



**"HEY PATRICK, IT'S JOHN HALSTEAD IN  
NORTHWEST INDIANA.**

**"JUST WANTED TO CALL AND THANK  
YOU FOR THE WORK THAT YOU'RE  
DOING. ESPECIALLY, I LISTENED TO  
THE 200TH EPISODE, WHICH WAS  
THE COLLECTION OF DIFFERENT  
INTERVIEWS. I THOUGHT IT WAS  
REALLY, REALLY AMAZING HOW YOU  
MADE THESE SEEMINGLY DISPARATE  
IDEAS JUST BUILD ON EACH OTHER.  
I LOVED THAT YOU ENDED IT WITH  
BAYO AKOMOLAFE BECAUSE HE'S JUST  
AMAZING...**

**"I JUST WANTED TO MENTION I THOUGHT  
IT WAS SO COOL, AND I WAS THINKING  
THIS THERE'S A BOOK HERE, YOU KNOW.  
THERE'S A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS THAT  
YOU COULD PUBLISH. I JUST HOPE YOU  
CONSIDER DOING IT...**

**"THANKS FOR THE GREAT WORK YOU'RE  
DOING. I LOVE YOUR PODCAST AND I  
HOPE YOU KEEP IT UP. I'M GLAD YOU  
CAME BACK FROM YOUR VACATION.  
THANKS A LOT, BYE."**

**JOHN HALSTEAD, 8:53 AM MST,  
AUGUST 18TH 2019**



# INTRODUCTION WILDERNESS OF MINE AFFLICTIONS

**WITH THIS VERY GENTLE SUGGESTION**, the seeds of this book were planted. Or maybe the better way to say it is that the seeds were planted long ago, and John's insightful, passing suggestion was the little charge of life that was needed for this idea to emerge, become fully realized, and to be ready to live on its own.

As John mentions in that call, this book is largely based on the 200th episode of my podcast *Last Born in the Wilderness*, a project I've been engrossed in producing for the better part of a decade. The episode John mentioned is a nearly four-hour-long audio essay, in which I attempted to present my vision of what this ongoing project has been for me (and I assume for others, as well), weaving together about nineteen segments (twenty if you count my TEDx talk, *Forging Connection in Perilous Times*) of interviews I had conducted over the past one hundred episodes.

Each segment was tied together with commentary—my attempt to connect the various threads of insight from the wide-ranging voices I've presented in this work, binding seemingly disparate topics and perspectives together into a coherent vision.

As the host of this project, I conduct long-form interviews; I then individually record, edit, and release each as a weekly stand-alone episode. I find people I'm particularly interested in, whom I feel would serve the spirit of this work, and ask them to participate by presenting their ideas. While I may highlight very different perspectives through this process, I've always felt there's a common thread that runs through each of them, something I attempted to demonstrate in the release of that 200th episode.

To say that this is a work of journalism, or that I'm presenting some kind of objective stance on what's happening in the world would, I think, be arrogant. It would also miss the point entirely. Certainly, there are scientific facts and rigorous forms of research presented in many of these interviews: in particular, regarding abrupt climate disruption and the unraveling of the biosphere (what I've occasionally and blandly referred to

as “environmental issues”) as a direct result of unrestrained industrialization over the past several centuries. These discussions also explore what’s happening politically, socially, and culturally around the world as these trends unfold. Those topics are discussed with a certain amount of factual basis.

But I want to make it absolutely clear that I have an agenda. I am biased in my presentation of these subjects, and the aims of this project should be apparent to anyone that has come across my work and delved into the catalogue of interviews I’ve conducted.

In order to further my vision with this work, I think it might be necessary to explain the title of the podcast in some detail. There are a few different layers to it, and I think this will convey my intentions and what this book in particular is meant to present.

First, the title *Last Born in the Wilderness* is a direct reference to a passage in the Book of Mormon (yes, that’s right). To directly quote the passage:

And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee. (2 Nephi, 3:1)

I grew up as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS or the Mormon church, informally), embedded deeply within its insular community and culture in Southern Idaho. The reason, at least on the surface, that I’m alive and living on this land we now call the United States of America is because my European ancestors converted to the gospel of the LDS Church sometime in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. They then sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, and through what I imagine was an arduous journey,

migrated across the great and expansive North American continent. They then settled in the region now formally defined as the state of Utah, a region then under the governorship of Brigham Young, the second leader, or “prophet, seer, and revelator,” of the LDS church.

I left the church when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old. I came to my senses, so to speak. I was the youngest of six children, and my father, quirky religious man that he is, would often refer to me as “my last born in the wilderness,” in direct reference to that passage in the Book of Mormon I quoted above.

What I didn’t anticipate is that, as the themes of the podcast evolved over the years (and quite some time after shaking off my membership in the church), I began to realize that the subjects I was interested in talking about and exploring with others were really apocalyptic in nature (remember, the root of apocalypse, the Greek word *apokálypsis*, means “uncovering, disclosure, revelation”). Apocalypse especially fits when it comes to the subject of abrupt climate disruption and what this trend has presented for the future of our species and for nonhuman life on this planet. The systems required to maintain the habitability of this planet are being disrupted and altered very rapidly and dramatically, with dire implications. And so within that context, what does it mean to be the “last born in the wilderness”?

