Mike Tidwell: Hi, my name is Mike Tidwell, I was born on March 19th, 1962. I am Executive Director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network and its political affiliate CCAN Action Fund. Our office is here in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Interviewer: So to begin with, we could just... maybe you could give an overview of your work. How you got here.

Mike Tidwell: I founded Chesapeake Climate Action Network in 2002 after spending the first half of my career as a freelance print journalist. I traveled the world as a travel writer, Sunday travel writer with the Washington Post and other publications. Wrote about history for National Geographic Sports. Had a really charmed life as a freelance writer, but I also read Bill McKibben's book, The End of Nature in 1990, which laid out for a mass audience the severe and terrifying consequences of climate change unless we take action. That was 30 years ago. We knew everything we basically needed to know about global warming, and yet fast forward to the year 2001, 2002, no one was really doing anything about this problem.

So I decided I was going to make the switch from a freelance print journalist to an organizer, although I had almost no training or experience running a nonprofit. I decided that's what I wanted to do. And so I formed Chesapeake Climate Action Network and one of the first grants I was able to get through friends of friends who knew people at Town Creek was from the Town Creek Foundation starting in July of 2002. Now, Town Creek Foundation has funded my group Chesapeake Climate Action Network for every second of every minute of every week of every month of every year since July, 2002 to the present. They have therefore allowed my organization to be a regional leader in fighting for clean energy and fighting against dirty energy projects across Maryland, Virginia and D.C. and becoming a model grassroots organization for groups, not just across the region but across the United States.

In fact, Bill McKibben, the man who wrote The End of Nature, Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org seen as the intellectual and hardworking leader of the climate movement in the United States has called Chesapeake Climate Action Network, the best regional grassroots climate group in the world. And he's traveled all over the world. He's organized in Australia, in Europe, in South America, and he said, "CCAN is the best regional group of its kind in the world." And that's in large part because we had the support of groups like Town Creek Foundation. So we are very, very grateful for that. Nearly 20 years of support, their vision, their encouragement, their mentorship for everything that Chesapeake Climate Action Network does.

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Interviewer: This is jumping ahead a little bit, but wondering if... I didn't realize Town Creek has been so involved in your funding all these years, I'm wondering what are your thoughts and feelings, concerns about the fact that they're no longer going to be funding?

Mike Tidwell: Well, the fact that Town Creek is sunsetting is something that I am personally in very deep denial about as are many people. It's just hard to imagine life without the friendships, the support, the rock solid foundation that, that fund has provided groups like mine. But we will soldier on. They've planted a lot of great seeds. We will continue to be funded by a legacy grant for another four or five years. So Town Creek has built the foundation upon which a lot of good work will continue to be built in the future, and for that we are very grateful.

Interviewer: Can you reflect back to when you described first starting making that jump, making the career change and how old were you and what were the challenges you faced switching from the charm life of a journalist to becoming the organizer that you are now?

Mike Tidwell: All my life, I wanted to be a writer. When I was in second grade, I started writing fictional stories about mad scientists who would drink potions and become monsters and things like that. High school journalism, college journalism, I am first and foremost a writer and honestly every day that I'm an organizer, I'm just a writer who's not writing. But it also turns out that I'm really good at organizing. When I was a kid, I did and continued to love baseball and I would always try to get a Sandlot baseball game going. So I'd knock on Bobby's door and say, "Bobby, come out and play baseball." And he'd say, "I don't have a glove." And then I'd reach into my pack and hand him a glove. "Here's a glove, Bobby. Now you have a glove." And then he'd say, "Well, my mom won't let me play right now." I'd say, "Bobby, go get your mom. I'll talk to her."

And so I've always been someone who could persuade, who could organize who would do everything I could to achieve my own will, which was I really wanted to play baseball and it really needed Bobby. But really I wanted to be a writer all the years early in my career until I again, saw that the gulf between what we know about global warming and what we're actually doing about it is almost intergalactic and distance that someone had to start doing something about it. We already knew enough about it. By the year 2001, 2002, when I formed CCAN, it was very, very hard for me. It was probably the hardest moment in my life because I had spent 20 years building my freelance career to exactly where it was in 2001, 2002.

