

ISSUE 07 | FALL 2021

THE CHANGING TIMES

NATURE CONNECTION - CLIMATE ACTIVISM
CREATIVITY - EDUCATION - CULTURAL CHANGE
TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE - LOCAL FOOD





from the editors

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WHO WE ARE

"The Changing Times" is a seasonal (quarterly) publication of Families For A Livable Climate that invites community-wide response to these turbulent and revolutionary times, seeking submissions from people of all ages and backgrounds. In this space, we share stories, express love for the world around us, and offer ways for everyone to get involved in answering the call to change - in ourselves, our families, our communities, and our country. We know this work happens by challenging our systems and leaders; conversing on racial justice, resiliency, grief work, activism, youth empowerment, education, intergenerational support, local living, and traditional knowledge; and connecting with one another through our relationship with nature and the creative arts. While the magazine is based in Missoula, MT we consider "conversations with the peripheries," throughout Montana and beyond to be vital, so anyone is welcome to subscribe and/ or submit.

Families for a Livable Climate is a project of Social and Environment Entrepreneurs (SEE) a non-profit public charity exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Cover Photo | Kaleigh Cunningham

Smell the leaves - they
breathe
crisp air and exhale orange -
then
the tamaracks sigh.

—

There is a lot of temptation to collapse into fall. After the bustle of summer, the collective "pause" so often described of autumn feels like a welcome, needed reprieve.

Summer, with it's warm weather and, often, lack of precipitation, makes the "go go go" all too easy. We hit the ground running for Memorial Day and don't look back until Labor Day.

And it's all good fun - hiking, travel, walks outside, dinners at the park, camping, outdoor music - the list goes on. But soon the list goes on too long, and we crave a moment where the world, using the weather, forces us to turn inward.

So we collapse, as it were, into the warm fall colors, the crisp air, and the shortening days. We embrace the boundaries put on activity - almost grateful for their stoic insistence.

But I wonder if there might be a lesson here - in our reaction to fall. In the midst of labor strikes, increasing "burnout", and the persistent trauma and stress of a pandemic, why do we wait for our breaks until our metaphorical cups are full?

Our failing, capitalist society demands constant, fast-paced

consumption - of entertainment, retail, food, things, weather ... indulgence. This happens at the direct expense of those exploited by companies trying to capitalize on small, cheap labor forces - and the more indirect expense of consumers always feeling a step behind.

We can't keep chasing a capitalist dream that doesn't exist.

We need to give ourselves a break.

So, for this fall, take your break. But perhaps, also see an opportunity for growth. May we embrace the calm, quiet pace of this season - and feel our bodies lean into it, take it on, and embody it. This way, when given the opportunity, we don't need to run, chasing the next consumable. This way the body and the mind seek solace in the opportunity to rest.

May we remember this feeling - and carry it past the fall, past the winter, into the hard months of spring and summer when we can feel our bodies edging towards the quickness of those seasons - may we find a day, or two, to pretend it's fall.

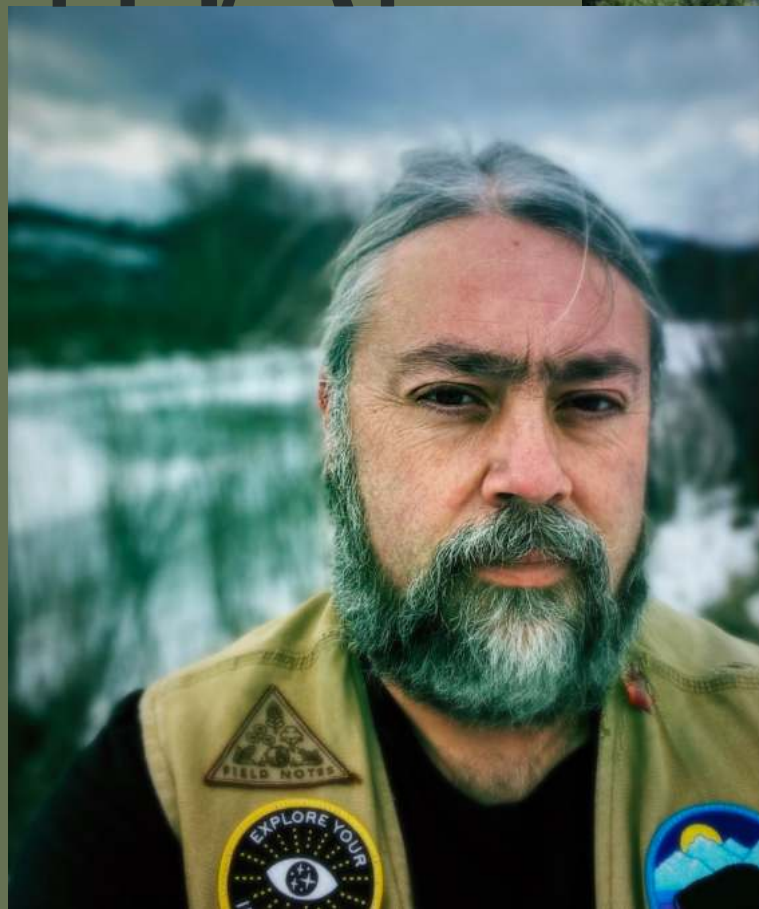
And give ourselves a break.

— Meg Smith

Editorial Team

Meg Smith
Megan Thornton
Sydney Bollinger

A CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS LA TRAY



By Sydney Bollinger

On a sunny autumn afternoon, I called Chris La Tray to talk about his new poetry collection *Descended from a Travel-worn Satchel*, the Little Shell Tribe, writing, and his forthcoming book *Becoming Little Shell*. Enjoy an abridged version of our conversation here and find the full version online.

—

Sydney Bollinger: In the introduction [of *Descended from a Travel-worn Satchel*], you talk about how when folks read *One Sentence Journal* it kind of reminded them of haiku. Is that how you think this collection started or did it start somewhere else? When did you start writing haiku?

Chris La Tray: Those comments made me start writing, just because I wanted to look into and see what people were seeing. That was just more ignorance on my part, because clearly there's a relationship there.

