

SARAH WOODROW

Raising Children of the Earth,
Regenerative parenting and earth
connection in the time of collapse

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Preface

I am honest in this book, about our planetary situation and the trouble we are in and my life. I talk about miscarriages, sex, birth, death, extinction, grief, joy, collapse and everything that makes up the experience of being human on the Earth right now, without shying away or glossing over. It is a reflection of my attitude toward life. When you meet me, I do not just want to talk about the weather. I want to hear your sorrows and joys and your pains and truths. I want to see into your human experience. I want to see all of you, not just the part of you that the world says you can show people. So this is the energy I bring to this book, you are seeing all of me.

I have always found it important to face the truth even if it is uncomfortable or painful. I've added "times of collapse" to the title so that hopefully you already know what you are about to read. But, in this age of trigger warnings, it is only fair to warn you that this book may be direct about the danger we are in, as I believe we do not have time to dance around it.

It is a pre-requisite to this book, that you have reached the point where you have accepted that modernity is ending and there is nothing that can be done to prevent it. No amount of going zero waste or vegan, no amount of voting, no electric car or not-yet-invented technological magic. This place is sometimes a lonely

place, as there are many who believe human supremacy and ingenuity will swoop in to save our modern way of life. A way of life that is entirely dependent on concepts of infinite growth in a world where we have crossed planetary thresholds which is causing a mass extinction that threatens our very existence. If you are already in a place of acceptance this book will bring you solidarity and may become a stabilizing force in the face of the incoming instability. If you are not in a place of acceptance it may help you to get there, but there are other books you may want to visit first. I am not here to convince you about the pitfalls of politics, activism, economic growth or carbon footprints. I have no interest in placing hope in politicians or elites splashing their money around publicly, acting as though they are doing what they can to “save the planet”. I don’t have time to prove to you that our institutions and economies are failing or to give you the detailed ins and outs of the latest Earth systems science. If you feel you need more evidence and explanation, there are many more qualified people to read or learn from. I am here to talk about and envision a complete transformation of our ways of being, perceiving and loving, and how that applies to how we raise our children in the context of collapse.

This book is ultimately a hopeful book, but it is a journey. I hope that we will go into the dark together and come back into the light transformed. You will likely feel some discomfort with some of the ideas here, depending where you are on your journey into acceptance and re-imagining our way of life, you may feel grief or worry. You may experience discomfort in your body and mind around choices you have made and your ways of being. You might feel distress or grief about what the future might hold for you and your children. Whatever you feel, when your feelings

arise inside you, try to sit with them rather than push them away. Seek to understand your experience of them. Feel where they are inside your body, notice the shape of them, find the edges, get comfortable with the discomfort. Work to embrace the difficult feelings, feel gratitude for them and gently treasure them as the warning signs that they are. It is OK to go slowly. It can take time to absorb and integrate information like this. If you find you disagree, that's OK too, explore that, get clarity on where the gaps in our understandings are, step into the challenge this book brings to your thoughts. I didn't write it so everyone would agree with me. I am starting a conversation about what is important about raising children in this time that I haven't seen happen. The important thing is that we push that conversation forward together.

You may want to make changes to your life as a result of this book. This book is not supposed to leave you the same as you were before, it's supposed to push and pull at your edges and tangles. We are living through the consequences of humanity's actions and it is important that we feel that discomfort in order to change. This is a part of the transformation we all need to go through, we are at a threshold and the initiation into that threshold will involve fire. We unfortunately do not get to avoid the fire, it is what it means to be human on the Earth and alive right now.

It also seems that it may be important to preface this with some notes of the terminology I decided to use. Words matter and I've made some clear decisions here.

Consciousness around using the word "Nature" has followed

me throughout writing this. I try to use the term “Nature”, in specific ways that only result in our connection and oneness. In other places I prefer to use “Wild” or “Living World”. I have found in certain contexts that the word “Nature” is used to refer to separation of humans from everyone else. I try to use it in a way to emphasise that we *are* nature. I sometimes refer to the “Earth Community”, by which I mean all of the residents of Earth, not just the humans.

I decided to refer to the Earth in gender neutral ways. I experimented with “her” or “Mother Earth” and although, as a woman, I enjoy when people use that reference, in the end it seemed important not to project our gender binary and stereotypes onto the huge, ancient, mysterious and unknowable Earth for this book. I capitalise Earth or Gaia, as you would the name of a living being, out of respect.

I sometimes refer to Gaia instead of Earth, Gaia was a Greek goddess of Earth. Gaia is also the name of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis’s Gaia theory, that stated the Earth is a self-regulating system, where all living and non-living things are interconnected and work together to maintain a balance of conditions suitable for life. I use the terms Gaia and Earth interchangeably, I can’t explain why, but Gaia feels more heart based than Earth and it usually conveys more of the love I hold. Gaia feels more personal.

Instead of “climate change” or “climate emergency”, I use “climate destabilisation” because that is what has happened. There has been a lot of focus in the news and in protests on preventing it, yet it’s already happening. Destabilisation can

only be curbed and adapted to, not prevented or reversed. It does not only manifest as a pleasant sounding “warming”. It encompasses heat, cold, wet bulb temperatures, forest fires, melting ice, changes to the Gulf Stream and all of the extreme effects we are seeing. It is chaotic and unpredictable, as things that become unstable always are. It does not skirt around the predicament in the same way as “change” or “crisis”. It clearly describes what is happening with the climate, which is only one aspect of the planetary crisis.

I describe what I mean by “Collapse”. There is too much confusion and misinformation around to assume you are on the same page as me so I have spelled it out as clearly as I can. I don’t go into the details of the different ways collapse could happen. There are already a lot of books out there about what it could look like. I am not trying to prevent collapse or provide in depth risk analyses of the future, or even predict the future. I am trying to rethink and redesign my family’s way of being and relating, because ultimately if we are to face these problems, that needs to happen, however the future unfolds.

“Planetary Collapse” is a term that I saw my friend and mentor Joe Brewer, writer of the book “The Design Pathway to Regenerating Earth” use first. The media tend to reduce our problems to a “Climate Crisis”, to be solved by “carbon footprints”. It doesn’t convey the reality that many are directly experiencing a lot of collapses right now. Ecosystems, societies and institutions are collapsing. It is already happening and at the root of that is the collapse of our biosphere. Joe’s use of the term “Planetary Collapse” is the most appropriate terminology I have found and can get behind.