Freelance writers spend the early part of their career pastoring and begging editors to give them work. Just always constantly having to bother editors and

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say, "Please give me an assignment. Please send me to this country to write about subject X." But where you want to be in your career is where editors are calling you. And that's where I was by 2001, I had editors calling me and giving me all the work I needed. I was making a decent living. I was supporting my family, I was the luckiest person on the planet. But I had this [inaudible 00:06:35] understanding of what was happening to the climate. I had read Bill McKibben's book, The End of Nature in 1990, my own son was born in 1997. By 2001, I couldn't continue to look at my then four year old son Sasha in the eye and keep doing what I was doing.

I mean, I was backpacking across Sicily for the Washington Post and writing Sunday travel stories about it and taking naps and almond groves in Sicily and being paid to do it. But by 2001, knowing that the Arctic ice caps were melting, seas were rising, pollution was increasing and no one was really doing anything about it, I couldn't look at my four-year-old kid and go take more naps and almond groves in Sicily. I just couldn't do it anymore. So the first thing that happened to me is I got angry. A really big scientific study came out in January of 2001 basically saying, "We're almost out of time and just revolutionary change needs to happen in terms of clean energy." And I remember just getting angry. Why? Because my neighbors weren't that worked up about this issue, not as worked up as I was.

Campuses weren't exploding in protests. My other writer and musician friends who were continuing to write books and record CDs and didn't seem bothered, they weren't going to stop everything they were doing. So I got really mad at everyone around me for not doing anything. And then I realized, "Mike, you're not out there. You're not out there doing anything about this issue. You're worried about it, you're fully knowledgeable about it, but you are not out there organizing and raising your voice about this issue. So how in the world can you get mad at other people when you're not out there?" So I made the decision I was going to walk away from a 20 year freelance career, stop taking phone calls from my editors, stop fulfilling every dream I'd ever had for myself in terms of freelance and creative writing and to turn to the organizer side of myself and try to do something about it.

I went and at first I thought, "I would just go work for Sierra Club, on global warming." Our league of conservation voters work in this region. But when I went to all these groups, even Greenpeace, Sierra Club, nobody had climate change at the top of their list of things they were doing. Everyone had it on their list in the early 2000s, nobody had it at the top. And so I was like, "Wow, I want to work for a group that has climate change and clean energy at the very top of their mission statement." And when a group that you want to belonged to doesn't exist, it's time to form your own group.

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And so that's when I had the audacity to say, "With no formal training in nonprofit management or mass movement organizing, I was going to try to do that." And just through working really, really hard networking, having a vision, I was able to grow and help in large part with the help of Town Creek grow that early organization from just me and a laptop in my home to now 17 full-time employees with an office here in Takoma Park, Maryland. Office in Richmond, Norfolk and Baltimore.

Interviewer: How did your friends and family react to when you told them?

Mike Tidwell: My editors were astonished. They had never experienced a writer who for no good reason in their view, walked away from a hard earned niche in the freelance writing business. I had an editor at National Geographic Books at the time, who had read the story that I wrote about backpacking across Sicily, inviting me to a fancy launch at the Tabard Inn, on Dupont Circle. Said, "Order whatever you want." And he said, "Look, we want you to write a book about backpacking across Sicily. We want you to spend six months just walking across Sicily and write a book for National Geographic Books." So this was precisely at the time I was going through my own personal climate crisis in conscience. And I turned it down. I turned down a book deal. He said, "You move your family to Sicily, study Italian." It was the ultimate dream assignment and I literally couldn't take it. I knew it would take me two or three years to see the project through. Again, I couldn't look at my four year old kid at the time.

So it was hard. My friends thought I was crazy, my editors thought I was insane. They didn't understand. I said, "This is the issue we're all going to be talking about within 10 years." Which turned out to be mostly true. Certainly what we're talking about every day now, 20 years later with California wildfires, burning everywhere, unrecognizable weather and a climate criminal in the white house. So what I saw as my life's work for the rest of my life has been validated by events and I've been proud to being part of the organizing to combat climate change, but there's so much more left to do and there's so many more people like me who need to emerge from their normal lives as lawyers and teachers and janitors who make time for this issue. And you're seeing more of that, and especially students who are rising to the occasion all over the world. We have pushed our planet completely outside its comfort zone.