For instance, is it the wilderness that is disappearing, is it us, or both? Are we really the last people on the planet to actually experience these wild and intact places, to have an actual conception of the wilderness and an experience of it? In actuality, yes: these places are disappearing at an alarming rate, with very little to indicate that this will be, or can be, reversed.

That’s a very serious proposition that I pose with this work. It is within this context and within this space that I present these



interviews, regardless of the person that I'm interviewing and their particular perspective on that subject.

And truthfully, it's a difficult thing to grapple with. Obviously, you can go over the information and figure it out for yourself. There are mountains of data that point to that conclusion, which we will get into in the first section of this book. But to understand it on an intellectual level is really just the first step in the process of radically accepting this information.

It's one thing to come to that conclusion objectively and to see the information as it is, and it's another thing entirely to accept it on an emotional, spiritual, and animal level, to really know what it means to be alive in a time like this.

I come to this work with a sense of empathy and compassion for those I am living with on this planet, for my fellow brothers and sisters that were born in this time. When I first started this work, I felt I had to present this information aggressively, that I would have to shout this truth from the mountaintop, to say unabashedly: "We're going to go extinct, so straighten the fuck up and act accordingly (whatever that means)."

But I realized that just as much as this is a time to speak the truth, this is also a time to be very gentle and humble, to understand that people are now seeing the writing on the wall in one way or the other—whether they consciously acknowledge it or not. It's very important to understand the feelings that come up when the truth of our collective predicament is faced, and that our reactions can lead us in very different directions.

How you, how we, choose to proceed with this knowledge is the most important question for us right now.

This project for me has now become, more than anything, a space that I and many others

have co-creatively carved out for those ready to have this discussion, those ready to talk about what's really happening, and to talk about how to be in this time.

So much of what we're hearing right now in climate and environmental activism is framed within the imperative to act. Action, action, action! We have to do something right now, now, now! As it is often framed, we only have twelve, or ten, or five years left before the climate system hits some arbitrary, politically agreeable threshold of no return, a Rubicon that once crossed, we'll never be able to come back from.

The truth is, we've already crossed the Rubicon. Regardless of what we do right now, global climate change is happening, with enough heat baked into the system to guarantee several degrees of warming just from the heat trapped in the oceans alone. That heat is irrevocable, and the level and rate of change currently underway is likely beyond our capacity to survive.

I'm not saying that people shouldn't do something, that there aren't actions that are meaningful, important, or necessary right now. The point here is to ask the question: what kind of actions are we supposed to engage in now, within the proper context and understanding that I and so many others have outlined?

If you want to engage in political action and social change, what kind of action is worthy of our love, dedication, and rage in a time like this? Whatever it may be, how you treat your fellow human beings and nonhuman life on this planet has to be within the understanding that we may not have much time left. And so how do you want to be? What is the most sacred and beautiful way that you can be in this time, with the full awareness that we don't really have a lot of time to fuck around?

This is by no means meant to disempower you. There is a delusional view going around

that hope itself is a facilitator for action. In my view, hope—especially hope grounded in the logic of this system—occludes us from engaging in the actions that are required of us right now. As my friend Barbara Cecil has said, “Hope is fundamentally an avoidance of an essential risk that needs to be taken.”

Imagine you were given a terminal diagnosis for some disease, and the doctor comes into your hospital room and begins to tell you that this is the time to try a series of intensive surgeries and treatments. The doctor says that by doing this, you will survive and beat this thing. But you know, deep down, that this isn’t true. Not only that, everyone close to you can see what’s really happening as well.

In these circumstances, what is the more honorable and right thing to do: exist in a state of denial about the finite quality of your life and believe that you can “beat” this thing? Or instead, accept that the time you have left is precious, that it is imperative to embody the knowledge of your death, be present in that fact, and accept that grief itself is a facilitator for right action, whatever that may be?

When I talk about action, I’m coming from a radical perspective. When I interview people about what we can do, I’m not looking at it from this sort of institutionalized perspective that we often hear in mainstream activism, this nonviolent, defanged thing where we appeal to authorities and governments to do the work for us. They’re not going to do it for us. It doesn’t actually benefit them to do it, whatever “it” may be.

Whatever proposals, agreements, or legislation they present will never get to the root of the matter. They want to keep the system going as long as possible, even if that means further plundering the earth, exploiting and extracting as much as they possibly can before the big game is up. They’re going to continue

to do that unabated, except they are going to call it “green,” “sustainable,” or even “compassionate” and “conscious,” when it’s really just more of the same. As my friend Dahr Jamail would say it, it’s just “capitalism with a green leaf on it.”

The kind of actions I suggest we engage in may seem a bit radical and extreme, but considering where we’re at right now, that’s really the only meaningful type of action that I can see worth engaging in. I really just want to provide a space for people to comprehend, understand, and learn to be present, to not be in denial, to recognize that it is your sacred duty right now to be as present as possible, and every action that you take must come from that place of knowing.

As they say, once you see it, you can’t unsee it.

It isn’t a mistake that you’re here right now. It isn’t a mistake that I’m here right now. We’re supposed to be here right now. We must take responsibility for where we are, and part of taking responsibility is to understand what’s actually required of us.

In doing this work, I’ve tried to contribute in some way to that discussion. I hope in exploring this work, you too can begin to figure those things for yourself. You don’t have to agree with me or with anybody I’ve presented in this book. I only hope that the perspectives that I highlight will help you come to terms with what’s currently unfolding on this planet, and that this is no time to look away.