



TAKE HEART TAKE ACTION

The TRANSFORMATIVE POWER *of*
SMALL ACTS, GROUPS, *and* GARDENS



TRATHEN HECKMAN

Introduction

**In a world on fire with overwhelmingly large crises,
what if the power of small could change it all?**

Three days into the historically devastating Tubbs Fire of California in 2017, I can barely comprehend it when the state fire chief says, “It’s gonna get worse before it gets better.” Years later, with an endless procession of more devastating fires, floods, droughts, hurricanes, a pandemic, and the unrest of injustice boiling over, many are coming to grips with the hard-to-swallow truth that it’s gonna get worse before it gets better.

But what if the power of *small* could change it all? What if small daily acts of courage and conviction, small groups of unstoppable world changers, and even small gardens of regenerative delight could transform your life and your community and help grow a movement big enough to change the world just when it’s needed most?

Of course, it all seems so daunting that it’s hard to fathom how one person’s actions can have any real impact. Our small efforts and groups feel woefully insufficient to the task at hand. When we’re fueled by fear and urgency, it’s easy to burn out or push others away, frustrated at a lack of concern.

Full of beauty, inspiration, and practical ideas, *Take Heart, Take Action* is an ode to the reverent, resilient, and irrepressible spirit in each of us. Every day there is a better world being born, and a world that is rapidly unraveling. Which do your actions feed? Are you ready to rise up and reclaim your joy and greatest contribution?

This book is for grassroots activists, leaders, and everyday people who seek a new path to personal and community transformation by being the change they wish to see. When you start changing yourself, and transform your hurt into positive action, the world around you starts to change; though individual efforts alone won't do it. We need collective action and collective will to rapidly spread climate solutions, models, and policies that are just and regenerative.

Twenty-five years ago, as I was waking up to the painful state of our people and planet, I felt somewhat overwhelmed and alone in my concerns, with little hope or vision for what could be different. But then I started to come across people who seemed more alive and passionately connected to a deeper purpose. They were regenerating gardens, farms, and even forests. This landed me at a conference with thousands of such changemakers, who cracked open my heart, mind, and paradigm to how rich we could live while solving our most pressing planetary problems. It set me on a path.

That path led me to start Daily Acts, an educational nonprofit that inspires transformative actions that create connected, equitable, climate-resilient communities. Twenty years ago, Daily Acts was founded on the belief that to transform our communities and world, we start with ourselves. We must be the change we wish to see. By unleashing the power of community and through a wide array of partners, Daily Acts has shown again and again the incredible power of small, passionate, committed groups of changemakers.

Many years later, I was strolling through the Solar Living Institute gardens, finalizing details for a workshop at another gathering of changemakers when my phone rang. It was one of our speakers. As I answered, I heard this sprite-like voice burst

through the line, “Hot damn, Mr. Heckman! How the hell are ya?” I smiled and laughed, thinking, *I can't believe this is my senator.*

A decade before, I couldn't have imagined knowing who my senator was, let alone that he'd be so damn real, funny, and inspiring. At best, government seemed not to be stepping up to the problems we face. Not to mention the broken, divisive politics. So, I didn't yet see government and grassroots collaboration as a pathway to transformative change.

I didn't yet know the power of small, the power of community, the power of simply taking heart and taking action. I couldn't have imagined going from installing one greywater system to five in a day, thirteen in a weekend, and then the one hundred Greywater System Challenge, helping shift local and state policies along the way. Or that we could go from transforming one landscape to the scary-to-mention goal of mobilizing 350 gardens in a weekend and later to catalyzing tens of thousands of resilience-building actions and projects. Or that a small group could be a big catalyst in shifting a city from climate laggard to national leader.

The simple truth is that there has never been a time when our small acts and small groups have mattered more. But we gotta believe and lean in, and sometimes let our hearts break. Because this is how the light gets in. It's finding where your heart's inspiration meets the hurt you are called to heal.

In this big planetary moment, *Take Heart, Take Action* is about the journey of finding your path, your people, and a good compass to guide you. Through a series of inspiring stories, you'll learn about three things: how to transform yourself, your garden, and your group as a pathway to transforming our communities and world. Such stories provide a road map—a secret formula to success.

As you read through these pages, you'll:

- Discover a set of steps for how to find and live your inspiration. This includes creating a personal compass that helps you stay awake, engaged, and sustained.
- Learn how growing a garden filled with food, medicine, and wonder can teach you about community and nature's operating instructions. Whether you garden or not, the lessons you learn in a garden about how nature works apply to most everything.
- Build on the lessons of personal change and gardening to see how small groups can become ecosystem catalysts, aligning many people and partners to act as a larger force for good.

Importantly, you'll learn a simple formula to do it all, a time-tested set of values and operating principles that form the structure and flow of this book: Reverence + Ripples + Relationships = Resilience. Reverence is about waking up and following our hearts. Once awake, Ripples are the actions we take to find our vision, voice, and power. Relationships is about creating and nurturing community because that's how our planet works. What comes of this is a Resilience we live and build by waking and taking action in right relation, day after day. And it doesn't matter if you are far along your path or just starting, super organized, or would never ponder such levels of geekery as pontificated in these pages. It's about finding what's right for you and keeping it close by.

In a dark and stormy world, we need bright beacons and a good compass to guide us. The stories and tools in these pages provide both, as well as some bread for the journey.

I wrote this book to help us gather reverence in our hearts, to reclaim the power in our actions, and to nurture life's relationships as an essential pathway to personal and community transformation. Long ago, exposure to people who used their voices to inspire others woke something in me: a desire to live my inspiration in a way

that regenerates self, nature, and community, and to nurture this in others.

I also wanted to answer two questions I get asked a lot. How has a small group like Daily Acts created so much positive change, continuing to innovate, adapt, and evolve through all manner of crisis and difficulty? And how in the hell do I stay so inspired and engaged after decades of navigating such challenging terrain?

I've spent over half my life following my inspiration and twenty years helping grow grassroots organizations, networks, and collaborations that unleash the power of community. But given the urgency of now, we need quicker, more systemic change. Wherever you are on your journey in finding your calling and helping grow kick-ass groups, I want the hard-earned wins and losses of Daily Acts and myself to quicken the curve for you. I want government, business, and philanthropic leaders to quit focusing so much on big fixes and to invest in the world-changing power of small.

Nothing in these pages will excuse you from the difficult work of finding and following your North Star or from dealing with the messiness of being human and working with humans. But that doesn't mean we can't have a damn fun, inspiring time and build great relationships as we heal our hurt and the hurt of our world.

This is not a "How To" for self-help, permaculture gardening, or running grassroots organizations. It's a heart-centered "Why To" sharing my experience and Daily Acts' success to inspire readers and leaders to change their lives, organizations, and communities, and to support others to do the same. We do this by claiming the only power we have—our daily actions—and by following nature's operating instructions to nurture community and regenerate life on this planet.

As people, organizations, and movements rise to this moment and prioritize nurturing networks, regenerating ecosystems, and unleashing the power of community, the small, engaged groups in every place are essential. Your daily acts are essential. And the power of small is bigger than you think. It's time to rise. As we say at Daily Acts: **take heart, take part, take action.**

In a world on fire with overwhelmingly large crises, what if the power of small could change it all?

In *Take Heart, Take Action*, you'll discover how to transform your life and the world through daily actions, small groups, and regenerative gardens. This book is full of inspiring stories and practical examples for how small acts can make a big difference in enriching our lives and the world. Read it. Take heart, take action—and inspire others to do the same.

“A roadmap for a life of camaraderie, meaning, and kick-ass regenerative actions.”

—**VICKI ROBIN**, author of *Blessing the Hands that Feed Us*

“Daily Acts is leading the way to a more sustainable, climate-resilient future here at home and across the nation.”

—California State Senate Majority Leader **MIKE MCGUIRE**

“Trathen is the right messenger at the right time. If you need a dose of inspiration, here it is.”

—**RICHARD HEINBERG**, Senior Fellow at Post Carbon Institute

“Simple recipes for making what appear to be miracles.”

—**ANDY LIPKIS**, Founder of TreePeople and Accelerate Resilience LA

“Trathen’s leadership and the work of Daily Acts are shining examples of the power of community.”

—US Congressman **JARED HUFFMAN**

“Amid the necessary work of national and global organizing, it’s important and refreshing to make an impact locally. You’ll get some great ideas here about how to help and be inspired.”

—**BILL MCKIBBEN**, author of *The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon*

“As timely, relevant, and accessible a book as you’ll find to renew your vision, nourish your heart, and catalyze you into action.”

—**NINA SIMONS**, Co-Founder and Chief Relationship Officer at Bioneers



TRATHEN HECKMAN is an award-winning nonprofit leader with over twenty years of experience cultivating grassroots groups and community networks. He is the Founder and Director of Daily Acts Organization, which specializes in unleashing the power of community to address the climate crisis. Trathen lives in the Petaluma River Watershed, where he grows food, medicine, and wonder while working to compost apathy and lack. Visit Trathen at www.dailyacts.org.



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