



## Sophie Robinson

*Environmentalist and film producer*

By Humaira Taz

How many psychology majors can you think of who are dedicated to protecting the environment and are doing it through films? Not many I can assure you. Sophie Robinson is one multi-talented woman who fulfills both of these roles and more. “I have been studying climate change and raising awareness about it my whole life. That passion has taken me to filmmaking, where I can create beautiful and change-inspiring documentaries about climate change,” she emphasized.

Sophie currently works at PF Pictures as an executive producer and director of outreach. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Williams College in Massachusetts and is now working on getting her master’s degree in sustainability from Harvard University. Prior to filmmaking, she was a grassroots climate change organizer for two years. During that time, she coordinated 350 Massachusetts for a Better Future Project, which involved actualizing the agenda of the statewide volunteer network and figuring out collectively what people can do to raise awareness about climate change. The social movement was created to address the climate crisis and bring to light issues of the fossil fuel industry. According to Sophie, she loved the cause but the work was very tiring. “One day I was driving home from work, pretty exhausted, and just decided that I wanted to quit my job and make a film instead. And that’s exactly what I did. I arranged a meeting with a company that produces climate change films, where the director and I discussed what we wanted to make and the angle that we wanted to take on the film. After that, we worked together from conception to completion on the movie *The Age of Consequences*,” explained Sophie.

Sophie’s passion for saving the environment stems from her childhood. “I grew up on an organic berry farm in New Hampshire. Both my parents were environmentalists, especially my dad. To give you some context, he was one of the first people to buy the Toyota Prius...probably in 2000 or 2001, right when they came out on the market. He would drive it around and get people excited about renewable energy. He was a huge proponent of renewable energy since the 1970s. As a matter of fact, he was the volunteer executive producer of a movie about the works of Amory Lovins on energy conservation and renewable

sources of energy,” she reminisced. “In high school, I had my first class on environmental science and fell in love with it instantly,” said Sophie.

When I asked if going into filmmaking with a background in psychology was a hurdle, she explained that having that background helped her to understand how people feel and respond to things. During the filmmaking process, it helped her determine what kind of framing would be appropriate in conveying her message, how the message should be delivered, and who should deliver it. “*The Age of Consequences* highlights the sensitive topic of national security, war, and how climate change might exacerbate that. It was very exciting and terrifying at the same time when the movie came out in Spring 2017, but we are happy at how well it has been received.”

Sophie is funding the Materials Research Society (MRS) Nelson Buck Robinson Science and Technology Award for Renewable Energy in honor of her father. This is an annual award that debuts in 2018 and will be presented to a student, postdoc or young professional who is dedicated to pursuing research on renewable energy and aspires to make significant contributions in this field. “My dad passed away when I was 15, and my mom passed away when I was 21. When they died, they left a sum of money behind. Since both of them were advocates for renewable energy and the environment, I decided this would be the best use of that money,” she recalled.

When asked how she chose MRS to be the recipient of this award endowment, “That’s a great question. I did a lot of research first to select the right organization, and then I asked a friend of mine at MIT who is doing research on solar panels. He recommended MRS, and it matched with what I was looking for!” explained Sophie.

Her next project is a film that highlights the financial impacts of climate change on the economy, both positive and negative. She explained that she wants the film to speak to people having a wide spectrum of political beliefs, so using bipartisan language is very important. Outside of filmmaking, she attends Women’s Marches and encourages people to learn about climate change. “I have immense gratitude for people in science and otherwise who are working to control the impacts of climate change. We need people from all backgrounds in this fight to protect the environment.” □



Humaira Taz is a Bredesen Center Research Fellow at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.