

# The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Kristine Tompkins:** If the accumulation of wealth is the game, it's pretty boring. It's not enough to be wealthy anymore. It is. What did you do with the assets you had? And I don't mean just financial. I mean your arms and legs and your mind, and your love, and your assets as a social mover and shaker. Then your life gets really interesting.

[00:00:27] **Nate Hagens:** Today I am pleased to be joined by Christine Tompkins, the president and co-founder of Tompkins Conservation and former CEO of the apparel company, Patagonia, for nearly 30 years, along with her late husband, Doug Tompkins, she has committed her career to protecting and restoring wild beauty and biodiversity in South America by creating parks, restoring wildlife, inspiring activism, and fostering economic vitality as a result of her conservation efforts.

[00:01:01] Through this work, Tompkins Conservation and its partners have protected approximately 15 million acres of Parklands in Chile and Argentina. This conversation with Christine about her years at Patagonia, her shift towards full-time conservation and her mindset towards diving into these uncharted projects in her life exemplifies what it means to use power in service of life.

[00:01:30] When hearing about Christine's story, I ask you to consider what power you hold in your own life, through your skills, your community, your network, and your voice, and what might you do with it? Additionally, if you are enjoying this podcast, I invite you to subscribe to our substack newsletter where you can read more about the system science underpinning the human predicament, where my team and I post special announcements related to the great simplification, as well as some upcoming written content.

[00:02:03] You can find the link to subscribe in the show description. With that, please welcome Christine Tompkins. This was a fantastic, intimate, and hard hitting conversation. Chris Tompkins, welcome to the program.

[00:02:19] **Kristine Tompkins:** Thank you. Very happy to be here.

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[00:02:21] **Nate Hagens:** I have 20 prepared questions and 30 seconds ago, I've just decided to throw them all out.

[00:02:30] and just have a conversation with you as someone who cares about the same things that I do, and we'll see where it goes. I, hold you in deep respect because you are someone who has in the battle between power and life, you are squarely on the side of life. but even more impressive than that, you've been doing that for decades, before it was cool and, achieve status.

[00:02:58] So, lots of. Areas to go here, but maybe we could start with you were the CEO of Patagonia, the clothing company. What went through your mind, and your heart, when you decided to quit and formally, with your late husband, Doug Tompkins, divert your life's energy towards conservation instead of, business as usual?

[00:03:25] Like what was going through your mind, back over 30 years ago?

[00:03:29] **Kristine Tompkins:** Well, Patagonia company that never really was business as usual, so the leap that I took wasn't nearly as wide as most people think. I started, I met Yvonne Sheard when I was 15. He was 28. He's 86 now. And, I started working for him full-time when I got outta college and had no idea what I was going to do.

[00:04:00] and then shortly thereafter he wanted to start making clothes and he wanted to call it Patagonia. And so, okay, sounds good. And, over a bit of time he asked if I would be willing to kind of take it on. And first we called me a general manager and then, I don't know what else. And then eventually, just for the times and how you communicate with people, we started calling my role the CEO role.

[00:04:29] And, we created and built that business. It grew very fast. It was, You know, in those days, in the early seventies there, there weren't tons of outdoor clothing manufacturers, and those circumstances evolve into a couple different things. One, we could kind of make it up as we went along, and Yvonne and his wife Melinda, always understood that business was a thing, but business was not always the thing.

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[00:05:11] And so we were charged with by our own convictions to be really good at, creating not a good company, but a great company. And what's the criteria for that? What makes something great instead of just good and in, in, our case, again, with the ards, really. Understanding the unwinding of the natural world and human societies pretty early on, they knew that the company should be used as an asset toward changing the world.

[00:05:51] So those things were woven together at a very early time. By the late seventies, there was no question about this. And so it's very difficult to, see what I eventually decided to do 20, 24, 25 years later to retire as a 43-year-old and go with, my soon to be husband Doug Tompkins to a roadless area in South Chile and start working in conservation and rewilding full time.

[00:06:27] So it, it wasn't a, it wasn't the leap that most people. Imagine it, it must have been, it was a leap, that's for sure. But, they're very, both, all the things I've done in my life have been strung together by a piece of thread that is probably since birth, still tugging at me. All those things are connected.

[00:06:51] **Nate Hagens:** And what is that thread?

[00:06:53] **Kristine Tompkins:** Good question. I get asked that an awful lot, and I ask our mother, who, I think she was probably 96 at the time, what I was like as a child. And, the few times I've, I asked her that before she died, she always said something like, A, you were a handful. B, nothing was ever enough.

[00:07:14] And C, you had no. Braking system. There was no, you never the thought of throwing the brakes on something regardless. Was it one of the horses or whatever it was. so I was probably, whatever I, whatever personality traits I have now, they'd been there a long time and they propel me forward.

[00:07:39] **Nate Hagens:** When you were five years old, do you have any memory of your love for the natural world?

[00:07:45] **Kristine Tompkins:** No, not really because we grew up on a, our great-grandfather's ranch, and so we were outside all the time, usually forced to be outside because having us indoors was just too much. and so we were outside all the time, but, the concept of nature, the concept of. Human dependence on this

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quote unquote outdoors was completely foreign to me until, gosh, I was probably in my late teens, early twenties when I began to understand that milieu is, we are as teeny part of it rather than the other way around.

[00:08:34] There's no way I would've understood that as a young kid.