Instead of “climate anxiety” I use “Earth grief” as a description of the feeling of dread and fear that makes us hold our breath when we are confronted with the reality of being alive at this time and witnessing the consequences of our destructive ways. I reject the pathologisation and gaslighting around this valid and authentic feeling that comes from a deep knowing. I also believe that the feeling you have when you walk into a supermarket and are faced with dystopian piles of vegetables flown across the world wrapped in plastic actually has to do with a whole lot more than just “climate”. It is a feeling that performs an ecological and spiritual function and we should hear it and feel it fully, as well as describe it appropriately.

I often use the term “parents” or “parenting”. This refers to anyone who resonates with that word, even if you aren’t technically the direct parent of someone you are likely to be what is known as “alloparenting”, which is when you are involved in caring for a child who is not yours. We all raise our children. It takes a village. I may also use “mother” or “mothering”, when used generally this is not intended as a gender specific term as anyone can “mother”. All who care for children are welcome to absorb and integrate these thoughts and ideas.

When I refer to the “sacred”, I do not mean it in any specific religious definition. I mean simply “deserving of reverence and respect”, and ultimately it is trying to capture a feeling and an experience that I feel many of us have lost and cannot really be described. Some people may refer to it as god, the divine or the sublime. For me, it’s a physical sensation of appreciation when you realise that something is a small but important part of a bigger whole. There is sacredness all around us, things that we

should not be owning or changing for our own needs, but we are, because we have lost that understanding of what we should leave as sacred. We believe so strongly in human supremacy over all beings that treating something or someone as sacred is not taught to our children anymore.

This book is everything I have learned and everything I know I want to learn. It is the book I wish I had when I first woke up to the gravity of parenting in these times. It's a book of intention and vision, practicality and purpose. It is about giving adults information, inspiration, solidarity and support they need to figure out how to nurture their children during this unprecedented time in history. It's about sparking ideas, creativity and intent within your own hearts on how to respond as parents and guardians to the multiple crises we face, which will look different for every single family. I am presenting this so you can receive this information, absorb it and then follow your intuition about how to bring what you need to your family. It is like a buffet, take what you like, leave the rest. There is no perfect pure way, not all of this will ring true for you. There is only moving forward together in solidarity and with intent to live in service to the Earth.

This book is the past and the future and all of the moments in between. It is a collection of figurings out and thinking on the cultural stories that I am weaving into my nest with the intent of raising my children into an ecological, Earth centred consciousness. It is my resistance to the mainstream culture that is dangerously and suicidally void of Earth connection. In lots of ways this is not based in reality, it is a vision, and implementing what is in this book could continue for the rest

of my life. It may never be “finished”. It is, at it’s core, a love letter to my children to let them know what I tried to do to lay out the path to a regenerative future for them.

I

Introduction

1

My Journey

How did I arrive at the conclusions that led me down the path of writing this book?

In June 2016, I was pregnant and I awoke to find that the U.K. had voted to leave the European Union. I cried as I held my bump and whispered to him how I was so sorry. A future where he could have travelled freely to any country in Europe was taken from him, the future that was clearly going to be worse in many ways. It was the first time that I had really considered the idea that his would not be the rosy shiny future I had imagined for him. When I look back now I cannot believe how closed my eyes were.

A few months later he was born. I was in labour for 72 hours, I was interfered with, injected and cut, I was scared, I was exhausted. But right at the end, when I thought I had no more left, somewhere from outside of me, a river of energy flowed through me. I felt truly connected to something bigger, a greater power or life source flowing from the Earth. As I held my

newborn baby I felt the remnants of something ancient and powerful vibrating in my muscles and bones. In that moment I felt connected to the Earth and more alive than I had ever experienced.

I realised how living in a bubble of privilege, comfort and no risk wasn't honouring this life I had been given. That being human is a whole range of feelings and experiences which my life choices were limiting. I had long been swallowed up by a dominating culture of disconnection and cushioned from its toxicity by privilege. Becoming a mother revealed a lot of damaging toxicity I had previously not been exposed to. Even just during the birth, when I was emotionally and physically damaged by the patriarchal medicalisation of birth, and a few days later when they took him away from me to NICU without my consent, as if babies are inert lumps, immune to trauma and pain. My first experiences of motherhood were of being unsupported, forcibly separated, traumatised, ignored and undermined and it became clear that was a common, if not normal experience. My eyes were prised wide open to the privilege gauntlet of giving birth and mothering.

For years, at every turn I was encouraged to go against my natural intuition and mothering instincts to separate from the baby. Everything about my mothering was taken to be a form of resistance or rebellion; baby wearing, co-sleeping, natural term breastfeeding, child led education, consent and respect from birth. Following my intuition and love was like swimming against the tide. During those years, this new little life that brought so much joy; his laughing, dancing, pure playful self, simultaneously broke me and built me. It was the deconstructing

and healing work of parenting, peeling back my layers, revealing where all the lies were, layered under conditioning and trauma. It was like my skin had been opened and I was raw and ready to see the world in a new way.

I had known bits about planetary collapse before, but I hadn't allowed the information in, not really. I believed, as many people still do, that if it was as bad as it is, then I would know. They would have told us, other people would be doing something to "save" us, like they do in the movies. I had that sense we all have, buried somewhere deep that there was something very wrong but it was better and easier to avoid that, so I could go to work and get on with my life. But in that first moment of motherhood, looking into the eyes of the next generation, it was incredibly important that I face reality. I had this small person relying on me not to leave him unprepared. I took in every bit of information available on soil degradation, biodiversity loss, climate, ocean acidification, air, soil, water and blood pollution. I felt the trauma of our destroyed wilderness and cried for it. I woke up to my complicity in the death and destruction. I opened my eyes to the privilege of being in that bubble, and how it was built on the bodies of indigenous people, people of the global south and our more than human kin.