You look at Arctic ice, you look at sea level rise, you see the whole scale destruction of ecosystems all over the world from climate change, and you realize we've pushed this planet outside its comfort zone. And in order to address that global threat, we, human beings have to push ourselves outside of our comfort zones. We have to do more, do it faster, do it more courageously in terms of organizing and demanding energy and social reform. And that's what I

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did 20 years ago. I was comfortable as a writer. I didn't want anything in my life to change. It was exactly the way I wanted it to be, and I had to push myself into a completely new and uncomfortable world and learn to navigate that world for the sake of my son, for the sake of everyone's children.

And now we have to do that more. We have to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone, now that we're here in the year 2019 and things have frankly even gotten worse, but it's not too late. We still have time. We just have to go faster and more courageously than we ever thought we could. And I want to tell my favorite Town Creek story at some point.

Interviewer: Why not now? Go ahead. Tell me your favorite Town Creek story.

Mike Tidwell: My favorite Town Creek story involves Stuart Clarke, the Executive Director for now, I think more than a decade, and the executive director who's seen Town Creek through to its sunset. So Stuart Clarke is one of my closest friends and confidants and mentors in the climate movement. And I remember May of 2010, the huge Gulf oil spill in Louisiana, just unbearably horrifying in terms of the amount of oil that was choking ecosystems and destroying the lives of shrimpers and crabbers along that beautiful Louisiana wetland coastline, and it goes on for months. So that starts in may of 2010. Coincidentally in June of 2010, there was a major study put out by the University of Delaware showing the mind bending potential for offshore wind power in the Mid-Atlantic to power basically the entire East coast. That if you were to put a series of wind farms off the coast of the East coast of the United States from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, it would be an energy game changer.

So this was a vision for offshore clean energy at the same time that we were having a nightmare for offshore oil production in Louisiana. Those two things happened at about the same time, and I realize we have an enormous teachable moment right now in the United States and in the region of the Mid-Atlantic to tell this story. This is what the nightmare looks like, we're seeing it in real time now in Louisiana, and this is where we could be going on the US East coast in terms of clean offshore energy. I went to visit Stuart Clarke at Town Creek in June of 2010, after that Delaware study came out and he and I talked about this. We talked about the juxtaposition between Louisiana oil choking those ecosystems, destroying that society and clean wind powered electricity that could create jobs on the East coast from Cape Cod to Cape Hatteras and off the coast of Maryland sustained forever. And he and I together decided let's start a movement to promote offshore wind power in Maryland and across the East coast.

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He provided some of the initial funding, we strategized together, we built a coalition together, we influenced the governor of Maryland together and by 2013, three years later, Maryland had passed the strongest offshore wind bill in the country. And that bill has now been expanded, and within the next 12 months, we're going to see at least one, maybe two, fully built offshore wind farms in Maryland. Virginia is also about to build a very big offshore wind farm. We have an offshore wind farm in Rhode Island. But we were the first state to pass legislation declaring to the rest of the country, this is the direction we're going, and a whole industry is now emerging as a result. I think that 10 years from now you're going to see half the electricity in the East coast powering everything from our electric cars to our iPhones is going to be coming from these big beautiful turning wind turbines off the coast of Massachusetts in New York State, Maryland, Virginia, all the way to North Carolina.

And part of that really began with a conversation that I had with Stuart Clarke, where he saw the vision, he shared the vision with me, he continued to support what I was trying to do as a nonprofit. He came to Annapolis to talk to legislators as a private citizen, he influenced other foundations to fund this effort, and he was just a great collaborator and it wouldn't have happened without him. It just would not have happened without Stuart Clarke's ability to meet with people, to listen closely and to put resources in the hands of people who are really trying to make a difference. It's a classic Town Creek story of taking an idea and translating it into reality for the benefit of everyone. And I will be eternally grateful to Stuart personally and to all the trustees at Town Creek for allowing that to happen and imagine that times 1000 different causes and different campaigns from food, to land use, to climate change. That's the legacy of Town Creek.

Interviewer: It seems like you really do remember that conversation you had with him. Can you set the scene for me a little bit? Think back to that actual meeting, what it looked like? What it smelled like? What you guys sounded like? Where were you? Things like that.