SB: What was your experience writing haiku?

CLT: I love it. Yeah, I think I said in the introduction there also that if I could only do one thing that's the type of stuff that I would do...I don't think it's even an attention span thing. I just enjoy trying to say a lot with very little. So, yeah, I've been doing it as much lately just because I'm trying to get this Little Shell down and that's pretty much taking up the majority of my writing time, but I still, you know, may write a couple a week.

SB: Are there any poems [in *Descended from a Travel-Worn Satchel*] that are particularly close to you, or that you have a special affinity for in the collection?

“In a lot of ways this is the most personal thing I've done because each poem is a little short story of a moment.”

CLT: I have a real affinity for all of them. In a lot of ways this is the most personal thing I've done because each poem is kind of a little short story of a moment—that means something to me that might mean something entirely different to somebody else. But, I would say that two of the haibun*—“Eight Nations,” the one about traveling to all the tribes during COVID, that one means a lot to me, as does “The Road North” if only because of

the way I did it. I was driving up to Ronan to teach poetry to fourth graders and I just had my phone in my hand with the voice recorder. I'd drive by certain images that capture me, I would try and write spontaneously, recite a haiku related to what I

saw. The haiku that are in that particular haibun all came from that and they all came pretty close, like right off the tape to what's on the page. I had never done anything like that before. So just as an exercise in stream of consciousness, I enjoy that. I have not done it since, but you know I've pulled off the road and written things in my journal or, you know, in my field notes. Just because if you don't, you forget and I think there's even a haiku in here that talks about a morning commute—a haiku comes and I wish I'd stopped because I forgot it. I think, oh I'll remember that, which is always a mistake. Those two in particular I think are my favorites.

SB: That was one of my favorite parts of the book. It was both very informative but also very emotional. It was interesting to read about all these different places that you went to and what was going on there.

*haibun: a poetry form that combines haiku and prose. The haiku (interspersed throughout the prose) offer poetic imagery.

CLT: Yeah, all different and all in one state, which I've never done that kind of trip through Montana before. It's one thing to look at people's Instagrams and see pictures of these places, but to actually go out and experience and it's...you know, Thoreau talked about there being enough of interest within 20 miles of where anybody lives to devote an entire life to and that's pretty true. There's just so much out there, it just kind of blew my mind. I think part of that gets triggered in my memory when I read that particular piece, so that goes along with it.



SB: Can you talk a little bit about your book *Becoming Little Shell* and briefly about the work that you do with the Little Shell Tribe?

CLT: Yeah, so the book is kind of a history of the Little Shell and Métis people in this part of the country, with the narrative of my family sewn through it, because when I grew up, my dad denied that we're Native, as did his dad. My grandma would talk about it, so I knew that we were Chippewa, but I didn't know any details because if you pushed my dad too far, if him saying it was bullshit wasn't enough, then he got seriously pissed about it. So, when I got older it was something I became more and more interested in—and then you have the whole world of where we came from and how important the members of my family and our ancestors were to specific things that happened in Montana.

It's weird because when I went out recently to Minnesota and North Dakota, I was introduced as the Tribal Historian or the Little Shell Scholar, which I'm not. I'm just a storyteller and that's what I tell people. I don't have academic training in any of this. I just took it upon myself to learn it because it was interesting to me. As a storyteller, it's a story that has so many layers to it that I think are

interesting and people need to know. We've got over 6,000 members [total] now, and we were only federally recognized in December of 2019. We've just got this huge hill to climb, as far as defining who we really are and there are holes that need to be filled that some of us need to kind of step into. So, I do take a lot of responsibility to make sure and represent the Little Shell vocally with everything I do to make sure people know that this guy is doing this thing. But, I'm also Métis, and I'm also enrolled with the Little Shell tribe because that often leads to people asking, "What is that?" It gives me an opportunity to tell our story.

SB: I've been excited since you first mentioned it so I'm really interested in reading it when it comes out and just learning more. Even that short piece about the Little Shell Tribe in "Eight Nations" was illuminating for me because that was about health care and Indian Health Services and how the tribe doesn't have that yet and the 100 year waitlist and I was like, "Oh my gosh!"

CLT: It's one of those narratives, too—what I thought was my family story was so many people's story. So many people grew up in that same situation, where they knew they were one thing, but they were told to not talk about it. I find that that's a story not just with Indigenous people, but also LGBTQ people. How many people have had to grow up closeted because it wasn't safe whether it was in their family, or within their community or was in the culture at large? And who the fuck wants to live like that? It's a horrible way to live and so many of us have that in common. So, it became much bigger than what I originally thought it was going to be.

SB: So you mentioned how you've been called the Little Shell Historian, but you

see yourself more as a storyteller. What do you see that role being for both the Little Shell Tribe and just yourself?

CLT: You know, I ask myself that question all the time. There was a guy—Nicholas Vrooman—and I have his book right next to me here. It's called *The Whole Country was....One Robe: The Little Shell Tribe's America*. Back in the early mid-2010s the state gave every tribe a certain amount of money to document their tribal history, a written version of the tribal history, and Nicholas Vrooman was the guy who wrote this. It's pretty academic, you know, an oversized paperback that looks more like a college textbook. He literally was our Tribal Historian, and I refer to him as my mentor because I met him when this book came out, [and] learned more in a 20 minute presentation from him about my own people and my own literal family than I've known my entire life.

He passed away in June of 2019, so he didn't live to see us get federal recognition, which is one of the great sadnesses of this story. But, there were a number of us that he mentored and [he] was always very encouraging, like, "I'm not the one who needs to be telling this, you are." Luckily, I had a few hours of recorded interviews and presentations that he did before he passed away, so I still had a ton of information beyond the book but there isn't anybody else as closely related to our current tribal organization than me who is doing this kind of thing. There are other historians out there and I'm sure other books will come out...but I can text our Tribal Chairman right now and get a response, so I'm as close as you can be and I feel a great responsibility. Like I said, no matter what I'm doing—I could be talking about haiku, which has absolutely nothing to do with Little Shell—I'm gonna make sure that whatever environment I'm in knows that that's who I am.

