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# Crista Valentino

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, world, coalition, community, rewilding, wild, nature, conservation, support, work, young, greenpeace, wilderness, instill, stories, decisions, land, vision, connected, briefcases

## SPEAKERS

Crista Valentino, Jack Humphrey

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Jack Humphrey 00:15

You're listening to the rewilding Earth podcast. The rewilding Earth podcast is supported by businesses such as Patagonia Tula and bio habitats, as well as the Wheaton foundation and listeners like you. If you love the work that the rewilding Institute is doing, please consider [donating@rewilding.org](mailto:donating@rewilding.org) and be sure to sign up for our weekly newsletter while you're there. Krista Valentino co founded coalition wild in 2013, after an invitation from the wild foundation to address the lack of support and visibility available to younger generations In the environmental sector, she continues to lobby for a stronger integration of youth voices and empowerment in organizational and business decision making, and has achieved this through recently co publishing intergenerational leadership toolkit for conservation and leading multiple projects that accelerate further initiatives around the world being led by young people for nature. Krista is the North American focal point for the world Commission on protected areas, young professionals was named Wyoming's top 40 under 40, and is on the executive committee for the 11th world wilderness Congress. Crista, thank you so much for being on rewilding earth today. I want to talk about coalition wild and how it all fits with everything I see. It's coalition based, right so I see wild foundation and nature needs half and we belong to nature needs half coalition, and I suppose them by by association, we belong to coalition wild in some way, but tell us how all this stuff works. You're the founder of coalition wild. So I'd like to hear a little bit of the background and how all of these groups work together. And even groups we might not know about.



Crista Valentino 02:09

The Wild Foundation has this amazing attribute about them that we sort of joke. They're often at the center of this very, very wide and vast web. And so you can pretty much travel anywhere around the world and mention the wild foundation or somebody within that network and probably find someone who's connected to you. And so look, we just found our one degree of separation. Here we are, here. Yeah. So how it all fits together essentially, is your the wild foundation in nature needs half is really our vision for the future. Is vision an idea that in order to create a planet that thrives and not only thrives for nature and for wildlife, and love places, but also thrives for human species ourselves. We need to consider what it is that nature needs and our ask our vision, our what we're pushing for, is to protect half of the world's land and oceans by 2030. And what that means is just that that doesn't mean the you know, your grandparents conservation, which is often fortress wilderness, you know, putting up boundaries, putting up protected areas, nobody goes in. Well, we like to think of more is how do communities interact with the world around them? And how do they take care of and work with and live alongside wildlife and wild places and in wilderness, and so nature needs to have that vision and like you, you subscribe to it, we subscribe to it and believe in it with coalition wild and then Coach, while the work that I specifically work on really started in 2013. And I realized that young people didn't really have a platform to tell their stories to get connected to each other to gain support for their involvement in the environmental movement. And so coalition wild originally started as this movement, but has really evolved into more of an organization that works to equip these emerging leaders into how do we give them the tools mentorship, connections and networks and really the the backing that they need the confidence that they need the leadership skills that they need to really make changes and change in their community but also change globally. And so of course, well fits within the wild foundation in the sense of where project of the wilds Foundation, but we work exclusively with 35 year olds and under are run completely by under 35 year olds, my entire board everyone's youth, so it's really for youth by youth effort.



Jack Humphrey 05:09

I love that. So I told you before we got started, I'm a Gen Xer, and I hang out with an awful lot of boomers in this movement. And they're the ones who came up with that fortress building wilderness stuff thus far no further, and they had a lot more to work with, you know, we've lost an awful lot over. And so things have had to change even if you, you know, wanted to do what people used to do what we always got an earful from. People like Dave foreman and David Brower and those guys, and they would always talk about their, like core stuff like Sand County Almanac, where they develop their land ethic and they developed all of these ideas. Thankfully, for all of that work, I kind of feel like an in

between or, but what we're trying to understand now, I think, is who's the Aldo Leopold now for you guys.



