

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*

“I don't have to tell you things are bad. Everybody knows things are bad. . . We know the air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat, and we sit watching our TVs while some local newscaster tells us that today we had fifteen homicides and sixty-three violent crimes, as if that's the way it's supposed to be . . . I don't want you to riot—I don't want you to write to your congressman because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. . . I want you to get up now . . . and go to the window. Open it, and stick your head out, and yell:

**I'M AS MAD AS HELL,
AND I'M NOT GOING
TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!”**

Lumet, Sidney, director. *Network*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1976. 2 hrs., 1 min.

Introduction

As the news reels of superstorms, firestorms and shitstorms play on and on, the bad news no longer restricted to the nightly news shows,¹ I can't stop thinking about this scene in the old movie, *Network*. I don't recall much about the film except for that scene, so I can't say if it holds up to the high standing I've given it in my memory banks. Not everything does—I used to think tube tops were a flattering fashion choice.

But that scene comes back to me time and again, over all these decades. The intensity and the fury of the newscaster, urging, *commanding!* people to stick their heads out of their windows and shout, “I'm mad as hell and not going to take it anymore!”

I so relate to his frustration. His wrath. What I do not understand is why we aren't all shouting out our windows, as we witness ever more ruin of our stable climate, fresh water, soils, oceans, forests, coral reefs, biodiversity, and², dare I say, basic civility. All the while some so-called news outlets ridicule peer-reviewed scientific studies and armchair “experts” send death

¹ It's true, kids. Back in my day, news broadcasts were shown before and after prime-time evening programming. News reports weren't a 24/7 thing.

² ...bees, frogs, gorillas, rhinos, box turtles, orangutans, tigers, lemurs, and I have to stop there, or I'll be too sad to write any more.

threats to hard-working scientists³ for daring, like their predecessor Galileo, to challenge the culturally convenient lies we've been told about the world. While ultra-conservative billionaires fund disinformation campaigns, and so many elected representatives do nothing but rail against the WOKE⁴ agenda. The idiotic assertions ("drink bleach to cure COVID!"),⁵ the denial of basic truths ("it snowed today so climate change is a hoax!"), and the absurd deflections of responsibility⁶ come at me like a freight train full of coked-up monkeys that I swear I did not order, Universe.

There's so much to be mad about these days, isn't there? Despite my propensity to rant about the small-but-maddening minutiae of daily life, I repress most of my anger over these critical issues that threaten Life as We Know It. The problems loom too large and too many—I just cannot get my arms around the magnitude and multitudes. But I know they are deadly, lethal for our kind, dimming the bright futures we want for our children. I'm furious that we've let it come to this.

It's not easy containing the rage. Confining it in a smoldering tinder box requires half of my dwindling energy. But I've given it everything I've got, terrified I'd self-

³ Some 40% of 468 climate scientists surveyed in late 2022 say that they've experienced online harassment because of their work; it's 73% for the scientists who post at least once a month.

⁴ Anyone else find it ironic that the term "woke," which some use to deny systemic racial injustice, originated from Black culture—as a warning of potential violence against Black People? Can't make this stuff up.

⁵ E.g., drinking bleach might cure or prevent COVID-19. Five states reported an increase in calls to poison control centers after Trump's comments about drinking bleach as disinfectant.

⁶ Delivered, ninety-nine times out of ten, by the person who is absolutely the most responsible, per my unofficial survey.

immolate if I unleashed all that pent-up, white-hot fury.

I'm also a deeply spiritual, New Age type person, well-schooled in the Law of Attraction ("LOA" for the disciples), and that's where the real trouble begins. Believe it or not. The LOA, as I understand it, is a fancy way of saying "like attracts like," and that includes our thoughts. If we are thinking about being broke all the time, the Universe will keep sending us more experiences of being broke.⁷ So if I want more hope, more happiness, more joy in my life, then I must project more hope! More happiness! More joy!

Sure, that's an oversimplification, but few things please me more than wrapping up something squirmy in a neat package, like swaddling a soft-scented baby that was a poop-covered mess just a bath ago. Chef's kiss. I find fewer and fewer opportunities to do that nowadays, though. The world around me seems a palette of murky hues reminiscent of diarrhea, the black-and-white clarity of my youth vanished like my waistline.