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Tips and Tricks for Solarizing Your Home

- Our array was installed by the wonderful folks at SBS Solar, but there are several great companies in the Missoula area, including OnSite Energy, Inc., Big Sky Solar & Wind, Jordan Solar, Solar Plexus, and more.
- We got our low-interest loan through the Montana DEQ, but many credit unions, such as Clearwater Credit Union, and banks also offer low-interest loans for clean energy projects.
- The federal tax credit for a solar investment is 26 percent through the end of 2022; then it goes down to 22 percent through the end of 2023. The state of Montana provides a \$500 tax credit for individuals or \$1000 for a couple (\$500 each) through the end of 2021.
- We could have installed 9 or 12 panels; we went with 12, and were very glad we did. Post-kid, we use more electricity, and working from home has also increased our usage. We've also been taking other steps to electrify our home, so 12 panels doesn't fully cover our usage.
- If you live in an older home, you may need to update your electric.
- Installing solar in the spring is fun because you can see your meter run backwards right away. We installed ours in the fall, so we had to wait a little longer—but it was very satisfying, once the seasons shifted, to see how much energy we generated as the days lengthened!

I always thought that solar panels and electric cars were for other people.

My friend whose husband works for the City: they've had rooftop solar for years. The couple down the street with the enormous modern house: I admire their zippy little Tesla every time I walk

by. But the idea that my husband and I, with our modest salaries from a community college and a small non-profit, could afford to make those investments seemed like a distant pipe dream.

Until, four years ago, it didn't.

My husband gets all the credit; Greg was the one who figured it couldn't hurt to get a couple of bids for a solar array. Our next-door neighbor had just installed panels on his garage, and we loved the idea that people walking down our alley would see two sets of solar panels right next to each other. We discovered that there were various low-interest financing options available, along with generous federal and state tax credits. That, along

with the prospect of paying 70-80 percent less for our electricity, put the final price within reach.

I know it's not doable for everyone. It wasn't for us until recently, though we probably could have made the investment a few years earlier. But if you have even a little disposable income, a solar array is worth looking into—and it doesn't cost anything to get a bid or three. Once we started crunching numbers, we were surprised at how quickly the idea shimmered from pipe dream to possibility, and how quickly we went from "maybe...?" to "heck, yes!" With a little upfront investment you can install a solar array that powers your home with sun energy for decades—or more. Plus, you get to nerd out, every day, over how much energy you're generating, whether it's 24 kilowatt-hours on a sunny June day or 740 watt-hours on a snowy December one.

So before you pass by your neighborhood solar arrays with yet another wistful sigh, reach out to a local solar installer or two. Becoming one of "those people" may be more possible than you think.

WE CAN ALL BE "THOSE PEOPLE"

By Allison De Jong, 42

Allison De Jong, 42, is the Communications Coordinator and Editor of Montana Naturalist magazine and Field Notes on Montana Public Radio at the Montana Natural History Center. In addition to finding ways to make her home more sustainable and nerding out over everything from renewable energy to botany to Harry Potter, she loves exploring Montana's mountains, forests, and rivers with her husband, Greg, and three-year-old son, Rowan.

Each issue, *The Changing Times* will feature an organization that works with children and families in work we view as critical: nature connection, fun and creativity, justice education, and community engagement. This fall, Editor Megan Thornton visited with Anna Baize and Naomi Alhadeff, both based in Missoula and working in Education and Outreach for National Wildlife Federation, about "Gardens for Wildlife," a program of National Wildlife Federation, and how to engage the whole family in welcoming wildlife through gardening.

Kids Connection



Megan: Do you have to be a "plant person" or have a big yard to create a successful wildlife habitat garden?

Anna: Absolutely not! Creating habitat in your backyard is fun and easy. Adding in native plants may be part of the process, but other habitat elements can be fulfilled in ways such as adding dead logs or birdhouses, and by adopting sustainable practices. You'll learn about wildlife through the journey of creating habitat. The Garden for Wildlife™ program provides instructions and recommendations of elements in each of the five categories, food, water, cover, places to raise young, and sustainable practices. Your habitat can be as small as a container garden, wheelbarrow, or front porch flower box!

Megan: Any wildlife that you have been

especially delighted to see?

Anna: Oooo! In our backyard, we have a massive bush, where it appears a couple of red foxes have made a den! Every once in a while I'll see them commuting along the greenway throughout our neighborhood, pouncing in the grass and chasing birds.

Naomi: This past spring I had two Evening Grosbeaks hanging out at our feeders for several weeks. I wasn't sure if they were nesting or not, but it was great seeing them up close for so long. Last week I had a Flicker on my suet feeder, which was beautiful to see too.

Megan: Do you have any ideas for getting kids engaged in creating the habitat?

Anna: Many families who have shown an interest in creating habitat walk through



completing the Garden for Wildlife™ program together. Incorporating children into every step, like purchasing plants, building a birdhouse, and watering, creates investment in our wildlife and natural spaces growing around them. Invite kids to observe their soon-to-be habitat space before and after you add any of the elements, then ask if they notice a difference in wildlife. For DIYers, some elements can be created at home, like a butterfly puddler, which may not attract our largest charismatic megafauna, but you will see a difference over time with our small but essential critters such as bees, butterflies, and birds.

Megan: If you had to pick 5 native plants to purchase and plant for residents of SW Montana, what would you choose?

Naomi: I would say here in western Montana, and this is in no particular order, but some of my favorites are Red-osier Dogwood, Golden Current, Black-eyed Susan, Pearly Everlasting, or Silvery Lupine. Oh, and I do love some Rubber Rabbitbrush!

Megan: What makes you most excited to spread the word and promote Garden for Wildlife™?

Anna: When I used to think about creating wildlife habitat I always imagined you needed a large space to be successful, but once I realized you could create habitat for our smaller species in container gardens or even wheelbarrows, I thought it was the most brilliant idea! I love to share and promote this program because it inspires others to create a purposeful garden in their backyard that doubles as habitat space.

