

Fierce Love

How One Mother Reinvented Herself by Saving the Planet

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Foreword

In the summer of 2006, in the midst of a divorce with two little guys in diapers, I found a cause. And I will never be the same.

I am a self-employed psychologist specializing in addiction. That day in June 2006, sitting on the coach in the family room, I realized that global warming poses a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of my children, now and in the future. Since that defining moment, I've decided to use my expertise in behavior change to serve as a catalyst to protect the planet for my children—for all children.

Love motivated me not just to recycle – perhaps a little obsessively—but to speak out, to become an engaged voter, and in spite of my natural reserve, to become a public person. I became an “unlikely environmentalist.” My life, my work, my world have changed. *I've* changed.

Today, I look at my cell phone which has been missing its back since I dropped it and my younger son picked up the back piece—the rest is history. My car has had a dent in it for month-- and in the great triage of my life as a single, self-employed parent, other things have taken priority. I struggle with how I will pay for health insurance for my boys—and wonder if we will be dropped for actually using that insurance. My older son has been known to say, “Mom, will you *please* take the kitty litter out of the back seat of the car?” And somehow-- for some mysterious reason-- my graduate degree didn't prevent me from dropping the pan of rice and chicken that I was about to serve my son for lunch today. I juggle a lot of balls, and I drop some. Welcome to my world!

And with all that on my mind, I listen to the news. Wildfires and hurricanes here and abroad. Drought in the Southeastern and Western states. Floods in India and protracted drought in Kenya. Today coincidentally I am packing up gifts for our first babysitter who was from Kenya, and has since gone back with her three beautiful children, Tony, Claude and Zawade. Carlyne, our sitter, told me that in the village where she grew up, no one has streams running through their yards anymore. They don't have running water. They rely on streams for water. The fact that the streams have dried up is a big deal for them. This is the human face of climate change.

Yet also today, I learn that the Nobel Prize in economics goes for research on how we can successfully share our natural resources—a vital part of the solution to the problem of how we can continue to thrive on this planet which indeed has limits. And by sheer coincidence I read a blog by my friend Rob Harmon (<http://www.b-e-f.org/blog/?p=1312>) who just invented something he calls Water Restoration Credits-- which allows us to purchase credits that fund the replenishment of dry streams—for a buck a stream. Signs of progress.

So why am I writing my own Foreword? I tried to get someone else, but... When I met Al Gore at a signing for *In Defense of Reason*, I told him the title of my book. He said, “Great title.” Shortly thereafter, I asked him to write the Foreword to my book. Hubris, I know. His staff politely said, “No.” So, here I sit... writing my own Foreword.

What I've found, even though I am overwhelmingly busy, is that being involved in a cause pulls me out of myself and my personal concerns. So here I am, bumping along imperfectly as I make

dinners, oversee my psychology practice, arrange play dates, shuttle the boys to soccer, try to figure out how to pay bills, write a book, run the “green” organization I founded, get the kids to the doctor, and launch a radio show. I get less sleep than I ever have—except when I had newborn babies—and I have no regrets about having joined the growing movement of unlikely environmentalists.

I don’t wish divorce on anyone. Anyone. But I think it’s no accident that my moment of awakening occurred while I was going through a divorce—with two rascals in diapers, no less. There were things in my life, big things, over which I had little or no control. In that state, a space cracked open that made me feel like I wanted to control what I could, and offer my children the best life possible under the circumstances. So into that space came... the problem of global climate change.

I do see a certain irony here—I feel out of control of my life, so what do I do? I take on one of the greatest challenges humanity has ever faced. Well, I *am* known for my perseverance and determination... Daniel Burnham, one of our great thinkers and planners said, “Make no small plans.”

So in part thanks to my divorce, I’ve been able to reinvent myself and grow into a bigger version of myself.

If you’re like most of us, you have a lot on your plate, too. Your kids get sick, your parents get ill, your basement floods, your boss is difficult—or maybe you’ve even lost your job. And there are lots of problems in the world, some of which can seem like white noise—remote, hard to wrap your brain around, much less do anything about when you’re already too busy.

