Part 1: My Story

It was last summer, and I was standing at the edge of a boat in a wetsuit ready to go snorkeling in the Caribbean. I’d never been to a coral reef before, but I had seen tons of pictures. With the colorful coral coming in all shapes and sizes, and the fish swimming all over the place, it seemed like a beautiful place full of life.

And that's exactly what I expected it to be. The boat pulled up to a little orange buoy that looked like a traffic cone. I bent over the side of the boat’s metal railing to take a peek at the supposed colorful coral reef below, but I saw nothing. It all looked brown from the surface. I jumped back from the edge in a start when our tour guide enthusiastically exclaimed,

“Step on out the waters perfect, and we are right over the best part of the reef”.
“Wow the best part of the reef” I whispered to my sister. “Must be pretty cool”.

I jumped into the water and immediately looked down. *Huh, the reef must be a little further away;* I remember thinking to myself because when I looked down everything was brown and white except for the bent over dark purple fan coral. There weren't any fish, *well I saw one fish it was a tiny yellow guppy.* Suddenly I felt a rush of sadness, the reef wasn’t further away it was dead. The coral was not like the pictures. My reef had little color and little life. *How I wondered. How can this be the best part of the reef if it’s mostly dead?*

My grandparents swam over to me with my sister, “What do you think of the reef?” My grandma asked after her head shot through the surface of the water like a balloon

“It’s interesting” I replied to my grandma, as she swam away I turned to my sister who knew I had more to say. “It’s interesting... how little life there is” I remarked at her, and she nodded her head in agreement.

After an hour or two on the reef, we hopped back on the boat and went back to the tour headquarters. While on that boat I sat and watched the white sand beaches zoom by. The beaches were beautiful, they were the best thing I had seen all tour. *The beaches that I saw on the boat ride back from the reef were the prettiest things I had seen on the coral reef tour. How could the tour where I was promised a colorful majestic reef, only give me a nice boat ride back to shore?*

I turned to my sister that night right before we went to bed and whispered “Pretty boat ride back”. *That's the best compliment I have, I thought to myself.*

“Ya the beach was nice,” she said before she dozed off.

I stayed up a while thinking about my day. I went to bed that night doubtful the pictures of the thriving reefs I’d seen online were real. I went to sleep knowing if beauty was present in the Caribbean reefs; it was quickly disappearing.
Little did I know that night, the coral reefs in the Caribbean were not the only reefs that were dying. All around the world a large amount of the oceans most vital habitats were dying or dead.

The dying of the coral reefs is a significant problem today, and we can combat the silence by preventing pollution and telling others about the peril our coral reefs are in. One organization that is fighting to save the coral reefs is the Coral Restoration Foundation.

**Part 2: What does this mean?**

**The Problem**

Dying. Death. Dead. The coral reefs are dying, the coral reefs are dead. Life is disappearing for the coral reefs, one of our worlds most important ecosystems. We are killing it. Now I know you have probably seen a picture sorta like this one:

“Tropical coral reefs are one of the most diverse ecosystems on Earth, home to a quarter of all marine species. Reefs generate billions of dollars in tourism, as well as food for people in 100 countries. Healthy reefs also provide protection for
coastal communities from storms, serving as barriers that diminish the power of waves and storm surges.” (John Hocevar Greenpeace.org)

Sounds perfect. Helps the economy, feeds us, houses marine life, saves our coastlines from storms. Wow right? Ya I thought so, but I’m pretty sure you haven't seen this picture. A picture that was taken within the past year:

Magical? Beautiful? Not a bit. The coral reefs are dying, the fish are dying, beauty is dying.

“Nearly 60 percent of the world's coral reefs are threatened by human activity” (Mother Nature Network).

We have the pleasure of living alongside these masterpieces that do so much for us, yet we are killing them. The coral reefs are one of the earth's finest creations and we must fight to save them.

**Major Causes**
While coral reefs are some of the most resilient ecosystems out there, they have so many threats that they just can’t bounce back. Here are some of their major causes of death, notice what they are all linking back to:

- “Since the 1960's, unnaturally high rates of crown-of-thorns sea star predation in certain regions of the Great Barrier Reef resulted in as much as 95% loss of living coral in these areas” (Sea World). **Crown-of-thorns sea stars eat the nutrients provided by forest clearing and agriculture. We clear the forests, and create the farms. Us.**

- “From dynamite fishing to global warming, we are rapidly sending the world’s reefs into oblivion. The latest reports state that as much as 27 percent of monitored reef formations have been lost” (NASA). **Dynamite and global warming are also linking back to us. Our dynamite is blowing up the reefs, and our man made gases are causing global warming. Ours.**

