The future is now

A Community Conversation
350Vermont organizes, educates, and supports people in Vermont to work together for climate justice — resisting fossil fuels, building momentum for alternatives, and transforming our communities toward justice and resilience.

350vermont.org
The future is now

A Community Conversation
Dear Reader,

Right now, the climate justice movement is making change in courtrooms, in statehouses, through nonprofit organizations, and on the streets. People are joining together to block pipelines, shutter coal plants, replant clear-cut forests, protect vulnerable populations, and defend Indigenous sovereignty.

Making change is exhilarating and joyful, but also uncertain and terrifying. Here at 350Vermont, we believe that climate justice requires spaces of nurturing, connection, and learning. Who better than families to hold those spaces and lead us through a long, intense, difficult process of growth and becoming? This zine features contributions from 350VT’s Mother Up!: Families Rise Up for Climate Action, a network of parents across Vermont taking organized, empowered action to protect the health and safety of our collective future.

If you feel overwhelmed and immobilized by the state of the world, if you feel burnt out and discouraged, if you feel alone and uncertain of where to begin, we invite you into this zine space to reflect, reimagine and re-energize. You’ll see that parents and kids all over Vermont are living out a new culture that challenges the status quo: we are learning from Indigenous wisdom, we are traveling by bike, we are building all-natural houses, we are reclaiming outdoor spaces for people of color, we are teaching our children through play and creativity.

We are feeling our feelings, too: grief, anger, joy, love. We are learning to reach out beyond the walls of individualism to support each other, to build a larger human family. Individual change is a worthy starting point, but it becomes transformative only when we come together and build a community around new practices that embody our values.

Do you have a hard time believing you can change the world and bring about a better future? Just look: Together, we are the world, and we are changing. The future is now. Welcome.

—The 350 Vermont zine team: Marisa, Marcy, Lily, Dana, and Abby

Learn more about Mother Up! or get involved at 350vermont.org/mother-up/.

Questions & comments welcome: lily@350vt.org

ZINE DESIGN BY MARCY KASS

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We canceled the airplane tickets in June. We waited till the last minute, desperately hoping things would change. But they didn’t and they weren’t going to. COVID was here to stay for a long while, and our annual trip to Ecuador to visit our family in the summer of 2020 was just not going to happen. Stuck at home, we got bored. There was really not much to look forward to. Balancing work, home life, and child care was a circus act and we were floundering.

And then we had an idea. Since we couldn’t be in the Andes with our family, why not climb a mountain in our area every week. We got started. Mount Monadnock was first. The day we hiked it was crowded and about 95 degrees. In an attempt to hike socially distanced, we ended up speeding up the mountain, trying not to get stuck behind or in between groups. Our muscles ached and we hadn’t brought enough water, but making it to the top was glorious, and we were hooked.

The next week we climbed Stratton Mountain. Unfamiliar with how to plan hikes, we hadn’t even thought to research the trailhead. We headed straight for the ski resort, assuming the trailhead would be easy to find from there (the trailhead
was actually on the other side of the mountain). Halfway up the wrong side of the mountain, miserable under the blazing sun on a dusty road that criss-crossed the ski slope, we realized our mistake. We chose to head on. Once we got to the top of the mountain, we hiked about a mile through the first shaded woods of the hike.

That little forested one-mile section made us feel alive. The kids ran ahead, laughing, and we were energized and filled with awe by the nature that surrounded us. We reached the fire tower and met a scruffy-looking backpacker. He told us he had begun his hike in Georgia and was on his way to Maine to complete the Appalachian Trail. We were inspired by his adventure and his humility.

Our hikes continued. We learned to research trailheads. We got better hiking shoes and water bladders. We started tracking our mileage and elevation gain. And we began to daydream. Could we thru-hike (hike from beginning to end) the Appalachian Trail as a family? Was that even possible?

We also grieved. Ecuador was being ravaged by COVID. We had many family members who had been infected by it and some who had died. It was so hard to not be there with them; we felt helpless so far away. This country was also erupting in protests to proclaim that Black Lives Matter, and our family joined them in fighting the racial injustices that abound.

In some ways, hiking became a form of building resilience to the emotional weight of enduring quarantine, the losses in our family, and the state of this country. Hiking as a multiracial, bilingual, mostly brown family began to feel like an act of resistance in a harsh world. We deliberately spoke in Spanish on the trail, both to help our kids, who were born in Ecuador, to keep up their first language, but also to feel strengthened as we walked through Trump-supporting areas. At some point on each hike we would acknowledge the Abenaki, who are the traditional caretakers of the land on which we tread, and that we were hiking on stolen land. All of this made our hikes not just about walking up mountains but about connecting with the land, healing ourselves, and decolonizing outdoor spaces.
Eventually, we learned that, indeed, families with young kids had thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail (the youngest being 5 years old!). But the more we thought about it, the more we realized we wanted to begin with something shorter and more local. And our dream for a Long Trail thru-hike in Vermont was born.

The Long Trail is a 272-mile trail that begins at the Vermont-Massachusetts border and ends at the Vermont-Canada border. While it is much shorter than the Appalachian Trail, it covers some extremely challenging and technical terrain. Do we have any experience at all backpacking? No. Do we know what we are getting into? No. Do we have two kids, 11 years old and 8 years old, who might not share our dream of doing something so challenging? Yes. Do we have a dog who will need to come along and carry his own food and water? Yes. Has any of that swayed us to reconsider our new goal? Not in the least.

Since that seed of thru-hiking the Long Trail lodged in our heads, it has grown quickly. We have begun planning for our thru-hike for the summer of 2021, and, honestly, it is what is helping us get through this Vermont winter. With a little bribery, the kids have gotten on board and are excited about using a backpacking bidet, sleeping under the stars, and choosing their trail names. We have obsessively poured over the waterproof Long Trail map that may need to be replaced even before our hike begins. We’ve read books, listened to podcasts, and begun researching and slowly gathering gear. Most importantly, we’ve been getting outside, hiking up mountains, training with weight in our packs, and getting our bodies used to hardship. It feels just right.

Since sharing our goal of thru-hiking the Long Trail as a family, we’ve been on the receiving end of a lot of doubt. Many people don’t believe that kids can or should do it. Many people think that you can either hike with kids or a dog, but not both. Many people think that our lack of backpacking experience makes us not understand the enormity
of it. And the truth is that our kids may not be able to do it and we may not understand the enormity of this undertaking. But that is not stopping us from believing in ourselves and taking the steps, both literally and figuratively, that we need to take in order to prepare ourselves for this adventure. We have connected with families who have thru-hiked the Long Trail with kids, and with folks doing antiracist decolonizing work in the outdoor adventure world, all of whom have supported this dream of ours. We are so excited to climb more mountains than we ever have, to connect even deeper as a family, and to encourage other families with kids, immigrants, indigenous people, and brown people to take up space in the outdoors. This is our small act of resistance.

**Allison Korn, Marco Yunga Tacuri, Lucas Yunga Korn, and Asha Yunga Korn** live in Brattleboro, where they moved from Cuenca, Ecuador, in 2014. Allison is a jeweler who makes silver jewelry inspired by nature, poetry, and people's stories of resilience (allisonkorndesigns.com; Instagram @allisonkorndesigns). Marco is the equity, justice, and inclusion director at Hilltop Montessori School; a photographer; and an immigrant justice advocate (marcoyungatacuri.com; Instagram @marcoyungatacuri). Lucas loves to make fires (outdoors!) and Asha loves to build cars with his legos. You can follow along on their hiking adventures on Instagram @togetherwehike.
There is a magic in yes-saying.

