

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Sarah Wilson:** This is actually a period of opportunity. We're straddling an old world that's collapsing and a new world which is yet to be born. And so the opportunity that we have in this moment is to get the better ideas, the more life-generating ideas that we want going into the future. We need them lying around so that as this crisis really comes to a head, they're ready to go, and that is actually something we can all do now.

[00:00:30] We don't have to wait

[00:00:36] **Nate Hagens:** Today I'm joined by philosopher and writer Sarah Wilson to discuss how to live well through the unfolding more than human predicament, and more specifically, how to remain as engaged, pro-social, and loving humans even as an uncertain world puts pressure on us to act otherwise. Sarah Wilson is a multi New York Times bestselling author and philanthropist.

[00:01:02] She edited Cosmopolitan Magazine Australia, founded the global I Quit Sugar movement, and hosted MasterChef Australia. She also wrote the bestselling book, First We Make the Beast Beautiful, and her book, This One Wild and Precious Life, won the US Gold Nautilus Literary Prize. Sarah lives nomadically, leading dynamic global conversations about modern philosophy, creativity, existential risk, and climate change via her Wild podcast, as well as her Substack community.

[00:01:38] Her latest book, I Eat the Stars: How to Live Fully and Beautifully in a Collapsing World, takes us through her journey learning about and then learning to live with the unfolding collapse of complex civilization happening around us. And she and I discuss just that in today's episode, including her journey through

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letting go of the false hope that if we only act now, we might save the current system we live in, and that letting go of that system might not actually be the worst thing humanity could do in this moment.

[00:02:15] A small caveat on this episode, I unfortunately had quite a bit of a cold, while recording this conversation, and I was feeling a bit lower in energy. And luckily, Sarah and I are friends, and she brought enough energy and stories to balance our conversation. With that, please welcome Sarah Wilson.

[00:02:35] Sarah Wilson, at long last, welcome, to The Great Simplification. you have had one of those careers that is kind of hard to define and put in a single box. You edited Cosmopolitan Australia, you founded the global I Quit Sugar movement, you hosted MasterChef, and I understand you became multiple New York Times bestselling authors a bunch of times.

[00:03:09] And now you've turned your attention to this story, existential risk, societal collapse–

[00:03:16] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah ...

[00:03:16] **Nate Hagens:** with your new book, I Eat The Stars. So this episode could probably go a million ways, but I would like to start with a speed round challenge of sorts. For anyone tuning in who isn't familiar with the term or might want a refresher, especially in different words, can you lay out the meta-crisis for us in five minutes or less?

[00:03:45] **Sarah Wilson:** Nice easy start to this conversation, Nate. Okay So the meta-crisis is basically all the crises that we are observing in the world today. So we're talking nuclear crisis, AI singularity, sort of at our doorstep, the climate crisis, food and water scarcity, crises. We're talking about financial trade route

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crises, everything that we're kind of being bombarded with as we open up our social media or our newspapers.

[00:04:14] It's all of those things happening at once. But it's even more than that because it's the crisis of all of these crises, the fact that there's so many crises happening at once. And so it's the crisis of our consciousness or the mindset behind why we have landed in this position with so much going on at once.

[00:04:35] So, to my mind, and I think you probably share the same thinking, Nate, it's the, the mindset we're talking about here is the growth mindset, the infinite growth on a finite planet mindset and individualism. But on top of all of that, it is also the fact that we, with our limited consciousness, we can't get on top of it all to be able to get a bird's eye view and be able to fix what's going on, right?

[00:05:02] So it's gone beyond that. It's so complex. It's so interconnected. Plus, we're in it and implicated in it, and that's what makes the whole thing meta. Does that make sense? That was under five minutes, I think.

[00:05:15] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. It does make sense. You brought up several things. We have a growth mindset, we have an individualism mindset, and a consciousness, and all three of those things are not the lenses with which to view this meta-crisis, which makes it really difficult, for a lot of people.

[00:05:42] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:05:43] **Nate Hagens:** and it took me a while to learn that as well. It's not like everyone is just robots waiting for facts to change their actions. There are layers of the onion of our built worldviews that we have to first overcome.

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[00:06:02] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. And I think one of the, sort of mindsets, the sort of sub-mindsets of that individualistic mindset that we've all grown up with is this concept of, the, the li- of linearity.

[00:06:16] That's what's so hard to fathom. I know that when I was looking at all of this and first entering into this realm, I was just really coming up against my tendency, my insistence on sort of doing the, well, if A, then B, and then we'll jump to this, and all of this kind of thing. And we can't fathom what we're in with that linear mindset.

[00:06:35] we've got to actually enter into the complexity. We've got to be in this, Again, that's what makes it meta.

[00:06:42] **Nate Hagens:** I really love your book, especially the fact that each of the chapters, like you said, is, kind of non-linear and they just have a one word, like ungrowth or hope or some of the other things, and we'll get into that.

[00:06:57] But it's impossible to present this story in a linear way, which is one of the reasons I haven't written a book. But the way you did it was beautiful.

[00:07:09] **Sarah Wilson:** Thanks. It was... I really had to be in it. It was the only way to do it, and I've had some criticisms that, oh, hang on, it's all over the place, it's scattered and so on.

[00:07:18] But, I explained from the outset in the little introductory chapter that I had to write it in a way that matched what we're in, And so I do jump from philosophy to science to economic modeling to spiritual, thoughts and, mindsets and, ideas. and so I've got to... And, also bring in my own personal story and my felt embodied experience, as I went along.

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[00:07:47] so that seemed to be the best way to reflect what we're in, I had to get that message as I went through it myself.

[00:07:55] **Nate Hagens:** I wonder how critical that is, and the fact that your book is so popular and well-received. People aren't, I suspect, searching for facts. They're more searching for authenticity and someone's experience that's mirroring their own, confusion and anxiety and uncertainty and all those things.

[00:08:19] What do you think about that?

[00:08:20] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah, I think it's both, to be honest. I grappled with that because when I first started writing this, and, when I first started learning about all of this, I-- I'm quite a left-brained person. I need science. I need the facts. I need to know where it all stacks up. And I actually think for anyone sort of, who's first entering into this space and becoming aware of things through this kind of meta-crisis or systems lens, it's important to, actually allow for that sort of left-brained way of thinking because it's familiar, because it's what will get us there.

[00:08:56] but as you go deeper and deeper into it, you realize that the facts just don't explain it all, and they don't actually get us to where we need to be. Because, Nate, you and I have t- spoken about this in the past. So intellectuals and academics in this space, they can get very bogged down in, sort of discussions as to, the actual etiology of a word or, you know, whether we should be calling it this or that.

[00:09:22] And I actually see that as a fear response and also a reticence to embody the complexity and the unknowingness of everything that we're in, right? So I think once you get into it a bit and you start to line up the facts, and knowing the factual stuff and knowing the theories and the thesis behind why this is all happening at once is really helpful.

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[00:09:45] We need that. But then we actually do need the more embodied explainers, and that's where it becomes f– really spiritual. And I know, you do that dance between the sort of the left and the right brain, experience it all, and we have to. It's, this and that, not this or that. And, yeah, I think we need to be able to embody it because this kind of heavy information, it produces so many big emotions, and it's got to move through our body.

[00:10:17] It can't be processed in our head.

[00:10:19] **Nate Hagens:** In my case, I think I graduated from the left brain, analysis of the situation where I had enough and then, like, naturally moved towards more of a right brain or integrated view. But when you're first learning about it, the-- you need-- there's a critical minimum threshold of connecting the dots, that the left brain analysis integrated system science is necessary.

[00:10:48] But you mentioned the emotional arc. So most of our viewers are somewhere on this journey of grappling with what you outlined. I'm wondering if you could talk about your own emotional journey and reaction when you first came to really understand the scope of what you outline in your book.

[00:11:12] **Sarah Wilson:** Well, for me, it was a little titrated because I came into this space, and I suspect a lot of people listening and, watching this, are much the same, through the climate crisis, It was ... I'd been a climate activ– activist most of my life. I grew up in this kind of space. And, it was actually through the profoundly rude awakening or realization that we weren't going to, quote-unquote, make it. that had been the great promise for decades. If we do this, then we can still make it.

[00:11:48] If we all rally together and get solar pla– panels and, vote climate and, recycle a bit more, we can make it. And that was a, fair, I think, rundown or approach to things because we did need critical mass. We all needed to do

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everything at once to be able to reach those, Paris Agreement, thresholds And so I started to sort of realize that we weren't going to make those thresholds.

[00:12:18] we weren't gonna make those targets. We were increasingly overstepping the planetary boundaries. We were getting alerts telling us that we're in, in, in red alert territory. I mean, the poor United Nations secretary general ran out of superlatives to sort of scream at us, like this, code red.

[00:12:36] he didn't, he couldn't go any further. And, and of course, all those other threats were piling on in, over the last couple of years, the decline in democracy, AI singularity, nuclear threat dialing up. We were closer than ever to the Doomsday Clock, was it 85 seconds from midnight, and so on.

[00:12:51] And, I suppose, like, it was just, it was overwhelming. and what I was observing in the climate movement was that everybody was overwhelmed, and everybody was in a state of agitated despair and, sort of just fatigued. And I decided to look into why that was the case, and I really realized that we weren't looking at this through the right lens.