I grew so frustrated and jaded with the ways that I was told to fix it. All consumer decisions, "Go Zero Waste! Be a Vegan! Buy second hand! Eat organic! Drive an electric car! Go to a protest! Get arrested! Turn off the lights!". Simple non-solutions that ignored the complexity and severity of the situation. Solutions that required me to pour all my mental power into them, a distraction so I didn't think deeper, consumer green washing to

get us to keep earning and spending money, keep those wheels turning, no matter where that would take us. I felt strongly that these things were “moving the deckchairs around on the titanic”. And those around me seemed completely unaware, they did what they were told was right, unquestioning, feeling good about recycling their plastic, casting their votes, without realising that it was just a distraction from the real work that needed to be done. This focus was on tiny solutions for huge “problems” that will never address the root cause; human behaviour and the way we relate to the world. I knew I had to go deeper, much deeper, into how we perceive our reality and the stories we tell ourselves about our relationship to the Earth. I knew I had to find the others doing that work.

First, it was important to me to be able to determine and face the truth. So after denial and grief I reached acceptance and a version of the story of collapse I felt aligned with. You may have your own. This is mine...

The planet itself will continue on long after I am gone, we will have to do a lot more to destroy the Earth entirely, although we are facing hundreds of years of further ecological collapse. That seems as though it is a long time compared to a human life, however on geological timescales this is happening very fast, it is escalating, and we will see things change rapidly over the next few decades. The world our children become adults in will be very different.

We are witnessing planetary collapse, which is the root of all of the human crises we are living through. The Earth will restore balance, over timescales beyond anything our human minds

can truly comprehend and in ways we will not be able to predict. The last time drastic climate destabilisation happened, it was through volcanic activity in the Permian Triassic period. It took an estimated 100 million years to stabilise. In the other well known mass extinction, when the asteroid hit the Earth the dinosaurs did not die straight away, it kicked so much gypsum into the atmosphere that it blocked out the sun. The plants died. Only creatures that did not rely on photosynthesis survived. Earth and Life endured both these mass extinctions. Life on Earth has already survived 5 mass extinctions. Humanity has not. We are now bearing witness to the 6th.

Large areas of Earth will become uninhabitable within the lifetimes of most reading this, we will see mass migration and deaths. My children and I are likely to bear witness to fundamental ecological collapses and tipping points, like that of the Amazon and the Arctic within just a few years. Just as I have seen the collapse of the Coral Reef since I visited it when I was 18 years old. We are already witnessing extinctions of beloved species, with species like the Western Black Rhino gone forever since I was born, and only 2 Northern White Rhinos left. There is a high chance that well known critically endangered species like the African elephant, Koala or Pandas will go extinct within my lifetime, let alone all the species we lose everyday that we never saw or named.

These processes are in play, collapse is an inevitable and natural process and it cannot be stopped. The Earth adapts and changes it's biosphere through the process of collapse and renewal, bringing things that are out of balance back into balance. This time it is not a geological or cosmic cause, our actions have

caused the collapse. Our homogenised global industrial society will not be able to sustain itself within the context of planetary collapse, yet I do believe that it is reasonable to hope that humans will endure. When a population overshoots, it collapses, like bacteria in a petri dish, giving room and space for something new. Life will change a lot over the next 100 years and there are a lot of different ways humans can respond and organise, ways we haven't imagined yet.

Collapse is a process. Some people talk of the collapse of global civilisation being inevitable within a few years, although we have been experiencing it collapse for at least 70 years already. Each day places are experiencing collapse while the rest of us carry on as normal; Sudan, Ukraine, Syria. Many humans and more than humans have suffered and will suffer. Life in those places has gone on in a different form and life away from those places has gone somewhat unchanged. Many people have been living within continuous collapses for years, it is a function of our privilege if we feel we have been unaffected. Collapse is often seen as the end of everything, fast, apocalyptic and scary. It is often not that way, many civilisations have collapsed throughout history and it can take hundreds of years. Civilisation collapse doesn't mean the end of Life, Earth or the Universe. Civilisations in comparison to what is at stake are quite trivial to let go of. Ultimately, Life, Earth and the Universe will continue, although humans are creating irreversible damage to our fellow beings and ourselves, we are insignificant to those cosmic forces over long enough timescales.

These wheels were in motion long ago and the breakdown of human's relationship with the living world started many

thousands of years ago. Humans have always had lives filled with doom, suffering and trauma, intertwined with joy, gratitude, hope and love. We have always faced struggle and hardship. Many societies and cultures throughout history have experienced periods of collapse or transition, leading to new forms of social organisation and innovation. Those things have always been outside of our individual control and we have always faced the future with perseverance and resilience. That is what we must do now. I am experiencing planetary collapse now and have been all my life, albeit from a bubble of privilege which is now rapidly losing its integrity. It's not a distant future thing, and it will continue after I am gone. Collapse is the decline or destruction of a particular system or way of life AND it can open up opportunities for new growth and evolution. Darkness and light have always co-existed.

Life in collapsing times is hard, sad and traumatic, life is wonderful in lots of ways too, life is a whole range of feelings and experiences. I actually think, since opening my eyes to collapse, life has brought me more joy, clarity and love. Becoming comfortable with collapse is just like becoming comfortable with your own mortality. Once you get OK with the idea that life as you know it could just end at any point, it gives you a framework to find ways to act now that are meaningful and worthwhile. Life becomes more fulfilling, you recognise that life is magical and beautiful and it is **temporary** no matter our cosmic, planetary or personal circumstances, how long we get to be here or the time we live in. We must always live, love and empathise as though our life is temporary. That is where the empathy, love and beauty comes from. They are seeds of humanity rooted deep in the knowledge that life is short, creating a deep appreciation

and gratitude for being alive. Death is necessary for us to feel these things. We want others to thrive and live in the short time we are here, because we share our mortality with them. We have an important role to play, here, in this time; to love, empathise and appreciate the beauty of life. Birth, collapse, death, these are all words for transitions and changes. Collapse is change. Change is inevitable.

Once I had accepted the reality of the situation, the important thing was to figure out how to live true to my values and move forward with intent with my children at the centre. I asked myself, *what if this story of collapse is accurate? What if the world as we know it doesn't exist when they are adults? What could life be like beyond collapse, without being able to predict the extent or the cause? How do I prepare them for a future of uncertainty and instability? How do I empower them to imagine a new and better world? What will I do differently as a parent in this new context?*

The Anthropocene, planetary collapse, ecocide, human supremacy, human violence upon the Earth ... however you want to phrase it, is a problem of relationship that is ingrained in our toxic domination culture. Our culture has evolved beyond humans being able to live within planetary boundaries. Humans are swept along with globalisation, capitalism, colonisation, imperialism, modernity. These things that define how we behave and relate, powerful systems of our own creation feel beyond us now. We were born into them, we are taught or indoctrinated as children to live with them, so we grow up thinking "it's just how things are". Yet within our own lives we do hold agency over what we choose to believe, the stories we tell ourselves, how much to engage with those systems and our

daily actions.