I particularly thrill in the moments where parenting becomes a practice of granting wishes, where I can help my kids to see their imagination manifest in the world. “Yes, we could make that happen!”

It is easy to despair, though, because children’s wishes are often shaped by a capitalist culture that claims to provide their only answers. But a parent’s wish-granting power is not determined by our place in the great plastic spiral; it is a magical emergence where two different kinds of future-practices meet: the innovative futurity of children, who will just dream forward and ask for the world they want, and the sustaining futurity of their grown-ups, who can often make enduring things happen. Where they meet, it is magic, and I

The wishes of children are always good. But they are not always safe. My youngest enjoyed using a cordless screwdriver before she could speak, and was intent from quite young on using the circular saw. My way of saying yes to this was to create a push-along saw using the tool it safely resembles.

The blade is a sixteen-inch circle of wood with a one-inch hole in the middle for a dowel, and twelve more one-inch holes bored right at the edge. A diagonal straight cut from the bottom of one circle to the top of the next produces a saw tooth pattern, which will look just the right amount of dangerous when you paint it silver. Make a handle for one side, and a little matching handleless part on the other, securing both with screws to the dowel and a bottom plate with a big notch in it. We painted the non-silver parts blue, but you really should impersonate whatever tool your little wishes they could safely use.
propose that there are few moments we can feel our magical power quite as fully as when we create the toys and games our kids dream of.

Having spent the last eight years making toys with and for my kids, I want to offer inspiration to anyone who feels like this is beyond their ability. What follows are some of my ideas that went really well (not all of them did...), and while you can feel free to copy them, please also take this as license to say yes to your kids’ wild ideas generally. And to get past some doubts, I have no training and no formal skills in toy making. If you have a pen, paper, and a straight edge, maybe a cheap drill, circular saw, and some boards, or some fabric, markers, and scissors, maybe you even have some sticks and string, you have enough to make toys and games. Good ones! Ones that your kids will remember!

Mostly what you will need is time to sketch out your ideas in advance, and the patience to workshop through an iterative creation process. But if you are down to fail a bit, you will have some wonderful successes before long.

Upon moving into a new apartment with a high counter, I asked my youngest whether we should buy stools or build them. That she wanted me to make them was not surprising — she will always choose the most tool intensive option (see previous page) — but when I asked what they should be like, her answer was, “Like Legos.” A wish like that, how do you say no?

After a few days, I came up with the design of one-foot cubes assembled from 2x4s, with a four-inch overhang on two sides so they could snap together. They would be light enough that a 5-year-old could drag one around to use as a stool, but solid enough to assemble into a little staircase, or to seat adults.

I showed her the designs and asked the critical question before investing in lumber: “Is this a good idea that will bring us joy, or a bad idea that will injure us?” She gave it a nice long pause and answered, “Probably both.”

Having created four blocks (two stools) of the planned six (three stools), and used them as our end tables, step stools, and improvised living room diving board for about two months, I can say that she was not wrong. Yes, there is a certain risk in offering a child a giant building block set to build their own furniture. But there is also a real joy in it.
To teach fine motor skills, I love drawing mazes. It’s easier than you may expect, and honestly, it’s a very meditative practice. Just draw the border with entrance and exit openings, then draw a winding path with frequent gaps in their side-walls for the branching paths. Thematic mazes are fun too! Make a skeleton, make a flame, or make a leaf! Here is a maze wherein my kid asked for Elsa to go through a maze to find the Legendary Ice Sword andreassemble Olaf the snowman. Yes! Totally, we can do that.

The board game that involves a contest of magical gnomes on a giant times table is too complex to describe in this forum, but let me offer you the challenge that there is no reason you cannot draw a giant times table on cardboard and treat it as a play space.

Kids love to create games and toys!
For instance, my youngest was elated when she discovered the existence of “house rules.” Now she delights in inventing modifications to household games to create cooperative versions of competitive games, or to make her favorite features happen more often: Blockus as artistic sandbox is a hit; Uno with more skips is fun; Uno with more draws is an interminable loop. Our second-order house rules about house rules are that as long as we all agree on the rules before we start, as long as we write them down if they get too complicated to remember, and as long as we agree not to change them again until a full play-through is complete, then an adult will usually agree to try the new version of the game. Yes!

And never forget that games do not always have clear boundaries marking themselves off from the rest of life. Consider varieties of peek-a-boo, rhyming games, dress-up and pretend games: kids are inventing these all the time. They flow in and out of daily runnings about. When we adults attune our ability to amplify this game-building urge in kids, and help their dreams take shape, kids will welcome us more and more into their creative process. We olders are lucky when we can see that dreaming up close, you know, because that quite literally is the spring from which the future flows.

Vivian G. is a trans femme lady dad living in Vermont. She has been arrested for sidewalk chalking at protests and clearly did not learn her lesson. She sends the hugest love to her two daughters, their mom, and to those other dear hearts that make this strange life wonderful. Yeah, you.
As a family of four living in Brattleboro, Vermont, we have many blessings. We own a house with a yard, we have running water that gets really hot, we have electricity and a cooking stove, and we stay warm in the winter. The rotten component in this nice household is that we use fossil fuels to power our conveniences every day and night, and that our carbon footprint is not where it needs to be in 2021.

Over the years we have made some nice improvements to our old house like insulating the walls, installing a woodstove, and getting rid of an old hot water heater. We also have made adjustments to our lifestyle, limiting hot showers, only turning on the lights we need, and replacing our second car with an electric bicycle. We strive to live more sustainably, and yet we still use barrels of oil each year.

Different programs have helped us finance our efficiency improvements, but we live on a small budget and installing solar power or a Tesla plate has always seemed beyond our means. We feel that as an individual household we are fending for ourselves in the quest for sustainability, that we are fishing for our own solutions, puzzling about whom to call for advice, and taking on more loans. The responsibility of becoming sustainable should not rest with a single family, and it needs to be affordable.

I dream of a Brattleboro where each household, be it a mansion or a trailer or an apartment building, plugs into a sustainable grid that is provided by the town. We cannot dismantle the fossil fuel system by ourselves, one household and one oil tank at a time. Green energy needs to be provided to everybody regardless of their financial means, their political opinions, and their carbon awareness. The time is now.

Jana’s career as a working artist spans twenty-five years, three cities, and five countries. As a painter she has worked for the opera, theater, television, and the movies, and has created a big body of oil paintings inspired by theater and surrealism. As a puppeteer she has created and performed multiple shows that have delighted audiences nationally and internationally in theaters, libraries, schools, museums, and street fairs. She teaches workshops in puppetry and art classes for children in her own studio in Brattleboro. She is blessed with a wonderful family — including her son Django, who is featured on the last page of this zine — and a feisty little parrot named Mango.
In 1995 I moved to Vermont with my husband, pregnant with our first child. We were seeking to build a home, a home that neither of us had ever had.

We were both raised in New York City, by single parents in apartments, with infrequent access to plants, trees, wild animals, blue skies and all the things that childhood should be filled with.

