

Transcription

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Episode 24: Attending to Body and Earth in Distress

Teaser: Early on I thought, if I write a book at all I need to write something that might help my kids and my students when they face the really hard times. I might not be there.

Ranae Lenor Hanson:

Hi, I'm [Ranae Lenor Hanson](#). I've written a book called [Watershed, Attending to Body and Earth in Distress](#), and I'm here today to have a conversation about the book with my colleagues Lena Jones and Teddy Potter. They'll introduce themselves more in just a bit but I'll tell you a bit more about myself and the book first because we're kind of intertwined, me and the book. Teddy and Lena are with me virtually, but virtually with me also is the white pine tree that knows me best. Because it comes with me wherever I go and also with me is the water I've drunk all my life which comes from all the four major watersheds of Minnesota. It's kind of made me, so I can't go anywhere without it. Standing behind me are the students that have taught me sometimes learned from me, mostly learned with me, for the past 31 years at Minneapolis College, we used to call it MCTC, [Minneapolis Community and Technical College](#), and I want to know that the land that I grew up on, that nurtured all of my beginnings, was Ojibwe land and the college is on Dakota land, not purchased yet. I did get a doctorate in multicultural and international education and before that an MA in writing, but I learned most from my students and even more from the land.

I'm going to start by reading a little bit from the book and then we'll begin a conversation. The first is just the first page so you know where it starts. It's called where waters divide and the first section is spring.

Each child's fate is linked to that of its natal watershed. On a late May day, my mom finished planting her garden next to the small trailer where she and Dad lived, just south of Lake Bemidji. The Mississippi headwaters begin at Lake Itasca, flow north into Lake Bemidji, then meander south toward the Gulf of Mexico. Thirty miles north of Bemidji, as far north as Itasca is south, lies Red Lake, home waters for the Red Lake Nation of the Ojibwe. Red Lake lets out to join the Red River, which flows north toward Lake Winnipeg, and then to the Nelson River, and on to Hudson Bay.

When Mom stood up to walk toward the house Dad was building, her water broke. I came into a land fed by rain and by snow, a land of swamps where two great river systems begin their journeys, one flowing north and one flowing south.

When I first wrote early in my life, I wrote for those that land because that land inspires me. But then I began teaching at the college and felt that my students' stories were much more needed than mine (also was a single parent with two kids and I had no time. Because you have no time if you're teaching in community college and you have two kids. So maybe that's why), but I didn't keep writing. I worked primarily to get my students' words out into the world. And then this happened I'm going to read from. Starts on page 33, the the earth that I was counting on that was the foundation of everything I knew and believed I realized was not as invulnerable as I have thought.

In the summer of 1989, the rains did not come. They continued not to come.

Leaves withered and fell from the trees in June.

My son was two years old. I was awaiting a second child.

The dry skies unsettled me. We lived then in the city with my children's father and his daughter and a swirling gaggle of friends. None of those friends seemed to be ripped open by the drought the way I was.

I put my child in a red wagon and surrounded him with jugs of water; we walked up and down the sidewalk, pouring water on the Trees.

I heard about El Niño. And then some hints of climate change.

When I drove north, I noticed that the pines on the southern edge of the boreal forest were dying. On the slope from the house to the lake, the birch leaves yellowed and branches fell. Tent caterpillars ate young leaves as they sprouted on the trees. The mink abandoned the shore.

Could humans, in a mass, truly doom life?

I had brought two more to this land.

* * *

Daily life consumed my time. The needs of my children filled my

mind. My attempts to partner dissolved into disaster. Responsible for the financial and daily survival of the children, I worked toward a doctorate while teaching at three different colleges.

Fear of homelessness sidelined my fear of ecosystem collapse.

* * *

Sit in an overstuffed chair. Pull a toddler onto your lap. Have a kindergartner snuggle under your arm. Turn the pages of a picture book; read the words. The children will point at the pictures. They will laugh. They will jostle their legs against yours. They will lay angel hair against your arm. One of them will say, "I know I came from you, Mama, and that you came from Grandma, but where did the first person come from?"