[00:13:14] That it was the meta-crisis lens that we needed to be viewing this through. We need to see this as complex systems collapse rather than a unilinear concept. And once I started to realize that, and lining everything up, and letting go of that idea that we can somehow make it, really what it was that I felt was a profound relief.

[00:13:33] And I almost felt grubby and guilty for that because, is this just me kind of giving up and thinking, "Oh, good. There's nothing to fight for anymore. I can just kind of, rest my climate boots, hang up my climate boots." But I started writing about this, and of course, this book started out as a Substack serialization.

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[00:13:51] But when I started writing, the first chapter basically talks about exactly this, like confronting exactly where we're at and letting go of this, this promise of it, of us hopefully making it. And, yeah, the overwhelming response from readers on my Substack was relief. People said, "Thank God. That makes sense."

[00:14:13] and I'm, I, was reminded of that quote from, Václav Havel, the Czechoslovakian president, the former president and dissident, and he said something to, I'm gonna sort of butcher his q- his quote, but it was along the lines of, "Real hope is not the belief that things are gonna work out well.

[00:14:29] It's the belief or the knowing that, that things are starting to make sense." And I think that's where so many of us arrived. We were like, "Right, this finally makes sense." and really what was happening at a large scale, it was what was happening actually within my own brain. The cognitive dissonance of being told one thing and yet seeing the headlines that go w- up against that, it actually resolved that really uncomfortable cognitive dissonance, and so there was this sense of congruence.

[00:15:01] And, and so, yes, that expresses itself as a profound relief. And I know that you know what, you and I have touched base on this a few times, just- discussing that, that really profound, I don't know, the depth of, human emotion that this journey takes you on. It's both scary and terrifying and rude.

[00:15:24] Like, I've used that word a few times. I also use the word unholy. It's like, what the hell? We weren't promised this. The neoliberal dream didn't include this. We were told that we would just have increasing comfort and increasing ease. What the hell? We were not told about this. And then there's also this expansiveness, because this is true.

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[00:15:46] This is where we're at, and it's time to put on our grown-up pants and, rise up into this, which is also, you know Another emotion that, comes up a lot, I think, on this journey

[00:15:58] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for that. So a central theme that you emphasize, building on what you just said, throughout the book, is the loss of certainty.

[00:16:11] the fact that we just don't know what's coming next– Yeah ... or how things will exactly unfold. Essentially living in a system that is destabilizing before our eyes. So Sarah, why is that idea of uncertainty so important, and why is it so difficult for us as humans to sit with uncertainty?

[00:16:34] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. Well, I think we're cognitively programmed to seek certainty.

[00:16:40] as humans we wanna make order out of the chaos, and that's how we're able to get through life and put a roof over our heads and feed our kids. But the more interesting, I think, answer to this is more philosophical, and it's, the philosophers and the spiritualists throughout the ages have addressed this exact quandary.

[00:16:56] And I find it really interesting to sort of reflect on the fact that we are apparently the only species that has a full and sort of, overwhelming sense that we will die one day. Now, I think, other species, and I know you've discussed this with other guests on your podcast, other species have a sense that, yes, that death could be close and that kind of thing.

[00:17:18] But we apparently live with it, sort of looming like a dark shadow, And, the existentialists and the philosophers have tried to find a way through this, Now, the problem with why we struggle to manage it in this day and age right when we

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need to be able to have, a, to be comfortable with uncertainty is partly because of modernity.

[00:17:44] Neoliberalism in particular, but it, goes back several hundred years, has worked towards removing-- and I have this phrase that I use in my book, "Removing the moral umpires off the footy field of life." Right? So we- it's now a free-for-all. We're expected to grapple with all of this on our own right when things have dialed up, and that is terrifying and it's hard, and I think it's so important to talk about this because people out there are feeling crazy. Like somehow they're meant to be handling all of this on their own. But throughout history, we've never handled this on our own. And again, this is part of the neoliberal mindset that we've all been trapped in, that if you're not handling it, well, that's on you.

[00:18:27] You just need to work harder.

[00:18:29] **Nate Hagens:** I interviewed, last year, a guy named Sheldon Solomon. I don't know if you've heard of his work, but it's called Terror Management Theory- Yes ... which is just that, that our, culture is so afraid of death, and that actually manifests in our behaviors, our political voting, and, everything

[00:18:47] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah, I interviewed him as well actually.

[00:18:49] he is a beautiful man. he's

[00:18:51] **Nate Hagens:** a wonderful man.

[00:18:51] **Sarah Wilson:** He's a beautiful man.

[00:18:52] **Nate Hagens:** Showed up in New York City with a tie-dye shirt and a swimsuit on.

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[00:18:56] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah, No, he's, And he lives his message. He really lives his message. You can sort of see that he's really gone down into the depths of that, and I think you've spoken to various people who've discussed this in terms of grief and other profoundly deep emotions,

[00:19:12] **Nate Hagens:** So does the meta-crisis awareness, accelerate those emotions?

[00:19:18] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah It brings them forward. It brings them into, in, right in front of us. It sma- we're smacked up against all of this. But really what it's doing is it's smacking us right up against our humanity. This is what it means to be human.

[00:19:34] and what it does is also forces in- us into a place where there's actually nowhere else to go. You mentioned before that with your left-brained analysis of all the facts and everything, you reached a point where it couldn't go any further, and in fact, it was annoying you. Like, it becomes annoying because it can't provide the answers. And I almost think that, sort of meta-crisis awareness, the collapse journey, it actually funnels us into a place that in some ways all of our sort of, you know, meditation retreats and those books that sit next to us, next to our bedside tables and we sort of pick up and we get these profound, expansive feelings, right?

[00:20:11] They last an hour or the, or an hour or two, but then they waft away because we've got to enter back into neo- neoliberal living. What we're going through is actually taking us to that space, that, that, thing, that we can only just touch tentatively with our spiritual practices. I actually think that collapse is taking us right to this, where there is nowhere left, left to go other than through this, through our emotional subjective experience of it all.

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[00:20:40] and it is one of the gifts of what is going on. As to give away the end of the book, I refer to this journey, through to collapse awareness, and in fact, collapse itself is a homecoming. We're being driven back into our full humanity again after we've wandered off.

[00:21:00] **Nate Hagens:** So I had a realization there while you were speaking, and I'm a little slow on the uptake today 'cause I'm, I have a bit of a cold.

[00:21:09] But it's that I crave being around people that have embodied responses to this and not just, "Well, did you know this?" and "Look at this." And it, y- like, to, complete your thought, it feels like these are, to use Bill Plotkin's phrase once again, ecological adulthood in humans, where, yeah, okay, I understand roughly the, the shape of what we face, and here's how I'm living and here's how I'm responding.

[00:21:44] And I didn't realize my aversion to the fact slingers until you just expressed that, so I'm gonna have to process that- ... a little bit. but it brings up another aspect of this. For many people, their first response to uncertainty is almost a compulsion to find some sort of hope. but you wrote about this in- I Eat the Stars. Why can that reaction, this striving and requirement to have hope become actually dangerous in these circumstances? And how do we learn to let go of false hopes without losing the motivation to move forward, altogether.

[00:22:32] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. We sort of touched on this a little moment ago in reference to the sort of the climate movement. I think the climate movement needed to actually have that hope dangling in front of us at all times because there was this sense that we would give up without it. I've never really sat comfortably with that, and I was constantly interrogating it. And, I think the fact of the matter is there isn't hope, and we've got to actually be clear on what we mean by this.

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[00:23:02] We're not talking about all hope. We're talking about the particular hope that we've been sort of, enticed with, for decades now. It's the hope that we can continue business as usual and everything will turn out okay.

[00:23:19] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:23:19] **Sarah Wilson:** And I had to sort of look into that, like, and I'd never done it before. I was like, "Well, what does it mean for everything to turn out okay?"

[00:23:26] And it's that, we can continue the neoliberal capitalist, growth, infinite growth on a finite planet, myth uninterrupted. And there's not a single planet where that can stack up. There's not a mindset, a worldview where that makes any sense, It is a ridiculous thing to actually peg so much on.

[00:23:52] So mentioned before the cognitive dissonance. That is real. I think as humans who have a visceral engagement with the world, we realize that it doesn't stack up. Now, a big part of the problem with this kind of hope that we've been peddled is that it's actually an immature response to the situation, and it's not that dissimilar to outright pessimism because pessimism basically says, "Look, it's so bad, there's nothing I can do, so I'm not gonna do anything."

[00:24:22] this kind of hope or hopium as the Reverend, the, the late Reverend Michael O'Dowd used to call it, is this idea that somebody... look, it's pretty bad, but somebody else out there will fix it, so we're all good. And for, for years we've been thinking it'd be the green economy that would fix it.

[00:24:38] There'd be these boffins that would work out sort of these great new green economy initiatives, and we should be all good, And then it's, we've realized that doesn't stack up. So now we're onto the tech bros. The tech bros apparently are gonna create this AI that is gonna be able to work out a solution to the climate crisis that our limited consciousness cannot work out for ourselves.

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[00:25:01] And that is actually, it sounds ridiculous, but that is actually where some of my most sophisticated, powerful friends working in the climate movement at the moment, that is where they've landed, that the tech bros are gonna fix this. And it's a complete denial of our situation, and it's incredibly immature.