We had survived our upbringings and were hell bent on doing things better. Present-day difficulties and intergenerational traumas continued to haunt us, but, being young, we filed the difficult stuff away for future reckoning. After a few years of searching, we made our way to Vermont, where we hoped to craft a new, better, healthier life for ourselves.

I knew that whatever was ailing me was not getting better in the toxic stew and screaming noise of the city. Just being out in the air, near trees and plants, allowed my nervous system, which was permanently turned up to 11, to relax.

In Vermont, living the life we craved felt easy. The week after we moved into the rental house we’d be living in while we built our green dream house, we attended a country fair where the electricity was provided by the solar folks who would be installing our photovoltaic panels. That same week, some building friends of ours from out West were holding a straw bale workshop at a local farm. The publication Environmental Building News, which we’d been avidly consulting, was located seven houses up the street from our rental. At my first midwife appointment, I discovered that my midwife lived, literally, in the house next door. The stars had aligned.

We, who had never owned anything, “bought” the land on which we planned to build our home a few weeks before we officially moved to
Vermont. It was Abenaki land, like all of southern Vermont. The idea of owning land seemed, and still seems, preposterous. I’m waiting to give the land back to some entity that makes more sense. In the meantime, I’m trying to do as little damage as possible: some permaculture near the house, the removal of a few trees and some invasive species, but otherwise letting things unfold, and leaving that all important biomass on the forest floor.

They say you should never live in a house you are in the process of building; they are right. It took seven years of madness to finish the house, and a couple more to realize we needed to do it again. We needed more space for our home based business, and for an aging parent, so in 2008 we built a second building: also straw bale, also local and all natural, also hand plastered and also off the grid. All of the same materials and practices that we’d used for our first building had worked so well, why mess with the recipe?

Back in 1995 we had created a set of ideals for ourselves: to build as people have traditionally built, to use only materials from within thirty miles of the building site, and to use only materials that will one day return to the soil whence they came. Considering that the average construction material travels thousands of miles, following our mandate forced us to interact with our community in ways that most people never do, and I certainly had never done before. In New York I did not know the person on the other side of my bedroom wall; in Vermont I became widely known, even to people I had never met before, as one of the “straw people.”

Of course there were certainly many items that we could not source from less than thirty miles away, but it was amazing to discover how much we could. We had our windows made by a carpenter who specialized in making replicas for historical buildings. All the wood for the timber frame and the outdoor stairs and decks came from nearby forests and was milled by a fellow who is too busy raising local beef to make lumber now, but we do chat whenever we meet, like two old grannies, about our hemlock timber frame and how it looks now. And the farmer who grew our straw for us — “You want the straw for what?” — grew both the 1996 batch and the 2008 batch, so even our straw bale walls are “related” to each other.

Speaking of the straw that makes our house so unique — it’s straw, not hay. And in case you think that I’m living in a haystack, you can’t see the straw unless you look at the secret “truth windows” where we left small areas of straw un-plastered so as to prove the truth to
naysayers. The fact is, the straw bales are hidden under layers of mud and lime plaster that have turned the thick, lumpy, furry enclosures that wrap around the timber frame into sleek organic sculptures that surround us in a soft undulating embrace.

The lime for our final coats of lime plaster came from a quarry a bit outside our range, in Lee, Massachusetts, but the mud for our initial coats of mud plaster came from literally under our feet, on the building site. Our dry-laid stone foundation was also home “grown,” from what old-timers call Vermont’s “most plentiful crop.”

Inside the house, we focused on being as nontoxic as possible, which meant no new stuff, only solid-quality old stuff that had already outgassed. We found sinks and bathtubs at various salvage places. Doors from an old hotel. At one point, every piece of furniture we had was from the side of the road or from family, and everything has a story.

In addition to our wish that the house be completely nontoxic and biodegradable, we also wanted to do something for sewage treatment that would put our “waste” to good use. We got a variance from the State of Vermont to put in a constructed wetland, as long as we also put in a small backup septic system. In twenty-five years, we’ve never used the backup system. Cattails and a variety of other plants suck up all the nutrients (aka pee and poop) out of the black and gray water, leaving the water that comes out of our constructed wetland to be drinking water quality, though to be honest, I’ve never drunk it.

I wish Vermont was still village based, but I’ve grown to love living out in the countryside. I’m more dependent on a vehicle than I would like, but every day I wake up here feels like a gift. Even now, after twenty-five years, I get so excited about the sparkling frost-covered branches glittering outside my windows, a magical surprise on a bone-chilling day. And what I smell and feel when I walk out my door when the moist green springtime arrives at last is something that no screen can ever capture.

My kids may not realize how much they know about natural building and salvaging and looking for local resources and saving electricity, but I think some green awareness is probably built into both of them, and hopefully they’ll bring it wherever they go and be part of the changes in how we think and live and consume and create. Both have loudly proclaimed that they never want to build a house, but I’ve caught my daughter working on floor plans, and my son is harboring an obscene number of books about architecture.

The marriage has not survived. Another COVID casualty. Even building a beautiful green home cannot cure trauma, unhealed grief, addiction, and the things that make people miserable. Eventually that stuff, no matter how carefully filed away, must be reckoned with.

But I’m still here and I don’t regret a single day that I spent building this wonderful all-natural home in this wonderful all-natural place.  

Juliet Cuming is working on a book entitled Earth Sweet Home, about building one of the greenest homes in America. Learn more about her house at earthsweethome.com.
Mari Copeny
“LITTLE MISS FLINT”
PAPER DOLL

BY ROBIN MORGAN

Robin Morgan is a music teacher and mother of three living on unceded Abenaki land in Brattleboro. She is inspired by the work of 13-year-old activist Mari Copeny, who brought attention and aid to the residents of Flint, Michigan, who were impacted by the water crisis. You can find out more about Mari Copeny and donate to support her efforts at maricopeny.com.
Tending Our Mothers’ Gardens
Community transformation in the time of earth changes

BY JESSICA DOLAN

NOTE: The title of this contribution is a tribute to the great healer and poetic visionary author Alice Walker, who published In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens in 1983.

The year 2020 has been a year of great transformation — a year of paring down to what is most important, of grief and healing. For so many people, it has been a time of reflection and going within. Some of this has been chosen, and some precipitated by necessity and circumstance, as we face mortality and grieve the loss of friends and loved ones, and life as we knew it — perhaps of jobs, or homes, or hopes or expectations of what we might want in life versus what is actually possible.

The cultural philosophy of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, which I have studied for years, has profoundly influenced the way I experience the world. In Haudenosaunee traditional knowledge, the legacy of the Peacemaker is the history of how the Five Iroquois Nations built a peaceful and abundant society together out of a shared experience of intense violence and suffering. At the heart of the philosophy is the practice of condolence, which contains the wisdom that grief,
suffering, and trauma are so powerful that they must consciously be cared for with a collective expression and healing process of empathy. Only with condolence can we rebalance the grieving in society so that we can live in peace and abundance together.

