

Women's Congress

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Companion for  
Political Change



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Women's Congress for Future Generations



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# CONTENTS

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The Traveler found herself at the threshold of a dark wood	2
To the Activist	3
Into the dark wood	5
Another way to begin	6
Gifts from the Dark-Seeing Owl	10
The transformative power of grief	10
The knowledge of agency: we have the authority to act	13
An understanding of power: true power is in communion	15
Following the trail of the Old Wise Woman	16
Crossing the threshold, choosing to act	18
Topic One: The Commons	24
Topic Two: Free, Prior and Informed Consent	28
Topic Three: Public Trust Theory of Government	31
Topic Four: Precautionary Principle	35
Topic Five: Guardianship	39
Out of the woods	42
Appendices	43
References	45
Notes	47
A Backstory: "Everything that Rises Must Converge"	49



I came to myself in a dark wood where the direct way was lost...

It is a hard thing to speak of, how wild, harsh and impenetrable that wood was, so that thinking of it recreates the fear. It is scarcely less bitter than death: but, in order to tell of the good that I found there, I must tell of the other things I saw there. I cannot rightly say how I entered it. I was so full of sleep, at that point where I abandoned the true way.

(Dante, *The Divine Comedy*)



## THE TRAVELER FOUND HERSELF AT THE THRESHOLD OF A DARK WOOD...

Something in her center brought her here. She knows the way forward is through the forest.

The forest is dark and full of energy, an ancient and real body of wilderness, as well as the deep and shadowy levels of her psyche.

Once she's inside the forest her awareness deepens. The roadblocks that obstructed her efforts are clearer.

She knows instinctively that the tools she seeks to continue on will not be found on the well-trodden paths, but deep in the heart of the woods.

The way is less clear but the wise old woman left cairns to mark the path, and the dark-seeing owl is near in the darkness.

And so she continues on, following the markers, deeper still...

## TO THE ACTIVIST; WHO IS ALONE AND STUCK; WHO KNOWS THE GAME IS RIGGED; WHO NEEDS TO CHANGE THE GAME...

To the advocate who feels called to the task at hand – facing the fundamental flaws in human systems, so dangerously out of step with nature's way – but who feels she has already tried everything to bring about change.

To the mother, who is tired of being told that making better consumer choices is enough, when she knows instinctively that she cannot shop her way out of the environmental health crisis of her family, her community or the Earth.

To the woman of color who is weary of being treated as 'disposable', whose child was stopped unjustly by the police.

To the woman who doesn't have food to make dinner for her children tonight.

To the young person who knows time is short and feels powerless in the face of the damage left by those older than she is.

To the elder who grieves at what her grandchildren are inheriting.

The Traveler may come from any walk of life, at any age and find herself in the dark wood.

She knows the dynamic and diverse things required for a healthy life and whole community. She knows that the environment is not just the natural world but also the social world and the built environment. But she is part of a political and cultural system that turns a blind eye to the chronic ill health of children, the loss of precious wildlife and beautiful places, as well as the growing threat of climate change.

She feels foreboding as the weather problems intensify and every day brings

new stories of loss and contamination of the places she loves. She recognizes the interconnectedness of unequal pay for women, racism, violence against women and the disregard for the Earth. She has made changes in her life to reduce her impact on the environment, but her individual behaviors feel inconsequential and symbolic in the face of such global, complex issues. Or she may not even have money for food much less organic fruits and vegetables. And so she feels complicit, alone, and stuck in the current that separates her from others and from taking meaningful action. This story of disconnection and isolation is the story of so many of us.  
[1]



The Traveler may be living at the edges, on the frontlines of environmental and climate injustice. She knows her people bear a legacy of environmental racism. For her, the environmental issues we face are not a new struggle, but an age-old resistance against exploitation. She knows she has been born into a cycle of historical trauma, but her elders have also taught her that she is more than this trauma, and she is powerful. She knows she has solutions, but like others in her position, she has to continuously fight for her voice to be heard, even at times amongst her fellow women Travelers.

The Traveler has perhaps been an activist for a long time, but does not necessarily identify with being an 'environmentalist'. Or she feels she has tried everything. She seeks new ways to intervene in the system because she knows from experience that traditional points for engaging as citizenry are broken. When she turns to people in positions of power and leadership to make the changes she can't do on her own, she is routinely dismissed. She fears the range of options available are not commensurate with the tangle of problems she sees.

How isolating and disconcerting to understand the incredible urgency of the human position, but hear only a faint echo in the political media, government hallways, and company boardrooms. How disorienting to

watch people in positions of great influence blatantly outweigh short-term profits over long-term, in some cases irrevocable, damage. How enraging to face ongoing exploitation, colonization and destruction, but be told anger is not OK [2].

The Travelers come from different directions to the edge of the forest. They have walked different lines and bear varying orientations in the human story. Each has witnessed the dangerous effects of human actions. But something in common brings them to this threshold: they are stuck, they know the game is rigged, and they need a game changer. Each woman is here because the Earth is in peril and she claims the authority to intervene, to connect and to act on the most important cultural and political work of our time. She brings with her a legacy of stories, ancestors, and wisdom. She brings skills that are only hers, a unique fingerprint of the divine. She joins with others to find and mark the path forward.

### **But how?**

Something is vibrating in her sternum, clutching her heart and her gut. She cannot, and does not want to bury this awareness again. Her instincts propel her through the woods.

## INTO THE DARK WOOD...

The Traveler has awakened from what feels like a muddy dream. She crosses the threshold of the forest and onto a faint path. Other Travelers are near. She hears the rustle of branches, catches a glimpse of a blue or red skirt. Their paths begin to cross, run parallel and at certain junctures, merge, only to diverge again. Eventually, she reaches a clearing and sees other Travelers emerging out of the shadows, the mud on their shoes, the calloused hands, the tangled hair. They gather in a circle; see each other, together. They have reached the heart of the forest, which holds the Tree of Life.

The dark wood in its wildness makes room for time out of time. It is a gathering place where the head and the heart work in partnership. Here, the measurable and seen is combined with the invaluable and intuitive. The dark wood is a harbor for mediating between the overwhelming and the futile, the global and the local, the "We" and the "I". The Traveler excavates the things she's habitually buried or shrouded and holds them near the light. In this space the Travelers are free to talk together about anger, grief, despair, and anxiety. They are free to search for new ways and new stories and to unearth the wisdom of the ancestors.

Sheltered by the forest, the Traveler sees more clearly her largest soul-self: Guardian, Counselor, Seed-Keeper, Ancestor, Connector, Advocate, Grandmother, Storyteller, Sentinel. These identities resonate with something deeply familiar, perhaps unrecognized and unnamed before, but which begin to shine in communion with her fellow Travelers.

## ANOTHER WAY TO BEGIN...

Ilene Evans, storyteller and civil rights historian with Voices from the Earth [3], tells about: *the time after the Civil War when women were unable to vote or own property. They had little political power. At a time when the nation was still ambivalent about freedom, women were unequivocal. They controlled the kitchen and the dinner table. Every child at their table had the right to live, grow, and be whole people. Then as now, we can see that the very soul of the nation was being determined in every lowly domestic environ. Looking back, somehow they knew the soul of the nation was at stake after the War. They knew that a child needed to eat regardless of their color, regardless of who their father was...*

Ilene said that that time has come again. The soul of the nation is at stake.

The human species is roughly 6,000 generations old yet in a span of only a handful, it has created and is now kidnapped by a culture of waste and senseless "sacrifice to the idols of profit and consumption" [4]. In only 4 generations fossil fuel has become regarded as the lifeblood of the economy, the unassailable current carrying the Traveler's species forward. Nearly all of our daily activities, and those performed by the vast majority of people in the world, harm the environment.

The byproduct of this hubris is a legacy of waste and degradation that extends far into the future. In some cases, toxic sites that exist today will need to be cared for by those living 10,000 generations from now. In some cases, forever. The true basis of life – clean air, water, habitable land,

biodiversity, human diversity, a stable climate – are treated as disposable, limitless, inessential. Despite all of the signs and all of the data, life on the only home we have is not protected.

### **We are not bound to a legacy of Injustice**

In the face of everything we know – about climate change, about environmental and public health, about the critical role of biodiversity in our survival, and the rampant inequalities and injustices—the ongoing corporate pursuit of resource extraction projects is deranged. The government turns a blind eye, permits these projects and claims that they have "no significant impact".

We know people are suffering now, and we know we are passing potentially catastrophic risks on to future generations. We witness with bewilderment, anger, anxiety and grief, this legacy we are leaving. In

the face of powerful and often willful negligence from leaders in business and government, we ask ourselves, "What can I do?"

Where governments are failing to meet their responsibilities, ordinary people are stepping up in countless brave ways. Where decision makers are taking baffling policy and economic stances in the face of increasingly dire warnings, people are serving as witnesses and innovators. In direct response to the political battle over climate (in)action, people are joining together and are taking action. Stories, images, data, dreaming, blockading, improvising—these are gaining traction as another kind of political power.

This power arises out of finding the roots and patterns of injustice and joining together. Each person, whether poor, a woman, Black or Native American, LGBTQ, a Midwesterner, middle-aged or an immigrant, holds unique stories, hard won knowledge of injustice, and powerful strategies and solutions. When we find each other we often take on new roles that go beyond the boundaries of our individual stories and histories. Sometimes we secretly hold identities we don't even have words for—those identities we felt whispered when we first came to the heart of the dark wood: **Advocate, Guardian, Counselor, Seed-Keeper, Ancestor, Connector, Grandmother, Sentinel.** We know that these identities have the

most meaning in a larger story with other people who have complementary roles to play.

Our individual experiences are important because they give each of us unique wisdom. Our work is to understand where our personal journeys bring us to a confluence of rich and diverse stories. The work ahead asks all of us to go beyond empty or isolating gestures, to acknowledge the deep lacerations in our collective history, and with that understanding, move into spaces where we find different relationships with each other and with the Earth. When we find each other and source a way forward, we are more likely to forge a path to a just and beautiful future.

All of our voices are needed to heal, reclaim, re-imagine. We need each other to answer the call from future generations to ensure a livable planet.

The major threats and ingrained systems we are facing require us to take action together. To succeed in this effort, we must stand together, share strength and support each other's work as we take on different facets of the problem. We must stand together because we have a new story to tell with a history of lessons and new legal principles that can help us address the injustices present and future generations face. We must stand together because the

Earth is too precious to hand over to faceless corporations enriching their shareholders through acts of exploitation, at the expense of the Earth and all her children. This new story can only be told with all our voices.

### **Women Rising Up**

Women have a shared collective history, as property, individuals with less rights, employees with less pay, and as the bearers of an age-old and pernicious violence both discriminatory and indiscriminant. Half of the human voice—the whole register of women's voices—is largely missing in this paradigm, and no voice is given to future generations or the natural world. People of color, LGBTQ persons, the poor, the elderly as well as the land and water, are routinely bartered, displaced, exploited, discarded.

Women are moving into place, joining their voices together to claim a healthy future for their children and grandchildren. Women are generally and globally more exposed to the outcomes of interacting social, economic and natural systems. We are more often responsible for our family's food, medical decisions and other necessities and we predominantly fill caregiver roles. We are more exposed to environmental risks and impacts (be they natural, social or economic) because of these roles. Women are the first habitat for future generations – our

bodies reflect and transmit the toxic state of our collective environment. We come from the Earth and we will return to the Earth. For all of these reasons we have a responsibility and therefore authority to sit at the decision-making table.

The *Women's Congress Companion for Political Change* was created to answer the hunger of women for ways to fulfill that responsibility and affirm our authority to intervene, connect with others, and act. The Companion is a response to you, the Traveler, who is on a journey answering a call to protect the future generations of all beings, who finds herself at the threshold of a dark wood searching for fellow Travelers and who is ready to listen to the experience of others, to source new roles in a new story, to hone worthy political ideas and put them into play on behalf of future generations.

This work is also offered as a way to end the isolation and loneliness attending this work and our own stories of injustice, for honoring the anger, grief and potential burnout that comes with seeking change. We are building solidarity, creating new narratives, strengthening and creating networks of partners that match the interconnectedness of the issues we face.

This work builds on two Women's Congresses. The first, held in Moab, Utah

was a beginning: a Women's Congress for Future Generations predicated on the recognition that future generations have inalienable rights, with the corresponding responsibilities held by present generations. The gathering was emblematic of responding to a larger call from voiceless future generations unable to defend their rights to an uncompromised existence and to transform social norms, policy debates, and public dialogue about our collective future.

Because so many of us have histories of being voiceless and silenced as women, as poor, as people of color, as LGBTQ, we refuse to let the systematic silencing continue. The injustices of all of us are connected. So too are the patterns of justice. Treat people of color well and we are more likely to treat the Earth well. Our mission at both Congresses was to transform social norms, policy debates, and public dialogue about our collective future and the future we are leaving our

descendants.

We join an existing, resolute, but oft-hidden current of action already underway, being led by Indigenous women and women of color in the global south and north. Our work is cracking open the public square just as the extraordinary indigenous movement, Idle No More, organized around circle dances and drumming. Like Idle No More we seek to innovate around barriers, realign the law with justice, change the rules of the game. We can transform our grief, anger, and despair into a new understanding of power. We can imagine and create new economic and legal principles, and new roles of government.

*"I dreamt that I was standing before the Tree of Life, charged with keeping it alive. One branch was already dead. I scanned the horizon for those I knew who were coming to tend it with me.*

*I dreamed once that the scales of Justice were being held by the Tree of Life.*

*I do this work with the Women's Congress and Future First because I hope to look future generations in the eye and say we did everything we could to give you a sporting chance. We did everything to tend the Tree of Life on your behalf."*

(Carolyn Raffensperger)

## GIFTS FROM THE DARK-SEEING OWL

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**The dark-seeing owl has left gifts for the Traveler to help her begin the journey.** The gifts are three navigational tools for the journey of the soul:

- the transformative power of grief
- the knowledge of agency – which gives us the authority to act, and
- a different understanding of power – the power in communion with each other and with the natural world.

### THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GRIEF

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#### Sorrow and the Soul Wounds [6]

If you have opened the door to this chapter then you are in the room of sorrows. These are not the sorrows of every day life, the ones that have attended humanity from our first breath to this moment. These are the sorrows of this time, the ones that our generation is the first to know—the threat of extinction of monarchs and whales, climate chaos, the pollution of every corner of the world. Our ancestors had not seen a picture of Earth floating in space and could not imagine that humans might forever alter that blue orb. We are the first.

Joanna Macy says this: "Until the late twentieth century, every generation throughout history lived with the tacit certainty that there would be generations to follow. Each assumed, without questioning, that its children and children's children would walk the same Earth, under the same sky. Hardships, failures, and personal death were encompassed in that vaster assurance of continuity. That certainty is now lost to us, whatever our politics. That loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time." [7]

A grandmother told me that when she thinks of her grandchildren's future she weeps. A young tattooed woman whispered that there won't be a rainforest when she finishes college and has enough credentials to work to protect the Amazonian river basin. Both lie awake in that dark-of-dark 3:00 am hour with a weight on their chests, literally the weight of the world.

The worst of these sorrows hit me (Carolyn) when thousands of the iconic birds of North Dakota, the white pelicans, abandoned their nests leaving their young to die. Cause unknown. That same year I brought my husband home from his cancer surgery only to find that aerial planes had not only sprayed the railroad with herbicides but had killed my organic garden.

Sorrow and grief are frequent companions for those, like us, who love the Earth. They sit beside us when we hear the news, when we live through the drought or fire or flood, when that new baby is born into a world of difficult futures. They are the other face of love.

Sometimes we have to stop and name the sorrows, trace them to their root. Our grief is part of the immune system of the Earth.

Some of this sorrow we suffer stems from a sense of moral failure over all these losses. The mismatch between being told to change our light bulbs when the planet seems in free fall—melting ice caps, polluted water supplies, drought—creates a needling angst and anxiety. We know that we are in deep trouble, but feel that there is little we—or anyone—can do individually. Anne Karpf writing about climate change in the *Guardian* a few years ago said, “I now recycle everything possible, drive a hybrid car, and turn

down the heating. Yet somewhere in my marrow I know that this is just a vain attempt to exculpate myself – it wasn’t me, guv.”

To fully acknowledge our complicity in the problem, but to be unable to act at the scale of the problem, creates cognitive dissonance. And this “environmental melancholia,” results in hopelessness. It is not apathy we are feeling, but sadness that can be eased only with taking actions, mostly collective, scaled to the problems we face.

The moral failure and the inability to act leads to what some now identify as a moral injury, which is at the root of some post-traumatic stress disorders, or PTSD. The U.S. military has been investigating the causes of PTSD because the early interpretations of it being fear-based didn’t match what psychologists were hearing from the soldiers themselves. What psychologists heard wasn’t fear, but sorrow and loss. Soldiers suffering from PTSD expressed enormous grief over things like killing children and civilians or over not being able to save a fellow soldier. They discovered that at the core of much of PTSD was a moral injury, or a soul wound resulting from the dissonance between their actions and their moral code.

The moral injury stemming from our participation in destruction of the planet has two dimensions:

- knowledge of our role, and
- an inability to act.

Our culture lacks the mechanisms for taking account of collective moral injuries and then finding the vision and creativity to address them. The difference between a soldier's moral injury and our environmental moral injuries is that environmental wounds aren't a shattering of moral expectations, but a steady, grinding erosion—a slow-motion relentless sorrow.

Environmental lawyer Bob Gough says that he suffers from pre-traumatic stress disorder. Pre-traumatic stress disorder is short hand for the fact that he is fully aware of the future trauma, the moral injury that we individually and collectively suffer, the effects on the Earth of that injury, and our inability to act in time. Essentially pre-traumatic stress disorder, the environmentalist's malady, is a result of our inability to prevent harm.

Some of the sorrow is rooted in our isolation. Much of the environmental and health messaging speaks to individuals. Stop smoking, get more exercise, switch from incandescent to LED light bulbs, etc. Sure, we need to do all that we are able as individuals—that is part of preventing any further damage to the planet and our own souls. Some day-to-day homely environmental acts are spiritual practices. But those individual efforts aren't fully responsive to the

deep sorrow and moral wounds we face.

