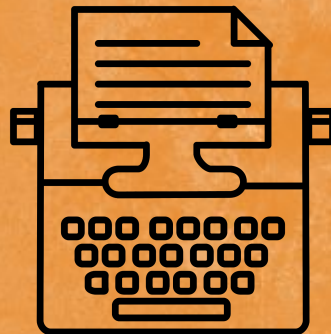


Title: Archive's File 0703: Letter to a victim of climate change

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FORMAS



Archive's File 0703: Letter to a victim of climate change

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Dear Grandma,

You and I never met, but we have so much in common. I saw a photo of you, which is rare for the time in which you lived, and we look so alike. Through my mother's stories and my imagination, I've been able to experience all your adventures, even the most tragic ones. We are both victims, though in different ways, of the bad actions and failures of us humans. Part of me enjoyed travelling with my mind, Grandma, pretending to be the strong, determined, and intelligent woman my mom told me you were, but I really would have liked to know you in person... while you were alive. I feel like they took you away from me, as if the bad conditions of the past had torn you from me. But who can we blame for this, if not ourselves? Mom found the courage to tell me about the circumstances of your death forty-eight years ago. Rome in 2140 was like a glowing metal: the heat was unbearable, the air heavy, the sunlight so intensely hot and blinding that you couldn't tell when you had been scorched. The cement roads were impassable, not to mention the toxic fumes emanating from the heat, and the sky was red and filled with dense smoke from the fires.

Mom told me how difficult it was to find water to drink, wash, or cook. In 2139, they built thirty-three wells across the city to collect water. To this day, only three of those wells remain, abandoned, and the one you used is still standing. How many people, like you, collected poisoned water from those wells every day, Grandma? How many, like you, used it to drink, wash clothes, or cook a plate of pasta? Grandma, you didn't die, that oil company responsible for the contamination slowly killed you. And along with you, another 1,916 people in 2152. At first, Mom and Dad's community thought they were miscalculating the numbers, there were so many of you. But, Grandma, do you want to know the saddest thing? Your graves are no longer there; that oil company sent men to destroy everything one night, as if your lives hadn't already been shattered into thousands of pieces. Fights and threats followed, but the damage had already been done. And you didn't get the justice you deserved. The other day at university, we talked about one of the worst periods of the 21st century, the period between 2130 and 2160, when you lived, Grandma, remembered today as "The Dark Thirty Years." The Massacre of the Wells happened right at the end of this period. The Thirty Years was a time of total blockage of human activities, a total blackout that involved all institutions: schools, universities, hospitals, art academies. Italy couldn't withstand the blow and almost fell into total anarchy, like Germany and France, if not for a slight improvement in the weather, which had caused despair among the 40 million people on the peninsula. The air quality had never dropped to such low levels, not even in 2077, when the global temperature increased almost reached 2.5°. It is said that during the Thirty Years, the sky was black, and the rain was so thick with fog that the water almost felt solid. Trees and parks in Rome were almost nonexistent, and the frequent fires flared up with incredible speed: many of the victims of those times died consumed by flames. Finding food, even hunting simple game,

had become a task that only a few—the strongest—who could survive on little, managed to complete. The population was at an all-time low.

When, finally, in 2163, during the 70th Climate Summit, nations worldwide unanimously voted to ban any activities or sales related to oil or non-renewable energy sources, things finally started to change. I wasn't born yet, Grandma, but my parents told me everyone was in disbelief, though uncontrollably happy: never before had all nations been convinced so drastically in such a general forum. With that Summit, decades and decades of struggles against climate change finally yielded concrete results. Grandma, not only was the vote unanimous, but the measures taken were immediately applied. They tell me that the positive change in the weather was extraordinary, as if we had given new oxygen to the Earth, a new breath, or a new soul. We don't really deserve any credit, except for stopping the alteration of the Earth's balance—though too late—but knowing human nature, of love and also of selfishness, we can rejoice in the Summit and the correct actions taken afterward.

The surprising thing for Dad was seeing how, little by little, even in the months after, the rain began to fall more regularly, less heavy and dark than before. Green spaces healed, partly on their own, partly with the help of local farmers, who had an interest in feeding those who had nothing to live on, and animals returned to repopulate much of these vast green spaces. The recovery of the land was mainly achieved through the technique of permaculture, and after the Summit, dozens of videos circulated from Native American communities teaching—even to those who knew nothing about farming—how to grow more crops together in the same land in a system that didn't exhaust the already incredibly depleted soil. But it wasn't just them, Grandma: all the world's communities, from every continent and town, participated in creating these videos, showing how to build or create the most varied things—fishing poles, baskets, bowls, farming tools—so that anyone, or rather, every community, could immediately roll up their sleeves and give something to themselves, their family, and their group. During this period, many of what we now know as “communities” were born: groups of individuals from the same families who came together by proximity and, over time, decided to stay united and work for everyone's needs. At first, they were like small tribes, and the main task was to feed themselves and others, but over time, communities all over the city began to develop distinctive traits of interest or skills, forming strong hubs that began to circulate culture again and take care of their neighbourhoods. Mom and Dad met in one of these communities, “Lo Spicchio.” Local realities, in fact, eventually took root as working groups, political critical mass, and, naturally, as artistic, literary, scientific, and philosophical exchange groups. The best new physicists, biologists, and doctors of today were called by those local communities to universities, which were being reborn from their own ashes. Many of the agricultural technologies we have today came from the work of these individuals, who were called to study and research.

