

# **Fierce Love**

*How One Mother Reinvented Herself by Saving the Planet*

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**DRAFT**

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## Foreword

I don't wish divorce on anyone. Anyone. But in the summer of 2006, in the midst of a divorce with two little guys in diapers-- really thanks to my divorce-- I found a cause. And I will never be the same.

That day in June, sitting on the couch in the family room, I learned that our addiction to oil poses a serious threat to the health and well being of my children, now and in the future. Since that defining moment, I've decided to use my psychological expertise in behavior change to serve as a catalyst to protect the planet for my children — for all children.

I couldn't see it at the time, but I now see that it's no accident that my moment of awakening occurred while I was going through a divorce— with two toddlers in tow, no less. There were things in my life, big things, over which I had little or no control; the life that I had known was coming apart. In that state, a space cracked open in me that made me feel that I needed to control what I could in order to offer my children the best life possible under the circumstances. For the first time in my life, I really wanted, *needed*, to make a difference in the world. So into that space came... the problem of our planetary crisis.

I do see a certain irony here — I feel my life is out of control, so what do I do? Imagine myself taking on one of the greatest challenges humanity has ever faced. Well, I *am* known for my perseverance and determination... Daniel Burnham, one of the great thinkers and planners of the last century said, "Make no small plans." Hubris, I know.

Love motivated me not just to recycle – perhaps a little obsessively — but to speak out, to become an involved voter, and in spite of my natural reserve, to become a more public person. I have become what I call an "unlikely environmentalist." And I've carved out a role as a catalyst for others to use their spheres of influence, however big or small. My life, my work, my world have changed. *I've* changed.

And my awareness has expanded. I started out being concerned solely with our addiction to oil. But then I learned about the potentially carcinogenic parabens in our skin care products-- including the sun block we slather on our kids. How about the toxic fumes that emanate from our petroleum-based plastic toys? And what about the hormone-altering PBAs in the plastics that permeate our lives—the cans, the water bottles-- and our bodies? Don't get me started.

Even though I'm now aware of and concerned about things like toxins in our food and water and skin care products and toys, I'm still mostly concerned with our addiction to oil because the consequences so directly impact the quality of life – and the potential for unnecessary suffering—for our kids that I do think it trumps other eco issues. And on some level, I think it trumps other issues of grave concern—health care, education ,

juvenile diabetes the list is long. We could solve all these other problems, and still have massive human suffering if we don't turn the climate crisis around.

What I've found is that being involved in a cause pulls me out of my personal concerns. However busy I am, overwhelmingly so at times, concern for a cause larger than myself, my family, my situation, feeds me an energy that fuels my spirit. So here I am, bumping along imperfectly as I oversee my psychology practice, try to figure out how to pay bills, write a book, *attempt* to remember my reusable shopping bags, make dinners, arrange play dates, shuttle the boys to sports, get them to the doctor. All that stuff. I get less sleep than I ever have — except when I had newborn babies — but I have no regrets about having joined the growing movement of unlikely environmentalists.

So, in part thanks to my divorce, I've been able to reinvent myself and grow into a bigger version of myself.

With all the day-to-day responsibility of being a single working mother weighing on my mind, I still make time to listen to the news. Wildfires in places like Minnesota, and hurricanes here and abroad, ice storms in Florida. Floods in India and protracted drought in Kenya. Drought in the Southeastern and Western states. The worst oil spill in US history—a massive disaster by any standard. People's livelihoods are destroyed, fish and birds and sea turtles dying, ecologically sensitive and important areas damaged, fish contaminated, clean up crews hospitalized, high rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, tourists' vacations canceled.

Before working on the book one day, I pack up gifts for Carolyne, our first babysitter, who was from Kenya. She has since returned home with her three beautiful children, Tony, Claude and Zawade. Carolyne told me that in the village where she grew up, no one has running water; they rely on the streams running through their yards. But the streams have dried up. This is the human face of a hotter planet.

Yet the same day I learn that a Nobel Prize in economics is being awarded for research on how we can successfully share our natural resources — a vital part of the solution to the problem of how we can continue to thrive on a planet limited resources. By sheer coincidence, I read a blog by my friend Rob Harmon (<http://www.b-e-f.org/blog/?p=1312>) who just invented something he calls Water Restoration Credits. These allow us to purchase credits that fund the replenishment of dry streams — a bargain at a buck per thousand gallons. As I write, we have an energy bill called the American Power Act in the Senate, finally. Signs of progress.

If you're like most of us, you have a lot on your plate, too. Your kids get sick, your basement floods, your parents need help, your boss is difficult — or maybe you've even lost your job. And there are lots of problems in the world, news of which can seem like white noise — remote, hard to wrap your brain around, much less do anything about when you're already too busy.

Yet I invite you to see, through my story, the hidden opportunities in your own life to find purpose and meaning. I hope that you will answer that little voice — or big voice — that says, “Here’s a chance to make a difference. Here’s a problem to work toward solving that will leave the world a better place.” No matter who you are and where you are, there are problems in your world that need solving — problems that need your talents and passion. Your life may be turned upside down, but you will come away transformed.

In the pages that follow, I share my story of personal transformation as I’ve joined the growing movement of unlikely environmentalists. I offer my psychological insights into how we move from denial to awareness to action, and how we can turn adversity into personal opportunity. I also share what I’ve learned about what the planetary crisis means in our day-to-day lives-- such as the impact of weird weather (what I call “global weirdness”), as well as the signs of hope and progress as we gain momentum in protecting the planet. In the final chapter, I offer my suggestions for how you, too, can join this new movement of unlikely environmentalists, use your spheres of influence, and reap the rewards of doing so.

The problem that I have been called to address is the dire state of our planet. But you may be pulled to address another problem that you can’t turn away from. That will be your road, and your contribution. If that road takes you to the problem of the planetary crisis — our human crisis — I will be delighted to have you working along side me. But whatever cause seizes, you know that through taking action you know that unexpected rewards await you.

*Sarah Warren, Chicago, IL  
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## **Chapter One**

### **From Casual Recycler to Unlikely Environmentalist: One Mother’s Conversion**

Several years ago, my mother told me she thought I should recycle more. I responded in an exasperated tone, “Mom, I’m busy.” And I was busy—raising two little guys in diapers, going through a divorce, and working. Ok. I’m lying a little. In fact, I was *really* busy. As in, overwhelmingly busy.

Fast forward, give or take a year. In June 2006, I happened to tune into a radio interview with Dr. Paul Epstein, a Harvard physician who’s been studying the health effects of increased temperatures. That day, I went from being a casual recycler, an ordinary, middle class single mother of two young rascals, working as a psychologist and coach, to a reluctant activist. First, I understood that a warming planet threatens my children’s health, not just in the future, but now-- problems like longer cold and flu seasons (have you noticed?), new virulent diseases for which we have no treatments, and West Nile virus. The problem was no longer remote and huge and abstract. It was a menace to my

two young boys whom I love—passionately. I felt alarmed and agitated, yet overwhelmed and paralyzed by a problem of such magnitude. Thankfully, that was to change only moments later. The interviewer asked if Dr. Epstein was pessimistic. He said that, in fact, he was optimistic because so many smart people around the world were working on the problem. Then, not only could I relate to the problem, but also I saw that there was collective momentum that I could join. I said, “I’m going to join that movement.” Having felt overwhelmed and at a loss only moments before, I now saw a vague path to action—and couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t take that path.

Would I have answered the call had I not been in the midst of a divorce? It’s impossible to know, of course. But I think perhaps not. I think I would have just been immersed in the day-to-dayness of family life.

At that moment I was called to action—and I answered. I was still really busy managing my life, but I knew that I had to find a way to use my professional expertise in behavior change and addiction to make the greatest possible difference—to address our addiction to oil. I didn’t know how, but I knew I had to find a way. Little did I know how amazingly my life would change, what wonderful and remarkable people I would encounter, and how much *I* would change by working to change the world for the sake of my children. I was about to become what I call an “unlikely environmentalist” and join the growing movement of new environmentalists. I was about to discover my voice.

Some years before, when data on our heating planet first received media attention, I thought skeptically, “Well, life is full of cyclical curves. We don’t know yet about this warming curve we’re on.” Over time, I had come to accept the near total consensus of the international scientific community that these were not mere natural warming cycles, but that our human consumption of electricity and petroleum products and trees--particularly in my lifetime--generates quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> that overtax the ability of the plants and oceans to absorb and recycle that CO<sub>2</sub>, causing global climate change. At the start of that day in June of 2006, I was no longer in denial about the problem, but I was in denial about the solution. By the end of that day, I knew I had to be part of the solution.

I suppose I could have stayed in that immobilized state I’d been in initially when I first listened to the interview. But I don’t *do* inertia. I find it intolerable. For the first month after entering motherhood, I felt overwhelmed by otherwise simple tasks such as the laundry. I *hated* being like that. I like to be effective. So I kick into gear—especially when my children are threatened.

### **Why a Reluctant Environmentalist?**

As is often the case when a person feels called—perhaps to paint, to write, or to minister—I did not feel I had a choice. As a working mother of two preschool aged boys, struggling to adjust in the midst of a divorce, free time was *not* something I had to fill. I was not looking to take on even one more task. Between motherhood and my work as a psychologist and professional coach, I already had a strong sense of purpose. But

realizing what the planetary crisis, unchecked, meant for my children's future left me no choice but to take action.

Still, I initially approached my activism reluctantly. Perhaps my greatest source of hesitation derives from the fact that I am a deeply private person. I've always lived a very private life. I've never been more politically active than going to the polls to cast my vote. Privacy suits me. Even in my professional life, I don't go seeking clients; they seek me out because of some personal dilemma. I render my professional opinions behind closed doors. But in order to effectively use my expertise in addiction and behavior change on a problem of such scale and urgency, I am forced to become a public person, operating on a wider stage. And so, I've changed. I've grown into a new and larger way of being in the world.