Crista Valentino 06:01

Yeah, well, and I love that everything that you just brought up because my first exposure I suppose to this work was through things like Aldo Leopold and land ethic. And actually my first job in the environmental sector was for an organization called the Missouri center on the ranch that the mirrors lived on in Grand Teton National Park. And if you for those who don't know, the Mary's helped to write the Wilderness Act and the Alaska Lands Act and help to preserve the the art National Wildlife Refuge, etc, etc. Marty was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and for her work in conservation, and all that. So and this was in my early 20s, and you know, 2010, I think, and so, I want a I think often when we talk about chess generations and these intergenerational shifts and changes. There's sort of this underlying thought that maybe we're pitting one against the other, that one is better than the other, or one has left and another has come in and it's, they're, they're almost opposing. We're one I personally believe that we can have both. And just because things are shifting maybe away from, as I said, that fortress wilderness or those land ethics or things like that doesn't mean that they aren't necessary or important or when used correctly in the best way that they can that they aren't useful or, you know, successful. But I what I've been really interested in watching is also just a shift in the way that as a global society, young people or This movement has been evolving, in where places it's important tense on, you know, like leadership, where before we've we've looked at these specific heads, whether it's, you know, like Aldo Leopold and John Muir and, and writers and quotes and acts and brands and logos and all these things, right? Where I think now because younger generations are so interconnected and so the world is so small for them, right? You're, you have friends on other sides of the planet that you may never meet. And you're working with people in groups towards common visions, that sometimes you don't even speak the same language, that I think that there's a much more holistic viewpoint of leadership and how to move forward with that. And so where young people are gaining that inspiration From yes is like people, you know, like gretta, who I think is a easy person to point to. But I think that they're also gaining it from so many different sources that's difficult to pinpoint one, because there's access to all of those, right? Like, you know, somebody listening here probably give me plenty of names of somebody who has inspired them, or who has helped them develop their viewpoint or idea of what biodiversity is or nature is or the need to protect it or alternatively, not protected, right. And I think it's that access that has actually provided quite a big opportunity for us to think more creatively and innovatively and with a much wider, you know, scope of understanding of how do we actually move forward in a way that provides a better future for the planet.



Jack Humphrey 09:58

That's a really good point. I love that you went there and, and described that because that is a really good way of looking at the differences between. I mean, you had to wait till somebody book came out or you had to wait until you could go to a conference to connect with people in in the old, meaningful way. You know, physically you had to get places and do and we still do all of those things. And in addition is everything that you're talking about, which is this crazy connected world where you can go out and get any information you need at any time from anybody. 24 seven on demand, and it does change an awful lot. I remember picking up a book. I think it was Greenpeace's first book on global warming in 1991 when I was in DC, and I couldn't get a job and when I had trained for in college, so



Crista Valentino 10:51

that hasn't changed either. Right?



Jack Humphrey 10:55

That is very much I hear the same. It was hard. I walked in with a tie I cut my hair I had beautiful, long hair, perfect for being a canvasser at Greenpeace. But I freaked out and thought, oh, time to get a job. We still had briefcases and stuff. I had my dad's briefcase, I didn't know what to put in. And I didn't understand briefcases. And I had a tie, and I cut my hair off. And I went to all the interviews and got rejected from all the places. And then I went up to Greenpeace and I with my tie and my short hair, and I was a bigger hippie than anybody there. And of course, they thought I was the man. So I started doing that. And I saw the book, the global warming book, it might have been the first edition or second edition, it was one of the first things I'd ever even that's the first time I ever even heard about it. And then to hear any more about it, it was really just a word of mouth thing. People would come in and educate and everything and now you can have webinars and you can get you know, people from all over the world together in one place. Nobody has to get on a plane. You know, sometimes that's really good, but other times it's not necessary. So it is a it's a different world. It's really, really cool. Is that why people feel like they can afford to really give good space for social justice alongside wilderness stuff alongside everything else? Because and I know that that's a sticking point sometimes for the older generations is like, why are you even talking about this stuff, we just go and we get this land protected. And we do this. And they don't understand. Sometimes it's that you guys have the bandwidth to do this now, because of the easy access, I think, to all kinds of different information and those things are connected.



