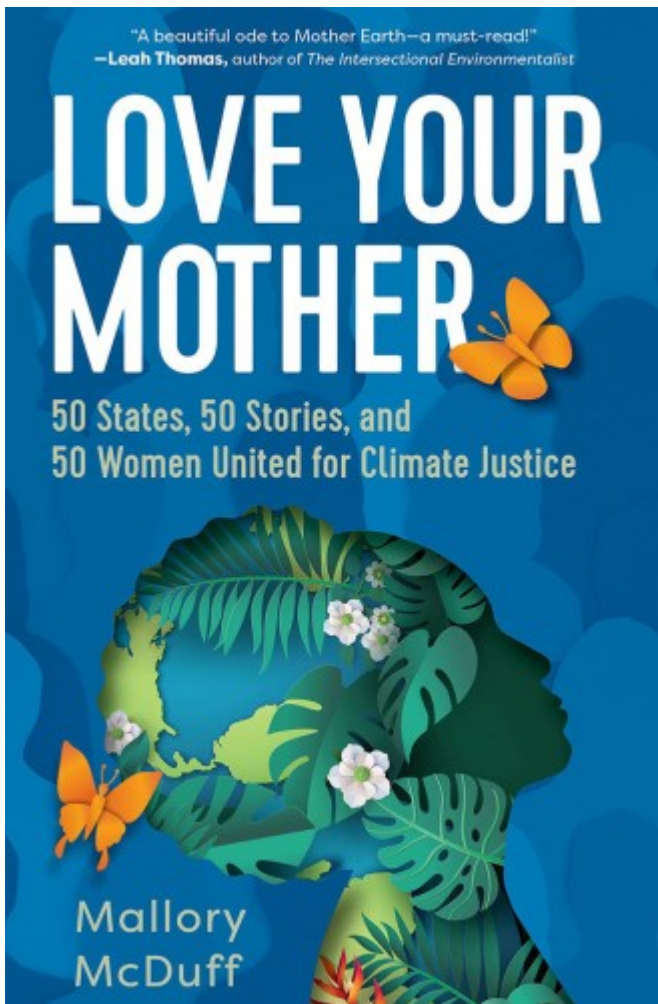


A multitude of ways to love the earth

Mallory McDuff's anthology centers non-White voices and women's narratives in the climate justice conversation.

by [Christian Watkins](#) in the [November 2023](#) issue

In Review



Love Your Mother

50 States, 50 Stories, and 50 Women United for Climate Justice

By Mallory McDuff

Broadleaf

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Minnesota attorney and activist Tara Houska—who also uses her Ojibwe name, Zhaabowekwe—knows firsthand how authorities respond when protesters challenge multinational energy companies on Indigenous lands. In December 2020, she and 21 others were arrested for impeding demolition crews set on installing an oil pipeline that would threaten the health of her community’s land and water. She tweeted that on several occasions police officers have responded to her and other Indigenous protesters with rubber bullets, tear gas, strip searches, mace, and detention in dog kennels.

Zhaabowekwe believes that the climate movement needs more than a quick fix. “I do not believe we will solar panel or vote our way out of this crisis without also radically reframing our connection with our Mother,” she writes in the 2020 anthology *All We Can Save*. She believes that Indigenous values provide necessary ideological anchor points and encourage a mutual relationship between humanity and the planet, unsettling the relationship of exploitation that advocates for a “green economy” sometimes fail to challenge.

With stories like this, Mallory McDuff models how to situate regional geography, personal narratives by women, and local activism in the climate justice conversation. *Love Your Mother* tells the stories of 50 climate activists across the United States, curated to inspire and equip readers for climate change advocacy. The environmental educator profiles “change makers” from across a spectrum of experiences and backgrounds. The women range in age from 14 to 70, and McDuff centers non-White voices. Raw emotional honesty and authenticity seep through the pages; they are a balm for the ordinary days and a source of courage for the long haul of justice work. Together, the stories offer a timely message: you are not alone in this fight.

Wanjiku “Wawa” Gatheru is “completely shifting the conversation” around climate justice in Connecticut, writes McDuff, moving it far beyond the topic of carbon emissions. As an undergraduate researcher at the University of Connecticut, Gatheru found that 25 percent of the students surveyed experienced food insecurity, which is

linked to the increased cost of healthy foods associated with climate change. Her research prompted the development of pop-up food pantries for students. It also brought state and federal attention to the intersections of food insecurity, racism, and climate justice in higher education. Noticing how the effects of climate change have compounding consequences for racial minorities, Gatheru was moved by her research to start a nonprofit organization, Black Girl Environmentalist.

Each story in the book flows from the identity of the one who tells it. McDuff does not attempt to universalize individual experiences; she simply provides a multitude of examples of ways to love the earth. These include engineering affordable solar panels for people in rural areas, designing plant-based dyes for the fashion industry, creating Instagram movements such as #greenramadan and #ecomuslim, biking around the world to collect stories about climate change, ceramic sculpting to educate farmers about water use, translating TikTok videos about climate change for non-English-speaking communities, supporting teenagers on a reservation who experience substance abuse and poverty, and much more.

What brings these stories together is that they are about female leaders who act locally while calling for structural change. McDuff explains that women are on the forefront of the climate crisis, both as scientists and as those who are the most vulnerable to its impacts. Still, while a few of the stories are explicitly about the contributions of the LGBTQ community, McDuff could have strengthened her intersectional approach by engaging a more expansive view of gender throughout the book.

Love Your Mother provides concrete possibilities for those who find inspiration in the everyday work of activists. For McDuff, the goal of climate justice is “access to a healthy environment for all.” Achieving this, she says, will necessarily involve changing the power relationships which run our economic and social systems. But rather than pointing to an opaque, unattainable goal, she extends a simple invitation to join the story as a first step. Her excellence as an educator shows up in her ability to decouple a pragmatic approach to building justice locally from the perfectionistic climate guilt and crisis anxiety that we see too much of in this genre. McDuff rejects this kind of perfectionism in climate activism and suggests we focus instead on doing what we can with similarly activated folks in our own neighborhoods. Naming the on-the-ground assets and obstacles of addressing climate change in our own backyards, McDuff activates us normal people.

In the end, McDuff's efforts revolve around the rallying cry of love. She says we must love ourselves through our anxieties so we can avoid getting mired in the weeds of the crisis or in the clouds about our expectations as we struggle to fundamentally change the world. "In every story I heard," she reports, "the call to love was epic." Even small acts of love, she points out, are an unstoppable force.