

**Season 4, Episode 3: Shifting the Narrative on Climate Change**

**Host:** ESF President **Joanie Mahoney**

**Guest:** Anne Therese Gennari

**Anne Therese Gennari:** For me, to be a true optimist is finding that balance of grounded awareness and empowered action, and recognizing that we can only show up as strong as we are. And I even put a Google Alert on to see if there's anything out there about climate optimism or climate optimists. And I get articles daily. I can't even keep up anymore. It's like Forbes, and Business Insider, and Vogue, and it's really something that people talk about. So things are changing.

We know the storm is coming. It's not going to pass. It's going to actually stall and just get worse. So now is the time to find that adventure inside us and go explore something different. I wish that was my college experience. Being surrounded by other Earth warriors would've been such an incredible experience.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Welcome to season four of Campus Conversations, the podcast. I'm Joanie Mahoney, and I have the honor of serving as ESF's president. For the past several seasons, I've been interviewing ESF faculty members who are making a mighty impact here on campus, in our local community and on our world.

But today, I have a special guest from outside the ESF community. Joining me from New York City via Zoom today is Anne Therese Gennari. Anne Therese is a TEDx speaker, author of the book *The Climate Optimist Handbook*, educator and sustainable influencer who's passionate about changing the narrative on climate change so we can act from courage and excitement.

She's also, I am very happy to say, ESF's May 2023 commencement speaker. I think you are the perfect person to speak to our newly minted climate warriors as they graduate from SUNY ESF. Thank you for joining me today Anne Therese, it's nice to meet you.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Well, thank you Joanie for having me, and for the incredible honor of being your commencement speaker. I'm so excited. So thank you on so many fronts.

**Joanie Mahoney:** So I think this came about because a woman at ESF saw your book and your message. And it really resonates because we're on campus with a small student population that's very much focused on the climate. So I say often wherever you are on campus, if you're in a club, or in the dining hall, or you're in a dormitory, or you're in a class, you are with other people who are passionate about doing environmental work.

And one of the things that we hear it's become a real pattern, is that these students feel the weight of the world on their shoulders. They keep hearing that they are the generation that's going to have to fix all this. And your message of optimism and reframing the conversation about the opportunity that being here right now presents us, I think is perfect for our students.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Well, thank you. And I can only say I can relate so much to all the students, because I've been there. And my mom used to tell me, "You cannot carry the world on your shoulders." And she tried to really have me understand that, but I wasn't listening. It's like, "Mom, I know I need to change the world. Don't you know how much needs fixing?" Even homework and having a good time, it was really hard for me and my youth, so I can relate to students.

And I just want to say too, I wish that was my college experience. Being surrounded by other earth warriors would've been such an incredible experience in all. So I'm excited for the students who have chosen this path, and also so happy to be there and hopefully deliver some optimism on their graduation.

**Joanie Mahoney:** So let's back up and tell people a little bit about you. You mentioned your mom. I think I've read that you grew up in Sweden. Is that right?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** That's right, yep. Born and raised. So people take you for granted that since I'm from Sweden, everyone in Sweden is tuned into sustainability. And I feel like maybe in one way, that's true. Because as a country, we've always been a little bit ahead of the game. I don't want to say that, but I grew up with recycling. It was just like a no-brainer in a way.

But with that said too, I was definitely what I call the recycling cop amongst my friends, and always kind of shaming people into doing the right thing. And I was that person.

So I think the environmental awareness grew organically with me from an early age. I don't know where it came from. My parents are both very attuned to nature. But even with them, I have been the one who's like, "You need to care more." So don't know where this came from, but as far as I can remember, I have cared about the natural world and wanting to better the world somehow.

**Joanie Mahoney:** So what brought you to the United States?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** That's a great question. And I asked myself the same. Apparently my mom said that when I was eight years old, I had walked into the kitchen and said, "Mom, when I grow up, I'm going to move to New York and work in marketing." And she's like, "Okay."

Well, she told me this on my graduation day because that day I got accepted into City College of New York where I was going to study marketing. So she's like, "This is wild because she's said this since she was a kid."