Crista Valentino 12:33

I don't think you're wrong there. I would argue, though, that it's not necessarily about the bandwidth, but rather a deeper understanding about how it's all connected. And part of that I believe, comes from the simple aspect of having time to see how things were done in the past have affected where they are now. And again, like that, that Like, simply tie, right you can't rush that. But understanding how setting aside land and pushing people indigenous peoples off of it actually didn't work or or didn't work in the way that was maybe necessarily intended to and had unintended consequences that we're seeing now. Or we're seeing that, you know, protecting in the United States or anywhere really these these small protected areas dotted around the country that are more islands and they are interconnected. So they don't allow for migratory paths and, and you're actually putting a highway through a major migratory area for some endangered species, whatever it is. We can see that now we have the time we will look at the research and the science to back it up. And so I think that when we talked about human rights, we're understanding one that land protection and human rights go hand in hand. And then as well, too, when we're looking at climate change in the climate emergency and taking climate action, we're also seeing humans being affected by this, you know, we're seeing human refugees and, and the effects that's having on people that, that maybe don't have the resources to guard against or mitigate against or plan for climate change. And we're realizing that we can't just act for the planet, we have to act for people as well.



Jack Humphrey 14:33

Okay, but I still think you guys have a lot more bandwidth. Because you don't sleep. You don't need as much sleep and you don't take naps. And I remember what it was like.



Crista Valentino 14:43

There may be a little bit of that. I will say that I have come across. Maybe bandwidth isn't the word that I would use, but less burnout there isn't that there's there's still this bright eyed, hopeful, ambitious, you know, the world is my oyster. viewpoint. And, and that's something I actually would wish upon all of us. And for me, I think one of the things that has staved off, burnout personally, has been working with young people and I'm lucky that I get to continue to work with, you know, people between the ages of 16 and 30, no matter how old they get, but it reinvigorates me and, and reminds me how to look at the challenges we face or the problems that can't seem to be solved or each catastrophe or new news story that comes out here. And to look at it with a spin of not a roll, I roll Here we go again, nothing we're doing is working, but rather, okay, how do we do this differently? How do we approach this with with fresh eyes and, and not be tainted by

sometimes the barrage of negative news and Also what happens when you're working in the trenches for so long, and, and you start to get burned out. And so there's an element that I find that I'm quite lucky in that aspect because I get to do that every day. But also reminds me the importance of connecting these young people to those who are veterans in the field through things like mentorship programs, not because I think it just, you know, young people could use mentorship, but also because it goes the other way. It helps to re instill that energy and kind of reignite that passion. People who have often been grinding away for decades.



Jack Humphrey 16:46

You're listening to the rewilding Earth podcast. Did you know we also publish insightful and inspirational content from leading rewilding scholars, poets, artists and organizers from around the world. You can visit [rewilding.org](https://rewilding.org) and sign up for our weekly diary. To receive brilliant, fresh insights on everything rewilding, you'll find over a decade of articles and news from the frontlines of wild lands, protection and all kinds of restoration efforts. Check us out at [rewilding.org](https://rewilding.org) and don't forget to share it with friends. I know very well what it's like to be with folks who are very, very isolated from from that or somewhat isolated from that mixture, engaging with a broad spectrum of people, and ages and different people on the hope scale. And let's just get this done in the energy scale and everything. I think that's extremely important. And one of the biggest reasons why I love having people like you on the show, so that people who may be a little bit isolated from that can see what I'm talking about because I get exposed to it through the show and the other things that I seek out some others in the you know, conservation movement who've been doing it for decades, don't



