

Catherine Johnson's Statement of Purpose

Purpose: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future." —Preamble to the Earth Charter. Through Evergreen's MES program, I hope to learn how individual choices affect our climate. I intend to research, vet, write, get reviewed, and publish an impactful book, which calculates the results of actionable choices; applies these actions to substantial populations; and then extrapolates the outcomes of each action for 100 years into the future. I plan to link actions to tangible effects, giving encouragement to the masses of individuals who ponder if their choices could really make a difference in the Earth's future; it is vital that we all understand that each action matters. People can be lulled into inaction by cultural stories about rights and dominion; the distractions of blaming and assigning responsibility to "fix" this mess; the belief that science and technology will save us; and misinformation that human activity isn't really warming the Earth, rather it's a climate "cycle." All of us are part of the production-consumption machine. It's not exclusively responsibility of the "rich," nor the fossil fuel companies, nor the car manufacturers, nor the politicians, nor the scientists to save our planet; it's up to all of us, an army of self-selecting people, who will personally and collectively change our behaviors, lobby our representatives, vote with our dollars, and teach each other. That's the message of my book and thesis. Humanity's finest hours are born from crisis. We are fighting for our continued existence, the survival of Earth's species, and the preservation of our only home. We need to rise above the tragedy of the commons. Unfortunately, planet-loving individuals won't likely see the results of their current climate action work. Victories will be measured in dire things that did not occur, a lessening of the coming catastrophic events. Some enlightened people may thank us for our efforts, but most will be unaware. We, who choose to save Earth, must content ourselves with altruistic motivation.

Motivation: When I crossed the stage to receive my diploma at Evergreen in June of 1988, the president, Mr. Joseph Olander, shook my hand and told me to "Make a Difference!" He clearly meant: "Make a positive difference with your degree." It was a mandate. I promised him that I would. I haven't. I now want to add my most powerful tool, my ability to articulate a persuasive written argument for change and hope, to the arsenal of those fighting for the biggest goal in human history.

Education, Analysis Skills, and Work Experience: I studied natural sciences at Evergreen because I wanted to know how the universe worked. My younger self failed to recognize that humanity interacts with nature, and she returns the favor. This is exemplified in quantum mechanics, Schrodinger's cat, and wave vs. particle theory; observing humans are part of an interactive system. I spent most of my working life in the technical writing field. I gathered data from subject matter experts, then analyzed and mapped user information into materials for technical and non-technical audiences, including technical company management, end users, and grocery store personnel. I've tested complex equipment. I have written and edited user manuals, training material, job aids, and trouble-shooting documentation. To gather data for a cost/benefit analysis and to streamline labor costs, I developed flow charts for inter-departmental projects and determined required work hours for those projects. I basically conveyed information from the people who knew it, to the people who needed to understand it, just as I hope to do with my book.

Accomplishments and Service: I can count a few of life's victories. I have added two conscientious, thinking people to the planet; I realize their accomplishments will be their own. I've have spoken truth to power in my social microcosm. I have saved a baby's life, and I supported a friend's son, during the pandemic.

I participated in a mission to build a Tanzanian hospital for moms and babies, who were literally dying due to lack of care, easily available at a medical facility. I have been an American mom to 20 exchange students, so I can communicate across cultures. I assisted a friend with Alzheimer's disease in his diagnosis, survival, and transition to care. I've helped people find employment and cleaned regularly for a sweet woman with mental challenges. I've assisted strangers to travel home, eat, get winter boots, and be sheltered. I've been honored to toss starfish back in life's ocean. I have not yet achieved my potential.

Experiences, Perspective, and Superpower: Experience informs perspective; I bring both to the seminar table. I have explored the King's chamber in the Great Pyramid; stood in the middle of Stone Henge on a starry night; and toured British castles, the Acropolis, and the Roman Coliseum. I have camped on Masa Mara and prayed in the Shrine of the Bab', on Mt. Carmel. I have overcome potentially fatal health challenges, and weathered times of extreme economic hardship. Life has dealt me amazing opportunities, catastrophic difficulties, and always a way to survive. My super-power is determination. Now, I am reinventing myself, again. I am returning to my educational home, vegetarianism, and my love of and activism for the Earth and her creatures.

My Green Choices: Hypocrisy robs credibility. One can't encourage others to live green, and then not live exemplarily green. In 2020, I liquidated my assets. I bought a tiny home and a Prius. I cook with induction. I regulate temperature with a space heater and window air conditioner. I conserve water and recycle. Since my Evergreen days, I haven't eaten beef; I eat locally produced items and as low on the food chain as is feasible. I calculated my eco-footprint. I found we would need 1.5 Earths to accommodate 7.9 billion people, living as I do. I am missing something that I desperately need to understand.

Secondary Purpose: At the 50-year Return to Evergreen event, I spoke with John McLain about bringing a tiny house community to Evergreen. I lived in my tiny home for two years; worked at a private construction company for over four years; and have connections to a tiny house builder and to people with significant construction knowledge. I ran a small community of housemates for five years. I hope to add my skills to the tiny house community project team; I see it as an ecological learning lab in sustainable living, a magnet for donors, and an inter-disciplinary project which could engage students from the MES, MPA, art, and horticulture programs.

Education Beyond the Syllabus: Recently, I had the privilege to meet Kathleen Saul; she is my newest shero and role model, because she graduated from the MES program later in life and has been successful in her subsequent pursuits. She encouraged me regarding my thesis. Another Evergreen role model, Tom Grissom, my Physical Systems professor, explained how he came to teach at Evergreen. Tom was making nuclear bombs for the government; daily he passed a conscientious objector, outside the gate to his facility. This man stood in the rain or sunshine, every day, all day with signs. Tom read the messages day after day, year after year, for almost a decade. Tom eventually quit his job, moved to Olympia, and taught ethics in science to a generation of young physics students. Tom never informed the man of his choice. That conscientious objector never knew the results of his sacrifice. Thought seeds were sown; they flowered into a meaningful impact. Evergreen taught me wisdom, not contained in the curriculum. Perhaps my grandchildren will see some results of climate activism, of which I will have played a small part. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead.