

LOWER CARBON GREENER FUTURE

By Tse Yik Ching

'I am here to save the world.' said Jake.

Jake is a 13-year-old boy. His mother died of asthma one month ago. In the Closing Ceremony of the Hong Kong Asian Games in 2023, he witnessed a group of activists protesting against the poor air quality that affected athletes' performances. Being shrouded in the atmosphere of anguish and sorrow, Jake couldn't bear it anymore. He decided to give it a try to his newly-invented time traveling machine.

ZHAAAAP!!!

So here he is, back in 1997 at a school in Kowloon City, talking to a girl of his age called Nancy.

'Do I know you?' the girl asked.

'I bet you don't. I am Jake, coming from 2023.' Jake said calmly.

Nancy, with her jaw dropped, frowned and then burst out laughing. 'Tell me all about the future then!' said Nancy, challenging Jake.

Jake shrugged and said, 'Believe it or not, in 2023, the environment is at a tipping point. The sky is no longer blue and the air is filthy. The carbon dioxide level and Air Pollution Index are always high!'

'Are you serious?' Nancy asked skeptically.

'Of course! That's why I am here now. I want to change the future and save...someone.' Jake says.

'What a lofty ideal!' Nancy sneered at Jake.

'Listen, the phenomenon can be attributed to the high carbon dioxide emission. If you now start leading a low carbon life, you can create a greener future.' Jake said ambitiously.

'What can I do?' Nancy asked reluctantly, yet somehow thought what this weird

boy was saying did make sense.

Jake continued, 'You should take public transports, which is less polluting. Also, you should classify and recycle rubbish.'

'These are all cliché. Tell me something new!' Nancy groaned.

'Alright, some attempts were initiated by people ten years later. In 2008, the government implemented the levy on plastic bags. Citizens were encouraged to bring their own bag. In 2009, one year before I was born, a conference was held in Copenhagen. Leaders from over 100 nations gathered to discuss the problem of climatic change. It's indeed a milestone.' said Jake.

Nancy, getting more serious, thought, 'Does he really know the future?'

Noticing Nancy's shocked face, Jake said, 'Pitifully, these efforts were far from being enough! Problems like the surging global temperature and melting ice caps still exist in 2023. They are all omen of a coming disaster. More should be done to create a brighter future.'

Meanwhile, an aeroplane flew overhead, interrupting their conversation.

Jake stared and said, 'Oh yes, aeroplanes release a wealth of carbon, which will inevitably intensify global warming. The chlorofluorocarbons emitted will also lead to ozone depletion.'

Nancy looked a bit bothered.

'Some flights can be substituted by trains and buying locally-produced products can help!' Jake explained.

Jake took a glimpse at Nancy's lunchbox, which is full of meat, in particular, beef. The messenger from the future noticed another problem. 'Raising cattle consumes vegetation and will raise carbon dioxide emission. You should eat more vegetables but less meat.'

'One more thing,' Jake pointed to her Styrofoam lunchbox and said, 'the disposal of Styrofoam releases carbon dioxide. You should also bring your own recyclable cutlery whenever possible. Do you know that all landfills in 2023 will be saturated? Wastes should be minimized or else, you have to live with that

awful stink.'

'Changing some of your eating habits can make a great difference! Do you know that producing a can of coke releases 170g carbon? We should drink fewer soft drinks.' followed Jake.

Nancy nodded, 'It seems worth-trying.....'

Jake, who was a bit relieved, continued, 'Things may change if you are determined to make an attempt.'

Nancy said, 'Frankly, after hearing your words, leading a low carbon life is not as strenuous as I thought. On the surface, it involves the sacrifice of some comfortable lifestyles. However, it can bring us to a more desirable, favorable and livable future ultimately.'

'Pathetically, not all people think in this way.' Jake sighed softly, 'but you can do your utmost to persuade others to change their perceptions.'

'Otherwise, our future would be rife with countless environmental problems. It is all about persistence and determination!' said Nancy.

'Exactly, our future can't be changed overnight. The principle behind a low carbon life is sustainability. Lifestyles that give us instant pleasure will only result in pain in the long run.' said Jake.

'Nancy,' Jake went on, 'you should write articles about this issue and send them to magazines or papers all over the world. This is a matter of life-and-death!'

Nancy looked puzzled and said, 'Slow it down Jake. I mean, why writing articles? How am I supposed to affect the others? I am just a girl.'

'You can and you have to. In 2023, on a day of very poor air quality, you died of an asthma attack!' continued Jake, with tears in his eyes.

'No way!' Nancy was in a state of shock.

'Please do as I said. I am sure that you have the power to make a change.' Jake said, almost crying.

Somehow Nancy could feel Jake did mean what he said. To comfort him a little, she went, "I promise I will exert myself in reducing carbon footprint. I hope my passion can inspire people around me." Suddenly, Nancy felt that deep down she was genuine about her concern for the issue.

'Thanks, Nancy.' said Jake, 'My time traveling will finish within minutes. I must go, goodbye.'

Nancy asked suddenly, 'Jake, who you are actually?'

'See you...mom' Jake whispered, waving at his young mother.

ZHEEEP!!!

Back to 2023, Jake realized that something was different. The Closing Ceremony began without a hitch. No demonstration, no riot. Sitting on the audience stand, Jake glanced up and saw a pretty blue sky. When he inhaled deeply, the pristine air gave him a kind of indescribable freshness.

'Jake.' Someone called him from behind. This voice was so strange, yet familiar.

Jake turned and looked at the woman he loves the most, with tears rolling down uncontrollably.

11th Lions International Youth Exchange Scholarship Essay Competition

Theme: Lower Carbon, Greener Life

Award: Certificate of Merit (Top 50)

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