Mike Tidwell: Stuart and I met at a coffee shop, his favorite coffee shop outside of Easton. I remember it was a really beautiful day, we sat outside. This was June of 2010 and it really began with a series of emails back and forth between me and Stewart over the Louisiana oil spill. How horrible it was. I had spent a lot of time in Louisiana as a reporter, wrote a book about South Louisiana and the Cajun Fishing Culture of South Louisiana as a writer. So Stuart and I began exchanging emails on just how appalling and discouraging it was to see this oil spill in beautiful South Louisiana. Stuart had been to New Orleans a number of times. He'd been to Jazz Fest there. He had an appreciation of the region. So we were just grieving together at first. Then the university of Delaware study came out in June of 2010 with this alternative vision for offshore energy.

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And I forwarded that study to Stuart and I said, "We got to meet." And so we got together for coffee and just sitting outside, going back and forth like, "What can we do about this? What kind of policies could encourage offshore wind power? How do we exploit this teachable moment? What do we say? How do we juxtapose the oil spill with clean energy?" And more than anything we were determined there having coffee outdoors at this little Mom & Pop coffee shop in Eastern Maryland. We were determined to put forward a vision for a solution at the scale of the problem. That people know that climate change is happening, but if you tell them to change a light bulb, they conclude one of two things. Either climate change isn't as bad as I thought, because if I can just change a light bulb and that fixes it, it's not a big deal or climate change is as bad as you're telling me, Mike and Stuart? And if you're telling me just to change a light bulb, then there is no hope for fixing the problem because I know changing a light bulb isn't going to fix this huge problem you've convinced me it's happening.

What you need to do is present a solution that is at the scale of the problem. The entire global climate is changing because of our use of fossil fuels. We can't dabble in solutions. We to go big, we have to have a bold vision. We need wind turbines from Cape Hatteras to Cape Cod, and here's a vision for how we're going to get there. And that's what really inspires people. And Stuart and I talked about that in depth, like, "What will be the vision? How will we mobilize people to embrace it?" Because it's harder to pass solution legislation, it's harder to convince the public to embrace solutions than it is to convince the public to oppose things. It's easy to get people to oppose things. Someone wants to build a highway through your neighborhood, no problem getting people to fight that. Somebody wants to frack in your state. Okay, well you can get an amazing coalition to ban fracking in Maryland within a couple of years. But when you want to fix something, and you want wonky policies that, whoa, we're going to tinker with caps on carbon emissions from power plants and the allowances are going to be traded at a escalating rate, et cetera, you lose the public.

So you need a bold vision and that's one of the things Stuart and I talked about. Let's plan in the minds, in the eyes, in the minds eye of people in Maryland and across the region a vision of these clean energy wind turbines, creating power 24 hours a day, charging your iPhone, your electric vehicle. We're going to electrify everything in our society. That's where we have to head. We have to electrify our cars, all transportation, all heating and cooling. Everything in society has to be based on electricity where you don't have to light anything on fire to keep the lights on. You just have to maintain those wind turbines, maintain those solar panels on rooftops that create clean electricity that powers everything in our economy that's run by electricity. And we began that whole conversation by talking about offshore wind in the summer of 2010 at the exact

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moment that the nation was ready to be taught a new way, was ready to be shown a new direction because of how repulse they were by the 20th century failed paradigm of fossil fuels.

Interviewer: Initially you described the wind turbines, you just said beautiful wind turbines, and so I'm not an environmental activist even though I'm an environmentalist at heart, but people opposing wind turbines partially because of the view and seeing them as ugly. So I think that... I'm curious about that. How intentional is that on your part of making sure to talk about them as beautiful and just change the whole way of thinking for people?

Mike Tidwell: Polling shows that the vast majority of Americans do support wind power. They want wind power to be put in the right place. They don't want wind farms placed in areas where there's high levels of annual bird migration, for example. And that's utterly appropriate. The good news is that wind farms all over the world have a almost minuscule impact on bird populations and other ecosystems. Is there such a thing as a perfect energy system? No. Do some bird strike wind turbines? Yes. But when power doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be a lot better than coal and mountaintop removal for coal and the climate change that comes from it. The good news is that nationwide utility scale, land based wind turbines have about 2.2 birds per turbine per year that die as a result of flying into wind turbines. So think about that. About two birds per wind turbine per year of utility-scale windmills.