[00:08:36] **Nate Hagens:** So you mentioned, you and Doug Tompkins moved to a roadless area. you were pretty remote. What were the feelings that came up on that first adventure? relative to being the CEO of a large multinational clothing company? At the time

[00:08:53] **Kristine Tompkins:** it was so extreme.

[00:08:56] The shift was so extreme. I retired on a Friday, packed up two little bags, and got on a plane for Santiago and then. For much further south. And, you know, this is truly a roadless area in the extreme southern portion of a very rough country, where the Andes fall into the Pacific. No electricity. We just had wood for heat, wood for cooking.

[00:09:28] So it was, and, though I lived in Venezuela as a kid for a while and growing up in, in agricultural California, of course, you know, some Spanish, but we went from English full-time to Spanish full-time. We just had the, planes. To get in and out with. So the weather, we, we learned how to judge not only what the weather is by looking out the window, but really understanding how barometers work.

[00:10:01] I mean, there's no, nothing. We had no phones. We were using, HF and VHF radios, so, so it was, it was extreme on, on, on two sides. One, you're going from a little hot shot, female, CEO and offices in Paris and around and, then you're right there in this temperate rainforest. it was a deep shock, cultural shock.

[00:10:37] And then I really began to understand our role, our place in nature. Then I really began to understand it because. It was so extreme and living next to Swollen Rivers, what does that actually mean? How tenuous are those things? Then I really began to see, I am so tiny. And that's when I began to understand nature in the, sense that as a nearly 75-year-old now, I understand it very clearly.

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[00:11:15] **Nate Hagens:** Sometimes, I go, fishing in Canada with a bunch of my male relatives and we rent a houseboat on Lake of the Woods or Rainy Lake, or Lake Superior. And then we'll find some island and just park there and have a shore lunch or something. And just walking around, I get the sense that I'm the first human that ever walked in this particular area.

[00:11:38] And it's this really eerie, profound feeling. And you probably felt that every day, in, Chile. do you know of what I speak?

[00:11:49] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yes, of course. I know that I felt it every day. Not only I. Being observant, more observant, but also just trying to get from early morning to the end of the day in one piece and the dependence on yourself was a whole nother revelation to us.

[00:12:13] I think that was profound. And this is what you're talking about a little bit as you land down in an isolated area, we're not used to having to depend on ourselves. I wasn't, I always had packed in with family around me and then, all the years with Patagonia, which I never actually quit. I'm my 52nd year anniversary is this year.

[00:12:48] But it, you realize what it meant to be human. Right up to the last 200 years for most people. And it also reminds you that of 8.2 billion people on the planet today, I don't know what is it? Is it a billion people are moderns and industrial people like the two of us, billions of people today live around this earth in the way that I'm describing now.

[00:13:24] and it was so shocking to me because I am a modern, I am an industrial person who decided to purposely go forward. I almost said go back. I have to change that, go forward into, a way of life that most people on Earth are very accustomed to.

[00:13:48] **Nate Hagens:** Since you just said that. I'm gonna read a quote, that's on [tompkinsconservation.org](http://tompkinsconservation.org), your website, by your late husband.

[00:13:55] We conceive of progress as going in a certain direction forward, but what is forward? If we were walking towards an abyss and reach the edge, well, we stop. If we take another step forward, we'll fall into the abyss and die. But if we turn 180

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degrees and take another step forward, where are we going? We're not going back to the past.

[00:14:15] We're walking towards the future. how, does that land with you today?

[00:14:20] **Kristine Tompkins:** Well, I think it's very true. It's a kind of a confusing quote, but if you really think about, phrases like progress is moving forward, progress. A decision for a government or a family or an individual to reject a kind of technology or decide to do things that fall outside of the norm of contemporary cultures, that's considered going backwards.

[00:14:55] But what forward should mean is the wellbeing and dignified lives of the human community and the non-human community. But from an industrial point of view, the shrapnel coming out of doesn't matter. Pick anything over the last 200, 150 years is considered very clearly and unemotionally the price of progress.

[00:15:29] When you think about everybody who wants to. go to Mars and in this, pain and suffering of having limited bodies, individual bodies, and a planet that is very limited, which everybody understands is now. So to get out of that and get things out of the way so you can find territory out in the front of the human experience where people can live to be 200 years old or 250 years old, and, burning forests and everything else we know today won't take place because they're unnecessary.

[00:16:14] That the. There is a, an enormous price of that pro progress.

[00:16:21] **Nate Hagens:** So you've been, in high echelons of, meetings with famous people and, all the conservation, environmental movement, and the CEOs because of your business for, a long time. How have you seen people, learn or not learn, an experience that the feeling you have about deep ecology and that progress may.

[00:16:50] Mean something different than our culture means. Are people pretty much the same in those echelons as they were in the nineties and eighties, or is there a, big shift

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[00:17:02] **Kristine Tompkins:** in my opinion, in the eighties and nineties, there was an understanding of threats sort of way out there on the horizon, be it climate chaos or the extinction crisis, things like that.

[00:17:15] But there was a lot of speculation. It was still climate science. Of course, a lot of people make the argument probably, I mean logically that people have understood the climate crisis for. Since the forties or so. But let's just take it in a, more contemporary framework. There was an ignorance, and the ignorance brought a certain amount of bliss because it was hard to understand and then you could question it because the physics of it, the mathematics of it were, are complex.