Naomi: What gets me excited about this program is when I share with people how native plants, instead of non-native or ornamental plants, thrive so much better here and provide food, shelter, and places to raise young for all of Montana's critters.

Visit the NWF website to find out more about Gardens for Wildlife, including:

- [Gardens for Wildlife Tipsheet](#)
- [Native Plant Finder by Zipcode](#)

This is an edited version of our interview. Please see our CT website for the full version, including suggestions on adding the "water" element as well as more on native plants.



CHOKED UP

A MONTANA CLIMATE STORY

Words & Photo by Elizabeth Kwak-Hefferan

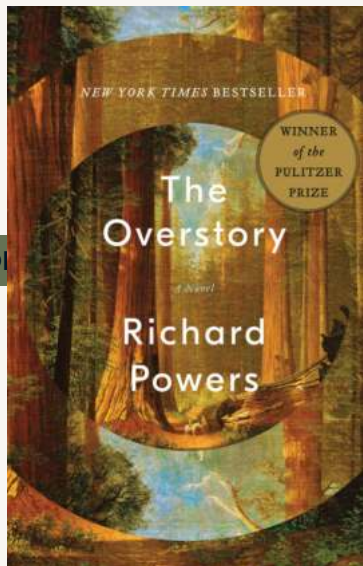
Wildfire season started early this year for us in Missoula, Montana. I was skipping rocks with my almost-four-year-old son at Rattlesnake Creek when a telltale haze began to blur the edges of the nearby hills—smoke from wildfires already burning in the region. It was July 10, much earlier than it's supposed to be. But clearly, things won't be as they're supposed to anymore.

A climate change-fueled megadrought has been parching the West for years. We'd been told to expect more frequent and intense wildfires because of it, and this year, we really felt it. I can't count the number of times the air quality tipped into the "unhealthy for sensitive groups" or "unhealthy" categories, as smoke from fires as far away as California and Oregon settled in our valley. Those were hard days. We didn't want to expose our two kids (we also have an 18-month-old daughter) to the choking particulate matter hanging in the air, so we holed up inside our house for days on end. My daughter would grab her shoes, carry them to the door, and cry, not understanding why we couldn't play outside. My son would shout, "I hate smoke season!" when we once again tried to explain why he couldn't go swimming, to the playground, to the farmers' market.

Even with our three air purifiers running around the clock, I worried about the smoke that was undoubtedly seeping into my son's preschool, the grocery store, the library, and anywhere else we tried to go. I pictured the smoke's particulate matter piling up in my kids' bloodstreams with every breath they took, setting off a dangerous inflammatory response in their little bodies. Every child deserves clean air to breathe and the chance to play freely outside. Too often, the children in the West this summer did not get that chance.

Some might say we just had a bad summer. But I'm afraid an awful smoke season is here to stay. Next summer could be worse—and summers after that will be worse, if we don't take drastic action to eliminate fossil fuels and curb climate change right now. I'm afraid our beautiful home will be uninhabitable during my kids' lifetimes. We can't let that happen.

Elizabeth Kwak-Hefferan, 39, is a freelance journalist who specializes in the outdoors, environment, travel, and parenting and an adjunct professor in the graduate journalism program at the University of Montana. Originally from the Chicago suburbs, she fell in love with the Rockies while doing a post-college internship at Rocky Mountain National Park. After bouncing around the West for a decade or so, she has settled in Missoula with her husband, son, and daughter.



The Overstory

a novel

Written by Richard Powers
Recommendation by Meg Smith

deliver visceral, heart-wrenching blows when they are lost: "The loggers are gone; there's nothing left to cut. They've long since headed to fresh groves...She touches the edge of the wondrous cut and breaks down sobbing. Nick stumbles toward her, but she holds him off. Adam must watch every awful spasm. There are consolations that the strongest human love is powerless to give." (330)

In fact, trees are Powers' central narrative, and, in their own way, agenic characters; more than a theme, they drive the story, slowly, with an agency cast over decades, too slow for human sense but powerful enough to move it.

This radical de-centering of the human in the novel marks a turn for the, at times self-indulgent, nature writing genre: if we are truly an "us", truly a species among many, how do we include their stories, the stories of other species, when we tell our own?

Powers' novel is an honest re-telling of humans as we exist in the natural world - countless small blurs whizzing about the long-lived lives of the presences that surround us: trees, rocks, rivers, mountains. As his work reminds us of our smallness, it highlights our massive collective impact - to kill the planet, to kill our species. He reminds us: the earth will continue, as it has, branching, changing, trying, reforming, transitioning, and moving.

What we don't seem to have realized is: "The most wondrous products of four billion years of life need help"-- and he isn't talking about the trees.

Soil · Soul · Society

a new trinity for our time

Written by Satish Kumar
Recommendation by Sydney Bollinger

All readers know the feeling of wandering through a bookstore, absentmindedly scanning titles, waiting for something to call to you from the shelves. On one particularly wintry afternoon (pre-COVID), I found myself at Missoula's Fact and Fiction, itching to be out of the house and doing anything. As I often do, I found myself in front of the religion and philosophy section, looking for something that would nourish me spiritually. That day, I pulled Satish Kumar's *Soil Soul Society* off the shelves. I went home and read it immediately.

This book both challenged my viewpoint on the human relationship to the more-than-human world and acted as a guiding light in my new approach to the world at-large. He asks all of us to consider how we treat Earth, reminding us of oneness with nature: "Whatever is born and will die is nature. Since we, humans, are also born and will die, we are nature too. Thus nature and humans are one. Therefore, we need to understand that we do to nature we do to ourselves" (19). When we see nature as divine and hold reverence for nature, we will automatically work toward "sustainability, coherence, and harmony" (23).

So what is the meaning of soil, soul, and society together? Kumar suggests that these three things—soil, soul, and society—are the trinity for our current age. As a former evangelical Christian, Kumar's ideas really pushed against my comfort zone, but in a way that I truly needed. His writing calls for peace—peace between humanity and nature, peace in the souls of humanity and other living things, and peace in human society.



If we can find peace in these places, we are able to create a just, sustainable society.

Though this book is relatively short, at 171 pages, I recommend reading it slowly and meditating on Kumar's words. He even leads you through meditations and prayers, asking you to consider your place on this planet. My copy is filled with notes and dog-eared pages, things that I want to go back to. I often turn back to Kumar's teachings to remind me of how I want to approach the climate crisis: with a deep love and reverence for the Earth and my fellow humans.

What have you been reading?

Stories bring us all together. That's why we decided to start *The Changing Times*.

Interested in sharing in an impactful read in our next issue? Whether it's climate-focused fiction, science written for general audiences, or even a graphic novel, we'd love to hear what you have to say.

Send us your recommended reading to magazine@livableclimate.org to be featured in one of our upcoming issues.

The human story is written in seconds on the timeline of the Earth. Modern man's is written in thousandths of seconds.

And yet here we are - face to face with a new geological era we unintentionally produced: the Anthropocene.

Staring into that stark reality, Richard Powers' book, *The Overstory*, about trees, seems, at face value, to fill a niche, nostalgic, guilty yearning to care more about the planet we, western civilization and neoliberal capitalism, are destroying.

I know I personally have felt that anxious twinge as I get Taco Bell, again, throwing crumpled wrappers into my trash can, or purchased, another, new pair of running leggings. Even if you care deeply about this planet and its well-being, it is far too easy to be sucked into capitalist schemes of consumption, waste, and consumerism. So, to the naked eye, the vulnerable, caring, deeply-flawed hippies - was Powers' book supposed to be a balm?

Again, perhaps if we were to judge a book by its cover. But Powers' book is not for the faint of heart. Here, trees talk in ancient, pulsing dialects written over hundred (or thousands) of years and

FALL

IT'S WHAT THE LEAVES DO (USUALLY)

By Peter Lesica

Each autumn, deciduous trees and shrubs shed their leaves. In some years leaves are shed earlier than in others. Last year many of the trees in western Montana, especially those in our towns, continued to hold their leaves much longer than usual; some even into the spring. Why do trees shed their leaves and what determines when they do it?

Leaves are the organs adapted for photosynthesis, enabling plants to capture sunlight and turn this energy and CO₂ into sugars and other carbohydrates needed for growth. In much of North America winter is too cold for these functions, so most plants become dormant. Leaves serve no purpose when trees are dormant, and they may be a liability. Strong winds and heavy snow can put tremendous pressure on limbs that have leaves. Our conifers have small durable leaves (needles) that can shed snow and survive the vagaries of winter without damage. Thus, most conifers keep their leaves for many years. However, for trees that produce thin, broad leaves, it's better to spend the winter naked and produce new leaves in the spring.

As autumn progresses, chlorophyll, the green pigment that captures light, is no longer produced; instead it is broken down, transferred to roots and stems and saved for the coming spring. As the green is withdrawn, other chemicals in the leaves become dominant, and the leaves

gradually change color. At the same time, enzymes digest the cells at the base of the leaf stalk forming an abscission layer of weakened cells. When digestion is complete, the leaf falls.

Dormancy is brought on by a change in the levels of plant hormones. Short day length is the most important environmental cue stimulating the onset of dormancy and leaf drop. This is clearly shown by the fact that in many cities the trees close to street lamps are often the last to lose their leaves. Drought will also hasten the onset of leaf fall. Thus, trees shed their leaves earlier following a dry spring and summer.

Last year, we had a wet spring and early autumn which may have delayed the onset of leaf fall of many deciduous trees in western Montana. In late October, before many of the trees had dropped their leaves, we experienced two nights in a row that were near or below zero degrees. In many of the trees that still had green leaves, leaf tissue froze and was killed before sufficient enzymes were produced to form abscission layers. As a result, many of our trees went through winter still carrying some or even most of their leaves. The good news is that the old leaves and most of the mountain ash berries from 2020 finally dropped off this spring, and things went back to normal (for a while) with a normal flush of new leaves.

Revised from an article first published in Kelsey, the newsletter of the Montana Native Plant Society.

Peter Lesica, 71, has been a consulting biologist in Montana for the past 40 years, a member of the Montana Native Plant Society, and a Faculty affiliate at UM for the past 30 years

A TALE OF TWO YARDS

ARE NATIVE PLANTS WORTH IT?
LET'S COMPARE THEM TO A TRADITIONAL LAWN.