Accepting that modernity's time is up and that there is no need to try to save it, is liberating. It frees our minds to imagine a whole new way of being, a more present and connected way of being. When you aren't distracted by holding on to what is, what really matters reveals itself. When I reached acceptance, with complete clarity, I understood that in order for humans to survive the 6th mass extinction it is important for our children to learn to live in deep relationship with our land and Earth. I was just too caught up in the game of modern life to realise that this is how I would want to live anyway. Many people spend their lives working towards retirement. Why would I want to live in the disconnection and stress of working in modern life struggling to earn money away from my kids for the promise of a future that is not likely to happen, instead of a connecting, life honouring path that nourishes the Earth and my family's well being right now? It was an awakening.

In western, white cultures especially, we have lost our knowledge of living in relationship with the Earth, directly with the land we live on. It is clear we need to heal that relationship. The way we can achieve real change is if every human, who no longer lives this way, returns to loving and honouring the Earth as a daily practice and way of being. That starts with our children.

Through my research I discovered a movement of people seeking to regenerate the Earth. Every day, I could see them regenerating landscapes, collaborating with the natural world to repair what had been destroyed. They grew permaculture gardens and food forests in deserts, cleaned toxic springs with plants, restored

rivers, returned species long lost to their native lands, migrated seeds north as the climate changed, created networks to regenerate entire bioregions. They saw humans as vital members of the Earth's ecosystems and sought to live in service to them. They wrote poems and made art, they danced and sang to the Earth and had joyous Earth loving ceremonies. They faced every devastation, drought, flood or wildfire, with fortitude and aptitude while facing the grief together and helping each other to heal from the trauma. Through them, I could see what was possible and that they were carving a path for our children to follow. In so many ways this future was better than the one I had imagined previously. And, no matter what the future actually holds, I felt in the core of my being that it was the ethical and true direction to put my faith and life energies into. I began spending more and more time finding them, making friends across the world and figuring out how to move into a new way of living.

The Earth is calling us, asking us to return home. We all live with the grief of being separated from the Earth everyday. We feel the Earth calling to us, but we shut the grief out because it is too hard to face. We have forgotten how to be wild humans and we don't know how to return, it feels as though there is no map for that. I hear Earth's call to raise my children to be Earth guardians and regenerators. This work must not end with our generation, it needs to continue for many generations to come. What we start doing now, with our own children, future generations will build on. This book is an attempt to provide a map for my family and to be visible about that so that others may be inspired to create their own.

When I think back to 2016, I realise it was the year I woke up to a new perception of reality. One where I finally recognised that going from a concrete box in a metal box to sit on a screen and type in a different concrete box then back again to sit in front of a screen and watch TV was not reality. That safe, boring, disconnected bubble of privilege had popped and I knew that I had to find what was real. I had to establish a new vision of the future and a new way of being in the world for the sake of my children, Earth, my fellow humans and more than humans. 2016 was the year I became a mother and the start of my journey into collapse aware, regenerative, Earth centred parenting.

I don't consider myself an expert, I am not someone who is doing this "right" and telling you what to do. I am still not very far down the path to living regeneratively. I'm right in the knots and tangles of modern life, trying to get free. I am writing this as a part of that work, this is a way for me to bring more of this into my life. I am willing to see what emerges when we put these ideas and visions out there. I'm a weaver pulling together twigs, grass and moss for creating a family nest of Earth connection into one place.

We do not have time to indulge in allowing guilt, fear, blame, worry, shame and sorrow to hold us back, so it is important we do this with compassion and understanding. When we did things that were not regenerative, we were not aware, we were subject to our conditioning or trauma and the impact of decisions made long before we were born. When we made the choices that seem wrong in the context of what we know now, that is just the path we had to take to get to where we are. The important thing is to make the choice to do it differently now. This work is not

linear, it is a spiral or a swirl, sometimes we will have to come back to the centre and start again. This work of breaking cycles and carving new paths is never easy. I hope that we can find solidarity in doing this together.

I want to acknowledge you, as a parent or caregiver raising children at this critical time. I deeply appreciate everything you do. This work is the most important work of our time, even in a world that doesn't acknowledge or value the work of raising our babies. You are consciously creating conditions for your children's well being and nourishing the next generation, you are focusing your intent on restoring long lost relationships and undertaking a lifelong journey of healing. You are creating the world you want to see, not just accepting it as it is. To gaze into the future with a heavy heart and to still live in the day to day, playing with your children and bringing them joy, consciously building your nest. To have made this commitment to life and love, you deserve to be celebrated. So, I celebrate you, your service to the Earth and your commitment to a regenerative future. I celebrate your recognition and reclamation of your true power. Thank you on behalf of all of Earth's children and their descendants for everything you are and everything you do.

Children in the time of Collapse

What does collapse mean in the context of this book, and how does it impact our children?

Already within my son's short life (at the time of writing this, only 6 years), he has witnessed war, ecological collapse, pandemics and multiple crises in sense making, economy, public health, democracy, culture wars, protests, and an escalation of fascism, racism, transphobia and misogyny. The Anthropocene has been recognised, and as such the end of the ecological and climate stability of the Holocene.

His life at only 3 years old, was completely turned upside down by lockdowns and face masks, that would previously have only seemed at home in a dystopian novel. For months and months we stayed at home seeing no one. Uncertainty and disruption won't end there. In the next 50 years of his life he will face the consequences of land degradation, mass extinction, toxins, population overshoot, over-consumption, drought, floods, famines, climate destabilisation, mass migration, wars,

more pandemics... and a lot that we cannot even imagine yet.

Most of humanity lives in cities, and views the world through a screen. They never come into contact with healthy thriving ecosystems. Children grow up knowing the brand names of trainers or burgers better than the beautiful names of plants, animals and herbs. Human culture is out of control, we've exceeded our own ability to control it or any of its destructive outcomes. Some people believe we aren't able to effect change in any useful way and that we have already locked in the collapse of global civilisation and passing several planetary tipping points towards our own extinction. Some believe that as we have over shot the Earth's carrying capacity, having children is irresponsible.