[00:17:54] And maybe I got that wrong, but today there that does not exist. So you're looking at an audience. When you think about leadership of the globalized economy, now it's willful because we do understand what the root cause of climate chaos is. We understand where the bulk of that impact comes from and everything else that we.

[00:18:29] No is no to be true now, but nothing has changed. There's been a lot of development in alternative energy, whether it's solar or otherwise. That's absolutely true, but it doesn't impact the, petroleum industry, the, gas industry. Those industries are piling forward as they always have because.

[00:19:02] Because there's, a lack of will. This is, the great moral dilemma for me.

[00:19:08] **Nate Hagens:** I'm not so sure it's a lack of will. I think there are certain people that are certainly have narrower boundaries of how they view the world than you or I do. but let's just assume that everyone agrees that, biodiversity loss, pending six mass extinction fish are swimming poleward because they can't get as much oxygen and warmer waters.

[00:19:32] all the wildfires, droughts, higher standard deviation of heat, all the things are true. If someone. Assimilates that, and they're a person that has some economic or social power. There's something like, a collective action problem or a prisoner's dilemma that we would all be better off, and especially people in the future would be better off if we did something and constrained the metabolism of the human enterprise.

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[00:20:01] But. Unless everyone does it, it's still in that person's best interest for his or her life and his or her children to maximize power and profits while the whole system is running. So is it willful, ignorance and dismissal of the problem, or is it, I'm caught in this social trap that I can't do, I can't wear my hat of being a, a proper wise, ancestor to future humans and other species because I'm getting these social signals.

[00:20:40] what do you think about all that?

[00:20:41] **Kristine Tompkins:** My opinion is, pretty firm and I've tried to knock it sideways many times, but I do not see, when I look at petroleum futures, when I look at. Policies, people being horrified that the US isn't is dropping out of the Paris Accord and all of these things that are, that have never been actually true in the first place.

[00:21:13] There's never been a Paris Accord signed by China or the United States. There, if you, if, you look at futures of most industry, there is no palpable nor obvious decisions from a boardroom to their leadership to throttle back their production of. I, really pick, an industry.

[00:21:48] **Nate Hagens:** So I, we just met a couple weeks ago, yes.

[00:21:51] And on that Carver conversation, we, wished we had met over a decade ago. So I don't know how, familiar you are with my work, but. Those board members you're referring to, it doesn't matter who is CEO because the structure, the corporate structure is such that if a CEO and a board, said, you need to throttle back what you're doing on behalf of the future and the forests.

[00:22:21] They would be kicked out because the objective of the entity is to maximize monetary profits tethered to energy, tethered to carbon, tethered to ecosystem impact. So the, core problem is the structure and the incentives and the prices, which is a self-organizing thing. King. And this hearkens back to, Yvonne Chouinard and, your work at Patagonia.

[00:22:47] I have discovered, recently I'm gonna have a guy named Wes Carter on the podcast in April. And he is the CEO of a company called Atlantic Packaging, and I expect he's probably a billionaire. but it's a private company and he's doing



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things. In service of the sacredness of life, and he's making decisions that are not monetarily the best decisions, but he's doing it for people and for the planet.

[00:23:15] And so my, realization recently is that private companies are outside the purvey of what I refer to as the economic super organism because they don't have the same structure and incentives that everyone else does. I'm, veering off here a little bit, but what are your thoughts on that?

[00:23:33] **Kristine Tompkins:** Well, yeah, I don't really much care one way or the other about CEOs because they go in and out on roller skates and, really it's the board who really drives the outcome of whatever activity the company is involved in.

[00:23:51] So I agree with you there. I think that very little is asked of, real leaders in the world today. I. I don't care if you're Pope Francis or you're any of the Big 10. Doesn't matter what area of human activity they come from. If I, right now everything we do trying to combat climate extinction, all these things is voluntary and we've really lost the opportunity for that to change because the power of sovereign states is quite reduced.

[00:24:31] And of course we're seeing a wildly interesting example of that here in the United States in the last two weeks. It's not that it's new that you have, I, you call 'em the billionaires sitting in the west wing of the White House or, but it is the first time it's so obvious. I think if there was some way to make.

[00:24:57] Business outcomes, involuntary. Then people start to get really smart because when am I at my best when I'm trying to weasel around something to get my business into a great place? If you can continually allow me to voluntarily make decisions that will, very slowly move the needle, I can be dumb as a hatch and I can still survive.

[00:25:31] I can make money, but if you put the pressure on me to be a great business, but also an importantly ethical business, then finally it gets interesting and that's where there are so few people who wanna make that combination of. Goals,

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[00:25:57] **Nate Hagens:** would there be more people, even orders of magnitude, more people, if oil was \$500 a barrel.

[00:26:09] and there were prices, and, penalties for ecosystem destruction and there were three simultaneous goals and a corporation. One is the wellbeing of its own employees and its customers. Two is protection of the ecosystem, leave no trace and third, economic profits. If, those sorts of things existed in our culture, would the involuntary response and creativity emerge as you're saying,

[00:26:41] **Kristine Tompkins:** maybe, but it wouldn't be insistent.

[00:26:43] What I'm suggesting is that a lot of the behavior, and I'm talking about the top 500 companies in the world, it's not just a few. A lot of what they, the decisions they make, the outcomes of the decisions they make are criminal. And the only thing that capitalism can respond to are the things where they can't get a, they can't escape.