[00:25:21] I don't know, Nate, have you ever had Toby Ord on your podcast? He's actually an Australian philosopher. He works out of Cambridge, I believe. And, he looks at the, existential risk, and he made a really good point a number of years ago that w- he sort of stacked up-- he sort of took, s- the average lifespan of a, a mammals, a mammalian species like the human species, and then sort of- A million years

[00:25:47] yes, and then, lined up where we're at, right? And then sort of tracked it against a sort of a 85, year trajectory on the planet, the average sort of lifespan for a human, and worked out that we kind of come in currently as a 16-year-old. And I reckon that makes sense. Mm-hmm. We are behaving like a recalcitrant teenager who is aware of what's going on, but we think somehow there's an adult out there who's gonna come and save us, So that's what, that's why hope is dangerous.

[00:26:19] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it's worse than that because in our current system, and you follow this channel enough to know that there is a psychopathic instrumentality to our institutions and economic system. So our default hope as a culture is the market will solve it. Yes.

[00:26:42] That prices and technology will solve something that is ecological and spiritual and, biophysical, and it cannot. And so that's maybe this deeper realization that you come to.

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[00:26:57] **Sarah Wilson:** And so you asked me sort of where did I, where did I come to in terms of giving people something to move towards if it was not hope.

[00:27:07] And essentially where I arrive at is the truth. Yeah. Truth is actually a far sturdier ballast for where we're at. It's actually going to service far more effectively, robustly, more humanly, for the years ahead. So that's what I ground myself in now.

[00:27:25] **Nate Hagens:** Well, when I was reading your book, I hadn't expressed it or seen it that way, but that's what I'm trying to do with this platform.

[00:27:33] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:27:34] **Nate Hagens:** is truth, and understanding, and the hope and the response bubbles up from that. But I'm clearly not leading with hope. But, here's the thing, how many people in the world are ready— Overstressed and anxious, and they don't know about the meta-crisis, and I mean, what are your thoughts on that?

[00:28:04] I mean, this isn't for everyone. No. And I think with your work, people find you, and it's like a beacon in the sky, and they are attracted to it. But it ain't for everyone.

[00:28:14] **Sarah Wilson:** No, it's not, and we've got to realize that. And I think this is something that, I've had to adjust to from coming from the climate movement because with the climate crisis, it was actually quite valid for everybody to run round, door-knocking, having dinner parties, and trying to sort of swing their neighbors and recalcitrant uncle over into this way of thinking that, we all need to do the big switcheroo, to, sort of electric.

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[00:28:38] We need to decarbonize. We need to sort of stop our addiction to fossil fuels and everything, and we need to do it all at once. It won't work if we don't all do it at once. And so that idea had merit.

[00:28:49] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it kinda worked because the narrative did change to that even though it was a biophysically delusional solution.

[00:28:57] The narrative actually did scale for a while.

[00:29:00] **Sarah Wilson:** It did. But applying it now to the kind of the meta-crisis that we're in now, it doesn't translate for those exact reasons that you just outlined. A lot of people aren't ready for it, and besides, there's actually not something that we can do to fix this at scale with all the humans on board.

[00:29:21] Really, what we're doing is actually creating the invite for people to understand and adjust their thinking so that they're prepared for what is actually coming. We can't fix it. We can respond to it. I mean, the way that you adjust your thinking is there's a simplification happening, so get ahead of the rush.

[00:29:41] That's been your thesis, and that's, I think, the modus operandi behind what you do. and I think there's a lot of merit to that, but people need to come to it when they're ready because this is so overwhelming. And the best thing that we can do, anybody who is actually, really wanting their friends and family to wake up to this because they love and care about them, is to actually just be, and it's a Meg Wheatley phrase, to be an island of sanity.

[00:30:08] So basically, we need to get ourselves anchored, our nervous systems rock solid and sturdy so that we are a place where people can come to as they start to wake up to this kind of stuff. We can't hit them over the head with it, and so instead, all that energy that we could be spending, hitting people over the

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head and doing lectures at dinner parties and getting worked up because, nobody's listening, we can actually use that energy to get solid in ourselves.

[00:30:36] And this is something that I, really do believe in, and I'm, referring to my cosmopolitan terminology from my deep, dark past working in that space. But we need people who are actually in this space now. We need to actually make this new way of being look sexier than the status quo.

[00:30:55] That is actually a responsibility now. We've got to invite people in so that they can actually see, their nervous systems can observe our nervous systems being grounded and sturdy, and they'll resonate. They'll resonate, and they'll say, "I wanna be part of this." and again, that's right-brain thinking.

[00:31:15] It's been that message. So, I think that's the big difference here. Not everybody's ready for it, so what we do is we get ourselves as ready as we can be to hold the space when people are ready- ready to, enter it

[00:31:32] **Nate Hagens:** That resonates with my view. Cool. in, in your work, Sarah, you present, in your book, the visual of a Venn diagram between the old world and whatever is coming next, with the space in between being a place where we get to decide what we carry with us.

[00:31:53] So what opportunity do you think this space offers us?

[00:31:57] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:31:57] **Nate Hagens:** And what would you like to see carried through, if we can?

[00:32:02] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah, so I describe that sort of space in between. It's that kind of shaded crossover bit where the two circles cross over. It's the final time. We are currently in that liminal time.

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[00:32:14] We're straddling an old world that's collapsing and a new world which is yet to be born, And there's that famous quote from Antonio Gramsci, who, he came up with the quote when he's been imprisoned by Mussolini in another liminal time, that time between World War I and World War II.

[00:32:34] he said, was it, "The old world hasn't quite died and the new world is yet to be born. Now is the time of monsters." And so that is certainly the case today. We are in an in-between, uncertain liminal time, and all kinds of nefarious forces are stepping into the void and filling it. fascist leaders, bad faith actors, and so on and so forth.

[00:33:02] I don't need to list them all. We're all living on this planet today. We know who they are, and we know what they're doing. And this is what has always happened in liminal times like this. But what also can happen in these in-between times when everything is up for grabs, we, the people, we can step in.

[00:33:20] And there's that other quote from Milton Friedman. It's a wonderfully ironic quote because, of course, he's the founder of modern capitalism. He said, and I'm paraphrasing here once again. change only happens off the back of a crisis, but what happens after the crisis will depend on the ideas that align around at the time.

[00:33:39] And so the opportunity that we have in this moment is to get those ideas, the better ideas, the more life-generating ideas that we want going into the future. We need them lying around. We need them lying around so that as this crisis really comes to a head, they're ready to go. So that is the position that all of us are in.

[00:34:01] Now, liminal times are far from being super, dark times. They've actually produced incredible, sort of isms. So that period I mentioned before between World War I and World War II, Simone de Beauvoir wrote about this in

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her book *What Is Existentialism?* She talked about the fact that the world was trying to grapple with, well, what comes next and what matters now.

[00:34:24] And so fascism, communism, and existentialism burst forward, and a lot of that thought actually was happening here in the city I live in now, in Paris, in cafes, as people were trying to grapple with all of this. Another liminal time, the Axial Age, was a very long liminal time between two massive epochs.

[00:34:42] It produced the market system. It produced Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism. There's other dark times that have produced incredible art movements, and philosophical thinking. And so this is what I actually find exciting, and I, and we need to remind ourselves of this. This is actually a period of opportunity.

[00:35:05] We need to be stepping into this before the fascists do, if I can put it simply. I fleshed that out in a fair bit of detail. and I make the parallels between these liminal times in history and sort of what we're going through now. And, I think we all feel it. Nate, I know you do. I know many of your guests on your program do as well, where there's a sense of urgency.

[00:35:27] Like, game on. This is... I mean, what a time to be alive

[00:35:32] **Nate Hagens:** The challenge is that at the same time all these crises are merging and bubbling up, the stock markets are at all-time highs, and the narratives in the news and the media are distracting from this. And so we probably large numbers of people won't actually get the message until- Yeah

[00:35:54] we're really in it. So let me ask you this. How long have you lived in Paris?

[00:35:59] **Sarah Wilson:** I've been here for just over three years now.

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[00:36:02] **Nate Hagens:** Okay. So are people in the cafes and people that you talk to, do you notice a difference from three years ago, which was not too far in the Ukrainian war? I mean, right now this is, September 10th we're recording this.

[00:36:19] forward prices on natural gas this winter in France and in Europe are \$25 per million BTU. In the US it's \$3.

[00:36:28] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:36:28] **Nate Hagens:** So th- this winter is going to be a challenge with storage and other things. W- are

[00:36:35] **Sarah Wilson:** And food ...

[00:36:36] **Nate Hagens:** every... And food, right. So, are people, everyday people talking about this aware of it, or is it sleepwalking like it might be in Chicago or New York City?

[00:36:47] **Sarah Wilson:** Or, Sydney or Melbourne, Australia or London. France, I think, has generally, and Europe more broadly, but particularly France, has always been a little more ahead of the curve on this stuff, I think.

[00:36:59] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah.

[00:36:59] **Sarah Wilson:** there's a whole range of reasons for it. I think particular to France is the French Revolution.

[00:37:05] Like, I mean, I'm reading a book at the moment called How the French Think, and it goes into sort of historically why the French, are so good at nuanced thinking, I mean, anybody who's been to France, to Paris, you walk around the cafes, people are just talking. They're talking and they're arguing.

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[00:37:21] This is what they do. This is their favorite pastime. That and protesting. And so it's part of their national identity, and they're so proud of it. When I first arrived in Paris somebody said to me, "Well, if you get invited to a dinner party, bring a good bottle of wine and a good argument."

[00:37:39] And it took me a while to adjust, 'cause I love arguing, but it has not gone down well in my home country for the last couple of decades, right? Where there's this real anti-intellectualism that has taken hold since about the 1970s. So France has always been really good with nuance. There's also the socialist roots, and so, things can get done here.

[00:38:02] Governments can issue edicts on behalf of the country, and sure, people will protest if they think it's unfair. They'll have a whine because ... When I say whine, I mean a whinge, in ... Because that's French as well.

[00:38:16] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know what whinge means either.

[00:38:18] **Sarah Wilson:** Oh, whine or whinge, I think one's British, one's Australian.

[00:38:21] To complain.

[00:38:22] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[00:38:22] **Sarah Wilson:** To have a really big fat complaint. and so, there's this sense that they'll, they suck it up because it's for the greater good. And so socialist principles are still, very much ingrained here. There is a sense that you do things, for the greater good and it plays out in so many different ways, Nate, in everyday life here, and it really takes me aback.

[00:38:44] But as collapsology has been a, a, a concept, a frondemont, is something that's actually very familiar to everyday people. I've spoken to ... I had a

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Corsican boyfriend for a while who had no education. He lived a very, alternative life. He's outside the system, but he's completely up to date on how collapse works and the terminology of it.

[00:39:10] So it's something that is definitely spoken about. On top of this, I think it was March last year, the European Union advised all leaders to inform their 450 million odd residents, to prepare a disaster kit or an emergency kit, a survival kit, and they were really open about it. And I don't imagine an American or an Australian leader could say it in these terms.

[00:39:34] It was like, "Well, it's in the event of a major catastrophic life-threatening crisis, including a war." Like, the notion of a third World War is being talked about openly. Macron has converted a number of hospitals into hospitals that'll be ... that need to be ready for World War III. So it's also happening in the UK.

[00:39:53] So when I go back to Australia and talk about these things, people are in shock, absolute shock. But yes, to answer your question, it is part of the vernacular here, and there is an awareness That, and also an em- an emotional, an intellectual ability to hold this information

[00:40:15] **Nate Hagens:** So w- a frequent question that I often receive doing this work is, well, should I start stockpiling, or prepping, or other similar responses?

[00:40:28] What's your stance on that kind of sentiment as a reaction to, or as a first reaction to learning about these topics?

[00:40:35] **Sarah Wilson:** Well, I get asked the question a lot as well, and what I say to people is really simple, and it generally cuts through. Okay, so if things get bad enough that warrants you stockpiling your tinned tuna and your batteries and so on, then, are you prepared to defend your tuna and your batteries?

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[00:40:56] And are you prepared to do it with guns and violence? Because that's what will be required if things get so bad that it justifies going off into the hills with your tinned products or your canned products. And, what about if the neighbor's five-year-old comes around hungry?

[00:41:15] What are you gonna do then? And when I actually went through that sort of chain of logic, I was thinking there was absolutely no way I could do it, because it goes against everything I know to be true about being human. And so I sort of try to meet people with those kinds of counterpoints, to get them f- to think through the implications of what they're talking about.

[00:41:38] Now, the other way that I can sort of phrase it is to say, well, listen, that mindset is actually the mindset that caused the problem in the first place. It's the mindset that has fueled the metacrisis, i.e., rampant individualism. So the flip side of all of that is... Oh, and I should add to this, for the left brain thinkers out there, I add to it that the studies have shown categorically that homesteading or heading off into the hills and living a subsistence living doesn't work.

[00:42:08] Less than 5% of these intentional communities last longer than five years, and that's just been a study that's been going for many years. They fall apart because you actually need a minimum of around 100 to 150 people to be self-sustaining, to keep food and water systems going, but also to defend it.

[00:42:28] I mean, 'cause that's the reality of things. And I found it really interesting. I remember when I first heard this, I thought, "Hang on, isn't that the Dunbar number?" And somebody recently told me, it's also the, the most effective size of a congregation, a religious congregation. So, it's a magic number, right?

[00:42:47] And we fail if we try to live on our own, separated from each other in smaller numbers. so, when I... Again, when I tell people this, they're, like, visibly relieved that they don't have to go and start looking at property outside of the

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major metropolises around the world, and learn how to work a generator and so on.

[00:43:11] but then they wanna know, "Well, what does work?" Well, what does work is actually, and I love this phrase from Pema Chödrön, which is start where you are. Like, stay where you are in your suburban sort of setup with your cul-de-sac and so on, or in your apartment building, or in your small town, and actually start to really form bonds of communication and cooperation and community within a group that would probably naturally fit to 100, 150 people, 'cause this is, that is how we naturally operate.

[00:43:46] And that is actually something we can all do now. We don't have to wait. We don't have to wait for, I don't know, the moment when we can sell the house and we can head off into the hills, and we've read all the textbooks on, on, on all of this. Now, that's not to say if that's not your... if that's your great dream in life, go off and do it, for sure.

[00:44:05] but, make sure you form bonds with all the people around you and cooperate and share and find ways to be resilient as a community. Now, I think a—many Americans now, as well as Australians, who have experienced some kind of climate calamity, they've had this as sort of a lived experience.

[00:44:23] you can't rely on governments and, and the money to come in from politicians or from wealthy people to save you. What actually works is community bonds, and I think we're starting to really realize that. More and more people are going through some kind of climate, calamity, I think, it's registering.

[00:44:45] It's really registering, this idea that going off on your own, it, can't work

[00:44:50] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I've decided that long ago as, as well

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[00:44:54] **Sarah Wilson:** I mean, you've been living with your ducks and your animal, out in the country for a while. But I don't get the sense that you're trying to live in a subsistence, sort of isolated way.

[00:45:05] **Nate Hagens:** No, we grow maybe 30 to 40% of our own food. But I think this work boils down to four things for me. One, and I think I'll do something frankly in the near future. One is preparing for a bend, not break, economic Deflationary depression and all the things that entails. Two, avoiding strategic thermonuclear war, and I work on that a little bit in the background.

[00:45:35] Three, protecting the web of life and midwifing the, the, biosphere and all our nieces, nephews, cousins in nature through what's coming. And four isn't a response or something we do per se, but it's inculcating a sense of the sacred for those that come after us, a homecoming as you will, a- as you- as you mentioned earlier. and that will take time. Like, we almost had to go through this to recognize our species level rite of passage. But on that note, I just have to assume that nuclear war is not going to happen.

[00:46:21] **Sarah Wilson:** Cause if it does, there's nothing we can do once it does. So there's no point staying in that space.

[00:46:26] **Nate Hagens:** Exactly, but applying that to what you just said, in the same way, what I realized is if there's a Mad Max future, I- I'm, my work is no longer relevant and we failed. so I'm just kind of assuming that a Mad Max outcome is not going to happen and do the best I can with the other things.

[00:46:49] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:46:49] **Nate Hagens:** I have not made huge progress in the local community.

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[00:46:53] I live in, rural Midwest, and the nearest neighbor is a quarter mile away and then another quarter mile. So i- it's a little bit of a dissonance because my community is online and through the networks that you and I share. And I'm still hopeful that we navigate away from the darker- Yeah

[00:47:18] trajectories, which is why we're doing this work. But-

[00:47:22] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah ...

[00:47:22] **Nate Hagens:** I do agree with you that... Well, I have the term pro-social prepping as opposed to guns- Yes ... and gold and beans and Bitcoin. It's more of a community, networking, the type of thing that you said.

[00:47:36] **Sarah Wilson:** I'm a little bit like you as well. I'm living in a foreign city.

[00:47:40] my friends and my family network is on the other side of the world. However, I've weighed things up and I think people are probably interested to hear what our take on all of this is. I've gone down the route of thinking, do I go and buy some property for my family and we can all set up there and, it's quite a large family, And I've crop- put a line through that. But equally, There's so much that's gonna be uncertain when we don't know how it's gonna play out. But all I do know is right now, and again, collapse slams us into the present. Again, another spiritual experience we weren't expecting. It's forced me to go, "Okay, I need to be of service now."

[00:48:22] And so I have made all kinds of decisions in my life over the last couple of years that essentially s- are about me being as available as I can to people who want this kind of information presented to them in a palatable way. While we see- And if that means that I'm not prepared for a Mad Max scenario, so be it, because I will put everything into doing this work now and preparing other people.

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[00:48:48] and I think that's a, a far better use of my time–

[00:48:51] **Nate Hagens:** That, is exactly how I feel and where I've landed,

[00:48:55] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. And I also do think that if you are in a community and you're able to get a generator, and you're able to actually start talking about water sources and things like that, do it. Do it Right And I would also add, follow the advice of various governments now around the world, that are saying s– get together a s– 72-hour emergency kit.

[00:49:16] Because what collapse is gonna look like in the near future, we all can, almost guarantee it, as long as the robots don't take over and a bomb doesn't drop. It's gonna look like sort of increasing blackouts and the internet going down and inconveniences. And, to go back to sort of what was happening in Europe over the summer, here in Paris, I was here during the heat waves that just ground the city to a halt.