The danger of this grief is that it can be paralyzing and keep us in that gray leaden place. The key to leaving the room of sorrows is to find the moral compass hidden inside. That compass orients us towards what is right, the north star that illuminates a faint path forward. It is the radar that we use to find others so we can take meaningful action. The moral clarity underlying this grief can compel us to seek the authority to act, which is the opposite of helplessness.

The opposite of grief is not optimism. We don't know if we will succeed in ensuring the health and wellbeing of future generations even if we start this very moment and we use all the money, talent and resources we have to turn the wheel of the Titanic. What we do know is that joining together, withdrawing our consent from economic and other systems that corrupt the future, and then taking action to co-create health and wholeness, increases the odds for synchronicity, surprise, possibility.

What transforms grief is taking action with others out of our love for the world. This transformation is grace. The synchronicity, surprise and possibilities are grace. We might still carry these sorrows transformed as they might be, but they will serve as compasses, not lead weights.

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF AGENCY: WE HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO ACT

Women's bodies are the first environments, the sanctuaries, for future generations. Women's bodies also reflect and transmit the toxic state of our collective environment. This relationship with future generations ties women to the Earth because women have a constant connection and exchange with the Earth. This obligation to future generations leads to women's unique responsibility, along with men, to uphold the rights of future generations.

Future generations have the inalienable right to an uncompromised existence. Recognizing this fundamental right leads to the responsibility to uphold that right. Yet these innate intergenerational relationships of inheriting and bequeathing are rarely factored into decisions about how society is planned and organized today.

For millennia, the Earth was sacred and divinity was understood as 'the Great Mother'. In "Artemis: The Indomitable Spirit in Everywoman", Jean Shinoda Bolen reminds us that: "it is relevant to the status of women to learn that, prior to patriarchal religions, humans honored the Great Goddess, mother goddesses, and the sacred feminine, although by many different names. Those cultures recognized that

all life came through female bodies and that women were embodiments of the sacred feminine in bringing forth new life." [8]

Eve Ensler writes that when we are separated from our bodies, we are separated from the body of the world; everything is connected — oil spills, pillaged earth, rapes. This separation has led to the political reality that women across the world have been kept voiceless and presumed powerless. This exclusion extends to Indigenous, Native, and First Nations peoples, communities of color, and communities of low-income or subsistence, who bear the brunt of pollutants, habitat loss, and environmental damage.

But women are rising up. Women are claiming their unique wisdom and obligations—from stewarding biodiversity and the commons, to recognizing their responsibility to their communities and to future generations. This leads to an authority to act.

Women's authority to act comes from a connection with the Earth and a connection to the future. This authority does not stop at the end of a woman's childbearing years. In fact many would say their authority grows with age. Valuing the wisdom of the council of women elders is embedded in the

Iroquois Confederacy. It is Grandmother wisdom.

Hecate, Goddess of the Crossroad, is “the wisdom in women who know that denial and wishful thinking harm rather than help when the truth must be faced”. The Goddess of the Crossroads is present where three major roads—the past, present, and future—come together.

And so women stand at the crossroad of the past, present, and future. We will map a path forward in time so that future beings can look back at that crossroad and give thanks for the choices we made.

In recognizing women as the first environment for future generations, we bring to the fore our own origins and our own legacy: where we come from and to whom we are responsible. If we do not take responsibility, who will? *Responsibility brings with it a form of agency.*

Knowing we have both moral clarity and the authority to act shifts our understanding of the true nature of power. True power comes in making common cause with others.

## AN UNDERSTANDING OF POWER: TRUE POWER IS IN COMMUNION

What is power? Civics educator Eric Liu defines power as the capacity to make others do what you would have them do. We don't really like talking about power, Liu points out. Talking about power is uncomfortable, scary, inherently evil, because "in the culture and mythology of democracy, power resides with the people. Period. End of Story."

He's referring to talking about the reality of power, which is not based on the consent of the governed but on the consent of a few who wield disproportionate influence. And we are now in an era where governance in the U.S., and in many parts of the world, is outsourced to a handful of players. As Liu puts it candidly, they "understand how a bill becomes a law, yes, but also how a friendship becomes a subsidy, or how a bias becomes a policy, or how a slogan becomes a movement".

Players who can gain a profit in protecting private capital and the free market write the dominating rules of the game. The tools used to make decisions – environmental impact assessments, cost-benefit analyses – do not measure the right things and do not account for Earth's life support systems. Citizens, rather than negligent companies, bear the burden of proving that an activity

is harmful. Harmful projects go forward, packaged and sold using the pro forma language of 'jobs' and 'economic growth', at the expense of public health and the environment.

The thing about power is that alone we don't have a lot of power to change the big societal problems. We can't alter the course of the climate by changing a light bulb in our children's bedroom. The radical changes needed require us to recognize, as Joanna Macy put it, our non-separateness. We are part of a well-populated story. True power is recognizing that our strength is in our connections, our (bio)diverse interrelatedness, and that in joining together we can do things we cannot do alone.

The magic of communion is that it is the wellspring of bravery. We can be brave because we aren't alone. We can choose to exercise power, not just for ourselves, but also with others and for the children of all species.

This power is nourished by the wisdom left for us by our ancestors, the creativity of our artists and storytellers, the sharp incisive logic of our lawyers and engineers, as well as the homey, every-day skills of tending, gardening, cleaning.

## FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE OLD WISE WOMAN...

The secret about being lost in this forest is that the Traveler is not alone. The owl is close and, along with the old wise woman, there are wanderers nearby. The power of communion and community is fundamentally different than the power of coercion and force. While each Traveler can make differences in the world, joining together creates a great power.

The following pages map the cairns left by the old wise woman. They are memorials—symbols of grief and also veneration for what has already come to pass. We honor the losses because they are the landmarks for what must be reconciled and healed for future generations to live well.

These markers come in the form of new language to help us shift the narrative and imagine different roles and questions. The cairns are navigation points on this strange and wondrous journey.

### **Come; Walk with Us.**

The Companion is designed to be a guide to new ideas that help both individuals and groups take seriously their sacred responsibilities to the Earth and future generations. It is designed to help change the rules of the game to try and leave a legacy of clean

water, healthy land, and a habitable atmosphere to generations to come.

One way to use the Companion is to **gather a group to meet regularly** to explore the ideas and find ways to apply them to a threat in the community. The group can take **6-8 weeks** to go through these pages' offerings, exploring one of the **five topics** at each gathering and applying them to the problems facing the community.

The group should **select a convener or facilitator**—someone to guide the discussions and strategizing. This role can rotate, but whoever is leading the discussion that week will hold the space for the group, walk members through the ideas and new language, and guide the group's discussion.

**The first meeting** might serve as an introductory space to each other, the threat you wish to address, the transformative power of grief, sourcing the authority to act, and the nature of power – the power of communion. The facilitator can find additional resources provided in the appendix of this document for ushering members through each topic. **In the following seven weeks** the group can explore a separate topic each week for five weeks and have two weeks to discuss points of political engagement. The

Companion has introductions to each topic for everyone in the group to read before gathering that week. The topics include the **Commons; Free Prior and Informed Consent; Public Trust Theory of Government; the Precautionary Principle; and Guardianship.**

**Every chapter includes questions** that can help apply the topic to the environmental problems being address. **The Resources chapter includes in-depth materials** on each subject for the discussion leader to explore and bring to the group if she so desires.

The last two weeks the group can **strategize ways and places to intervene** using the ideas in the Companion and make plans for continuing the work together if so desired.

**Through the use of the Companion, a group will explore:**

- The power of communion in getting out of loops of despair,
- Give or withdraw their consent to an activity,
- Tie their grief and sorrow to moral clarity and purpose for action,
- Find new political language and strategies that put that moral clarity into play
- Identify ways to make common cause with others, and
- Break open spaces to reveal different points of intervention for political engagement.

**There is no right or wrong way to go about this.**

**You can't make a mistake.**

**You are not alone.**

**Let's begin!**

## CROSSING THE THRESHOLD, CHOOSING TO ACT . . .

Return to thinking about that problem or that opportunity that brought you to the threshold of the dark wood. Think about those challenges in your community, and the thing it was that you want to fix or create in your community. *This thinking is what will help shape your first gathering.*

### **Questions for the first gathering: Identifying ways to make common cause with your community:**

- What is it that you wish to protect and why?
- How do you feel about the threats to what you love?
- When did you feel that you had power?
- What are the unique gifts you bring to this that you can contribute to stopping the threat or cleaning up damage?
- What question(s) needs to be added to this list?

### **The second gathering: coming to the Commons cairn (topic one), the Traveler will...**



Learn about a new way of expressing a very old idea – that some forms of wealth belong to all of us, and that these community resources must be actively protected and managed for the good of all. The commonwealth is all the things we share—air, water, wildlife, roads, sidewalks, museums, the Internet, public health.

### **Questions for this gathering on the Commons:**

- What was your first encounter with a beloved Commons—a park, a river, the ocean?
- What is the Commons that you seek to protect with this group?
- Who has jurisdiction over this precious Commons?
- How are decisions made about it? (A mayor or governor? An appointed commission? A state or federal agency? A citizens' group?)

- What question(s) should be added to this list?