Offshore, the numbers are even lower because there are fewer birds. You need to put the turbines 10 to 15 to 20 miles off shore, and the bird populations are much lower out there. But you have to do it right, you have to make sure you're also not in migratory areas for whales and endangered aquatic species of all kinds. And what Europe has shown, Europe has 62 utility scale, offshore wind farms in Europe right now. America has one, but several are coming. And the bird collection data, the aquatic life data has come in from multiple years and the news is good. If you are careful in where you place these things, these wind turbines can coexist, in fact can benefit aquatic life by providing hardcover for recreational and commercial fishermen and for coral reefs and other aspects of marine life.

We already had a headstart in that most Americans have a positive view of when power. For most people, when they see a modern wind turbine, whether it be in the Plains of Kansas or off the distant coasts of Block Island in Rhode Island. The main emotion that people experience when they see that wind turbine turning slowly in the wind is a feeling of hope. They just feel hopeful. They know why it's there, they know why there's being a transition made to wind power, it's because we are being clobbered by climate change. We are destroying our mountains through mountaintop removal for coal. Acid rain is

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destroying our forest and the planet is literally warming. So when people see wind turbines, they experience, most people, a sense of hope. This is the solution. Now, if you translate that to wind turbines interconnected off the coast of the Mid-Atlantic from Cape Cod to Cape Hatteras, most of them not even visible for most of the year during the haze of summer when tourists go to the beach, you won't even see most of these turbines.

In the winter, they'll be about the size of your thumbnail when you put your hand as far away as you can from your face, very, very small. But when you do see them, you will know that this is our transition to a new world. This is how your children and grandchildren sustainably, forever will be able to get the electricity they need to live their life. And our goal is to make sure that our children and grandchildren have the same opportunities in their lifetimes that we've had in ours. Every day I wake up, every day I wake up terrified that my 22 year old son will have a fraction of the opportunities in his life that I've had in mine because we're wrecking our one and only life-giving climate. And that's why I devote myself to this issue. My motivators are, number one, my son, he is the world to me.

I want him to have everything that I've had and for his children to prosper like I've prospered. My number one motivation. Second motivation is my Christian faith. I am a Presbyterian, I believe that creation is a gift. It's sacred. It was given to us. It is not our right to destroy it and therefore we have to preserve it and be good stewards of this planet. So it's sacred to my faith's tradition. And third is my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer. From 1984 to 1987, I was a fisheries volunteer in the Peace Corps in the middle of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And in that society, villages that I lived in, it wasn't a question of dirty coal fired electricity versus clean wind powered electricity. These village people didn't have electricity. It wasn't a question of gas guzzling Hummer versus electric vehicle, these people didn't have cars.

They contribute almost nothing to climate change, and yet they're being walloped, walloped by record droughts and floods that are taking food off their tables. And this is absolutely, completely morally unacceptable that we would do this to innocent people all over the world who have contributed almost nothing to climate change but are suffering first and foremost. So those are the three things that really motivate me.

Interviewer: How does your son feel about knowing that he's your main driver for what you do?

Mike Tidwell: He gets it. It's interesting. When he was very little, he... when he would build Lego houses, he would build the Lego house and then he would get to the roof

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and he would put Lego solar panels on the roof. And this was in the late... the early 2000s. And that's because as a kid, he didn't know you could build a house without solar panels because our back roof was covered in solar panels. So I brainwashed him from a very young age. He is now graduating in December with a degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Maryland. When he was a sophomore in college, he said, "Dad, I got to make up my mind what I'm going to major in. I can't put it off anymore." He goes, "I'd really love to major in history or some of the other things that I really love, but dad, I grew up with you and I know that the only thing that really is climate change, and so I too want to give my life to this issue."

And so he's getting a degree in Environmental Studies and is going to find some role in the climate movement. So I'm proud of it, also, when he told me that, I said, "Number one son, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you had to grow up with me. And number two, I'm glad that you're making this decision because we need everybody's help."

Interviewer: Great. It's like a calling really it seems.

Mike Tidwell: Yeah. I guess. When your house is on fire and you reach for a water hose and everything you can to put it out, if that's a calling, then. It's almost an emergency response. It's like, what else are we supposed to do? We just need more people to see the fire.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first time, I don't if you'll remember the first time you looked at it, wind turbine. Can you remember that when you saw one?

