk with me. We need you.

When to move on

When it comes to global warming (aka climate change), research argues, there are six Americas:

Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious, Disengaged, Doubtful, and Dismissive

Unsurprisingly, the Alarmed are the most convinced of the urgency of human-caused climate change and support policies to address it- that's about a quarter of us (maybe even you). From there, belief, sense of urgency, and support for policy drop.

I want to warn you about that last group, the Dismissives. They don't believe global warming is happening, and many think it's a hoax. Fortunately, only 10% of Americans fall into this group, and that has held steady for at least ten years. But when you encounter a Dismissive, please, don't try to change their minds. You are unlikely to succeed, and there's a good chance you'll end up feeling frustrated and defeated if you try. Save your energy for the other five Americas.

References & reading list

Climate change is real / But we don't talk about it: Yale climate opinion maps 2024: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us-2024/>

Five ways the climate crisis impacts human security: <https://www.un.org/en/climate-change/science/climate-issues/human-security>

Our silence is a problem / The root causes of climate silence: Don't even think about it: Why our brains are wired to ignore climate change by George Marshall, 2014, and Living in denial: Climate change, emotions, and everyday life by Kari Norgaard, 2011.

How to listen: Getting to the Heart of Science Communication: A Guide to Effective Engagement by Faith Kearns, 2021.

Inclusive science communication: Inclusive Science Communication Starter Kit. Christina DiCenzo, Sunshine Menezes, et al, 2020.

Who are you?: Saving us: A climate scientist's case for hope and healing in a divided world by Katharine Hayhoe, 2021.

Conversation isn't limited to words: Lessons from the Climate Anxiety Counseling Booth: How to Live with Care and Purpose in an Endangered World by Kate Schapira, 2024.

No time for silence: Global Warming's Six Americas, <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/sassy/>

We are so lucky to be living in a time when many people are writing incredible books covering every aspect of the climate crisis. Here are a few more favorites that informed my work here.

The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption by Dahr Jamail - A journalist and adventurer's grief-coated account of the death of glaciers, coral reefs, the Amazon rain forest, and human cultures.

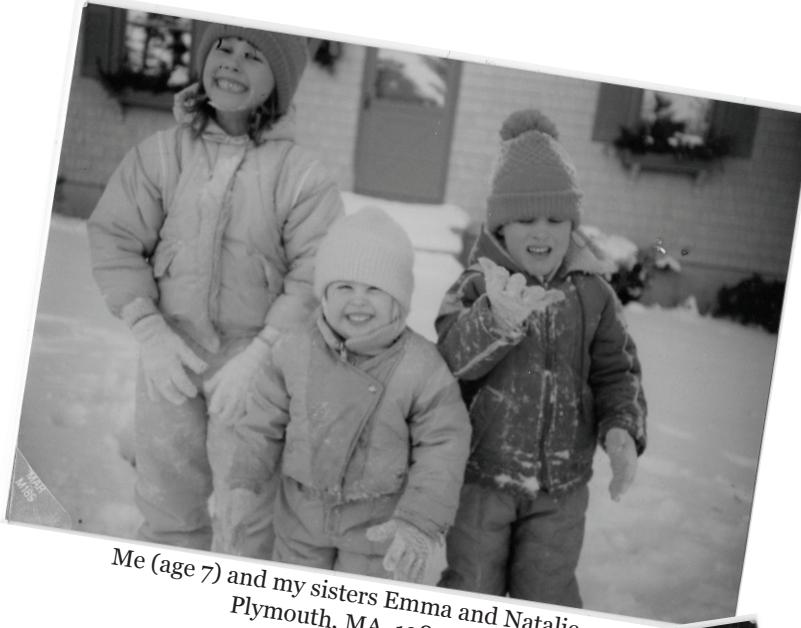
What if We Get It Right? Visions of Climate Futures by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson - A marine biologist talks with dozens of passionate climate activists about the many positive changes we could make when it comes to addressing climate change.

The Climate Book by Greta Thunberg - The young climate activist gathers an exhaustive collection of data about climate change into one convenient resource.

Scan the QR code on the back of this zine to download a free PDF of the zine and to check out my research, including a full bibliography.

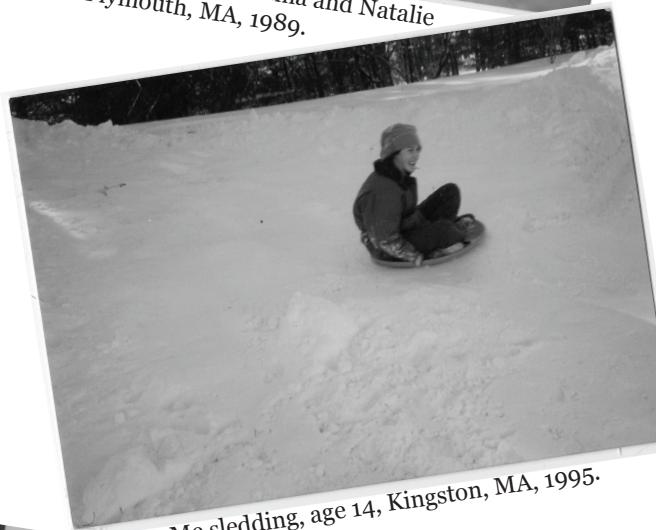
All photos are from my personal collection, unless otherwise specified.

Visit <http://stitchedinsound.com/icanseeafuture> for research with full bibliography and digital download of this zine.

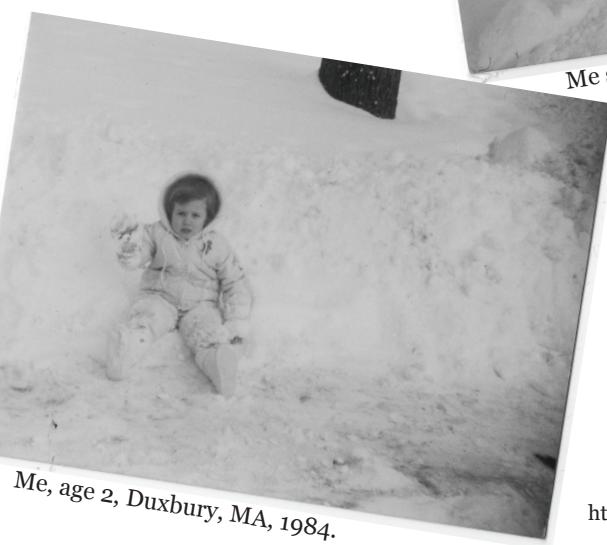


Me (age 7) and my sisters Emma and Natalie
Plymouth, MA, 1989.

Something I miss
is
southern New
England winters
full of
deep,
lasting
snow.



Me sledding, age 14, Kingston, MA, 1995.



Me, age 2, Duxbury, MA, 1984.



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