### ***The third gathering: coming to the Free, Prior and Informed Consent cairn (topic two), the Traveler will...***

Find language and ways of asserting where you have withdrawn consent, where you withhold consent and to what you wish to give consent. Informed consent is the means for protecting the essential dignity and personhood of the individual. The basis of democracy is the consent of the governed. The false premise promoted by the corporations-as-people fiction is that government's primary responsibility is to promote a growth economy even if it means destroying the water, the air, and wildlife. The real responsibility of government is to protect the commonwealth and health of its members. A first step is to make clear that we withdraw our consent to proposals or ideologies that threaten the health and wellbeing of our children, of our communities, of the Earth. The traveler will learn to seek, choose, and give consent to proposals and ideas that restore health and wellbeing. This is practical, not theoretical.

#### **Questions for this gathering on Free, Prior and Informed Consent**

- Do your government representatives listen to you? Is representative democracy working to protect the Commons?
- What would happen in your jurisdiction if it were clear that the people had withdrawn their consent?
- Are there any ways to express the withdrawal of your consent from an activity that threatens the Commons, your community and future generations? Letters to the editor? Meetings with politicians? Civil disobedience? Town hall meetings?
- What methods does your community have for expressing direct consent or denial of consent? Town hall meetings? Referendums? Ballot initiatives?
- Are there any ways to propose alternatives to harmful activities?
- What question(s) should be added to this list?

### ***The fourth gathering: coming to the Public Trust Theory of Government cairn (topic three), the Traveler will...***



Explore an ancient idea of government that stands in contrast to the view that the government's main responsibility is to protect private property. The ancient theory of government is called the Public Trust Doctrine, and contains two parts: (1) Community members have a right to equal access of Commons resources that are necessary for food, shelter, travel, community life, wildlife and water. (2) The responsibility of government is to hold these common assets in trust and maintain them for the wellbeing of present and future generations.

#### **Questions for this gathering on Public Trust Theory of Government:**

- Is it true that most discussions about government in your community promote the idea that government's primary role is to promote jobs and the economy?
- Do you have anything in your City Charter or State Constitution that says your government is the trustee of natural resources for present and future generations?
- What government entity is responsible for the funding and care of the Commons that you are trying to protect?
- Does your government have anything in its budget that specifically addresses the care, protection, restoration and enhancement of the Commons?
- Are there any upcoming events where you can begin to discuss and describe the public trust role of government?
- What question(s) should be added to this list?

### ***The fifth gathering: coming to the Precautionary Principle cairn (topic four), the Traveler will...***



Identify how environmental decisions are made now (through risk assessments, cost-benefit analysis, and permit-by-permit), and why these approaches have failed. The Traveler will learn about alternative ways to make decisions, which are based in the analysis of inherent cumulative impacts. In contrast to a profit-driven approach with corporations gambling away health and wellbeing, we will look at how government can use approaches like the Precautionary Principle to make decisions that are fore-caring and prevent harm.

## **Questions for this gathering on the Precautionary Principle:**

- What early warning signals do you see coming from the things you seek to protect?
- What goals do you want to see in place to protect the Commons you love?
- Is there any uncertainty about a proposal that threatens the Commons? Who is getting the benefit of the doubt?
- What are some alternatives to the harmful activity that is being proposed?
- Who is at the table making decisions? Are there mechanisms for the community to give free, prior and informed consent or to deny consent for the project?
- What question(s) should be added to this list?

## ***The sixth gathering: coming to the Guardianship cairn (topic five), the Traveler will...***

Realize that climate change and other environmental ills threaten the future in unprecedented ways. These threats challenge her to innovate practical new approaches and policies. Government has a particularly important role in planning for a difficult future since it can leverage collaborative efforts that prevent harms and mitigate difficulties. Government institutions change slower than business but they can have an outsized effect on the future. We are not stuck with institutions that are 40 years old or 200 years old if they are destroying the body of the Earth or the body politic. We can invent new institutions and new methods of governance. A fundamental piece of working in environmental justice is the approach that every individual and community speaks for themselves and has a right to a healthy planet. This right extends to future generations. For those who cannot speak for themselves, such as the waters, trees, and future generations, we can assign Guardians and invent other institutions that serve our communities and future generations.



## **Questions for this gathering on Guardianship:**

- What Commons and treasures do you have in your community that you want future generations to inherit?
- Does your state constitution or city or county charter mention the interests of future generations? Can you use this clause in your work to protect the common

treasures?

- Are there any political entities—mayor, county board, governor, zoning commission—that might be open to identifying one person who would represent the interests of future generations?
- Would your mayor or governor or attorney general consider appointing a legal guardian for future generations to:
- Review regulations for their impact on future generations?
- Do an audit of the Commons and report on their health?
- In the absence of any political body charged with protecting future generations, how could you be their voice?
- What question(s) should be added to this list?

The Travelers together have camped at each cairn, following the path to the next. At each marker, new political language and strategies have helped put moral clarity into play. The Travelers have broken open spaces to reveal different points of intervention for political engagement.

The last two weeks the group can strategize ways and places to intervene using the ideas in the Companion and make plans for continuing the work together if so desired.





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## TOPIC ONE: THE COMMONS

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### A NEW WAY OF EXPRESSING A VERY OLD IDEA

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## THE COMMONS:

### A NEW WAY OF EXPRESSING A VERY OLD IDEA

The Commons is a new way to express a very old idea—that some forms of wealth belong to all of us, and that these community resources must be actively protected and managed for the good of all (all that follows comes from On The Commons website—lifted wholly and completely unless indicated with a note in front of it. Visit: [www.onthecommons.org/about-Commons](http://www.onthecommons.org/about-Commons)). The Commons are the things that we inherit and create jointly, and that will (hopefully) last for generations to come. The Commons consists of gifts of nature such as air, oceans and wildlife, as well as shared social creations such as libraries, public spaces, scientific research and creative works.

Most environmental work—the kind you are engaged in in your community—is to protect a Commons such as air, water, and public health. Our task is to make clear that we will not sacrifice our commonwealth to private interests in the name of the economy. The basis of any economy is the Commons. Without clean air, clean water, wildlife, the economy would collapse.

**Enclosure:** Historically, this refers to the privatization of common grazing lands beginning in 15th Century England, which impoverished many peasants. Today it is used to describe the conversion of a Commons into private property. Enclosure entails not just the privatization of a resource, but also the introduction of money and market exchange as the prevailing principles for managing that resource. Enclosure shifts ownership and control from the community at large to private companies. This in turn changes the management and character of the resource because the market has very different standards of accountability and transparency than a Commons (Contrast a public library with a bookstore, or Main Street with a private shopping mall.) Because of its compulsion to extract maximum short-term rents and externalize costs, market enclosure often results in the “tragedy of the market.”

**Inalienability:** The principle that a given resource shall not be freely bought and sold in the marketplace, but shall remain intact, in its natural context. Inalienability derives from a social consensus that certain things and behaviors are so precious and basic to human identity that they are degraded if they are put up for sale. “Goods” that have traditionally been regarded as inalienable include votes, babies, bodily organs, sex, genes, living species and most aspects of nature, but market forces are increasingly challenging long-standing norms of inalienability.

**Public goods:** Resources that, because of their “public” nature, are difficult or costly to exclude anyone from using. Examples include lighthouses, city parks, broadcast programming and the global atmosphere. In the lingo of economists, these are “non-rival” and “non-excludable” resources. Government often steps in to pay for public goods because it is difficult to get individual beneficiaries to pay for them. But in the networked environment of the Internet, it is increasingly feasible for self-organizing groups to create and pay for public goods. Open source software is a prime example.

**Public trust doctrine:** A legal doctrine that says that the state holds certain resources in trust for its citizens, which cannot be given away or sold. Public trust doctrine has its origins in Roman law, which recognized that certain resources such as fisheries, air, running water and wild animals belong to all. Under the doctrine of *res communes*, the king could not grant exclusive rights of access to a common resource. The point is that there is a clear distinction between common property (which belongs to the people) and state property (which can be controlled and (mis) managed by government).

