

Caring for Home
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Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
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When I was a child, my parents had a picture of our house and yard hanging in the basement family room. It had been taken from the sky. Looking from up above one could see the house, the garden, the swing set, the doghouse; everything that was home. Why did my parents purchase that picture? Money was tight. They wouldn't have purchased just any picture taken from the sky. But a picture of their house and home. That they bought.

Have you ever gone to Google Earth? If you have, I can guess that the location you googled was your home address or maybe former home addresses.

An article in "Travel and Leisure" says this, "It's Christmas Eve, 1968, and the first humans are orbiting the Moon. NASA's Apollo 8 astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell and Bill Anders see the far side of the Moon. Anders took the first pictures taken of the Earth from the Moon, including the famous 'Earthrise' that arguably kick-started the environmental movement. 'Apollo 8 will probably be remembered as much for Bill's picture as anything because it shows the fragility of our Earth, the beauty of the Earth, and just how so insignificantly small we are in the Universe,' Borman (said). 'It was the beginning of the realization that we need to take care of it,'" [60 Years Ago We Saw Earth From Space for the First Time - Here's How We See It Now \(travelandleisure.com\)](https://www.travelandleisure.com/apollo-8-earthrise).

Pictures of home whether it is a house or a planet stir up feelings in us. This, this is ours, and we need to take care of it. We have a responsibility to this place.

Today some environmental activists are using that power of pictures, often moving pictures and I mean moving pictures in both senses of that phrase. In October of last year, 2021, "Vogue" began an article, "Drag queens are known to bring irreverence—and fabulous outfits!—to the stage. But have you ever seen a performer bring that energy to the hiking trail? That's what drag queen Pattie Gonia is doing on TikTok: The 29-year-old 'environmentalist, drag queen, and professional homosexual' uses their theatrical ensembles and clever videos to promote environmental activism. They've even rock-climbed in heels!

"Pattie Gonia posted their first TikTok in December 2020, and each TikTok they've posted since has been a bold statement about respecting the planet we live on (their videos have garnered over 1 million likes and 127,000 followers.) Among other moments, they've turned eliminating waste into a fashion moment: "If you can hold onto your trash boyfriend for two whole years, then you can hold onto this piece of trash for 5 more minutes," Pattie Gonia will say while picking up discarded trash on the ground, while wearing an elaborate gown made of—what else? —recycled trash. They've also recreated a scene from The Sound of Music to make a point about global warming. ('The hills are alive, with the sound of. . . climate change,' they quip.) 'My love of drag and the outdoors has always been one in the same,' says Pattie Gonia of their design inspiration.

"Pattie was born 3 years ago on a backpacking trip in Colorado. I had only done drag once before, but decided to do drag in the outdoors and it changed my life in just about every way possible. I learned

about myself as a queer person, I learned there was a massive queer community in the outdoors I didn't know existed, and learned there's so much work to do to make the outdoors a space that everyone has equal access to and feels safe in...

“(When asked) What made you want to start creating on TikTok?”

“(Gonia answered) I wanted to share my environmental advocacy through my art form of drag—and also make the outdoors as gay as possible....”

“My drag style has evolved over the years from just wearing heels to sporting full drag looks based on animals like birds (the drag queens of the sky!), or creating looks out of upcycled materials from plastic bags to tents. My love of drag and the outdoors has always been one in the same. What a lot of people don't know about drag is that its roots are in social justice. Drag queens (primarily queens of color) were at the front lines advocating for the gay rights movement. Nowadays, it's my goal to honor drag's original roots of social justice, but also fight for environmental justice as well,” [Pattie Gonia Is the Drag Queen Bringing Environmentalism to TikTok | Vogue](#).

When Pattie Gonia says, “I wanted to share my environmental advocacy through my art form of drag—and also make the outdoors as gay as possible....” that is a statement about making outdoor space home and about caring for that space.

“Birds (the drag queens of the sky!)” In my childhood home there was a bird feeder and bird houses in the backyard and in the living room bookcase there were books cataloguing birds with pictures on every page to identify them. In 1968 there was the photo of the earth from the moon, but in 1962 there was a book. It was not a book full of pictures but the title itself painted a picture with words, [Silent Spring](#).

Last month, October was lgbtq+ history month. So for this history month just past let me share this piece from the section on lgbtq environmental activists on the website [queerbio.com](#). It begins, “Did you know that the global environmental movement was founded by an LGBTQ person - scientist and marine biologist Rachel Carson of the United States? Her ground-breaking book 'Silent Spring' (1962) came from her scientific studies into the effects of the chemical DDT and other pesticides on natural habitats around the world.

“At the time of publication, countries around the world were shocked by the increasing number of deaths of birds, for example, that could not be explained. The book caused an international sensation by drawing a direct link to the increasing use of pesticides in agriculture and other areas. Despite pushback from the chemical industry, global governments established organizations to regulate and investigate environmental issues, notably the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,” [LGBTQ Environmental Activists - QueerBio.com](#).