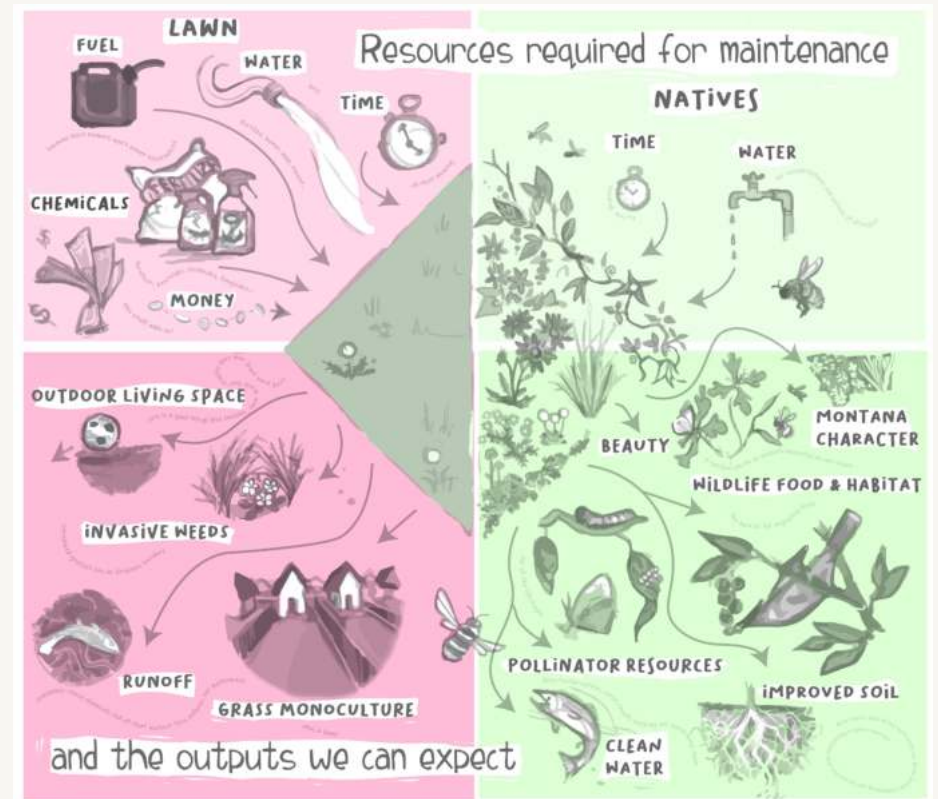


Illustration: Elliott Conrad

Elliott Conrad, 36, is the owner of Pipilo Native Plants, a small native plant nursery in Charlo, Montana. He grew up in a nomadic military family and thus can claim no point of origin, but has spent the most time in Colorado, New Mexico, and Montana. Formerly an aerospace engineer for the Air Force, he now studies why living plants burn for the US Forest Service. His hobbies include collecting seeds, growing native plants, drawing, birdwatching, and enjoying the farm life with a partner, cat, and two elderly horses.

Seven Ways

to manage insecure ancestral attachment

by Kate Fontana

What's your relationship like with your ancestors?

Now, notice I didn't say "what do you know about them?" I said: what's your relationship like?

It's October, which is when my Celtic ancestors celebrated the return of the Goddess into the earth, and the movement of the spirits between worlds, a practice shared by many other cultures. However, over the last few years I've been exploring one aspect of the devastating impacts of western colonialism on modern cultures. Due to the mass annihilation of cultures by and assimilation of cultures into the made-up idealized monoculture of whiteness, most of us—across cultural lines—have a widespread insecure attachment to ancestry.

You may have heard of attachment theory, but here's just a little primer for those who haven't or could use a refresher. Attachment theory is a therapeutic model which examines the relationship between infants and their primary caregivers. It describes several predictable patterns of infant and child behavior in response to the primary caregiver's ability—or lack there-of—to provide a consistent and stable-enough emotional and physical 'secure base' from which an infant/child can both seek comfort and closeness to as well as separate and explore autonomous movement away from the caregiver without fear of negative consequence. These are generally known as secure attachment—where an infant or child demonstrates a general receptivity to

closeness as well as resilience in the face of separation or distress—and insecure attachment—anxious, avoidant, or ambivalent behavioral adaptations that protect an infant/child's psyche from the trauma of disrupted connection to their caregiver. Insecure attachment behaviors range from anxious hypervigilance, clinginess, validation seeking, angry outbursts, and jealousy; to detachment, avoidance of the other, and "compulsive self-reliance"; to an ambivalent approach-avoid combination of the two.

All of these are coping strategies to manage the existential threats of being abandoned or punished for having needs on the one hand, to emotionally/psychically absorb on the other, by the caregiver. It's important to keep in mind that, in essence, these are some of our earliest adaptations to trauma.

Ok so that's attachment theory as it's been widely circulated in the west. However, there has been more recent critique of the individualistic nature of this framework as descriptive of a particular version of caregiving that is unique to (mostly middle/upper class and white) western culture: wherein the primary and often sole source of 'secure base' is provided by a single person, usually the mother, absent of a much larger network of clan, ecosystem, and visible and invisible ancestral, spiritual, and more-than-human world.

Indigenous social worker Estelle Semard shaped her work around the concept of cultural attachment as a more useful frame for indigenous persons, as relationships to parent culture, not just a

single primary caregiver, was shown to be more critical for the success of indigenous youth. Somatic animists Tada Hozumi and Dare Sohei, some of my teachers of the last several years, expanded these ideas to suggest that we all have attachment relationships to anything that impacts our nervous system—which expands the web of attachments to all kinds of human, animal, ecological, elemental and spiritual beings and forces in the cosmos. Sohei introduced me to the idea that the crucial element for people across racial and cultural identities to relate in a more sane way to each other and the created world is restoring secure attachment to the things that whiteness has so devastatingly separated us from: namely, body, earth, well ancestry, and the spiritual forces of the cosmos—like creativity, eros, and death.

There's a LOT to unpack in all that, but let's start with considering the original attachment model as a fractal or microcosm of the whole. There are observable cultural behaviors that arise when in absence of a secure cultural base from which to both resource and individuate from. Cultural appropriation is probably one of the clearest examples of anxious cultural attachment—where, because of lack of nourishing resources in one's own culture, a person or group grasps for nourishment from another, and is often defensive or sometimes violent if that is critiqued or withheld. On the other hand, xenophobia fits the bill for avoidant cultural attachment—a forceful and total separation and rigid boundary keeping to ensure a perceived sense of 'safety' or purity of self. I learned this primarily through Tada Hozumi's work on whiteness as cultural trauma.

White supremacy, arguably, is the most visible extreme reaction to the deep culture-wide psychological insecurity that results from the soul-split that whiteness has demanded, severing white folks from any sense of who we were before being colonizers and before "white" existed.

And there's MORE to unpack in all that (it's taken me about the last 3 years to

digest just these few concepts!) But for the time being, since it's fall and the season of the ancestors, let's return to them. If we are suffering from insecure ancestral attachment, is there anything to be done about it? Consider these 7 ways to begin exploring your own ancestral healing journey.

01 Nurture your own felt sense of the world around you through your belly. Yes, gut-wisdom is ancestral. Each of our own body's has a direct sensing relationship to the world around us, if we nurture it—both the visible world of human, plant, animal and elemental allies, as well as the invisible world of spirits and ancestors. This doesn't have to be a psychedelic trance-y experiences. Start with a simply practice of breathing into your belly, daily if you can. You might start to ask your belly, your gut-wisdom: what do your ancestors want you to know right now? And just notice what you notice without thinking too hard.