[00:27:21] I mean, eventually, and I'm not an alarmist, I'm not, but eventually a lot of this behavior that is causing direct human catastrophe, putting aside Mother Earth for the moment, they will be eventually criminalized and there'll be some sort of the hague like courts where. Things will become so heinous that, some of these things will begin to be looked at differently than they are today.

[00:27:57] They won't be absorbed right now, they're being absorbed around the world because that's the price to progress, in my opinion.

[00:28:05] **Nate Hagens:** I think it's happening faster than, you might be aware. My friend Palatal is working with many others, on eco side, law and rights of nature, but to make the really egregious environmental catastrophes be punishable by jail time, by CEOs and such, I mean, those conversations are happening.

[00:28:25] I just don't know. You've been at this a long time. I imagine that, you still have that, that fire, that Dr. Drove you since you were five years old. But you can't help but look at, the horror of what has happened. I. This entire time you've been devoting your life to conservation. You know, if you were sitting there in 1993 with Doug looking at, pictures of what 2025 was like, I don't think you would've believed it.

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[00:28:57] **Kristine Tompkins:** I think it's true that the facts themselves are not shocking. What is surprising to me, which we've finally shaken this sleep off, is the velocity at which it's unfolding and, that I didn't really see so well as I do now. two years ago, I, maybe three years ago, I knew it was bad and I, knew it was growing, but the velocity has changed the way we're looking at our own work, we have changed on a dime because.

[00:29:36] Even for us, and we're considered to be aggressive and out in front in terms of large landscapes and marine conservation and rewilding. But you know, we're kind of, we've been kind of asleep in a way that if you wanna try to get out and at least race the front end of the train, maybe you can't get around and stand in front of the train, but you can, definitely try to keep up with its pace.

[00:30:05] We've changed the, scale and, realize we have to work on a continental basis and we're used to working in millions and millions of acres at a time. That's, but you have to change the way, not, the. What you think you're, headed toward the sort of the bullseye. What are you aiming for? But you have to get there so much faster and much more audaciously and put nothing in your way.

[00:30:40] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask a difficult question. at least it's difficult for me. so you're very active and have, conserved tens of millions of acres, with your work, for wildlife conservation. And I, do want to get into some of the particular species that are involved there. So you're, noticing the importance of the biodiverse, biodiversity hotspots and, where, the best ecosystems are in the world that need protection and you're working on that.

[00:31:15] But simultaneous with that, the whole world is got, like adding blankets to our biosphere and it's, it's changing the future trajectory for everywhere. So there's like a micro and a macro, and you could be uber successful on the micro, but if the macro fails it, you know, it, you're not as successful as you thought.

[00:31:40] so how do you think about that climate and the broader global situation with respect to the, local and regional and continent, conservation that you're working on?

[00:31:51] **Kristine Tompkins:** Personally, I'm not really optimistic about the next few decades in, this century. I, believe that it's already breaking down.

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[00:32:04] You'd have to be deaf and blind not to understand that if you live in the Sudan, you live in the southern Polynesian Islands and really Florida, you name it. So the, a form of collapse of, in terms of whether it, all sorts of things is they're definitely on the rise. I don't have a lot of hope for this century.

[00:32:34] We are in a correction already. It's just, nobody wants to call it that from the Western hemisphere because it doesn't affect us as much as

[00:32:45] **Nate Hagens:** an, ecological correction.

[00:32:46] **Kristine Tompkins:** No, I think it's ecological and I think it's social. 'cause as people become more afraid and they are asking leadership to be more dogmatic, clearer, stronger, if you're from the United States, go get the things you need to, fatten the larger downstairs in the bomb shelter.

[00:33:11] So, no, I, absolutely think it's both, it's impossible to disconnect them. But, you know, there's like black swans in the, financial world. There are a lot of things we don't know how this is gonna turn out. We didn't know three weeks before the Berlin Wall came down, nobody understood that it was coming down.

[00:33:36] **Nate Hagens:** So are there possible white swans in the ecological, trajectory that you could imagine, even if they're somewhat fanciful?

[00:33:45] **Kristine Tompkins:** No, not really. But I do believe in the black swans that we actually have no idea what tipping point. So am I pessimistic about this century? Yeah, but I also, we don't know how it's going to turn out.

[00:34:00] And so all we can do with the things that we're focused on is go faster, be smarter, and have absolutely no fear. That's our motto. 'cause we don't know what's gonna happen, but who cares? W if you don't know,

[00:34:22] **Nate Hagens:** implied in a couple of your previous statements, you said the next few decades and this century, do you have hope for future centuries?

[00:34:35] **Kristine Tompkins:** I don't really think about hope very much. I, when I think about hope, I think about it right now. 'cause I get asked by so many people, what do you have? Hope? And I've gotten sick of it. and I just say, what it's come to

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mean to me is that if somebody asks me, do you have hope? What they're really asking me is, if you have hope, I'm gonna relax a little bit.

[00:35:01] As long as you're out there and you have hope and you're gonna hustle, that's one thing. And the second thing is one doesn't deserve to have hope unless they're doing something. I don't, I find most of us are so lazy and the heaviest shovel we raise is to ask someone else if they have hope. You have to earn hope.

[00:35:30] You don't get, you don't get to say or ask somebody, do they have hope. You have to get out there every goddamn day and, earn it because nobody else is gonna do it for you. And this is a great misunderstanding that, and people asking me, well, what can I do? Well, how do I know what you can do? I'm just meeting you among thousand people sitting in this theater answer me this.