You will recognize then and forever that these children belong to this earth. That soil and water must be sustained for them.

When, in the night, you realize that climate change means that the loons will probably die and the pines will fall into the lake, when you think that it would be wise to take these children and end things quickly, maybe by driving into that lake—you know, and continue to know, that they must live as long as they can, that you must work as hard as you can to reestablish thriving life networks.

* * *

I took my children back to the lake. We pushed down a path to the place where a spring gushes out under cedars to send its water winding through mossy, mushroom-studded banks. We went to the V-shaped trough that channels that water over logs, past rocks and eddying pools. My son pulled spruce twigs from young trees and set them into the flow. As their pitch reacted against the water, they do not fall away spun like tiny mad boats toward the lake. He laughed and pulled down another pitch boat.

"Josiah," I said, "ask the tree. See if it wants so many boughs

Broken.”

“Trees don’t talk,” said my son.

“Ask anyway,” I told him.

He turned to the tree. His lips moved. He looked back at me. “It said ‘okay,’” he assured me and ripped off yet another twig.

The next time, he paused before reaching up. His lips moved again, and then he turned to me in dismay. “Mom!” he cried out.

“It said ‘no.’”

We walked to the end of the trough and watched the water spill into the lake.

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Winter was hardest. We tried to go back, though my parents had begun a cold-season migration to parts south. Dad thought that when he left he should shut off the water, drain the heat runs, stuff the chimney. We could go there, but we would be cold and we would have to pee in the snow.

I tried. The children complained.

Mostly, the snow blew there without us. When it fell at all. I listened to weather reports and worried. In the city, sometimes, winter came late, or it came all at once and then went away. Some years, winter was as winter should be. Other years, not. I read the science and worried some more.

So that was the start of my Ecological dismay, and meanwhile I was teaching my students who were often ecological refugees, who spoke to me of the reasons for the dire conditions, the falling apart of the economies and life in their countries, and it was daunting. So that was a major reason that I ended up writing because the earth asked me to try to find a way through this, and then gradually my students asked me to tell the stories because they said I had privilege of audience that they didn't and that is true I had privilege of audience that they do not have although I hope they will get it. Lena, I asked you if you would join me in this conversation. Could you say why you said yes?

Lena Jones

Yes, besides the fact that I adore you Ranae [laughs], we've been colleagues, can you believe, almost twenty years, you know? But besides that you know I know a little bit about your journey of writing this book and, you know it feels like a privilege to be able to just have this wonderful conversation with you about it. But many of the things that you talk about in the book are things that resonate with me really deeply particularly the connections you make between climate catastrophe and our bodies. And at some point I'd want to hear, like how the heck did you think of these connections? You know, what made you think of telling your story this way. There were so many different ways you could have told it you know, it could have been a straight on biographical story about your relationship and you know with the land. It could have been a straight story about your journey with diabetes, but you know the way that you connected the two I think was really beautiful. And can I say it's one of the most physically beautiful books I've seen too? That cover is amazing.

I guess we were supposed to introduce ourselves too, right? I'm Lena. I teach at MCTC..I teach political science. I also coordinate the community development program there, and I'm also connected with an amazing organization called the [Center for Earth Energy and Democracy](#), which is based here in Minneapolis as well.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Yes, that's great and I'm going to briefly answer a bit of what you asked. One of the reasons that I connected the things is because it's only by living in the woods and on the water that I learned how to navigate crisis. I'm going to read one little paragraph. It's on, this one's on page 48.

Traveling on the water taught me that in a canoe, the best way to face a storm is head on. Try to run from it, and you won't know what's coming when the big waves hit. Get sideways to it and you're sure to be swamped. Head on, eyes open, you just might survive.

And that framing was really helpful when I was in absolute panic about the climate and then water and, you know, the other eco distresses coming.

