

We Are Earth

Everything changes over time.

It's natural. Though in some cases, time does not fundamentally alter a substance. The very foundations of my being, the Earth, are somewhat the same after some 4.54 billion years. I do not know fully how I came to be or where I am going in this vast, star-studded universe. Despite this, I let change carry me forward, slowly but surely.

But change can also happen in an instant. And for this floating rock in space, that change was humanity.

I realized a few centuries ago that the species inhabiting my celestial body were not properly caring for me. The *Homo sapiens*, or humans, as they call themselves, are greedy. They prioritize their comfort over growth and make a mockery of my natural resources, shredding my forests and coastlines, for their cities and computers. I was not their equal.

Despite this, I understand them. Because I was, am, and continue to be humanity. Energy is neither created nor destroyed, and the energy that enriches human life is the same energy that drives my ocean currents, the seasonal winds, and the cycling of my geothermal vents.

In my vast collection of lives, I was once a boy named Jian. I was born and grew up in Los Angeles, California. That area of the world was a muddled metropolis, but that was before. It eventually became optimized and energy-efficient, yet this green city rose out from the smoke of inequality, disempowerment, food scarcity, inefficient energy, and poverty.

I became aware of the failing state of my government on a normal day, when I was getting a glass of water. The water that came out of the tap was cloudy and tasted salty, bitter, and vaguely toxic, as if someone had dipped dirty socks into tepid saltwater. It was disgusting. And at the time, nobody knew that a sand shortage was the cause. I found out later that sand was the second most used natural resource on Earth. Its inherent value as a water purification filter made it invaluable for human wellbeing, but it was being exploited as a capital export for integrated chip building and construction around the world.

As I grew into a man, I learned that sand was just the tip of the iceberg. There were shortages everywhere, not just in sand, but in the resources that kept humanity functioning. Not to mention that humanity was at war with itself, in gender, societies, governments, and cultures.

But I was lucky to grow up in the Giant Leap Generation, a campaign that started with environmentalists, philosophers, and activists that decided enough was enough. Over thirty years, young people everywhere built the We Are Earth Initiative from the ground up, deciding that every generation should have a fair chance at life.

I was, in this changing world, a material scientist. I strived to create a world where science and nature lived in harmony, so I developed a sustainable, cheap, nontoxic material that could be made from ocean trash and invasive plant fibers. It was durable and it could be made transparent with a simple chemical

modification. One day, I successfully proposed to the We Are Earth Council that we could replace the world's reliance on glass, concrete, and plastics with this new material. It was a box checked off their list! Almost immediately, construction workers started to use my material instead of concrete, asphalt, mortar, and plaster. Glass windows were also replaced, and since the material was cheap, it could be utilized worldwide with little effort. The manufacturing process also required little energy and created no harmful byproducts, creating safe working conditions for the many jobs that this invention created. This change wasn't quick by any means. But it was constant, and the effects could be felt around the globe.

It almost felt like a different world when my son and I decided to go to Los Angeles's beaches to swim and build sandcastles. It was the absolute peak of summer heat, but now, heat had a different meaning from when I was young. Back then, heat was something you avoided at all costs. It could kill you, and had already killed millions. But in this moment, a midsummer swim in the ocean was the remedy to melt all of your worries away. The emerald green water was full of beneficial nutrients and stunning marine life. Contaminants had been removed from the world's oceans a few years ago, and along the coastline, the horizon sparkled radiantly. It was a scene that had been earned, grain by grain, over the Giant Leap years. I was snapped back to reality by my son shaking my leg.

“ㅇㅈㅈ! ㅇㅈㅈ! (Appa! Appa! Dad! Dad!) Whatever it is you're doing, it's boring. I want to race with you!”

He started to sprint across the whole beach, hand in hand with mine. I recalled all the details I had felt, and I could imagine what my son was experiencing now. Reflecting on the gritty sand in my water cup, I couldn't help but marvel at how soft and pure the sand felt under our feet now. And as the Earth, I felt the gentle rhythmic pounding on my surface as Jian and his son bounded towards the ocean.

I realized after the Giant Leap that the species living with me were capable of great care. The humans had the capacity to be as kind as they could be greedy. And through change, they gathered the courage to put aside their comfort to prioritize mine, restoring my trees and oceans for our longevity and happiness.

Change happens in an instant, and for this floating rock in space, that change continues to be humanity.

Though the very foundations of my being are somewhat the same after billions of years, I know that humanity is strong enough to be a positive force in the universe, where we will travel through the stars together, as equals.

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