**Tragedy of the Commons:** Title of an influential 1968 essay by biologist Garrett Hardin, which argued that overuse of common resources, is a leading cause of environmental degradation. This was interpreted by some, especially economists and free-market libertarians, to mean that private ownership is preferable to the Commons for the stewardship of land, water, minerals, etc. Yet in recent years many have challenged this view on both empirical and philosophical grounds. Professor Elinor Ostrom of Indiana University was a leading figure in demonstrating the practical utility and sustainability of Commons governance regimes, particularly in developing countries. Other analysts, such as Professor Yochai Benkler of Harvard Law School, have shown how people in online Commons can indeed collaborate sustainably to produce and protect valuable resources. This suggests that the vision of human behavior implicit in the tragedy of the Commons metaphor is not as immutable as many economists assert, and that collective management is an eminently practical governance strategy in many circumstances. The tragedy of the “anti-Commons” is now frequently invoked to describe the problems associated with excessive privatization and fragmentation of property rights, such that collective action for the common good is thwarted. An example is the proliferation of patents on bio-medical knowledge that impedes research on cures for malaria, or the proliferation of copyrights in film and video that prevents documentary filmmakers from clearing the rights to images for use in new films. These examples come from this paper: [http://www.sehn.org/lawpdf/Rec\\_01%20-%20\(Law\\_of\\_Commons\).pdf](http://www.sehn.org/lawpdf/Rec_01%20-%20(Law_of_Commons).pdf)

Ten principles create a legal framework to protect the ecological Commons for future generations. Each generation is responsible for managing these resources, which mandates accountability of the polluters (from an article on which Carolyn Raffensperger is the lead author: <http://ontheCommons.org/work/introduction-Commons>):

1. A life-sustaining, community-nourishing, and dignity-enhancing ecological Commons is a fundamental human right of present and future generations.
2. It is the duty of each generation to pass the Commons on to future generations unimpaired by any degradation or depletion that compromises the ability of future generations to secure their rights and needs.
3. The services and infrastructure of the Earth necessary for humans and other living beings to be fully biological and communal creatures shall reside within the domain of the Commons.
4. All commoners (the public or a defined community) have rights of access to, and use of, the ecological Commons without discrimination unrelated to need. Such rights shall not be alienated or diminished except for the purpose of protecting the Commons for future generations.
5. Publicly owned Commons belong not to the state but to the commoners (the public or a defined community), both present and future, who are entitled to the benefits of their Commons.
6. It is the responsibility of government to serve as trustee of Commons assigned to it by law for present and future generations. In fulfillment of this responsibility, governments may create new institutions and mechanisms as well as authorize responsible parties to manage the Commons or resources therein. All actions taken by government or its designees must be transparent and accountable to commoners.
7. The precautionary principle is a useful guide for protecting the Commons for present and future generations.
8. Eminent domain (the “taking” of private property for a public use and subject to payment of just compensation) is the principal legal process for moving private property into the Commons and protecting or enhancing the Commons.
9. The market, commerce, and private property owners shall not externalize damage or costs onto the Commons. If the Commons are damaged, the polluter, not the commoners, pays.
10. Future generations shall not inherit a financial debt without a corresponding Commons asset.

## **TOPIC TWO: FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT**

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### **A GUIDE FOR USING IT IN COMMUNITY STRUGGLES**

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## FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT

### A GUIDE FOR USING IT IN COMMUNITY STRUGGLES

**The basis of democracy is the consent of the governed.**

The alternative to governing with the consent of the governed is either anarchy or dictatorship.

The false premise promoted by the corporations-as-people fiction is that government's primary responsibility is to promote a growth economy even if it means destroying the water, the air, and wildlife. **The real responsibility of government is to protect the commonwealth and health of its members.** The commonwealth is all the things we share—air, water, wildlife, roads, sidewalks, museums, the Internet, public health.

Informed consent is the means for protecting the essential dignity and personhood of the individual. This right emerged after atrocities committed by the Nazis. The notion of informed consent as a right of communities, not just of individuals, is taking hold in international law.

At present the United States does not recognize a community's legal right of free, prior and informed consent but it does recognize the individual's right to free, prior and informed consent, particularly in research situations where the individual might be the subject of an experiment. **Experiments by their very nature have uncertain outcomes.** Projects like oil pipelines, fracking and mining are like experiments in that the long-term future has uncertainties and raises threats of harm to the community. **Accordingly, communities need to have the right to give or withhold informed consent.**

Community organizing and assertion of this right can help shift the terms of the debate and eventually make consent a legally recognized right. It is like the women's right to vote or civil rights for those who were once enslaved. There was a long struggle and then it became law. Here's how you can both use the concept in your work and eventually make it a legally recognized right:

- **Remind political officials about the consent of the governed** in making public comments on the issue you are addressing. If you are resisting a mine, fracking, a pipeline or other noxious intrusion on community life, you can express the fact that in order for government to be legitimate it must have the consent of the governed.

- **Insist that environmental or public health agencies (or the corporation proposing a project) provide full information** so the community can make an informed decision. The premise here is that the decision is not an agency's to make, it is the community's decision.
- **Demand that the first decision that must be made is not whether the project will go forward or not but whether it is an ethical project.** Does it compromise the rights of future generations or require them to pay for benefits present generations receive? Does it create injustice? Does the community bear the burden of the project but people living far away get the benefit?
- **Use all mechanisms for obtaining or denying consent of the community.** Referendums, ballot measures, town hall meetings.
- **Remember that consent must be given freely, before the project goes forward and on the basis of full information.** E.g., A corporation can keep its trade secrets about fracking fluids but it cannot frack if it does not disclose the information. Today, we do not have consent and as such corporations, through the Halliburton Law, do not have to disclose the fracking fluids they use.

## TOPIC THREE: PUBLIC TRUST THEORY OF GOVERNMENT

### PROTECTING THE THINGS WE SHARE

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## PUBLIC TRUST THEORY OF GOVERNMENT

### PROTECTING THE THINGS WE SHARE

All the nattering of the media and politicians has reduced the discussion of what government is for to promoting the economy and jobs. The main view of the political class is that the foundation of the economy is capital and private property, therefore government's primary responsibility is to protect capital and private property. Accordingly, most of our environmental laws are skewed in favor of the free market and growing the economy.

Standing in contrast to this view that government's main responsibility is to protect private property is an **ancient theory of government called the Public Trust Doctrine. The Public Trust Doctrine has two parts.**

- **The first** is that community members have a right to equal access of Commons resources that are necessary for food, shelter, travel, community life, wildlife and water.
- **The second** part is the responsibility of government to hold these common assets in trust and maintain them for the wellbeing of present and future generations.

Individuals have the right to use their share of the Commons that are protected and maintained by the government in exchange for giving up the right to take more than their share or harm the Commons by polluting or damaging the shared assets like air and water. In turn, if government makes a decision to allow use of a Commons asset that threatens or alters the future of a community, the community has the right to give or withhold free, prior and informed consent to that proposal.

**Government's legitimacy hinges on the consent of the governed.**

The Public Trust Doctrine stands for the premise that the commonwealth and health is the real foundation of the economy, and that all commoners have an equal right to shared resources. The commonwealth and health must be protected from harm or exploitation.

- It is the obligation of government to care for the Commons and pass it on unimpaired to future generations. It is the right and obligation of the public to give or withhold informed consent to troublesome activities permitted by government.
- Governments' responsibility is to serve as the steward of the Commonwealth and health.

- Public investment in the Commons necessary for health and wellbeing must be the first order of government spending. These Commons include clean water, sewage treatment, reliable, clean energy sources, public transportation.
- Access to the Commons necessary for life is a right, not a privilege. Clean drinking water and clean air are rights.
- Planning for and implementing those plans to build in community resiliency must begin now. The Commons are the main component of community resiliency in the face of coming climate chaos.
- Government policies must be adopted that:
  - Recognize the equal rights of people to access the Commons necessary for life, health and community.
  - Recognize the rights of future generations to inherit a habitable planet.
- Fund the Commons infrastructure that will be required in the coming days of climate chaos. The priorities are water, local food systems, public transportation, wild places and protection from flooding and drought.
- Establish polluter pays laws and mechanisms for enforcement. No polluter should be allowed to trash the Commons without being held accountable.
- Revamp the regulatory system so that we stop permitting polluters to destroy the climate, water, air and soil.

Using the Public Trust Doctrine in organizing to protect our communities begins with reminding public officials of their responsibility to serve as trustees of the Commons. Some state constitutions or city charters have language that describes this responsibility. For instance, the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has Article 1 Sect. 27.

### **Natural Resources and the Public Estate Section 27.**

*The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.*

You can make the case in jurisdictions that have provisions like this, that it is a constitutional mandate for government to conserve and maintain the natural

resources. Allowing a corporation to trash the common property is a violation of that constitutional responsibility.

One place to match this responsibility to the Commons with government activity is in budgets. Does the budget reflect the trustee responsibility to the Commons? If an industry is going to be allowed to do business in a jurisdiction is it likely to pollute the air or water? If so, then government should require an assurance bond or other financial mechanism that guarantees the public won't have to pay for the damage. By requiring a bond of potential polluters, government satisfies some of its responsibility to protect the common property.

## **TOPIC FOUR: PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE**

### **HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN MAKE DECISIONS**

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## PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

### HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN MAKE DECISIONS

The precautionary principle is defined in the Wingspread Statement as, "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically." <http://www.sehn.org/state.html#w>

That is, in the face of harm and scientific uncertainty, take action to prevent harm. The precautionary principle tells us to act ethically and protect future generations, not wait until all the evidence is complete. The question is "do we know enough to act?"

There are five steps that can be taken to implement the precautionary principle.

**Heed Early Warnings.** Are there trends in data that show increasing levels of disease or pollution or climate change? Those trends can sound an alarm of increasing levels of harm even if we don't fully understand all the causes. These early warnings can initiate more research. But they can also lead to various preventive measures when we have enough evidence to act.

**Set Goals.** When the trend lines show decreases in honey bees or increases in asthma and breast cancer or dying rivers, we can set goals that shape action to reverse those trends.

**Hold Polluters Accountable.** Lawyers have a fancy term for holding polluters accountable and that is reversing the burden of proof. Currently most law favors economic activity and dismisses predictions of environmental or public health harm. What this means is that polluters or mining and fracking companies are able to gamble with our health, clean water and air. When they lose their bet, the public has to pay for the pollution and the disease. Polluters must be held accountable by making them put up bonds before proceeding with a potentially damaging activity and they must pay if they damage the commonwealth and common health.

