“Can we start recycling?” I asked my mom as she threw plastic into the garbage can.

“No.” was her quick response. “We wouldn’t have to take the trash out as much if we had recycling, plus it would help the oceans!” I stated cheerily with naive hope. With an irritated sigh paired with a go to hell glare my mother declared “The Bible tells us that the earth has to get worse before Jesus will come back so I say throw it all in the oceans so maybe he will come back sooner!”

As a geologist from Oklahoma many friends and family do not understand why I chose grad school over the oil field. Family advised me to reap the benefits of “easy oil money”. I tried to explain to them that there is currently more CO2 in the atmosphere than there was when the dinosaurs walked the planet, and that we are already seeing signs of a 6th extinction. For these reasons I did not feel comfortable contributing to this global problem for “easy money” but rather I felt compelled to contribute to fixing the issues it causes. This does not make sense to them, they would rather benefit off of the system in place rather than struggle for change.

The more I succeed in academia, the less I can relate to my family. Their eyes often gloss over anytime I mention the Geologic time scale or use my “college words”, to them, it goes against what the Bible says. They give no thought to how the oil they abuse was formed nor how pulling from such a long-term carbon sink affects our current system. Topics like wind and solar energy create a distaste in their mouth because it’s “not as efficient as oil” but when I challenge them with “who told you that?” or “how did you find that out?” they cannot produce a source but rather scold me for “turning blue”.

When I was invited by a colleague of 3 years to travel to Tanzania to collect watershed quality samples, my rural, god-fearing, overtly modest mother, implied to family and friends that the only reason for the invitation must be from a sexual origin, completely discrediting a highlight in my academic career.

I came back from Tanzania feeling proud of myself. I knew I was helping people through this project, but it just wasn’t tangible to my mother. Why did I go over seas instead of helping Oklahoma? Trying to communicate the importance of the project was met with apathy and rejection from her beliefs and buy in to propaganda. My pride was quickly yanked from me as I let her emotions overwhelm me.

I have lost my relationship with my mother without the closure of death to console me. Her deep and blind trust in selective beliefs force her to believe that I have chosen an path that will lead to my destruction. She fails to understand the importance of helping socially vulnerable communities, she has no reason to attempt to believe nor try to understand science. So much of the “American Dream” rests on a selfish capitalistic thought process of “How can this benefit me?” instead of “How can this benefit the community?” Where does the hatred for the opposing party originate from? What feeds it? Why is an immediate shut down of a conversation the most commonly triggered defense mechanism when we are presented with opposing views?

It is common in my generation to cut out bad vibes, and limit contact with anything that does not create good energy for you. This in itself a different form of ignorance. Studies suggest cutting out certain luxuries by the masses would be massively beneficial. However, distrubtions to individual daily routines, turn into bad vibes. To quote *Timefulness* by Marcia Bjornerud, “Those who believe that the End of Days is just around the corner have no reason to be concerned about matters like climate change, groundwater depletion, or loss of biodiversity. If there is no future, conservation of any kind is, paradoxically, wasteful.” So I ask myself, how can I bring these real world issues into the tiny pockets of the rural Bible belted America that have no need nor want to relate to others on a global scale? I combat their fear of self ignorance through relentless positivity & simplified explanations. I often hit a wall when the conversation gets to the Judeo-Christian perspective that humans are made in God’s image, which gives us a superior status over the rest of the earth and its other inhabitants. I’ve yet to find a convincing, but gentle, argument to proceed past here.

I miss my mom every day, but I fight the urge to reach out to her because I will inevitably trigger one of her many pressure points and result in a fight between us. I must conserve my being in a similar manner as we as a people should conserve the earth. Although my situation is not unique, and many people struggle with opposing views within a family, the disconnect in communication prepares me in to communicate with people outside of my field. With a positive attitude, patience, and much self control, any conversation can be had, given all involved parties are willing to continue to try.