My work this last year has been as a grant writer for two organizations that serve areas in human society that have come into demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. One organization is Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA), an Indigenous organization that works to empower Native American communities to restore their traditional foods and seeds and, in the process, the relational kin-centric landscapes of community and environment. In March of last year, NAFSA began work to send hundreds of packets — pounds and pounds — of seed to Native American communities, families, and collective farms across Turtle Island (North America), so that people could grow gardens for food and nutrition security. NAFSA continuously listened to Indigenous community needs through the months, adapted and uplifted Indigenous brilliance and horizontal leadership, by providing webinars and resources that would meet vital needs for food, nutrition, and traditional medicine among Native peoples. This has been critical because, as a recent article in The Atlantic stated, 1 out of every 750 Native people has passed away from COVID-19 this year.

The other organization for which I’ve been working is the Vermont Wilderness School (VWS), an outdoor learning and nature connection organization. In 2020, VWS experienced a sharp rise in demand as well, due to the need for outdoor education during the pandemic. I bring up these two areas of purposeful work in my life because both organizations support areas of human learning and culture that have risen in adaptation and brilliance through the devastation of the pandemic: Indigenous food sovereignty and learning on the land are beacons of hope. Both areas are vital for survival, for strength, and for peaceful interdependence through the unpredictable challenges we are weathering as the Earth and climate change. We are experiencing those changes now. What can we learn from Indigenous knowledges, plants, foods, and seeds? What can we learn from observing and listening to Mother Earth and spending time on the land? What can we learn from our human family?

A big part of my life as a mama with a 2-year-old is physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually learning and doing seed stewardship and land-based learning, engaging all of our senses together, making family with community in ways that feel nourishing,
and exploring the outdoors. My daughter was not yet 2 when the pandemic arose. About one month in, she began to notice all of the songs of the birds, which we could hear more vividly due to the decrease in air and car traffic. We walked in the forest and gathered white pine and cedar needles, which are strong respiratory medicines and contain lots of Vitamin C. A couple months later, we prepared the ground and then invited neighbors of all ages, who came, wearing masks and keeping distance, to plant our garden together. We planted precious Wabanaki and Haudenosaunee seed varieties that have been lovingly saved and restored through generations of living seed banks: seeds grown, protected, shared, and traded across kinship and friendship networks throughout the Northeast. With humility, facing the perspective that seeds are vital to survival, that there are no monetary assets richer than seeds, water, and ground, we pushed their tiny bodies into the soil, whispering prayers of gratitude for sustenance while we did and singing songs while watering them. In the fall, we were drivers for the SUSU Healing Collective’s brilliant mutual aid project of using community-raised funds to purchase and deliver weekly CSAs of locally grown and raised produce, meat, maple syrup, and flowers to nourish and support BIPOC families in Brattleboro. After harvesting our garden, I packaged seeds and sent them to people who requested them.

What can we learn from the soil, the seeds, the water, and each other? Many people are calling this time the Great Pause, for sure not because we have stopped working, but because it is a time when we know rest and nourishment and care is
necessary for survival. So too is grieving the loss of loved ones and releasing the pain of centuries of violence that many of us carry in our bodies. Now is a time of listening to life stories and archetypal stories, and of mutual care and aid. The pandemic is a Great Teacher, showing that we must organize our systems of community care and sharing wealth to transform centuries of violent dominance, colonialism, racial and patriarchal oppression, and earth extraction — or else none of us will survive. If we engage our courage, share our gifts together, our humanity and love for one another and all life forms, we can co-create abundance and health for all; we can thrive through these Earth/climate changes. I am so grateful for all the beautiful people we can see, who persist in envisioning and enacting racial justice, caretaking the Earth and our families, farming, fostering community health and safety, writing poetry and prose, painting and crafting, and singing and playing music through pain, fear, and the unknown. Thank you for being here! We are slowly, collectively transforming a new society together, and I am so thankful to be alive at this time with you.

Jessica Dolan is a scholar, grant writer, gardener, ethnobotanist, Indigenous food sovereignty advocate and academic ally, lover of food and community, and mama who lives with her beloved daughter, Naia, in Brattleboro.
Wintering Rhythms

BY VIOLA (age 4) AND EMILY (age 37) MEGAS-RUSSELL
We are inspired by the Winter, its depths, its stillness, its quietude, its unabashed coldness. Its lessons in fortitude, hope in the darkness, embracing slowness, turning inward. And we are so grateful for and moved by the warmth we find in the fire, the blazing winter sun, in the simplicity of candlelight, in our love for each other and the Earth.
5 years ago, our family had to replace my rusty car and I bought a cargo bike instead. I was worried about commuting and picking my son up from school in the winter but I so wanted the bike that I was willing to give it a try. I never did buy another car. I find the worse the weather the more satisfied I am with my ride. I have done a lot of wilderness camping and biking is one way I get that feeling of really experiencing the weather and really seeing the natural world as I move through it. I always feel so much better when I bike to work and I love the satisfaction of loading up my bike with groceries. My son has taken to biking himself to school and exploring the back roads sometimes coming home with eggs from a roadside farmstand or borrowing a book from a friend.

— Cynthia Parker-Houghton
5 years ago our family had to replace my rusty car and I bought a cargo bike instead. I was worried about commuting and picking my son up from school in the winter but I so wanted the bike that I was willing to give it a try. I never did buy another car. I find the worse the weather the more satisfied I am with my ride. I have done a lot of wilderness camping and biking is one way I get that feeling of really seeing the natural world. It’s so much better when I bike than loading up my bike with groceries. My son has taken to biking too and has been biking himself to school and exploring sometimes coming home with eggs from a roadside farmstand or borrowing a book from a friend.

— Cynthia Parker-Houghton
We Climb Together Forest

by HEATHER BUCKNER

This piece was inspired by a tradition my family had growing up.

When I was a child, my family held weekly meetings where we would...
When I was a child, my family held weekly meetings where we would share gratitudes for each other, resolve challenges, and go over any important upcoming business. Once during a meeting, we decided to create a motto to represent our family. We settled on “We Climb Together” to symbolize our support for each other as we navigated the world as a family. Each of us then created our concept of a family tree, with grounding words on the roots and with branches symbolizing the values we wanted to share with each other and the world.

*We Climb Together Forest* is a vision for the future. In this piece, instead of a single tree, I imagined a forest of “family trees” all growing together and supporting each other as we take on the collective task of *tikkun olam* (Hebrew for “repairing the world”). The roots symbolize some of the pillars that will help us grow a better world, and the branches represent the values that we will strive to embody and spread outward to the world.

My partner, Sean, and my 14-month-old, Luna, contributed their talents and vision to this piece. It was Luna who reminded us to include laughter and silliness, which I very much agree are key values in our work to create a just, healthy, and sustainable world.

Heather Buckner is the Montpelier Mother Up! coordinator for 350VT. She is a mother, activist, and writer. Heather, Sean, and Luna live in a wooded rural neighborhood in South Royalton, where they enjoy playing outside and looking at all the beautiful trees in the woods.
Beyond Big Night

Life lessons from amphibian road crossings

BY ABBY MNOOKIN

NOTE: The first portion of this piece originally aired as a Vermont Public Radio commentary on April 18, 2018.

It was a wet spring evening when my six-year-old and I set out to help salamanders and frogs cross the road a few miles from our Brattleboro home.

With temperatures hovering in the upper 30s amidst steady rain, it was perfect early spring weather for the annual amphibian migration known as Big Night, when adult salamanders and frogs crawl out of their burrowing winter habitat and return to their watery birthplaces to breed. And because roads often come between their winter habitat and these wetland breeding grounds, salamander “crossing guards” like us are needed to move them safely across the road.