- “Ocean pollution poisons coral polyps. Pollution takes on many forms including oil slicks, pesticides and other chemicals, heavy metals, and garbage” (Sea World). **Finally all the chemicals named here are again made and used by us. Us.**

Us. Ours. Us. We are the cause. Some people argue that sun bleaching and predators are more deadly to corals, but what you just read contradicts that; we are the main cause. Us. While we are driving to work or school; we are simultaneously killing the coral reefs, and this doesn't just hurt the marine life it’s hurting us too.
Why We Care

When a coral reef dies not only are the marine animals losing a home and food source, about us humans are losing money, food, and so much more. According to TIME Magazine “The death of coral also represents a huge loss—as much as $375 billion annually—for the local economies along the globe they support” (Time) Basically the coral reefs support many seaside communities. So when the reef is turning brown and dying, seafood becomes harder to get and there is a decline in tourism. This all creates a huge loss financially. Another major effect of coral reefs dying is reduced safety. “When waves pass over a coral reef, their energy can be reduced by 75 to 95 percent suggests Endangered Species International” stated an article from the Christian Science Publishing Society. Coral reefs stop storms. Whole coastlines have been wiped out by hurricanes, and coral reefs can prevent that. These are just some of the most notable effects on us.

Imagine the next generation. Imagine your child pointing to the coral reef while watching Nemo and asking “What’s that?”, or only being able to marvel at the beauty of a beach. Coral reefs are one of the most amazing places on earth and we are losing them. In the future we will only see and remember their beauty through photos, and that will affect us. We need to work
together to save these ecosystems, to save the quarter of marine life that lives in them, to save the beauty for future generations.

Part 3: How Can We Help?

The Solution

Scientists are constantly looking for a way to save the coral reefs, and we can help. Yes, one way to help is to just simply donate to nonprofits like the Coral Restoration Foundation, but we can also help in many small ways everyday. For example one way to help save the coral reefs is simply just to use a reusable bag when you go to the grocery store. You can get them for $2 at the store and just keep them in your car, it’s that easy. Another easy way to protect our reefs is to conserve water. Do you let the water run while you soap up your hands or brush your teeth? If so then stop. Nature.org mentioned “The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater will pollute our oceans.” (Nature) Turn off the water, and help prevent runoff and pollution. Nature.org also wrote “Help reduce pollution: Walk, bike or ride the bus.” (Nature). One more way that we can fight is to try and stray away from cars. Now I'm not asking you to totally give up your car, but I do want you to bike, walk, or even bus every once in a while. It saves the coral reefs, and it’s healthy. Finally the best way to help the reefs is to spread the word. Just tell people what’s happening and how they can help. The more people that know what’s going on, the better the reef gets.

Part 4: Do Something.
In conclusion, we must help prevent pollution and spread the word about our reefs to combat the silence against the pressing, real world problem of the dying coral reefs. By doing these simple tasks, we can work together to prevent the tragedy that is the death of coral reefs.

Since I learned about this problem, I have been riding my bike and the bus more often, making sure I don't keep the water running, and I got my mom to buy us a few reusable bags. But more importantly yesterday, I taught a sixth grade class how to reduce their footprint and save the reefs. At first I was extremely nervous, I kept thinking to myself… What if they don't get it? What if they don't realise how important this issue is? Then I stood up in front of them and realised how important it was for me to spread awareness. I looked down at my shaking fingers and started to talk. “Who here has visited a coral reef?” I asked, 13 hands shot up into the air fast as a bullet, I decide to call on a smaller boy with blond hair in the front to recall his experience.

“The coral was so pretty, with all the colors and fish. I even saw a sea turtle!” He said in a very excited voice.

“If only that were still the case” I replied.

I told my story. The one about the coral I saw last year, about how brown and sad it was. The next slide showed a comparison of a reef from this year and 2003. Jaws dropped. Nobody believed this was happening, it all seemed so unreal, but then smiles trickled back like rain on a roof when I told them the 4 easy ways they could help. I spread awareness. I combated the silence. I made a difference. You can too.

One of the best nonprofits fighting to save the coral reefs is the Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF). CRF raises healthy corals on multiple offshore facilities, plants them into reefs, and monitors them. According to the CRF mission “Through propagation techniques, tens of thousands of corals are grown and maintained in multiple offshore coral tree nurseries” (CRF). They are growing more corals than the population of Wilson and Jackson combined, and we
need to help them continue this. Now you are probably wondering if this is working. Or if it’s making a difference. “Our innovative techniques are scalable and they are making a difference for our oceans.” (CRF) The Coral Restoration Foundation is making a difference and we need to help them. Donate now to support the rehabilitation of one of the greatest, most diverse places on earth.

Works Cited


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