I have the usual parental concerns. I shuttle my kids to soccer, squeeze in homework, run to the grocery store for milk. I had to go through the ordeal of buying health insurance.. I'm aware that social security is going to run out. I am a member of what I call the "sandwich generation"—sandwiched between aging parents and young kids. I'm mourning the loss of my size 4 figure. I want my kids to be confident, well-rounded people who get their best shot at a good life. And I'm as busy as most of us are, juggling all my responsibilities.

But no matter how busy I am, my first obligation as a mother is to keep my children healthy and safe. This is why I've worked to try to increase enforcement of the stop sign across from the elementary school where drivers routinely blow through, even when elderly people, dogs on leashes, and babies in strollers (including mine) are in the middle of the cross walk. (Ok, so maybe I've had a slight penchant towards activism, but on a small scale.) Likewise, if a warming planet has the potential to harm my children, I have to do everything in my power to protect them from that threat. And so, I tear myself away from them, and I ask them to tolerate moments when, as my youngest son used to say, I'm "busy at the 'puter."

Despite the considerable tradeoffs and the complexities of being a working single parent, the more I've learned about the impact of my lifestyle on the atmosphere, the more I've seen what our unhealthy planet means for future generations, the more I've explored the moral and ethical implications of inaction, and the more I've experienced and witnessed the personal rewards of action, the more deeply convicted I've become in my belief that the most important thing I can do as a mother and a professional is devote my time and talents to trying to avert planetary catastrophe for my children—for all children.

For me, our ailing natural world trumps everything else—because *everything* is at stake: our standard of living, our quality of life, even political stability and conflicts. At the same time, I understand why other people may see different equally or more pressing concerns. I was chatting with the door attendant at my office building, whose name also happens to be Sarah. She said that what saddens and worries her is so many children getting killed by guns. In her world, that trumps everything. And I respect that.

But for those of us who are not worrying about such immediate life and death concerns, for those of us who are in a position to pick and choose our commitments, I believe passionately that we need to act on the planetary crisis as the most pressing issue of our era.

Some months ago the mother of one my sons' friends said, "Thank you for your activism." I smiled and nodded, but I felt uncomfortable being called an activist. The term didn't fit my sense of myself. Yet, the term is accurate now. When more recently my younger son asked me if I was a warrior, I hesitated, and then replied, "Yes." Then he said, "So you're a lady warrior." Yes, that is where love has taken me. I'm not an activist by nature; I'm an activist by necessity.

When I met Dr. Paul Epstein recently —as I hoped I someday would-- at a luncheon hosted by The Climate Group, I thanked him for coming into my life and complicating it, for the better.

### **Starting Down the Path**

The day of my awakening, I sent two emails: The first to my friend Ann, one of my best friends from college, the other to my brother Brad, who has been working at the interface of business and the environment for nearly 25 years, telling him that this work on the health effects of our heating planet reminded me of our father's dinner table accounts of how events such as the construction of the Aswan dam created conditions for the development of new potent diseases. These were my first—tiny— steps as a green activist. I didn't know then how much more was to follow. And how much I would change.

That pivotal day, I connected the ill health of our planet to potential harmful effects on my children. That was one part of the causal chain—the implications of a hotter planet for our health. Since then, I've set about learning how my lifestyle contributes to more heat being trapped in the atmosphere-- thereby putting my children at risk. I turn on the car and I think about the unintended consequences of my driving. I drag myself out of bed at night to turn off something I forgot, motivated by love for my boys and the wish for them to have a bright future. This was another part of the causal chain that I came to see, not just how a warming planet affects my life, but how *I* affect the health of the planet and its inhabitants through my actions and inactions. And, importantly, I've come to see that lifestyle change alone isn't enough-- that we really need to change our policies and practices on a larger scale. This part of the causal chain has been the most personally transformational. As I've gradually learned more and more about my contribution to the problem—little parts in the causal chain-- I've challenged myself to reduce my contribution to the problem; not only to tackle my addiction to fossil fuel but also to speak out on our addiction to oil.

All of this has led me to discover the power of my voice. And to embark on the awkward, sometimes-difficult process of figuring out how I could use what I call my

“spheres of influence” to bring my expertise in behavior change and addictions to bear on this most vital problem.

I thrashed about for several months. Finally, I hit on the idea of writing a book of inspirational stories about what parents have been doing to protect the planet for our children, and the rewards they've reaped. What you're reading now is my story. Because the book is personal in nature all of my parental and professional activities, missteps, dilemmas, ventures, adventures and encounters became material for the narrative. I'll introduce you to some of the wonderful people I've interviewed now, because they've touched my life. But you'll learn much more about them on my blog and website and podcasts, and in my *next* book.

One of my favorites is Raymond Randall, the quintessential unlikely environmentalist. He's a member of the NRA and the Ocean Conservancy, and he told me right off the bat that Rush Limbaugh is “too liberal for me.” Raymond had several converging inspirations for his commitment to becoming a steward of the planet. One is that he belongs to the Northland, A Church Distributed (<http://www.northlandchurch.net>), where the pastor, Dr. Joel Hunter preaches about caring for the planet. Dr. Hunter, whom I also interviewed, comes out of the civil rights movement and was persuaded that things like rising sea levels would harm the poor and most vulnerable, which he sees as morally unacceptable. A management consulting assignment with Wal-Mart also showed Raymond how the market could be used to generate more environmentally responsible business practices. His daughter's interest in sea turtles brought him to join the Ocean Conservancy. Thus was born an unlikely environmentalist, who now heads up his church's environmental stewardship committee that has brought him into contact with all sorts of national environmental groups.

There's Debra Shore who had been working primarily as a writer when she “got mad” about the state of the forest preserves in the Chicago area. A diminutive and reserved person with a teenage son, she went through a women's leadership training program, and ran for office. Now in office, she has led the Metropolitan Water District Commission--a large and environmentally important office-- down a greener path.

Tim Rushner (not his real name) left his law practice of two decades in the aftermath of losing two siblings to cancer. An unassuming man, he went through a period of soul searching, and decided to work on the problem of climate change because he saw no better use of his skills and talents. He now holds a high level position in an environmental business.

Karen Leigh Cook says, “First of all, I'm having *fun*.” A fiery environmental policy advocate who didn't finish college, she travels the country brokering policy deals that protect the planet. This amazing single

mother believes “We have to clear away the policy obstacles for the next generation.”

Melissa O'Mara's husband is battling serious cancer, which they attribute to environmental causes. Melissa has been spearheading IBM's sustainability initiatives, as a marketing professional has made herself a sustainability expert by burning the midnight oil. How's this for an amazing title: IBM Industrial Sector Business Development Executive, Innovation and Sustainability Solutions. She's designed that title for herself to reflect her commitment. A mother of three, Melissa believes that we need to offer our children hope for solving our environmental crisis. She's convinced that the way she can be most effective in fulfilling her commitment is by leading the way for corporations-- not just IBM but its clients-- to reduce their environmental impact.

Inspirational teacher Simon Hauger leads what I call the “green car kids” at the automotive voc tech school in West Philadelphia ([www.evxtteam.org](http://www.evxtteam.org)). Simon saw that his students weren't really learning math and science through his traditional teaching methods, so he had the students build an electric go cart for the Science Fair. It won, and the students actually learned math and science. They've gone on to *design* and build a series of green cars that have won against well-funded teams from universities like MIT. Thanks to the efforts of Ann Cohen, the team manager, they are coached by Toastmasters on public speaking and meet with elected officials. These economically challenged students have gone on both to college and to well paying jobs. These students' lives have been transformed.

These are just a few of the people I've interviewed, whom I'm pleased to count as friends and allies.

Professionally, as I've become more involved in our environmental crisis, my career coaching practice has evolved. I had previously offered values-oriented career transition coaching, but a new focus of the coaching process became helping people “green” their careers in particular, and find a mission more broadly. This is partly because of the self-selection of clients, I'm sure, and partly because the topic has been on more and more people's minds. It's certainly been an opportune way for me to integrate my personal interest with my work. So I've “greened” my business and career by helping other people green their careers. And I'm using the experience I've had in finding a cause to help others find their mission, whether personally or professionally.

Along the way, I've met wonderful people whom I wouldn't have otherwise met, and have deepened my relationship with my brother with whom I now talk often across 2000 miles, sometimes more than once a day. And most fulfilling to me, by challenging myself to use my voice beyond the privacy of my office, I've changed my sense of myself in the world.

## **Transformation and Empowerment**

In order to do this work, I've had to grow into a larger version of myself. The process has been both painful and exciting. Overwhelming because of the uncertainty of having no "job description," no road map for how to navigate this unprecedented juncture in my own life and in history. Difficult because there are not enough hours in the day to be useful in this crisis in all the places where I see need and opportunity. Challenging because I've had to push myself, both personally and professionally, to move into a larger role than I've ever inhabited. Although I've used my psychological training in a number of different ways—from research to teaching to expert witness to career coaching and addictions treatment—until now, I've always felt clear about my professional identity. I can, of course, continue rendering services as before, and I have—but new, broader uses of my knowledge have emerged.

But, the process has been exciting because I am working to ensure a viable, vibrant world for my children. And I am changing myself, who I am. My brother commented to me recently that we had undergone a role reversal from our relationship as teenagers, when he careened around while I cautiously navigated the world. Now, I'm the one who's taking risks and making grand plans. He has many more years of substantive knowledge about the environment, but he says I'm now leading him out onto a wider stage by engaging a broader audience.

Exciting because the challenges we face at this moment in history represent a tremendous opportunity for us to come together for the sake of humanity.

Now I know the research on the women in the 1970s that fought to clean up Love Canal, the country's most notorious toxic waste site in New York State. Those women were similarly transformed. I'm not alone in reaping the personal rewards of fighting to protect the natural world for the sake of my children.