02 Consider that knowing about your ancestors intellectually isn't the same as having a secure relationship with them. I teach a program on anti-racism as spiritual formation. In this program, I lead folks in a meditation on various layers and sources of support and nourishment: the earth, community, Spirit/God/dess/Cosmos, body--and ancestors. After taking a group of college students through this, one white participant observed: "I was surprised, when you told us to imagine our ancestors, I just felt...nothing. I felt a complete blank. I mean, I know my

grandparents, and I know I'm German. But in the meditation it didn't feel like anything I was connected to." Being aware of the lack of connection is an important starting point. Many white people in particular do not have any kind of actual relationship or felt sense of being supported by the multitudes who have come before. Conceptually, perhaps—some of us may intellectually know where our ancestors were from; but that's very different than being able to relate with and resource from them in a sustaining way, to go to them when you are dysregulated and actually get help; and having a community of every-day cultural practices that nourishes that kind of relating. The ancestors of white folks, as well as many from various cultures who have more recently been assimilated into whiteness, however unconsciously and understandably driven by survival, have by and large given such cultural resources up for acceptance into white culture, material, wealth and power.

03 Consider and learn more about the attachment behaviors: anxious, avoidant, ambivalent. Do these describe your dynamic with your own ancestry? What about groups that you belong to? In what ways do you interculturally, cross-culturally, or spiritually enact hypervigilance, clinginess, approval seeking, avoidance, extreme self-reliance, or a combination? When you are triggered, stressed, or overwhelmed, especially in racialized contexts, what is your default? How do you relate that to your own experience of connection to nourishing ancestry, or lack there-of?

04 Acknowledge and sense into the ancestral stewards of the land you are on. What indigenous territory do you live on? If you are white, consider just acknowledging the reality of being on unceded/occupied lands. I live on Puyallup tribal land, part of the Coast Salish region. Acknowledge the ancestors of the land, recognizing that your ancestors may have been colonizers, and that if you like me are white, we are squatters. Practice being in a state of awareness, gratitude, communication and good will towards the ancestral stewards of the land, as living beings of the visible and invisible world. This can be sobering, humbling, but doesn't have to be guilt-ridden. Just practice being in spacious tension with the reality of the past that is still alive presently.

05 Build an alter. Now I'll warn you, don't get fixated on this part—it's easy to have the most elaborate alter and still be totally fragile and unable to authentically engage in cross-racial exchanges (I know because I've been there). But this is kinda a fun part, and the Catholic in me loves the tangible tactile things, so I'm including it. Building an alter can be a simple way to just bring your ancestors more consistently into your awareness by simply letting them take up physical space. Start with whatever you have and already know about. What names of direct DNA ancestors do you know? Do you have any photos? Do you have any heirlooms or tokens from them or their era? Set them on a small table or a windowsill or whatever space you have. But also, ancestors don't have to be direct

DNA forebears. In fact, for most white people, and no disrespect to all y'all's grandmas, but we're going to have to reach way back for anything close to a truly healthy ancestor. So you can also just feel into: from who or what do I receive nourishment and guidance? And see if there's a token or symbol of that that you can include: a feather, a color, a leaf, a seed, a word, an image of an ascended master, god or goddess.

06 Make an explicit invitation to the healthy ancestors. When I'm working with my own energy field, clearing a room, or setting intention for a reading, I am specific in saying: "I invite in those of my/so-and-so's ancestors that are of good health and well enough to be of support in this healing." Not just anyone is welcome. Not all ancestors are healthy and can contribute to your health (see above comments on white ancestors). Some are sick and have flocked to you because they can lean on you or take from you energetically. No harm is usually intended, but it can have the affect of feeling like you are swimming through tar just to get through a day, like your carrying more than your share of the world's burdens, or like you keep repeating a mental or physical pattern of which no amount of vitamins or positive thinking is breaking you out. Our ancestors may have called it 'possession.' Not frequently, but it does happen that there are some of truly ill-will. So make it clear who's invited in and who's not. Often I imagine setting a perimeter around myself or the room--that can be all kinds of images, like a fence or walls of golden light or a ring of fire. Then I imagine a door with a little peep window, like a speak-easy--I speak the intention

and then peek out to see who's there, and open the door just for those who are healthy and clear.

07 Spend time with your alter and talk to them. It doesn't have to be fancy. Start to designate a little time to just sit, ground, breathe into your belly, not think too hard and notice what you notice. Do you get any physical sensation? What objects or photos draw your attention? Do images or memories emerge? In your mind, just call out: Hello! Who's there? And listen for a response. It's ok if you feel like you're just pretending. Get quiet and imagine a garden gate or archway through which you are inviting your healthy ancestors, or through which they are inviting you. Does someone/something show up? Who? How? Why? What might they say if they were really right there? At the beginning, you'll probably feel like you're just making things up. It's ok. Just go with it.

Blessings of these thin times to you and your kin! May all beings everywhere have exactly what they need to be well.

Kate Fontana, 36, is Co-Founder and Steward of the Sanctuary Northwest, a center for trauma resilience, spiritual wellness, and cultural restoration. Their mission is to transform the lives of trauma survivors for the better, and nurture strong resilient families, communities and ecosystems where all life thrives. Visit them at www.thesanctuarynorthwest.com.

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“The awe-inspiring beauty of Montana’s remaining wild places.”

-Sarah

“What gives me hope is the recent restoration of the protections for migratory birds. Also friendly smiles give me hope.”

- Mary

“Finding my Strength in my Heart and in the Soul of every single Part of Nature.”

- Heike

“My birthday!”

- Willa

“Planting apple seeds at the Ranch.”

- Samuel

“I like when the leaves fall and we are walking in them.”

- Oona

“School gardens blooming all over the world!”

- Megan

“The trees because they are pretty.”

- Ellie

“People all over the world from all different backgrounds finding their personal connection to the land they inhabit.”

- Mariah

“Hearing kids talk about the climate and environment gives me hope because so many of them seem to have a visceral, passionate interest in the problems and possible solutions.”

- George

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?