Yet I invite you to see, through my story, the hidden opportunities in your life to find purpose and meaning. I hope that you will answer that little voice—or big voice—that says, “Here’s a chance for you to make a difference. Here’s a problem that you can solve that will leave the world a better place.” No matter who you are and where you are, there are problems in your world that need solving—problems that you can use your talents and passion to address. Your life may be turned upside down, but you will come away transformed.

In the pages that follow, I share my story of personal transformation as I’ve joined the growing movement of unlikely environmentalists. I offer my psychological insights into how we move from denial to awareness to action. And I also share what I’ve learned about what global warming means in our day to day lives as well as the signs of hope and progress I see in our society as we gain more and more momentum in protecting the planet. In the final chapter I offer my suggestions for how you, too, can join this new movement of unlikely environmentalists-- and reap the rewards of doing so.

The problem that I have no choice but to address is the dire state of our planet. But you may be pulled to address another problem that you can’t turn away from. That will be your road, and your contribution. If that road takes you to the problem of the planetary crisis—our human crisis—I will be delighted to have you working along side me. But whatever cause that seizes you, when you recognize the signs there is place for you to use your talents to solve a real world

problem, and discover ways to use your time and talents to solve that problem, you will be rewarded.

Sarah Warren, Chicago, IL
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Chapter One

From Casual Recycler to Unlikely Environmentalist to New Eco Warrior: One Mother's Conversion

Several years ago, my mother told me she thought I should recycle more. I responded in an exasperated tone, "Mom, I'm busy." And I was busy—raising two little guys in diapers, going through a divorce, working. Ok. I'm lying a little. In fact, I was *really* busy. As in, overwhelmingly busy. But that was then.

Fast forward, give or take a year. In June 2006, I happened to tune into an interview on the radio with Dr. Paul Epstein, a physician at Harvard who's been studying the health effects of global warming. That day, I went from being a casual recycler, an ordinary, middle class single mother of two young rascals, working as a psychologist and career coach, to a reluctant global warming activist. First, I understood that global warming threatens my children's health, not just in the future, but now-- problems like new virulent diseases for which we have no treatments and West Nile virus. The problem was no longer remote and huge and abstract. It was a menace to my two young rascals whom I love—fiercely. I felt alarmed and agitated, yet overwhelmed and paralyzed. Thankfully, that was to change only moments later. The interviewer asked if he was pessimistic. He said, in fact, he was optimistic because so many smart people around the world were working on the problem. Then, not only could I relate to the problem, but I saw that there was collective momentum that I could join in. Having felt overwhelmed and at a loss only moments before, I now saw a vague path to action—and couldn't live with myself if I didn't take that path.

At that moment I was called to action—and I answered. I knew that I had to find a way to use my professional expertise in behavior change and addiction to make the greatest possible difference—to address our addiction to oil. I didn't know how, but I knew I had to find a way. Little did I know how amazingly my life would change, what wonderful and remarkable people I would encounter, and how much *I* would change by working to change the world for the sake of my children. I was about to become what I call an unlikely environmentalist and join the growing movement of new environmentalists, and I would ultimately become a new eco warrior.

Some years before, when global warming was first starting to receive a bit of attention in the media, as a psychologist trained in the ways of social science, I thought skeptically, "Well, life is full of cyclical curves. We don't know yet about this warming curve we're on." Over time, I had come to accept the consensus of the international scientific community that these were mere natural warming cycles, but that our human consumption of electricity and petroleum products and trees--particularly in my lifetime--generates quantities of CO₂ that overtax the ability of the plants and oceans to absorb and recycle that CO₂, causing global climate change. By that day in June of 2006, I was no longer in denial about the problem, but I was in denial about the solution.

Why a Reluctant Environmentalist?

As is often the case when one feels called—perhaps to paint, to write, or to minister—I did not feel I had a choice. As a working mother of two preschool aged boys in the midst of a divorce, free time was *not* something I had to fill. And, between motherhood and my work as a psychologist and professional coach, I already had a strong sense of purpose in life. But realizing what the global climate crisis, unchecked, meant for my children’s future left me no choice to take action.