So I have been asked on many occasions, why have children? Many people who are collapse aware are looking at over population and what the future holds, and deciding not to have their own children. I am not here to convince anyone to have children, especially if they do not want them. It is a deeply personal decision and will be different based on your circumstances and worldview. There is no right or wrong answer and many arguments around it don't accept nuance. They tend to reduce a human life down to its carbon emissions or decide its worthiness based on the length of the life and the degree of comfort or suffering the person may experience. We need to be careful about the toxic, ableist, privileged and discriminatory idea that only a "perfect, healthy, long life" is worth living or valuable to the world that can bubble under most of these discussions. This kind of belief reveals the troubling relationship we have with birth, illness and death, now we've hidden the inconvenient,

messy truth of them away in hospitals.

When I became a mother, for the first time in my life I felt as though nature was me, I was nature. I was creating bones, a brain, a heart, lungs, eyeballs, while I slept, walked around, sat on the sofa, my body was doing amazing things my mind couldn't comprehend. When I finally held the tiny hands, tiny bones covered in soft delicate skin in my hands and gazed into those bright eyes for the first time, I was in awe of my body. Whole people with personalities, brimming and buzzing with life were formed within me and now they were out in the world breathing and being. I was a portal for their existence. My experiences of becoming a mother, the relationship that is formed in the womb, the way you can silently communicate and get to know a baby before it is born and the enormous transformation involved in the process of pregnancy and birth, the depth of the love, was not something that I felt could be simply narrated or negated with cold hard scientific explanations. People who can give birth are not allowed to talk about these experiences openly enough, especially the way we hold the powerful cycles of life and death within our bodies. Birth and Death are forces of life that we have disconnected from our culture.

In 2019, the year of the peak of Extinction Rebellion in the UK, new IPCC reports and Jem Bendell's Deep Adaptation essay, I was deep in the rabbit hole of my research on how bad planetary collapse was and I found out I was pregnant again. I was surprised, we had wanted another child but I was feeling so heavy and dark and I'd been seriously reconsidering. I was full of grief and fear for the future. It had taken me so long to realise that I was already about 8 weeks gone. I only realised because I

was unbelievably tired all the time and I was dreaming of people holding their babies on a conveyor belt, while I screamed at them that the conveyor belt was just going to send us off a cliff and no one could hear me. So I did a test, and as I stared at two pink lines, I wanted to feel happy but I felt this dark void inside me. For weeks it absorbed my feelings and made me feel so exhausted. I felt as though I was so open to all the suffering in the world that there was no room for being me and that if it was possible to let myself feel I would have been consumed by it all. It crept up on me and over time, I became worried I had prenatal depression. Then when I went to the scan at 12 weeks, they told me there was no heartbeat. The baby had died at around 8/9 weeks, either just before or not long after I had discovered I was pregnant, and certainly around the time I started to feel the void.

I had to have surgery, but I had to wait 4 days. Until then I had to carry on, feeling what I could now name as the presence of death in my womb, my belly still growing. When I woke from the surgery, I felt a clear absence. The numbing void had gone, replaced with the powerful emotions of potent and life changing grief. I was crying when I lay down in the surgery and I awoke crying, as if I had carried on crying while I was unconscious. I had thought I would feel relief that I wasn't bringing another life into a collapsing world, but I felt no relief at all, just overwhelming grief and the painful aching emptiness of yearning. The grief I held for that baby mirrored my grief for the Earth, it taught me all about the turbulent twists and turns of grieving and its roots in love. I'd not been raised with a spiritual literacy that matched my experiences, but I came to feel that the arrival and departure of that baby was supposed to happen. Just as my first baby had taught me my body could hold

the powerful rivers of creation, this baby taught me my body could hold the void of death too. That I was connected to it all, death, birth, life and all the cycles that Life and the Earth gifts to us. And just as the birth of my first child woke me up, this temporary presence brought me into an intimate relationship with grief and its transformative qualities.

After a long time of really integrating the experience, I came to feel strongly that grief wasn't a bad thing, to be avoided. Despite how traumatic the experience was, it felt necessary and important. I realised that I have to accept the inevitability of grief so I can fully and deeply live and love. It brought me to the clarity of love I hold for my family, life and the Earth. My grief for Gaia is actually about connection, not disconnection. It's the Earth reaching out to me, and I am responding, whether I feel love or grief, I am feeling that connection. Some people go their whole life never feeling this deep connection to the Earth. I recognised how necessary my grief for the Earth was, how I needed to go through that process in order to transform my way of being. When faced with the question; would I choose not to have been pregnant and lost the baby, to not experience that love and grief? The answer was without a doubt, no. I will always choose love and life, for however short a time, even if grief is inevitable. I began to feel that my family and how I raise them, and my love for them, is my expression of love for the Earth, my regenerative contribution and healing life's work. Everyone might have something different they are called to do in this time, and a different response to similar circumstances, and this was mine. I learned that while we are alive we have a short time to lean into love, to feel it fully and that's what I need to do with my love for the Earth and my children.

In my process of leaning into loving and living fully and deeply, 2 years later, my second baby was born a week before COVID restrictions were lifted. I had spent much of my pregnancy anxious, as any pregnancy after loss will be tainted with, especially in a pandemic. But I could feel his strong calm presence whenever I centred myself. In a turbulent, confusing and traumatic time, where the government span us around, we lost relatives and worried about the living ones, he brought clarity and meaning. His presence within me was grounding. I couldn't explain why, but I felt as if he wanted to be born fully in the knowledge of the times he was being born into and I could feel he was strongly rooted there, determined. I felt that by allowing my grief to transform me, I had become the mother he needed. Unlike the previous baby who I didn't feel I got the chance to know, I felt his presence and loved him immediately. I believed and still believe as he grows up and reveals more of who he is, that he has a healing and connecting spirit and has been born for this time. I felt his absence before I got pregnant so intensely, I can't explain how it felt in any other way than he was waiting to be born. Now he is here, I no longer feel that urgency accompanied by acute yearning and a bone deep fear that I will never get to meet my next child. Our family is complete.