And then, Teddy's a nurse educator. So before I have her introduce herself I'm going to say I became type one diabetic. I didn't know it could happen when you're 64 years old, but I want everybody in the audience to know because I would have died if I hadn't gone to ICU that very day. It was my last chance to

go. I had been saying it couldn't happen because I was never prediabetic and I thought you'd get a chance to fix things before it was too late, but no, you don't always get a chance to fix things. So the day after I was admitted, the doctor came in and said I was definitely diabetic and also had ketoacidosis and that I would need insulin the rest of my life, and I was so ignorant I asked him whether he couldn't just give me enough now to take care of it, and he said no, you need to do this and you need to give yourself shots every day as long as you live.

I didn't look happy about that. He said “does that disturb you? Don't you like shots?” I said, “well that isn't the problem,” But, I said, “I've planned, should things fall apart, that I'd be able to canoe off into the woods and survive on my own and I didn't see how I could do that.”

Here's one, another paragraph I'm going to read:

Two hours later the doctor came back.

“I have good news for you,” He said, “and check this out. You'll be able to live in the woods for up to three months. If you can find a deep cool lake and a waterproof container with a rope, you can drop your insulin in that container to the bottom of the lake, then your insulin will remain usable so that you can live by yourself in the woods.”

I smiled at him. All I need to do, I thought, is keep my light cool and that was that was the crunch, like okay I got to work on this with every ounce in me.

I got insulin. But so far, there's no insulin for the ocean and um, we don't have a cure. But if my lake isn't cool and neither will I survive. Teddy, will you introduce yourself and tell us why you said yes?

Teddie Potter

Absolutely, it's such an honor to be with you, Ranae, and also with you Lena and in this dialogue. My name is Teddy Potter. I'm a clinical professor at the University Of Minnesota in the school of nursing.

I coordinate the doctor of nursing practice and health innovation and leadership. So I'm preparing all our future nursing leaders. No matter where they lead. And then my other hat that I wear at the university is I'm director of planetary health, which leads me to Ranae's door. Reese's and my paths crossed back at Minneapolis Community and Technical College where I had the deep honor of teaching for 12 years, and

as Ranae captured so beautifully, learning from the students. They were my greatest teachers and they set my feet on a path that I have appreciated and feel that it has guided my scholarship, my service, and really everything I try to do in the world is because of the heroes and heroines that I met in community college. So, why did I say yes to Ranae? Well, when Ranae asks you to do something, I don't think there's a lot of temptation to say no because um, you know that she's up to good trouble, as has been said, making a huge contribution to justice and to the betterment of other people. And so, it's an honor to be invited to read her book and to reflect on it. The book is nontraditional. I will say it's not a scientific diatribe about what's happening with climate change, although there's enough data woven through the pages that if people are new to climate change they will receive a good 101.

What I particularly appreciate is Ranae's absolutely exquisite ability to use metaphor to teach us, and the book is really one metaphor of the intersectionality of the earth, our bodies, future generations, past generations, justice... it's all there through the story she tells. The stories, Lenor said and she loved the cover and I resonated with the beauty of the book in other ways too in that the words stick with me, and the stories stick with me, and they make me think for a long period of time of wow that really does explain this well. I'm grateful for you sharing this work with the world Ranae.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

And thanks Teddy for that. Do you mind if I read a little more?

Teddie Potter

Um, please do.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

I said it already as part of what I feel like, but here, the connection between diabetes and justice is similar to the connection with climate change and justice. People in Minnesota don't always connect immigration with our ecological problems and they are like hand in glove. They're just together, but not only immigration. I'm going to read from page 88.

At work my colleague, an Ojibwe Norwegian woman who teaches Ojibwe culture and Native American studies, smiled and told me how glad she was that I was back and okay.

“Pat,” I said, “I’m having trouble with this. I’ve become a weight on the system. I get all this medical stuff. I produce bags of trash now. I have good insulin. I have health care. My life got saved. But we have students who don’t have any of this.”

“You’re right,” she said. “On the rez, they don’t have much. My sons’ friends, three boys . . . their mother . . . she told them she had the flu. She stayed in bed, said she’d get better. Didn’t have money for insulin. If she had told me, I would have gotten her some. She didn’t tell me. Died.”

There, standing together by the copy machine, we put an arm around each other.