[00:35:58] What are you really good at? What are you really good at? I don't care if you're 12 or 112, tell me what you're good at. Stand outta your chair and tell me, because whatever that is, you can march out your door this afternoon and go help people who are trying to save something or create something or, so I'm sick of talking about hope unless there's a big fat.

[00:36:26] Tail attached to it.

[00:36:27] **Nate Hagens:** It is, kind of emergent from our actual fossil fuel abundance and the economic surplus that we have has kind of resulted in this, social appropriation that the end of a conversation, all like all the environmental movies about climate change and, nature is disaster.

[00:36:51] Disaster. Look what we're doing to the elephants and the rainforest, but at the end, if we have solar and wind, there's still hope. And they finish every movie like that. Like it's some formula that matches the human psyche when it's really just a social filter on what is acceptable to be said these days.

[00:37:09] And what you just said in the last couple minutes makes complete sense to me. but most people don't have the status and the gravitas that you do to be able to say it. But I think you're absolutely right.

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[00:37:22] **Kristine Tompkins:** I think that if, The great sickness is to imagine that help is on its way, and that if I sit in my house or I mow the grass on my front lawn every day and I'm a good citizen, being a good citizen does not mean what it used to mean 25 years ago, even 10 years ago.

[00:37:51] People are inherently lazy, including me on some, you know, all of us, that I don't wanna be on another, I don't wanna be on another team. I wanna be on this one. I wanna be with Greta in the streets.

[00:38:12] **Nate Hagens:** So along with deep ecology comes deep responsibility, which we are mostly abdicating.

[00:38:18] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah. You know, I talk about abdication a lot now and people go, whoa, what are you talking about?

[00:38:25] I said, well, you know, you get aite about talking about King Edward abdicating, 60 years ago. You are abdicating your own future, but park your own future aside. That's a very intimate decision that you can make on your own, but by God, if you choose to abdicate

[00:38:53] life, dignified lives into the future, then who the hell are you? What do you see when you look in the mirror? What. Honest to God, who are we looking at here? And there are no saints. It's such a slog. It's so simple. Just get outta bed tomorrow morning and do something. Start small if you have to, but to abdicate your own heart, lungs, mind, and I do not care where you come from.

[00:39:35] That is the most crushing, fatal,

[00:39:43] lack of a decision you will ever make. Hands down. 'cause it doesn't matter if you lose. There are a lot of movements and wars that are won and lost. The real deep loss in our chests. Is to, is doing nothing.

[00:40:08] **Nate Hagens:** I feel that I, really, feel that, I think there is some truth though. and I know of some research on people doing altruistic acts are 300% more likely to do an act if they see someone else doing something altruistic.

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[00:40:28] And in the same way that people's bodies just receive that arrow with your words that you spoke, they don't know what to do. And yes, you're right, you don't know them. So how can you recommend what to do? But maybe there are some just broad categories of how to get started because I think, I sense, of course this is a, You know, a self-selected group of a hundred thousand followers that watch this podcast. Many of them deeply care about the natural world and want to play a role and don't want to do nothing, but I don't think they know what to do. So do you have any general advice, along those lines, in your experience and what you've learned and seen?

[00:41:14] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah, I suppose I would say, because it is the question, it is, you know, I can be a hard ass about it and really, you know, come down people through the microphone, but then I remember my own experience. And if somebody just changes how they view their language, if you say, I wanna get up tomorrow morning and I want to know my neighbors.

[00:41:40] We're not talking about the Jones on one side and the Smiths on the other walk out the door and. Who else is there? There are birds there. I don't know. Some people have a lot of neighbors, others fewer. But every breath of every being deserves a future. So the smallest towns have, you know, land trusts trying to save a pond or some tall grass prairie.

[00:42:17] There, there are groups there, maybe there are four members. But then take pride in being the fifth. Just if you take one step out of your house and say, okay, I have to work, I have to help take care of my family. I have a dog. All, these things are true, but one part of every day. I'm going to do something that has nothing to do with me and everything to do with life with capital.

[00:42:47] Al. I really don't care what town or village you might be in. Certainly cities. You wanna volunteer, go volunteer. I have a friend who's been taking young kids out of a lot of the public schools in Harlem into Central Park for the last 30 years. Kids who've never, they're close by, but they've never been in the park.

[00:43:15] They don't know. They don't know what the birds are. They don't even recognize so much that neighborhood is there. You can't believe what's transpired. Out of that, hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands of kids, because we all have something to give. Maybe that's the parting shot. I don't know.

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[00:43:39] **Nate Hagens:** The mutual friend that introduced us, Randy Hayes of Rainforest Action Network, asked me to ask you this question, but he said, be prepared for a one hour answer.

[00:43:49] Oh God. But, building on what you just said, could you briefly define Rewilding and tell us what Rewilding means to you?

[00:44:00] **Kristine Tompkins:** Rewilding is pretty simple. It, means leaving behind territories that are fully functioning. And I'll explain what that means. In the 2 million acres of EBITDA wetlands that we protected and now it's, a national park, it's one thing to protect the land.

[00:44:24] It's another thing to make making sure that all the species that have gone missing over really since, in this case, since the 14 hundreds, 15 hundreds. So rewilding is acquire or aggregate large territories. And in our case, we work in big ones. And then don't stop there. A lot of US national parks kind of stop there.

