



by Alison Foley, Founder & Director, **Ten Little Pieces**

Growing up in Australia's island state, Tasmania, the ocean was never far from home. From as early as I can remember, I wondered what adventures lay over the horizon. As soon as I finished university, I gave into that wanderlust and sailed the world onboard super yachts. I was fortunate to see some of the world's most remote, fragile and beautiful environments, both above and below the water. My respect for the majesty and mystery of the oceans has always been profound and as a mother now, I realize that my children and yours, will not have these same privileges. Over recent years, I've become increasingly aware of the damage our consumption habits are wreaking on waterways, remote islands and familiar ports all over the world. Still to me, it seemed like a distant problem – one that wasn't impacting where I live.

My penny drop moment happened one stunning Summer's day on Noosa Main Beach with my hot, tired and cranky children who were whinging for the long promised ice-cream. So, while I packed up the beach kit, I said to my kids that an ice-cream would cost them ten little pieces of rubbish. To my astonishment, within 20 metres or so of beach, my kids returned to me with a shopping bag full of bottles, cans, straws, little plastic spoons, food wrappers and cigarette butts. We washed our hands and as we got the ice-creams, my son Liam asked for his in a cone because he didn't want the little plastic spoon that came with the cup. "They're not turtle food mum" he said. My 6 year old had connected the dots between what he consumed and what could end up on one of the most beautiful beaches in Australia. I asked myself, what could I do to help other children connect those same dots?



And so, Ten Little Pieces was born. An empowerment movement for ordinary folks to make a big difference to the places they love by collecting ten little pieces of rubbish, anytime, anywhere, especially with children involved. It's an easy mantra for children to remember and repeat, developing respectful habits that connect them to the places they play, knowing that every little piece of rubbish we can stop from reaching the oceans is one less that might suffocate a bird or be ingested by a turtle. The act itself, of leaving places better than we find them, opens conversations regarding conscious consumerism, environmental stewardship and a rethinking of our concept of waste. It presents precious opportunities to develop awareness and responsibility in children by empowering them to make a huge difference to their immediate environments. In an age where disempowerment and feeling overwhelmed are commonly experienced, this simple activity demonstrates that it feels good to do good. Since our humble beginnings only 2 years ago, Ten Little Pieces has become a 5 Gyres Ambassador, part of the Plastic Pollution Coalition, & a member of the United Nations Environment Program – The Global Partnership on Marine Litter. What started as a Facebook group has evolved into a Not For Profit Organisation delivering empowering education programs with a growing global following. Our work in educating and inspiring children and students of all ages to take action to protect and preserve the places they visit has been immensely rewarding as we work to encourage innovation towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals from even those of our youngest generation.

I love the famous Maya Angelou Quote: "Do the best you can until you know better, then when you know better, do better". When we honestly answer children's questions so that they know better, you know what happens? They do better, and they take their whole communities with them. The most powerful actors in cultural change are our kids, and I don't for a second underestimate their ability to influence not just their own environmental impact, but that of their families, their (un)-school communities and wider society. And as we learn about the consequences of our own consumption, embody your children – put aside guilt, shame, regret and remorse and remind yourself of Angelou's wise words.... do better.

As we engage with youth both here in Australia and internationally, I'm increasingly aware of the sense of justice and injustice they feel in the environmental context. They see right and wrong with clarity and deserve every effort to support their ambition to remedy the challenges our oceans, wildlife, air, climate and freedoms are facing. They will reconsider, without hesitation, whether they "want" or "need" something once they understand the consequences and impact of their choices. Time and time again, I see them choosing the option that benefits the greater good and that brings me so much hope. This hope drives my passion for the education of children in regenerative concepts, closed loop systems and solution based thinking. Can the simple act of picking up a little bit of litter really alter the perceptions of connection in a child's world? Yes, it can, and it turns out, it can do so much more. As guardians, we adults instinctively want to protect our children from danger and from fear, but I caution against protecting them from the truth. We're in trouble. The climate science and projections on ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, the scourge of plastic pollution, natural resource depletion, the CoVid pandemic, Black Lives Matter, famine, natural disasters, continued intensification of agriculture and what seems like wide-spread ignorance, denial, overwhelm or worse, apathy, tell us that.



As Arundathi Roy shares:

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no difference. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."



So be ready to listen to your children, answer their questions and guide them towards action through understanding.

Just a few days ago, I took my 3 and 4 year old sons to the rainforest by our home. On any outing, we always take a bag and I wear a glove to collect any litter we might find as we go. On this day, World Oceans Day, we also collected leaves. They were all different colours, shapes, sizes, ages, varieties, & textures. They were all beautiful, all necessary, all connected, and all intrinsically important for the functioning of this ecosystem. As we sat by the stream, me and my boys, we talked about biodiversity, (the theme for World Environment Day) and we also talked about race, the beauty of difference and the belonging of all these leaves to the forest. I had found a way to talk to my pre-schoolers about the Black Lives Matter Movement in a way they understood. I believe we are The Benchmark Generation. All who live now are responsible for all that comes after. There is still hope and our world is a beautiful one, well worth saving. But rather than putting the weight of these challenges on the shoulders of our children, allow them to stand on ours as we prepare to share in the revolution we must all now be a part of.



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