We have become so disconnected from our spiritual, personal and emotional stories and people are so quick to pass judgement or make decisions on behalf of others that I hesitated to tell this story of how I came to decide to have a child in the knowledge of collapse. It gives people something easy to critique when a book like this holds feeling, perception, connection, intuition, relationship, nuance, spirit and emotion at its heart instead of the numbers, science and groupthink. I decided to share it, in

acknowledgment of this, because I believe that stories of love and grief are some of the most important medicine we have.

This is not to deny or trivialise the reality of population overshoot, it is just the truth. Babies will continue to be born for as long as the human race is around. Reproduction is a part of the human natural condition. Our cycles of life, our ancestral lineage, people of all ages living in community, sex, it is all integral to being human. It is so natural, our fertility is even connected to the cycles of the moon. If the goal is for humans not to succumb to the mass extinction, then collapse aware people cannot stop raising children. If humanity raises only deniers, we will be in an even worse position. There is a trend among the collapse aware of shaming or belittling those who have children. This stems from a fear of death, grief, suffering, as if it can be guaranteed that those things can be avoided, rather than inevitable. We cannot avoid our grief by avoiding love in the first place. Children bring love and healing, our expressions of love for children and our children's children's children need to guide us through these times, whether we choose to have our own children or not and whether or not we believe that they will have a world to live in. We need collapse aware children who know the realities and who are well prepared to do the work that is required of them. There is no regeneration without children.

Whatever your beliefs or experiences, if you are reading this book it is most likely that you agree that children are important and the way we raise them is the main starting point for humanity returning to right relationship with the Earth. What is clear is that having children in times of collapse is an enormous responsibility and we are being asked to step up. Those of us who

choose to have children in the face of planetary collapse do not bring children into this world lightly, some of us had children before we were aware, some of us have had children fully in the knowledge of collapse, some of us have chosen not to have our own children and to raise those in need instead. Yet here we are, together, facing this challenge of raising our children in times of collapse, head on. Exploring ideas of raising our children in ways that we were not raised and forging a path to cultural and social evolution. The next generation will play an important role in the healing that needs to happen. Parenting has long been considered valueless. We need to challenge that idea, now more than ever. Because parenting is critical to ensuring we can restore a livable planet for the Earth community. Culture change starts with how we raise our children. The paradigm shift from industrial consumerism to Earth Centred and regenerative begins now, with this generation of children.

We are currently suffering from cultural and spiritual amnesia. We once lived in close relationship to the land, its seasons and needs, we roamed freely, we honoured the moon, the sun and the seasons, we filled our lungs with clean air, drank wild water, ate what the land we lived on provided and we were thankful. We may have had shorter lives and endured more discomfort but we knew the Earth and each other well, we were integrated and knew how to be a part of an ecosystem. Now many of us live in comfort, entitlement and privilege, sitting on sofas, inside warm houses, in front of screens with stuff from all over the world being delivered to our doors, unable to even bring ourselves to roam next door to talk to our neighbours. We know nothing about the ecosystem or bioregion we live in, probably can't even name the nearest river, our food is flown in from distant lands,

our soils are neglected and degraded, our water filled with toxins and sewage. We barely even stop to look at the stars and when we do, they are hard to see through the light pollution. We live for many years longer, and we don't even like it. We dream of returning to a simpler way of living, we feel alone, distant and separated. Our bodies hold the stress and toxins of modern life and we are deeply damaged by it. Wilderness used to mean "home" and many of us live with deep wounds from never being able to return "home". That wild, connected living feels forever lost to us.

My children's futures will be extremely different to the one I had, the one I thought they would have, of going off to university and making a good living, engaging in modernity and raising a family, probably in a suburb. That lie of fake prosperity and fake happiness we are sold everyday. I have grieved that future and come to the understanding that raising them to know that loving, preserving and regenerating life is more important and meaningful than anything materialistic. Our ethical framework for being humans on the Earth has been broken for a long time. We need a new ethical framework and we need to consciously raise our children with that framework. All of these crises are a problem of human relationship, how we raise our children to live in relationship with life and the Earth matters.

And all we can do in the face of the severity of the situation is live in service to the Earth, keep moving forward. We have to face the future with hope that if we raise our children to be deeply connected, to know how to regenerate our relationships with each other, the land and the more-than-humans, that there will be future generations who heal the world rather than continue

to destroy it. I hold these hopes at the same time as my fears of failing and grief at the damage that will never be reversed, because those feelings are irrelevant to whether or not this is the right path. This is what is necessary in these critical times in order to move forward with conviction.

This is for parents seeking to raise children within a culture of Earth connection and regeneration and are committed to the story of humanity entering a new level of ecological consciousness. Even if the world around them doesn't, whether you are in an urban apartment, or a cabin in the woods. It doesn't only introduce the fundamental ideas, it also provides practical examples for you to try and build upon. We cannot control the toxic culture we have spent our lives swimming in. But within our own families we can have great autonomy over the culture we create around our children, the culture of our nests.

My dear friend and mentor, Gail Burkett, whose elder wisdom and guidance is lovingly woven throughout this book, described children in the most beautiful terms. She said that children are not clay, they are not a blank slate, they arrive on this Earth as whole people made of stardust, with their own soul contract to fulfill. They are born for our times and we need to support them to follow their stardust. Their stardust is their gift to the Earth. As parents and guardians, we need to make sure there are no obstacles blocking their stardust.

When I considered where I could put my energies, I first thought about writing a children's book. The truth is the children can't do anything without adults providing them a strong foundation to leap from. So this book is not about controlling or shaping

children, it's about being conscious, intentional and discerning about the family cultures we create and building that foundation. It is about us as parents, as the adults, stepping up to the times we live in to do the work required of us right now.

Committing to the Story of Regeneration

So what does it mean to commit to a story of regeneration?
How do we bring this to our nests?

There are many paths playing out right now. We can choose the ones we walk down. Some choose to believe everything will work out without changing anything. Some choose to believe the consumer path is enough or all we can do. Some believe they don't have anything to worry about. Some choose to believe it is a problem for the distant future and our descendants to worry about, others choose to believe that we are doomed and there is no point doing anything. Most of these result in little meaningful action or purpose. The one I choose and that many others are choosing, is that humans are entering an age of ecological, regenerative consciousness, where we have what may be the last opportunity to heal humanity's relationship with the Earth.