Still, I initially approached my activism reluctantly. Perhaps my greatest source of reluctance derives from the fact that I am a deeply private person. I’ve always lived a very private life. I’ve never been more politically active than voting. Even in my professional life, I don’t go seeking clients, they seek me out because of some dilemma. And I render my professional opinions behind closed doors. Privacy suits me. But in order for me to be effective in using my expertise in addiction and behavior change on a problem of such scale and urgency, I’ve forced to become a public person, operating on a wider stage. And so, I’ve changed. I’ve grown into a new role.

I have the usual parental concerns. I had to go through the ordeal of buying health insurance, and now I’m concerned that I’ll be dropped if I use it. I’m aware that social security is going to run out. I am a member of what I call the “sandwich generation”—sandwiched between aging parents and young kids. I’m mourning the loss of my size 4 figure. I want my kids to be confident, well-rounded people who get their best shot at a good life. And I’m as busy as most of us are juggling all my responsibilities.

But no matter how busy I am, my first obligation as a mother is to keep my children healthy and safe. This is why I’ve worked to try to increase enforcement of the stop sign across from the elementary school where drivers routinely blow through, even when elderly people, dogs on leashes, and babies in strollers (including mine) are in the middle of the cross walk. Likewise, if global warming has the potential to harm my children—I have to do everything in my power to protect them from that threat. And so, I tear myself away from them, and I ask them to tolerate moments when, as my youngest son says, I’m “busy at the ‘puter.” And certainly my resilience has been tested as I juggle my various responsibilities.

Despite the considerable tradeoffs and the complexities of being a self-employed, single parent running a household with two very rambunctious little boys, the more I’ve learned about the impact of my lifestyle on global warming, the more I’ve seen what global warming means for future generations, the more I’ve explored the moral and ethical implications of inaction, and the more I’ve experienced and witnessed the personal rewards of action, the more deeply convicted I’ve become in my belief that the single most important thing I can do as a mother and a professional is devote my time and talents to trying to avert climate catastrophe for my children—for all children.

For me, global warming trumps everything else—because everything is at stake. At the same time, I understand why for other people there may see other equally or more pressing concerns. I was chatting with the door attendant at my office building one time about my book, and she said the thing that saddens and worries her is so many children getting killed by guns. In her world, that trumps everything. And I understand.

But for those of us who are not worrying about such immediate life and death concerns, for those of us who are in a position to pick and choose our commitments—I believe passionately that we need to act on the planetary crisis as the most pressing issue of our era.

Some months ago the mother of one my sons' friends said, "Thank you for your activism." I smiled and nodded, but I felt uncomfortable being called an activist. The term didn't fit my sense of myself. Yet, the term is accurate now. When more recently my younger son asked me if I was a warrior, I hesitated, then replied, "Yes." Then he said, "So you're a lady warrior." Yes, that is where love has taken me. I'm not an activist by nature, I'm activist by necessity. I've become "Dr. Sarah-- lady eco warrior."

When I met Dr. Paul Epstein recently—as I knew I someday would-- at a luncheon hosted by The Climate Group, I thanked him for coming into my life and complicating it, for the better.

Starting Down the Path

The day of my awakening, I sent two emails: The first to my friend Ann, one of my best friends from college, the other to my brother Brad, who has been working at the interface of business and the environment for nearly 25 years, telling him that this work on the health effects of global warming reminded me of our father's dinner table accounts of how events such as the construction of the Aswan dam created conditions for the development of new potent diseases. These were my first—tiny-- actions as a green activist. I didn't know then how much more was to follow. And how much I would change.

That pivotal day, I connected global warming to potential harmful effects on my children. That was one part of the causal chain—the implications of global climate change. Since then, I've set about learning how my lifestyle contributes to global warming pollution-- thereby putting my children at risk. This was another part of the causal chain that I came to see, not just how global warming affects my life, but how I affect the health of the planet and its inhabitants through my actions and inactions. As I've gradually learned more and more about my contribution to the problem—little parts in the causal chain--- I've challenged myself to reduce my global warming pollution.