## **Using My Spheres of Influence**

Since my turning point, I've been discovering, expanding, and using my spheres of influence—as a consumer, a parent, and as a member of a school community, as a voter, a parishioner, a professional, and a neighbor. I've discovered that I have voice that I can use in every part of my life-- not just in my office-- and everywhere I go I can model my own version of stewardship of our precious planet. And I reap the personal rewards of living in alignment with my values.

I've not only been writing, speaking, and adjusting my lifestyle and business practices; I've also joined the Executive Committee of Cool Globes: Hot Ideas for a Cooler Planet. During the summer of 2007 this partnership between the City of Chicago and the Field Museum of Natural History commissioned and installed 124 globes on Chicago's beautiful and well-traveled lakefront in a remarkable use of public art to increase public

awareness of “solutions.” The project started with the modest goal of finding 25 corporate globe sponsors to raise funds for environmental education in the Chicago Public Schools, and ended up with over 100 sponsors ranging from Toyota to Starbucks. Thousands of visitors went on guided tours of the globes. The public sculptures developed in this project have now traveled to San Francisco and Washington, DC as well as London. And, this project was achieved largely by the hard work of many newly minted “unlikely environmentalists.”

Living the motto “I’m using my spheres of influence,” I try not only to live and work in a manner that is mindful of my environmental impact, but also to catalyze in all places in my life. I found a collaborator at my sons’ school who was interested in greening the school’s practices. My co-chair and I learned from each other in little ways—she got me thinking for the first time about the wastefulness of straws. She and I have had a number of conversations about how lifestyle change is a process, and is a matter of negotiation with spouses. Her husband sets the “green” bar high—she jokes that her husband might divorce her if she used paper towels-- even recycled-- instead of cloth rags. Even though she’s committed, she hasn’t always been ready to go as far as he has. We don’t all move in sync. Change is a process, and we’re uneven in that process.

I also scatter email and Twitter “seeds” to the wind when I find information that others might use—even occasionally in foreign countries. I field phone calls from friends who want to go green. At my church I asked the rector and his wife what stood in the way of recycling. This led to their forming a green committee to look at environmental issues as a facility—from reducing waste to looking at our old leaky windows. The committee has formed, and I’m not on it, thankfully, but I successfully served as a catalyst. That felt good. I’ve instituted recycling at my office suite and gotten the light bulbs switched over to compact fluorescents even though there was some initial concern about the quality of the light-- which turned out not to be a problem. Because I see an opportunity for corporations to take an important leadership role in reducing global warming pollution, I helped Corporate Climate Response plan a two-day conference in Chicago in the fall of 2007. For the first time in my life, I’ve met with my state senator and my US Congresswoman. I’ve written my US Senator’s office—and been called back in response. What did I say in the first letter I ever wrote to an elected official? I said I didn’t want my children drafted into wars over food and water.

Even small encounters can be significant—when I’m offered a paper or plastic bag in the store, I’ll usually smile and say, “I don’t need a bag, thanks. I’ve got my own.” That is, when I’ve remembered my bags! Often the checkout clerk agrees, and sometimes they’ll remark that they’ve never seen reusable sacks like the ones I use, and they’ll ask where I got them. One day, I declined bags at the supermarket—not Whole Foods, mind you—and the checkout clerk said I was the third person that day who didn’t want bags. They’re reinforcing me, in effect, for my efforts by letting me know I’m not alone.

Speaking up has also had the effect of enlisting people directly. I’ve had not just friends and acquaintances but strangers volunteer to help with my book in various ways—doing research, editing, or connecting me to resources.

People want to get involved in this issue. It makes them feel good. Excited, even. It *is* exciting to feel emboldened enough to engage the world in this unprecedented moment in history. **Faith and Hope**

My work on the planetary crisis is an act of faith, based in a belief that as human beings we have the capacity to use our intelligence to learn how to live in a way that will allow life – including human life-- to thrive on earth, and to do what's right and necessary to protect the children we love.

My faith derives in part from an earlier conversion—to Christianity. I had been raised in a secular family. My father subscribed to a rational-scientific world-view. We had discussions about the nature of the universe, but spirituality never entered in. My mother is prone to taking in strays—both animals and people—but rejects organizations of most sorts. Having been raised in the Congregational Church, somehow she found reason to rebel—against what I'm not sure! After I finished graduate school-- and lost that community—I went looking for a new community, which I ambivalently sought in church. Some months later, on Easter Sunday, the priest preached about being invited to “the dance,” and said it was OK to stumble. I accepted the invitation—and have been stumbling around ever since.

Part of what I realized through that conversion experience was that I was longing for connection to people who had lived before me and to people who would come after me, to traditions and people that transcended my lifetime. I call on my faith now during this challenging time, and also on that sense of connection to those who will come after my lifetime.

Since my own conversion to the life of an unlikely environmentalist, numerous religious leaders have spoken out on the need to act as stewards of the natural world. The Pope has repeatedly talked about the importance of caring for Creation, saying, "We need a decisive `yes' to care for creation and a strong commitment to reverse those trends that risk making the situation of decay irreversible." Since his election, the Vatican has supported environmental sustainability through a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions, and the Pope has also said they will install solar power in the Vatican City. For the first time, at its 2007 annual convention, the Islamic Society of North America, one of the largest Muslim groups in the US, addressed the issue of conservation. In my own community, we have one church that has completely “greened” its sanctuary and offices, and a synagogue under construction that promises to become the first certified green synagogue in the country. Yet another nearby synagogue has a staff position dedicated to environmental stewardship. The Dalai Lama has been a vocal spokesperson for the environment. In 2006, seventy-six Evangelical leaders issued “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.” The paper calls for federal legislation on carbon emissions, and asks Christians to vote their conscience on global warming. Among the signers was Rick Warren, author of the best seller *The Purpose-Driven Life*, who, like me, has come to recognize the power in working on an issue larger than oneself. .

Since then evangelicals, climate scientists, and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club have collaborated on a number of occasions. The UN Secretary General spoke at a meeting of evangelicals at which he noted the fact that those in the developing world who have the least responsibility for climate change will be the hardest hit. He said, “We have an ethical obligation to right this injustice. We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable. Without a strong global effort against global warming, we will fail in achieving ...the implicit human right to economic justice and development....The good news is that people and institutions of faith all over the world agree. This gives me great hope.” In 2008, a group of 45 Southern Baptist leaders, one of whom was persuaded by his son, signed a statement supporting stewardship of the earth. Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson, who was raised Southern Baptist, wrote *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, which makes the urgent case for caring for the environment in a series of letters to an imaginary pastor. E.O. Wilson also has spoken of the potential for us to destroy ourselves--and our capacity to save ourselves using our human ingenuity. There is a great deal of preventable human suffering at stake. Pastor Joel Hunter, of Northland A Church Distributed in Orlando, whom I mentioned earlier as a catalyst for Raymond Randall, preaches about the moral imperative of caring for creating, and has come out in support of what is now called the American Power Bill in the Senate.

Organized religion aside, since my “green” awakening, my relationship with nature has deepened. Previously my eco actions were primarily limited to recycling—and pretty much on autopilot. I was busy starting a family and working, and didn’t connect my actions to their consequences for a natural world that I pretty much took for granted. Now I’ve come to live more mindfully.

“Mindfulness” has come somewhat into vogue lately, with myriad authors such as Andrew Weil, Susan Piver, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, recommending programs of spiritual renewal and health through mindfulness. I believe that mindfulness can help not just our souls and our relationships and bodies but help us make decisions that take into account our effect on the natural world— and on our children. As I walk my kids to school, I’m more acutely aware of the subtle changes in the weather . As my older son has taken an interest in learning about birds, I’ve learned to be more alert to seeing and hearing birds—which is lovely. I ask myself questions as I make purchases. How much energy did it take to make this? How far was it transported to get here? How much water was used in the production? How long it will be of use? Can it be recycled or reused? Do we really need it to begin with? How big a house do we really need? How do I use the car, and how big does it *really* need to be to serve our needs? Even the act of questioning constitutes a form of mindfulness.

For me, being active in addressing the problem brings me hope. My own actions make me feel that I am doing everything I can for my children, and I encounter countless others who are doing their part in big and small ways. And faith in humanity helps fuel my reserves of resilience to do the work that needs to be done.

## **The Legacy of Lady Warriors**

Many feisty mamas have come before—motivated by love—and made the world a healthier, safer place for our children.

Feistiness is about mother dogs scrappily protecting their babies. They will do whatever they have to do to keep their young safe.

Protecting our children means that we dig deep to find resilience and courage. We don't put up with priests who molest children, or contaminants in the food we feed our children, or lead in their lunch boxes, or coaches who bully our kids. It's about passionately saying “*No*” to threats to our children, and “*Yes*” to our children thriving.

Candy Lighter, the mother who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) -- and sparked a movement that made our roads much safer—was scrappy. After a drunken hit-and-run driver on a suburban street in California killed her 13-year-old daughter, Cari, Candy stood up and fought to make sure that drunk drivers did not kill other sons and daughters. She mobilized others to become advocates for safer roads. She later wrote, "I promised myself on the day of Cari's death that I would fight to make this needless homicide count for something positive in the years ahead." That's feisty. And we can thank her and those she mobilized as advocates for the fact that we have many fewer deaths from drunk driving.

Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, built her environmentally conscious business from one little shop to 2,000 worldwide. A vibrant and humorous mother who recently died of hepatitis C, she wanted to make sure that her customers put natural and healthy products on their skin—and therefore in their bodies. She strove to minimize the environmental impact of her business, and to ensure that her suppliers in developing countries were fairly compensated. She was a model of corporate responsibility who believed in giving back to the community and holding other corporations accountable.