So yeah, I don't know. I guess I was always called to be here. But for some reason I've been fascinated by the United States. I came here as an exchange student Upstate New York, I would say 2008, 2009, and wanted to come back to New York as soon as I could. So I don't know. I'm called to be here, I would say.

**Joanie Mahoney:** The community that you grew up in, is it a large urban area like New York City or were you in a more rural space?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** I grew up in dead middle of the countryside. It was cows and the whole shebang. So I don't know what it was with New York. And it's fascinating, because literally the first day I stepped out onto the New York City streets, I felt like home. I was like, "This is where I'm supposed to be. I love it here." And we tried to live in San Francisco. We were there for two years. Love that city too, but I just needed to be back in New York. So I'm stubbornly a New Yorker for some reason, and can't explain why. It's just like a life passion of mine, I would say.

**Joanie Mahoney:** So did you always set out to be a writer, or was this an outgrowth of the passion that you have for getting this message to people?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** I would say both. I wanted to write books when I was seven. So again, goes back in time. I would sit at home and write books. Who does that when they're seven? So I feel like it's also something that I just have known for a long time that I wanted to do.

I set myself on the mission to quote unquote work for the planet in my early twenties, and wanted to find a creative different kind of way to do so. Because I recognize that the issue is that how we communicate these issues do not speak to most people, and they don't care about it because it's not cool or sexy enough, or for some reason they feel like it's not part of their world. So I wanted to figure out a way to, how do we make people realize this is all of our, not issue, but challenge and something that we should be caring about? So I knew deep inside that I wanted to be an author, but it didn't seem like the most straightforward way back then.

And I sort of tended to social media and the influence that we have there. I started my own modeling agency actually. Role Models Management represent models, talent artists, activists in different ways that want to use their platforms to speak up for good. So that was my mission for a while.

And it wasn't until during COVID that I kind of had a sit down with myself and said, "What do you actually want to do, if you were to really tell yourself this is what I dream of doing?" And it was being an author and a speaker. So I took the quote unquote extra time that we were given during COVID to do nothing but to sit around at home and figure out our passions and our lives. And I wanted to be a writer. So I think I've always known, but it took me many detours to get here.

**Joanie Mahoney:** So you started out on social media, and then you said speaking. So what kind of speaking do you do? Is this your first commencement at a college graduation?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** It is. It's my first commencement. I have spoken at schools before, more in a workshop format. But I've also spoken at different climate events and different stages around the world.

So I call myself a motivational speaker for climate change. I think it's needed. So my mission is to step on and just make people feel inspired. And I want to see more of that. So I took that on as my mission. But it is my first commencement speech, so I'm very thrilled.

**Joanie Mahoney:** That's fantastic. We are honored that you would agree to do this. I think the woman who saw your book and thought that the message was perfect for our grads just reached out to you cold, and we were thrilled that you agreed to come do this. So I think our students are going to be really happy, and that's why we wanted to do this interview ahead of time. We'll put it out and they'll get to know you a little bit.

So now, I understand also you are a relatively new mom. So I'm curious how that affects not only your ability to write, but also your outlook and whether it's changed your work in any way.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Goodness. I kind of wish people would warn you more before you become a parent, because it is so life altering. But a hundred percent, it's changed a lot of things.

It's actually quite funny, because I was writing this book for almost a decade, got more serious during COVID as I told you. But last spring, in early March, I found out I was pregnant. And that was it. I was like, "You know what? This book has got to come out now. I have a timeline, an actual timeline. The book has to come before the baby." That was my thing.

So the book did get published I think two weeks before the baby came. So my two babies came around the same time. And I'm glad that I put myself on that timeline, because I don't know how I would find time to do anything right now.

I do find time to maybe answer some emails during my day, but it's hard to find the creative time that you need to just tap out of the world and sit down and download, because that's how I write. I need to just be in flow. I love to write early in the morning. So between 4:30 and 6:00 is my prime hours to write, and those hours just do not exist anymore. Because if she's not keeping me up, I want to get that sleep. So I'm definitely sleeping through those hours these days. So yeah, things have changed. I hope to get back to writing at some point when she's a little bit older and sleeps through the night again.