I’d located this amphibian road crossing through a website run by Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, or BEEC. I’d participated in several crossings during my years as a biology teacher, but this was my daughter’s first one, and we were both giddy with excitement.

Arriving shortly after dusk with headlamps and reflector vests, we were soon joined by nearly ten other people — the unofficial “site coordinator,” who’d been recording data at this location for years, a local BEEC staffer, and a family spanning three generations.

Amphibians were out in even greater numbers. In just two hours, our group crossed several hundred, including spring peepers, wood frogs, yellow-spotted, and four-toed salamanders.

First, my child moistened her hands as she’d learned at BEEC camp. Then, handling the amphibians with gentle excitement (mostly), she carried them safely to the other side of the road.
She quickly learned to identify each species for our tally: wood frogs were bigger, with a dark mask and a quack-like call; peepers were tiny with an X on their back and a high-pitched squeak; spotted salamanders, which she lovingly nicknamed “sals,” were longer than her hand with bright yellow dots; and their much smaller cousins bore the unusual distinction of having four-toed hind feet.

The clear highlight was the wood frog that wriggled up her sleeve to take temporary refuge in her armpit.

Some crossings result in such high amphibian mortality that culverts or tunnels are built for protection, but we only saw a few cars that evening. So it’s possible that most of the amphibians would have fared just fine without us. But the experience was the closest, most impactful, encounter with wildlife my child has had so far — and one that I hope will help to foster a lifetime of connecting to the natural world.
Afterward: I continue to witness and support these amphibian road crossings. Last year, in the early days of the pandemic, my family made a night adventure of it with both kids; we wanted to take advantage of a safe opportunity to leave the house and felt comforted that it was less stressful for our kids to show up overtired while remote schooling from home. This time, it was my younger child’s first crossing, and the magic and wonder were palpable.

Parenting amidst overlapping crises, including this pandemic, racial injustice, and climate disruption, can be overwhelming to say the least. It can be hard to know where to focus energy and which actions will have the biggest impacts. At the core of all of this, and what some Indigenous people name as a root cause, is our illusion of disconnection — from each other, from other life forms, from place, from this planet. And so growing in kinship and connection stands as one of the solutions. While Big Night is an annual event, it inspires us to grow our daily practice of rooted connection and belonging — with each other, with other life forms, with place, with Mother Earth. This is one way that our family moves toward the future that we’d like to see.

**Abby Mnookin** is the statewide Mother Up! coordinator and part of 350VT’s staff collective, an educator with Vermont Wilderness School, and a birth doula. **Lucy Mnookin**, age 8, wrote this poem during the first COVID spring while taking a weekly Zoom poetry course with her Dita (grandmother). Their family lives in Wantastegok/Brattleboro.
When we got our third apartment, I decided we were finally going to compost. My partner found some reclaimed wood, and we bought some red worms online. I set up the vermicompost box in our kitchen. But this was subsidized housing, subject to frequent inspections. The housing manager threw a fit. Under no terms would she allow this in her building. The only compromise she would consider was putting it out on our balcony. On the third floor. The worms shortly froze and did not return to life in the spring.

Like us, they were denied a connection to the land. Our next apartment was the first time we were on the first floor as a family, but it was no better. We weren’t allowed to put anything in the ground. Just a few potted plants. The woman across the way got in trouble with the housing authority because she had too many flowers lining her walkway. Jeopardized housing.

The court had just joined Brattleboro’s curbside compost program in conjunction with pay-as-you-throw garbage when we moved on. My neighbors complained. Another rule to follow. Another way to be punished. I explained to them as best I could that it would save them money, that putting the food in the green bucket meant it got picked up for free. I wasn’t really the one they listened to. No connection to them either.

I think of it often, how America insists land must be owned and how so few Americans own any of it. My parents composted while I grew up in suburbia. Grass clippings after mowing the lawn and ash from the grill. No food, of course: that would attract animals. I attract animals now, birds, skunks, raccoons, and foxes. They gobble up what’s half good and leave the rest.
for the worms, the ones that were in the earth when I got here. I’d be a little more cautious if the bears crossed the river. These are things I have to learn, “having” land for the first time. Hopefully, I can teach my kids. Most people don’t get the chance.

I don’t think my parents ever once turned the compost. They certainly didn’t use it to garden. My mother’s idea of gardening was to give us kids a penny for every weed we pulled out of the lawn or rotten apple we picked up. Four apple trees, and we weren’t allowed to eat from them. Something about germs.

I don’t think it’s her fault. Her mom fled Nazi Germany, worked in New York City and later in the District of Columbia. She didn’t have a minute to learn about American soil until she was retired and her kids all grown. The tradition passed down to me is the diaspora, and I don’t think we’re the only ones. This country is riddled with wanderers, people blown into one corner or another. Forgot how to set down roots.

I turn my compost, wondering if I’m doing it right. I work it into the garden soil and wonder why some of the plants don’t thrive. Thank goodness for YouTube. Finally some connection. I have to remind myself it takes time.

The kids don’t throw food in the trash can anymore. They say they feel good about it and about the garden, though, as my son says, he’s happiest about me doing all the work instead of him. I hope they’re learning anyway, and when it’s time, they’ll be able to do this themselves.

And I can only hope they’ll have access to land to do it in the future. I’m glad that towns are now doing composting projects, but what I’d really like to see is our society come to view access to land as a right, not reserved for those who have the privilege to “own” it. To decolonize these shores. Sure, it will take time to learn how. All things do.

Kestrel, her partner, Beau, and their children, Benny and Swan, are hunkered down in Westminster during this COVID season. They’ve lived there five years and, though the future is uncertain, hope to continue. Kestrel is also a member of the Westminster Conservation Commission.
A Valentine for the Planet

BY KATIE ANTOS-KETCHAM

“It is plain to me that the line ought to be drawn without fail whenever it can be drawn easily. And it ought to be easy (though many do not find it so) to refuse to buy what one does not need.... And yet, if we are ever again to have a world fit and pleasant for little children, we are surely going to have to draw the line where it is not easily drawn. We are going to have to learn to give up things that we have learned (in only a few years, after all) to ‘need.’”

—WENDELL BERRY

If you come to visit us in Starksboro, you’ll discover that our journey to live more simply is not just about what you will see, it’s also about what you won’t see. A permaculture phrase, “Limitations create abundance,” and a similar sentiment in a song our family sings at Quaker Meeting, “Tis the gift to be simple, “tis the gift to be free,” both help to guide us. Both remind us that when we say no to convenience-giving technology and set our mind to rejecting the paradigm that says buy, buy, buy (even if it says buy, buy, buy “green”), we are saying yes to living more joyfully and more abundantly in relationship with the land. It means living with more integrity and in solidarity with all the world’s people. For us, this journey is an act of love.

About five years ago, my partner, Pete, left a job that required him to commute almost sixty miles a day. This transition reduced our family income significantly, but it gave him the opportunity, with new employment, to mostly work from home and to be more present in our children’s daily lives (and to drive a lot less!). It also allowed him to help care for our elders, as it was also around this same time that we added an in-law apartment to our home for my parents. For our children, this switch also meant that homeschooling, something they had asked for, was now possible. It means that Carter, who loves being outdoors, can now spend hours out in the forest surrounding our home rather than spend his days primarily inside, sitting at a desk. It means that Bailey, who loves our animals, can check on them during the day, which is especially helpful during the winter to make sure their water hasn’t frozen.

