

MADNESS

ON THE BRINK OF

ECO-APOCALYPSE

*Furious Facts, Dark Humor
& SOS Calls to Action¹*

Cheryl Leutjen
Author of Love Earth Now

¹ *Plus superabundant superfluous footnotes*

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CHAPTER THREE

The Band Played On

“A beloved juvenile red wolf named Muppet has been killed by a vehicle strike . . . Muppet, who was apparently struck and killed on April 15, was the fourth red wolf road mortality in the past 10 months. Muppet’s father was also killed by a vehicle strike six months earlier . . . Fewer than 20 red wolves remain in the wild, making them the most endangered wolves on the planet.”

Sad stories like Muppet’s flood my inbox, making me certain I lack the emotional fortitude to stay well-informed anymore. These emails now pile up because I’m on a News Diet, one which I pray will be more successful than any of my food restriction efforts.

Just yesterday, another awful email slipped through my definitely-not-ironclad blockade, informing me that Earth’s operating systems are failing—on six out of nine fronts, in fact—and two of the other three are hanging by a gossamer thread. Which sounds as encouraging as your doctor saying your blood pressure is too high and your cholesterol is astronomical, but your lungs may be okay for another six months if you quit smoking. Except this scenario is more akin to demanding 8 billion people quit

smoking¹, while the governments of the world pass out subsidies to cigarette manufacturers—but what’s lighting up the Internet is the Tide pod challenge.

“We are in very bad shape. . . We show in this analysis that the planet is losing resilience and the patient is sick.”

Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

The more I read about the collapses of our Earthly life support systems, the more I think about this phrase: “and the band played on.” I picture the eight-member band² aboard the *Titanic* playing ragtime and hymns³ to soothe the freaked-out passengers as the ship groaned into the ice-cold, inky depths. Hearts pounding, perhaps struggling to stay in their seats as their chairs slid when the pitch of the ship tilted steeply, still doing what they loved best. I consider them lucky, as compared to the other ill-fated passengers, anyway. In their final moments, they had something to give, something to do to

¹ As in STOP BURNING FOSSIL FUELS.

² For posterity: the members of the band were violinists, Wallace Hartley, George Alexandre Krins and John Law Hume; violist and bassist John Frederick Preston Clarke; cellists John Wesley Woodward and Roger Marie Bricoux; and pianists Percy Cornelius Taylor and Theodore Ronald Brailey. None survived the sinking of the *Titanic*.

³ Many accounts claim the band played “Nearer My God to Thee” at the end, but this hymn wasn’t in the songbook reported to be aboard the *Titanic*. The 22-year-old junior wireless operator, Harold Bride, identified the song as “Autumn,” which is the tune for a variety of hymns popular at the time. In case you were wondering.

offer solace, something to do that gave them joy.

I honor their devotion as I consider my own role in the unfolding catastrophe of our time. I think of them as I crank up the tunes to drown out my own sense of impending doom. I think of them as I do what I know how to do and what gives me joy, be it ever so small or ineffective considering the looming eco-apocalypse.

I want to delve into the findings of that disturbing “Earth Beyond 6 of 9 Boundaries” study—which I’ll call the “Earth Out of Bounds report” in the remainder of this book—and get a better understanding of what these assessments mean. If the “doctors” have issued a dire prognosis for our Earthly life support systems, shouldn’t we at least read their reports? My children’s futures depend on the viability of these life support systems, after all.

I’ve managed to summon the courage and the necessary fortifications to delve into the report, and to devote an entire chapter to each topic. Seems the least I can do, given the gravity of the topics. Note that I’m not claiming to represent the exact findings of this scientific report—some of it is over my head, I confess. I’m sharing what I got out of reading about each category of concern, what fears and possible responses each prompted.

Still, I am worried about putting any additional strain on my own emotional support systems. I’m already at DEFCON 2, with little provocation required for me to go nuclear.

So, I’ve taken a cue from the musical therapists of the *Titanic* for the chapters in which we consider the “Earth Out of Bounds” report. I’ve created a playlist of suggested

musical selections to play as we go,⁴ to ease our collective distress, as we consider all this awful news.

