



# One in a million

As the founder and CEO of the movement, 1 Million Women, Natalie Isaacs has inspired hundreds of thousands of women to reduce carbon emissions.

Story by Rosamund Burton

Meet flame-haired Natalie Isaacs: she received the 2017 *Australian Geographic's* Conservationist of the Year Award; 1 Million Women won the 2013 Momentum for Change Award at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and in mid-September Natalie was one of 22 Climate Trailblazers, and the only Australian, at the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco.

Her book, *Every Woman's Guide to Saving the Planet*, hit the bookshops a few weeks ago, and I visit her at her home in Newport, where she lives with her husband Murray Hogarth and their youngest son, Isaac. She opens the door dressed in floral pants with a wide leather belt, and a simple green top. With her mane of red hair, clear complexion and broad smile, it's hard to believe this mother of four is in her mid-50s - and a grandmother.

Vibrant oil paintings hang on the walls; on a long wooden table is a colourful Moroccan tagine pot; and a guitar sits on a chair.

"The dog has eaten the sofa," she says grimacing, as she looks at the ripped fabric and Sancho, the young Labrador blue heeler cross. "He's a beautiful dog, so I couldn't be cross with him." Sancho and Roshi, the elderly beagle cavalier, gaze up at her wagging their tails.

Natalie grew up in Brisbane, a couple of streets from the river, before the family home was destroyed in the 1974 flood. She was almost 13 years old and remembers going out with her parents and two older brothers to celebrate the week before, because her mother and father had paid off the house.

"We weren't insured for flooding and lost everything. I don't think the experience shaped me," she reflects, "but it is a lesson that love is what's important, not possessions."

After school she moved to London. Her father suggested that she look for a business idea there and bring it back to Australia. She did courses in aromatherapy, beauty and cosmetics, but it was The Body Shop that took her interest. While in London she watched it grow from one store to seven so home she came with her business idea to create a skincare line. It wasn't until she was in her mid-20s that she made 10 beauty products and started her cosmetics business, which she called *Natalie Jane*, and then changed to just *Natalie*.

She also met environmental journalist and husband-to-be Murray; when he was offered a job working on the ABC's *7.30 Report* in Sydney, Natalie followed him south, they got married and started their family. In early 1993, they moved here.

"We wanted somewhere that felt like a Queenslander and we wanted beach," she says with a smile. Their four children, Bronte, Jacob, Shea and Isaac all went to Newport Primary and Pittwater High, and Isaac is in Year 11 there now.

"Pittwater has been a beautiful place to bring up all our children, and they have a deep love of the earth, I believe, because of being here."

Natalie developed three more cosmetic brands for chain stores, which focused on creating self-confidence in teenage girls. The *Natalie* products were high quality and Australian-made, but these later brands were over-packaged and made cheaply in China.

"I sold my soul to the devil," she admits. "My obsession was standing in stores watching how much of my product was taken off the shelves. I didn't care about the quality, just that the product was sold."

Meanwhile Murray had left journalism and was working at environmental company, Ecos Corporation. The company was also involved in installing free eco lightbulbs in people's houses. Because of her sales experience Natalie was asked to help train the light bulb team.

Standing in a room of people celebrating the installation of one million eco light bulbs, she had the epiphany that she could

be part of this movement, and do something to reduce CO2 emissions.

"We had just renovated this house, and without any thought had put in energy-sucking halogen downlights all the way through it," she recalls. "Now I thought I'm going to get our energy consumption down."

She reduced their household energy consumption by 20 per cent, just by being vigilant around the house, and describes feeling so empowered. Then she got the food waste down by 80 per cent, and stopped buying fast fashion.

"I had sat at our dinner table with journalists and environmentalists talking about climate change and CO2 emissions, thinking I don't know about this, so I won't say anything, and subsequently I wouldn't do anything. But now I realised when it comes to combating climate change, it needs us all to take action."

In 2007 Natalie had the idea of founding a women's movement aiming to take action on climate change through the way they lived. After her career in cosmetics working with women was natural to her, but also, she explains, in high-consuming economies, like Australia, women make between 70 and 85 per cent of all the pur-

chasing decisions that affect a household's carbon footprint.

It took two and a half years to get 1 Million Women off the ground and Natalie emphasises that she was helped by so many women on the way.

1 Million Women was launched in 2009 and started as a website on which women signed up to cut one tonne of pollution out their lives within a year. In the first year 40,000 women signed up to do that, and now over 300,000 women have successfully completed the challenge and the 1 Million Women community is now over 800,000 strong.

She believes that a person's desire to change their lifestyle and sustain that change has to come from the heart, and from a deep love of the earth.

"That love of the earth is what I have here in Pittwater," she says. "It's the calmness and serenity I feel when I walk on Bungan or Bilgola Beach, or when I swim in the rock pool at Mona Vale. It's the difference between just loving your environment to being in love with it. If you truly love the ocean you have to think about the amount of plastics we're buying, because they're choking the ocean."

In *Every Woman's Guide to Saving the*

*Planet* Natalie provides myriad ways to take climate action, from not buying vegetables wrapped in plastic or eating less meat, to how to choose a bank which doesn't invest in fossil fuel power stations, or a superannuation fund which invests in renewable energy. She also readily admits her reluctance to make some changes.

"I drove everywhere in a big, gas guzzling Pajero, and it wasn't until 2012, when 1 Million Women had been going three years, that I started taking the E88 to the city for work."

In her passionate, but gentle way Natalie outlines in the book her journey from being unaware, inactive and "not having recycling sorted" to the eco amazon she is today.

"My message to everyone who lives in this area I love so much," she concludes, "is that how we live is a big part of the solution to climate change. None of us are perfect, but we just need to keep moving in the right direction."

*Every Woman's Guide to Saving the Planet* by Natalie Isaacs is published by ABC Books (RRP \$9.99)

\* For more information about 1 Million Women go to [1millionwomen.com.au](http://1millionwomen.com.au) or visit [facebook.com/1MillionWomen/](https://facebook.com/1MillionWomen/)



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: Climate change trailblazer and author Natalie Isaacs moved to Newport 25 years ago; getting the 1 Million Women message out in the media; with daughter Bronte circa 1992; the family love relaxing at Newport Beach; celebrating son Isaac's bar mitzvah at Bungan Surf Club in 2015.