Crista Valentino 17:56

we get inundated so much. Humans buy buy problems or to do lists or next things and don't get me wrong, I do too. If you can't look at it with a little bit of perspective of one, you know, we're all sitting on the same spinning earth. And we all have a limited amount of time, as morbid as that sounds, we all have a limited amount of time here. And so I personally prefer to spend my time working towards something I believe in and feeling good about it than the alternative. And that's a choice and we all have that choice. And so you know, it does not make it's not that I'm not realistic, and or that they don't recognize, sometimes the insurmountable odds that may be in front of us on some of the challenges or problems or issues or whatever. It's just that a, I choose to look beyond it, you know, not look away from it, but just Okay, I see, you know, let's keep going. Because you know, otherwise, life doesn't seem that fun.



Jack Humphrey 19:10

And there's a really big scope to it all too. I mean, we have these insufferably short lives 8090 years if you're lucky, and that might not be lucky if you're not healthy, but we they're very, very short lives and that scope has tended I feel to it makes our policies the way they are. It makes it because we base it on. We're not generational thinkers yet as a, as you know, some parts of humanity are some tribes are, but the whole of humanity and more importantly, the part of humanity that's in control of all the levers and cogs and wheels. Don't think generationally like past our lives. And so it seems like a lot of our our wildlife policy, our outlook for everything is really just very, very short sighted. Do you see that as well as it is? Do you see anything changing in the future around that? You guys work on stuff like that?



Crista Valentino 20:05

Yeah, I do see it. And I couldn't agree with you more. And I do, I would like to believe and maybe this is the optimist in me. I would like to believe that it's shifting, and I believe it shifting for two reasons. One, insane youth today. And when I say you've not only just under 35, but I'm talking about like the teens, you know, the credit generation, who are actually recognizing those before us, our parents or grandparents made decisions and they are affecting me is an inherent understanding that they learned very early that I believe will carry to when they are parents age, 6070 days, younger, older, and will be able to look back at as they make decisions that affect the next generation. Right? I don't I would like to think that that it doesn't just There, then now that you have this information, you carry it with you and you. That's how you that's how you base your decisions off of. So that really excites me. I also believe that because we're seeing the effects of those decisions and how they're cascading in the consequences that they make, and the connectedness of our communities through things like social media, you can now really understand things like, Hey, I may be sitting in in Los Angeles, California, with something I'm doing here, whether it's the way I vote, or, or the item I'm choosing to purchase, or where I spend my money or whatever that whatever it is, affects somebody and something I may never see or someone I may never meet on the other side of the world. And so understanding that that consequence chain i think is a lot more on the surface than happened the past?



Jack Humphrey 22:02

Okay, I'm checking out the site. I'm looking around. I'm seeing 78 total ambassadors implementing self design solutions, and 9100 people involved in all projects being implemented by ambassadors. Talk to me about that. What am I looking at here?



Crista Valentino 22:19

Yeah. Okay, so we have a program called our ambassador program, and it's a totally virtual online 100%. Free, and young people under 35 just need to apply. And they need to apply with an idea that they have that they want to implement in their community. And we take anywhere between 30 and we'll probably go up to about 50 for our next cohort, young people. We bring them through this nine month, kind of crash course in creating change. And over nine months, we work with them. We provide things like webinars and tasks and toolkits and worksheets. We provide them with a peer mentor all of these things, helping to lead them towards taking a first step towards action. And the key to this program, though, is that we do not tell the young person, what project they need to implement, or what cause they need to support. What it comes down to is what are you passionate about, with the challenge facing that thing you're passionate about? And what's the solution that you can do to affect it. And in for us, that's really important because at the end of the day, it's not about having coalition while its brand on on one of these projects in a community, it's not about what we've produced or what the person has gone out to produce for us. What we care about is really instilling in these young people the skills necessary, but also really the confidence they need to go out and be leaders, not just in their communities, and not just for that one project, but to be leaders for a lifetime, hopefully for the planet, and how that will help to inform the decisions they make in the job they have in the careers they have in what they you know, how they lit. And so, really what we're doing at the end of the day, is we've created this sort of leadership course and have and really, you know, instill in these young people are these done months, all the things necessary they everything from like, how to write a strategy, document and do communications, to answering interview questions, to writing budgets and everything in between. We're giving them the skills and equipping them with what they need to really step up and to use their voice and to realize that they matter. What they do matters, and that they can make a difference.



Jack Humphrey 25:05

That is really cool. And I'll tell you why I think so. One is that we're so often told, especially the younger we are, what we need to do and the path we need to follow. And it's under the guise of advisement and maybe even mentorship. But with mentorship with a nefarious side to it or something where I want you to do this thing. I need more people in my, in my army of people who understand it this way. We do it this way, my way, the way I teach and you guys aren't doing that. That's, that's really quite amazing. What are some of the stories that you get out of that then so people come in and they take the course and then they go off in the direction they choose? What kinds of stories do you have to tell about that?



Crista Valentino 25:52

I mean, it's good timing. We just wrapped up on March 1, our Last cohort and we we graduated 35 new ambassadors, again all implementing projects and they're all over the world. I think I think we had 35 Master, I think we had about 32 countries. And they're really ranging. For instance, we have one gentleman working down in Latin America, and he is creating these micro grants for women and young people to create agroforestry and like farms in their communities, and so he's helping them go back to using the land. On the other side of the world. In Nigeria, we have a young man who is putting together plugging episodes, which is jogging while picking up trash. And every week they choose a different like street or different community and he gathers a bunch of people and they all go running around and picking up Trash. And it's everything in between a young woman in the UK, it has combined her love for books, with her love for flowers, and all in these different areas in her community has set up wildflower boxes with beautiful quotes about nature written on them to encourage people to stop and think and smell the wild flowers. And, and so really, it goes across the board again, it's that idea of what you care about and how can you get involved. But what as much of these, you know, successful stories I can tell, but really, we received back and I was just reading this before we jumped off jumped on our call was that what we're providing them is a community. You know, almost everyone have said that you they cared about the environment. They want to get involved. They didn't know where to start, how to start it off. All of a sudden they, they joined a group of people of 35 people they didn't know who understood that, who understood them in a way that they didn't have to, you know, explain themselves or defend themselves, who actually faced often the same challenges that they face no matter where they were in the world. They gained a support network of people that they could tell their challenges to and have somebody cheerlead alongside of them and say, Hey, I feel the same way. Keep going. One of the sentences was, I just feel like I have a voice and people aren't listening. For us. That's one of the greatest outcomes that we could have ever asked for. Is that your, your, like the all these young people we work with, they have everything that they need, they have the passion, they have the ambition, they have the vision, the care, right, you can't teach somebody how to care. And we're just giving them a space where not only is that That okay, but it's celebrated.



Jack Humphrey 29:03

You've created room for beautiful acts in a deep ecology since like the woman you talk about that's making the wildflower boxes if somebody went to a more traditional because these things have happened in similar kinds of ways throughout history and people were trained, getting trained for a very narrow set of jobs within the conservation community, and it was like a college that only offered so many things. And it was very purpose based.

We need more people here in fundraising. We need people to lobby in DC we need people to run organizations. And so it was a very narrow field of things and for you to open it up to letting people do it fill it broadens out into things like those wildflower boxes and the micro funding and what that says to me Mi is that the solutions to the really, really big problems are hidden somewhere in that open area of creativity and allowance. Because if we continued to just go down this road we just need we need more fundraisers. We need more funding, we need more lobbying. We need the narrow things that most people think about in the professional conservation movement. Well, we're going to certainly only get what we've gotten if we're not changing anything, right?