Taking another cue from my own eco-grief management plan, I'm also dispersing the "Playlist chapters" among some other, more frivolous stories. Let's give ourselves some time and space to process the worrying conclusions of the "Earth Out of Bounds" report. To grieve, to curse, to rage before plowing through the next installment of furious facts. There's always time for cursing.

Facing the truth about the state of the natural world that supports all our lives is not for the faint of heart. I know. I've spent many a dark day, cowering and crying. Seeing my children begin their young adulting lives, knowing the horrific crises they are inheriting, convinces me to step up my efforts to do what I can.

My book *Love Earth Now* focused on our discovering and heeding our individual calls to action—along with essential self-care for body, mind and spirit. All are vital if we are to have the bandwidth to stay engaged.

This time around, however, I'm broadening the perspective into the sphere of our cul-de-sacs, communities, clubs and confederations. Much as the Powers That Be may want to keep us fragmented and isolated, we can do so much more working together. From our places of despair, we can take heart knowing how many community-based, national, and international organizations are already taking concerted action. They offer us not only hope, but camaraderie for the

⁴ Listen on Spotify <https://tinyurl.com/yb9dd4hm> OR Tidal: <https://tinyurl.com/ycx4kvff>. Or search for "And the Band Played on For Madness Readers"

long road ahead of us.

I'll still do some of my trauma processing alone by mad-shrieking in my closet, but this introvert has discovered a deep satisfaction in collaborating, pooling resources and taking turns. When I need a break, I'm grateful to know the work continues. Grassroots multitasking to the sanity rescue.

Deep breaths . . .

“If we wait for governments, it’ll be too late; if we act as individuals, it’ll be too little; but if we act as communities, it might just be enough, just in time.”

Rob Hopkins, cofounder of the Transition Town Movement.

TRANSITION TOWNS

“Community-led Transition groups are working for a low-carbon, socially just future with resilient communities, more active participation in society, and caring culture focused on supporting each other. . . . There is an increasing recognition that top-down approaches are not sufficient alone to affect change and need to be combined with community-level responses.”

<https://transitionnetwork.org/>

If you're looking for your “eco-village,” folks in your local area who are building a more resilient place to live, check

out the Transition Town Movement. Launched in 2006 in Totnes, England, community members came together to re-imagine what it means to live in a sustainable society. Not waiting for their government, big corporations, or anyone else to implement it for them, they selected their own projects, designed to support their local community in adapting to a rapidly changing world.

The idea spread to other local communities, and now there are Transition Town chapters in towns, villages, cities, and schools across 48 countries. Is there one near you?

Each Transition group sets its own priorities, agendas and actions, guided by principles and resources from the organization. They may opt to focus on local food production, energy dependence, pursuing zero waste goals, community education, developing a local currency, and more.

How do you start a Transition Town? Check out the TED Talk of Lynn Hartle, a member of the Transition Town in Greater Media, Pennsylvania.

[TED TALK](#)

“In Transition Town Greater Media (TTGM), we launched a FreeStore which was created to keep household items out of the landfill, create a circular economy, and help people understand how a “gift economy” can contribute to reducing our waste stream and improve community resilience. We also helped foster the Green Wagon project, which is like a little lending library, but for native plants. It provides a place where neighbors can get free plants for their yards, participate directly in improving the neighborhood biodiversity, and learn about the benefits of planting natives. Both initiatives promote opportunities for socializing, connecting and learning while helping our community thrive.”

Skip Shuda, TTGM President, Media PA

Learn more about the Transition Town in Greater Media, PA:

Transition Town Greater Media <https://ttgmPA.org>

About The Author



Cheryl Leutjen draws from her experience as a geologist, attorney, small business owner, spiritual practitioner, nervous stand-up comic, and worried mother. This wealth of experience, along with degrees in Interdisciplinary Ecology, Environmental Geology, and Law, affords her a broad perspective to contemplate the dire environmental challenges of our time. She writes, rants, and facilitates creative experiences to inspire us all to discover our own path of living more Earth-mindfully.

Her book, *Love Earth Now*, won a Silver Nautilus Book Award.

She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and three cats who care not one whit about her credentials.

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