**Identifying the best alternatives to harmful activities and choosing them.** Most environmental decisions consider the risk of single activities, mines or chemicals. They decide if those risks are acceptable. Instead of simply accepting risk, the precautionary principle directs us to determine if an activity poses a threat of harm and if it does, to look for a safer alternative. Is solar or wind power safer than nuclear

power? Are there alternatives to toxic pesticides for managing lawns?

**Democratic participation leading to free, prior and informed consent.** Because the precautionary principle is a way to make ethical decisions, it doesn't leave all decisions to scientists. Communities and people affected by a decision should be at the table to document the early warnings, set goals and look for the best alternatives. Communities have the right to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent to activities that affect their future.

### **Applying this in your community:**

In most cases proposals for confined animal feeding lots, pipelines, mines, fracking and other noxious activities are evaluated on the old environmental model of allowing acceptable harm. The public has to pay for the gambles of corporations when they pollute the Commons.

Arguments for noxious activities are usually based on the necessity of growing the economy and jobs. Most governmental bodies see their primary role as protecting the economy. You can assert that their true responsibility is to protect the commonwealth and health. This means that if water, air, public health or other important common assets are threatened, government has a primary duty to protect them.

Local governments can set up Early Warning Committees that evaluate clusters of unusual diseases, trends in problems such as polluted drinking water, and changes in wildlife that provide clues about trouble in the environment. An Early Warning Committee could be empowered to propose legislation or recommend research with the intention of taking precautionary action based on the research findings.

Communities can set goals for what they'd like their community to become. Reducing diseases and pollution, protecting drinking water, increasing green spaces—whatever the community thinks should be improved. Government can be measured against those goals and budgets should be tailored to those goals.

Some projects in some jurisdictions require that an environmental impact assessment be done on a project. One part of the assessment requires that alternatives to a potentially harmful activity be identified. Many local or county jurisdictions don't require alternatives to be identified or chosen. However, it is worth demanding that businesses and activities be recruited that add to the Commons and not harm them. Some jurisdictions create Green Zones and provide incentives for environmentally friendly businesses that provide economic opportunity but do not add environmental harm.

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The Achilles heel for most local governments is having to pay for messes left by corporations or businesses that spill, pollute, and damage the Commons. One way to protect the community is to require that a potentially noxious industry post an assurance bond. Construction firms regularly post bonds in case of engineering failure.

## TOPIC FIVE: GUARDIANSHIP

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### NEW ROLES TO FULFILL THIS RESPONSIBILITY

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## GUARDIANSHIP

### NEW ROLES TO FULFILL THIS RESPONSIBILITY

Climate change and other environmental ills threaten our future in unprecedented ways. These threats challenge us to innovate practical new approaches and policies. Government has a particularly important role in planning for a difficult future since it can leverage collaborative efforts that prevent harms and mitigate difficulties. Government institutions change slower than business but they can have an outsized effect on the future.

#### **New Ethic**

A new ethic is emerging that will provide a rationale and structure for meeting the challenges ahead: present generations have a responsibility to protect the rights of future generations to inherit a livable planet. Future generations include nature and all of her creatures. This new ethic invites rethinking governmental institutions and creating new ones that can fulfill our responsibility to future generations.

#### **New Institution**

A key new institution to take responsibility for future generations is a Guardian of Future Generations. While the exact title doesn't matter, what is important is to charge someone with the duty to care for future generations and provide the tools to carry out that duty. The guardian can be elected, appointed or designated in other ways. The guardian would have three primary responsibilities.

Prepare an audit of the commonwealth and common health under that government's jurisdiction. This audit would provide an inventory of parks, water and air quality, and infrastructure necessary for community wellbeing—all of the Commons that are essential for the health and well being of present and future generations. The audit could be reported as a qualitative, non-monetized set of assets.

Draft a legacy plan for the Commons. What is needed to improve, restore, and expand the Commons to leave them in good shape for future generations? Some threats are particularly important to consider in plans. It is difficult to flourish in the face of floods, drought and fire. The legacy plan could become the basis of governmental sustainability goals.

Review all regulations and land use plans for their impact on future generations. The guardian would be empowered to make recommendations for modifications to regulations and land uses that would protect future generations.

## Key Role of Government

The proposal for a Guardian of Future Generations is premised on the idea that government has two key roles and responsibilities.

1. To serve as the trustee or steward of the Commons for present and future generations.
2. To be responsible for protecting our rights to a clean and healthy environment.

Few rights are as important as that of a clean and healthy environment. By making these roles explicit, government bodies have a rationale for structuring budgets. The budget should be tied to the Commons under its jurisdiction. The argument isn't whether government should be big or small but whether it can fulfill its responsibilities to care for the commonwealth and common health.

## Starting Place

If you want to establish a Guardian of Future Generations in your local or state government you can look at who you know in government, at the local newspaper or other organizations that might be interested in helping to promote the idea. Every government is a little different. You might have a city manager or an attorney general or a mayor who is willing to champion this idea with you. A mayor or governor could appoint someone to fill this role. A county board could appoint someone. A sustainability officer in your city could adopt the role and serve as the de facto guardian.

You might begin this effort because something you treasure is being threatened by a proposal that will bring harm. Fracking, mining, a big development—you can ask if this proposed project will leave long lasting damage. Does this project threaten future generations?

The idea of a Guardian for Future Generations signals to the community that you care about more than immediate dollars. You care about the health and wellbeing of all the things necessary for life.

Many people in government assume that their role is to promote the economy and that a strong economy will guarantee prosperity. Making clear that the role of government is far broader than that will help to shift the conversation so that government officials and others can see that there is a bigger, more responsible role for government and that is to protect the basic infrastructure of life. **Become Guardians of Future Generations. Become a moral force.**

## OUT OF THE WOODS

The transformation that happens in the dark woods is not gentle, but it is regenerative. Like a chrysalis, the forest can be a place for breaking down the old self and regenerating the new self.

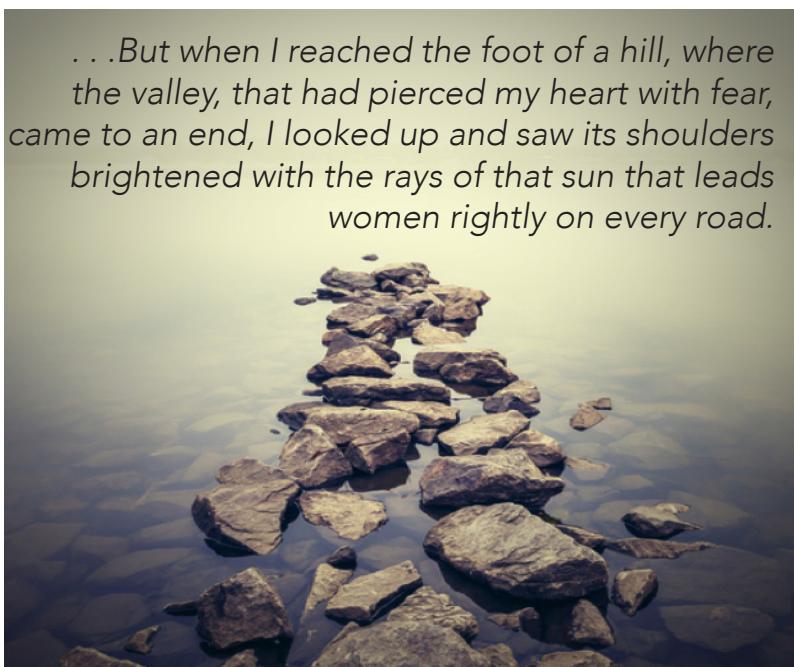
The Traveler still knows that people are suffering, and that there are potentially catastrophic risks being passed on to future generations. She knows she will continue to witness willful negligence from leadership. There will still be mornings she'll wake and weep.

But her heart has broken open, and she is fully present to what is happening in the world and the responsibilities required ahead. She is resolved in her bewilderment, anger, anxiety and grief. In communing with other Travelers, landmarks, and the creatures in the wood, she has deepened her ecological awareness, and though she now knows more of the risks, she also sees herself in the intricate web of beautiful life.

The Traveler entered the forest stuck, but carrying with her a unique wisdom, purpose, and lessons to give and receive. She followed the markers, and found others. As she weaves her way out from under the canopy, she leaves something for the next Travelers at the cairns left for her by the dark-seeing owl and the old wise women.

She leaves the woods holding onto this renewed heart. How powerful a current can be when it is borne out of "soul force", in communion with others who feel called by the same insistence on truth and justice: this is fierce love for the world.