Our decisions around recreation and vacations have shifted too: more than ever, they are local. Our children have never flown in a plane, but when we were asked to help create a memorial for my father, who died at home in 2017 after battling cancer, we decided we would travel to Oregon as a family — by train. Recently, COVID-19 has kept us even closer to home, and we’ve walked, skied, and snowshoed roads and trails in our “backyard” that we hadn’t previously explored. More
and more, we’ve come to see that we don’t have to travel far to find beauty and adventure, or to gain perspective. The land here has so much to teach us; there’s so much right here to love.

Of course, you will see things when you visit that you might wonder about. When people come to visit us for the first time, something they notice is we have a lot of firewood. We love heating with wood and making maple syrup the old-fashioned way, with a wood fire in the arch. The whole family can help split and stack it — and, in the process of working together, we know with certainty how much energy it takes to heat an old Vermont farmhouse in the winter and how much sap must be boiled to make the maple syrup we all love.

You’ll also see growing fruit and nut trees and shrubs, perennial plants, and our annual gardens, as we’re working to increase our skills growing, harvesting, and storing food for our family and to share. There’s a quote in my favorite cookbook that says, “In my experience, the shorter the food chain, the greater the pleasure in the meal.” I love serving simple soups in the winter knowing they are our potatoes, tomatoes, and green beans.

If it’s laundry day, you’ll also see we have clothes racks and clotheslines. Not having a dryer is one way we save electricity. At this very moment as I write on my computer, which does use electricity, the fuel mix to create power for the New England grid is 49 percent natural gas. By using less electricity, we use less fracked natural gas imported via pipelines from places like the Indigenous territory in Alberta, Canada. By using less electricity, we also stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples who have suffered while the Canadian hydropower industry has forced them from their land and polluted their rivers and food supply with methylmercury. Never mind the tremendous amounts of fossil fuels used to construct these mega dams or the methane released when the reservoir is created behind the dam. For us, using less is the path for a just transition. It’s a way to share our love for all peoples — those born and those yet unborn.

You’ll also see we do have a solar hot water system, and we’d likely stop here on our tour to talk about solar some more. For us, the green energy
movement toward solar electric, electric cars, and electric heating tends to ignore the impacts of industrial mining and forget that resources like cobalt, lithium, and silica are finite resources. Again, for us, using less is the path, and limitations can create abundance.

We know we aren’t perfect, and sometimes our kids are unhappy about the way we live. They have to really wait for their clothes to dry. They know their friends have iPads and iPhones, and they don’t. But our choice to live simply comes from love — love for the earth, love for all the world’s people and all living things, and, most close to home, love for our children and their future on this planet.

When not at home, Katie teaches humanities and advises the Environment Action Club at Champlain Valley Union High School. Pete works for New Community Project, focusing on the intersection of social justice and environmental issues. Bailey, 13, loves our chickens most of all, and Carter, 13, loves to be outside.
Becoming a Zero Waste Family

BY LISSA SCHNECKENBURGER

Last year (what now seems like a pre-pandemic lifetime ago) my family embarked on a Zero Waste Challenge & Letter Writing Campaign. Inspired by a 99% Invisible episode called “National Sword,” our challenge was to go two weeks without putting anything in our trash can or recycling bin, and to write letters to amplify our cause. We decided to turn it into a public Facebook event so that others could do the challenge with us and share ideas, tips, feedback, and frustrations (bit.ly/zerowasteandletterwritingchallenge). Why go broke trying every variety of biodegradable dental floss when you can divide and share notes, right? We did a lot of reusing and simply not buying stuff, but it was still REALLY HARD! Everyone should do a challenge like this with their family and friends at least once — not only as a way to cut down on waste, but also to experience how infuriating it is on a personal level and then channel that frustration into contacting companies and policy makers who can make widespread change. The idea that companies can fill our homes with trash in the form of packaging, empties, and single-use items without the responsibility of cleaning it up is ludicrous. Putting pressure on businesses and our representatives to do better, and to alleviate that burden from consumers and taxpayers, is crucial.

Contrary to what you’ll find when you google “zero waste,” you don’t have to buy anything to get on board. If you’re on a budget and have the time, you can make natural body care products in reusable containers that you’ve salvaged from the recycling bin. However, I’m a full-time musician and a parent, so my recipe for homemade chapstick is still hanging on the fridge unused. As
a friend put it recently, I’m all for zero waste living, but as a feminist I’m not interested in being stuck in the kitchen all day by myself, either. In other words, make sure you have collaborators on your zero waste journey — both within your household and out in the world.

The heroes in our zero waste story are the menders and fixers! People who help us hold on to the beautiful old things that we love rather than throwing them out and buying new ones. These heroes helped fix my scissors, suitcase, bike, lamp, and several outfits for next to nothing. It is worth getting to know your local tailor, cobbler, and hardware store workers, because keeping and fixing your old things is the name of the game. Menders are sometimes hard to find in the modern world, so once you do, hold on to them and give them lots of business and appreciation! I’m especially grateful for Mindel and Morse Builders, Mariachi Shoe Repair, On the Mend blog and sewing shop, and so many friends at the Brattleboro Time Trade for their dedication to helping us keep loving what we already have.

The surprising thing was that it was actually generosity that contributed the most to our family’s trash pile. Like when friends sent an unexpected gift in the mail that was packed in bubble wrap, or generously brought us takeout in a plastic container, or dropped off some homemade treats wrapped in saran wrap, or when a school event gave out plastic goody bags. Paying attention to the stream of trash coming into our house also coincidentally made me pay attention to how lucky we are to have such great friends and neighbors. This is why it is so important to have conversations about waste and write letters to people who can change our system in a major way. I learned that going zero waste is a long and slow process that absolutely will not be achieved overnight (or even in two weeks). I have to remember to be patient with myself (and society) as my family and friends learn new habits.

OK, so we didn’t completely achieve our goal — we ended our two-week challenge with a small pile of trash — but this challenge was just the beginning, and I know we will be digesting and incorporating all that we learned into our daily lives for a long time to come. Zero waste living is a growing worldwide movement, and there are lots of resources online if you’re interested in learning more. I especially enjoy participating in zero waste Facebook groups, where no matter what my issue is, there are always plenty of people willing to brainstorm creative solutions and keep things out of the landfill. (Holes in your tights? Cut them into hair ties! Rug falling apart? Turn it into garden mulch!)

Check out the online version of this piece (350vermont.org/becoming-a-zero-waste-family) for a list of tips and ideas from our challenge to get you started. I wish you the best of luck on your zero waste journey.

**Lissa** is a musician, parent, and activist based in Brattleboro. Her latest single, “Labor On,” was inspired by the climate justice movement and is available online at lissafiddle.com.

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350 VT

The Future Is Now
Every morning that I sit down at my desk, I speak her name out loud.

“Hello, Feather, you look beautiful today.”

My family and I do this with all of the green-blooded beings in our home. Feather is a Christmas cactus with feathery, pale pink blossoms. Tryon is a rescued Boston fern who perpetually drops dried leaf bits, given to us by a neighbor who just didn’t want so much mess. Isis is a mother-of-thousands succulent who regularly releases miniature buds, clearly hoping that these little babies will find soil to spread into and not just the wooden table beneath her.