During the New Renaissance, Italy still had a centralised government, but failure to meet legal obligations for the Planet's protection had caused much distrust among citizens and residents of our nation. In particular, in South Rome, where I was born, many resistance groups formed against the government's attempt to restore the capitalist system, the only one until about 2090, but which, by the end of the 2010s, was considered by some—according to

philosopher Jason Moore—the main, if not the only, cause of global warming. The struggles of these Roman communities inspired new actions from north to south of Italy during the 2070s, converging into a single national movement, “Re-plant Future,” carrying one main request: to establish an economy of degrowth. The main struggles were fought between 2172 and 2175, and the feminist liberation movement was the principal vehicle for ideas and achievements, following a model of planetary ecological revolution outlined by philosopher Stefania Barca in the 2000s. Several representatives of the movement managed to enter Parliament to voice their opinions on economic decisions, and that’s when a new chapter of Italian history began: from 2179, the capitalist system as it had been known was no longer acceptable. The model of capitalist degrowth was adopted: a system in which a company’s goal was no longer to continuously raise profits, but to increasingly and substantially ensure the right to life, housing, and health for its employees; actions that didn’t only include salaries, but also agreements with companies and the public, donations of goods, listening groups, daycare at workplaces, and doctors available at work.

I, Grandma, was born in 2180, when the situation in Italy had already started to improve about twenty years earlier. Now, at twenty, I see the fruits of the hard work and effort of thousands of men and women who, for decades, have fought for their lives on a planet that was turning against us due to the consequences of our own actions.

The weather keeps improving: the sky is no longer as black as it once was, and the seasons are stabilizing, which is relatively new, as until five years ago, we had three summers and one autumn. Temperatures are much more bearable, hovering around 24°C almost year-round, both day and night, but scorching peaks of 40°C still occur. Nature has noticed this new breath, and since agricultural practices resumed after the summit, there are no longer any completely dry or barren areas, just a couple in Sicily, but with the latest engineering interventions, excellent improvements are being made.

Here in Rome, there have been many changes, starting with housing. My house was partly built by my parents, partly by their community “Salvia,” and with it, twelve other homes in the group. I spent a lot of time in my room when I was little, especially when it was too hot outside to play; now it’s a place where I keep many memories, and besides sleeping and studying, I don’t do much there. Usually, Mom and Dad and I spend time in the kitchen and living room, when every Monday and Wednesday, the Salvia exchange group brings us meat, cheese, and especially vegetables. Regarding the diet, I’ve discovered that in the past people used to eat much more meat. There were also what they called “intensive farms,” although I’ve never seen them. Recently, Parliament passed a new law declaring these farms to be violent, and this system is now illegal. We now eat meat one or two times a week but mainly consume vegetables, which grow very quickly in greenhouses or, especially, in hydroponic farms.

When leaving my house, you realize just how much cultivated land we have south of Rome, an area that decades ago was nothing but steel and concrete. On top of all the houses, there are solar panels that maximize the absorption of sunlight, and around these, there are trees, shrubs, and lush flowers, maintained by every family or condominium, so much so that thousands of small forests have sprung up all over the city.

Most of the spaces are pedestrianized, and for elderly people or those with mobility issues, it’s possible to take motorized, zero-impact wheelchairs on the streets, allowing everyone in

the city to move freely. The public transport network has been extended across all of Rome, but instead of excessively digging into the ground to create new metro lines and slowing down work for the relocation of archaeological finds, they built tram tracks pretty much everywhere, so that even a citizen from North Rome can get to the other side of the city in about 30 minutes. The incinerator here in Rome no longer exists, and now any packaging or containers produced must be biodegradable, as well as the products themselves, so as not to impact vegetation or wildlife. Alternatively, waste must be usable as fertilizer to nourish the plants.

Schools and universities in Rome, as well as throughout Italy, have reopened and are now tackling a very high illiteracy rate—about 40% on average in our country—since during the Thirty Years' period, educational activities completely halted. Many of the illiterate people are men and women around forty years old, who were neither born into education nor grew up with university. Half of the classrooms in every school are for children, and the other half are for adults or seniors. I must say that all the communities in Rome have taken it as one of their central tasks to educate their members. In my community, Tintarella di Luna, there are three men and two women who didn't know how to read or write. In just a few months, they learned to write their names and those of the other members of the group, and now they are working hard on reading. We've found a few stories from the past, some simple fairy tales to read and transcribe, for example, but many of the stories they study are created by us, inspired by climate change and the scientific discoveries of the past ten years.

Each group usually also takes care of supplying for their families: the older members, both men and women, in addition to exchanging produce from our garden, manage to get some game, either through barter or small hunting sessions, which is then donated to the families of Tintarella on a rotating basis. The communities in my neighborhood are also responsible for security, cleanliness, and the upkeep of the area, working alongside the police or the waste management authorities in the city. Politics in Italy had to make a big effort to understand how, over time, power has become less centralized, but they too have admitted that without local initiative, our country wouldn't have survived. In the end, we humans always find a way to rebalance ourselves as a presence on Earth.

Also, much of the art seen on the streets is made by us: I personally participated in the creation of the mural on Via Marconi. We depicted Mother Nature as a woman with hair like branches full of green leaves and eyes as blue as the sea of Sardinia, now being purified. Mother Nature looks down, holding a big book in her hand, which she is reading, with words like “rebirth,” “life,” “hope,” and a few small illustrations showing children and adults playing together. The meaning of the mural is about our lives, the lives of those who survived environmental catastrophes, hunger, pollution that suffocated thousands of lives around the world, petrifying their lungs. The story of humanity can never again be separated from that of the Planet; we are its creatures, and She knows this. But it is we who must rewrite our own history, Grandma, no one else can do it for us. We do this for the lost lives like yours and for those that still have hope, like mine and my future children and grandchildren... It's hope that moves us forward. We cannot afford to let it disappear. We will continue to fight.

A big hug, Grandma, I love you.
Alessandra

