

“Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better” - Albert Einstein.

On my right ring finger I have a Bornean hand-tapped tattoo of a question mark. To me it signifies the life philosophy to question everything, inspired by Michio Kaku and Albert Einstein. Questions about human behaviour and a fascination with brains, humans and animals alike, led me to study psychology. I am now a clinical neuropsychology master student specialising in developmental (neuro)psychology. I am an advocate for mental health, mindfulness, minimalism, and sustainability, which explains my affiliation with LUGO. During my bachelors I did the Sustainability and Health social sciences honours college track, which entailed an introductory course on sustainability. I quickly experienced my first bout of eco-anxiety. The political inaction surrounding climate change and the theories of what will happen to this blue planet we call home scared me. Although I had participated in beach clean ups, did my part to separate my rubbish and recycle, and ate a predominantly plant-based diet, this is when it really sank in: we need to be doing more, meaning I need to be doing more.

Mother nature is a big part of my identity. I am half Dutch, but my other half is of native Bornean heritage – I come from a hunter-gatherer tribe called the Bidayuhs and was born and raised on the Malaysian part of the island of Borneo, home to one of the oldest rainforests in the world (130 million years old!) and a biodiversity haven. We have 15,000 species of flowering plants, 3,000 species of trees, 420 species of birds, and 221 species of land-living mammals. Growing up, hiking, snorkelling and spending time in nature was my leisure. When I was two I almost got kidnapped by an orangutan and when I was 12 I rescued a flying fox from being turned into soup. Nature was always close by.

Three years ago during the summer break, I visited the coral reefs I used to swim and snorkel around every school holiday when I was a kid. They were wiped white. Bleached. Plastic was easier to spot than any of my favourite fishes. It broke my heart. Hearing about the devastation that the palm oil industry is wreaking on Borneo is another thing. I constantly ask myself, how can I actively be doing more? I started assimilating more and more eco-conscious habits into my life. When I saw the LUGO vacancies, I decided to apply as Brand Manager. I figured it would be a great way for me to channel my passion for sustainability, creativity and love for mother earth to press and invite students and staff to contribute to the reduction of Leiden University’s ecological footprint, and so far I’ve been loving it! My task involves creating promotional and informational materials for events, the Student Sustainability Network on LinkedIn and our podcast. Although I am far from saving the Bornean rainforest, I am happy to have LUGO as a platform for me to share my climate-related concerns and insights on how to live a little bit more sustainably every day.

While clinical neuropsychology may seem a universe away from sustainability issues, my foundational knowledge in psychology has helped me think about sustainability and environmental issues through the lens of human behaviour and behavioural change. My stance on sustainability is to drop the perfectionism associated with it and to replace it with eco-consciousness. Emphasising simply being conscious about sustainable decisions can help make it more accessible because there is also an element of self-compassion introduced. People should not feel bad about not transitioning to being a full vegan, or accidentally eating an animal product. We should be celebrating every single sustainable decision made, whether it is small, like being consistent at bringing a reusable bag to do groceries, or big, like choosing to purchase an electric vehicle. Climate change is scary, but fear and pointing fingers are not going to drive change. Education and awareness will.

Big changes and big goals like going vegan cold-turkey the 1st of January onwards, never flying again, never using indoor heating again, living without making any waste etc. are difficult to achieve. Breaking them up into smaller goals will make them much more achievable and save you the guilt-trip when you break a “rule”. Challenge yourself to try new things like making plant-based, seasonal recipes that you can score from the local market, or start taking a reusable grocery bag and water bottle with you everywhere to avoid having to purchase single-use plastic out of convenience. Being eco-conscious is all about planning, being a few steps ahead, and I think that's beautiful. When you're just beginning, it truly challenges you to step out of auto-pilot and to be more mindful of your everyday choices. If you don't own a car and use public transport, you're doing great! Next, how about getting off a stop earlier and walking the remainder of the way to your destination? Pay attention to your surroundings, sounds, smells, bodily sensations. Be present. You might not find yourself in a lush green forest, but you might just start your day feeling a little bit more grounded. Your concentration span might last a little longer, and you might feel slightly less irritable. How about picking up some books on sustainability and climate change (I recommend 'The Uninhabitable Earth' by David Wallace-Wells), or if you're more of a movie person then watch some documentaries (for example 'Borneo: Paradise Under Siege'). Make a vow to yourself and Earth to no longer travel by plane within Europe, or to only purchase cruelty free beauty products. There are so many (underrated) small, achievable steps that can be taken!

I hope humankind will find a balance between advancement and honouring the soil our ancestors came from, before it's too late. Although there will be days when everything seems pointless, where you question if your actions **really** make a difference, every conscious action has a small, but significant effect and might just inspire others to do the same. Don't be afraid to question your own nature.