And, I embarked on the awkward, sometimes painful process of figuring out how I could use what I call my "spheres of influence" to bring my expertise in behavior change to bear on this most vital problem. How could I use my years of experience as a psychological coach, a business consultant, and an addictions specialist to address what people from Tom Friedman, author of *Hot, Flat and Crowded*, to President Geore Bush have called "our addiction to oil"?

After thrashing about for several months, mentally trying on different roles as an expert in behavior change for the age of planetary crisis, I hit on the idea of writing this book—an inspirational and informative personal account about the personal rewards of combating climate change. And because the book is personal in nature, all of my parental and professional activities, missteps, dilemmas, ventures, adventures and encounters become material for the book.

Interestingly, as I've become more involved in our environmental crisis, my career coaching practice has evolved. I had previously offered values-oriented career transition coaching, but a new focus of the coaching process became helping people "green" their careers. This is partly because of the self-selection of clients, I'm sure, and partly because the topic has been on more and more people's minds. It's certainly been an opportune way for me to integrate my personal interest with my work. So I've "greened" my business and career by helping other people green their careers.

And working on the book led me to think further about how to enlist more unlikely environmentalists, which led me to found the Spheres of Influence Salon on Climate Change. The Salon, a national and local organization, brings "Inner Sphere" national thought leaders and experts around the country into relationship with each other to promote the work of combating climate change. But importantly, it brings "Outer Sphere" concerned citizens who are aware but not engaged into dialogue with experts, providing "on ramps" to make a difference. When a new member emailed to say that after she and her teenage son attended a policy engagement event, her son understood how important his voice will be, I said "*Yes!*"

Through Spheres of Influence I developed a friendship with actress Nora Dunn, a member of the organization. When I was approached to develop a green radio show, I asked her if she'd like to co-host. She said yes, and thus was born a novel collaboration. Five years ago, I would never have dreamed that I would co-host a radio show.

Melissa O'Mara, a sustainability leader at IBM, joined Spheres of Influence largely because she saw in me someone who was playing "A Bigger Game." Melissa is trained as a coach in the Bigger Game™ model, which sees as a wonderful approach to helping people challenge themselves to use their talents on a larger scale. Ten years ago I would have said I was content to work competently as a psychologist in my practice and raise a family. Now, here I am, playing a bigger game than I'd ever imagined.

Along the way, I've met wonderful people whom I wouldn't have otherwise met, have deepened my relationship with my brother with whom I now talk to across 2000 miles sometimes more than once a day, and I've changed my sense of myself in the world by empowering myself to use my voice beyond the privacy of my office.

Transformation and Empowerment

In order to do this work, I've had to grow into a larger sense of myself. The process has been both painful and exciting. Painful because I've had to push myself, both personally and professionally, to live into a larger role than I ever inhabited. Although I've used my psychological training in a number of different ways—from research to teaching to expert witness to career coaching and addictions treatment—I've always felt, until now, clear about my professional identity. I can, of course, continue rendering services as before, and I have—but new, broader uses of my knowledge lie ahead. Painful because of the uncertainty of having no "job description," no road map for how to navigate this unprecedented juncture in my own life and in history. Painful because there are not enough hours in the day to be useful in this crisis in

all the places where I see need and opportunity. Painful because of the uncertainty of being able to have a significant impact.

But, the process has been exciting because as I work to ensure a viable world for my children, I am changing myself. My brother commented to me recently that we had undergone a role reversal from our relationship as teenagers, when he careened around while I cautiously navigated the world. Now, I'm the one who's taking risks and making grand plans for a new career with lofty intentions. He has many more years of substantive knowledge about the environment, but I'm leading him out onto a wider stage.

Exciting because the challenges we face at this moment in history represent a tremendous opportunity for us to come together for the sake of humanity.

