

What is an Effective Climate Change Story?

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SPEAKERS

Tamara Staton, Peterson Toscano, Dr. Natasha DeJarnett, Allison Whitaker, Lillace Mellin Guignard

P Peterson Toscano 00:00

Welcome to Citizens Climate radio, a climate change podcast. I'm your host Peterson Toscano, and today we're going to take a deep dive into climate change storytelling. Welcome to Episode 78 of Citizens Climate Radio, a project of Citizens Climate Education. This episode is airing on Tuesday, November 29 2022. In this episode, Tamra Staton shares another important step for us from the Resilience Corner. We also have some good news about climate ballot initiatives in the recent US midterm election. And today, we're exploring that all important question, "what is an effective climate change story?" Climate change storytelling is so important to our work. But what is a good climate story? And how can I improve my storytelling skills? And how can I tell a new type of climate story? I've been exploring, researching and practicing climate storytelling for over 10 years. In this episode, I will share some of what I've learned. I will provide you with samples from a variety of sources. We hear Alison Whittaker read one of her short stories set in the future. Poet lilace Mellin Guignard uses poems to connect weather, holidays and family to climate change. Keyana Pardilla, has been listening to stories from her elders on a Penobscot reservation, and Dr. Natasha DeJarnette shares her real life story about the impacts of climate change. In addition to sharing her story, Dr. DeJarnette will demonstrate what I call the climate change pivot. And by the end of this episode, you will have fresh ideas about how to tell your stories. We can tell all kinds of climate change stories. Most typically these can be broken down into two categories. They are the stories we tell about the impacts of climate change, and those stories that reveal the impacts of climate change solutions. In this episode of Citizens Climate Radio, we will look at stories about the impacts of climate change. These include incidents of extreme weather. They can also be stories about changes you have witnessed over time, and the ways these changes affect you and everything and everyone you love. Climate change impact stories are the most common stories I hear. These stories have been especially important to tell during a time of climate denial and skepticism. Basically, the message of the climate change impact story is "See it really is happening!" But these stories can also do a lot more than that. The second type of story is harder to tell. It is a story around climate change solutions, specifically stories about the impacts of the solutions. Next month, I will share with you three types of climate change solution stories. Today though, let's hear a moving story that looks at the dangers caused by extreme weather. Dr. Natasha DeJarnett is a public health expert who has been on our show many times. Dr. DeJarnette is an assistant professor in the Christina Lee Brown Environment Institute at the University of Louisville Division of

Environmental Medicine. She researches the health impacts of extreme heat exposure and environmental health disparities. If you ever heard one of Dr. DeJarnett's presentations, you know, she is excellent in sharing data and highlighting the many ways we can protect our loved ones and communities. She's also a powerful storyteller. For this episode. She tells us a dramatic story from when she was 12 years old.

D Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 03:57

It was late on a Saturday night, and mom dad and I were leaving the home of our family friends a few miles from our home in Georgetown, Kentucky. It was extremely dark, but we could see that it had rained because the street looked a little wet and the grass had some rain droplets on it. But we were all smiles as we have hopped in the car reminiscing on the new memories we just created with our friends. Then we started our drive home. Within less than a minute. I heard my dad say from the driver's seat. I can't see the road anymore. Within seconds we figured out why as the front tire splashed in the water and then the rear tires. The tires were quickly submerged. As the water crept up, I heard the engine go from a strong hum to a low deep growl. The water started to seep in the car and it was puddling beneath our feet. Panic set in. We couldn't turn around. In fact, Dad no longer had full control of the car, we began looking desperately for solutions. I looked outside the rear passenger window beside me. And instead of solutions, I saw my 12 year old reflection. On the other side of the window, I saw water creeping up. In my reflection, the water was at my chin, panic turned into fear. Then the water was at the same level of my nose and my reflection. Fear turned into terror. When I saw the water go over my head and my reflection, we were terrified. This was an entire family in the car, a dad, a mom, their only child, all of our hopes and dreams, facing the immediate threat of death. As we searched desperately for a solution, we noticed the driveway nearby. This was our only hope. Somehow, the floodwaters guided us to that driveway and dad began to regain control of the car and turn the car towards the driveway. We drove up the driveway, and from there we watched the floodwaters for hours until about 3am. Those floodwaters were higher than the mailbox at that house. We were mostly silent during that time. But I'm certain we were all individually sending up prayers of thanks to God for surviving the impossible. The next day, we shared our story with our friends. And they explained to us that that happens every time there's a heavy downpour saying you can't get into or out of the neighborhood whenever that happens. They even shared their similar experience of being trapped in floodwaters on the same street with their small kids in car seats. Mom and I were on that street recently. And she pointed out across on the side of the road near our incident, and she explained that a woman had gotten trapped in the floodwaters a couple of weeks before and didn't make it. They found her car the next day.