*... .But when I reached the foot of a hill, where  
the valley, that had pierced my heart with fear,  
came to an end, I looked up and saw its shoulders  
brightened with the rays of that sun that leads  
women rightly on every road.*



## APPENDICES

### REFERENCES

**This resource list provides a list of background materials that will help you research each topic in the Companion.**

#### **Introductory materials:**

A 15 minute video of Carolyn Raffensperger speaking about Becoming Beloved Ancestors: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHYKBnI-Kfw>

A good overview by Carolyn Raffensperger of all the components of honoring the rights of future generations: <http://www.kosmosjournal.org/wp-content/article-pdfs/guardians-of-future-generations.pdf>

A brief essay on economics and future generations by Kaitlin Butler and Carolyn Raffensperger: <https://www.guernicamag.com/daily/kaitlin-butler-carolyn-raffensperger-economics-for-future-generations/>

Declaration of the Rights of Future Generations from the 2012 Women's Congress for Future Generations: <http://www.wcffg.org/declarationfortherightsoffuturegenerations.cfm>

Declaration of the Rights of All Waters from the 2014 Women's Congress: <http://futurefirst.us/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-All-Waters.pdf>

#### **Climate Change:**

An article about the difficulty and necessity of talking about Climate Change, "The id and the eco", by Rosemary Randall (Aeon Magazine, December 5, 2012):

<http://aeon.co/magazine/psychology/rosemary-randall-climate-change-psychoanalysis/>

A selection from Wendell Berry's recent book, Our Only World. In this adapted excerpt, "Wendell Berry on Climate Change: To Save the Future, Live in the Present", he speaks about the importance of connecting the dangers of the future back to the solutions we know are good for today (Yes! Magazine, March 23, 2015):

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/together-with-earth/wendell-berry-climate->

change-future-present

### **Couvening:**

The book, The Art of Couvening by Patricia and Craig Neal with Cindy Wold is an excellent guide to creating authentic engagement and crowd-sourcing wisdom.

Joanna Macy has numerous books, essays and articles that can help you honor grief and find the wherewithal to take action: <http://dahrjamil.net/on-staying-sane-in-a-suicidal-culture>" and <http://www.joannamacy.net>

### **Commons:**

All that appears in this section comes from On The Commons website—lifted wholly and completely unless indicated with a note in front of it. The ten principles at the very end come from an article on which Carolyn Raffensperger is the lead author: <http://ontheCommons.org/work/introduction-Commons>

The most comprehensive overview of the Commons can be found at On The Commons website: <http://www.ontheCommons.org>

See especially: <http://www.ontheCommons.org/work/introduction-Commons>

An overview of the Law of the Ecological Commons for Present and Future Generations written by Carolyn Raffensperger, Burns Weston and David Bollier: [http://www.sehn.org/lawpdf/Rec\\_01%20-%20\(Law\\_of\\_Commons\).pdf](http://www.sehn.org/lawpdf/Rec_01%20-%20(Law_of_Commons).pdf)

### **Free, Prior and Informed Consent:**

Background Paper by Carolyn Raffensperger, Peter Montague and Maria Pellerano,

Instituting the community right of consent, SEHN newsletter: [http://www.sehn.org/Volume\\_17-1.html](http://www.sehn.org/Volume_17-1.html)

Principles of Perpetual Care: Taking responsibility for future generations in the face of contamination that extends for hundreds of thousands of years. Consent is one of the principles: [http://www.sehn.org/Volume\\_17-2.html](http://www.sehn.org/Volume_17-2.html)

Podcast, powerpoint and background materials on the community right of free, prior and informed consent: [http://www.healthandenvironment.org/wg\\_calls/14352](http://www.healthandenvironment.org/wg_calls/14352)

**Public Trust Theory of Government:**

Background Paper by Carolyn Raffensperger, Peter Montague and Maria Pellerano

Reviving the ancient principle of the public trust doctrine, SEHN newsletter: [http://www.sehn.org/law\\_publictrust.html](http://www.sehn.org/law_publictrust.html)

Video of Bill Moyers interview with Mary Wood: <http://www.alternet.org/environment/bill-moyers-ingenuous-project-save-our-climate-using-ancient-legal-theory>

Podcast of Mary Wood, Carolyn Raffensperger and Joe Guth: [http://healthandenvironment.org/partnership\\_calls/13830](http://healthandenvironment.org/partnership_calls/13830)

**Precautionary Principle:**

A wide array of materials can be found here: <http://sehn.org/precautionary-principle/>

The renowned Wingspread statement can be found here: <http://www.sehn.org/wing.html>

A good essay on the principle and environmental health: [http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2011spring/2011spring\\_Raffensperger.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2011spring/2011spring_Raffensperger.php)

A video of Carolyn Raffensperger unpacking the precautionary principle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHYKBnI-Kfw>

San Francisco passed an ordinance based on the precautionary principle. That ordinance can be found here: <http://www.healthandenvironment.org/articles/homepage/1481>

A great overview of local governments using the precautionary principle:

<http://nsclc.olemiss.edu/Precautionary%20Principle.pdf>

**Guardianship and Future Generations:**

A comprehensive list of resources: <http://sehn.org/guardianship-of-future-generations/>

Of special note on the SEHN website:

- The Bemidji Statement on Guardianship of the Seventh Generation: <http://www.sehn.org/bemidjistatement.html>
- Models such as Guardianship and Ombudsmen for Protecting Future Generations: [http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Models\\_for\\_Protecting\\_the\\_Environment\\_for\\_Future\\_Generations.pdf](http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Models_for_Protecting_the_Environment_for_Future_Generations.pdf)
- Model Constitutional Provisions and Statutes for Implementing the Rights of Future Generations: [http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Model\\_Provisions\\_Mod1E7275.pdf](http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Model_Provisions_Mod1E7275.pdf)

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**NOTES**


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### To the Activist

[1] Indigenous peoples (used to encompass indigenous, native, and First Nations peoples) steward more than 85 percent of the Earth's protected areas. 40 percent of the economy and 80 percent of the needs of the poor are derived from biological resources (see: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/170/why-is-biodiversity-important-who-cares>). Indigenous peoples have stewarded the land with millennium-tested traditional ecological knowledge that bases their human systems in relationship to the planet.

[2] Read for example: Darren Fleet and Stephanie Krasnow, "Deep Anger", AdBusters, June 6, 2014. Available online: <https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/113/deep-anger.html>

### Another Way to Begin

[3] Ilene Evans is an international Storyteller, Singer, Actress, Dancer, movement specialist, and Artistic Director of Voices of the Earth. <http://www.vfte.org/index.html>. Ilene "specializes in multicultural tales inspired by a rich Affrilachian life and all its folklore." For more visit: <http://www.ilene-evans.com/>

Ilene told this story to Carolyn Raffensperger in a conversation about women rising up in the environmental movement. The story was written with permission for: Butler, K., Raffensperger, C., and Ristau, J. (2014, November 6-9). Heartland and Headwaters: Illuminating Possibilities and Pathways for Growing a Civil Rights Movement for Future Generations". Prepared for Women's Congress for Future Generations, Minneapolis, MN. November 6-9, 2014: Minneapolis, MN. Science & Environmental Health Network: [http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Heartland\\_and\\_Headwaters\\_2014\\_Womens\\_Congress\\_setting\\_goals\\_for\\_going\\_forward.pdf](http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Heartland_and_Headwaters_2014_Womens_Congress_setting_goals_for_going_forward.pdf)

[4] Pope Francis, "Stop the Culture of Waste, What is the cost of our tendency to throw away?" April 21, 2014, onfaith.com. Available online: <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/04/21/pope-francis-stop-the-culture-of-waste/31766>

[5] Toxic sites like the abandoned Giant Mine gold mine near Yellowknife, NWT, Canada will remain toxic for 250,000 years or more. For more on making wise choices about perpetual care, see: Carolyn Raffensperger, et al. (2011). Principles of Perpetual Care: The Giant Mine, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Available online:

<http://sehn.org/principles-of-perpetual-care/>

## **The Transformative Power of Grief**

[6] An earlier version of this essay was published by Carolyn Raffensperger in Common Dreams. <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2013/01/24/prescription-injuries-soul-healing-earth-healing-us>

[7] Joanna Macy. World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007. Pg. 97.

See also, The Story of the Elm Dance, available online: <http://www.joannamacy.net/theelmdance/55-the-story-of-the-elm-dance.html>

## **The Knowledge of Agency: We Have the Authority to Act**

[8] Jean Shinoda Bolen. Artemis: The Indomitable Spirit in Everywoman. San Francisco: Conari Press: San Francisco, CA, 2014. Pg. 154.

## **An Understanding of Power: True Power is in Communion**

[9] Eric Liu. "Why Ordinary People Need to Understand Power". TEDCity 2.0, September 2013. Available online: [http://www.ted.com/talks/eric\\_liu\\_why\\_ordinary\\_people\\_need\\_to\\_understand\\_power](http://www.ted.com/talks/eric_liu_why_ordinary_people_need_to_understand_power)

The Bull and Bear economy is dying. That is the old way of doing business. We need new economic principles for the 21st century and Future Generations. The Owl Economy is about relationships. It is about sharing, reciprocity, being a member of a community, taking care of the children of all species. It does not destroy the tree of life in which it makes its nest. To read more about the Owl Economy see Carolyn Raffensperger's document, prepared for the 2014 Women's Congress for Future Generations: [http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/An\\_Owl\\_Economy\\_final.pdf](http://sehn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/An_Owl_Economy_final.pdf)

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## A BACKSTORY:

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### “EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE”\*

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The first Women’s Congress for Future Generations was organized by a group of women spread across the United States, working, each in her own way, from home, in media, on the frontlines and on computers, all, in some capacity, on behalf of Future Generations. We worked on issues of mines, nuclear legacies, persistent pollution, law, precautionary policy, chemical reform, climate justice, environmental justice, social justice, and public health, all-the-while mentoring, mothering, grandmothering, organizing or holding down jobs. Some of us had restless ideas or captivating dreams and visions, but limited capacity to move those ideas into the world, or to translate them into action. Some had incredible capacity to act, but yearned to connect with fresh ideas. Some were already out there, converting ideas into change, and wanted to expand her influence and reach.