Now I know the research on the women in the 1970s who fought to clean up Love Canal, the country's most notorious toxic waste site in New York State. Those women were similarly transformed. I'm not alone in reaping the personal rewards of fighting to protect the natural world for the sake of my children.

Using My Spheres of Influence

Since my turning point, I've been discovering, expanding, and using my spheres of influence—as a consumer, a parent, and as a member of a school community, as a voter, a parishioner, a professional, and a neighbor. I've discovered that I have voice that I can use in every part of my life-- not just in my office-- , and everywhere I go I can model my own version of environmental stewardship. And I reap the personal rewards of living in alignment with my values.

I've not just been writing, speaking, and adjusting my lifestyle and business practices. I also joined the Executive Committee of Cool Globes: Hot Ideas for a Cooler Planet, a partnership between the City of Chicago and the Field Museum of Natural History that used public art – to the tune of 124 globes during the summer of 2007 on Chicago's beautiful and well-traveled lakefront—to increase public awareness of global warming “solutions.” The project started with the modest goal of finding 25 corporate globe sponsors to raise funds for environmental education in the Chicago Public Schools, and ended up with over 100 sponsors ranging from Toyota to Starbucks. Thousands of visitors went on guided tours of the globes. A free downloadable curriculum was developed, and now the Conservation Clubs in the Chicago schools have \$500,000 to work with instead of their previous annual budget of \$75,000. The public sculptures developed in this project have now traveled to San Francisco and Washington, DC as well as London. Among other things, this project was achieved largely by the hard work of many newly minted “unlikely environmentalists.”

Living the motto “I'm using my spheres of influence,” I try not only to live and work in a manner that is mindful of my environmental impact, but to catalyze action on global warming in all places in my life. I found a collaborator at my sons' school who was interested in greening the school's practices. My co-chair and I learn from each other in little ways—she got me thinking for the first time about the wastefulness of straws. She and I have had a number of conversations about how lifestyle change is a process, and is a matter of negotiation with spouses. Her husband

sets the “green” bar high—she jokes that her husband might divorce her if she used paper towel-- even recycled-- instead of cloth rags. Even though she’s committed, she hasn’t always been ready to go as far as he has.

I also scatter email and Twitter “seeds” to the wind when I find information that others might use—even occasionally in foreign countries, and field phone calls from friends who want to go green. At my church I asked the rector and his wife what stood in the way of recycling. This led to their suggesting that they form a green committee to look at environmental issues as a facility. The committee has formed, and I’m not on it, thankfully—so I successfully served as a catalyst. I’ve instituted recycling at my office suite and gotten the light bulbs switched over to compact fluorescents even though there was some initial concern about the quality of the light-- which turned out not to be a problem. Because I see an opportunity for corporations to take an important leadership role in reducing global warming pollution, I helped Corporate Climate Response plan a two day conference in Chicago in the fall of 2007. For the first time in my life, I’ve called my US Senator’s office—that Senator now happens to be President of the United States.

Even small encounters can be significant—when I’m offered a paper or plastic bag in the store, I’ll usually smile and say, “I don’t need a bag, thanks. I’ve got my own. You know—save the planet!” Often the checkout clerk agrees, and sometimes they’ll remark that they’ve never seen reusable sacks like the ones I use, and they’ll ask where I got them. One day, I declined bags at the supermarket—not Whole Foods mind you-- and the checkout clerk said I was the third person that day who didn’t want bags. They’re reinforcing me, in effect, for my efforts by letting me know I’m not alone.

Speaking up has also had the effect of enlisting people directly. I’ve had not just friends and acquaintances but strangers volunteer to help with my book in various ways—doing research, editing, connecting me to resources. People want to get involved in this issue. It makes them feel good.

It is indeed exciting to feel emboldened to engage the world in this unprecedented moment in history.

Faith and Hope

My work on the climate crisis is an act of faith, based in a belief that as human beings we have the capacity to use our intelligence to learn how to live in a way that will allow life – including human life-- to thrive on earth, and to do what’s right and necessary to protect the children we love.

