

Earth 2020

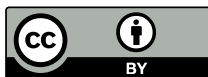
An Insider's Guide to a Rapidly
Changing Planet



EDITED BY PHILIPPE TORTELL



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Saving the Boat

Zoe Craig-Sparrow and Grace Nosek

I, Zoe Craig-Sparrow, was born and raised on the Musqueam reserve in British Columbia, and grew up fishing salmon on the Fraser River with my family. The currents are swift here, and the water is dangerous. Many, including members of my family, have lost their lives on the River.

In my childhood and teens, I served as a deckhand under my grandfather (an experienced commercial fisherman) and my mother (who was also raised fishing on the water), soaking up their knowledge and experience, accumulated over many generations.

When I was twenty, I got my first chance to captain my own boat on the River, accompanied by a deckhand and my thirteen-year-old sister, Charlee. We were fishing along a bend of the river, in a place with notoriously swift currents and many rocks. At one point, the currents became too strong, tearing our net and pushing it into our engine, where it soon became hopelessly tangled. I screamed to cut the engine, which we did, but it was too late. The propellers were wrapped up in the fragments of the net and the engine was useless; we were sitting ducks. The current immediately began to pull us dangerously close to the rocks, which threatened to puncture our fiberglass boat and sink us. I knew that we were in mortal danger, and that the lives of the boat's occupants were in my hands.

In the physical scramble to save the net and the boat, I was burned and cut by rope, and (to make matters worse) also stung by a wasp. My hand immediately started swelling and burning, but I had no time to register the pain. I felt sick to my stomach, the adrenaline pumping through my veins.

I had never dropped the anchor before, and was running through my training in my head (how much rope needs to be dropped, where, and how). I soon came to another terrible realization; the anchor was not attached to the boat. With my burned and swollen hands, I scrambled to secure the anchor to the boat, using the knots that I'd learned as a young girl. In those precious seconds, which I imagine now must have seemed like an eternity, I managed to successfully drop the anchor, as the deckhand pulled the snag free and brought the now useless net into the boat. We were momentarily out of mortal peril, but we now needed to keep the boat away from the rocks until help arrived. Getting a rush of inspiration, I grabbed the hook we used to pick up the net, which was attached to a long wooden stick. My sister, Charlee, used the stick to push us away from the rocks until help arrived. After a tense period of waiting, my family came to tow us back to safety.

Today, we (Zoe and Grace) are grappling with the great peril our world and our future are facing. Our rapidly warming world is pushing already strained social and ecological systems to the brink, profoundly threatening humans and animals alike. We know that climate change is already devastating vulnerable and marginalized communities — including Indigenous peoples, racialized minorities, women and people in the Global South, among others — and that such human devastation will increase exponentially if we continue on our current path. We are in the boat, engine destroyed, being dragged dangerously close to the rocks.

Our course is made more difficult by the powerful societal currents that are pushing our boat straight into the rocks. For decades, the fossil fuel industry and its allies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars undermining climate science and action, leaving many people unaware of the true dangers we face.¹ Companies like ExxonMobil have sowed doubt about whether climate change is real, serious, human-caused, and even whether it can be solved by humans.² They have profited, and protected their own infrastructure

from climate change,³ while making the rest of us feel helpless. Now, they are investing heavily in defeating climate legislation around the world while holding themselves out as climate leaders.⁴

Governments have been slow to address the climate threat, in no small part because of the fossil fuel industry's coordinated efforts to undermine climate action. Voters have not always signalled robust support for bold climate action, and politicians have not demonstrated the political courage to act ahead of public opinion or anger entrenched corporate interests.

Faced with these institutional failures, it may feel impossibly daunting to engage with the threats of climate change, biodiversity loss and other environmental crises.

But think of Zoe, with her hands burned from the rope and swollen with wasp venom, far from help and terrified for the safety of her little sister. Think of Zoe finding the courage, strength and creativity to save her boat and its occupants against all odds.

Think of the courage of Indigenous land defenders putting their bodies on the line, time and time again, to protect the land, water and air for all of us in the face of colonial and corporate forces often prepared to use lethal violence against them.⁵ Think of the youth climate strikers around the world, some still in elementary school, recognizing that justice for the planet requires justice for all humans, and leaving their childhood joys behind to demand systemic social, political and economic change.

Like Zoe's ingenious scramble for a tool to keep the boat off the rocks, these groups are coming up with creative solutions to the climate crisis. They are centering long-ignored voices to dream up new futures. Futures where we conserve energy by working fewer hours and consuming less, where we have more time to connect, play, build community and pursue our passions. Futures where every human born in this world has the right and the opportunity to thrive, and where we do not mercilessly exploit non-human animals.

It will often seem easier to tune out, to hope that someone else will take up the task of saving the boat. We are all busy in the twenty-first century, and many of us are locked into the current economic and political system — worried about job security, paying the mortgage or continuing to afford the same quality of life. It can be scary to work for systemic climate action, to call or write your represented officials, to speak to friends, family and

strangers about electing climate justice advocates. In a world where there is no pause, it is easy to feel overworked, overwhelmed and too tired to engage.

But know this — young people, often led by Indigenous youth, recognize that we're on the boat. We're reeling and sick, viscerally aware of the immense suffering caused by inaction on climate change. We can see the rocks ahead and it terrifies us. And yet, we are showing up every single day to try and guide the boat away from danger, knowing that it is the most vulnerable who are already in the water. We see the danger, but we also know where and how to guide the boat to safer, more just, more intersectional waters. We're pulling at the rope, grasping at the anchor, getting buffeted and knocked down in the process. And yet, we are still showing up in the streets and in the institutions of power, week after week. We need your help. We need it now. Help us tell the story of the true dangers we face, of the vulnerable people who are already suffering, to whatever community you are a part of — your reading group, faith organization, recreational sports team, alumni group, place of work, financial institution. You have the power to engage your communities, to help bring more people into the work. If you can, donate your time, skills, money or passion to youth- and Indigenous-led organizations.

Zoe could only save the boat because she was mentored, prepared and supported by generations upon generations before her. Let's create the same intergenerational bonds as we collectively work towards climate justice. Together, we can, and must, save the boat.

Endnotes

1. R. J. Brulle, 'Institutionalizing delay: foundation funding and the creation of US climate change counter-movement organizations', *Climatic Change*, 2014, 122, 681–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-013-1018-7>; R. J. Brulle, 'The climate lobby: a sectoral analysis of lobbying spending on climate change in the USA, 2000 to 2016', *Climatic Change*, 2018, 149, 289–303, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2241-z>
2. G. Supran and N. Oreskes, 'Assessing ExxonMobil's climate change communications (1977–2014)', *Environmental Research Letters*, 2017, 12, 084019, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aa815f>

3. A. Lieberman and S. Rust, 'Big Oil braced for global warming while it fought regulations', *The Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 2015, <http://graphics.latimes.com/oil-operations/>
4. Brulle, 'The climate lobby', 2018; A. Sharp, 'Oil and gas majors have spent \$1 billion undermining climate action since 2015, report says', *National Observer*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2019/03/21/news/oil-and-gas-majors-have-spent-1-billion-undermining-climate-action-2015-report-says>
5. See also 'Mother Earth' by Deborah McGregor in this volume.

