

Emilie Brown, Placer High School

Growing up, I had the privilege to live in the American River Canyon. I remember taking long walks with my mom through the canyon and smelling pine scents floating through the air. I remember every spring watching the hills turn bright orange with flowering California poppies. I remember listening to the sounds of the native bees and butterflies rushing from one flower to the next. I remember the dreamlike clouds floating through the canyon and the sweet smell of freshly watered meadows after every rain.

As I grew up, I watched a great change unfold before my eyes. Every year, I watched it rain less and less. I watched the Tahoe snow fall farther and farther away and I watched fires race up the canyon feasting on dry brush from rainless springs. Eventually, I began to hear about climate change in the news and I began to connect what I saw happening outside my bedroom window with what scientists were talking about on TV.

Through my own interest, I learned that we are losing about 230 billion tons of arctic sea ice every year and witnessing glacier retreat and decreased snow cover around the world, that about 2.47 million trees are cut down every day, and that we are expected to lose 90% of our corals in the next 20 years. I remember being scared and overwhelmed because I didn't want the future that the climate change projections were telling me I was going to get. The impacts of these issues are not 20 years away, some of them are not even 10 years away; they are happening now, which means we have to act now because our future is on the line. Watching my home change inspired me to found the Placer High School Environmental Club.

Today, as founder and president, I take on a supererogatory role, hosting weekly educational meetings, managing a weekly podcast, and composing a biweekly column published in the *Auburn Journal*. I developed a food waste recycling program, organized tree plantings, and led efforts to build clean water systems in other countries. I regularly work with our local government to develop more eco-friendly standards, I have collaborated with countless environmental organizations throughout our town, and I have helped clean thousands of pounds of waste from the ARC.

After just three years, I have transformed a humble group of seven people into a motivated, well-educated organization of almost 80 and each club member I meet is driven and inspired just as I have been.

Our goal has always been to help create a brighter future and reduce the problems facing our earth. I believe we have accomplished that goal. We have been able to make local changes helping to lower greenhouse gas emissions in our town, keep wildlife alive, make sure our community is clean, and share our voices. But more than that, we have lit a match of inspiration for future high schoolers who want to make a difference for their planet and community.