Ida B. Wells, a self-described “hot head,” helped launch the NAACP. In the 1890's, among other things, she fought against the lynching of African Americans as well as whites. When she learned of one particular lynching, she decided not to get involved until her 13 year-old son said, “If you don't go, nobody else will.”

Alice Trillin was a classy, feisty mama. The non-smoking daughter of two heavy smokers, when she was diagnosed with lung cancer, she became an outspoken opponent of second-hand smoke. She was not afraid to speak her mind and challenge whomever she believed needed to be challenged. And, among other things, she was beautiful, charming, wore fabulous clothes, and proudly refused to wear sensible shoes. Given my love of shoes, I can relate. In 2001, she died from heart failure caused by radiation damage to her heart while being treated for lung cancer, and is beautifully remembered by her husband, Calvin Trillin, in *About Alice* (2007).

Soft spoken mother of two, Maya Lin, best known for designing the Viet Nam wall as a very young woman, has been working for two decades to raise awareness of the environmental crisis through her powerful art installations.

When Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize risked her life to prevent deforestation in Kenya, this charming, gracious mother showed defiance to the corrupt authorities who beat her for her courage. When the Nobel Committee honored her “for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace,” they recognized that global peace depends upon respect for nature.

We all remember Julia Roberts’ portrayal of Erin Brockovich. Well, years later, Erin Brockovich-Ellis continues her environmental advocacy by going after still more corporate polluters as the director of research at a law firm. She believes that mothers’ love is a strong motivator to protect the natural world—and she embodies that belief.

Lisa Nigro founded Chicago’s famous Inspiration Café with twin toddlers in tow. The Inspiration Café broke new ground in empowering homeless people to become economically self-sufficient. True North featured her story by in an ad campaign that ran during the Super Bowl in 2008. Recently she said in a radio interview, “I’m just an ordinary girl with an extra-ordinary spirit.” I know Lisa; she does have extra-ordinary spirit.

Perhaps less well known, Margaret Hetherman is a single, self-employed mother in New York. She spent her own money to mount billboards on the I-94 in Detroit where she’s originally from, saying “Take back the winter” with her daughter’s image in the background. She decided to launch the campaign in response to questions from her 5-year-old daughter. She wants her daughter to know snow in winter as she did as a child herself.

It’s amazing what one person can do.

Of course, mothers don’t have a corner on love as a motivation to leave the world a better place. In fact, I’ve interviewed a number of dads who are fighting to protect the planet for our children and grandchildren. They are attorneys and real estate developers and physicians and schoolteachers, all members of the growing movement of new environmentalists.

We share a common bond. We all love our children intensely and are working to leave the world a better place.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Process of Change, The Rewards of Change, The Power to Change**

So you’ve heard the story of how I morphed from a casual recycler to a deeply committed protector of the natural world.

Now I'm going to apply a psychological lens to the process of personal and social transformation.

### **Addiction and Denial**

As a psychologist I work with all kinds of psychological concerns, but I have a specialization in addictions and apply that lens to our current crisis. I definitely see an addiction framework as applicable to the problem of environmental and energy crisis. Even President Bush referred to "our addiction to oil."

So *are* we addicted to oil? The term addiction is often, in my view, used too loosely. I don't believe that it's technically possible to be addicted to food or sex or relationships or the Internet, or frankly anything that does not create physiological dependence. However, I do think that lots of people engage in behavior that may appear "addictive." As an addiction psychologist, I would call all such behavior compulsive. And acting compulsively means we're not acting mindfully. We're not paying attention to *why* we're doing what we're doing, and we're not paying attention to the consequences.

Whatever we call it, certainly many of us eat more than we need to, spend more time on the computer than is healthy, and buy more than we need. In my case, I buy more cute shoes than I *really* need. One way that our collective tendency toward compulsion relates to the health of our planet is that our level of consumption—and our corresponding pollution output—reflects a belief that more and bigger is better. We drive cars and trucks that are way bigger, in general, than we need. Most SUVs—perhaps the least safe cars on the road-- never go off-road. Most cars and trucks don't even haul much stuff or many people the majority of the time. When my ex-husband and I bought a family car, we thought only about the maximum space we thought we needed for our future family, not about the impact of the car on the atmosphere-- or the fact that we didn't yet have children.

We build homes that fill up entire lots, which we then fill with stuff, all of which needs to be heated and cooled. This takes energy and produces global warming pollution. And we go into debt to buy all the stuff to fill the house. Think of our current housing and credit crisis—we got in over our heads.

And of course, much of this behavior isn't just random habit, but is fueled by psychological needs—such as to quell unspoken anxieties, or to prove something to others or ourselves.

But there's another way that the addiction model is applicable, even though, of course we can't be physiologically addicted to oil, or coal, or SUVs, or fun shoes, for that matter. One of the hallmark features of addiction is denial. Denial is about failing to connect our behavior to its consequences and effects—in spite of the evidence. We all know—and may have even experienced directly—the stories of alcoholics who aren't performing at work who blame their problems at work on a bad boss or unfair expectations. Likewise, we are familiar with alcoholics who are unable to see how their drinking affects those

they love—including, tragically, their children. When alcoholics move out of denial and into recovery, everyone benefits.

Similarly, we as a modern society had been living without awareness of the effect of our lifestyles on the natural world. In the past, that was not denial; that was ignorance. For quite a while, the public didn't have a lot of information about how we were impacting the environment and putting our children at risk by living our consumer-oriented, addicted-to-oil lifestyles.

Now we have more information. I don't feel too terrible about the way I was living before I became aware of the implications of my choices. And certainly, like most of you, I've been busy raising a family and working, and had plenty on my mind. I just wasn't thinking about how my choices affected the environment, now and in the future. Not any more. Now, I'm informed. These days, you almost have to make an effort *not* to be. We can hardly open a newspaper or magazine or listen to the news without being reminded of the global climate crisis, and how we can "live green" to help correct the problem. The animated movie *Arctic Tale*, released in the summer of 2007, reminds us that how we live here affects the animals in the Arctic. If I fail to act now, that's denial about the solution.

The parallel to the denial of the addictive process here is that we now have lots of indication – scientific data and signs in our own backyards--about how our lifestyles put our children at risk, just as an alcoholic's drinking does. As long as we continue to consume vast quantities of oil, gas, plastics, aluminum, paper products, electricity, and stuff that's hauled half way around the world to get to us, much of it bundled in huge amounts of packaging, we engage in denial about the impact of our behavior on our children and their children. In this, we are not unlike alcoholics consuming too much alcohol, destined to either profoundly regret our excess or die in denial.

A cardinal feature of addiction is rationalization. Alcoholics often say things such as, "I deserve this drink because I had a hard day," or, "It's OK for me to drink today because I'm celebrating." The variations go on: "My husband drinks more than I do, so why should I quit?" Or the classic, "I'll quit tomorrow." If I say to myself, "I'm just one person, it doesn't matter what I do," or "Why should I inconvenience myself by recycling when my next door neighbor doesn't?" or if I say "Why should I trade my SUV for a hybrid when China is continuing to increase its global warming pollution?" I am rationalizing my behavior. I'm justifying not changing. And the problem persists, and worsens.

Besides, because we've basically outsourced much of our CO<sub>2</sub> output to China by encouraging them to run factories 24/7 in order to produce stuff for us—it's not really fair to point the finger at them. That's called blaming—another hallmark feature of addiction.

It's as if we've been on a collective binge since about 1960—only instead of drinking, we've been consuming lots of stuff. And instead of getting DUIs and lab results telling us

that our liver is shot, we're getting global weirdness and a host of complications that take the problem to a crisis level. Our actions have caught up with us.

But we have the power to confront our resistance to change—I can challenge myself on my reluctance to turn off my computer and my “need” to continue buying sassy shoes. And we can share with recovering alcoholics and addicts the rewards of a new way of life—including getting closer to family and knowing we're doing right by our children.

The good news is that as an addiction specialist, I can say that there is hope. I've helped many drug addicts and alcoholics change their habits. They have to go through physical withdrawal, which thankfully we don't when we use cloth rags instead of paper towel, or when we walk the kids to school instead of driving.

Change is hard—and necessary, and possible. And the rewards for us and our children are immeasurable.

### **Guilt and Shame... Love and Responsibility**

Let's talk about guilt. Guilt and shame are often used interchangeably, but in fact they're not the same. And because they are used in a way that confuses the terms, guilt has in recent decades gotten an unfairly bad rap. Shame includes a painful sense of embarrassment or humiliation. There's not much to recommend the experience. And it tends not to be very motivating; in fact, it can be pretty paralyzing. Guilt, however, derives from our conscience, from our sense of what's right and wrong. And we would not want to live in a society where people lacked a sense of right and wrong. Guilt has a very real purpose that helps us refrain from doing harmful things to other people, and leads us to make amends when we've wronged others. Our legal system gives people “credit” for acknowledging their transgressions. Guilt helps us act responsibly. And it helps us raise children with a strong sense of conscience.

So, a sense of responsibility to our children—our nieces and nephews and grandchildren—can lead us commit to doing what we need to do to ensure them the best possible future by protecting the planet. We already do that on other fronts—we save for college; we get up in the middle of the night. Protecting the planet for those we love is just a natural extension of our love and responsibility.

My younger son, 4 years old at the time, told a bedtime story that I found both heartbreaking and heartwarming. He said, “Someone left the light on in bathroom all night. The next day all the polar bears died. Then the next day all the penguins died, all because someone left that one light on. So, I'm going to put up signs all over the world with a “no energy” symbol, because that's the way it works, right?” What his story shows, among other things, is that when we raise our children to see their part in protecting nature, it becomes part of their conscience. Preschoolers are just at that stage of development. And that's a wonderful thing. He may rebel in a few years and need to act like he doesn't care, but this will always be a part of him, and it will infuse his life. On another level, I love that he feels that he can make a difference. I am quite

certain this sense of capacity to solve problems will not be limited to the environment. Teaching children to feel effective in solving problems is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children.