It can be so easy to get pulled into the idea that you have to move,

go to an eco-village or some far away off grid place, in order to raise your children in commitment to the vision of regenerating the Earth to lead an Earth centred, regenerative life. If you live in a degraded place or a city it can feel as though the idea of Earth connection is so far away. That you can only experience beauty, love, evolution if you wait until either you move on, or this cultural change that is promised arrives, so that you can really live into your values. You can feel like it is something that is only accessible to the privileged. This can leave you drowning, time occupied by needing to make money to one day afford this huge change, and paralysed by the inability to leave your current life.

We can't fall victim to this way of thinking, nor the one where we can't make a difference. We don't have time. Our lives are short, the timeline to make these huge paradigm shifts is short and we have to do the best we can right now. As the adults, we need to vigorously rethink and redesign the future and our culture for the next generation. These paradigm shifts are emerging now, from the ruins of what has come before and it is time to start moulding them in the way we want them shaped. We need to commit to living in service to ecology rather than the economy, life rather than money. We need to compost everything that no longer serves us or the Earth. We need to remember what the Earth should look like without our constant interference. We need to restore and reclaim what has been forgotten about living in relationship with Gaia, to remember how to love the Earth. Most importantly, we have to show our kids how. This has to happen from where ever we are, in whatever circumstances. This act of service to the Earth starts with us, and continues with our children, and hopefully their children. The work we

do now to raise them with this in mind will ripple through the generations, if we are lucky enough to have future generations.

Our children need to have a realistic view of what is happening, without being traumatised by the reality of the situation into a state of denial, apathy and inaction as many of the adults I have described are. They look to us to provide clear framework, vision and direction and we need to confidently lead them there. Many writers have written of a “new story”; Charles Eisenstein, Anne Baring, Daniel Christian Wahl, Thomas Berry, Jeremy Lent and others. The “new story” is where humanity shifts from the “old story” of separation, control, domination and into interconnectedness, co-operation and reverence for life and the Earth. In the face of all of the crises and collapses that the Earth is experiencing, it is a hopeful vision, where humanity has a role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of the Earth and more than humans. Where humans awaken from our delusion of separateness. It is a vision where we are on a path, not to total destruction, but to evolution.

“Active Hope” by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, lists 3 stories playing out right now...

1. Business as usual, which is the predominant cultural story and has lead us to ecological disaster.
2. The great unravelling, essentially the collapse of society as we know it.
3. The great turning, involving “the great work” where we commit to building a regenerative future where we live in harmony with Earth.

They say that all 3 of these stories are playing out at once and state that “Active Hope” is taking action without really knowing if the outcome will bring what we hope it will. “The Great Turning” is really another word for what I mean by “Story of Regeneration”. At the moment out of all of the stories and paths available, this is the one that still dreams of better days. Whether it becomes a reality or not, actually doesn’t matter, because it’s still the ethical way to live and the place to focus our life energies. If we believe any of the other options and live towards them, then we are choosing disaster.

A commitment to the “new story” requires us to engage in an evolutionary process. Barbara Marx Hubbard was a futurist and visionary who advocated for the conscious evolution of humanity. She believed that humanity was undergoing a transformational shift, a new phase in our collective development that would lead to a more cooperative and interconnected world. Hubbard created the concept of the “wheel of co-creation,” which symbolizes the process of conscious evolution and the collaborative efforts needed to bring about positive change. The idea is that individuals each have a unique role to play in this evolution, so as parents we have an integral role in nurturing the next generation and contribution to make in the unfolding of this collective destiny.

Regenerative cultures weave relationships with the living world and prioritise the wellbeing of all of Earth’s kin. They are the medicine to centuries of a harmful culture of separation, materialism, human supremacy and dominion. They are created intentionally with our whole being, dedication and commitment. We need to incorporate regenerative practices in all areas of life,

from agriculture, to education, parenting and governance. It all needs to be re-imagined from being extractive to regenerative, leaving landscapes and relationships with life better than they were before. We need to restore, heal and enhance rather than degrade and destroy. This is a path that remembers and retains what is regenerative and composts and renews what is harmful, a future that rejects the narrow focus on economic growth and technological solutions to one that embraces a more holistic and regenerative vision of the flourishing of all life that recognizes our human place within the larger universe. This is a whole new way of thinking and perceiving and kids are currently swimming in that culture of domination and separation, so we need to create these new stories with which to water their growing minds.

Traditionally, connection would have been taught as a spiritual aspect of culture. There is a risk that those of us living with religious wounds may struggle with these concepts of spirituality and those of us committed to a religion in our lives may feel it is intruding on theirs. Yet it is simpler than that. Spirituality is feeling truly alive, present and connected to something bigger than yourself, in this case, Life, the Earth and the Cosmos. So, spirituality can be independent from religion and there can be many individual and subjective routes to achieving that feeling of connectedness. In the West, we have gone so far down the path into science and rationality that we no longer nurture anything else in our children. We evangelise and indoctrinate them into materialism, individualism and scepticism. In order to return to Earth connection, we need to retreat to the place where spirituality and science meet. To raise our children in that space where there is more warmth, myth and magic, mystery

and connection, where their dreams, creativity, intuition and empathy are seen as equally valuable to their intellect. As Daniel Christian Wahl says “To heal the Earth we have to heal humanity. To heal humanity we have to re-perceive and remember our intimate relationship with each other and life as a planetary and cosmic process”. It is true that our culture has become so spiritually bereft and divided that we are barely even connected to each other. We and the Earth are suffering for it.

This beautiful vision, however, requires considerable effort to materialise. It is not something we can approach half-heartedly. In order to bring this story to life for our children, we need to see clearly where we are being asked to go and we need to be prepared to make sacrifices to get there. Spirituality has often relied on faith, a trust in something existing without any concrete evidence. Perhaps we do need faith that our tiny actions will be a part of a whole, that even the fungi and the trees are a part of this vision, that it's not down to only us alone and that together we will take our place in the Earth regenerating. Yet out of all of these complicated actions that need to happen, we need to start with only one thing; How we love the Earth. If we do not genuinely feel this love, if we just spend our days swamped in distraction and disconnection, then we will never be able to shift these paradigms. Where ever we are, what ever we are doing, we need to teach ourselves and our children how to love the Earth and how to be loved back. Commitment plays a huge part in building loving relationships, and we need to commit ourselves to loving the Earth.