The cast of green characters goes on and on. These are our friends, our family, our living kin. It seems like such a small thing, but this speaking out loud is a ritual skill, a disruptive act that breaks our cultural agreement that plants are inferior to humans. In a way, it is an act of decolonizing, cleansing our psyches from the premise that humans are the most legitimate of all beings. It normalizes that there is a more sane, loving, connected way of interacting with the matrix of all life.

Our human-centric viewpoint is leading us straight into ecological catastrophe. Yes, there are a gazillion everyday, practical things that we can do to change our state of affairs. But none of them is more powerful than confronting the cultural lie of human superiority and separateness. This lie is deeply psychologically problematic: when we don’t value the lives of other-than-human beings, they become lifeless “things” or “resources” meant only for consumption and exploitation.

Humans have a place in the spiral of life, but we are just one kind of being in a much wider field of relationship. Other-than-human beings have their own cultures, intelligences, languages, communities, and ways of being in the world. We don’t have to understand them to offer respect, appreciation, even awe. Definitely awe. I don’t know about you, but unlike plants, I still haven’t figured out how to make food and medicine from light and water, just giving it all away in the end.

We must find ways of interrupting the human/nature split that is so entrenched in our ways of thinking. Unintentionally, we are constantly framing nature as all things that are not human. Nature is something we go out into, something we visit with, something that relaxes us from the grind of our lives. If we are going to the river or the mountain only as part of our self-care process, we are missing an opportunity for deeper connection, and once again framing things from a self-
absorbed perspective. The Earth is not our emotional support planet.

We can learn other ways of thinking and being in the world. We can heal our otherness. We can start our days with thanks instead of take, take, take. Earth-honoring values are part of the ancestral inheritance of all living beings. It’s in us still: we just need to be willing to remember.

I do my best to nurture these memories in my children. When they were very little, we would sing to seeds as we tucked them into the soil of their moist, warm beds. We would surround the plants in their rooms with little crystals and colored sands and then paint their pots. We would celebrate and hum to our house plants as they received their weekly showers. Engaging with an animate world is so uncomplicated and innate for children.

Of course seeds want to be sung to; of course plants want to be welcomed into the world this way.

As my children have gotten older, they have become a little more self-conscious about singing to seeds, so we find other ways to practice. In the evenings we greet, honor, and thank the plants on our dinner plates. We wonder where these beings came from and what the conditions of their lives were like. We connect with the wild spirits of their ancestors, wondering how they lived before their domestication and the takeover of the industrialized agricultural machine.

When we are harvesting food, medicine, or flowers in the forest or meadows, we take a moment to ask permission and give thanks. We put out a call and wait for a response before just charging forward.

We leave offerings of dried herbs, small stones, and other precious biodegradables by the base of the old mother oaks. These greetings of friendship and thanks keep us extended wide, daring to see the world with open eyes.

Some days my children are inquisitive and available, other days they roll their eyes or pluck unthinkingly. In many ways I am trying to peel back what they have already learned from our culture, trying to undo and redirect before too much time goes by. I feel their malleability. Occasionally I hear my daughter humming to the plants in her room. There may still be time.

For now I keep speaking to the living world. Out loud. These subversive words are bursting with joy and reverence for the beauty of all beings. I speak out loud for myself and the unraveling of my conditioning. I speak out loud for my children and their burgeoning sense of belonging. I speak out loud for my other-than-human kin, expressing my heart longings to know them better. I speak out loud but in the following quiet, in the listening, I hear whispers in return, their own longings for sacred acknowledgment and reconnection.

Kendra Ward is an acupuncturist, herbalist, and writer whose work weaves feminine and earth-based sensibilities. She lives with her husband, 12-year-old daughter, and 9-year-old son in Charlotte, which is the traditional homeland of the Nulhegan band of the Abenaki peoples. You can learn more about her work at kendraward.com.
Our family (Hannah, Ryan, Jamie, and Freya the dog) welcomed our new baby, Ivy Elizabeth, in December. We live on ten beautiful acres in so-called Plainfield, Vermont, occupied Abenaki territory, where we grow a lot of our own food, and are constantly and passionately adding more perennials for food and biodiversity (even when we make promises about taking a break from adding on new projects...).

We are so grateful to live on land that we love and tend, and the last few years have been focused on building our home and establishing gardens and perennials. This year we are excited to focus more on giving back to our community, and developing a deeper understanding of white supremacy and what it means to live on stolen land. We have a journal where we write down different aspects of the seasonal traditions that we celebrate, and we add things like family recipes and specific songs and practices as we learn more. It helps us to write things down so we remember what we do in each season, as our traditions grow and become more elaborate.

The following is a poem I wrote about the birth of our daughter. I have been thinking a lot about ancestry, and grappling with the desire for my kids to feel deeply connected to this land where we live, while also recognizing the incredible wounding of white supremacy and living on stolen land. This is a long journey that I don’t have a lot of answers to, and I feel we are only just beginning.

Selkie Daughter

BY HANNAH MORGAN

Our family (Hannah, Ryan, Jamie, and Freya the dog) welcomed our new baby, Ivy Elizabeth, in December. We live on ten beautiful acres in so-called Plainfield, Vermont, occupied Abenaki territory, where we grow a lot of our own food, and are constantly and passionately adding more perennials for food and biodiversity (even when we make promises about taking a break from adding on new projects...).

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Remembering
holding a silver skin, wet and slippery.
A tiny dark head, perfectly round...
Emerging
Remembering dark water rolling
and rolling
rounded stones polishing.
Salty brine that sticks in our clothing
perpetually damp with the smells of lanolin and ocean.
Dark waves, sometimes shining.
That is where we are from.
I doubt myself and whether I can actually remember the sound of water
endlessly leaving and returning,
the fish and the sea birds with cries
now entirely unfamiliar to me.
Like the Selkie, standing on the wet stones looking seaward
never quite belonging
captured by love but forever homesick,
No matter how distant a memory.

Silken body, dark hair, tiny rosebud mouth wet with milk
Kitten tongue
Seal pup
She keeps changing.
Her grandmothers both love the ocean.
I never really got to know my grandmothers.
Not enough to know what lived in their hearts or what they dreamed of.
What is a lineage...
In the spring when the ground thaws
We will bury the placenta beneath
a birch tree.
Elizabeth, Beith, Birch
beginning
Birth
buried in this earth,
this particular mix of minerals and dirt.
To hold her to this place;
Elderberries, yarrow, wild strawberries, witch hazel,
rowan, hawthorn,
thyme, currant, raspberries, horehound, chamomile,
high bush cranberry,
lilac, holly, asparagus, motherwort,
rose, garlic, blueberries, hazelnut
apple trees and pears, plums
and peaches...
the nettle patch and tiny oaks we planted from acorns.

Here in this home that is so far away
from the silver water, the polished stones
the endless salty susurration.
Only the murmured memories in our salty bodies
at night, in the quiet dark alone
with the small light of the electric
candle in the window
as I nurse my Selkie Daughter.
The following excerpt is from the introduction of Parenting 4 Social Justice: Tips, Tools, and Inspiration for Conversation & Action with Kids by Angela Berkfield with coauthors Chrissy Colon-Bradt, Leila Raven, Rowan Parker, Jaimie Lynn Kessell, and Abigail Healey, illustrated by Brittney Washington, and with forewords by Autumn Brown and Chris Crass. The book was published by Green Writers Press in March 2021.