I'm doing my best to think the happy thoughts—which requires a gargantuan effort these days, akin to birthing octuplet elephants—given the poor prognosis for our species on planet Earth. Did you see the news that, not only was 2023 the hottest year on record, but that all ten of the hottest years have occurred in the last decade? That the coverage of Antarctic Sea ice hit a record low in 2023? That the oceans are warming at an

⁷ The Universe can be a real ass sometimes. PLEASE DON'T SEND ME ANY DONKEYS.

“unprecedented”⁸ rate, which means they can absorb less of our excess CO₂? That the collapse of the entire Amazon ecosystem could occur much sooner than we ever imagined? Or that plastic, the “forever waste,” is now so pervasive that it’s in our lungs, livers, kidneys, breast milk, testicles, and our infants? Or that scientists give us just a handful of years to make massive reductions in emissions or we’re toast?⁹ How fortunate that all this is unfolding just when the chances of the U.S. tackling these crises post-November 2024 Presidential election are slim to none . . . she said dripping with sarcasm.

And still, I’ve soldiered on, battling with the ferocity of my cat hopped-up on too much catnip, trying to stay aboard that power-of-positive-thinking train. I can’t utter the words “I’m angry” aloud without looking for the lightning bolts. Ridiculous.

And dangerous. I’ve been forestalling a full-out venting of my rage with the clench of a boa constrictor, but bottling up all the flaming fury I feel isn’t good for my mental health. I’m grateful my parents taught me about meditation instead of shooting guns to deal with emo angst. I’m so ill-suited for jail.

So, as of today, with you, dear reader, as my witness, I’m relinquishing my grip and jumping off the cliff into the land of Fury—praying I land with more agility than

⁸ “Unprecedented” being the most overused word of our times. I caution against making it the trigger word for your drinking game while watching the news.

⁹ But, no worries, I heard those rascally scientists who have devoted their lives to serious research can’t be trusted; they’re just in it for the money. We’ve all seen how many scientists make the Billionaires List, right?

the time I flew over the handles of the motorbike I had just “learned” to drive.¹⁰

Today, I am giving myself permission to purge the pent-up negativity like that scene in the horror classic, *The Exorcist*, where the possessed child spews green projectile vomit. And rant like I’ve never ranted before. Forget the years of training in Midwest Nice. Say it all without consideration of the karmic blowback—even to the point of revealing my cringiest confession: I’m mad at God. I feel we’ve been set up to fail. Fail at solving climate change, fail at caring for the biodiversity on which humans rely, fail at protecting the natural resources that support Life as We Know It.

Which makes me even madder.

More on that later.

If you can relate to my fury, in any small way, if the death spiral in which our once-bountiful Nature churns keeps you up at night, this book is for you.

But it’s not for everyone. This is not a book to read if you’re looking for flowery prose,¹¹ positive affirmations or simplistic “change your light bulbs and all will be well” platitudes.¹²

I’m not here to convince anyone that climate change is not only real, but deadly for our kind. Or that preserving habitat for red wolves and mountain lions is more important than new mini-malls and mega mansions. Or

¹⁰ Explaining the blood and bruises when I went back to work at the movie theater after that lunch break was interesting. I can’t recall, but I hope there was a gory film playing that day.

¹¹ If you ARE looking for flowery prose, I recommend reading my prior book, *Love Earth Now*.

¹² Or if superabundant and superfluous footnotes upset you.

that giving up coal-fired plants and gas-guzzling vehicles is essential if we want a climate that sustains Life as We Know It.

If the science, the hellfire storms, and all the alarm bells ringing aren't enough to convince you that our benevolent, life-sustaining environment is worth protecting, then I suggest you keep your TV tuned to whatever station feeds you the disinformation you like to hear.

“Today, no nation can find lasting security without addressing the climate crisis. We face all kinds of threats in our line of work, but few of them truly deserve to be called existential. The climate crisis does.”

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III
Leaders Summit on Climate, April 22, 2021

My patience with “this isn't the right time” and the “science is uncertain” crap is long spent, like my tax refund before it even arrives. I mean to act with the urgency that's worthy of the many crises we face as a species on this planet. As a recent cancer survivor, my life expectancy is not what it used to be. I intend to be a force for positive change while I can, as a lasting gift to my children.

