

# “Remembering who you are”

Peter Reason reviews a book on leadership

Learning to Lead Together:  
An Ecological and Community Approach

Jane Riddiford

Routledge, 2021

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In amongst the high-rise buildings and construction projects of the urban redevelopment at King's Cross, London, Global Generation (GG) has over the past 12 years established a series of movable community gardens, originally known as Skip Gardens. The latest incarnation is the Story Garden, built with more than 650 adults and almost 300 children and young people. “We're not just building the garden but also building skills, relationships, confidence and resilience!” This book by GG's founder and co-director, New Zealander Jane Riddiford, is an account of her learning to lead collaboratively through the evolution of this work.

The reader must from the start understand what Riddiford means by ‘leadership’. She is not interested in leadership as command and control, but leadership as ongoing collaborative inquiry. “Remembering who you are is key.” Riddiford's roots are in the pioneer culture of New Zealand: her not-so-distant ancestors participated in the clearing of forest to make space for sheep. From this, she holds a romantic relationship with the pioneering, ‘can do’ spirit of New Zealanders, while also being aware of the shadow of opportunism that stripped the land bare. Riddiford – I should say I have known her and her work, although not closely, for many years – shows

both sides. She is charismatic, inspirational, full of ideas and initiatives, as well as deeply collaborative, respectful of the contribution of others. She shows how her cultural conditioning and colonialist background lead her to think very carefully about talking too much and taking control. Yet while placing primary value on inquiry, she will not stick to this too rigidly: leadership is a dance between collaboration and individualist endeavour.

The seeds of Global Generation were sown back in 2002, when Riddiford was involved in taking a group of inner-city children to camp in the countryside. Many of them had never left the city. Riddiford was inspired both by their terror of the dark and “anything that moved”, and by their learning from the experience: “To invite teenagers to embrace nature connection activities slows them down and brings out a more open, patient, creative energy.”

The first garden was created on the rooftop of a high-rise block, which provided a base from which Riddiford forged relationships with the CEO of Argent, the developer of the King's Cross site, as well as with the *Guardian* newspaper and with other corporate bodies. From these early steps evolved the idea of growing vegetables in skips that could be moved to different sites as the development proceeded. The project works continually between the young people, the construction workers, local business, volunteers and full-time employees.

However, “focussing on the skips alone misses the point ... it seemed doubtful to me that growing vegetables, changing lightbulbs, and counting carbon ... were enough to change

the world.” Drawing in particular on the ancient Māori legend of three baskets of knowledge, Riddiford developed what she calls the ‘triple gem’ that places all activities in the context of ‘I, We, the Planet’ and the story of the vast, expanding universe. This enables the young people to explore inner, outer and collective dimensions of who they are and what they are part of. As one of the GG Generators puts it, “What's different about what we do at Global Generation is, not only do we change from the outside but we change from the inside too.”

The key is in the name: ‘Global Generation’ refers to that generation of people who have a global perspective, who can generate activities that will support the planet and all who

inhabit it. Of course, it is about working with and for the young people. But Riddiford writes that she often finds herself saying, “We are not doing this for you, we are doing this because you are needed to grow a different kind of future.”

It is only fair to the potential reader to say that I struggled at times to find my way through the storyline: the book needed a stronger editorial hand. Nevertheless, this is a treasure trove of ideas, practices and inspiration for anybody involved in ecological and community development. R

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## The ethical choice

Edward Davey explores the moral implications of eating meat

How to Love Animals in a Human-Shaped World

Henry Mance

Jonathan Cape, 2021

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Henry Mance's *How to Love Animals in a Human-Shaped World* is a brilliant book of moral philosophy, environmental insight, and compelling argument. The author – chief features writer of the *Financial Times*, and a gifted, subtle, erudite journalist – sets out to demonstrate, in chapter after devastating chapter, just how flawed, contradictory and often cruel our relationship with animals is.

The central paradox is that we love animals, as evidenced through our pets, our visits to zoos, and our commitment to wildlife documentaries and Nature organisations, while tolerating and endorsing all the horrors of modern-day factory farming and fishing, discounting animals' suffering because of our preference for meat, fish and dairy. Mance allows the reader no such luxury, with graphic accounts of slaughterhouses, the practices of fishing fleets, and the lives of chickens, pigs and cows. I was particularly struck by a compelling passage explaining how the farming system we have established is so circumscribed that no animal can truly flourish, take any of the decisions, or live the full kind of life that it might otherwise do in the wild.

The ethical implications of this system in terms of pain and suffering are compounded by the broader environmental impacts of climate change, rainforest destruction, freshwater pollution, and biodiversity loss, all of which are set out in scrupulous detail. Throughout, Mance's immersion in the subject is impressive. The world's food and land use systems are responsible for a quarter of its greenhouse gas emissions, and are the primary drivers of biodiversity loss. Climate breakdown and ecosystem loss pose an existential threat to the lives of animals, further compounding this vicious cycle.

The solution, according to Mance, is within our grasp.

We must project that same love of animals we demonstrate in the love of our pets to the rest of the animal kingdom, most immediately by forgoing meat, fish and dairy, as the author has done, and pivoting to a vegan diet. This is ethically the right thing to do, Mance argues, as well as a culinary adventure (enjoying the broad support of his vegetarian wife and daughters). Such a transition – were it to take place at scale – would liberate land and ecosystems across the world, enabling biodiversity to recover, and humanity to live more in harmony with Nature. Indeed, E.O. Wilson's inspiring vision of half of the Earth being ‘put aside’ for Nature (and Indigenous peoples) comes into view, were such a shift to be made.

The book also points out how it might be possible, with appropriate support from governments, for farmers and fishers to benefit from a world in which meat and fish consumption, at least for many of the world's people, were significantly reduced. Farmers could be rewarded for the adoption of more regenerative practices, for producing all the other foods we would need in plentiful volumes, and for safeguarding Nature. Coastal communities could in many instances turn to the cultivation of mussels and other bi-valves, as well as be supported in the adoption of more sustainable fishing practices. In other words, this must be a just rural transition, as well as a just marine one, if it is to take place – and one that will necessarily look different in every country of the world. (Mance's explorations cover geographies as diverse as Mongolia, Colombia, Indonesia and the US.)

The core insight, however, remains the same, and is powerfully told by Mance in a book that deserves the widest possible audience. Our current treatment of most of the world's animals is profoundly wrong, as well as unnecessary. It is before us to chart a different course, and we all have a role to play, starting with the food choices we make each day. R

Edward Davey is the author of *Given Half a Chance* and a director of the Food and Land Use Coalition.



Photograph by John Sturrock