Mike Tidwell: The first time I saw a wind turbine in person was outside of Davis, West Virginia when I was making a film, an early film that we made. We released it in 2004, we filmed it in 2003 called, We Are All Smith Islanders. We made a film that was based metaphorically on the disappearing Island of Smith Island in the Chesapeake Bay. Sea level rise is about to erase that Island completely, and we use that as a metaphor to say we are all Smith Islanders that climate change could... we live on a small planetary Island in the outer space where there's no safe shore for our retreat, so we're all Smith Islanders. And as part of that, which you can still see online, and I think you can Google it and watch that film. As part of that film, we wanted to show the positive solutions that can help us solve climate change.

And my filmmaker, producer, Mark Cohen and I traveled with one of my board members, Charlie Garlow, outside of Davis, West Virginia to a ridge line called Backbone Mountain, where there was an early wind farm. I think these are like one megawatt wind turbines. Beautiful, they're still, they're creating electricity

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every day right on the border with Maryland in West Virginia. And it was a beautiful day, just cloudless, just stunningly beautiful. I think it was September, October. And we film Charlie Garlow standing on the roof of my car with the turbine behind him. We needed to elevate him. You can't see the car and the shot, but we have him elevated with this turbine right behind them, and this little bit of shade goes over him every time it rotates so it's shade, sunlight, shade, sunlight of this giant turbine. And it's just an amazing hopeful blue sky day with this amazing, hopeful wind turbine. And that's the first time I'd seen one in person. And I was right up close to it and I remember it like it was yesterday.

Interviewer: All these challenges can have the reaction in people where it paralyzes you or it gets you depressed. You go into denial. So it seems like if you've ever struggled with any of that, I don't know, but if you have, you've pushed through it to do what you're doing. What are your thoughts about the challenges for people I guess your son's age and younger? Just the new crop of people who it's now going to be their job to figure out what to do with what we've left them and how do they face these challenges and what challenges are they going to have that might be different than the ones that you've had?

Mike Tidwell: We're in a bad situation. I mean our climate, our daily weather, wherever you are in the world is unrecognizable. Whether you're in downtown Tokyo, the Highlands of Ethiopia, the silk road of central Asia, the weather is too hot, too wet, too cold, too dry. There's no normal anywhere in the world. We have wrecked a lot of what sustains this planet and scientists tell us, we have barely 10 years to stabilize this pattern of destruction and pull the planet and ourselves back from the abyss. I don't get paralyzed by depression for one main reason, I just stay busy. I just don't allow myself time to get down. I work 50, 60, sometimes 70 hours a week. Because if I pause, I will just literally weep and go into a dark place where I fear I won't come out. And I think for some people who don't have the great privilege and opportunity to take action on this issue every day, that's where they go.

They go to a dark place, they've gone many people from a state of denial. It's not happening, I don't want it to happen, I can't let it in to finally letting it in, especially lately. And then going straight to a place of denial without pausing in between on action. So that's my job is to get people to take action. My job is to get people out of denial. And by denial, I don't mean just that conservative denying that climate change is happening. I mean, denial that we think that well, somehow we're going to get out of this without changing our lives. Even liberal progressive people, assuming that enough is being done, somehow we'll get through this. That is flat out denial. Enough has not being done and we're not getting through this and we need everybody's help and everyone needs to

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sacrifice, give up their time, push themselves outside their comfort zone and join a massive revolution.

So I see how far behind we are. When my son was really young, I think it was like eight or nine years old, it was around dinner time in the winter, I remember it was dark outside and I got a call from a journalist on deadline about some new scientific report that came out. My son was doing homework in the living room and I take the call on my cell phone and this reporter's that... we're having a difficult conversation about hard things like disrupted agriculture being predicted, food shortages from this new study and I'm talking to this journalist in realistic terms. Yes, this could be a threat to civilization and this is exactly the kind of thing scientists have said might happen to us if climate change continues. Have this whole conversation with a journalist, I'm passionately arguing that the rest are overwhelming and that we have to address them.

I hang up the phone completely forgetting that my son is in the next room doing his homework at age eight. I put the phone down, he looks up from his book and he says, "Daddy, are we all going to die?" And at that moment I said, "You have got to figure out a way to communicate with your son right now in a way that he will understand." I start racking my brain, "Okay, what can I say to him? And he's really into sports and into football." And I said, "Okay, Sasha, we're not all going to die. We're going to get through this but it's going to be difficult." I said, "Imagine a football team that's down by 21 points with two minutes to go and no timeouts. Do you think a football team, high school, college or NFL has ever come from behind and won a game when they were down by 21 points, no timeouts with two minutes left?"