### **Changing, Learning and Transforming**

Change is a process, as we all know. So let's talk about change. First, by addressing the often profound changes that come about unintentionally as a by-product of what might be called life-changing experiences. For you, it might be illness, or the death of someone important to you, or losing a job. Then we'll look at behavior changes that we deliberately commit to make, like exercising more or drinking less. In my case, divorce was the life changing experience that created conditions that opened me up to changing my habits and getting involved in this cause. Not that you should wait to for a life crisis to change your lifestyle and use your voice!

What made me ripe for changing my lifestyle and using my voice was the very personal crisis of divorce. I actually couldn't see that at the time. Not at all. I was just in it. I had no perspective on what was leading me to feel that I had to find a way to make a difference in the world. The first time that came into focus was during a conversation with my new friend Melissa O'Mara, whom I mentioned earlier. Melissa is a leader in corporate sustainability at IBM who also, not coincidentally, happens to be trained as a leadership coach. She remarked on how my divorce had created the potential for me to engage differently in the world. I agreed with her, but this insight wasn't in sharp focus for another year, until I received feedback on my book from my friend John Woldenberg who produces films-- and therefore understands story telling. He told me that I needed to bring my divorce to the front of the story. Nor surprisingly, given my private nature, I resisted this idea. But he was right. It all started with my divorce cracking open a space in myself that made me available for a cause.

In *Posttraumatic Growth* (1998), Richard Tedeschi and his colleagues review psychological research on what allows people to emerge from challenging life experiences. What becomes clear is that there is more to turning personal challenge into opportunity than simply telling ourselves to make lemonade out of the proverbial lemons -- and it's not just that some of us are luckier than others. One theory is that personal catastrophe challenges the assumptions that we have lived by about “mastery, meaning, and self-worth.” Thus, in reassessing and rebuilding assumptions about our world, and ourselves, we can successfully adapt to new and difficult realities. In particular, this research emphasizes the importance of seeing events as meaningful as opposed to random. This is why we so often find people saying, “Things happen for a reason.” We also learn that personal crises can yield new and better social support and relationships, more maturity, altruism and assertiveness, and improved coping capacities-- including knowing when to ask for help. Other findings suggest that there are certain personal attributes that increase the likelihood of benefiting from stressful experiences, such as flexibility, determination, intelligence, and willingness to take risks. In my case I would say that my perseverance might compensate for other qualities that I lack!

Interestingly, in *Posttraumatic Growth*, Candy Lightner, the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) comes up. You may recall that I mentioned Candy Lightner earlier when aligning myself with other mothers whose love has motivated them to fight to make the world a safer and better place. After a drunk driver killed her daughter, Candy Lightner converted her pain into a movement of mothers who set about making our roads safer through their advocacy. They used their voices, and we have all benefited.

Having been primed by the upheaval of my divorce, I transformed both my behavior and myself. I started learning how my actions and inactions contribute to the health of our planet, learning what I could do-- even as a divorced, working mother -- to reduce my use of fossil fuels. And I learned to use my voice to speak out on the policies that will ultimately make more of a difference than our changing lifestyles-- because isn't it more effective to improve emissions standards for cars across the board than to have a bunch of individuals trying to drive their inefficient cars less? Doesn't it make sense to have policies that promote recycling and composting instead of all us trying to figure it out ourselves?

In *Changing for Good* (1994), psychologist James Prochaska and his colleagues synthesized the research on intentional behavior change and identified six stages that are common to purposeful changes in our habits. This is relevant to lifestyle changes that can protect the planet.

**Pre-contemplation**—At this point it's, "Change? What change? Who me?"

**Contemplation**—Now it's, "So *maybe* there's something on my radar about a problem that *might* require me to change. But do I really have to?"

**Preparation**—Now, "I'm getting into gear. There's a problem and I'm getting ready to tackle it." This tends to be a period of intense learning.

**Action**—"I'm off and running."

**Maintenance**—"I'm figuring out how to stay the course."

**Termination**—"I've adopted a way of life that I can sustain pretty effortlessly."

As a society, I would say we've been hovering in the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages for a few years in our habits related to the state of the natural world. And more and more of us are converting our awareness into action. In *The Tipping Point* (2000), Malcolm Gladwell writes persuasively about how even small things add up. Small individual changes catalyze greater changes. The more individuals conspicuously change their behavior, the more we create a new normal.

Like most of us who are not lifelong, diehard environmentalists, I certainly started out in the pre-contemplation stage. But once I learned what our addiction to oil meant for my kids, I blew quickly through the next stage of contemplation and kicked into preparation

mode and then quickly into action -- on most fronts at least. I'm still struggling to turn off that computer! I'll share more about what I've learned later change in this chapter.

These six stages of change really focus on individuals making changes to their own behavior, almost as if we lived in isolation from other people. But the reality is we have relationships with people in our day-to-day lives-- like our children and spouses. Different members of the same household often-- usually?-- change at different paces, so we are in a process not just of changing our behavior but also of re-negotiating our relationships. Now *that's* a process.

I think of three wonderful and quite different examples of how families contend with the reality that we don't all move at the same pace: The Sleeths, the Strauss family, and Colin Beavan and Michelle Conlin. I mentioned previously that I interviewed Matthew Sleeth; I later interviewed both Matthew and his wife Nancy. Matthew was an ER doc who was the first in his family to decide that the way the way they were living, as affluent consumers, was not consistent with his values. Several years ago, when he spoke to Nancy about this realization, she said, "What are you going to do about it?" So she started out essentially prodding him to live up to his words. Ultimately, living in alignment with their values would mean Matthew quitting his job as a physician, selling the big house and shedding all the upper middle class trappings, giving up his nice income to become a writer and spokesperson, not eating out, even moving to another state where they could downscale their lives and live near the children's college thereby reducing the impact of their travel. Nancy admits that when Matthew announced that he wanted to quit his job, she said, "Are you sure you need to do that much about it?"

We are talking about a radical overhaul of the Sleeth's lifestyle, which also coincided with his becoming a Christian, having previously considered himself a secular humanist. And Nancy had been raised in the Jewish faith. Their two teenage children, Clark and Emma, weren't so sure about all of this religion talk. Matthew says, "First my son, then my wife, then my daughter came to believe." And their religious transformation led them to examine how they were living in relation to their beliefs and values, which ultimately helped them all not only make commitments but sustain them. Yet Nancy and Matthew say that they've each taken the lead in different areas while the other lagged behind. I love her story about not wanting to dry clothes on a line in the backyard because no one in the neighborhood did that. But when Matthew went ahead and started hanging the clothes out, she was ashamed that she wasn't helping, so she started to share that task her Matthew and the children. She can no longer imagine using a clothes dryer. (In that, she's ahead of me!)

Matthew and Nancy now say that that the final stages of raising adolescent children went more smoothly than the earlier adolescent years, and that as a family they are much closer. And now the entire family is now devoting themselves to protecting the planet, not just at home but in their work and their son's college studies. Matthew has written *Serve God, Save the Planet* (2006). Nancy has authored *Go Green, Save Green* (2009), and they have launched Blessed Earth ([www.blessedearth.org](http://www.blessedearth.org)), where their daughter blogs as well. From the outside, it could look like they all just fell in line with each other,

a 21<sup>st</sup> century “eco-Cleaver” or “eco-Cosby” family. But they are refreshingly honest about their struggles. And the process continues as they challenge themselves and each other to live and work in a manner that is consistent with their values.

I've not interviewed Rachelle and Richard Strauss myself, but I have heard a fascinating radio interview with them. Their story conveys very clearly how much pushing and pulling between couples there can be as they attempt to go green. After a family vacation with their three year-old daughter was interrupted by a frightening flash flood, Rachelle realized that the effects of our warming planet were a clear and present reality-- and that “I had been part of it.” For Richard, the flood prompted him to think about the bland, passive response of people he'd observed during the flood. A contrast with the sense of responsibility he'd felt towards people trapped in their cars as the waters rose. But for Richard, the storm did not remain a preoccupation. Rachelle, by contrast, began thinking about what she could do to make a difference, and decided to tackle their lifestyle. She announced to Richard that they would start recycling, to which he replied, “No way.” Even though he is a really decent person, he didn't see how one person or one family could make a difference. To which she responded by saying she would do it on her own-- which she sustained for... three days.

About five months later, she found a photo of a turtle that had swallowed a plastic bag, having mistaken it for a jellyfish. She emailed her husband the photo and the accompanying article. He was moved to tears by the photo, and realized that whether climate change is real or not, we as humans were destroying the planet. He said, “That's it. We're never taking a plastic disposable bag again.” They made a commitment and have struggled --successfully-- to maintain it. And he became a recycler. Further still, they committed to generating only *one* trashcan of trash in 2009, and succeeded. For 2010, they have committed to *zero* waste. They also started to use their spheres of influence as consumers-- which of course I love. They started to not only talk to local storeowners, but began calling manufacturers to engage them in dialogue about such things as their packaging. Then they began to record their efforts on a blog, [www.myzerowaste.com](http://www.myzerowaste.com). And not only do they challenge companies on their packaging but they photograph and showcase products that they think pass muster.

In *No Impact Man*, a documentary released in 2009, we watch as Michelle Conlin struggles mightily with her husband Colin Beavan, who practically drags her into his year-long project of drastically reducing the environmental impact of their family, including that of their then two year-old daughter. Michelle readily admits to loving to consume-- high fashion, Starbucks in wasteful to go cups, reality TV, you name it. And she hates nature. She is not keen on his project, at all. And she reminds the viewer, the project is called No Impact Man-- but really he's asking them to be No Impact Family. There are times when she openly resents him and pushes back. And he keeps trying to persuade her, even daring at one point to attempt to convince her to hold off on a Starbucks that she craves. But after six months she tells him, when he doubts the project, that it's been worthwhile for them, if for no other reason than they've had fun as a family. At the end of the year, they talk about what they've given up for a year that they plan to reintroduce—but Michelle has a long list of things she *doesn't* want to add back

into their lifestyle. She says, “There's no turning back.” And of course I think this cool—not only does Colin go beyond lifestyle change to speaking out on policy, he also gives talks on the rewards of going green, such as rediscovering that we're all connected and building community.

