

Back in third grade, when I wore Crocs and my head was always in the clouds, I made a video. Despite my age, it was an actual video about a legitimate issue-litter in the Potomac River. In the video, I showed my family cleaning up a public beach on the Potomac River. The beach is in the Northern Neck of Virginia, near our own beach house. The Alice Ferguson Foundation found the video on YouTube and named me a Trash Ambassador for the trash summit in 2008. I'd like to take a moment to thank the Alice Ferguson Foundation for encouraging me. That was the beginning of seeing myself as someone who could make a difference.

After that, I became aware of some issues concerning litter when I interviewed Alexandra Cousteau. She is Jacques Cousteau's granddaughter, and she came to my elementary school to talk about the environment. My dad met her as well and we both learned the devastating effect plastic bags have in the Potomac and around the world. They fill with sand, change the flow of streams, and kill millions of fish. They snag in our trees and help breed mosquitoes. My dad was so interested in the issue that he helped get the ball rolling for a statewide bag tax when he was an Alexandria City councilman. Delegate Adam Ebbin has been sponsoring the legislation since then. I hope it passes this year. I want to ask my dad and mom to stand up to recognize their efforts and their endless support.

Litter has always been the issue I'm most interested in. I think it's because it's only a big problem because of people's thoughtlessness. Their careless attitude

takes people's time, animal's lives, the beauty of our environment, and the health of our planet. Along the way, I've participated in Potomac River cleanups sponsored by the Alice Ferguson Foundation. It made me feel accomplished.

That's why litter was the topic I picked for my seventh grade science fair project. I went down to the Potomac River three times and cleaned up trash to study which type of litter was the most common in the river. The answer I got was plastic bottles, but I now believe that which type is the biggest problem is no longer important. That's because all types of litter are problems.

My beach house is on the Potomac River, so I feel a need to protect it. I swim in that river, I kayak there, and I watch that river during storms. I see dolphins there, fish swimming there, and birds eating fish there. It's my river, and it belongs to everyone.

My science teacher last year, Mary Breslin always has her students do science fair projects that contribute to the community. They must be globally relevant, and help make change happen. I want to thank her! Without her, students wouldn't know what it's like to have a teacher who cares about the environment and really wants us to make a difference. I'd like her to stand up, because I couldn't have done it without her. Neither could all of her other students.

I contributed my science fair project along with others; and my project was chosen to be our change project. Our class decided to learn more about the issue

and what needed to be done. I want to thank my best friend Brooke Teferra. She was the one who helped me contact everyone who could come for our panel of experts. Please stand up! She really is awesome!

When my seventh grade science class invited a panel of experts to come, they told us about how we are young people and we are the future. We need to be the ones stepping up to make a change. Ashlea Smith and Becky Horner of the Alice Ferguson Foundation and Kurt Moser from the Earth Force really inspired me to make my own change in the world. There are so many great ideas and amazing people who are trying to make these changes. This is the path I have chosen to follow, and I know with help from others we'll be able to make a real change.

Ms. Breslin helped make the issue real by organizing a service-learning day at the end of the year. It involved cleaning up the Four Mile Run. Our grade removed several invasive plants, roots and all, from the watershed. We also got information about the water quality, cleaned up litter, explored the woods along the run, and studied macro invertebrates. We then wrote papers about it and presented it to our grade.

My class is here today because the issue is still important to them, though the project has already ended. I'd like my old science class to stand up because

they made this whole journey possible. We all made science fair projects that have made a difference in our community.

This whole experience has been inspirational, and I'm so grateful that I'm the one it's happening to. I plan to continue to work for change in the future, and keep reaching higher and higher. The path I'm on is not easy, and everyone does not support it. I know it's the right one, and I'll keep going no matter what. This journey has just begun. Now, the same way I was inspired by my dad and Alexandra and in turn inspired Brooke, Mrs. Breslin, my classmates and my school, we are all empowered in the same way to enact change. I'd like to recognize each of you and ask you to stand up. Thank you for being on this journey with me. <3