And he said, "Yeah, I guess probably." And I said, "Yeah, it's happened. You know how it happens? Number one, you have to have a great plan, you have to have a great quarterback, you have to have amazing teamwork and you have to have a little bit of luck and you bring all those things together and you win the game." And I said, "That's how we're going to solve climate change. We're going to have a great team, great leaders and we're going to execute a great plan and we're going to cross our fingers because I'm not going to lie to you. It's tough because you just heard me talking to that journalist. It's tough. But with a little bit of luck I believe we can solve this problem." And at the end of the day, I live by that metaphor. On my worst days, that's all I got. Is this metaphor that I made up for my eight year old kid. We're down by three touchdowns, there's almost no time left. We need leaders, we need teamwork, we need a plan and we need to cross our fingers.

Interviewer: Good parenting moment there. You did it.

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Mike Tidwell: I pulled that out of my own pot.

Interviewer: Let me just give you the chance to... if there's any last thoughts that you want to share. If there's anything you want to share for the Town Creek oral history of course, and then secondly, if there's any kind of call out you want for the folks of Takoma Park who might hear you on WD of how maybe they can get involved if they don't already know you. I know it's a small community.

Mike Tidwell: I have been a full time climate organizer for 17 years and I've been privileged to meet lots of people in the world of activism. Lots of people in the world of philanthropy. Lots of journalists, lots of people in academia. But I have to say that some of my favorite people that I've met have been the trustees and the staff and the executive director at Town Creek over the years. It is a cliche that people in philanthropy hear all the time and probably it doesn't register because people like me say it to them all the time, but literally the work that we do would not be possible without them. Stuart Clarke, Jennifer Stanley, Lisa Stanley, Betsy Taylor, Dom Bosh, Phil Dietz as trustees and Stuart Clarke as executive director have made possible all the major clean energy changes that have happened in Maryland and across the region. Also in D.C. and Virginia over the last 15 or so years.

They have made it possible. They have been philanthropic leaders and they have set a vision for the rest of the region and they have accomplished something, frankly, that no other single foundation has been able to do. And that is point to a future where we are safe from climate change and put in motion with the scarce resources, a plan and support of people who are going to make it happen. So literally we could not have done what we've done over the last 17 years without Town Creek. I personally, am not sure I could have survived those early years as a struggling nonprofit, getting all my training on the job if it weren't for an early grant from Town Creek. So Town Creek has changed my life personally and Town Creek has changed the lives of literally millions of people across this region. And for that I am eternally grateful we will never forget them. And when the history of the climate movement is written for this country and this region, Town Creek, I think will get more than a few paragraphs and I'll be happy to begin that with this oral history right now,

Interviewer: Is there any future young environmentalist that goes into the archive and listens to your oral history? Town Creek won't be giving anymore. What should they do? If they've had such a big impact on you and now they won't be there giving, what should a young person...?

Mike Tidwell: Well, young organizers have so much power now that they've demonstrated through climate strikes all over the world. I think that a new paradigm of action

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is starting to take place. It could have never happened without these early movements, the early movements that some enlightened philanthropies helped get going, but now we've reached a moment of critical mass and I really believe that, that students not only have the information they need, that climate change is a threat, but we've established these paradigms of direct action. We've created this culture of grassroots involvement that students can now take advantage of. On September 23rd, 2000 people joined students in D.C. and shutting down 15 different intersections in the nation's Capitol, raising awareness about the climate emergency.

There was no major philanthropic funding for that. That was a ragtag army of teachers and students and some professional organizers, but mostly activists with Black Lives Matter and the immigration movement all coming together, taking a day off of work, striking from their jobs and raising their voices and getting incredible national and international media for what they did in the district.

And I think it's the education and the establishment of the early tools of activism that foundations like Town Creek have put out there for future generations to take advantage of. Of course, we're going to have to raise money, but now we can raise money from a full public that's completely alert to the problem. There's more money to be raised from individuals. So I think that Town Creek has joined other philanthropies and setting the stage where that philanthropic money from other foundations will continue to come, but now we can appeal directly to the public for individual donations as we have a truly intersectional grassroots movement.

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