

Global Change

Matt: Hey, Kate, did you read this article in the National Geographic? I can't believe how much man is changing the planet.

Kate: Yeah, I had a look at it. Quite interesting I suppose if you believe that sort of thing.

Matt: What? What do you mean, "if you believe that sort of thing"? Are you saying you don't believe that we are damaging the planet?

Kate: To be honest, Matt, not really.

Matt: Are you saying global warming isn't a fact, deforestation isn't a fact, the greenhouse effect isn't actually happening?

Kate: Hey, calm down Matt. I just think too many people take these things as being definitely true without knowing all the facts.

Matt: You really don't think global warming is happening. You know they've said sea levels are going to rise by quite a few meters over the next fifty to a hundred years. Weather conditions are getting worse all over the world. Can you remember how many big hurricanes there have been in the United States over the last few years? I think evidence is all around us.

Kate: I don't think we have enough information to be honest. We've only been measuring these things for around two or three hundred years. We have no idea what was happening fifty thousand years ago. For all we know, this is just a natural blip in the whole climate cycle. I don't think we should change how we're living just because of twenty years of abnormal measurements.

Matt: And don't you think all the other effects we're having on the planet are destructive?

Kate: What do you mean?

Matt: I mean, like, deforestation, overpopulation, threatening the existence of many endangered animals, pollution of the air and the seas. I mean, I could go on if you want!

Kate: No, I understand what you're saying and, yes, it's true that there are several problems worldwide caused by human influence. I think the destruction of the Amazon rainforest is really dangerous and it's something we could live to regret. I read somewhere that they were considered to be the "lungs of the planet" and there we are happily chopping it all down. And it would be a shame to lose some of those animals that may become extinct, you know, like the rhino or the panda. But we shouldn't

interfere with nature. If they are going to become extinct, then we have to allow nature to take its course.

Matt: You've just contradicted yourself in two sentences, Kate. First you said it's bad that we're interfering with nature by destroying the rainforest and then...

Kate: That's not the same thing!

Matt: Well, of course it is! The only reason 99% of these animals are endangered is precisely because we are threatening their habitats, either by chopping it down as you say or by expanding towns and farming into areas where these animals normally live and hunt. You can't destroy an animal's habitat and then turn around and say we can't interfere with nature to save it.

Kate: I don't think having twenty panda cubs in zoos around the world is a very smart way to save an animal. It's totally artificial and is cruel to the animals involved.

Matt: I would go along with that, yes. The real solution is to save the animal's original habitat. So, does this mean you don't really agree with renewable energy sources either? Don't you see the sense in trying to lessen man's impact on the planet?

Kate: I think we need to start looking for alternative sources of oil.

Matt: You mean alternative sources of energy?

Kate: No, of oil. This country imports too much oil from overseas and we need to become more self-sufficient.

Matt: But that's crazy, Kate. There will be no more oil left in fifty to seventy years' time. We have to start looking seriously at alternative energy sources such as solar and wind.

Kate: Look, I don't see it as being very realistic to expect people to go back to using windmills and the like. It's naive to think we could do that. Are all automobiles going to have solar panels in the roof or a little windmill on top?

Matt: It would be highly irresponsible of this country to move towards an oil-free future without having planned for where energy is going to come from. I worry that we will all have to start building nuclear power stations again.

Kate: If there's no more oil left, then I can't see any alternative. I'm not really worried. We always seem to find a solution to most things but there are always pessimists like yourself telling the rest of us that the world's going to end, etcetera etcetera. I won't be fooled into panicking.

Matt: Fooled? I simply don't understand your blasé attitude towards all this, Kate. Your father works in the power plant too. I would have thought you would have had a real interest in all this.

Kate: My father? My father is the biggest sceptic of all. He thinks everyone is just trying to force up the price of gas and oil to make a quick buck. And, to be honest, I tend to believe him. Take the ozone hole, for example. You don't hear about that anymore. I remember ten years ago, you couldn't switch on the TV or pick up a newspaper or magazine without seeing satellite images of the huge hole and how we were all going to burn and get skin cancer.

Matt: Kate, that was twenty years ago and you know why we don't talk about it anymore, don't you?

Kate: Because we've got some new scare stories to tell people?

Matt: Not at all! That was and still is a serious issue, which is why the world leaders got together, in Montreal I think it was, and banned immediately all the chemicals that were causing that ozone hole.

Kate: The CFC's?

Matt: Exactly. That was a perfect example of mankind actually working together and achieving great results when the need arises. I fear we will have to do the same for all these other issues, such as global warming, and I just hope we won't wake up too late.

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