[00:49:43] And everything stops, and you can't rely on all the things that you normally rely on to be a cog in the system. And so yes, there are sensible things you can do as well, like get together food and water to last you three days in case there is a shutdown.

[00:49:59] **Nate Hagens:** So from first glance, Sarah, your books, including I Quit Sugar, I think another one was called First We Make the Beast Beautiful, and now your newest one, I Eat the Stars, could seem disconnected from topic to topic.

[00:50:15] But you've expressed that there is a fact that runs through these, that they all take complex ideas and unapproachable topics, and that you have a skill for distilling them down to a general audience. So how do you approach that type of task, that type of project, especially as someone who isn't necessarily coming from an academic discipline.

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[00:50:43] Like you're trying to explain these things to the common man or woman

[00:50:48] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. I've always taken the approach, show don't tell. I think that's the most effective way to go about things. So the I Quit Sugar sort of message was, I quit sugar, I gave it a go, I went down the rabbit hole 'cause that's how my head works, and worked out all the science and how it all works and all the political implications and so on, and I emerged with a book and a bunch of recipes.

[00:51:10] You can give it a go if you like. And that kind of approach was cognitively bearable for people. 'Cause most people do not wanna quit sugar. but if it can be treated lightly, as an invitation, an experiment, then they're just gonna see how it goes. And what I worked out is that, in that case, two weeks in, if you can get people there for two weeks, the biology starts to kick in.

[00:51:35] You start seeing the benefits, and so vanity takes over. The skin's better, They start to see a weight change and so on. So I've used that approach with a bunch of things. also that message I said before about we need to make the new way of being sexier than the status quo. I also think when you're a messenger in this space and you're trying to speak to everyday people, you really do need to go first.

[00:52:01] You need to be the guinea pig. You need to put yourself in there. And, actually all of my books have been written in real time, so I'm not... I'm only half a step ahead of the reader. I don't purport to be on a pedestal, speaking down to them, and so I think that's super important. People don't. You know, the self-help industry's all been about somebody who's been there. They've trademarked the concept, and now they tour the world, sold-out stadiums with pyramid scheme products t- to boot, and talk down to people.

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[00:52:34] And that works for a while because a lot of people want to be told what to do, but it doesn't su- it's not sustainable. Ultimately, change happens when people embody the change themselves, and they can relate at a human level to what, the promise at the end is, So they're some of the tactics that I, I use.

[00:52:53] But also just doing that dance between the left and the right brain, Give, give the factual information 'cause people need to know it because they need to explain it to their husbands on the couch that evening and go, "Well, hang on. That doesn't sound right. Eh, You do need some of that ammunition and, you need to do the, the, the emotional, spiritual side of things.

[00:53:19] there's a really interesting point in my journey with the book where I'd... I was in Greece, and I hitchhiked home one night from a dinner party, and this guy picked me up and drove me up the hill.

[00:53:29] **Nate Hagens:** Was he Corsican

[00:53:31] **Sarah Wilson:** by any chance? No. This guy was actually English. and he was very wealthy as it turns out 'cause the next morning he ran into me and he said, "Ah, it's you," and sat down with me and was asking what I was writing 'cause I was writing my book.

[00:53:44] This book was written in cafes and various places, bus stops and so on around the world. And, and he drilled me on it all and was doing that sort of, "Well, what about this? What about that? And eh. And haven't people always been saying the world's gonna come to an end? And how's this different to..."

[00:54:00] we all know this line of questioning. And so we went down, down, and of course we landed at a spot where it started to get quite emotional, and at one point he put down his coffee and he looked at me and he just said, "This is gonna have to be spiritual, isn't it?" And it was so interesting.

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[00:54:17] He got there on his own, through this kind of going layer after layer where I wasn't trying to tell him he wasn't... He was wrong for feeling the way he was, but we just kind of, we went there together. And so yeah, I tell that anecdote in the book and sort of, open it up into that sort of spiritual chapter about how, yeah, that's where we're at.

[00:54:38] This is spiritual.

[00:54:40] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you a difficult question because it's something, I mean, we rhyme in our audiences and what we're trying to convey. You mentioned, a few minutes ago, the bulk of humanity, but in truth, Sarah, the bulk of humanity is not watching our podcast or reading your Substack.

[00:54:59] And so how do we convey the magnitude of our situation I mean, it is to a, academic, erudite, global north, Western sort of audience, but there are billions-- Well, there's two billion people that heat their, food with cow dung, and, charcoal and such today. So how do you include non-Parisians and Australians in, in your thinking on, what we face, or do you?

[00:55:42] 'Cause I struggle with this

[00:55:43] **Sarah Wilson:** I get asked this in audiences when I do events around the world on this topic. "Well, hang on, what about the Global South?" n- not great phrasing, but it's a shorthand. Because of course, much of the world is already in what looks like collapse. I'd argue in Sudan, Congo, Gaza, that is what collapse looks like.

[00:56:04] and so my answer to that is, I don't know that we can do anything material at this stage, to address that inequality. It is, in fact, the in- inequality and the polarization. Peter Turchin, have you had him on your podcast? I

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[00:56:21] **Nate Hagens:** have.

[00:56:21] **Sarah Wilson:** The guy... Yeah. The guy who wrote End Times. He sort of said the two levers, in collapse are really, polarization and high levels of inequality, or reducing the levels of inequality.

[00:56:34] So there is work that we can do there, right? We can reduce inequality and reduce polarization wherever we can, and there's some really tangible things that I know you talk about, but I talk about in my book that, anybody who's wanting to have a list of things that they can go off and do, there are some things.

[00:56:52] But really, I've gotta be honest with myself. I write books that are not cheap, that, and, you do podcasts, as do I, that require technology to be able to access them. We r– we communicate to a particular audience. It's a very important audience because they're imp– they're the audience that actually do have some kind of agency, still.

[00:57:16] and so that's what I actually have to stick to, because that's the medium that I'm able to use. What I'd also say is that, and I'm gonna be really brutally honest here, we've got the furthest to fall. Yeah. And one of the biggest, one of the things that I write about a lot and talk about a lot is that we probably won't die of being burnt to a crisp or, by wildfires or drought.

[00:57:38] We probably won't be inundated by floods. The greatest risk you face in the US, I face, here in, in the Northern Hemisphere, but, a lot of the listeners in Australia also face, the greatest risk we face is mass civil unrest.

[00:57:53] **Nate Hagens:** Yep.

[00:57:54] **Sarah Wilson:** And we're on the brink of that. We are so close to it. It is a perfect storm of conditions for it.

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[00:58:00] There are the material conditions, but then there's the subjective conditions, i.e., the polarization, the fragmentation, the fact that we are so, distant from each other, the acedia that is sent, that has set in, this incredible loneliness from meaning. It's a perfect storm for us to really lose our shit.

[00:58:18] And so the work that I do, that I'm really focused on, is actually speaking to an audience who have access to my books, to basically get them informed so that they do not add to this mass civil unrest, which could actually see the whole stack of cards go down.

[00:58:33] **Nate Hagens:** Let's double-click on that. You often push back on the Hollywood version of collapse as zombies and-

[00:58:40] **Sarah Wilson:** Mm-hmm

[00:58:40] **Nate Hagens:** wastelands, and describe something more mundane and slow-moving, like power outages, you mentioned earlier crumbling infrastructure, a long vulnerable night on the porch with your friends and the like. And you call the response in your book a radical simplification, and you give people permission to actually consider, and enjoy a simpler life.

[00:59:08] And as you can imagine, this framing is close to my heart. So paint a picture of what a simplification looks like- maybe in your own life, and how someone who hears simpler but feels poorer in their body when the word lands.

[00:59:28] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah.

[00:59:30] **Nate Hagens:** yeah, unpack that a little bit.

[00:59:32] **Sarah Wilson:** Well, I mean, I've got to confess, or at least, put this out there, I've lived in a very simple way for a number of decades now.

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[00:59:40] I grew up, in a very simple way. on a, would you believe, a self-sustaining farm? as dad said, it was because we were broke more than anything else, with just too many kids flo- you know, floating around. so it's quite familiar to me. I was very much gr- brought up to sort of see the pointlessness of waste and the pointlessness of owning things.

[01:00:04] And so despite the fact that I was the editor of Cosmo and so on, I used to ride a bike to work, I wore secondhand clothing. I've never owned a handbag in my life. I managed to sort of slip through that whole system and play the role of editor, but sort of take off the accoutrements at the end of the day and live very differently.

[01:00:23] I've worked out that buying... Once you enter into that system, it is painful and tedious and it's just horrible. And once you actually exit from it, you start to realize how much flow there is to living this, this far more simpler life. So I've been doing this for a while, and I've been talking about it for many years.

[01:00:45] and, through all the layers of living, the way I cook, the way I travel, the way I, be with people, it's, I pare it all back. it's as analog as I can make it. and I can only say it just brings more joy and then, there's so many studies that show that to be true. But when I actually started talking about this kind of thing, and on the Substack, which then became the book, the feedback in the comments, again, was this kind of, it was kind of comical relief.

[01:01:17] Like, people were, like, relieved to actually have it put out there, and then people started having fun with realizing what this actually looks like, the implications of this. And pe- I got people to write a list of, if we got rid of this system. Because what we're really talking about here, collapse could just be the death of the system.

