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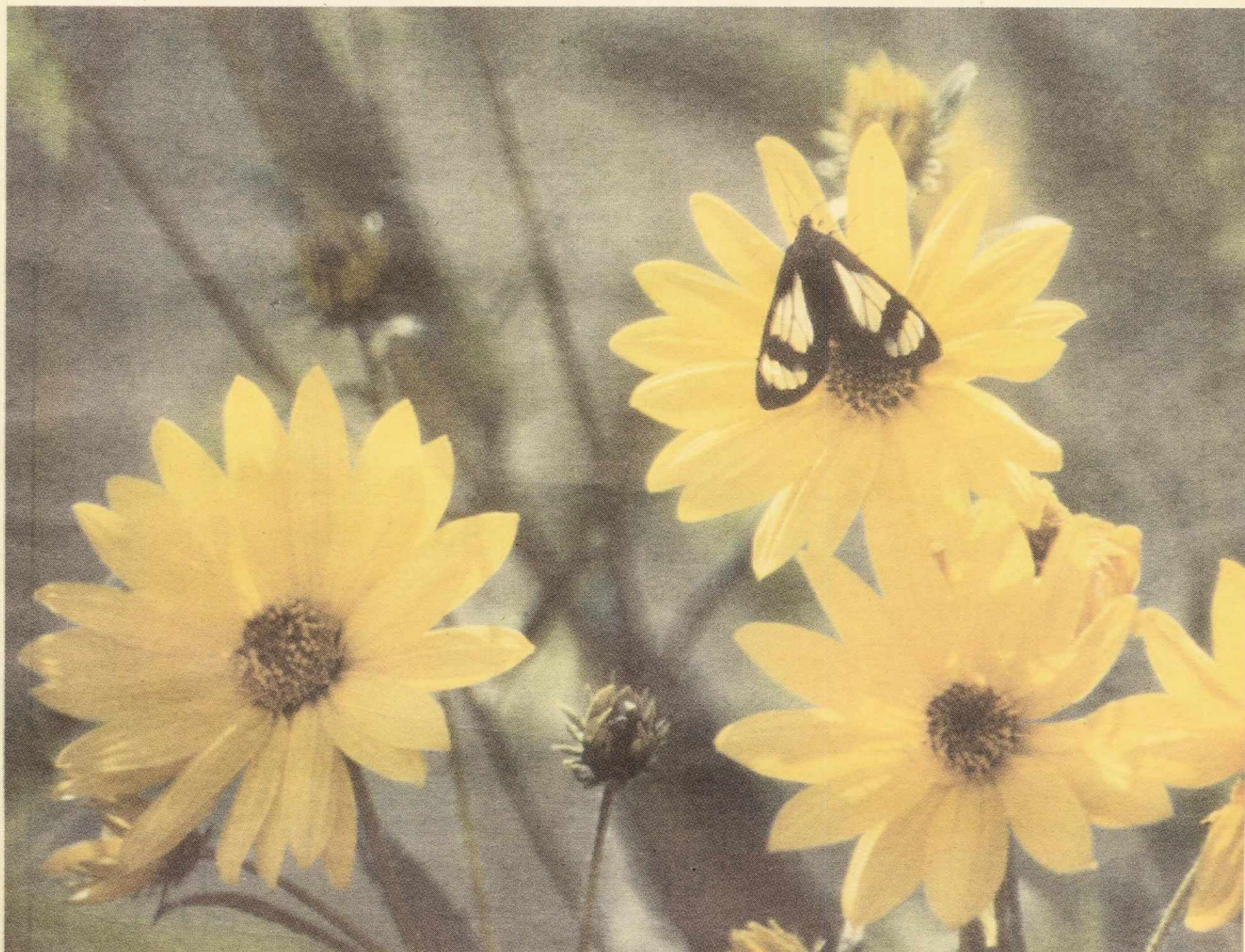


PHOTO: ANGEL FIGUEROA

## The Earth: we love it, we love it not...

by Myurathy Muhunthan

Concern for the environment is becoming a greater priority. Awareness of our disintegrating environment, whether it is pollution in the air, land, or water, endangerment of space and species, or the ozone layer, is rising to the forefront of all our minds. Although we acknowledge the need for change, it is often blocked by resistance to taking the initiative. The initiative that is believed to be needed seems to have varying levels of intensity among people of different generations. If there are different attitudes towards the environment among the generations of our grandparents, our parents, and youth, there are also different levels of commit-

ment to changing the world.

The older generation and the younger seem to be more concerned about their environment than the 'middle' generation (ranging from 40 to 55 years). This is a rather broad and simple classification and undoubtedly in danger of overgeneralizing. However, the first worldwide survey of the environment, conducted for the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) by Louis Harris and Associates, found that young people showed more concern for the environment. These attitudes are confirmed not only in the 14 countries surveyed (which included Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Hungary and China), but also more locally — in our homes.

As with any issue, real action begins at home and then spreads outwardly. Within my own family, there is less desire to change the environment in the 'middle' generation. Although my close relatives are far from ignorant on these issues, there seems to be much more of a 'what difference can I make?' attitude. In contrast, my grandmother, who was used to a time when there was a need to conserve resources, is more compassionate towards the problems of pollution and desertification.

There are many things that can be done: recycling papers, tins, and aluminum cans, carpooling, using reusable mugs, planting trees, getting involved in environmental groups, or at least participating in conserva-

tion. These actions may seem insignificant, but knowing mathematics or statistics, if everybody in the city conserved a small amount, the total effect would be greatly multiplied. If these small efforts are beneficial, why do some people hesitate or refuse to participate in conservation?

There is a possible explanation for this 'generation gap'. In our grandparents' time (born in the 1920's or 1930's) there was not much industry, a lot of unused land, many unexploited resources, and fewer people. Technology allowed them to harvest only a limited amount from the land and water. People living in the first half of this century developed a close relationship with the environment which gave them a greater respect

and understanding of nature.

The next generation, the 'middle' generation (born in the 1940's or 1950's), came into the world at a time when improved technology allowed people to exploit a greater amount of natural resources. It was not a time of conservation, but of use and abuse. The mentality of many people in this generation was set in that mode of usage. To shift it into conserving and preserving is proving to be difficult.

Now we come to the present generation (of which I am a part), which is facing the consequences of past abuses of the environment. Young people want to live in a much

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