[00:44:53] Yellowstone hasn't wolves were gone. They brought them back famously and bison are there. So we, acquire large tracks of land over time. We make them national parks by donating them all back to either the Chilean government or the Argentine government. And then we look from the top predator down.

[00:45:21] Who's missing? And that list, taking EBITDA as an example from Jaguars, Pumas, ocelots, giant Anate, pomp steer, marsh, deer and the 27 species we've had to work on. And today these top predators are back roaming free and dispersing out into Brazil. And Paraguay in Chile, same thing. Nobody, no species had really gone truly extinct in Chile, but we've had to bring a lot of species back that have been on the brink and nearly so.

[00:46:04] **Nate Hagens:** How do you bring a species back?

[00:46:06] **Kristine Tompkins:** Every species is different. finally with Jaguars to get Jaguars back into Northern Argentina, we had to create the first in the world Jaguar breeding center. It's a lot of time, it's a lot of money. but in that time, which was 15 years ago, almost 20 years ago now, that was the only way to do it.

[00:46:30] We couldn't, there were no individuals to work with.



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[00:46:34] **Nate Hagens:** Naive question. It's okay. what is the importance of the full spectrum of, predator prey all the way down to the, in the trophic pyramid in a forest or a national park? why is that area better with, a viable populations of jaguars than without?

[00:46:53] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah. Let me see if I can do this as fast as possible. But basically it's this, if you take any place in the world, put a tack on a map. That place exists. Because of millions and millions of years of evolution, and from the tiniest microbes up to, in this case, the top predator jaguar in northern Argentina, all of those things have to fit together.

[00:47:24] If you take the top predator out, everything else about the ecosystem starts to collapse. So, as an example, KA, they've, they're, the world's largest rodent. So they were just part of an ecosystem. They were being predated by Jaguars, cougars, Oslo, everybody. But in the absence of those top predators, their numbers exploded over the last, say, 400 years.

[00:47:59] And so that changes the grassland, that changes the forest, it changes everything. But this is happening, thousands of times over ev one, some species are exploding, their numbers are exploding, other ones are being pre protected too heavily, even by their little neighbor. So that collapses and an ecosystem, they're resilient.

[00:48:26] It's not like everything has to be firing always on the same, notes. But if you want ecosystems, and if you go back to Yellowstone, Yellowstone isn't perfect. It should be 20 times the size that it is. But as an ecosystem, when they brought wolves back to Yellowstone, it changed how the moose. Eat inside the forest.

[00:48:55] It pushed the elk back out into the grasslands that cleaned up the river systems that were getting clogged. And all of these things begin to unfold, albeit very slowly, that another hundred years in Yellowstone is gonna be functioning in the way that it was. E in evolutionarily designed to function

[00:49:21] **Nate Hagens:** as a former college teacher.

[00:49:22] I will give you an a for that explanation. but it made me think of, in the Pleistocene there were multiple top predators, humans and others, and now we

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don't have that balance. And maybe that is on a macro scale part of the problem that we face.

[00:49:40] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah. You know, the Clovis people knocking out the megaphone and all these.

[00:49:46] For us it looks like, how did those people do that in such a short period of time? And I can't answer that, but I do know that I'm a deep ecologist. An idea that Arne Ness, the Norwegian philosopher came up with decades ago, and the central piece of this thinking is that all life has intrinsic value. And if we believe that, if you really believe it, then that influences the decisions you make about what your work is every day or how you go about almost anything.

[00:50:30] **Nate Hagens:** I truly believe it, Chris. and I've loved wildlife my entire life, but just in the last few years, in parallel with me recognizing the horror and the tragedy that is unfolding, I've, there's been a shift in me. Just a silly example, two silly examples, the 15 minutes before this podcast. I had some coffee and I sat down and I looked at my bird feeder, and all the different winter, woodpeckers and things just as my kind of new look connecting with, watching the, who lives with me here.

[00:51:05] And then the silly example is in the shower. In the basement. I take a cold shower after a sauna, and there are three spiders that are living in the shower, and I take a shower with them and I try not to disrupt them. 10 years ago, I would've been like, oh, there's a spider in the shower. And now I, just totally like, okay, I'm living with them.

[00:51:27] They're in my basement. They're forming some, performing some sort of role, and I'm not, I am kind of afraid of spiders, but I'm not afraid anymore. So maybe there are more humans. Maybe it takes time and awareness and recognition and, some special sauce. I don't know what to have this recognition that we're all connected and that everything on this blue green earth is sacred.

[00:51:55] How many millions of species we don't even know, but it's so profoundly beautiful and tragic at the same time.

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[00:52:02] **Kristine Tompkins:** You know, it goes the other way too, because I think for several years. I was just focused on we humans kicking the bejesus out of the non-human world. And in the last several years, I have developed a rekindling of my relationship to humankind.

[00:52:27] I look at what's taking place, you know, whether it's the Sudan or any number of places at, on any given day. And it, I have moved back to all life has intrinsic value, and that is not just the non-human world. So I, look also after my conversation with Pope Francis at the Vatican. I was lucky to spend an hour with him before Covid hit.

[00:53:03] And, It was a conversation that really rolled my humans were never absent in my thinking and heart, but now I articulate things differently and I feel things differently after, rethinking a lot of these things.

[00:53:32] **Nate Hagens:** Well, here's the thing. Jaguars and, kabira and tapers and green macaw and ant eaters, they can't regenerate Jaguars in Chile.