The vision of women launching a civil rights movements for future generations exhibited an immediate gravitational force, once Carolyn Raffensperger (IA), Executive Director of the Science and Environmental Health Network, spoke it into being at a breakfast convened by visionary, Dr. Joanna Macy (CA), in the spring of 2011. Over the six months that followed, that idea pulled in young leaders from Peaceful Uprising, including its Director, Henia Belalia (UT), Dylan Rose Schneider (UT), and Rachel Carter (UT), grandmother and dreamer, Rhiannon Chants Hansen (IA), public radio producer and community leader, Christy Williams Dunton (UT), professor, Dr. Heidi Hutner (NY), sociologist and writer, Dr. Rebecca Gasior Altman (MA), grassroots communications strategist, Celia Alario (UT), climate change researcher, Kaitlin Butler (NY/UT), sustainability consultant, Monica Perez Nevarez (NY), from the Work that Reconnects, facilitator, Barbara Ford (OR), Katie Silberman (RI), Danielle Nierenberg (IL), Nancy Myers (MI), and Sherri Seidmon (OR), who work with the Science and Environmental Health Network, and Nicholina Womack (UT), a single mom and social justice advocate, who took on the role of volunteer coordinator. With a core intact, signatories, and dedicated volunteers were drawn in, too.

When we began, we were an assembly of strangers with an immediate affinity towards one another. We began meeting regularly by phone that autumn. We pulled in our allies. We reached out to new allies. We worked from our core and at the very edge of our capacity, driven by our vision and commitment to radical inclusion. We consulted with trusted mentors, elders, allies—men and women, alike—each time asking: what might such a gathering look like? What can we achieve? How

should we go about convening? Whose voices must be heard? What does it mean to hold space for women's voices? And thus, this Congress, and what is created at the Congress and beyond, reflects the ideas and work of as many as we could connect with, all of us working after hours and in the spaces between our regular roles and responsibilities. The remarkable radio station KZMU and the energetic and visionary group Peaceful Uprising joined with SEHN to organize the Women's Congress. Christy Williams Dunton and Nicholina Womack staffed the Congress with the help of many volunteers.

In response to this momentum, nearly 200 women and men from 26 states and 4 countries gather in Moab, Utah in 2012 for the first Women's Congress for Future Generations. We gathered in a nape of Utah's desert solitaire, surrounded by the stark tapestry of red rock spires, rivers, mountains, and canyons – the traditional lands of the Ute and the Goshute, the Navajo further south, the Southern Paiute to the southwest. We gathered there because the landscape—the Colorado River, the ancient sacred sites—are threatened with fracking, tar sands and a proposed nuclear power plant. We travelled there to honor this treasured desert place, this heritage. We celebrated the Earth. We shifted traditional roles, and thought about the kind of world we want to live in. We mapped possibilities and pathways toward achieving whole health and justice in this generation and for all generations to come.

The Moab Congress aimed to create a living, dynamic Declaration and Bill of the Rights of Future Generations in word, art, and song, which was carried forth from Moab by equally dynamic, passionate, and diverse leaders.

Gathering in Moab was emblematic of responding to a larger call from voiceless future generations unable to defend their right to an uncompromised existence. Our mission was to transform social norms, policy debates, and public dialogue about our collective future and the future we are leaving our descendants. And to join our tributary to the existing movement of women rising up.

Two months after the First Women's Congress gathering in Utah, three First Nations women and one non-native ally convened Idle No More, a call on all people to honor Indigenous sovereignty and to protect the air, land, water and all creation for future generations. One year later, in September of 2013 another group of women gathered in New York for a summit convened by the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN). The premise of the summit was that women around the world would be most affected by climate change and women were key to the most important solutions. Even before and around these events, an untold number of women in the global south and north were rising up, putting their bodies in front

of bulldozers, walking hundreds of miles to confront their governments, physically withdrawing their consent to the activities threatening their environment and future generations. At the WECAN'S summit, the women also released a Declaration. Other groups have drafted similar Declarations over the years. These Declarations have a lot in common; all are staking out an intellectual territory on policy and all are committing to action.

By 2013, another group of women in the Midwest, ushered together by 2012 Congress participant Ann Manning, met and began the process of dreaming a Second Congress, to reclaim their responsibilities to future generations. They began each planning meeting with: "The world is in peril, and we withdraw our consent."

...And with those four words, the women made common cause: We withdraw our consent to a toxic future.

We withdraw our consent to continuing the failed experiment we've run for centuries, and to an economic model that threatens those things that are critical for human and ecological survival.

We give our consent to the things that fulfill our responsibility to our only home the Earth, and to future generations.

At the Future First 2014 Women's Congress for Future Generations, held in Minneapolis, MN, nearly 500 participants set their gaze on the complex issues that lie at the heart of our environmental and economic issues; issues that women care deeply about as they affect the family, the community and the future of children and Mother Earth. We 'crowd sourced' a Declaration of the Rights Held By All Waters to name the rights of waters and our responsibilities to the waters to add to the existing Declaration of Rights for Future Generations, and a Bill of Responsibilities for those Present.

The land of the great lakes, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and the Dakota, was our gathering ground. The Midwest offered a unique ethos, a wellspring of innovation, and a history of care for the commonwealth and common health, the marriage of the heartland with the headwaters, the birthplace of the American Indian Movement, and one of the largest interconnected fresh water systems in the world.

\*Quote from Flannery O'Connor

The event was a transformative experience for many; they left hungry for more points of connection and intervention. Participants found new possibilities to take responsibility and authority to act. There was a deeper reckoning with one's own complicity but also the knowledge that none of this work is ours alone to do. Together, we are stronger, wiser and able to effect real change. Together we are on a journey.

We hope our work can stretch our collective imagination, drawing our attention forward, inspiring us to ask: What are our responsibilities to future generations, and what do we want our legacy to be for the generations who will live centuries from now? We hope all of you who feel called to speak for future generations will join us in the broader work to uphold their rights. We invite you to gather, participate, and contribute your voices, artwork, songs, and poetry to this emerging dialogue on women's rights and responsibilities.

### **Sacred Witnesses**

While recognizing the centrality of women, the Women's Congress recognizes the wisdom of men and the value of their allyship in protecting the Earth. In 2012, men were invited to participate as Sacred Witnesses, as partners and observers, bearing witness to women fulfilling their responsibilities to future generations. Men, too, have great responsibilities in this journey of protecting Earth and Future Generations. Indeed, men have played an integral role in planning conversations that preceded the Congresses and in thinking about their role at the gatherings.

The idea of Sacred Witnesses is an experiment in how we might do the work before us. We think of it as creating a new dance. We are all learning the steps.

At the 2012 Women's Congress we imagined what Sacred Witnesses might do at the Congress and beyond. In planning for this we went back and read some older stories of major events including the Seneca Falls Conference in 1848 where demands for women's voting rights were first announced. The debate among the women was whether it was too radical to argue for women's voting rights. It was a man, Frederick Douglas, who insisted that this right be included in the Declaration of Sentiments. Women may have drafted the Declaration that came out of Seneca Falls, but it wouldn't have been such a landmark event without men. And there are many, many more stories like that one. It is partnerships, not heroic individuals, who advance rights and political agendas. No single individual or group can do it alone.

The possibilities for one's role as a Sacred Witness are wide open. Before the first Women's Congress, an Indigenous man dreamed that men were witnessing the land itself. That seems exactly right — that you have the opportunity to bear witness to the land, to women, and to the needs and rights of the Earth and Future Generations.

We are struck by the language, to bear witness. It is something that is born, that is carried, that is delivered, in much the same way as women bear children.

Witnesses bear the truth. They tell the truth.

We are aware that there are people who have been wounded by relationships between men and women because of imbalances in power, unkind words, and structural hurts. We are aware that gender identification is not binary and that the terms 'man' and 'woman' are fluid and dynamic. A year before the first Women's Congress, Carolyn Raffensperger and Christy Williams went down the Colorado River with the fine Riverkeeper John Weisheit. A Navajo elder told him that the San Juan River is a female river and the Colorado River is a male river. That confluence of the two was essentially the telephone line to the gods who help men and women with their relationships. When the confluence of the San Juan and the Colorado was flooded, that telephone line was severed. The gods didn't know we were having trouble. We wonder whether the pain of the land itself is reflected in human relationships. If we heal the land might we heal these relationships too?

Our hope was that at both the first and the second Women's Congress gatherings we created a space to speak and act out of our vision of how the world can be and lessen the pain of the past. Pain arose and was expressed at the Women's Congress. But we stand with men of great heart, who are shining examples of great allies, great beings.

We extend gratitude to the men who have assembled as Sacred Witnesses and Allies. We give deep thanks to all who have expressed a kindred calling to uphold the rights of Future Generations. We thank you for the gift of your presence, your attention, and your recognition of deep truths. Let us celebrate one another, explore ways to rebalance human relationships, grow, each in our own way, reach beyond ourselves and our time—let us become "beloved ancestors."