Social justice is about power, whether or not we each have the ability to make decisions that affect our lives. In a parent-child relationship, parents have the most power. This power differential can create a separation between parents and kids. As a parent, I make important decisions that impact my kids’ lives. In many situations, what I say goes. This power can be important for keeping our kids safe, but can also be misused to control or dominate them. When we don’t name and address the power dynamics in our home, it is ingenuine to challenge the unequal and unjust power dynamics in society. Kids will see right through that!

In her book Parenting for Social Change, Teresa Graham Brett talks about building relationships with kids based on respect rather than control. She writes, “We can choose to use our power to support, facilitate, and assist the growth of children in ways that affirm their personal power, dignity, and humanity.” Her work has helped me gain clarity on how I want to parent. While it is important to me to set healthy boundaries in the home, it is also important that those boundaries are in many cases developed in
collaboration with my kids, so they have a say in what happens in their life and so they feel affirmed in their humanity and decision-making power.

For example, last summer we took a media break as a family. We already have a one-hour-a-day limit, but the kids think about and plan for that hour all day long. I was exasperated by their focus on screen time. So we sat down and talked for about five minutes about how they were losing out on important time with friends and time outdoors because they were too focused on watching TV and playing electronic games. In our conversation we decided to take a media break for the summer, with a few exceptions. This was a respectful and mutual decision and affirmed all of our humanity and needs.

There are many ways that a parent can affirm children's decision-making power. Can you think of an example of where you are able to affirm your children's decision-

**Action Now!**

BY JUBILEE ANTHES, KATIE WILSON, AND JUNIO ANTHES-MOODY

This climate protest was inspired by the picture book *Greta and the Giants* by Zoë Tucker and Zoe Persico. During this time of COVID-19, family-friendly actions are further apart. At least we can continue our journey at home until we can gather back together again.

*Jubilee Anthes* (age 8) and parents *Katie Wilson* and *Junio Anthes-Moody* live in Brattleboro.
making power? It is important to note here that all kinds of circumstances, many of them related to class, race, ability, and family makeup, affect what makes most sense for each family. For example, maybe you can’t let your kids decide what they want for breakfast when you’re budgeting your food really tightly. It is particularly hard to affirm kids’ decision-making power when you as a parent don’t have much power yourself. Sometimes when we are in disadvantaged positions we have to teach kids to be okay with not having a choice. It can be important to name that reality, so that we and our kids don’t internalize it as a problem with us personally, but that we understand the lack of choice as connected to unjust systems.

What we do at home matters. Conversations over breakfast, apologizing when we make mistakes, and making friends outside of our “neighborhood” all contribute to social justice. As adrienne maree brown writes in Emergent Strategy, “What we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system. I have to use my life to leverage a shift in the system by how I am, as much as with the things I do.”

My parenting for social justice practice is based on this principle. If I’m so busy attending activist meetings and protests that I’m not able to give my kids the love and attention they need, which creates connection instead of separation, then I am not creating a strong fabric for their future. There are times to contribute to the larger community and societal change and there are times to be at home with my kids. I need to make room for both instead of putting one over the other.

In the past couple of years I’ve reexamined how I live my life. I had been running around stressed out and unable to recognize my own needs because I was so busy responding to the needs of others. I wasn’t operating from a place of power — the ability to take action — but from a place of guilt and sometimes the inability to say no. I was depleted and was responding to my kids, my husband, and my coworkers from that depleted place. Once I recognized the need to take care of myself, and actually began to do it, I began to show up for my family and my community with more patience, humor, and creativity. Addressing injustice and working for social justice is not always easy, and sometimes it is not rewarding in the short term. This is a long game. The issues we are trying to address have been around for many many generations. We may see some small successes in our lifetime, and we are also going to see many defeats. We need to take time for healing, singing, enjoying each other, dancing, being quiet, and envisioning the world we are striving for. Without time to take care of ourselves, it is hard to cultivate that vision for change.

I recently heard Ash-lee Woodard Henderson, the co-director of the Highlander Center in Tennessee, speak on envisioning the world we are striving for. She said, “We move towards whatever our vision is, so it is crucial to have a radical vision for social justice.” She told a story about asking a group of
high school kids what their vision was for change. They answered that they wanted to hold the police accountable for the way they were policing their neighborhood. She said, “That’s great! Is that your highest vision? Are there police in your vision?” They went back into a huddle and when they came back they said, “There are no police, there’s no need for police. Everyone will have the housing, food, meaningful work, and community that they need for a dignified life.” Now that’s a vision! By articulating that more radical vision, those youth can work on creating that world.

Sherri Mitchell talks about the importance of envisioning the world we want to create. She lives by what she calls the 10-10-80 rule: investing 10% of our energy in looking at and understanding what needs to be changed, 10% of our energy in holding back the tide of harm that is coming at us, and 80% of our energy envisioning and creating the world we want to live in. This rule keeps me on track, focused on envisioning the world I want to live in instead of continually getting pulled into a downward spiral of everything that is wrong. When I am able to live into that vision, I can bring that visionary energy and creative thinking into my parenting.

As I’ve been more intentional about making sure I have the right combination of quiet time (through hiking, meditation, yoga, and personal retreats) and people time (through inspiring conferences, organizing meetings, and talking with mentors), I’ve been increasingly able to cultivate a radical vision of justice, equity, and peace. Visioning is healing and it gives me the strength to show up for parenting and for the racial justice organizing work that I do.

Parenting for social justice is a journey. It is not about perfection or about being the “most woke” or the “best social justice activist” (notice the separation present in those phrases?). It is about telling our children the truth, supporting connection instead of separation, and encouraging their radical visions for a just world. It includes having conversations about hard topics, noticing power dynamics, and paying attention to the small things. I’m so glad my family has a community of people to do this with, and I hope you find your community of practice too.

Angela Berkfield is a social justice educator and activist. She lives in southern Vermont and is a parent of two young boys who are advantaged because of race, class, gender, and ability. Angela has taught in a variety of settings over the past two decades and is a cofounder of the Root Social Justice Center, ACT for Social Justice, and Equity Solutions.

3 Ash-Lee Henderson, Co-Director of Highlander Center, Speech at CommonBound, July 2018.
This is our family table. No matter where we have been during the day or what we did, on most nights we gather around it. It is where we get the most done. I feel like from this table we can navigate the world; we make plans and solutions and share our ideas. It gives me perspective, as if when we eat dinner we are lifted up from within the turmoil of the world and can suddenly look down upon it. Just my mom, my dad, my brother, me, the occasional guests, and sometimes our little parrot.

Django Grace is an avid skier who loves the winter and the snow. He rides his bicycle almost every day of the year to school, soccer practice, the theater, or a friend’s house. He began to worry about the climate at age 9, and has since joined numerous protests, conferences, and projects addressing the climate crisis.

He played a key role in organizing and staging the die-in that interrupted the Heifer Stroll in Brattleboro in 2019. He is the only youth on the Brattleboro Energy Committee, serving to advise the selectboard on ways to make Brattleboro a more sustainable community. He is a freshman at Brattleboro Union High School.