We don't always move in sync with each other in our families – on the green front, or on any other, for that matter. So change is not linear. It's a dynamic process. But change is possible.

### **From Contemplation to Action: What I've learned so far**

Several years ago, when my mom was giving me a hard time about not recycling more, I wasn't really thinking about the state of our planet. I recycled as much as was convenient, acting on autopilot. I was more in pre-contemplation than contemplation mode. Well, when I learned that the methane gas from landfills—where everything we don't recycle goes—is a form of heat trapping pollution over 20 times worse than car emissions, guess what? I started recycling *everything*—from Splenda or sugar packets (yes, both in small quantities) to plastic water bottles that can be turned into things like fleece or carpet. I also realized that the problem isn't just what comes *out* of landfills, but what goes *in*—like paper products from trees that absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, and plastic bottles that don't biodegrade and are made from petroleum which increases our dependence on oil. It takes 95% less energy to make an aluminum can from recycled aluminum than to make a new one—and the energy saved from making one can from recycled aluminum could run a TV for 3 hours. And Alcoa *wants* our recycled aluminum.

I now know that the paper industry is the fourth largest contributor of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of all US manufacturing industries, and curbing deforestation is absolutely key to protecting the atmosphere. If the entire North American magazine industry used just 30 percent post-consumer-waste recycled paper, it would equal taking roughly 150,000 cars off the road. With deforestation, when the trees are cut down they release CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Deforestation and tree burning are responsible for a full fifth of the CO<sub>2</sub> that is released into the atmosphere worldwide. Now my paper products at home and at work are from recycled paper, and I've cut down to about one roll of recycled paper towel a month—by using rags made from my kids' old T-shirts. I've been trying to reduce my use of all kinds of things, including paper, aluminum and plastic. These days, the wastebaskets in the bedrooms and bathrooms remain almost empty.

Now both my kids know what's trash and what's recyclable, and my oldest enjoys playing “recycling cop”—saying to the sitter, “Hey, don't you know that piece of paper can be recycled!” He also says, “Recycling makes mother nature happy!” And I'm not alone. Actress Uma Thurman says, “I'm very fortunate in that I have 5 and 9 year-olds who are getting a much better education [in environmental issues] than any of the rest of us. So I'm constantly instructed on a daily basis what to do.” The process works both ways: we lead our children into a sense of responsibility for the natural world, but they challenge us as well.

Yet, kids have an endless interest in more stuff—and producing and packing and shipping stuff generates huge amounts of heat trapping emissions. The requests for new stuff come up with every trip to store, if not more often. We all know the situation well. What I now say to them when they ask for yet another toy is, “You know what, I think you have enough toys. Let’s wait ‘til your birthday. And we’ll give away some of the toys we already have to some kids who don’t have any toys.” This does not prevent the next request, but in the moment I hope that it communicates a sense of what my mother’s friend Judy calls “enoughness.” This is also what Juliet Schor’s calls “plenitude” in her 2010 book of the same name. I’d say my kids are pretty deeply in the pre-contemplation stage on this one!

As anyone who knows me can attest, I have a close personal relationship with caffeine. I consume a steady, slow caffeine drip to keep me going as I juggle all the parts of my complicated life. Although I own a too-small, beautiful thermos, I’m not great about using it—because it’s too small. So, I finally found a plastic-free ceramic 20-ouncer. If I end up not having it with me, I reuse or recycle all the plastic cups (and even haul them home to recycle if need be). I hand back the cardboard sleeve they put on hot drinks, and if it’s double cupped, I reuse the outer cup. At one Starbucks, a staff person told me that a very committed employee personally hauls the recycling from the store to a recycling center. Now *that’s* a personal commitment. And—I’m sending a message to Starbucks that even though they’ve made a substantial commitment to reduce their emissions by 20%, they need to work on that waste stream! But what we really need are policies that make recycling universal and cap our emissions across the board. Which means we need to get those policies in place.

My favorite bottled water is Evian, which is hauled all the way from Europe. But the problem isn’t just the transportation half way around the world. It takes so much energy to produce plastic bottles that if I use three fewer plastic bottles a day it saves about as much CO<sub>2</sub> as my car emits in a year. And in the U.S. we use *2.5 million plastic bottles an hour*. That adds up to 22 billion bottles a year. So, I’ve decided to switch to filtered tap water—which of course is nearly free. I have an under the sink filter at home (which even *I* can replace), and use a Brita filter pitcher at the office. And since plastic is made from petroleum, I’m doing my part to reduce our dependence on oil at the same time!

Turns out we lose 60% of our heating and cooling through leaks in our homes that add up to an average of 4 square feet per home. So, to reduce heat loss I decided to replace some old rattley windows with Energy Star ([energystar.com](http://energystar.com)) rated windows, and get this—insulated the surrounding walls with recycled blue jeans. Not only did that insulation noticeably warm up cold and drafty spots, but my contractor said it didn’t irritate his eyes, throat and skin the way fiberglass does—and, of course, it kept a bunch of denim scraps out of the landfill.

One of the key things I’ve learned is that even little steps can have a big impact. When I found out that if we all changed just *three* old school/ light bulbs to those curly compact fluorescents (CFLs) it would equal taking 3.5 *million* cars off the road, I started turning off lights and unplugging everything not in use that had a little red or green light—all the

way down to the toaster. And I changed almost all my light bulbs to CFLs—why wait to replace bulbs as they burn out? (I keep conventional light bulbs in the dining room fixture which would just look too weird with compact fluorescents.) I started unplugging and turning off just about everything I could at the same, and my bills went down about 25%. My electric bill doesn't go up during the summer either because I use ceiling fans instead of air conditioning, unless it's oppressively hot and humid. With the exception of turning off my computer—which I'm still struggling to do in spite of the fact that I *know* it loses half the energy it draws before it even reaches the computer—it's been really easy, especially when I think about what my actions mean for my children.

Home Depot and Wal-Mart (which has gone green, and at least partly for the right reasons whatever other legitimate complaints people may have about their business practices) have big selections of CFLs, and not just the curly ones, but also normal-looking ones as well as floodlights. Even grocery stores are starting to carry them. What's more, because they last from five to nine years, I'll hardly ever have to change a bulb again. I even bought LED Christmas lights, which were on sale at the grocery store—they use only 10% as much electricity as the old-fashioned strands, and the bulbs never have to be replaced. My older son even understands the electricity connection-- and he didn't really learn it from me. One day he said, "We create global warming by staying up and using our lights." I hadn't quite thought of it that way....

I've been canceling subscriptions to newspapers and magazines that I don't read-- some of which I've been getting without ever having subscribed to begin with. I've substituted on line news subscriptions instead. And with my mailbox bulging with unwanted catalogs I've gone to [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org) to reduce the number of CO<sub>2</sub>-hungry trees that are being felled in my name. In the first month of service, 100,000 people signed on to get rid of 800,000 catalogs. One of the moms at my sons' school said that she had just done the same after she got 34 catalogs in the course of three days. Another said she found it "liberating" to cancel catalogs with her daughter. It takes 53 million trees to make the 19 billion catalogs that are sent a year. The energy it takes to produce all those catalogs results in 5.2 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> entering the atmosphere each year—the equivalent of 2 million cars. So I believe it's extremely important to eliminate as much wasted paper as possible. For over 15 years the children's toy catalog company HeartSong has been trying to correct their contribution to deforestation and heat trapping emissions by planting two trees for every one tree used to create their catalogs. Next I've got to deal with junk mail—for that one I'll be going to Mail Preference Service ([www.dmchoice.org/mps](http://www.dmchoice.org/mps)). So on this I'm in preparation mode.

When I learned that every gallon of gas I use releases 28 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air — picture a big bag of dog food—I started to plan my driving more carefully, and do things like walk my kids to school, which is nice exercise and visiting time. I take the train more, and I would take public transportation even more often if our system were not unreliable and vastly underfunded—a reminder that we need to vote to fund mass transit if we want to offer viable alternatives to cars. My oldest son now totally gets it about driving. We'll be driving along and he'll say, "You know, we're making global warming right now."

And I balance out the auto emissions that I can't eliminate, as well as my air travel, by buying green-e certified "offsets" through Bonneville Environmental Foundation (b-e-f.org) that replace polluting power with clean power sources from wind and solar.

I used to walk away from the sink and forget that I was running water. I never even thought about the water that went down the drain with no purpose. No more. I now get that over thirty states are expected to experience water shortages by 2013. Our water resources are being depleted by various factors, including evaporation caused by warmer conditions, and it takes electricity to move and treat water, so I try not to waste water. I've joined Cate Blanchett in turning off the shower while I'm washing my hair, then turning it on again to rinse like they do in Europe. And I've taught my kids to turn off the water while brushing their teeth. My sons have put up pictures of polar bears and penguins by the sink to remind them that their actions have impacts—indirect effects, I know, but I *love* that they're making connections and being responsible. When my youngest was three he came out of the bathroom while his brother was brushing his teeth, and said to me, "Hey, he's wasting water!" What have I wrought?

When I discovered that agriculture is one of the main sources of this country's emissions—to the tune of 18% of the total—and that it takes 2500 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef-- I started to cut back on meat—which of course is better for my family's arteries as well.