If spring was silent would this still be our home? If the birds went silent, would humans also? It might not have been a literal picture, but it certainly painted a picture in many minds. Rachel Carson wrote in [Silent Spring](#), “Why should we tolerate a diet of weak poisons, a home in insipid surroundings, a circle of acquaintances who are not quite our enemies, the noise of motors with just enough relief to prevent insanity? Who would want to live in a world which is just not quite fatal?” She also said, “The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us the less taste we shall have for the destruction of our race. Wonder and humility are wholesome emotions, and they

do not exist side by side with a lust for destruction. She was providing lessons in caring for this earth as our home.

The canary in the coal mine is not always literally a bird. "Climate change impacts marginalized people the most and first," is the first sentence out of Jamie Margolin's mouth before they introduce themselves as a queer youth climate justice activist in Seattle, Washington in a youtube video. [\(597\) Youth Climate Activist Jamie Margolin on the intersection of the climate justice and LGBTQ movements - YouTube](#). She makes the point that a very large percentage of homeless youth are lgbtq+ and that the homeless will be the first to be endangered by intense heat or the cold of polar vortexes or extreme weather events brought to us by climate change.

Both Pattie Gonia and Jamie Margolin are well aware of the intersectionality of social justice concerns. Climate justice, environmentalism, advocacy for the homeless, work for lgbtq+ rights all can and do intersect.

One of my favorite religious images of the universe is Indra's net. According to Wikipedia, "Indra's net' is an infinitely large net of cords owned by the Vedic deva Indra, which hangs over his palace on Mount Meru, the axis mundi of Buddhist and Hindu cosmology. In this metaphor, Indra's net has a multifaceted jewel at each vertex, and each jewel is reflected in all of the other jewels.

"In the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism... the image of 'Indra's net' is used to describe the interconnectedness of the universe. Francis H. Cook describes Indra's net thus:

"Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each 'eye' of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering 'like' stars in the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring," [Indra's net - Wikipedia](#).

We are all connected in so many ways. Looking at the earth from space I have to ponder how many ways everything on such a small blue green ball has to interact. The water I drink today may have once been a part of the blood of a dinosaur. The air I breath this afternoon might have been flowing over the ocean this morning. The soil under my feet might be the remains of plants and animals who were in this place millennia ago. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his letter from the Birmingham Jail, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Can we save our home, this beautiful blue green planet? Can we save it so that humans can continue to live here? I know I can't do it alone, but then I am not alone. I am connected to so many others. Pattie Gonia noted that, "Drag queens (primarily queens of color) were at the front lines advocating for the gay rights movement. Nowadays, it's my goal to honor drag's original roots of social justice." Gonia knows a connection to the past that empowers them.

I recently read Tiya Miles book All That She Carried tracing a bag given by a slave mother to a slave daughter as they were separated. On one of the very first pages of the book Miles writes, “In the third decade of the twenty-first century, we face our own societal demons, equal in some respects to the system of slavery that would finally be slayed. The world feels dark to us...We think it is a fantasy that we might rescue our children’s futures, or revive our democratic principles, or redeem our damaged earth. In our moment of bleak extremity, Black women of the past can be our teachers. Who better to show us how to act when hope for the future is under threat...(than) black women who were nothing and had nothing by the dominant standards of their time yet managed to save whom and what they loved?”

Many of us love this earth, our home, but we will not save it alone. But then we are not alone. We are connected. We are connected to astronaut Bill Anders taking a picture of the earth from the moon. We are connected to Rachel Carson as she shared what human-made chemicals were doing to our environment. We are connected to drag queens of color who stood up for lgbtq rights at Stonewall. We are connected to Pattie Gonia doing drag for environmental advocacy. We are connected to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who reminded us of our network of mutuality. We are connected to the ancient Hindus and Buddhists who spoke of Indra’s net. We are connected to birds and all creatures with whom we share this planet whose plights foreshadow our own. We are connected to queer youth climate activist Jamie Margolin as they remind us of the effects of climate change on homeless youth. We are connected to black women and others who acted when action seemed hopeless. As the Christian writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders.... And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,” Hebrews 12:1 NIV.

Yes, hope for the future is under threat but... But we love this place. But we care about this earth. But this planet is home.

In closing hear this poem entitled “A Vision” from American writer, farmer, and environmental activist Wendell Berry.

“If we will have the wisdom to survive,
to stand like slow-growing trees
on a ruined place, renewing, enriching it,
if we will make our seasons welcome here,
asking not too much of earth or heaven,
then a long time after we are dead
the lives our lives prepare will live
there, their houses strongly placed
upon the valley sides, fields and gardens
rich in the windows. The river will run
clear, as we will never know it,
and over it, birdsong like a canopy.
On the levels of the hills will be
green meadows, stock bells in noon shade.
On the steeps where greed and ignorance cut down
the old forest, an old forest will stand,

its rich leaf-fall drifting on its roots.
The veins of forgotten springs will have opened.
Families will be singing in the fields.
In their voices they will hear a music
risen out of the ground. They will take
nothing from the ground they will not return,
whatever the grief at parting. Memory,
native to this valley, will spread over it
like a grove, and memory will grow
into legend, legend into song, song
into sacrament. The abundance of this place,
the songs of its people and its birds,
will be health and wisdom and indwelling
light. This is no paradisaal dream.
Its hardship is its possibility.”

“Its hardship is its possibility,” and we are not alone in the task.