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[01:01:32] that's a framing that we can work on. We are letting go of a system. People started listing all these things. I went, "Oh my God, no more unboxing videos." "No more golf courses." they went golf, courses, golf clubs, n- no more of that. the idea of driving your kids to weekend sports, like your entire weekend spent shuffling your kids in and out of cars and activities and everyone's exhausted by Monday morning.

[01:02:02] And one person wrote, "The LinkedIn version of myself." You can finally get rid of that. And I think the point here is that, We've been hanging on to this mythological perfect way of being that's promised more and more growth, and more and more comfort, and more and more ease. But really what it is it's dangle- it's basically all about sort of preparing for something.

[01:02:27] It's this idea of the run-up, the dress rehearsal, right? So we, dev- we build nest eggs, and we save our money, and we go off and get an education so that we can go and do this, and then it goes on, and on, and basically the promise is you do all of this, and then you retire, you join a golf club, and then you die.

[01:02:45] And what I think- The-- when you really start to absorb the implications of simplifying your life, you realize that what it's doing is, again, planting you in the present. And f- y- we're being forced to live now. We're being forced to do all the things that neoliberalism promises us, but way, way down the track.

[01:03:04] We now get to do it now. There's that parable of the fisherman. It's told in all different ways, but the Greek version is the one I know. There's a Greek fisherman, and he goes out each day, catches a fish, he takes it to the taverna, and his mate, who owns the taverna, cooks it up, and they share a tipiro and play cards and talk all night and eat this fish.

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[01:03:22] And he goes out the next day, does the same. A German tourist, it's always German for the Greeks. A German tourist sees all of this and says, "Well, what are you doing? Why don't you, why don't you get a boat, and then you can catch more fish?" And the Greek goes, "Well, why would I do that?" "Well," and it goes on and on, "Well, then you could catch more fish, and then you could actually employ some staff, and then you could catch more fish, and then you can get a bigger boat, then you could have a fleet of boats." And eventually the Greek goes, "And why would I do all of this?" And he said, "Oh, so that you can go and sit in the taverna with your friend and drink tipiro and play cards and talk all night."

[01:03:56] the point is made.

[01:03:57] **Nate Hagens:** It's really a microcosm of our whole culture in many ways.

[01:04:01] **Sarah Wilson:** I think so too. And it's actu- a penny drop, and I think for a lot of people, again, there's a palpable relief.

[01:04:10] **Nate Hagens:** So throughout, I Eat the Stars, you emphasize the idea of collaboration and collective action as the fundamental root of any viable response to the situation we're likely to face.

[01:04:24] Can you explain why you believe this so strongly? Yeah. And what might that idea look like, in, in practice?

[01:04:31] **Sarah Wilson:** It's actually the only thing that works in tough times. I mean, the fact of the matter is that humans, we're not a very strong species. We're quite feeble. We can't run fast. We don't have fangs.

[01:04:43] We don't have horns. Like, all we've had is our ability to communicate and to collaborate and get collectivist, and that's actually what has seen us r- rise

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to the top of the proverbial food chain is that ability. And so it's our superpower. We actually can't survive without it because we don't run fast.

[01:05:05] We don't have much else going for us. I mean, it's been in our system for hundreds of thousands of years to behave this way. There's wonderful studies that show that kindness is completely contagious, and it gives us this incredible sort of happiness boost. Even watching someone be kind to somebody else gives us the same happiness jolt.

[01:05:28] we are c- a collective species. It's not only what sees us survive, it sees us thrive. Without it, I don't know that life's worth living, really.

[01:05:40] **Nate Hagens:** Where does duty fit into that picture, and how do you think that's different from Western culture's current perception?

[01:05:49] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. Duty is something that I think, our Western perception, has a sort of self-flagellating negative connotation to it.

[01:05:58] it's what you do on the side. You go to church and you do it, you atone a bit or you give some money to, to a, a trust or a philanthropic org- organization. But actually, I flesh out this point of duty, a sort of a particular take on it that I think again reframes things a little into a far more human way.

[01:06:18] You know that study that was done to show that the idea of the hedonic treadmill, that happiness actually doesn't fulfill us- Mm-hmm ...

[01:06:26] **Nate Hagens:** Mm-hmm.

[01:06:27] **Sarah Wilson:** and the study was done, a number of decades ago, but it basically compared, I think, the happiness levels or the, sort of the satisfaction levels of people who'd won the lottery with paraplegics.

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[01:06:37] They really took two extremes there. And what they found was that after a couple of years, both had similar levels of happiness. Yeah. 'Cause there's this, this set point that we all go back to. And so the idea of buying things and trying to sort of manage our way to happiness, it's pointless.

[01:06:57] Now, what a lot of people don't realize is that one of the s- scientists who worked on that study, there was two guys that were involved, he went off many years later to go, "Well, what is it that actually does produce meaning for humans? What is it that actually s- is long-lasting?" And what he found was it was our commitments.

[01:07:17] It was what we actually do out of duty that brings the most meaning to our lives. And I don't think that's something that is talked about often enough. I mean, again, we had philosophers and spiritualists who used to remind us of that, but of course, they've gone. We haven't had that tradition, at least for most of us listening, and, here.

[01:07:41] We haven't grown up with that tradition. And I talk about a friend of mine who talked about the idea of being compelled, and I think that's a really powerful word- word. I think a lot of us are feel- feeling a compulsion to be of service, that sense of duty is no longer something that we feel we have to do to look good.

[01:08:02] It's actually coming forward as something that is part of this very, very human experience we're going through. We are feeling compelled to do it, and we know it actually brings us incredible- incredible meaning.

[01:08:15] **Nate Hagens:** I certainly feel it. I don't know how many people feel it, but I... what you just said really resonates with me.

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[01:08:23] and you mentioned set point theory, but also Abraham Maslow, in his personal writings after he died, they found out that he had a tier above self-actualization which was in service to something larger than your own life. Yeah. That was the top of the, Maslow's hierarchy

[01:08:44] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. And it's the same with, v- Viktor Frankl in Man's Search for Meaning.

[01:08:49] he'd actually worked on this sort of e- area of psychology all of his life, and then he spent four years in Auschwitz. Came out and wrote a book in nine days about what it was that saw the, p- some people survive Auschwitz and some people perish. And he boiled it down to those who had something to live for bigger than themselves were able to get through, and they were often not the big burly blokes.

[01:09:14] They were the, the sort of more introspective people. It comes up time and time again, and really it's a matter of us all revisiting those wisdoms 'cause they're timeless. They're part of our human experience

[01:09:26] **Nate Hagens:** So the next question, touches on a sensitive topic that I would like to ask you, but it's a big question that comes up for people after learning about all this- Yeah

[01:09:36] and the synthesis and what we face, but I know you've spoken about it before. The choice of whether or not to bring a child into the world right now. Can you explain why this has become such a contentious and difficult decision for people, especially at this moment in history?

[01:09:56] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. I mean, I speak from personal experience because I had to confront this exact quandary, at one point.

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[01:10:04] and in fact, I write about it extensively for anybody who's kind of wanting to deep dive into my, grappling with it. It's sort of a secondary thread of my book about the climate crisis, that I wrote five years ago, six years ago, called This One Wild and Precious Life.

[01:10:21] But anyway, that was a sidebar. I think the reason why it's particularly tricky and contentious today is that up until quite recently, like only a couple of years ago, most of us were concerned about bringing more children into the world because we thought it would just, add to further carbon emissions and that there was this, population bomb per, Paul Ehrlich's book from, decades ago.

[01:10:43] And honestly, it is such... It blows my mind to think it was only a couple of years ago, like we're talking four, five years ago, when all of the modeling and all the experts in this realm of, population came out and went, "Oh, actually, that trajectory, that exponential trajectory in human numbers on the planet that we thought was just gonna go up and up, it's actually gonna hit a peak, in a couple of decades, in and around sort of 10 to, 11 billion people.

[01:11:15] And then it's gonna come back down the other side at the same incline as it went up." So I should just add to this before anybody starts wanting to correct me on all of this. Since then, in the last 12 months, the modeling has shown that the deadline is gonna come. I think they were talking about it being 2080.

[01:11:35] they're now looking at 2040 to 2060. We're gonna hit peak pop– peak population, and it will barely make 10 billion. So it's a very different picture that we're facing here. And so, for political leaders around the world, they're starting to freak out because less people being born means less tax-paying citizens to pay into the coffers to fund all of these different things, to fund the system.

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[01:11:59] And so we're now witnessing an absolute turnabout where conservative governments particularly around the world are clamping down on women's, abortion rights. Obviously that's happening in the States. All kinds of pronatalist measures are coming into play. China, which had a one-child policy for years, now has a three-child policy.

[01:12:20] I mean, it's a complete about face. and it's sort of understandable because we are actually facing a massive crisis where we are going to be, dropping in numbers at an exponential rate, and it has huge implications because we're gonna see crumbling cities, we're gonna see crumbling infrastructure.

[01:12:39] the entire system is going to collapse. And, for a lot of people, when I'm actually trying to describe how the domino effect of all the different things are gonna play out, I actually use the example of population collapse 'cause it's actually quite easy to comprehend. And population collapse, once it sets in, it can't be averted.