[00:53:45] So there are things that humans are uniquely capable of doing in service of life. If more of us. Stop asking, what do you have hope and, do things. So, so let me ask you this. a colleague of mine, a dear friend of mine, DJ White, who I think you would quite like him and his wife, decided instead of having children, that they would reproduce other species as their, the goal of their marriage and, their life.

[00:54:19] So today's, massive, availability of online information and interconnectivity and social connection. Is it feasible for the people listening to our conversation, to become a champion for another species? And how would someone even begin to think about that and go about that?

[00:54:40] **Kristine Tompkins:** First of all, 100%.

[00:54:42] It's possible. To decide, okay, I'm gonna work in my area. This species is famously absent or, nearly so. And if you, anywhere you are, you can find out who's working on that species. If it's a particular one, you can find out who some of the rewers are in the United States. you can find us, you can find, if you're in Europe, there are a lot of rewilding projects going on over there, and every one of them needs whomever happens to be listening today.

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[00:55:23] Every one of you is needed at a local, regional, national, international level. That's just simple. It's an invitation to join other like-minded people. Who are just like you guys. We have families, we have headaches, we have all these things that all of us are responsible for in our own personal lives. But I tell you, if Doug were alive, he would agree with me that, shifting the central focus of our life toward conservation and rewilding changed it utterly.

[00:56:09] And, it's a gas besides it's hard work, successes, failures, blah, blah, blah. It is the best.

[00:56:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, let me ask you another difficult question. I think for the average person, these are difficult questions, but given who you've been since you were five, these are probably like, easy pitches for you maybe.

[00:56:32] But, so you've just talked about the listeners of this program and how they might, you know, directionally get a start in rewilding or championing another species. What about the elites in our world, circles that you still probably, swim in? What about, I mean, you, you know, you were very successful financially in your work at Patagonia, and have been, you know.

[00:57:00] Spending your financial wealth in service of redistributing and allocating and protection of the natural world. What message do you have for other people that have amassed large digital and electronic claims on biophysical reality in their offshore accounts, that are looking at the world and trying to grow the amount of financial claims on reality.

[00:57:23] At the same time, ecological reality is dwindling, both for their children, their grandchildren, the unborn of ours and other species, but maybe even in their own lives. what is your elevator pitch or scream, to those type of individuals that might happen to watch this conversation?

[00:57:42] **Kristine Tompkins:** All life needs.

[00:57:44] You guys, people who come out of business have a different way of looking at being driven. We don't mind being driven. We think it's a good thing. We like discipline in a way of getting someplace that you wanna get to. obviously

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financial assets that you have are it goes without saying there. I don't care what someone's personal wealth is.

[00:58:24] If we don't use that wealth for something that falls outside of our personal gain, our family and so on, then you know, as the saying goes, your last shirt has no pocket. And I tell you, the partners that we have in Chile and Argentina through Rewilding, Chile and Rewilding Argentina, who are our legacy groups, they've worked, we've worked together for 30 years.

[00:58:53] Some of our best partnerships are people who do they wanna be on the ground every day and, you know, do live the way we live often. No, but do they wanna be part of something big that's changing the end of this story? Absolutely. And they like being involved. They like hearing the things that failed and they, that, you don't have to give up your business life, but you're like a gold mine.

[00:59:23] For conservation and rewilding to be participative to the degree that you wanna be. But those characteristics are essential and don't worry about dying with nothing in your pocket. Everybody does. So that it's so much more interesting than business. I tell you, and it's not just coming from me. I know a lot of great individuals, European, from the states, from Asia, who have said, if I'd understood the power of this.

[01:00:04] I would've started decades ago. I just didn't understand it.

[01:00:08] **Nate Hagens:** Do you know Jeremy Grantham by any chance? Because he said something very eloquent, very similar to what you just said, and he is also trying to wake up, deep pocketed individuals to this crisis and stated, there's nothing more exciting and relevant and important to your life than playing a role in this.

[01:00:28] And not just your money, but your creativity, your network, your enthusiasm, your discipline, everything.

[01:00:35] **Kristine Tompkins:** There's no question. I could open up our, friendship partner list, and you'd find a lot of very well-known people in there. But they are smoking when it comes to these things. They're engaged. they wanna understand the hardships with these top predators, all these things.

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[01:01:01] And they're gaining, they're not losing anything. It's just like Doug and I have felt since 1993. We have only gained through this.

[01:01:11] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you this. My view is that everyone is wearing three hats. Well, the one hat is, their job and their boss, or the bills they have to pay. Another hat is they wanna be a good family member and in their community.

[01:01:24] And another hat is they want to be a good ancestor to future generations on the planet. But it's that first hat that drives most of our behaviors and decisions. with the demographic you just described, is it possible that. At least at that echelon and maybe then changing in society at a later point that we can think of our return on our investment in non-monetary ways.

[01:01:56] Like you get an ROI because you invest in this company and it throws off 15% annually, and you get those dollars back on top of your investment. But what if that ROI is denominated in species or ecosystem health or stability, of, the, biome or the wellbeing of the indigenous communities and, local villages that are on the land?

[01:02:19] You don't get a monetary return per se, but there is a, return and it's measurable. What, are your thoughts on that?

[01:02:26] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah, I mean, let's face it, a lot of people are really successful in business or knuckleheads. It doesn't take, you know, to have a good company. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to be a good company.