My faith derives in part from an earlier conversion—to Christianity. I had been raised in a secular family. My father subscribed to a rational-scientific world view. We had discussions about the nature of the universe, but spirituality never entered in. My mother is prone to taking in strays—both animals and people-- but rejects organizations of most sorts. Having been raised in the Congregational Church, somehow she found reason to rebel—against what, I’m not sure! After I finished graduate school-- and lost that community—I went looking for a new

community, which I ambivalently sought in church. Some months later, on Easter Sunday, the priest preached about being invited to “the dance”, and said it was OK to stumble. I accepted the invitation—and have been stumbling around ever since.

Part of what I realized through that conversion experience was that I was longing for connection to people who had lived before me and to people who would come after me, to traditions and people that transcended my lifetime. I call on my faith now during this challenging time, and also on that sense of connection to those who will come after my lifetime.

Since my own conversion to the life of an eco warrior, numerous religious leaders have spoken out on the global climate crisis. The Pope has repeatedly talked about the importance of caring for Creation, saying, "We need a decisive `yes' to care for creation and a strong commitment to reverse those trends that risk making the situation of decay irreversible." Since his election, the Vatican has supported environmental sustainability through a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions, and the Pope has also said they will install solar power in the Vatican City. For the first time at its 2007 annual convention, the Islamic Society of North America, one of the largest Muslim groups in the US, addressed the issue of conservation. In my own community, we have one church that has completely “greened” its sanctuary and offices, and a synagogue under construction that promises to become the first certified green synagogue in the country. Yet another nearby synagogue has a staff position dedicated to environmental stewardship. The Dalai Lama has been a vocal spokesperson for the environment. In 2006, seventy-six Evangelical leaders issued “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.” The paper calls for federal legislation on carbon emissions, and asks Christians to vote their conscience on global warming. Among the signers was Rick Warren, author of the best seller *The Purpose-Driven Life*—certainly I’ve found my purpose. Since then evangelicals, climate scientists, and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club have collaborated on a number of occasions. The UN Secretary General spoke at a meeting of evangelicals at which he noted the fact that those in the developing world who have the least responsibility for climate change will be the hardest hit. He said, “We have an ethical obligation to right this injustice. We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable. Without a strong global effort against global warming, we will fail in achieving ...the implicit human right to economic justice and development....The good news is that people and institutions of faith all over the world agree. This gives me great hope.” In 2008, a group of 45 Southern Baptist leaders, one of whom was persuaded by his son, signed a statement supporting stewardship of the earth. Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson, who was raised Southern Baptist, wrote *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, which makes the urgent case for caring for the environment in a series of letters to an imaginary pastor. E.O. Wilson also has spoken of the potential for us to destroy ourselves--and our capacity to save ourselves using our human ingenuity. There is a great deal of preventable human suffering at stake. Pastor Joel Hunter of Northland Church in Orlando told me that the impetus for his involvement in fighting climate change. In my view doing everything in my power--and enlisting others to do the same—is the only option.

Organized religion aside, since my “green” awakening, my relationship with nature has deepened. Previously my environmental actions were primarily limited to recycling—and pretty much on autopilot. I was busy starting a family and working, and didn’t connect my actions to their consequences for the natural world that I pretty much took for granted. Now I’ve come to

live more mindfully. “Mindfulness” has come somewhat into vogue lately, with myriad authors such as Andrew Weil, MD recommending programs of spiritual renewal and health through mindfulness. I believe that mindfulness can help not just our souls and our relationships and bodies but help us make decisions that take into account our effect on the environment – and on our children. As I walk my kids to school, I appreciate the subtle changes in the weather more. As my older son has taken an interest in learning about birds, I’ve learned to see and hear birds more—which is lovely. I ask myself questions as I make purchases—How much energy did it take to make this? How far was it transported to get here? How long it will be of use? Can it be recycled or reused? Do we really need it to begin with? How big a house do we really need? How do I routinely use the car and how big does it *really* need to be to accomplish that anyway? Those questions constitute a form of mindfulness.

And faith in humanity helps fuel my reserves of resilience to do the work that needs to be done.