It is clear that as a human race we must face some painful truths in order to take action to survive this mass extinction and to

reduce and regenerate the damage to the living world. We need a generation of creative healers and weavers who are not afraid to face those truths and who know deep down that they can choose their response to the multiple crises humanity and our kin face. My hope is that I raise children who, instead of looking at the future with a feeling of disempowerment and doom, are fueled with courage and determination. Who do it with imagination, respect, urgency, agency, joy, resilience and compassion. What collapses can be rebuilt, what is degraded can be regenerated, what is hurt can be healed. This is a worthwhile and meaningful future. My children need to grow up knowing that we are a tiny part of a bigger story of planetary healing, of Earth regenerating, and that living in service to that story is really the only ethical way to live in our times. Nourished by this story, they will never feel alone, because they will belong to the Earth. They will know they are one with all life, they will be rooted where ever they go. They will know the feeling of being held by their ancestors and of loving and being loved by the land. They will live in a state of aliveness that I as someone who has lived much of my life entrenched in capitalism and experiencing the suffering of a spiritual void may take the rest of my life to unpeel the layers of conditioning to get to. They will retain an awareness of the Earth from childhood that is taking years for me to cultivate and return to, their experience of being rooted in the living world will leave them nourished and liberated in ways that I have spent my whole life searching for. They will know what it means to commit their love to the Earth.

This vision can sometimes feel so huge it is hard to hold, so I started small. With just a scrapbook. In the scrapbook I wrote our family commitment to the Earth. I read it out at our seasonal

ceremonies and family meals. When you speak a thing out loud, as an intention, even if it isn't currently true, it has a habit of becoming true. Especially when you involve children. Returning to loving and honouring the Earth as a daily practice and way of being is something that requires our focus and intent in order to break out of our current ways of being, we need to remind ourselves regularly. It gives us permission and time to envision the role we have to play and communicate it to our children as a commitment, one that laid out clear intent, meaning and purpose. Here is our commitment:

“4.6 billion years ago, a cloud of dust and gas began to collapse under its own gravity. At the centre of the cloud, a star was born. That star was the sun. Gas and stardust scattered all across the solar system. It contained elements, carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen... and it formed planets. One of those planets was Earth. The stardust, which contained hydrogen and oxygen, reacted to form water on the Earth's surface, forming oceans, rivers and lakes. Earth was the only planet around the sun with water. From that water came life. We are life.

We drink the water provided to us from the rivers and oceans. When we breathe, we breathe the oxygen that the trees and plants have provided for us. When we eat a plant, we eat the food nourished by the fertile soil and pollinated by the bees. All of us came from the stardust. We breathe deeply while we remember and feel deep in the core of our beings that we are one with all life.

We are guardians of the Earth, we share, restore, regenerate and give back to the Earth. The Earth has given us our precious lives full of love and grief, joy and sorrow and allowed us to be a part of it's

rhythms and cycles. We honour the Earth, We love the Earth and we give thanks everyday for all that the Earth provides.”

Not long after we started doing this, my son started asking serious questions about this responsibility. “Why are all the trees the same?”, “What is an ecosystem?”, “What is a monoculture?”, “Why do we cut down trees when we can just trim their branches and use that wood?” “Would you have preferred it if you were born in a cabin surrounded by trees?”. He is thinking about how to be of service, he’s imagining how different things can be, he’s critical of our relationships, without having to know all of the scary and depressing facts of planetary collapse. As I write this, he’s only 6, we’ve been doing this since he was 4.

I am gradually filling that scrapbook with ideas of how to honour our commitment. It is simultaneously a record and a plan as we try to figure out how to do this as a family. My kids fill it with their drawings and stickers while I write in the spaces all the ways we find to honour the magic of life and the Earth together. When my children are older they will have this book to take with them into their own family nests, like an ancestral recipe book.

It had an almost immediate effect in the decisions we made about our own lives. My husband and I worked less, I volunteered more, we haven’t flown in years, we chose to slow down and spend more time together, to make money less central to our lives, we rewilded our garden, cut down our travelling and centred our lives around our home, unschooled the kids, we stopped drinking alcohol, we made different decisions about our food and our friendships, I realised I should write this book, plus a bunch of other decisions that we made differently because

this gave us an ethical framework to do that. These are all decisions we've made from our house in a suburb of a city. We know we can go deeper with this and we're always trying to push ourselves further towards our commitment. Who knows, maybe one day we will move to an eco village, but this commitment has impacted us in a million different small ways by changing our framework for our decision making to ask, simply, "is this in service to the Earth?" and our daily question of "how will I love the Earth today?".

When you are committed to this vision, you don't look for joy in the places you used to, you find joy in meaning and connection. Commitment requires discipline and resilience, by staying committed to something, you devote and focus your life energy, you show up to do the work required and push through any challenges and obstacles. You become prepared to face discomfort, inconvenience and sacrifice because it becomes meaningful. You know that any decisions that aren't in alignment with that vision will likely sit heavily on you and that you can trust your intuition to be your guide. So, if you do nothing else from this book, do speak your commitment to your love for the Earth out loud to your children and let it ground you in the vision of a story of regeneration.

Proposal

Logline: A book for collapse aware parents about how to create a regenerative family culture and raise children into an earth centred consciousness.

Description: Those of us raising children in a time of collapse and poly crises are being called to forge a new path for our children. We are currently suffering from intergenerational amnesia. We no longer remember how to raise children in connection with the earth, and her cycles and rhythms. We once lived in close relationship to the land, its seasons and needs, we roamed wild in deep connection with the other than human communities around us. Now we live in “comfort” and disconnection. All of the crises we face are crises of relationship. Knowing how to raise our children to remember our intimate relationship with each other, life and earth is important to the changes humanity needs to undertake to do our part in healing mother earth. This is a book for parents seeking to raise children within a culture of earth connection.

Impact: How will your project transform lives, revitalise communities, or regenerate ecosystems? (250 character limit)

Cultural change starts with how we raise our children. Parents are desperate for guidance on how to raise children in the

face of planetary collapse, how to raise them to be resilient, compassionate, cooperative and knowledgeable about how to live in service to the earth. Undertaking this work as parents will start with our children and what we do now to raise them in earth centred consciousness will ripple through the generations.

Audience....

Collapse aware parents.