[01:02:43] What it really takes a lot of work and guts is to be great. And I say the same thing about our lives. I can be a good person, I can, do everything I can for all the concentric circles around my life, my family, my friends, colleagues at Patagonia teams in Argentina and Chile. All that's true. I can do that with my eyes closed.

[01:03:11] But if I wanna leave something great behind and I never do this by myself, I am only one of hundreds of people I work with, then, the game gets interesting. If the accumulation of wealth is the game, it's pretty boring. And I think the guys who are. That milieu realize that there are a lot of knuckleheads out there who are extraordinarily wealthy.

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[01:03:44] But what if you can change something that adds to beauty, adds to wholeness on this planet, and all those things that feel nebulous. They're not very sexy, they're not fabulous the way money is, but you watch making money is not that interesting. I promise you, eventually, there will be a time when doing something.

[01:04:21] it's not enough to be wealthy anymore. It is. What did you do? With the assets you had, and I don't mean just financial, I mean your arms and legs and your mind and your love and your assets as a social mover and shaker. Then it becomes interesting. Carnegie was a wealthy guy. What has he thought of today?

[01:04:48] He's a wealthy guy. People think about that. But by and large, he is considered the libraries in every town in America. All these things that he left behind, then your life gets really interesting.

[01:05:03] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for that. that, that really landed for me. You, mentioned earlier the CAPI virus and the Ocelots and the Jaguars, and I know your, organization also, protects and is involved with Andean Condors and otters and Macaw.

[01:05:23] I imagine you have some amazing personal stories, working with these species. Is there anything you can share a particular memory, that, that is still inside you, that, you can recall?

[01:05:37] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yes, I do have one. let's see. I'm 75 now. It's probably on my 65th birthday or so. This Jaguar Center I was mentioning earlier, is quite complex.

[01:05:51] It was the first of its kind in the world. It was a lot of pressure to get it right and our first female Jaguar. it's very hard to describe what it's like to be really right up next to a Jaguar. I mean, there's a fence between you and, but for my birthday, I went out and I lied down in the grass, just 18 inches from her.

[01:06:22] And luckily enough she lied down on her side and for an hour or maybe more, I just, I lied there. And I told her life story as I knew it and I told her mine. And, She's the godmother of, oh gosh, we have almost 40 jaguars now in the wild

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dispersing into Bra Brazil and around and yeah, I mean, every so often you stop long enough.

[01:07:05] To tell another species their life story and they'll tell you yours. So yeah, I suppose that's one of 'em.

[01:07:14] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you so much, for all your work and, courage. I don't think you've probably listened to too many of my episodes, but I, do, if any, but I, ask, questions at the end of the same, of every guest.

[01:07:32] I'm not gonna ask you what you care about most because I think that's, pretty apparent by your, words and your deeds. But what advice do you have, for young humans who are coming of age learning about all the things that you and I have been discussing? Do you have any advice to, A 12 to 25-year-old, current generation, Chris Tompkins, who's, becoming aware of the stakes of our times.

[01:08:02] **Kristine Tompkins:** It's a tall order right now to be young right now, I would say don't turn your back on the facts

[01:08:17] and shed the fear that you've got and turn whatever that fear is into action. Try to step back from your own personal fear

[01:08:31] and go for broke, whatever that looks like to you at the time that you're asking yourself that. I wish people would remind young people of the Vietnam War, the, you know, just the sixties and seventies and I don't romanticize them. But I do go back in my mind and I realize, don't, stand at the back, go up to the front, be smart about it, but go up to the front.

[01:09:08] **Nate Hagens:** That's probably good advice for whatever age, you are at the moment. if you had a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to your status or situation, not that I expect you would care. what is one thing you would do to change, human and planetary futures?

[01:09:30] **Kristine Tompkins:** In some ways this century is gonna play itself out.

[01:09:33] I don't pretend that it's not. And then how do you stomach that? You know, again, I'm almost 75, so I'm not gonna see a lot more, but, I come back to



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having no fear, and that is a luxury of age. I realize that, but I also have been around activists who have reminded me that yes, age can influence our understanding of fear, but it is not foreign to young people and they pick it up and they use it.

[01:10:19] And may all the gods bless them because I learn from them still. The sense of having no fear.

[01:10:28] **Nate Hagens:** You seem pretty young to me, certainly in spirit. And I, my deep feeling is you still have a very important role to play in the conversation of humans and, the biosphere and the future. Thank you for your lifetime of, work and for your time today.

[01:10:45] Do you have any closing words, for our viewers?

[01:10:50] **Kristine Tompkins:** Yeah. No, I think a lot of the subjects we talked about today are pretty serious and dire and, I would just like to tell you guys who are listening that we also dance like mad and we go into the field and have these trips. We swear we'll never do again and than we do, and we, have a lot of fun in our lives.

[01:11:16] And a lot of us have been working together for decades. And I don't know, I think I'm probably the luckiest person on the planet, frankly.

[01:11:25] **Nate Hagens:** Chris Tompkins, thank you so much. you were an inspiration. I wish we would've met, 20 years ago.

[01:11:32] **Kristine Tompkins:** We're gonna make up for it. Don't worry.

[01:11:34] **Nate Hagens:** If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of the Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform.

[01:11:42] You can also visit the [great simplification.com](https://greatsimplification.com) for references and show notes from today's conversation. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our Discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stint, Leslie Balu, Brady Hyen, and Lizzie Sir.