And for me, being active in addressing the problem gives me hope. My own actions make me feel that I am doing everything I can for my children, and I encounter countless others who are doing their part in big and small ways. This brings me hope.

The Legacy of Lady Warriors

Many feisty mamas have come before—motivated by love-- and made the world a healthier, safer place for our children.

Feistiness is about mother dogs scrappily protecting their young. They will do whatever they have to do to keep their young safe.

Protecting our children means that we dig down deep to find resilience and courage. We don’t put up with priests who molest children, or contaminants in the food we feed our children, or lead in their lunch boxes, or coaches who bully our kids. It’s about passionately saying “*No*” to threats to our children, and “*Yes*” to our children thriving.

Candy Lightner, the mother who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) -- and sparked a movement that made our roads much safer—was scrappy. After her 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was killed by a drunken hit-and-run driver on a suburban street in California, Candy stood up and fought to make sure that other sons and daughters were not killed by drunk drivers. She mobilized others to become advocates for safer roads. She later wrote, "I promised myself on the day of Cari’s death that I would fight to make this needless homicide count for something positive in the years ahead." That’s feisty.

Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, built her environmentally conscious business from one little shop to 2,000 worldwide. A vibrant and humorous mother who recently died of hepatitis C, she wanted to make sure that her customers put natural and healthy products on their skin—and therefore in their bodies. She strove to minimize the environmental impact of her business, and to ensure that her suppliers in developing countries were fairly compensated. She was a model of corporate responsibility who believed in giving back to the community and holding other corporations accountable.

Ida B. Wells, a self-described “hot head,” helped launch the NAACP. In the 1890’s, among other things, she fought against lynchings of African Americans as well as whites. When she learned of one particular lynching, she decided not to pursue it until her 13 year-old son said, “If you don’t go, nobody else will.”

Alice Trillin was a classy, feisty mama. The daughter of two heavy smokers, when she was diagnosed with lung cancer, she became an outspoken opponent of second-hand smoke. She was not afraid to speak her mind and challenge whomever she believed needed to be challenged. And, among other things, she was beautiful, charming, wore fabulous clothes, and proudly refused to wear sensible shoes. Given my love of shoes, I can relate. She recently died of lung cancer, and is beautifully remembered by her husband, Calvin Trillin, in *About Alice* (2007).

Soft spoken mother of two, Maya Lin, best known for designing the Viet Nam wall as a very young woman, has been working for two decades to raise awareness of the environmental crisis through her powerful art installations.

When Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize risked her life to prevent deforestation in Kenya, this charming, gracious mother showed sass to the corrupt authorities who beat her for her courage. When the Nobel Committee honored her “for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace,” they recognized that global peace depends upon respect for nature.

We all remember Julia Roberts’ portrayal of Erin Brockovich. Well, years later, Erin Brockovich-Ellis continues her environmental advocacy by going after still more corporate polluters as the director of research at a law firm. She believes that mothers’ love is a strong motivator to protect the natural world—and she embodies that belief.

Social venture pioneer Lisa Nigro founded the famous Inspiration Café in Chicago while she had twin toddlers in tow. The Inspiration Café broke new ground in empowering homeless people to become economically self sufficient. Recently she said in a radio interview, “I’m just an ordinary girl with an extra-ordinary spirit.” I know Lisa—she does have extra-ordinary spirit.

Perhaps less well known, Margaret Hetherman is single, self-employed mother in New York. She spent her own money to mount billboards on the I-94 in Detroit where she’s from originally, saying “Take back the winter” with her daughter’s image in the background. She decided to launch the campaign in response to questions from her 5 year old daughter. She wants her daughter to know snow in winter as she did as a child herself. It’s amazing what one person can do.

Of course, mothers don’t have a corner on love as a motivation to leave the world a better place. In fact, I’ve interviewed a number of dads who are fighting to protect the planet for our children and grandchildren. They are attorneys and real estate developers and physicians and school teachers, all members of the growing movement of new environmentalists.

We share a common bond. We all love our children fiercely and are working to leave the world a better place.