Crista Valentino 30:27

Yeah. Well, and I am personally sort of thinking, I've also built coalition wild around this, this idea of, in my opinion, what the world doesn't need is more conservationists, what we need are more teachers or bankers or parents or whatever, caring living their lives in a way that exemplifies how a you know a thoughtful and reciprocal relationship with Nature, the only way that we do that is by giving people the space and the permission to act out their passions and the things that they care, you know, or in support the things that they care about in their everyday lives, whether that is in their work in their career, or outside of it. And whether that is in a typical way, like you mentioned, or in a typical way. And if we really want to see huge global shifts, and decisions being changed and made, we need to hit at the heart of where people make decisions that that's where that's in their soul. And the way that you do that is you tap into their passion, and you can't tell somebody what to be passionate about.



Jack Humphrey 31:47

Well, and then when you weave all of these folks back into the fabric of society, as if they were taken out of it at any time, but I mean, when they go and do their thing. Certainly the woman's not going to be making those flower boxes. Forever everybody evolves and does different things and this is just the context and a point in time for everybody but just to get everybody back out into the world and and and watch how that all goes you've you've been able to do this for a while. How long has this program been going?



Crista Valentino 32:19

And so coalition miles been started in 2013. Our ambassador program has been let's see, this is our third cohort. So we just wrapped up our third year.



Jack Humphrey 32:31

Now you're just this big lightning rod for all the stories that come back. How do you keep track of everything? Do you even try to keep track of everything or how does that even work?



Crista Valentino 32:42

Um, yes, I try. And sometimes I do better than others, but I don't know if it's me or not, or I don't know if it's the stories I think mostly that Oh, for me, like over working with people over nine months, you get to know them, especially the ones who are really engaged and really committed and genuinely it sticks with me. I bet I could tell you the stories and the evolution, the progress of 90 to 100% of everyone we've worked with. And it's because of you know, when you mentioned earlier, that idea of Hope it runs so much deeper than hope because hope seems like almost a flippant and naive emotion. It these young people represent opportunity to me, you know, they represent progress. They represent, you know, somebody stepping up and saying, like self selecting, saying, I want to be involved. I want to do something and not just I want to but I can now, can you help me do this and you don't for me, you don't forget somebody who puts out their hand and says I'm ready. Take me.



Jack Humphrey 33:58

Is this the kind of work You see being really instrumental in in specific goals like nature needs half.



Crista Valentino 34:05

I think it's actually a perfect indication of how we do this. Right? Like, again, going back to this idea of when and if you come in whether you're coming into a community that you don't know, or people you don't know, and you try to tell them how they should be working, and in what ways and why it's going to fall flat, and the amount of engagement and commitment you receive is going to be waning. And so how do you gather a bunch of acquaintances from around the world, all with different experiences and histories and backgrounds and understandings and get them to move towards a common vision, you instill in them the permission to think on their own, to create their own ideas and, and to build a community around that. And so coalition while it's doing that as instilling in them the skills to do so. But I think that what we're also doing is developing this community of support. And of looking in that community support, giving the freedom to try new things and to be innovative and creative. And as you said, you know, uncover some of these

unlikely solutions that maybe wouldn't have been uncovered. If you gave somebody you know, a task at hand or what to do. And so when we think about the larger nature needs half vision, we need to think about it as this is a vision, but how we get to the vision is up to you. And, and how it gets carried out is going to look different person to person, community, community, region to region, and that's okay. And that's actually what we want. Because that's the only way it's going to be effective. And so through something like the ambassador program or coalition wild, I think we're we're showing on at the moment, small scales, how this Natalie could work but is working. And with this bigger vision over the next year or two or three, to develop more of these programs and workshops, and not just for youth, but for anyone across the board for these communities, and to help them really recognize their own potential, and to step into that space.



Jack Humphrey 36:24

Krista, thank you so much for being on rewilding earth today. You are awesome. Thank you for all the work that you do and keep going.



Crista Valentino 36:32

Well, thank you. Thank you for having me. And thank you for listening. And thank you for supporting these conversations.



Jack Humphrey 36:43

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