[01:12:59] It, has a r- l- a life of its own, and we're already seeing it play out. In Taiwan, for instance, there's hundreds of schools that have shut down. There's entire villages that are starting to shut down there. The replacement rate is currently, I think, at .7 or .8. same with South Korea. So, so we're really facing a massive drop-off in humans.

[01:13:20] Now, for a lot of people that might be like, "Great. Less humans left, less carbon emissions." The problem is the actual... Then, we're hitting peak replacement rate sort of now-ish. It'll take a couple of decades before we actually see the numbers drop off. It's too late to meet those deadlines, net zero by 2050 and so on.

[01:13:41] So how does that answer the question of anybody out there thinking about having children? Well- It's kind of, the fear of adding to population

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numbers h- has gone. Sure, another person is gonna add carbon emissions in the next couple of critical decades, but I think there's a bigger, there's a bigger thesis to all of this, and that is to have children is to be human.

[01:14:12] And I basically think we must remain as human as we can in this moment. Margaret Mead, got asked by her sister a very similar question, and it was just before the out- outbreak of World War II. And obviously there were all kinds of tensions happening around the world, a lot of fear. Margaret Mead, the wonderful anthropologist, responded, "Well, listen, do you think that anybody, a mother, parents just prior to World War II," or she rattled off d- different points in history, "do you think that they were wrong to have children?"

[01:14:47] And, she sort of has, she basically says, "We don't know. There's been dark times all throughout history." And the wonderful, sort of outcome of all of this is the s- her sister wound up having two children, and one of them became a very famous psychiatrist, and the other became a very famous jazz flautist.

[01:15:05] And this is the point, right? We have children, and who knows what kind of... these children were obviously born into wartime and had, probably a very horrible start to their life. But we don't know how a human is gonna flourish off the back of trauma like that. Nate, you'd be aware of those studies that show that 70% of people that go through trauma don't go through PTSD.

[01:15:28] Instead, they go through post-traumatic growth. We don't talk about that. But that is, like, what humans do. We thrive. We tend to thrive in adversity, and we can't lose sight of that, of, that in all of this.

[01:15:45] **Nate Hagens:** I'm actually not familiar with that post-traumatic growth. Can you define that?

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[01:15:50] **Sarah Wilson:** Yeah. So, I think it's Sebastian Junger did a lot of the, the work– Oh, yeah

[01:15:53] on this. Yeah. Yeah, in that book Tribe or Tribes, I can't remember which one. That is an

[01:15:57] **Nate Hagens:** awesome book.

[01:15:58] **Sarah Wilson:** That's where that comes from. But there's studies that have been done. I've got the citations in my book. growth is actually the most common human response to trauma. And, a really wonderful example that Sebastian outlines in his book is that during the London Blitz, Winston Churchill and everybody else was worried that the Brits would lose their minds.

[01:16:19] And so he went and opened up a bunch of mental institutions on the outskirts of the city so that people who lost their mind could be sent out there as bombs fell. And what actually... And they had to close the mental institutions that were in the center of the city 'cause it needed to be used for, for, people who were injured.

[01:16:36] but what wound up happening is that the institutions stayed empty, and in fact, the people, the patients in the mental wards joined the movement and started driving ambulances and things like this. And the studies have shown that it was the happiest time in British history. It was also recorded as having the highest wellness levels of all time, and that was because of the austerity measures, the rationing, right?

[01:17:02] And it was because people were coming together in solidarity. They were rising to their commitments and to their duty, so they had this incredible sense of bigger meaning to their lives. And they were collaborating and communicating and forming, these sort of, these larger communities. And I think

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that's one of the best examples of things, of this, this point that we've been fleshing out here.

[01:17:28] **Nate Hagens:** Under various scenarios, that could in fact be how things, unfold. and I wish it will be so. So one of the, the central questions I took away from your book is, something like how do we continue to live as sensitive, tender-hearted humans amid such a tumultuous, expected shift?

[01:17:55] It's, a beautiful and a, and an important question, and my follow-up, Sarah, is what about people who are s- coming from a starting place of being less sensitive and less tender-hearted when they start to learn about the metacrisis and everything coming down the pike? Do you have any recommendations for those individuals who would like to deepen that side of themselves but don't quite know how?

[01:18:24] **Sarah Wilson:** Gosh, as you ask that question, I can feel so much pain for anybody who's in that position. It's really a, a, kind of a roundup of some of the things that we've been talking about here. I think some left brain analysis, you know, allows for indulging in the s- i- in sort of the rational side of yourself and going and looking into the studies that sort of back up some of this stuff.

[01:18:49] Actually, enter into it that way. Once your nervous system is okay with all of that, then I think it's about being open to more embodied experiences. I don't recommend meditation for those who have come from, you know, f- a long way to the left. I know that when I first started meditating, it was a bridge too far.

[01:19:15] meditation has become part of my practice in sort of m- more recent years as I've been able to sort of move into all of this. The way I suggest people to get a more of an embodied understanding of all of this is actually through movement. Just to remember that this stuff needs to be m- the big emotions need to be moved through our bodies.

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[01:19:34] So Go and move in, in, in nature. That is a silver bullet for all of this. Run in nature, walk in nature, dance in nature, which I do a lot of. That's how I got through the writing of this book, was catching a train outside of Paris into one of the forests and just sort of running/dancing with music, listening to music.

[01:19:58] And again, this is another little tip, in the minor key. So this kind of, melodic, melancholic kind of beautiful ephemeral music that kind of allowed me to expand. And, then allowing myself to cry. I think one thing I've learned is that women, we're, given societal permission to cry, and tears are an incredible outlet for these big emotions that we're experiencing.

[01:20:27] I think men really suffer from not being able to do that. And so there's other practices. I think that some psychedelic experiences can enable men to access, ways of releasing, the emotional buildup. So another thing that I sort of wrote about in a previous book, in *This One Wild and Precious Life*, it's, I came up with the term soul nerding.

[01:20:53] So it's reading the works of troubled minds who have existed before us, who have chronicled their journey through big complex issues. So the existentialists are probably a really good starting point for all of this. And, I think if you're an A type, that's sort of the person you described before.

[01:21:15] if you're an A type, almost see this as a sort of practice, a developmental practice. Equally to, to sort of soul nerd, but then equally to get your nervous system prepared for what's ahead. So they're the sort of the, the mindsets that I would probably present to somebody who is struggling with entering into this space, is to appeal to their A type tendencies for a goal and, for a need to know,

[01:21:41] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, I get what you're saying about society giving women more permission to cry than men. I've cried more in the last five years than I did the 50 before that combined. Well, maybe when I was one. I don't remember

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crying then. And it's cathartic, and I feel like I had an oil change or something, and, it's, moving something through my body.

[01:22:05] so I resonate with that.

[01:22:07] **Sarah Wilson:** The tears of recognition are really important as well. I don't know if you feel this as well, Nate, but I speak at different events and so on, and people will get up and they'll share their vulnerable, I guess, reaction to all of this. And, They'll start to cry, and then for me, the tears are them, releasing something, and then I start to cry because there's this recognition, This is what we are craving. We are craving to see reflected in the other that which we know to be true, but we haven't been able to surface ourselves yet. Mm-hmm. And one of the other antidotes, or, sort of tricks that I outline in the book, which kind of speaks to your question here, is Go out into the world.

[01:22:57] Go out into the world and look into other people's faces. like go out into the street and walk along, in your neighborhood and look into people's faces. And I highly recommend doing that and smiling, giving a slight smile. And I highly recommend doing that when you're feeling despair, because you will get the feedback that humanity is a heaving, messy, but ultimately compassionate species.

[01:23:28] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, and our current economic system, accentuated by walking six abreast in New York City with your heads down. You don't even look at the other person- Yep ... let alone give full attention to their face.

[01:23:43] **Sarah Wilson:** Mm-hmm. I mean, it's a perfect storm, as I've said several times in this interview. A perfect storm of circumstances that have landed us here.

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[01:23:51] And once we start to realize all the systemic factors that have brought us here, not only do we get a sense of compassion for our species and how ridiculous we are and how vulnerable we are, but we also have a m- I think a very important hit of hum- humility. And that is part of what we're gonna have to go through.

[01:24:10] We've been overlording over nature and over life, thinking that we can control, we can do a better job than the incredible flow of life. And, part of what we're going through is a h- is a humbling, And God, it's a relief. One of the things I say in the book is, perhaps we don't have to put in so much effort.

[01:24:33] Maybe there could be some ease to this. Maybe there's going to be ease to this. And it almost feels like... I almost feel guilty saying it, but I actually know it to be true. It's part of this simplification process.

[01:24:49] **Nate Hagens:** So I'm wondering where you are now personally, Sarah, with all this. Are you m- mostly at peace and fully aligned with everything that you've laid out in your book, or is this, an ongoing up and down process, continually for you?

[01:25:06] **Sarah Wilson:** Both. At the same time, I kind of... I'm in pain a lot, I am in grief. I wail and wail, and it just erupts, and it'll last days. just feeling into just the grief, grieving what we're losing, Grieving even the idea of certainty and increased ease and comfort, But also grieving the animals, grieving the loss of seasons. Feeling the grief of everybody really. And then flip side is I feel incredible joy, The point is, I feel more alive than ever before. And, I wouldn't swap that out for anything. No, I'd probably swap it out for some kind of resolution to what we're in.