“She had had a job with health insurance, but she lost it. Got another one without insurance. I went up to that boss at her funeral. Told him he killed her. He could afford the insurance, just didn’t want to give it.”

“How are her sons?” I asked.

She shook her head back and forth. “You know.”

I briefly explained my new condition to each of my classes. My students would need to know how to react if I passed out while I was with them.

The next day, a student came to my office. “My mom’s got it, too,” she said.

“Type 1?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Diabetes. She has to wake up every two hours to give herself shots in the stomach. She’s pretty sick.”

“She live here?” I asked.

“Senegal.”

“How do you talk to her?”

“On the phone. I wish I could see her, know how she’s really

doing.”

“Every two hours?” I asked. “All night?”

“Yeah.”

“She wants you to be here in the U.S.?”

“She does. She wants things to be better for me. But she misses me, too.”

“Greet her from me. Tell her you’re doing great in my class.” She smiled. “I will. Yes. I will.”

That's the bit but you know it happens over and over again. The students show up and what are you supposed to say. I guess that's a question you know, um we just meet them but do you have thoughts?

Lena Jones

Yeah I mean, I don't think there's any one standard answer to that you know. I think what determines what you say is just kind of listening and honoring their story, you know, and responding, you know with a sense of humility. You know it's not like we all, you know we're in this situation in the classroom. We're clearly in a structure where there's a particular power structure. You know, we're the teacher. I'm doing my quote marks, right? right? And um, you know we come with a particular set of knowledge that we got from going to school a really long time, right? But, how do we create this space, you know, where people can tell their stories. And in the process, you know, I know for myself telling my own story, in that process of doing that like, you learn things.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Yes.

Lena Jones

And you also teach things, and things that you can't always predict, you know. Putting an attention back on you Ranae since this is about you and your book, like what were some of the things in the process of telling your own story that you learned about yourself, about the world, about whatever?

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Yes, and one of those things was how to make a container for the hard part. I wrote the book in several strands. I wrote the parts about the lake up north up at the house by myself in two weeks when I got time, nobody else was there. I wrote the diabetes parts in the city, my St. Paul home close to my Endo, who I needed to call often those first days and then I got a writing refuge, [Mesa Refuge Writing Retreat](#), and I was in California at a beautiful place, and there I wrote the student stories because I needed a container. I needed to feel like there was a group around me, there were trees, there were bluebirds, and it was beautiful, and it's also an interesting place, you know when the earthquake comes, but there I could tell the story.

Early on I thought if I write a book at all I need to write something that might help my kids and my students when they face the really hard times. I might not be there. I once had a class of students who were telling me that they were talking about climate change to their parents and their grandparents at that time and the grandparents said oh never mind I won't be alive and I looked at the student and I said they said that to you, and you were right there? I realized I was like one of the only adults with them willing to talk about this, and I needed to gather up anything I knew. It's a teaspoonful, but I'd better give my teaspoonful.

So there are these sections between the stories where I ask people to do some of their own work, like this one that I thought of reading which is practice for mourning. What is your practice for getting through grief? When the student who I call Delaura in the book, she lived on the north side. She's African American. She went to the army to prove that she could escape from her home in Chicago, and she had asthma. Very bad asthma. The day that she did not come to class, and she was a delight, I mean, we all loved her. She worked on campus. She was passionate, way beyond what I thought she should be given her health. The day I got the message that she had died reaching for her inhaler, and I know that climate is going to make asthma worse and that our students who live in neighborhoods near the freeways almost can't escape the asthma, and then when it heats up and their neighborhoods get hotter than anybody else's because there are no trees. The grief is pretty intense, but I need to do these things.

Say some make art to honor species as they become extinct, and I told the stories. The same day that I got a message saying that she had died I got a message from her saying that she was going to be an ambassador for global studies and that nothing could stop her, and I'm standing behind her in that. At least if you read the book, you'll read about her. You can write griefs on little slips of paper and bury them in the soil. I burn sweet grass. You can make poems. Crying helps. I have a place in my garden where I put the stones and I burn the sweetgrass for each of my students that have died in my awareness. I don't know if I lost your question Lena or not.

Lena Jones

Sounds good to me.

Teddie Potter

It leads into a question I had for you Ranae, and that is um, stories are so incredibly powerful but they only come out when people feel safe to tell the story, and clearly you have created that environment for your students because the depth of what they're sharing tells me that they feel safe and that you're a trusted advisor and a confidant and that they can tell the full depth and range of their emotions. Looping back to climate change, um, we know that really a lot of the people that might be climate deniers are in climate shock, and are experiencing a grief and a loss. There's even the word solastalgia now which is a psychological condition of loss of place, loss of when a beloved lake or piece of land or mountaintop is destroyed in that deep sense of feeling of [solastalgia](#), of profound loss of place. And my question for you, is I think your book helps us explore that, it actually helps us feel safe enough to start to enter that grief, and if you don't enter the grief, you aren't empowered to get busy in doing anything. So what tips would you give us? What would you say we can do to create safe spaces for our families, our communities, to begin to talk about this?

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Yeah that's a great question. I will admit that after I taught writing for a few years, I started working in mental health because I figured that I couldn't teach writing without really developing skills of dealing with people's emotional states. I didn't get a degree, but I worked in the field for a while, and we know that our students don't often have the luxury of also having a therapist. We also know that maybe they're getting it, but most therapists don't yet have the skills for dealing with something as big as eco-collapse and climate change, and I do think that many of my outstate (I'm not so much just an urban person, I've lived all around the rest of the state), my friends and relatives who don't talk much about climate change

are very concerned about water and my crisis started with climate change but it it gradually grew, you know. And now I don't think that's the main word I would use. In fact, if I were to rewrite the book I would probably use the term climate change even less, because where I've been able to make the communication with other people is around a lot, in Minnesota, around water, but it may be other places around food. It might be around clean air.

I think people often have to start with the grief that is least hard for them to face. But also if you're going to sit with someone as they tell you, as one of my students did, about her cousin who got on a boat to escape Somalia and and sank, you got to go through your own grief. So, we need to do it ourselves and we need to do it together. Those of us who are adults, elders, old folks, we need each other because standing by the the young ones is tough and they they need us to stand by them. But I don't want them to have to face what they are facing, and especially not what they might face, so I need all of you to also do that. I think if we make a net we give chances.

It cheered me when I learned the history of insulin, that, you know, a hundred years ago I would just be dead, and in much of the world I would just be dead because nobody would think somebody my age became type one and was insulin dependent, and before they didn't have insulin and they were dying, and it was desperation that taught people who didn't like each other to find insulin and isolate it and make it available, and that happened, that's like a miracle, that we're alive, and such a miracle we need on several fronts. I got a text from my grand niece in Northern Minnesota today saying that she thinks that the ash trees are wilting and um, she didn't think [Emerald Ash Borer](#) was there yet. I am setting aside my freak out about that. This is like halfway between Duluth and the Canadian border, and if Emerald Ash Borer is already there, we got a problem. But maybe somebody can come up with something that will kill those bugs and save the ash trees. So we've got to keep working on all these fronts.

Teddie Potter

It leads me to just talk, just briefly, about planetary health, which is an emerging field which acknowledges the interconnection of human health and the health of the planet and absolutely, you cannot have one without the other. Which brings me to your beautiful web weaving of diabetes and climate change, and that you see those parallels, and one of the comments you made just recently in this conversation is you don't always get a chance to fix things before it's too late, and I think that should be

front and center for all of us about the changing planet. We've had plenty of warnings. We're not going to get additional warnings. How do you stay grounded in the midst of this profound knowledge?

