

How to Tell a Climate Change Solution Story

Citizens Climate Radio Episode 79

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SPEAKERS

Steve Fambro, Juno, Allison Whitaker, Alan Gratz, Errick D. Simmons, Tamara Staton, Peterson Toscano, Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz

Peterson Toscano 00:00

Welcome to Citizens Climate Radio, a climate change podcast. In this show, we highlight people's stories, we celebrate your successes, and together we share strategies for talking about climate change. I'm your host Peterson Toscano Welcome to Episode 79 of Citizens Climate Radio, a project of Citizens Climate Education. This episode is airing on Tuesday, December 27 2022.

Peterson Toscano 00:26

Today, you will hear about climate stories that highlight climate change solutions. In the art house novelist Alan Gratz explains why telling climate change stories is so challenging, even for professionals. After years writing about other topics, his young readers asked him to take on climate change. He listened and recently published the novel Two Degrees. In the Resilience Corner Tamara Staton continues unpacking the five steps to resiliency. This time, she helps us to ask for the help we need. And I have good news to share. Lots of good news. In fact, this whole episode explores examples of stories that point to climate solutions.

Peterson Toscano 01:10

Last month. I told you about stories that highlight the impacts of climate change. These are stories about extreme weather, as well as the many changes happening all around us. In this episode, we look at the second type of climate story, it is the story that reveals the impacts of climate solutions. This is a much harder story to tell, because many of the best solutions are still on the table. In fact, you're working hard to get lawmakers and community leaders to take these solutions seriously, and put them into practice. In say 25 or 50 years, we will be able to tell many stories about the beneficial impacts these solutions will have. But we need to tell the stories today.

Peterson Toscano 02:03

There are three different types of climate solution impact stories, you can tell. Number one, the Current Solution Success story. Number two, the Future Solution Success story. And number three, the Solution Motivation story. And don't worry, I will have an outline of this information in our show notes.

Peterson Toscano 02:24

Number one, the climate solution success story. For this one, I look to the experts Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. In addition to the research they do in the many resources they provide yells climate communication also regularly reaches the public through Yale Climate Connections. This is a daily short radio program that provides original reporting and commentary on climate change. You can listen to these online as well and through a podcast. Each episode is only 90 seconds. Turns out you can say an awful lot in 90 seconds. At least a third of Yale Climate Connections stories are climate solution, success stories. Sometimes they report on a new breakthrough in technology, or they introduce us to an important person or group pursuing climate solutions. The episode can be about a solution that has been put into action. So here are two stories from Yale Climate Connections.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 03:26

I'm Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz, and this is Climate Connections. Soon some electric vehicle drivers will be able to run errands and then power up their vehicles without plugging in. They'll just need sunshine. Steve Fambro is co founder of Aptera Motors Corp. His team created a three wheeled electric vehicle with built in solar cells that provide enough energy to cover many people's daily driving needs.

Steve Fambro 03:53

It'll operate like a normal electric vehicle. But all the while you've got this imaginary extension cord that's charging you up 20 3040 miles a day in some places.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 04:03

The vehicle which is slated to go into production next year looks like something out of a sci fi movie. Imagine a shark without the fin. He says that aerodynamic shape and the vehicles lightweight materials help maximize efficiency that allows the solar cells to power up to 40 miles of driving each day.

Steve Fambro 04:22

In a regular EV it just wouldn't be efficient enough, you know you would cover the whole thing and cells and the car might go five miles 10 miles, something like that.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 04:30

The efficiency also allows the Aptera to have a large range when it's been plugged in and fully charged. The Aptera with the largest battery pack option can go up to 1000 miles. So pairing hyper efficient design with solar cells can help reduce the need for fossil fuels.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 04:55

The Mississippi River runs from Minnesota to Louisiana, bringing opportunities for recreation and industry to the communities along its banks. But as the climate changes, the river also brings a growing risk of costly and dangerous floods.

Errick D. Simmons 05:09

Our organization was founded out of necessity 10 years ago to help cities deal with some devastating flooding and drought conditions that have been a persistent issue for our river valley.