I've learned to see waste all over the place where I used to not notice it all. We need to use a certain amount of energy, and therefore generate emissions, to live. But so much of the energy we consume is wasted. I see wasted pollution in lights left on in unoccupied rooms and office buildings and stores, in inflatable holiday yard decorations, in cars and trucks and buses with engines idling, in kids' birthday parties with excessive and unnecessary plastic party favors that were hauled all the way from China and end up in the trash, in "to go" cups, in food that's grown, transported, cooked, then thrown out. And wasted energy is wasted money.

I've found that as I've become more aware of the effects of my actions on planet, the atmosphere, the ocean, I've become more environmentally aware in general. I've switched to natural deodorant from antiperspirants—which contain aluminum—not just because mining aluminum generates a lot of atmospheric pollution, but also because aluminum is linked to cancer. Just exactly what is lead doing in lipstick produced by major US-made brands such as L'Oreal and Cover Girl? And how come, as I learned in *Parade* magazine, 90% of the 10,000 chemicals used in cosmetics have not been evaluated for safety? And the potentially carcinogenic parabens in skin care products, including the sun screen we slather on our kids-- what about that? This is why I use Aveda ([www.aveda.com](http://www.aveda.com)) products that are made from natural ingredients, and sold in minimal, recycled packaging. Aveda isn't just a company that sells nice botanical skin and hair care products (which they are rightfully working to improve)—they have made a significant commitment to reduce their environmental impact, including their CO2

emissions. That's why I choose to support them over other cosmetic companies that may sell products that feel or look good but don't have the strong environmental commitment.

I've started buying green cleaning products, which don't have any great bearing on our heating planet but are a good idea for other environmental reasons—including reducing our risk of cancer and asthma. And some alternative methods, like the old-fashioned use of vinegar and water for cleaning windows, are way cheaper.

As I used up the last of my conventional laundry detergent, I thought about the fact that it ends up traveling to the vast "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico where the Mississippi River meets the Gulf. In dead zones, the water is uninhabitable because of products like that, as well as fertilizer run off from the farms that provide most of the food we eat. What makes a dead zone dead? Things like phosphates and nitrogen from chemical fertilizers and sewage cause out of control algae growth that chokes off the oxygen that marine life requires to live. The range of states that dump into the Mississippi River which ends at the Gulf spans from Montana to Minnesota to Pennsylvania to Louisiana, and includes numerous farm states such as my own state of Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, and Mississippi. So pretty much not matter where you live in the US, the farms that produce the food you eat are responsible for that dead zone. That dead zone at the mouth of the Mississippi River covers about *8500 square miles*. Try to picture that—it's the size of the state of New Jersey. As of this writing, we don't know how much more the dead zone will expand in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Dead zones started to be documented in the 1970, and by 2008 numbered over 400 around the world, the most notorious of which is that one in the Gulf, caused largely by our reliance on chemical fertilizers in agribusiness. The good news is that dead zones are reversible. In places where chemical fertilizers have been discontinued, marine life has come back, and fishing has resumed. So, enough about dead zones.

I'm haunted by the thought of sea turtles eating plastic bags because they mistake them for jellyfish. I'm also horrified that plastic in the oceans breaks down and leaches hormone-disrupting chemicals such as BPA. So it's not just that fish and other marine life are eating plastic and dying, it's affecting their reproductive systems. Then we eat the fish. So what about our reproductive systems?

There are gigantic trash heaps swirling around our oceans which include many toxic materials that are too small to be readily seen or photographed by aerial photography. The largest of these trash heaps has been characterized as the "world's largest landfill" is called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch which has been estimated as the size of Texas at the low end, and as twice the size of the continental US on the high end. It's very difficult to measure, but either way, it's disturbingly huge.

I'm stunned that our use of plastic in the US has doubled every decade since the 1950's, and is predicted to get to about a pound a day per person—most of it ending up in landfills or littering the oceans.

And I've learned about the incredible amount of plastic that we ingest, and pass on to our babies *in utero* to the point that *no* babies are born in the US without plastic constituents or byproducts—I find this appalling. And then we inadvertently “feed” our children plastics in the form of things like teething rings and baby bottles and pacifiers and food from plastic lined cans that release toxic BPA into the food. I simply do not find it acceptable to feed my boys a chemical that is known to mimic estrogen. Europe and Canada have banned BPA. Have we in the US? No. Another opportunity to use our voices!

And remember what plastic is made from? Petroleum. More evidence of addiction to oil, and the incredible price we are paying for that addiction.

At least we've progressed to the point where many of us think eating organic foods and giving our kids organic milk makes sense. Wal-Mart and most grocery chains now carry organic food products. But that's stuff that goes *in* our bodies. So what does the clothing we put on our bodies have to do with heat trapping gases? A lot, it turns out. From what I've learned, the two key factors related to the environmental impact of clothing have to do with whether the cotton or wool is organic, and the overall manufacturing and distribution processes. Clothes that are made from materials that were grown organically produce between a third and half as much CO<sub>2</sub> during the growing process. That's substantial. And clothing manufacturers that use recycled and/or recyclable materials are greatly reducing the amount of energy it takes to produce clothing. Beyond the materials themselves, there is the production process, which can be either more or less environmentally responsible in terms of both energy efficiency and issues like use of toxic chemicals to treat, dye or glue materials. Since what we put on our bodies does matter for the natural world, I'm starting to spend my dollars on clothes from companies like Patagonia and Nau that produce ecofriendly clothes.

But, we can't shop our way or eat or even conserve our way out of the planetary crisis. We need to use our voices.

### **Discovering the Power of Our Voices**

Yes, we need to green our lifestyles and business practices. But what I now know is that those changes are necessary but not sufficient. It makes sense to live in alignment with our values—it feels better. And small changes add up when we individually and collectively reduce our impact on the natural world. But, to achieve change on the scale and at the pace required, what we *really* need to do is use our voices. Which, I've discovered, is really an amazing opportunity to make a difference. And that, to use an overused phrase, is very personally empowering.

My learning has not been limited to all these easy (well, some not-so-easy) green lifestyle choices. I've also started inform myself about policy so that I can vote wisely on enacting legislative protections and opportunities for the world my children will inherit. And now speak out to my legislators. Ironically, because I'm busy doing things like writing—here

and on the Internet-- about how important it is to speak out, I don't do it as much as I might like.

I was never a deeply engaged voter—at all—until I realized that the policies contributing to our climate crisis threatened my children's future. Now I would say that this engagement has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my transformation.

This is the kind of realization that led to Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. Yes, MADD comes up again—it's such a great example of personal empowerment through advocacy. With MADD, ordinary citizens gathered together to speak out to get legislation that made our roads safer for us and for our kids. Using our voices, our ordinary-people-like-you-and-me voices, *works*. And that discovery is amazingly empowering.

Think about the parallel. Our roads are not safer from drunk drivers just because we sent a message to individual drivers to drink responsibly—which would be akin to saying “Make greener purchasing decisions.” Our roads are safer because people advocated changing the laws that set limits on the amount of alcohol we consider it acceptable to consume before driving. Policy change is what got us here. We may need to be both patient and persistent, but policy change—thanks to vocal voters (and future voters!)—is what will protect our planet and our atmosphere for our children.

So on the green front, we now have organizations such as CoolMom.org, a network of moms that puts policy at the top of its list of commitments. Again, we see a parallel to MADD. We can come together, get informed, and discover the power of voices to make a difference for our children and the natural world that we leave them.

I assure you that I am *not* naturally inclined to think about policy. But because I now understand what our policies mean for my children, I'm gathering bits of policy-related information from all kinds of sources—books, the Internet, magazines, lectures, even art exhibits.

I went to an art exhibit called “Massive Change” by visionary designer Bruce Mau where I learned about the importance of planning dense cities with great public transportation so that people don't need to drive—this is why New York City produces less CO<sub>2</sub> than any other major US city. So now I understand that I need to vote to fund mass transit. From various sources I've been learning that although the coal lobby would like us to think that we can cleanly burn coal in state-of-the-art power plants, we're nowhere near there yet—so we need to vote against the construction of any more coal plants. So I've come to see that we need to block coal and fund clean, renewable energy—solar, wind, and hydropower if we're in areas where we have big bodies of water.

For the first time in my life I'm thinking about farm subsidies that keep afloat environmentally damaging crops. We have massive subsidies for water-intensive cotton. We have huge subsidies for polluting corn crops that are not being grown for food but for ethanol that is so energy inefficient to produce that it results in only a 2% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction

over gasoline. Who are they kidding? We can do better than that—and we have to, for our children’s sake.

I’ve learned that Federal legislation that would limit CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, generally called cap-and-trade, is absolutely essential. That proposed legislation—currently called the American Power Act-- is based on successful legislation that a few years back resulted in the lowering of the amount of sulfur dioxide in our air and water. In the absence of federal policy, states are stepping up to pass legislation, but this creates a patchwork of inconsistent laws that make it tough for businesses that operate in different states. I now believe that because of the severity and urgency of the climate crisis, we need the steepest possible cuts in the shortest possible time frame because time is of the essence.

Here’s how Tom Friedman, author of *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (2008), makes the case. “People often ask: I want to get greener, what should I do? New light bulbs? A hybrid? A solar roof? Well, all of those things are helpful. But actually, the greenest thing you can do is this: Choose the right leaders... Why? Because leaders write the rules, set the standards and offer the tax incentives that drive market behavior across a whole city, state or country. Whatever any of us does individually matters a tiny bit. But when leaders change the rules, you get scale change across the whole marketplace.”

To Tom Friedman’s point, in the 70’s and early 80’s, we had an oil crisis *and* a president who supported renewable energy. We made progress on developing solar technology. But oil prices began to fall, and tax credits that had been granted under the Energy Tax Act of 1978 were discontinued. We started to scale up, then we scaled back. We’ve lost ground in the intervening years.