P Peterson Toscano 07:12

Let's look more closely at Dr Natasha DeJarnette's story; it will help us see what an effective story contains. I find in her story three elements that are essential. 1. an actual story or a narrative. 2. Compelling specific details, especially those that tap into people's senses, and 3., the emotions of the storyteller. You can hear these three very clearly in Dr. DeJohnette story. First of all, it is a story. She shares a specific moment in her life that includes characters conflict and resolution. She's not telling us about her opinions regarding climate change or ideas for addressing it. She captures our attention with an action packed story. Secondly, she provides compelling specific details.

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Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 08:05

As the water crept up, I heard the engine go from a strong hum to a low deep growl. The water started to seep in the car and it was puddling beneath our feet.

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Peterson Toscano 08:18

And finally, she names multiple emotions like confusion, fear, panic and relief. I don't know about you, but she also stirred up my own emotions. In a moment you will hear Dr. DeJarnett as she shares the climate change pivot. This is an absolutely essential step in our climate communication. The climate change pivot bridges your story to an actionable next step. First, though, let's hear more climate change impacts stories. In addition to stories about extreme weather, we can tell stories about the unfolding changes happening to the climate around us. These changes occur over years, and they affect us personally and emotionally. Poet Lilace Mellin Guignard writes poetry and nonfiction. In January she will be on our show to talk about her experiences of being a woman alone in the wilderness. She wrote about these experiences in her memoir *When Everything Beyond the Walls is Wild--Being a Woman Outdoors in America*. In her short poems Lilace shares what it feels like to live in this time of climate change. As a parent, she weaves in emotions that may be familiar to some listeners. Earlier this year, Lilace led a poetry workshop for climate change leaders. The BTS center promotes spiritual leadership and a climate changed world. For the workshop. They commissioned me to collaborate with Lilace. She recorded readings of her poems. I then added music and sound effects. You will hear Lilace read two poems after the Magi Depart, and Evergreen. For people in North America who enjoy winter weather and feel a pang about the warming of our winters, Lilace expresses both grief and determination. Each poem is a mini story of moments in the life of a parent and children. More importantly, Lilace tells the deeper emotional stories many of us quietly experience

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Lilace Mellin Guignard 10:31

After the Magi depart by Lilace Mellin Guignard . On the tongue the names sparkle like snowflakes, benzene, toluene, xylene, before their sounds melt into air. Parents watching kids leap and tumble in white drifts would need to repeat the syllables to keep them from evaporating. But who doesn't want fear to break into tiny pieces and float away? So of course we focus on the children sledding down and trudging up the hill. Nothing around but cow pastures, cornfields fences, and a drill rig flaring half mile away. The tip cozy like a candle. This is the life, the land we know. Change is coming. We can feel it like a dream and squint into the twilight looking for our kids, looking for a sign clear as an angel saying, "Arise and take the young child." But all we hear is benzene, toluene, xylene. The air is crisp and sparkles. Our children laugh through blue lips Evergreen. "And the poet's are at their windows because it is their job for which they are paid nothing every Friday afternoon." from Monday by Billy Collins. The day after Christmas 2006 And nowhere in the lower 48 is below 30 degrees Fahrenheit except my husband reports a spot in Maine. I can be up beat. Children in northern climes with new bikes are out riding them spinning circles and circles. But how can I ignore those tykes who stand on porches holding sleds, their hats in their hands? Really it is not today that worries me, an unremarkable gray without threat or promise. Same birds at the feeder. Neither does tomorrow. A word my son knows only means not now, but some vague future. How will any

child believe in a jolly giver of gifts wearing a fur coat by a fire at the icy top of the world once the glaciers are puddles in our textbooks? Regardless, the poet's will be at their windows finding new images. Maybe something a pretty shade of green to compare the sky to, pretty if we can just divorce memory from emotion and approach the new dawn whatever its color, with the heart of a child on Christmas Eve, who looking back knows he could have let go of the cat's tail sooner. Feels bad that she busted her brother's favorite toy train. Yet hopes a larger forgiveness presides. Yes, we poets will always be at our windows except when at our children's bedsides singing shushing singing.