In autumn, as the leaves began to drop and the tamarack needles cover the forest floor, it can be easy to feel that something has come to an end - and here at *The Changing Times* we believe that each season is just the beginning. So, we put out a call to our supporters, contributors, and the public - what brings you hope? What moments; what feelings; what beautiful, precious blips remind you that there is always beauty to look forward to? And here are their answers. May you be inspired and remember to look for what brings you hope.

sčtip spq'n? hunting moon

by Claire Charlo

We are now in the fall season. The month is that of the hunting moon. More like the time to harvest, because we hunt year round. Fall is the preparation for winter. The berries and roots are dried. Fish, moose, elk and deer are also traditionally smoked and stored for winter. This is the month where you can catch warm rays of sun into the late afternoon while being surprised by morning frost.

This is also a time to make our bi annual pilgrimage to our sacred Medicine Tree in our ancestral homelands where we were forcibly evicted from. We travel outside of Darby Montana, to give our prayers of gratitude for the past season of summer. To thank our ancestors for our bounty of berries, roots, fish and meat. This was an essential to the survival of our people.

Despite times of gathering changing. We continue our tradition of going to the Medicine Tree in the fall. To bring our offerings of gratitude and prayers for the future.

As we get ready for winter, we also prepare for the pause that winter brings. Where the weather would slow the activity of hunting, and gathering.

We have a different pause now, it's a pandemic. We have tried to navigate it with grace, and a healthy dose of caution for almost two years. My family and I recently survived COVID. I am grateful for the plant medicines that helped my family and I. We will be recovering for a while. For two solid weeks we stayed home, from work and school. Slept, drank tea, smudged, prayed, fed and played with rescue kittens we have been fostering since they were 10 days old. We depended on a beautiful community of family and friends that dropped off groceries, flowers, and kitten formula. We took a pause and watched the fall leaves turn yellow, orange and red. In time of harvesting, I took a pause, and reflected on the beautiful community of friends and family that we, collectively are. I'm grateful for all of you.

Claire Charlo, 47, was born and raised on the Flathead Reservation. A direct descendent of Chief Charlo, Claire Charlo attended law school and graduated with a Juris Doctorate. Claire works as a Civil Advocate for the Salish & Kootenai Tribal Defenders. In her spare time, Claire is a Water and Land Defender. Claire also writes, beads regalia/jewelry and sews star quilts. In the summer Claire is in the mountains picking huckleberries and digging roots.

From the director

Thank you so much for supporting Families for a Livable Climate's work as a donor, business sponsor, subscriber, ally, or friend!

Your support has been key in reaching more than 400 new families over the last year!

The autumn sky has felt like a tonic after our summer of smoke and heat. Clear blue sky is the sky we want for our future: clear and safe for all of our kids.

We know climate change will impact our kids' futures, but how do we connect to find our collective voice and strength to minimize that impact?

Since last fall, we've been focused on bringing climate conversations into more spaces through media, one-on-one connections with families, and hosting events to support conversations and community, from Hamilton to Helena.

Speaking up

In collaboration with Stories for Action, we recently launched Montana Climate Stories (mtclimatestories.org) to help paint a more complete picture of how Montanans are being impacted by climate change, and their hopes for a livable future. (We would love to hear your story.) We appreciate the support of Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate and Mountain Mamas with this project as well!

Our seasonal magazine, *The Changing Times*, gained subscribers, and we're excited to announce that with this issue, we will distribute magazines to select locations in **western Montana communities. We have deeply appreciated the support of Clearwater Credit Union, and all our business supporters to make printing the magazine possible.**

We've written multiple op-ed pieces with partner groups, including Mountain Mamas and Moms Clean Air Force Montana, Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate, and 350Montana, emphasizing the impact of climate change

on all Montana families, and the power of our collective voice. You can read the latest coverage of our work in the Fall/Winter issue of *Montana Naturalist* magazine, available from the Montana Natural History Center and our website (livableclimate.org).



Inspiring Engagement

This summer, with the help of our amazing summer staff, we created a detailed how-to get involved guide (based on time available) to make joining the climate movement simple for families and kids.

And our families have joined together to taking action in person, recently delivering the heart-felt wishes of Montana families for our shared future to Senators Tester and Daines.



Meet The Fellows

Our work is resonating

This summer, Families for a Livable Climate received its first major grant through the High Stakes Foundation, and our director, Winona Bateman, was selected as the U.S. Fellow for the yearlong Climate Parent Fellowship created by Parents for Future Global and Our Kids' Climate, joining eleven other women from around the globe.

"You and Families for a Livable Climate do such amazing work, and you give me hope. Thanks for being a bright light for so many people in our community and beyond."
- FLC Supporter, September 2021

Looking ahead

As we look toward the coming year, we're preparing new events and skills workshops, such as our new Conversations Across Differences workshop (stay tuned!), and more Work That Reconnects opportunities. We're speaking up for a Build Back Better bill that includes bold climate action, addressing leaders at COP 26 with our international network of parents, and developing on our response to NorthWestern Energy's plans to build methane gas plants, joining a statewide call for the company to change course. It won't be easy. We will need everyone to speak up. Stay tuned.

Realizing a livable future means systems change. At the heart of these changes are people like you and me, envisioning what we want our future to look like, and asking for it on all levels of society.

Thank you for being part of our community and supporting our work! We hope to see you soon.



In gratitude, Winona Bateman

Director, Families for a Livable Climate

P.S. As a thank you for your support this year, we would love to send you our free, family climate action guide. Request one via this link: livableclimate.org/actionguide. Limited supply.

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This tier allows you to show your support and give right to the magazine. With this tier, you will receive each issue mailed to your house and a special premium gift sent during the holiday season.

Subscribe online at livableclimate.org

As always, *The Changing Times* is freely available online and at our Western Montana distributors.

IN MONTANA'S CLIMATE STORY

Contribute

Inspired to add to our Montana climate story? We have two options for writers and artists to share their experiences with climate change through writing, storytelling, poetry, photography, art, and more.

Submit Writing

We take submissions for each of our quarterly issues. Since we follow the seasons, we ask that all submissions be relevant to their season of publication.

We are currently taking submissions for our Winter 2021 issue from now until January 14, 2022.

Stay in Touch

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