But it's also changed my outlook on myself, my role here, the world. Many people have strong opinions about having kids as a climate activist. And I understand that, because for a long time I was very torn in that question. Can I actually morally have a child for her sake, for the child's sake, but also for the world? I'm going to contribute another humongous footprint to the world.

But I would say now being a mom, it's the most climate optimistic thing I've ever done. And she's such a wondrous being, obviously. She's my child. And I just feel more committed to create a beautiful world for her to grow up in. And I think it's important that we allow ourselves to visualize something even better.

I am actually excited to see the world that she will live in when she's my age. And I know we have a lot of challenges ahead. But if we recognize those and step up to the plate and say, "Okay, how do we just choose change? How do we do things better?" And I think the world that we will move into is going to be even better than the one we know today. So that's what makes me optimistic.

**Joanie Mahoney:**

And that is such a good way of thinking about it, because I've heard that same sentiment from young people. But it is very optimistic to become a parent, and then to see the real time as this person goes through all the stages of their life, and see how much better we get at being inhabitants of this planet.

So I'm curious, when you started speaking, were you already optimistic? Did you come to this work as an optimist, or did you ever experience that... I think you used the phrase doom and gloom of, "This problem seems so overwhelming." How do you get from that fear to this place of optimism? I think that could be the key for a lot of, especially young people who have lived their whole lives with 24 hour news cycles of doom and gloom about the climate. Do you have something that clicked for you that you can share to say, "It reframed my thinking, and I can look at this through a more optimistic lens"?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Yes. And I was not an optimist to begin with. I was what I refer to as an angry activist. And my TED Talk is actually about that, From Angry Activist to Climate Optimist. And the book also, I've taken lessons from my own journey to help other people hopefully get to the more optimistic place faster, and gain access from my own understanding of that.

But I was so frustrated with the world. I was angry with myself. I had a lot of self-inflicted pain from that. I literally did not feel like I as a privileged person deserved to feel healthy, and happy, and well, because the world was so broken and in so much pain. So yeah, I did not start out here.

I wished there was this one thing that clicked from me, but I speak about this in the book too. It was a highly spiritual experience. It was after dinner conversation with my brother, and I had of course brought up something about the environment, and there was an argument. And I again felt like no one else cared. And I was alone in trying to save the world. And I just broke down. I literally ended up in my parents' guest room, fell to the floor, and just cried. I've never cried like this before. Something was like, "We got to release all this fear, and anger, and despair."

And I was in a paralyzed state for probably 10 to 15 minutes where somehow, I was just releasing it all. I can't explain it. But afterwards I felt so light, like some huge rock had lifted from my chest, and I closed my eyes, and this message came through. And it was like, "You're here to do this. Your life journey is about the environment, but you are doing it the completely wrong way. This is not going to be sustainable for yourself or for the movement. And you're here to be a climate optimist."

That is kind of what came through to me. And I was like, "I had no idea what that means." I've never heard this before, but it sounded awesome. I'm like, "I need a different way of life." And if there's a way that I can actually feel good about myself and enjoy life, and at the same time step up to my mission, even with more intention, I want to know what that looks like.

So that's how my quote unquote climate optimist journey began. And it took me a while to understand what it actually means to be an optimist. And in the early days, I thought that the way to be one was to sort of ignore all the negative. Because like you said, there's so much information out there about the doom and gloom.

So if I can just shut that kind of awareness store to negative information and only focus on the positive news... Because at that time, there started to be more positive news circulating. So I thought, "I can just be the one who focuses on the good and ignores the bad."

However, as I think we know, the body keeps scoring. We're still kind of paying attention subconsciously. So my climate anxiety actually intensified during that time. And there were days when I got completely lucid, cry in the shower, have a tantrum with my husband in the car, and get upset for the most ridiculous reasons.

And so it wasn't sustainable. And it wasn't until I learned how to grow my emotional resilience, tend to myself, and healing myself, and recognizing that I'm broken too, and I need tending and love. And once I began to heal myself with different tools, which I also mentioned in the book, I could show up a much more resilience empowered person.

And also, when you do show up from that empowered place with light and love, other people tend to be more drawn to your message as well. So your influence grows at the same time. So for me, to be a true optimist is finding that balance of grounded awareness and empowered action. And recognizing that we can only show up as strong as we are.

So I compare the two. Toxic positivity is what I was trying to do in the first part of the journey where, let's just be happy all the time and say everything's going to be great. But in a way, you're fooling yourself because you know things aren't great. So there's a disconnect between the reality we're facing and the things that we want to believe in. So the only way to continuously have hope and believe in something better is by choosing to participate. So whatever you can do gaining agency over your own world.

I mentioned in the beginning that my mom used to say, "You can't carry the world on your shoulders." And I did truly believe that I could change the world somehow. If I was just stubborn enough, I could figure out a way to change the world. And I've learned being less naive these days I'm older, that I can't change the world, but I can change my world.

And I think once we all start to gain agency over the small things that we can do to change our worlds, we're not living in a vacuum. We are social beings. We live in society, in the system. And once we start to really step up to our own power in change our own world, that will ripple effect to the people around us. And that's how the positive movement spreads. But if we are stuck in this overwhelm of needing to change the world, we will ultimately get overwhelmed and stuck there.

So I think stepping away from that and coming back to what does my world look like, and what can I do in my community, in my school, in my family. And that's how you feel empowered, and that's where the optimism grows.

**Joanie Mahoney:**

Wow, what a fabulous message. I'm wondering what the reaction was from the people in your life when you went from angry, pessimistic. I'm trying to think of the words you just used to describe where you were before that spiritual moment that you had. And then you came out as, swung the pendulum so far to toxic positivity. What the reaction for the people closest to you was during that time. Did you talk about what your mindset was and that you were trying to

change the way you were looking at things? How was that received with the people around you?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** No, I haven't really reflected on this to be honest with you. Looking back at the time, I was in college back in my hometown in Sweden. I do remember people saying, "What's happened to Anne Therese?" My name was Therese at the time, but, "What's happened to her?" Because I changed. And I think I went on a spiritual journey.

So in the beginning, I was really focused on discovering myself, and what I really wanted to do, and not fall into the societal expectations of you, and what you were supposed to do. And that's when I decided that I wanted to move to New York City, and I just had to kind of get away.

So when I was an angry activist, I was also hiding a lot of that with myself all the time and trying to quote unquote play the games. I would go to all the parties, and do all the things, and get the best grades, and all the things that I thought was how you show up a good citizen and a cool friend.

So I was holding onto a lot of things on the inside too, and would come home and kind of break down in my own silence. But I remember people saying that I changed, and I soon thereafter did move to New York and started over in a way. And I felt like that was such a refreshing new start for me. So I think because of that reason, I wasn't really around the people I used to be around with anymore. So I don't know if they had that kind of reflection of it.

But the interesting part is that I thought I was just leaving my own life behind and starting anew. But in recent years, I've had high school friends and people from my childhood actually reach out to me and say, "I just want to let you know that I love your message and you're so optimistic. And because of you, I now bring my bag to the store. I started my own vegetable garden. I say no to plastic."

And it's like, never would imagine these people would even care in the first place, and I had no idea that they were even still paying attention to what I was doing in my life. But that's really cool that people from my old life have now come forth and said, "I just want to let you know that you really do inspire me."

So I mentioned this in the book too, because I think we all feel like we're so small and what we do doesn't matter. But everything we do, and every action we take, and every choice we make plants seeds with the people around us. And it may not become a flower right there, but it starts to grow, and gets nurtured. And maybe somewhere down the line, they have also changed because there was something there to trigger them to pay more attention and become more conscious. So we make so much more change than we might see.



**Joanie Mahoney:** I absolutely agree with that. And I think it's interesting. I think you touched on it about how much more effective you can be. People can hear you now in a way that maybe they couldn't hear you before when it was stubborn, and angry, and pessimistic, because people don't want to hear that. So they kind of shut it out.

But when your perspective changed, and your message changed, and it reached people, it's so much more effective. And now that ripple, it's just going to keep going, and going, and going. And they'll be flowers planted to use your metaphor, that you'll never even be able to see. So you really are changing the world without taking on this job of changing the world. And if you're one person and can do that, imagine what the hundreds of graduates from our college every year going out into the world can do.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** I get goosebumps just thinking about it.

**Joanie Mahoney:** Yeah.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** And what's that quote now? I'm completely blanking on who said it. But it's that, "People won't remember what you say. They'll remember"-

**Joanie Mahoney:** "How you made them feel," yes. That's a really good lesson too for our grads. And you've lived it and can tell them both ways. And this is clearly a way that's resonating with folks, and they want to hear you. What you say will matter, and it will change the lives they are living, and in turn touch the people in their lives. So I think it's great.

I'm curious about the love for New York City, without disparaging New York City. But if you come here as somebody concerned about our planet and you walk into a city like New York, it's got to be kind of tough. I really don't want to disparage it, so that's why I'm measuring my words so carefully. But you walk down the sidewalk and there's walls of trash waiting for the city to come and clean it up. Does that lend itself to optimism? How do you look at a city like New York? Do you see it as an opportunity? Do you see us getting better?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** I love that you bring this up actually. And I feel because of the mountains of trash that do exist in this city, you get to really practice what I call healthy denial. And I think sometimes, you have to go there, because otherwise you'll go absolutely crazy, and because there is so much wrong with the world as it looks like right now. So we have to obviously be motivated by that to spark action, but at the same time come back to recognize we're not there yet. So give ourselves a little bit of a break, and just kind of sometimes ignore what you see right in front of you.

But I think too, it was moving to New York that I was really introduced to the systemic waste that exists here, so much more than in Sweden. Anywhere in Sweden, but also compared to other places in America, I'm sure.

But just the fact that the culture here is so much to go. You step into a Starbucks and get your coffee to go, you order lunch to grab, and eat that in a park, or bring back to the office. That's just such a part of the culture.

And at first, I was just not used to this. It was so overwhelmingly mind-blowing to me that this is how people lived. And I'm like, "Oh my goodness, how much waste are they creating just in one single day?"

And that made me realize that this is about culture change and systemic change. And yes, we can continue to show up in our individual actions. And like we said, that plants seeds, and sparks awareness, and shifts norms. But it really comes down to figuring out how we create a system that doesn't allow for that to continue to happen.

So for me, living in a place like New York reminds me that we need a change. And I can say that because during COVID, my husband and I actually left the city to live with my mother-in-law in the Berkshires in Massachusetts. Beautiful place. A lot of that earthy awareness, going to the co-op to buy everything in bulk. That exists there. And of course, it really spoke to my lifestyle.

But it's easy to feel like things are fine and everything's great when you are allowed to live that way. And then you're back in New York, and you remind yourself that this is still leading change. So I think for me, it just continuously motivates me to show up for the work.

And I will also say that I am excited about cities. And you probably hear a city in the background. Always some siren going on. The thing about cities that motivates me is that right now, they do speak for about 70% of all the carbon emissions, which obviously isn't great. But, since cities are so densely populated, there are so many opportunities to actually make cities the climate heroes of the world if you say so. Because people live so close together, we can create new systems that anyone can benefit from. And people are taking public transport here much more than in suburban areas. It's also about new energy grids and making buildings net-zero, net positive, and that anyone can benefit from that.

So I think there's so many opportunities in cities that we have to start to really recognize and get excited about. And that's why I think I'm drawn to live in a place like New York.

**Joanie Mahoney:** That makes sense to me. Because something that you do there to make a little change will have a huge impact, just by the sheer volume of people that are there that will be affected by it.

And at ESF, we are at the leading edge of a lot of these kinds of conversations. So when we talk about reduce, reuse, recycle, at ESF, they already have banned single-use plastics. You will not see students walking around with water bottles. You won't even see them with single-use plastics in their to-go containers. They'll bring dishes back, that then get washed and reused.

But the faculty is doing the research to say, how do we make the packages better in the first place? Further upstream in the conversation, rather than worrying about it when it's the piles, or walls, as I described them, of trash along the street. How do we make those containers smaller, biodegradable, more environmentally friendly? So it's a really cool place to be at ESF, because these solutions that the world's not yet aware of are emerging from the research that's going on.

And then our students are living this in their behavior. You will be so encouraged if you hang around with students from ESF. You will say, "We have hope for the future," because the students here are behaving the way we need everybody to behave.

But even still, you can pick a student out at ESF that is living in this microcosm of good behavior with cutting-edge research coming, with peers that are not throwing things away. Couple examples are when the semester ends and everybody is moving out, our students will collect what they don't want anymore for their dorm room, because they're specific to dorms. And now these students are going to be moving somewhere else where these dorm purchases are not appropriate.

And in the past, and I think at other colleges, all of that gets put out on the side of the road. I'm sure some people pick it up and reuse it, but there was no deliberate effort for that to happen. So they collected all of it.

And then when the new students come in the fall, they set it all up beautifully. So before you go to the store to buy all these things again, here's all of these kitchen utensils and dorm staples that you can use.

And it's such an encouraging place to be. And yet and still, I think our students are struggling with mental health issues because they see this overwhelming scale of the problem elsewhere. So I think that thought about if you focus on these massive cities around the world where most of the people are, you can move that dial pretty quickly.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** I just want to reflect on how amazing that is that you guys are really walking the walk. I can't wait to meet you students. I'm so excited, because this is what the future looks like.

To quickly go back to individual actions, that's something that I really want people to remember is that when we take certain actions, it does shift who we are and how we show up. Our entire energy shifts while we start to gain agency over the things that we can do. I can bring my own water bottle. These small things will actually change the character that we show up as, and that character, again, will have a much bigger impact than we know. So all these things will ripple effect in ways that we can never even imagine and never even follow up and know, but just remembering that we are making an impact in those small ways.

**Joanie Mahoney:** The other thing that I think would lend itself to optimism is looking at the sum total of the incremental change that's been made. I'm of a different generation than you. I just turned 58. And when I think back to high school in the 1980s and the way the world was, the change feels slow.

But if you go all the way back, I remember visiting relatives in the city of Boston, and they were recycling before we were. And it seemed foreign to me that you would have two different trash cans and you'd be separating your trash. But now, people would think you were crazy not to do that. So while it feels incremental and slow, if you just go back 30, 40 years, you will see tremendous progress. Not just in our behaviors.

I mean young people are so much better at being citizens of the planet. We weren't shopping in consignment shops and thrift shops. It's a badge of honor for young people to not buy new things, and to not throw things away, and to have a small footprint. Not only is there a lot of progress in that behavior, but there's also so much progress in the technology.

You talked about energy. I'm sitting in a house that has solar panels on the roof, an electric car charger in the garage, and a fully electric car. And you have people working to make sure that that electricity is clean on the other end. The momentum is so strong right now. That's something to be really optimistic about. We're going to have a hard time keeping up with the capacity of people who are trying to electrify. That's a great problem to have. We didn't have that problem 30 or 40 years ago when people didn't even think about filling up their tanks with oil products, right?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Right. I just listened to a TED Countdown speech about the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. And since we are reliant on technology, that can have an exponential growth, which we've seen. I don't remember the numbers, but solar today is 100 or 500 times cheaper than just a few decades ago. It's crazy, right?

Business of oil is a commodity that always fluctuates. It goes up and down and up and down. It's hard to predict. But with technology, it's always going to be cheaper.

So that's how you scale. And then more people start using it, it's going to even cheaper in the future. So a hundred percent, just looking back... And you don't even have to go 30 years back in time. Because when I started talking about sustainability and climate change five, six years ago, it was not a thing people talked about. It was not a cool issue. And today, it's everywhere.

And I even put a Google Alert on to see if there's anything out there about climate optimism or climate optimist. And I get articles daily. I can't even keep up anymore. It's like Forbes, and Business Insider, and Vogue, and it's really something that people talk about.

So things are changing. It's changing fast, and I think it's easy to get frustrated and feel like we're stuck. But ultimately, we're moving forward much faster than we know.

**Joanie Mahoney:**

Absolutely. And if young people just think back, I think I got my first cell phone 15 or 20 years ago at the most. And then look what's happened with technology. That can be a possibility for looking at this optimistically is just the speed that we're making progress makes some of those goals feel better.

And at ESF, we have a goal of being carbon negative in five years. And we're well on our way. And I think when you hear we have to reduce X amount by 2030 or by 2050, it feels daunting. But when you look at how far we've come in such a short amount of time... And I'll say one of the most optimistic things is in that UN report that was characterized broadly as scary, I heard an interview with one of the authors, and she's from Canada. And she said, "What really is being buried also in that report, is the acknowledgement that we have everything we need right now to fix the problem. We don't have to invent anything else. We have it under our control." That feels good.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Yeah. I just want to piggyback off something that you've said, which I've known now for a few years, which makes me optimistic, is the fact that we do have what we need to activate this journey or so to speak. I mean, the journey is ongoing, but to really make this happen.

And so what my book is ultimately about and what I really want people to understand is that what we need right now is not the new technology, is not the new science. We have that. We have to find the courage to choose change. And that comes back to all of us. We have to say, "Wow, we are living through such extraordinary times." Actually, to be alive today means to be part of making

history, because that's what we're doing. And we get to say, "Okay, this is not working. Let's think again and let's try something new."

That is scary. And I think we have to recognize that as a species, we are not programmed to choose change all the time, because that's not what's smart and safe. Back in the day, if something was uncertain like a storm on the horizon, you would kind of crawl back and stay safely tucked away and wait for the storm to pass. And so that's a very metaphorical way of saying that, but that's kind of how we're responding to uncertainty and scary information.

So it's normal to kind of take a step back and be paralyzed a little bit like, "I don't know what to do. This is scary." But we have to recognize that right now, we have to do the opposite. Let's look at the scary storm, so to speak, with some sort of curiosity and excitement to say, "We know this storm is coming. It's not going to pass. It's going to actually stall and just get worse." So now is the time to find that adventure inside us and go explore something different. And we have to start choosing change.

And we can practice that muscle daily by making small changes to our personal lives, and then get better at just accepting and exploring new possibilities in the future to come. And that's really what I want us all to recognize is that to be a hero today is to find the courage to choose change. And that can look different depending on who you are, but we don't have to figure it out. We have figured it out. So now we just have to activate that solution.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I agree. And your daughter someday will be reading those history books about this moment, and I'm sure be very proud of the role you're playing in making that change. Before I let you go though, we're going to have the opportunity here at ESF to hear from you. But how do folks who are hearing this podcast learn more about you? Where should we direct them if they want to hear more?

**Anne Therese Gennari:** So I'm pretty active on Instagram. I'm still in that generation. So Anne Therese Gennari is my name, all in one word. And then [theclimateoptimist.com](http://theclimateoptimist.com) is my website. And then my website has all the links to my book, and I have a guided meditation, and I have a masterclass coming out. So anything that you might want to find is there.

**Joanie Mahoney:** That's excellent. Thank you so much for taking time with us. I'm even more excited now to welcome you for our commencement at ESF, but I'm happy to hear the work that you're doing. I think it's going to be so important for our students, and more broadly, anybody who's listening to this, to hear that message of optimism. So thank you so much.



**Anne Therese Gennari:** Thank you, Joanie, for having me. It's been a real pleasure, and I can't wait to see you.

**Joanie Mahoney:** I'll see you in a couple weeks.

**Anne Therese Gennari:** Yes.