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Peterson Toscano 14:46

Learn more about Lilace at her website tentofone'sown.com Many thanks to the BTS center for supporting the work of artists addressing climate change. Learn about their online book studies treats their podcasts and other programs by visiting the [BTS center.org](http://BTScenter.org). Coming up, you will hear about the all important climate change story pivot plus Tamra Stayton. With the resilience corner stay tuned. Okay, let's talk about that all important climate change pivot. Telling a compelling story filled with details and emotions will grab someone's attention and may even stir up their own emotions. As a result, they're then ready for your climate pivot. Know, the climate pivot is not a dance move. And you are likely to see at the Citizens Climate national conference dance party next June in Washington DC. Although it would be a good one. No, yeah. No, the climate change pivot happens when you jump off of your story into the climate solution you're proposing. For example, Dr. Natasha de trinette told us the moving story about her family trapped in their car in the middle of a sudden flood. In

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Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 18:40

my reflection, the water was at my chin. Panic turned into fear, then the water was at the same level of my nose and my reflection.

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Peterson Toscano 18:50

After she tells the story, she then does the climate pivot.

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Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 18:55

Climate change is causing more frequent and more intense flooding events. These increase our risk of illness, injury and even death. This puts communities like our friends at greater risk. But adaptation activities can help protect those from the immediate dangers. For example, environmental health practitioners can work with planners to make flood prone communities more resilient. But we urgently need mitigation action to prevent the climate crisis from getting worse. I don't know why my family was spared that night. But perhaps it was for this moment for me to put a human face on climate change, for me to share the urgency needed to protect our communities and our families for filled with hopes and dreams and a bright future. It's been said that we're the first generation to experience the health impacts of climate change. And it's also been said that we're the last generation that can do something about it.

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Peterson Toscano 20:00

This pivot helps people understand why you're sharing your story. It connects your story with a necessary meaningful response to climate change impacts. So you have your story, and then the pivot. This combination might very well bring the person closer to acting on climate change. That means they're ready for a practical, meaningful, achievable next step, like want to join me for our next local Citizens Climate Lobby meeting? Or do you want to get together over coffee sometime next week to talk more about this? Alright, let me summarize everything we've covered today, we can tell effective climate stories. climate change impact stories are the most common stories I hear the stories that reveal the dangers of climate induced extreme weather, and other impacts on our lives and the world. Make sure your story is compelling with specific details and emotions. Once you tell your story, switch to the climate change pivot. This is when you connect your story to the climate work you're doing or a particular solution you're pursuing. Finally, give your listeners something to do suggest a meaningful and achievable next step. Next month, we will do a deep dive into another type of climate change story, a story that reveals the impacts of climate change solutions. And here's a little teaser for you. It is a future success story. This type of story relies a lot on our visioning and imagination. We need to imagine a world filled with solutions and then tell stories about this world. Our goal is to reveal what we are working so hard to achieve. This is not always easy to do. When we succeed, we create a yearning and others for this better world. You will find a large and growing collection of these types of stories on the website with many routes.com This is the home of the CliFi Imaginarium. I collaborated with Allison Whitaker, one of the facilitators at with many routes.com She wrote a story immersed in a solution. Together we created a radio drama version of her story Forest at the End of the Lane. This story was inspired by a climate solution known as tree intercropping. According to drawdown.org tree intercropping is a suite of agroforestry systems that deliberately grow trees together with annual crops in a given area at the same time. I love this solution because of the multiple benefits that come with it. Tree intercropping increases the carbon content of the soil and the productivity of the land. It reduces erosion while creating habitat. It protects fast growing annuals from wind and rain damage. It also protects light sensitive crops from excess sunlight, and it draws up minerals and nutrients for shallow rooted plants. I mean, that gets me excited. I almost don't need a story but Alison has a story set dab smack in the middle of a community forest garden. She shares a vision of what it would be like to experience tree intercropping and she includes at least one creature who found a home in it. Here is Alison Whitaker with her story Forest at the End of the Lane.

A

Allison Whitaker 23:35

I took on my boots and shuffle through the tall wet grass carefully trying to dodge the last dandelions of the year. Mist floats just above the ground as the sun tries valiantly to burn through the clouds. Cocoa and I have just finished our breakfast, and it's time to do some foraging. I took a few wildflower blossoms into my gathering basket as we walk. Coco loves these walks. I love them too. We follow the lane until it ends in the neighborhood forest garden. When we moved to the green collective community three years ago, the first item of business was a course on respecting the shared spaces, including how to harvest food from the community forest guarded. At first I expected people to trash and shared spaces, because in years past shared areas became no man lands unsafe, abused and ignored. Seeing communities like mine turn this around has created an immeasurable sense of community pride. For us fresh air revitalizes my body, especially when I've been cooped up indoors. I

breathe deeply in these walks. They allow me to recalibrate and give me time to think as we walk along I collect apples spinach, wild garlic, and mushrooms. The birds singing the canopy above and I'm starting to learn their calls Woodlark. Robin. We've learned to leave some food for the forest creatures because if we don't, they'll take the unripened fruit and vegetables, or their population will dwindle and the ecosystem will become imbalanced. forest gardens are all about balance. And learning how to keep things in balance is something we're learning from indigenous cultures around the world. Our community collective has been key in connecting indigenous elders from around the world to towns like mine, and ensuring they are fairly compensated for sharing their wisdom. It's led to flourishing indigenous communities and the regeneration of land and communities like mine all over the world. When learning the forest garden, we were told that there might be predators, they are an important part of the ecosystem. Chill runs down my spine. Slowly my breath comes again, my mind running through the possible scenarios. We aren't supposed to kill predators unless we feel our own life is in danger can even kill if my life was in danger. I was trained to make myself look bigger and make loud noises to send threatening creatures running and fear the last cry makes people leave this animal is in danger. Coco and I make eye contact and I give her the hand signal to stay by my side. She silently slinks over. I a leash her to be sure she doesn't get too curious and we press on the trail I attempt to get a view of the source of the cries. We reach a vantage point and through the mess of vines and undergrowth I see it. What is that? It's a badger. And that struggling? It seems to have a paw tangled in something, and that badger is not going anywhere. The badgers claws have carved deep troughs in the ground and its lips curl back in a smile show very large, very yellow teeth. Fudgesicles. Do I try and help the badger and risk being hurt? Do I leave and let it perish? I tie Coco's leash to a tree and instruct her to sit quietly. In my bag. I carry a set of wire cutters because the forest garden was created on an old farm and errant barbed wire in the underbrush is in regular nuisance. Looking more closely, I realized that the badgers paw is tangled. I edge the clippers out of my bag and slowly move forward.

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Peterson Toscano 28:27

That was Alison Whittaker reading her story Forest at the End of the Lane. Special thanks to the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit for their awesome badger sounds. Learn about their work at Wildcru.org. You can read more Future Solution stories like Alison's over at the CliFilmaginarium just visit withmanyroots.com. They also offer various workshops, including the online introduction to climate fiction. That site again, is withmanyroots. You will find an outline of all these storytelling tips in our show notes. There will also be links to the various resources I mentioned, just visit CCLusa.org. Under the blog tab, select climate change podcast look for episode 78. What is an effective climate story? Do you want to learn more about climate storytelling, and get some experience and a group? Join me for a storytelling celebration. Citizens Climate Education will host a free online storytelling workshop, January 17 2023. I will share activities and insights. You're going to walk away with fresh inspiration in telling your compelling climate stories. It's going to be fun and informative. Join me on Tuesday, January 17 2023. At 8pm Eastern time, we will gather on Zoom to register for the training visit CCL usa.org/story, that CCL usa.org/story. Our time is nearly up, but we still have time for Tamra Staton in the resilience corner.