05:20

Errick D. Simmons is Mayor of Greenville, Mississippi and co chair of the Mississippi River cities and towns initiative, the bipartisan group of mayors is working together to reduce the impacts of extreme weather.

Errick D. Simmons 05:33

One of the things we're doing together is deploying over 66,000 acres of new natural infrastructure along the entire Mississippi River involving eight states in over 30 cities.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 05:45

They've partnered with the nonprofit Ducks Unlimited to restore more than 60 wetlands near the river. When complete, the project areas will provide wildlife habitat and help hold excess water during storms.

Errick D. Simmons 05:57

This nature based infrastructure will lessen the impact that our cities are seeing and also lessen the burden that our folks incur on a yearly basis as a result of climate change.

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz 06:08

Climate Connections is produced by the Yale Center for Environmental communication. To hear more stories like this visit climateconnections.org

Peterson Toscano 06:18

That was Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz and Yale Climate Connections telling us current climate solution success stories to hear and read more of these stories visit [Yale climate connections.org](https://climateconnections.org) So the first type of story is the current climate solution success story.

Peterson Toscano 06:34

Next, we consider the future climate success story. This type of story relies on our efforts to envision and imagine the world filled with the solutions we advocate. We want to paint a picture of a future worth pursuing. And when we succeed, we create a yearning and others for this better world. When I am looking for a story like this, I head over to the CLI fi Imaginarium.

Allison Whitaker 07:05

The Cli-fi Imaginarium was my colleague Sofia's idea.

Peterson Toscano 07:09

That's Alison Whitaker.

Allison Whitaker 07:11

She dreamed up a space in the early lockdowns of 2020, where we could imagine a different future, a future filled with solutions, a future that was hopeful, and a future that was co created. She built a space for that called the cafe Imaginarium, we have a group that meets twice a month, we choose a topic, the topic is a solution, preferably a very dry one. But we go with a lot of different solutions. The dry ones are actually really fun because what happens is, people make them interesting. They also stick with you. Something like district heating is not something I can tell you I would normally engage with. But after having read so many district heating stories, I know exactly what it is. And I can imagine a world where it might be a reality for people. We're trying to help people create a future that they want to live in. And we are over dystopia.

Peterson Toscano 08:14

Last month I shared a radio drama version of Alison's story Forest at the End of the Lane. This story was inspired by a climate solution known as tree intercropping.

Allison Whitaker 08:25

This is another solution that I probably wouldn't have engaged with had it not been for classify forest intercropping is basically creating a garden in a forest. So you have all of the benefits of the carbon sequestration in the forest, and you have the added benefit of food.

Peterson Toscano 08:45

Every month I attend the free online intro to climate fiction workshops. So far, I've written four stories inspired by four different climate solutions. Writing the stories feels like time travel. Imagining the world we are working to achieve helps me build endurance and determination. If you want a shot of inspiration, head over to the CLI fi Imaginarium visit withmanyroots.com. They offer various workshops, including the online introduction to climate fiction. That site again is with many roots.com.

Peterson Toscano 09:21

So far, we've looked at stories that highlight current climate change solutions, and stories that point to a future world filled with climate solutions. Now for our third and final type, the climate solution motivation story. This story reveals why I am motivated to do the climate work I'm doing. The story itself may not seem to have anything to do with climate change. Still, this story goes right to the heart of our work. So I will tell you one of my own climate solution, motivation stories. And remember our stories are compelling when we include specific details and emotions. As you hear my story, listen for the specific details I weave into it. Also consider the emotions I include in the story and stir up inside of you. Here is the story of my very first memory.

Peterson Toscano 10:20

The first memory I have, is of me, panicked, like I'm underwater and struggling to breathe. There are loud noises, there's there's crying, there is shouting, there's sirens. Then the next thing I know I'm in this plastic oxygen tent, with strangers peering at me. My mom's nowhere to be seen. I had yet another serious asthma attack. We lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and virtually everyone in my class had asthma. My mom kept looking for solutions, bringing me to doctors trying new medicines, but nothing worked. So then my family decided to do something radical, to move out of the city to the countryside in the Catskills in upstate New York. And I have to say, at first, I hated it. It was so scary being in the country with wild animals or bugs and things I didn't understand. And none of my friends were nearby and, and there was no like neighborhood to ride around in. But after a while, I settled in and started a new life with new friends, and with the ability to breathe deeply, play freely and live a healthy life.