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Um, well I don't always stay grounded. I sometimes remember, oh what did I say in the book, I said stop? Okay. And by the way, diabetes taught me that because I did not want to stop at first when my blood sugar was going low I wanted to finish whatever I was doing, and then eat something. But, I had to learn to not finish anything, but just to sit down and eat and wait. So, is that stop, sit down, breathe, eat, wait, drink some water, and that's what I have to do when I get to the crisis, is stop and look around and actually take it in face it. If you don't face it, you can't do anything, and once you face it, even if it's pretty hopeless, or you can't see any way out, you do something, you make a plan. I keep wanting to tell you about my students because they're so precious, but this is kind of an answer too. I'm going to read another bit. This was a student, Emia. It's not her name. I changed the names of students unless they asked me. A few of them asked me to use their names, so their names are in there, but otherwise they're different. She'd been a guide for tourists in Mongolia before she married a Minnesotan, and came to live here.

She told her classmates one day, "what they say about the glaciers is true, but back home I did not understand. For years when I took visitors to the villages, the glaciers were there with water flowing from it for the villagers to drink. But then, when we went to the villages before I left, there was no glacier. It was just gone. I told the people don't worry, it will come back. It has always been here. Now, I understand that it will not return. The glacier is really gone." And her classmates asked her, "what were the village people drinking?" and she said she didn't know, but then she came back to class the next day and she said, "I'm teaching my son. We never had toilet paper back home, but here he uses so much I tell him now when you go poo you can now use only one piece. We have got to be careful. It goes into the water. I wanted to tell her that using one little piece of toilet paper when a small boy of five goes poo doesn't seem like enough, but I looked at her face and I realized that the practice was helping her. She felt that by protecting the water here and teaching her son something, she was helping the villagers back in Mongolia.

And that's the answer I wanted to get to Teddy. It's that any practice we can come up with, or suggest, or reinforce in our students when they think of it is helpful because it's that ritual returning to that. That makes you able to go on, and it also helps, like for this student she was claiming here as home and that is a big challenge for many refugee students, whether they're refugees from New Orleans or Florida or Alaska and we've had them all on the campus, or Afghanistan. They have a challenge of their heart being

somewhere else, and they need to, I think, also learn to know this land, so helping them look at the trees here and come to get a friend tree in Minnesota.

I've had students telling me that they know 40 trees back in Somalia and they don't know a single tree here and then when they come back and say I know an oak and his name is Omar, or whatever, you know. Tell them, doesn't matter what you name them. It doesn't have to be what I call them, just name them then you know that tree and you go visit that tree often. And then you learn that the water here also needs your attention. I've had students say there's so much water in Minnesota, there's no problem, you know, Somalia no water, here just fine. And then when they learn about the fact that all our water comes from the sky in Minnesota. If we don't take care of the rain and the snow and keep it pure, we won't have any and Iowa surely won't have any and neither will Hudson Bay, because we get it first. And any practice like that that Emia came up with that helped her, I think was worth doing.

Lena Jones

You know I was thinking, you know Ranae, I had the privilege of having you speak in one of my classes. The beautiful thing that the book does is um, open up that space for people to make their own connections. You know, through telling your story, you open up a space for people to make their own connections, whether it's connections between their personal health and the health of the ecosystem, or whether it's connections between, you know, something we do here and what happens someplace else. I remember that beautiful moment in the conversation where a student from Iowa you know who realized that you know what he was doing here affects his family and his watershed in Iowa. And I was like yeah, you know, I wanted to applaud when that happened and and you know, it's a beautiful thing that your book kind of creates this space and kind of opens up, you know, the space for people to make those own connections, you know, and and make them in the face of I guess all sorts of systems that try to keep us from making those connections, you know, and that try to to make us approach everything in a really kind of rigid western medicine model. I appreciate how your storytelling challenges that.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

When I think about what can be done about these issues we're facing, the place where my feet have to land is that our consciousness has to change.

We have to realize that we are not separate individuals. Covid has helped a little bit. I used to tell classes of students when we were in a closed room, you know, actually you're breathing each other's air. You know, what was in his blood is now in your lungs and they would like, Oh, I don't think I want to breathe

anymore. Now we know you know, yes, we do breathe the same air and we drink the same water and what I put into the water and then put into the septic system goes to Iowa. It really does. And then it goes to the Gulf, and the fish get that straight up and the people sometimes get it a little bit cleaned, but the fish are part of me too, and the plants are part of me too. I mean, I'm part of them, actually. They're much more important than I am. And if we begin to have that sense that we are part of a larger life, then I think we can change, we can take on some of the tasks that are before us and, who knows, life wants to go on and I think life could find a way..

Teddie Potter

Yeah, you throughout the book really weave the message of choosing life, and when you encountered your diabetic diagnosis it would have been so easy given just how overwhelming it is to manage type one diabetes, to throw in the towel and just say, you know, enough is enough. I don't want my life to change. I don't want to have think about planning meals and say no to certain foods, and I don't want to have to change the way I do activities, and you consistently chose life, and I think that's the message that we need to to pivot towards when we think of what we're doing to the planet. We know what we're doing. We know what's coming. We know that it's going to be impactful. Some of the most severe events are going to be within this decade, and happening within this decade.

So we know we need to pivot and change and choose life. I think the diabetic story has so much to tell us about your resilience and about your sort-of dogged persistence that I'm going to do this, I'm going to figure this out, even when the you know diabetic booklet was failing you due to a typo and your machine wasn't behaving the way it should, the pump wasn't behaving the way it should and call help centers weren't helpful, you just kept back at it, back at it, back at it and I love that. I think the book gives a real, almost like a spiritual blueprint, of what we need to be about right now, but it also invites that we're not alone. We're going to make it because we're together. So Could you give your audience some ideas, Ranae, of if people want to start to connect and and build these connections with other people. How do they begin?

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Well I think they begin not just with people. I think they have to begin with birds and trees and getting their hands in the soil. Getting your hands in the soil is one of the best ways to overcome the depression that comes from all of this. Get to know the roots of the plants around you and name them. You don't have to learn the real names or the names other people use, you can name them yourselves, and find a tree

and name it. And learn that robins, for instance, robins each have their own song and they teach their children their songs and you can learn to know individual robins.

So, start with easier, the trees and all of those, they just want to talk to you right off, and they know what's happening they can feel that it's a little bit hotter here. The people are going to be trying to fool themselves. Get a basis with those things, and then talk to people as you can, and admit really how you're feeling and do the grieving together, if you can, but also the other things we do need to keep going toward life and I know it's, you know, I've got students, I've got kids and I knew I couldn't leave them right then just because I got diabetes over spring break, you know. The class was waiting so I had to figure out how to test my blood sugar. It was hard, but I had to do it because they were there. So there will always be younger people and younger beings, little baby robins, and you got it show up for them.

And then another thing, before we started recording, I showed you both the embroidery my daughter made, and I want to return and describe that for people who can just hear this. Because even if we can't save the future, we need to live today well. The past also matters. Anyway, let me tell you this. For my birthday, she gave me the embroidery of a canoe, and the canoe is a birch bark canoe. It's beautiful and got cattails above it. But um, the canoe is empty. But when you look at the reflection of the canoe in the water, you see me and my two little kids in the canoe. I didn't see it at first, but she embroidered them in there and I realized that the canoe remembers us.

If we're not in the canoe anymore, and they're grown up and gone off to the west coast, but they were in my canoe, and I did paddle them out into the lake and the canoe knows and the water knows and their souls know, and that's important. We need to do now what now asks, and talk to what's around us now. We're not doing this just for the future. We're doing this for now, and then the future could well be ok. There's chance. But even if not I want what we did yesterday to have been loving, and if it wasn't, then today.

But I think the point of writing the book is to be able to talk to the two of you, and to be able to have others talk back.

I wrote in the book that people should write in the margins or cross out my words or whatever, and I've had nice messages back from people who are saying, "you should see it. It's all marked up I've written all over it!" Like that is what I want.

I can only do my story and you can do your story, even though they're all interwoven with the story of that oak out there, we can tell each other and that helps us move or stand up at least.