Why haven’t our elected officials vocally put this crisis front and center prior to the current Congress and administration? Because *we’ve* failed to elect leaders who have a strong vision for a sustainable energy policy. Because once in office, *we* have allowed them to ignore it. We as voters have not been mindful of the state of our planet – and the connection to the policies we implement. And elected officials have been afraid to take a strong stand because they fear they won’t get elected or re-elected. Even though we have made headway on that front since the beginning of 2009, we need to tell them that it’s the opposite—we won’t vote for them unless they come out strong on the climate crisis. We need to speak out on things like new coal plants. Our children are counting us. Tomorrow’s children are counting us.

I had never reached out to my elected officials until my turning point. And I don’t have much time to write letters or meet with my legislators – but I’ve done it a few times now because I felt compelled to hold my elected officials to account for the sake of my children, and to support them in taking necessary policy steps. Was I nervous when I made those first calls and visits? Sure. But it was worth it. I’m committed to doing more of that-- somehow I will find a way to make the time. And when I write about the importance of speaking out to our elected officials, I’m scaling up beyond my individual phone calls and visits to elected officials.

And it's been rewarding to get a call in response to a letter to my US Senator, and to establish an ongoing relationship with my Senator's office. Likewise it's been gratifying to have my Congresswoman sit and take notes about my concerns. I hadn't realized that elected officials were so interested in what I had to say. And now I know from attending workshops that as few as *five* voters can get an elected official's attention.

Our voices count not just as voters but also as consumers. We can hold corporations to account for their waste, and for what they sell, how they manufacture it, how they distribute it. One of my favorite stories of holding corporations to account is that of Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, whose campaign as a young housewife brought us freshness dates on groceries. We now take this for granted, but prior to her efforts, it wasn't possible to tell whether the food we bought was fresh. She and a group of other stay-at-home mothers got together and bought a few shares in the local grocery store chain, and showed up at shareholder meetings. Thanks to those moms getting together to use their voices-- their spheres of influence-- we now know that the food we're buying isn't spoiled.

As I write, people are boycotting BP in the aftermath of the oil spill. When immediately after the oil spill I stopped buying BP gas—which I used to buy because I thought they were less-bad than the alternatives-- I wasn't thinking of that decision as part of a campaign. I was just using my conscience as a guide. Then I learned that there was a massive movement to withhold consumer dollars from the company that appears to have knowingly put lives, wildlife, and livelihoods at risk. Lots of people are voting with their wallets.

I have a voice. That has been one of my most powerful and rewarding insights. My voice matters. So does yours.

### **A Mission-Filled Life**

When I started out, I had no idea what getting involved in the growing green movement would do for me. That's been one of the pleasant discoveries.

We can use our voices, we can learn new habits and disciplines, and we can live consciously. We can use our spheres of influence. We forge new friendships and bonds. We can slow down. As a result, we can find new meaning in our lives. And as the growing list of books on personal transformation remind us, from *The Purpose Driven Life* to Wayne Dyer to Gretchen Rubin's hugely successful *The Happiness Project* — we are capable of finding meaning and purpose—in fact, we *yearn* for meaning and purpose. Daniel Gilbert, a Harvard psychologist and author of the best selling book *Stumbling on Happiness*, suggests that our capacity to seek meaning is part of what makes us human, and is a prerequisite for the experience of happiness. I would go even further and suggest that we *need* a sense of meaning and purpose in order to anchor ourselves in our day-to-day lives and to fully participate in humanity.

The best selling book *Three Cups of Tea* chronicles the story of Greg Mortenson,

who was by his own admission a lost soul until he literally stumbled into a village in Pakistan after failing to reach the summit of the mountain K2. He discovered that the village had no school, and promised to come back and build them one. He came back, delivered on his promise and then some, and risked his life to launch a one-man campaign to combat terrorism at its roots by building schools around Pakistan and Afghanistan. Greg Mortenson is not a natural spokesperson, but he has been transformed by finding his cause. Individual children's lives have been transformed. Villages have been transformed. And the world is a better place.

When we live lives that are not engaged in making a difference, we run the risk of feeling alienated and adrift. But when we decide to harness our talents and energies in the service of solving a real world problem, and join others in that common purpose, we ground ourselves in an affiliation with other people around a shared goal. The choice is ours—to live our lives in ways that fundamentally isolate us from each other and our values, or to live in alignment with our values, in community with others.

### **The Joys of Nature**

Another area I've been learning about is our relationship to nature.

Most of our environmental leaders fell in love with nature as children. Psychologist Louise Chawla has studied the backgrounds of those who have committed to leading us into a way of living that protects nature; these leaders all had formative experiences as children that taught them to respect the natural world.

Yet sadly, we now have reached the point where children spend only 30 minutes a week in unstructured play in nature. As Richard Louv so eloquently observes in his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2005), in the span of a generation, we have become so oriented towards TVs and computers and other technologies that we have lost our connection to nature. In urban areas, we have few natural spaces, and those that exist may not be safe for kids. In suburban areas, going outside consists of structured activities like sports. The price of this disconnection is high for our children in an immediate sense—among other things, we see high rates of obesity and diabetes. He believes that there is also a spiritual price. This dramatic shift in habits also correlates with diminishing enrollment in major, longstanding mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club.

I'll let Richard Louv speak for himself.

Children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and therefore, for learning and creativity. This need is revealed in two ways: by an examination of what happens to the senses of the young when they lose connection with nature; and by witnessing the sensory magic that occurs when young people... are exposed to even the smallest direct experience of a natural setting. (p. 55)

Just as we can't love strangers in a real and mutual way, we can't appreciate nature if we don't know it. Nature has become an abstraction. Yet Paul Hawken, co-founder of Smith and Hawken, reminds us in *Blessed Unrest* (2007), "We are nature."

Richard Louv also brings to our attention an unintended negative consequence of some of our approaches to environmental education. When we focus educational efforts primarily on the damage that we are doing to the natural world, it can create fear and anxiety at the expense of "joy and wonder."

In my own childhood, I recall playing in the woods out back, and having my mother show us rare plants such as Lady Slippers. I don't ever recall a time when I didn't know the difference between an oak and a maple leaf. We would go for drives in the country, and go on day hikes. Both my mother and my paternal grandmother loved to garden. Some of my fondest and most powerful childhood memories include eating vegetables from my grandmother's garden which were so flavorful, and the aroma of her canning room which I can still conjure up in my memory. My brother went to a Youth Conservation Corps program in high school; he attributes primarily that experience to his becoming an environmental consultant. My sister went to a wilderness camp that she loved so much that she still goes at the end of the season every year. It's impossible to imagine that her daughter won't go to that camp-- and love it.

I've decided that my kids and I are going to get out there and get to know nature and enjoy it. The TV in the family room doesn't get reception, and I've decided to leave it that way. No cable, to minimize the irresistible draw of TV—all we can do is look at DVDs. Watching movies is a very conscious decision in our house; TV is not a default. My children don't own any electronic games. I want them to learn and play outside of the realm of technology—for now at least.

I look for little outings to woods and zoos and nature centers. One really cool time, while on a cicada hunt, we saw a beaver. And until I first heard the seventeen-year cycle of cicadas, I never knew that they sounded like drummers. Once on a trip to the woods, my son and his friend decided to give every one "nature names." His friend took the name "Nature," which turned into the nickname "Natch." My son became "Leaf," and I was designated "Mother Nature." The boys climbed around on fallen trees, which were sometimes battleships and sometimes hideouts. They learned about how the current on the river carries things away, such as the sticks they threw in. We came home happy with pink cheeks and big smiles.

My older son has a favorite tree across the street that he likes to climb in. He calls it his tree. At the base of another tree, on a busy corner, he has created various themes. Sometime he likes to drive sticks in the ground and create "an ant amusement park." At other times, he calls it his "thoughtful spot." I love that the place can transform in his imagination. And I particularly love it when it calls it his thoughtful spot. He's an energetic boy, yet he knows he needs a place to think. Nature provides him that.

When we walk to school, we stop and listen to the birds, and talk about the trees we see along the way. We've seen baby robins sticking their necks up waiting for food. My children will run to me to report the sighting of a dragonfly. When we recently saw a chipmunk, I asked my oldest if he had ever seen one before and he said, "Only in pictures."

We all get fresh air, and I see and appreciate more the sights and sounds that I never used to quite notice. So in a funny circular way, my decision to ensure that my children connect with nature has brought me into more contact with nature. It's good for my soul.

I bought a tent so that I can take the kids camping, even though I really, really don't love sleeping on the ground. I want my kids to join the Scouts—I've even asked if mothers can participate. I want them to go the wilderness camp in Canada where their Uncle Bob went—assuming when they get to that age they'll agree!

I love my kids, and the natural world sustains us, so I want them to fall in love with nature. I want my boys to know that the natural world isn't separate and apart from them but that they are inextricably part of nature. I want them to experience the natural world not virtually through the TV, but through real engagement in the natural world. I want them to discover, to explore, to play, to experience wonder and curiosity. I want there to be whales in the oceans, not just in aquariums, so that my older son can fulfill his current ambition to study and protect marine mammals. I want my sons to be able to take their children whale watching in Puget Sound as we did when they were young boys.

### **The Process Continues**

So I've learned a lot and changed a lot, and the process continues. And our society continues to learn and change.

Now I'm in the maintenance phase with a lot of lifestyle changes, and challenging myself to enter the action phase with recalcitrant behavior—like turning off my computer and remembering my pesky reusable shopping bags.

Since I've started down this road, more new and unlikely environmentalists have been learning along with me. More and more people are jumping on board, and moving from pre-contemplation and contemplation through preparation and into action. My shorthand for this is "awareness into action." Knowing that there are others stepping up reinforces my actions and is enriching because I feel connected to these other people.

I'm forging new friendships. I'm using my voice. I'm living into my values. I'm discovering new capacities in myself. I'm being myself, only bigger.

The rewards I reap help build up the reservoir of resilience that I draw on to keep myself forging ahead. It's been an amazing and wonderful ride, and I'm going to keep on riding because I love my children and want them to thrive.