

Preface

When we first started thinking about this book, we imagined it quite differently. It was going to be a quick follow-up to an earlier collection on the precautionary principle that had come out of the Wingspread Conference of 1998, which is described in Chapter 1. We intended to put together some case studies and draw some conclusions. We thought we needed to advance the thinking on the precautionary principle and spark people's imagination about how to apply it to all sorts of issues.

We were in for some surprises.

The first surprise was that we weren't exactly advancing the thinking on the precautionary principle. Rather, the precautionary principle seemed to be advancing *our* thinking. As all of us working on the precautionary principle discovered, the principle had unforeseen reverberations and implications. Like a stone dropped into a pond, it made waves of logic; rippled into ethics and values as well as policy; and etched into the banks of our understanding of science and the role of government. This was happening as we at the Science and Environmental Health Network were developing precautionary principle theory in speeches, workshops, and articles. We began conducting workshops around a kind of "Precautionary Principle 101," then adding more advanced sessions on scientific uncertainty, toxicology, economics, risk assessment, and so on. And this developing theory interfered with the completion of our intended book of case studies. We would write drafts, and then our thinking would change. We revised and edited and updated as our ideas evolved. We added more case studies, continually updating them to reflect our new understanding.

The second surprise was that events were also outpacing our writing. A precautionary principle movement was developing faster than we could record it. And the people in this movement—state and local government leaders, environmental activists, health professionals, PTAs and school boards, regional and national coalitions and campaigns—all wanted tools.

They wanted lots of examples of how to apply the precautionary principle, not only to all kinds of issues but in all kinds of situations. What would a precautionary principle ordinance look like? Who was doing alternatives assessment? What kind of legislation could you write around the precautionary principle? Could it help make schools healthier places for kids?

And so we decided to expand the book into a toolkit that would offer enough options, examples, and theory to help people figure out how to use the power of this concept to reshape environmental policies at any level, from the schoolground to the oceans. We could not write a precautionary prescription for every situation. In our workshops we were telling people they could do this at home, applying their own wisdom. This has turned out to be true. We offer lots of tools developed by us and many others, and more tools and applications are on the way. This book will be updated and supplemented on the web (go to www.sehn.org/precaution/).

This book is evidence that collaborative intelligence is what really matters. The participants in the Blue Mountain workshop on ethics and the precautionary principle, described in Chapter 1 and Appendix B, identified gratitude as a value necessary for our survival because our lives depend on air, water, soil, plants, humans, and other animals. This book also depends on an entire ecology of heart and mind (as well as trees, water, oil). We can no more thank every person involved than we can thank every drop of rain that makes the river. But we can thank a few clouds that watered the garden of this book.

The board of directors of the Science and Environmental Health Network—David Wallinga, Roxanne Turnage, Sandra Steingraber, Madeleine Scammel, Steve Lester, Peter Montague, Lois Epstein, and Martha Dina Arguello—were provocateurs, guardians, and comforters.

Some funders provided inspiration as well as money. Roxanne Turnage of C.S. Fund, Ruth Hennig of the John Merck Fund, Amy Lyons at the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, Anita Nager at the Beldon Fund, Pete Myers, Patricia Bauman, and Sam Mills.

We had many fellow travelers, each of whom carried something unique in his or her magic backpack or held some extraordinary skill we used for navigating rough terrain: Hans Schoepflin, Frank Arundel, Wendell Berry, Andy Jameton, Deena Metzger, Caroline Casey, Jeanne Clark, John Raffensperger, Joanna and Jesse Myers, Ilene Evans, James Hillman, Kenny Ausubel, Janine Benyus, Paul Stamets, Derrick Jensen, the UnReasonable Women for the Earth.

Our environmental colleagues kept us honest, made us infinitely smarter than we were without them, and sent us a lot of great political jokes. (The

Blue Mountain Statement also identified humor as necessary for survival.) This book would not exist without Tracey Easthope, Joel Tickner, Peter DeFur, Ken Geiser, Katie Silberman, Davis Baltz, Charlotte Brody, Gary Cohen, Lois Gibbs, Anne Rabe, Joan Reinhardt Reiss, Tom Goldtooth, Dani Nierenberg, Diane Takvorian, and many, many others.

Of course all the writers who contributed to this work are included in the list. Not only have they been marvelous partners, but they have also been patient during the incarnation of a book. You'll find more about them in the About the Authors section at the end of the book. And we thank our graphic artist, Cindee Lee of Eugene, Oregon, for creating the lovely icons representing our tools and building our toolchest.

Our husbands, Fred Kirschenmann and Vic Myers, tied for the award of sweetest, most loving husbands on the planet. (We've entered them in the intergalactic competition. The results should be in soon, but we are pretty sure they won this, too.)

Carolyn also wants to thank the Dream Giver, fire, the white pelicans of North Dakota, the black walnut tree that shelters her house, Mary Oliver for writing really great poetry, Albert Camus for developing a philosophy out of resisting evil, and Ames Mennonite Fellowship. She thanks the opponents of the precautionary principle for being the stone on which we sharpened our arguments.

Nancy thanks all the academic and scientific writers who have graciously put up with her editing over the years. The editing, she has found, is easy compared to the writing. She thanks water in all its forms. She thanks morning tea, the porch swing, the beech-maple habitat, Lalo and Mourka, and the women of Spirit Feast.

We thank our editors at MIT Press, Clay Morgan and Robert Gottlieb, for their patient guidance and helpful suggestions. And we are most grateful to some anonymous reviewers who had deft and imaginative solutions to nagging problems with the manuscript: Drop this. Shift that. That kind of advice is peer review at its best.

If you are reading this preface and wondering why your name isn't in the list, believe us, we've awakened at 3 AM wondering how we could have left you out. So _____ (fill in your name), thank you too!

Finally, we would like to thank Lynne Fessenden and Ted Schettler, the other two members of the Science and Environmental Health Network staff. Thank you Lynne for your patience, attention to detail, creativity. Thanks for your kindness and your smarts. You've held this little ship together through many a storm. Ted, thank you for your ability to relate the smallest detail to the biggest picture, your gift for the interesting

question, and your tenderness toward the earth. Lynne and Ted, we like being your teammates.

May this book be the right tool for your hand and heart. May you use the ideas in it to protect and restore the health and beauty of creation. May you be a guardian of the Earth.

Carolyn Raffensperger

Nancy Myers