Peterson Toscano 11:47

Now, you may be thinking, Okay, it's a compelling story, but what on earth does it have to do with climate change? And where is the climate solution in it? My story contains in it one of the reasons I do climate work. You may not see it though, because that reason is locked in the story needs to be opened with a key. That key is the climate pivot. Now, the climate pivot is not a dance move you're likely to see at the Citizens Climate national conference dance party. Although it would be a good move the climate pivot, the pivot happens when you jump off your story into the climate solution you're proposing. After I

tell my story, I then add the climate pivot, I connect the story to my climate work. The pivot is essential in helping people understand why I told the story about struggling with asthma as a child.

Peterson Toscano 12:42

After telling the story, I say something like, "and that is why I'm committed to the transition to clean energy. I believe people should be able to live in the places where they thrive. Cities should be and can be filled with fresh air where children and adults have healthy lungs and bodies. By ending fossil fuel pollution, we will save lives, we will live better lives in the places we love. That is the world I am fighting for, to make it happen. I'm talking to members of Congress about carbon pricing, urban forest and electrification of homes and businesses. And I can really use your help."

Peterson Toscano 13:21

So I have the story. And then the pivot. This combination will likely get someone interested in the solution I'm proposing. They then need a practical, meaningful, achievable next step. So I might ask, "want to join me for the next local Citizens Climate Lobby meeting?" Or "would you be willing to receive a monthly text alert with a specific, achievable and meaningful climate action step?"

Peterson Toscano 13:47

Alright, let's summarize everything we covered today. We covered three different types of Climate Solutions stories. Number one, the current solution success story. This might be a story about a breakthrough in technology, or might be about an important person or group who suddenly is on board and pursuing climate change solutions. It might even be about a solution that has been put into action. Number two, the future climate success story. This one requires your imagination to envision what the future will look like, with solutions in place. This is a form of CLI fi or climate fiction. And finally, number three, the climate solution motivation story. This story reveals why you are so passionate about a particular climate change solution. Once you tell a compelling story, you can then do the climate change pivot, connect your story to the solution you are pursuing. But don't just leave them with a pivot. Provide your listener with a specific, meaningful and achievable next step. And it might be as simple as asking, do you want to hang out sometime next week to talk more about this?

Peterson Toscano 14:59

You'll find an outline of what we just heard in our show notes. There you'll also find links to Yale Climate Connections, the CLI fi Imaginarium and more just visit CCLusa.org. Under the blog tab, select climate change podcast, look for episode 79. How to Tell climate change solution stories coming up, professional writer grapples with climate change storytelling, you will hear all about his new novel, Two Degrees.

Peterson Toscano 15:32

Okay, do you want to learn more about climate change storytelling, we want to get some experience in a group. Join me for a storytelling celebration. Citizens Climate Education will host a free online storytelling workshop January 17 2023. There I will share activities and some insights that give you feedback to your stories and your story ideas. You're going to walk away with fresh inspiration and telling your compelling climate stories. I promise you it's going to be fun and informative. So join me on Tuesday, January 17 2023. At 8pm Eastern time, we will gather on Zoom to register for the training, visit CCLusa.org/story.

Alan Gratz 16:25

This might have been the hardest book I've ever written.

Peterson Toscano 16:27

That's Alan Gratz, an author of nearly 20 books that he wrote for young adults. In his latest book, he takes on climate change.

Alan Gratz 16:36

I began to write books that kids really responded to what I like to call social thrillers, compelling books. They were thrilling books that also tackled larger issues. This all began with me writing a book about the Holocaust. I met a guy who'd survived 10 Different Nazi concentration camps in World War Two, and lived to tell the tale. His name was Jack Bruner. I worked on this book with him to tell his story. And kids responded to it. And I got so many letters saying we want more books like this. At first, it was more books about World War Two. But then as I expanded with books like Refugee, which told one story set during World War Two, the story set in the 1930s. When I opened things up to writing about bigger topics that were a little bit more contemporary, and kids really responded. And they said, We want to book about 911. So I wrote a book about 911. Once I wrote a book about 911. They said we want to book about climate change. And I was like, whoa, okay, that's different. It's not a specific event. Like I've written about D day. I've written about the Battle of Okinawa. I was like, boy, this isn't a specific event. This is a big, a big, big topic. But I think that's the reason why so many kids asked me to do it, they kind of come to my books, I think looking for both an exciting read, but also a way to understand a big, unwieldy topic in a way that is approachable for middle schoolers.

Peterson Toscano 18:03

In a moment, Alan will read from his new climate change novel, Two Degrees. Writing books has been an important part of his ongoing learning about issues and topics that interest young people.

Alan Gratz 18:18

I'm not an expert on anything that I write about. I don't have a PhD in World War Two history. I wasn't in the Twin Towers on 911, or anything like that. Just like I had to research those topics. I had to research climate change. I read a lot of people who were very alarmist and I read a lot of people who were like, it's bad, but it's not the worst thing ever. And I just tried to take all that in and say, Well, look, climate change is real. And I told my editor right away, I was like, I'm not arguing in this book, that climate change is real. We're gonna work from the assumption that climate change is real.

Peterson Toscano 18:54

Like many of us telling climate change stories, he had a lot to say. He ran the risk of overwhelming the story with data and facts.

Alan Gratz 19:03

My first draft had so much science and so much to talk about climate change. And my editor was like, This is good. It's very informative, but we're not reading nonfiction, we have to take some of this back out. That's where a really great editor can help you. Remember to focus on story but also get all that stuff in there that you want to get in there.

Peterson Toscano 19:24

Alan overcame the challenges and crafted a novel with three individual narratives woven together. This braided approach reveals multiple aspects of the climate crisis through the eyes of four young

characters. I very much enjoyed reading the book, but then I'm always a sucker for a good climate story. But what about the middle schoolers Alan wants to reach, especially those not involved with the climate movement? Does it work for them? To find out I asked the son of a friend to read *Two Degrees*. He reviewed it for us.

Juno 19:57

My name is Juno. I'm 13 years old. I pretty much never read, and I read comic books when I do read

Peterson Toscano 20:05

For you picking up this book for someone who almost never reads, what was it like starting off?

Juno 20:12

The atmosphere is very dramatic. I would recommend it for my friend, Henry, who is obsessed with disaster movies, and survival movies. The only kind of books I've read, like the problem was like, there's like a killer or something or like a villain. Never before ever read a book where there's like an natural disaster is me. It's like interesting.

Peterson Toscano 20:38

Am I right in remembering that you like music a lot? Yeah, I do. So if you were to choose a song to go with this book, what might that song be?

Juno 20:51

That's a hard question. Some kind of hard rock that's very hardcore and a lot of electric guitar.

Alan Gratz 21:18

Owen and George are two boys who live in Churchill, Manitoba up in Canada. Their story is about polar bears who are spending more time on land because the Arctic sea ice is melting earlier in the spring and coming later in the winter. At a time when they don't think that there will be polar bears in the interior, there are. They run into a mama bear that wrecks them a little bit and then they are pursued by a male polar bear later on across the tundra as they're trying to get home. So at this point in the story, George and Owen are on foot, they've lost their snowmobile. They're a little bit wounded, but still able to keep trekking through the tundra.

Alan Gratz 21:58

They're trying to get back to Churchill. And while they're walking, Owen is thinking about a lot of the things that he has seen in a round Churchill that he's not really paid attention to. He's kind of having a personal reckoning with what he is seeing it not really understood.

Alan Gratz 22:18

I'm not totally oblivious Owen thought as they walk. He saw the permafrost walls and ponds and lakes crumble and flood. He smelled the wildfires on the tundra. He laughed at the weather lady letting lake farts on fire. Pointed out to the tourists, all the red foxes and workers and grizzly bears that were pushing out native species because it was warm enough for the new animals to live here now. He knew too that the polar bear season was getting longer and longer every year, because it meant more money for him and his family. What Owen wasn't doing was thinking about what any of that really meant. Crumbling permafrost lake walls were one thing. But what happened when it got so hot that the houses in town began to settle and sink into the softer soil? What would the mama polar bears do for dens

when wildfires destroyed their ancestral bedding sites? What happened with all the new animals in the North killed off the Arctic foxes and belugas and narwalls and polar bears? They already lived there. And even though the warmer temperatures meant a longer tourist season, how long could the polar bears everyone was coming to see survive if they kept losing more and more hunting time on the sea ice every year? The big picture. That's what he was beginning to see now. And the big picture was climate change. What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic, Owen thought.

Peterson Toscano 23:53

The book is Two Degrees by Alan Gratz. It is available wherever you get books. To learn more about Alan and his books, visit Alan.gratz.com Oh, and I shared Juno's review with Alan and he has a message for you know.

Alan Gratz 24:14

Hey, Juno, thank you so much for reading Two Degrees. I'm so glad that you loved it. It means a lot to me that you read it and that you gave it a great review. I hope you'll tell more people about it and I hope you'll keep reading my books and other people's books.

Peterson Toscano 24:30

If you have an idea for the art house, feel free to contact me radio@citizensclimate.org Coming up Tamara Staton and the Resilience Corner

Tamara Staton 24:48

Hi, I'm Tamra Staton, CCLs education and resilience coordinator and this is the Resilience Corner. I want to do everything that I can And 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 second step, accepting. When we are intentional about building our strength and focus in the face of climate change, it impacts others as well. This is the power of the third step that we're going to explore today. Seeking help.

Tamara Staton 25:36

We are social and communal beings. Our brains are wired to connect with other people. This leaves us somewhat dependent upon others for their help. At the same time, many of us grew up in cultures that encourage independence. cultures that assign a certain amount of weakness or immaturity, around relying on others. Cultures that expect us to tough it out or just deal with it, so as not to appear fragile, broken, or needy. It's hard for some of us then, who recognize our need for connection and social acceptance, to lean into something that isn't as accepted by society, asking for help and leaning on others. We might worry about being perceived as a failure, or about burdening or inconveniencing others if we asked for help. While I certainly haven't mastered this skill, I do have three ideas that might ease the process.

Tamara Staton 26:31

Number one, practice asking for help when your needs are simple. "Can you show me where that is? Can you lend me a hand here? Would you be willing to take out the garbage for me tonight?" Practicing with simple needs makes it easier to ask for help. When you have bigger, more emotional needs. It also expands your health network.

Tamara Staton 26:53

Number two, remember that asking for help is hard for many people. When you ask for help, you are making it easier for others to do the same. "Do you have a few minutes to listen? Can I vent for a few? Do you have time for coffee this week?" Your vulnerability positively impacts others.

Tamara Staton 27:12

And number three, be real when people check in with you. Next month, we'll take a closer look at the practice of resilience building. But for now, see what you can do to consider where some help might be nice. And then practice asking. "Do you have time to talk? Can you give me your opinion on something? Can I have a hug?" Whatever you need, just remember this, you are not alone and people are available to help. Friends, family, colleagues, neighbors, as well as support groups and health professionals. Asking them for help may likely ease some stress. And that's important because we need you and your deep commitment to a livable planet Earth. I'm Tamara Staton with the 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 CCLusa.org/esilience. 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.

Peterson Toscano 28:38

The Resilience Corner is made possible through a collaboration with Tamara Staton, education and resilience coordinator for Citizens Climate Education. The resiliency Hub website is [CCL usa.org/resilience](https://CCLusa.org/resilience).

Peterson Toscano 28:55

Thank you so much for joining me for episode 79 of Citizens Climate Radio. Here at Citizens Climate Education. We are all about getting the public and members of Congress excited about climate change solutions. These include carbon pricing, promoting healthy forest, building electrification, and more. To find out how you can get involved visit CCLusa.org.

Peterson Toscano 29:20

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 me—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. Visit CCLusa.org To see our show notes and find links to our guests. Citizens Climate Radio is a project of Citizens Climate Education