If you're even a fraction as concerned as I am, I hope you'll read on. Maybe you'll find some camaraderie in our collective rage. Maybe we will even find some peace

through the catharsis. But I make no guarantees. There just aren't any anymore. That's something that those of us who were convinced Hillary Clinton would win the 2016 election have learned.

Witnessing the destruction of our beautiful world, knowing humanity has had so many chances to make more life-affirming choices, creates the perfect recipe for a scalding soup of anger, anguish, and frustration. I mean to steep in that furious stew until my blood stops boiling. The way a 104-degree fever brings on chills. That's my plan, anyway.

Only then will I be any good to anyone, because trying to hold it all in makes me too exhausted to act. To appreciate the beauty that, thanks to a host of miracles, still surrounds me. To pick up my hatchet and bucket so I can continue to chop wood and carry water.¹³

“This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of the world. So don't be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, because these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnectedness with all beings.”

Joanna Macy, renowned environmental activist
and scholar of Buddhism and deep ecology

¹³ Taken from a Zen Buddhist saying:
“Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.”

This book is a mish-mash of rants filled with furious facts and rambling essays about my own frantic efforts to cope with the madness, sprinkled with spurts of comedic relief.¹⁴ In other words, it's about as chaotic as the times in which we live. That's just how I roll these days, lurching and reeling, as each new terrifying wave crashes over the bow of my rickety old ship.

I was prepared for some disruptions as we transitioned from the Old Ways, and we figured out how to live sustainably. I just never imagined they would give way to . . . even older, antiquated ways, the norms circa 1950, say.

I tell myself it's the "last gasp of the old gas,"¹⁵ and that entrenched systems and hierarchies aren't going to go quietly in the night.¹⁶ But it's hard to stomach, like eating Flaming Hot Cheetos when my acid reflux flares up.

If I am to stay well-informed (and the jury is still out whether that's a healthy choice for me), I must digest the furious facts in bite-sized chunks. And then follow up each chunk with one of my many coping and, *dare I say it*, thriving mechanisms that keep me upright and functioning. On most days.

I invite you to pick and choose your own mix of

¹⁴ That's how bad things have gotten—this introvert has turned to stand-up comedy to get some things off her Earth-loving and plastic-hating chest.

¹⁵ "Gas" being a definitely on purpose pun, given the stranglehold the fossil fuel companies have had on our abilities to change and adapt for so long.

¹⁶ Exhibit A being recent Supreme Court decisions that hamper the efforts of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to respond to the climate emergency. As if tackling climate change wasn't hard enough!

chapters to read, tackling the deep dives when you're sufficiently steeled, and opting for the shallow swims when you're not. We've already put off making the necessary systemic changes essential for our survival for decades now. Instead of rushing in like well-meaning missionaries who unwittingly kill their converts with smallpox, let's give ourselves some reflection time. Get some facts. Ponder. Then, leaning on the love in our hearts for all we hold dear, make our considered plans of action. And give them all we've got. This is no time for playing small.

Those action plans may include joining forces with others who share your pain, your vision, your desperate need to be a force for good at this harrowing time. Most chapters in this book end with a showcase of one of the many, many, many groups, clubs, nonprofits, and “cussed stubborn” folks who have channeled their own fears and furies into positive actions.

Perhaps one of their missions will inspire you to form your own posse. Or to seek out an existing chapter near you. Doing something meaningful is the best antidote to despair that I know. Doing it in the company of like-hearted souls amplifies that curative salve a hundredfold—at least it does for me.

We are stronger together. Let the heartless destroyers know that we will not quietly sip our Merlots and whiskeys,¹⁷ while turning a blind eye to the devastation that the status quo wreaks.

¹⁷ I don't mean to disparage the periodic use of numbing tonics. But they have yet to solve any of my problems, no matter what reassurances they provide in the moment.

Be good to yourselves, no matter the speed at which you're navigating the grave challenges of our time. "Self-care" may be the most overused trope today, and yet it's essential if we are all to remain functioning, doing what we can, and, yes, thriving.

Now, take a deep breath, and. . .

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Let's get this rant party started.

Exercise our Right to Free Speech as loudly as we can, while we still have it.

What's making YOU mad?

Come meet me at the window.

Bring a megaphone.

GO.