Teddie Potter

It isn't that the point of watershed anyway, of watershed is a certain space that a river or tributary occupies, yet it eventually joins up and becomes part of the whole, so it's that balance of living well and hopefully, but respectfully connected to the beings in our watershed and the downstream rest of the globe that we're connected to in other ways.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Um, yeah, people have asked me like exactly what watershed am I in, and it's such an interesting question because many you know you can pick your yard is one watershed and it just drains to the sewer and the street and the storm sewer and, you know, the one under the street and the one in the edge of the street, and but then that's part of a bigger one and that's part of a bigger one and... So first take care of the very little one, but they all go to one ocean, and it really is only one even though it's called many different names. So it is a great image too, of how we are. We're all in this together and the all is bigger than people. The all means all.

Teddie Potter

And both macro and micro, so diabetes helps us understand the profound thirst when your cells aren't getting what they need. It's just that these needs are universal from the tiniest tiniest little particle ah of ourselves to the greatest greatest global connection. And I think that's where the arts and humanities make such an incredible contribution to restoring planetary health, because we've got to make, as you say, some heart changes and some soul changes. That don't just come because we have more scientific knowledge.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

No, and there's where diabetes has been a great teacher for me too, because I've had to think about my mitochondria and the little creatures in each of my blood cells, like when the insulin goes in what's it, it's opening up the cell so that the cell can get some of the glucose so that the mitochondria can make energy for me. But, how's it doing that you know? I have come to better understand myself as a community because they've got to be healthy. All of all, of them. The little ones in me and the littler ones in them, they got to be functioning for me to function and then I've got to be functioning for the bigger thing to function. We're all also just little cells. And the bigger life.

Thank you both do we have any final things we want to say before we say goodbye to these good folks, whoever they are, who will listen to us one day

Lena Jones

You know I um, I want to echo the part about how it's not going to just take scientists, or or even politicians, you know speaking as a political scientist or policymakers. You know in the policy realm there's a way of thinking about problems. That we target this little piece here you know without thinking about how things are all connected with one another and affect one another you know? So it's going to take, you know, folks who are policy specialists, and it's going to take scientists, and it's going to take folks in the humanities and it's going to take everyone to figure out how to deal with this beast that threatens all of our lives.

It's going to take everyone. I think the beginning, what's going to activate folks again, is changing our minds, like building that soul connection. One of the beautiful things that your book inspired me to do was build a deeper relationship with three trees in my yard that I called, they're like three sisters. They are these huge huge trees that I know are related to one another. I know they are. One is just, I'm looking right at it, and then there are two to the side of me, and we have a talk every morning, and it's been beautiful to just kind of see their personalities change through the time of the day through the seasons. You know, how beautiful they are without leaves, you know, and then now that they're all lush and beautiful too. You mentioned the robins too, because you know I have lots of bird friends in my yard too, and rabbit friends, and also getting to know you know the trees that are on my walk. You know every day too. You know so it's um so yeah, thanks for inspiring that. Thanks for inspiring me to make a lot more friends in my neighborhood.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

And thank you for doing it.

Teddie Potter

And just a tandem on that, I think your book, for people who've lost their way, their lost their connection to the Land. You have a beautiful way of normalizing the walk home. It is okay to talk to the trees. It is okay to ask, like your son said, permission to use part of the tree. That's the way home, and that's really the way to the solution of our problems. We need to rebuild our relations, and understand that our sort of colonizing extraction mentality has brought us to the brink of extinction, and we have a chance to choose

Life. So I just want to close with a great deal of gratitude for your paintings. You're painting with words and it's lovely and I'm very grateful.

Ranae Lenor Hanson

Thank you both. I want to make a plug here at the end for working across disciplines and daring to speak outside your field. Because, I did a whole lot of that. My degree is cross-disciplinary which makes it hard to get a job, and makes it hard to explain what you're doing. Please, get more students to do that. And then, I really want people to dare to talk about stuff that isn't their specialty, and to think about that because we've got to do all of it. I don't think we can make any plans about anything without thinking about the water and the climate and the trees and the grass and, you know, and the people in Sudan. We can't. It's all one thing. Which means we've got to make mistakes, and we will say things that we don't know enough about, and we'll have to go do a bunch of research in a new field that we didn't want to have to learn anything about but, that's that's part of what we've got to do in order to be responsible beings on this glorious piece of land we got to live on.