T

Tamara Staton 31:02

Hi, I'm Tamra Staton, CCL's education and resilience coordinator. And this is the Resilience

Corner. I want to do everything that I can to see that you have what you need to stay strong and steady in the important climate work that you're doing. Last month in the corner, we reviewed five key steps to deepening resilience, noticing, accepting, seeking help, practicing and repeating that process regularly. And then we took a deeper look at the first step noticing. While it's clearly important to notice the world around us. This first step of noticing encourages awareness of what's happening within us. And this can bring us closer to accepting our experience and the world as it is. And that's step two that we're going to explore today. Accepting. There are two aspects of acceptance that can help us deepen our resilience. The first one involves making space and allowing for our thoughts, feelings and needs. Because when it comes right down to it, what you need is what you need. The second part of acceptance involves a willingness to see our surroundings and circumstances exactly as they are in the moment. Acceptance in this way, free from judgment allows us to focus our energy and attention on what matters most. As a foreign language teacher, I feel pretty fascinated by word origins, the Latin root of the word acceptance mean, to take something to oneself, in my words, bring closer bring something towards your heart in a way that resonates and allows you to be close to it. This is the goal with acceptance. But it's not always easy, right? How often do we know exactly what we need? Last night, I was grumpy and irritable. I didn't know why. Initially, I resisted my inner grump, and felt frustrated and annoyed with me my mood and not knowing why I felt this way. But then I remembered, make space allow, bring closer and with time and clarity around what I needed, my mood improved. Then there's the challenge of judgment and expectation. Once I'm clear on what I want or need, I can get pretty judgy about that need. Sometimes I tend to make my needs or feelings meet all sorts of things about me or others. If I'm tired during the day, I may get all up in my head about how I should have gone to bed earlier. If I'm hungry and need to eat, I might get hypercritical about what to eat, and how often it's so easy to spin out into criticism, especially with those needs that feel harder to meet. One challenge with his judgment, however, is that it makes it much harder to meet the need. Instead of hearing the need to hear the story that I'm telling myself about needing it. For the moment though, the best and most effective way through is with non judgmental acceptance. Accepting our internal experience is definitely helpful. Similarly beneficial, is making space and allowing for what's happening around us. This can be challenging, particularly when the circumstances don't favor us or leave us feeling deeply concerned, like climate change or election results. There's a big part of me big that doesn't want to accept certain things as they are. My desire for change motivates me to act. And I like that. Sometimes I worry that if I just accept things as they are, I'll just give up. But when I really think about it, accepting something doesn't mean I like it. Acceptance doesn't have to be a stamp of approval. Instead, the process of accepting of taking something to myself creates a level of peace and ease. It helps me to see things more clearly without being distracted by defiance. And that clarity makes more space to take action where it really matters. Next month, we'll take a closer look at asking for help. But for now, see what you can do to give yourself latitude to feel what you feel and need what you need without judgment, because we need you and your deep commitment to a livable planet Earth. I'm Tamra Stayton with resilience corner, I thank you for being here and for your commitment to progress. To learn more about tools, trainings, and resources for deepening resilience, check out our resilience hub at CCL.usa.org. Forward slash resilience. From there, you can also access and share resilience corner videos with friends and family who might be interested. And until next month, remember this, you are strong, you are resilient, and you've got what it takes to make good things happen.

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Peterson Toscano 36:26

Thank you Tamra, I am loving this series so much, especially how much you're encouraging to

us, which I know we all need. At least I know I need. Thank you. The resilience corner is made possible through a collaboration with Tamra Stayton education and resilience coordinator for Citizens Climate Education. The resiliency Hub website is [CCL usa.org/resilience](http://CCLusa.org/resilience). Thank you so much for joining me for episode 78 of Citizens Climate radio. Next month, we will do a deep dive into what I see as the most effective type of climate change story. The stories about climate solutions. Alan Gratz is the author of the new young adult climate fiction book *Two Degrees* he will share with us his writing process and will read from the book. You'll also learn about the climate solution motivation story, perhaps the hardest and most effective type of story to tell. Special thanks to the members of our Advisory Board: Tamara Staton, Meggie Stenback, Katie Zakrzewski, Sharon Bagatell, Caillie Roach, Solemi Hernandez, Hannah Rogers, Sean Dague, and Brett Cease. Citizens Climate Radio is written and produced by meâ€”Peterson Toscano. Other technical support from Ricky Bradley and Brett Cease. Social media assistance from Ashley Hunt-Mortorano, Flannery Winchester, Katie Zakrzewski, Finley Hungerford, and Steve Valk. Moral support from Madeline Para. The music on today's show comes from [epidemic sound.com](http://epidemic.sound.com). Please share citizen climate radio with your friends and colleagues. You'll find us wherever you listen to podcasts. Visit CCLusa.org. To see our show notes and find links to our guest. Citizens Climate radio is a project of Citizens Climate Education.