

**CLIMATE, from page 5**

they're facing with such energy, intelligence, heart and courage! Those are the people we need to be pointing our own children to, and even adults to, because they are profoundly engaged in ways that are actually making a difference.

What I would tell anyone 13 and up is that we do have solutions and we do have a dire problem, and we have to get to the root problems, and that's going to take everybody.

**E.G.:** *What would you say to someone who says that if you really care about climate change, you shouldn't have become a parent in the first place?*

**M.D.:** I think that's a very unrealistic point of view. I see life in a much broader context of humans being part of a natural system, and part of a natural impulse to giving life. That said, we also have a crisis right now of too many people trying to share a dwindling number of resources.

One of the ways that I believe we need to approach this is from a pragmatic point of view. Who wants to have children, and who is in a position to or doesn't want to have children? Both of those sets of women or couples – are they empowered in their choice?

At the same time, I think it is important for us to be aware of the impact that First World families in general have on the climate crisis. The American lifestyle is destructive to the planet, and it's a lifestyle that's been actively cultivated by the industry and corporate world toward consumption.

There is often focus and blame put on families for existing, for wanting children, for wanting babies in their lives, which is a beautiful thing to want. It's a natural thing to want, and I think we have to be careful not to villainize people who have children, when really the issue is that we have a larger culture of consumption that is destroying the planet. It's not our babies destroying the planet; it's the culture of consumption that's destroying the planet. And that's where we should be focused.

The fact that I did have two babies, and my babies are now consuming because they're not babies anymore, I'm aware of that. And I think that's something that I struggle with in terms of just looking at my own carbon footprint – it's bigger than it was 25 years ago

**E.G.:** *There was a lot of information in your book that surprised me. For example, that the typical American family dog has a larger carbon footprint than a person living in Haiti or Afghanistan. Why is that, and what can we do to rein in our pets' carbon "paw prints" as you put it?*

**M.D.:** That was a quote from Larry Schwartz in Salon magazine, and that surprised me, too. I found the reason dogs in particular have a large carbon footprint is they're often big, they eat a lot, and they eat a lot of meat. And the cereals that are in some of those foods have palm oil or a palm oil derivative in them, and they're really tricky to find. Some of the names of palm oil are really cleverly disguised these days, so it's hard to trace. But for dogs, one of the ways to shrink the carbon footprint is to really examine the ingredients, look at all the derivatives of all the cereals that are



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY DEMOCKER

*Mary DeMocker participates in a rally at the courthouse in Eugene.*

part of that food.

The main thing is the food, but there is a whole industry now that has grown up around pets as part of the family. There's a huge industry for pet collars, and there are a lot of plastic chew toys. There is much more medical care, grooming care, products – and it's not just for dogs. There are elaborate things for cats and for all kinds of animals. A lot of the smaller animals, guinea pigs and such, or even chickens – the shavings that we are giving our chickens for their nesting area, those are from trees. So part of it is, look at the deforestation or what may be happening with whatever pet you have and start to trace back what it is you're buying and where it comes from and what the carbon footprint actually is, for whatever animal you have living with you.

**E.G.:** *What are some small steps you think even the busiest of parents might be able to take to get their kids thinking about climate change or engaged in the movement?*

**M.D.:** One of the first things would be to inspire them, and let them meet other kids who are engaged already. And that could be through Earth Guardians, it could be through Our Children's Trust, sharing a video or reading about William Kamkwamba, the boy in the book, "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind." I think stories are a great way to start.

Another would be to know what's happening in the local community.

Find your local fight. Check out 350.org, they have a national map online. Here in the Northwest, we've choked off every proposal in recent years for new fossil fuel infrastructure. All through North America, people are stopping those dangerous

projects one by one, by forcing local officials to deny permits. Learn about your local fossil fuel resistance fight, and talk about it in age-appropriate ways with your kids.

If there is a vote coming up in your town, show up for it. You don't have to go to meetings, you don't have to knock on doors or join the campaign per se, but you can show up when it's important. Just show up for a public hearing. My kids did that; it literally took an hour and a half, and we went down on a Monday night, and we were there for the vote. When your local grassroots group has a campaign and they say, "Hey, this is when we need people," be one of those people that show up.

Show up for a protest. That's every now and then on a Saturday afternoon. Help your family put their bodies where they can see other people and be part of a group that's making their presence known at a time that matters.

Give money to grassroots groups fighting for clean energy. If nothing else, make a call to your local official or agency to demand they oppose permits for new dirty energy projects.

Another thing I would say is to do something creative with your children. Make one sign that's colorful. This could literally take 10 minutes. Stick it in your window, stick it on the back of your car, stick it on your bicycle trailer. Somewhere, put some public statement that says something that's important to you and your family. It might be "Exxon knew." It might be "One less car ride," "I'd rather be on the bullet train," "This family is for wind energy," "This family is against pipelines," whatever it is that's important to your family that links to something that's happening in your

**IF YOU GO**

**What:** Mary DeMocker book signing and discussion on climate conscious parenting. 350PDX Director Adriana Voss-Andreae will be there to connect people with local climate campaigns.

**When:** 2 p.m., Saturday, April 14.

**Where:** Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside St, Portland.

community. Put up a sign about it, make it fun; make it colorful.

**E.G.:** *As sports have come to dominate many aspects of family life, you point out that there are unintended carbon consequences as parents cart their kids from one out-of-town game to another. What's your advice for all the soccer moms and dads out there?*

**M.D.:** There's a writer, Bruce Feiler; he says it beautifully: Youth sports industry is colonizing family life. What we have done to try and minimize that is to point our kids toward sports that aren't as all-encompassing as some of the year-round travel teams. And we were in those year-round travel teams with one of my children for about four years. There are many ways that it was wonderful because it was a very tight community. We spent a lot of time together with those families, and it was wonderful for my child. At the same time, it was pretty all-encompassing.

I made an effort to point my child toward sports that were a little more balanced. When my child left the soccer world, we went to martial arts for a while, and then to ultimate Frisbee. And ultimate Frisbee, in general, is a lot more balanced for family life. There are several sports that are. One of my kids was in lacrosse, and it only met for one season, and then the rest of the year they were off. Look for sports that are only one season, or that are through, for example, the YMCA. It's affordable, and it's only once or twice a week instead of five or six days a week.

The other thing I would say is to delay it as long as possible. That's getting harder and harder, so I know that's hard for parents to do because all the other families are doing it. But if possible, delay it, especially those year-round clubs.

**E.G.:** *One chapter I could relate to my childhood was "Let Kids Play with Knives." I just don't see kids running around the neighborhoods the way they used to. But how does encouraging unstructured outdoor play tie into climate activism?*

**M.D.:** There is more and more research about how unstructured play allows children to naturally develop their capacity for personal agency and problem solving and even conflict resolution – this is in Richard Louv's book "Vitamin N."

One of the big things we're going to be handing our children is a lot of conflict in this climate crisis. If you look at what happened in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina, it was devastating in terms of the kind of human conflicts that came out of that and the kind of duress that families were put under after that flood.

If you look at Houston, that's the fourth-