[01:25:56] A rebalancing now of everything. But what- that's what we are going through. We are going through a rebalancing. This is a correction. It is a coming

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back around to a homecoming. I mean, this is unfortunately what it's gonna have to look like. but to answer your question, yes, I am far more sturdy.

[01:26:15] I mean, I've, I've made no secret of the fact that I've s- struggled with anxiety, bipolar disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder. I wrote a book about it, *First We Make the Beast Beautiful*. And I would say that I'm in the calmest s- like, most stable position I've ever been in my life, and it really is because of the work I've done on this journey.

[01:26:39] It has taken me to a spot where I, This is a thesis that I've been sort of playing around with, but I haven't got the evidence to back it yet, so take it with a grain of salt. But I actually think a lot of the anxiety, as well as a lot of the neurodivergence that has been sort of surfacing over the last decade or so, I think it's actually coming from people who are feeling the lack of congruence.

[01:27:05] A lot of autism, for instance, is about pattern recognition. And so those of us who can actually recognize that this pattern does not stack up, that it's fundamentally wrong, we've been feeling a dis-ease for a number of years. And so once you actually start to realize, no, you weren't going crazy, right?

[01:27:23] Like, th- this, what you are seeing and feeling into as a human at a visceral level, it's real. It actually, sees a lot of the anxiety subside, and I notice this in the spaces that you and I work in. I speak to people who've had chronic anxiety. I'm like, "Do you feel less anxious these days?"

[01:27:41] And I'm like, they say, "Yes." And I'm much the same You know, less congru- incongruence, a lot more attunement, as painful as it is, but this is where we're at.

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[01:27:56] **Nate Hagens:** So do you have advice for people listening to this episode on what they can do to address some of the things, in the metacrisis, or, do you think it's mostly up to politicians and leaders?

[01:28:08] **Sarah Wilson:** I don't think we can rely on politicians or leaders because they're, they can't solve it. It's not because they wouldn't like to. They're not capable of it. Nobody is capable of this, and once we realize that, then we can then put our energy into the first part of your question, what can we do? I think simplify now, per, your thesis.

[01:28:28] I think that's a tangible thing that we can actually, focus on, going analog, developing various life skills, but that also includes, building community, s- networks, getting to know your grumpy neighbor down the corridor of your apartment, take them some muffins, whatever it might be.

[01:28:45] that's some tangible stuff you can do. I would also say that treats- getting your nervous system sturdy as not something that's nice to do that'll give you glowing skin and a nice gut microbiome. It's actually part of the work now. We can't afford to lose our shit. So we're gonna need some sturdy entities that take the place of the fascists who are coming in with their false security.

[01:29:14] So I would certainly suggest that. And I would also be a soul nerd and start to learn some of these truisms and start to adopt them and have them, sort of absorb them. Absorb as much of it as you can. The truisms that tell us that to live fully, we need to know how to die well. To fully...

[01:29:40] to be pushed up against a deadline like we are now, then it actually forces us to live beautifully. And so once we can really get comfortable with some of those very age-old truisms and beliefs and teachings, it all starts to make more and more sense. So I think they're, I think they're, a good starting point for all of this.

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[01:30:07] **Nate Hagens:** And how would you change the advice you just gave for young humans in their teens and 20s who are becoming aware of all this?

[01:30:15] **Sarah Wilson:** I love that you ask that question of people, on your podcast. It's the hardest question to answer. One tangible thing that I can answer with is, for anybody who's entering college or university as it's called, in Australia and the UK, if you're looking for something to study, study humanities.

[01:30:34] I think knowing how to think in a discerning and nuanced way is going to be so valuable in the future. And yeah, so study philosophy. I mean, even the tech bros are telling us, that's what they are, that's what's valued now. I mean, they're offering six-figure incomes to philosophers to come and work for these big companies now.

[01:30:56] Not that should be factoring into the c- into things at the moment. But I think, yeah, discerning thinking is going to be at a premium going forward. So that's what I would suggest that young people study. and- This is something that I say to people who come to my talks and sit in the front row, young people.

[01:31:14] And they're very earnest. They're usually in pain. They're seeing what's happening in the world, and I-- and they'll ask a question. I'll say, "Well, listen. Hey, listen, tell me, do you feel that everything that you're feeling and, doubting, do you know to be true?" And they say, "Well, yes." And I said, "Please go with it."

[01:31:32] Just if you can actually trust what your body is telling you and what your gut instinct is telling you, please trust it because I don't know that there's authorities out there that could actually dispute what you're feeling any longer. And young people do have access to that more than we do. I would ask every adult out there to encourage their children to actually listen to that intuition.

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[01:31:55] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. That's good advice. you follow the podcast, so you know some of my closing questions. What do you care most about in the world, Sarah Wilson?

[01:32:06] **Sarah Wilson:** I could come up with a Pollyanna-ish answer or the right answer, but what I actually care about is the pain in people's hearts Like the mass human pain, that I think is, being felt, it's, That's what I care about. That's what brings tears to my eyes as it is now.

[01:32:31] **Nate Hagens:** If you could wave a magic wand and there was no recourse, to your decision, what is one thing you would do to improve, the future?

[01:32:40] **Sarah Wilson:** Oh my goodness. I can't stand questions like this because I can't, narrow it down to one thing.

[01:32:49] I would say, I mean, a really simple one would be to actually fully embody our part in the natural way of things. I think that would be probably the closest to a silver bullet in all of this.

[01:33:02] **Nate Hagens:** what does that mean, exactly?

[01:33:05] **Sarah Wilson:** It's to have a real sense that we are part of something much bigger. To, to, actually know that the answers that we seek are to be found in the natural rhythms.

[01:33:16] that we can't meddle with it. We can't actually disrupt the flow. We've got to join it, And, and then the answer will become apparent. I think indigenous knowledge systems work with this, and they've preserved it at all-- Like, they've just preserved it over hundreds of years and despite everything that's gone on because it is so fundamental to the human endeavor.

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[01:33:40] So I would probably tr- trust our, our, indigenous friends on that one, that is actually probably the silver bullet.

[01:33:49] **Nate Hagens:** So your book just came out, but are there any research questions or things that you are super focused on, passionate about, obsessed with right now about the future or the world, that is keeping you up?

[01:34:05] Like what is most alive for you right now? What are you most curious about?

[01:34:09] **Sarah Wilson:** Oh, that's a great question. I'm actually at the moment, again, I'm just gonna answer as honestly as I can. I am actually, and I'm ringing around the various elders that I've interviewed over the years, and I've been really lucky to have some incredible elders who were mentors, throughout the wr- writing of this book.

[01:34:28] W- women in their 80s predominantly, who are working- have been working in this space for decades. I've been asking them how they maintain this. How it is that they find the, the vigilance to actually really believe, th- their path and to maintain it, and to find meaning in the minutiae. Like, it's all very well to talk about these broader ideas of what matters and, its connection, and its nature, and all, all this kind of thing.

[01:35:01] But when you wake up in the morning, right? And you're feeling a little bit groggy 'cause you haven't had quite enough sleep, and you've got a whole heap of emails to attend to and everything. I sort of am really wanting to know how it is that we're all to sort of move forward in this and find meaning at a daily level, In the granular process of life. And that sounds particularly esoteric. It kind of is, but it's right. That's right where I'm at the moment because I'm needing to find that thing to sustain myself going forward. I have moments, like s- to your

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earlier question, it's up and down. I have moments of insight and expansiveness and sense of my duty and my place in all of this.

[01:35:43] And then I have moments of, what matters anymore? What's the point? As we all do. And so I'm trying to work out how to maintain the sweet spot, on an ongoing basis. That's very esoteric, but I think some of you out there would probably know what I'm talking about.

[01:35:59] **Nate Hagens:** When you find the answer to that, leave me a WhatsApp message.

[01:36:03] **Sarah Wilson:** I will. It'll be a long voice note.

[01:36:05] **Nate Hagens:** Do you have any closing comments for people watching and listening who understand and agree with what you've laid out here today and, in your book, which I recommend reading?

[01:36:16] **Sarah Wilson:** Be as thoroughly human as you can– not least of all because it's what brings us joy.

[01:36:25] It's what actually, is the point of it all. But also because it does stick two fingers up to the techno-fascists, to the bad faith actors who are making our situation worse. While we are being as human as we can, they can't get at us. I'm not really suggesting that there's an us versus them thing going on.

[01:36:51] I don't think there's a cabal of bad dudes in a room with a whiteboard plotting to get at us. That's not what's going on here. But again, it really speaks to that idea of making the new way of being sexier than the status quo. Be human. Advertise the joy, the importance of being fully human. Investigate it if you don't know what that means for yourself.

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[01:37:14] I've got a chapter in the book where I ask all kinds of people that question, if you need some help with it. But actually investigate this, be it, and, and it's, an act of deviance and defiance today, and I think that's an important, that's an important attitude to take.

[01:37:33] **Nate Hagens:** Sarah Wilson, thank you, for your work and your continued voice, in these times.

[01:37:39] To be continued, my friend.

[01:37:41] **Sarah Wilson:** I hope so. Thanks, Nate.

[01:37:43] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit thegreatsimplification.com for references and show notes. From there, you can also join our Hilo community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzy Sirianni.

[01:38:06] Our production team also includes Leslie Batt-Lutz, Brady Heine, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Sleiman, and Grace Brunfelt. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode