Courage My Friends Podcast Series II – Episode 2
Ecological Grief:
Mourning the Past, Fearing the Future and Finding Hope

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.
Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: It's been two years already. If we can't get it together to deal with this world-wide pandemic, how are we going to deal with the climate crisis?

STREET VOICE 2: The future just seems so uncertain. What do say to my kids?

STREET VOICE 3: This is outrageous! The rich are getting richer, the are getting poorer. Where is the compassion? Where is the solidarity?

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas…

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: As prehistoric glaciers melt into rising seas; wildfires turn ancient forests into ash. While people see their homes flood in some parts of the world; drought and melt claim food and water life-lines in others. And where the seasons lose their predictability and the ground its sturdiness; within the climate crisis we are also losing our sense of permanence - and we are feeling this loss as grief. What is ecological grief and what does it look like? How do we mourn our ecosystems and planet? And is there a hope and a power to be found within this grief?

In this episode of the *Courage My Friends* podcast, *Ecological Grief: Mourning the Past, Fearing the Future and Finding Hope*, we are very pleased to welcome Ashlee Cunsolo.

Ashlee Cunsolo is the founding Dean of the School of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Studies of the Labrador Institute of Memorial University, a former Canada Research Chair,

and a member of the Royal Society of Canada College of New Artists, Scholars, and Scientists. She is a leading voice internationally on climate change, mental health and ecological grief, a regular contributor to media and policy and editor of *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Grief and Loss*. She is a mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and partner, living and learning as a guest on the homelands of the Innu and Inuit in Labrador, Canada.

Welcome Ashlee.

ASHLEE: Hi, it's so great to be here.

RESH: It's wonderful having you here! So to start, what is ecological grief?

ASHLEE: Well, ecological grief as a term is created to really summarize the myriad experiences that people are having emotionally and mentally to the loss and the change and the degradation of environments, of species or of special places. So, it really is the grief that we feel when there are disruptions to a place that means something to us. When we see the loss of sometimes it's a particular species, sometimes it's loss through large environmental events. And really what it's getting at is something that people have known for thousands of years; you know, for thousands of years humans have been deeply and emotionally connected to the environment. But what it's trying to do now is provide new language and new terms to summarize something that is happening so much more rapidly and really at a global level than we've seen previously.

RESH: And you and your team were actually among the first to hone in on ecological grief as a field of study. So could you speak a bit more about your work?

ASHLEE: I originally started working in Northern Labrador, which is in the Northeast part of Canada in what's called the Nunatsiavut Land Claims Settlement Region. And this is a self-governed Inuit region in Northern Labrador. And the community of Rigolet, which is the southernmost community in that region, started a project back in 2007, 2008, really looking at the ways in which climate change was impacting human health within the community. And it's really important to state up-front that Labrador has been rapidly changing for decades. It's one of the fastest warming places anywhere in the world. And because of that, Inuit in this region have really been at the frontlines for decades.

So after that initial project was done, the community wanted to have a sense of how is climate change writ large impacting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. And so I had the great honor and privilege of working with Dr. Sherry Lee Harper, who's at the University of Alberta and the Rigolet Inuit community government, and a team of Inuit researchers on this multi-year study to look at this climate change and health impact in the region. And what was really amazing was in the first couple of years we interviewed over 80 people, all different ages, backgrounds, different connections to the land - I think our youngest was nine years old, the oldest was over 80. And no matter where they were coming from or what they were doing, the mental health and the emotional impacts of climate change came up for everyone. That was such a striking moment for the research team and

for the community to realize the pervasiveness in which changes in climate, in the environment were really impacting the spectrum of emotional responses.

And one of the pieces that came up that people talked a lot was was grieving and grief and mourning over the loss and the change. Mourning things that had already been lost, but then also mourning things that they knew were going to be lost in the coming years because of the climate projections.

RESH: And we know that the climate crisis, those projections tell us that it's getting worse. Reports that just came out of the intergovernmental panel on climate change, which is the world body of climate science, most recently told us that this is "code red for humanity". Yet, what many may not realize is that Canada itself is on the frontlines of the crisis. So we are warming at two to three times faster than the rest of the planet? How?

ASHLEE: Yes, Canada, as a nation, which has a large Northern landmass, the Northern regions are rapidly changing. And that two to three degrees, average temperature change is something that we're seeing. And in fact, for many Northern regions it's three times faster than the global rate.

You often hear the global call is 1.5 degrees is the temperature change we don't want to exceed. In Labrador we've seen an over three degree average temperature change already. And depending on which projections and which scenarios you look at it's projected for anywhere from a 7 to 11 degree average temperature change by 2100.

RESH: Wow.

ASHLEE: So when you think about that and you think about a place that relies on snow and ice and cold, that has a whole ecosystem around it, that has human cultural systems; with a projection of 7 to 11 degrees, I mean that's catastrophic. That is a very, very different environment and that's a very, very different future.

Canada as a whole is experiencing a lot of the severe impacts of climate change already, but they're often unequally distributed. So you really see this in Northern areas, in coastal areas, and it's often impacting people who are already experiencing other forms of inequity or marginalization or colonization or oppression.

RESH: And it's interesting within those global climate projections, we hear that "well, we're at the crisis now, but we could be moving to catastrophe if we go beyond the 1.5". But as you're saying for these communities, they're already at catastrophe. And we're also seeing the same type of thing within many places in the Global South, because they're also on the front lines. So how have the communities that you've been working with.. How are they seeing the climate crisis? What are they seeing of the impacts around them?

ASHLEE: Well, so, so many things. When we talk to people and when you look at other research from across Northern Canada and particularly among Inuit

populations and Northern First Nations, who really have been sounding the alarm for decades and decades and have been really talking about noticing very large and also very subtle changes.

People here in Labrador have noticed first and foremost the increasing temperature. Not only is the region warming, but it's disrupting things like ice formation. Sometimes ice might come in in previous years in October and November and then break up in, say, April, May, sometimes even into early June. And now you're seeing ice not forming until December, January and breaking up in May.

So what that means for people where ice is really your highway, it's your livelihoods, it's your freedom of movement, your connection to other communities, the ability to hunt and trap and get supplies - and it's just so important for your overall wellbeing to be able to get out - is they're seeing a big reduction in ice coverage and also ice extent and thickness. So the ice isn't as thick, it's not lasting as long and it's not covering as much area.

People talk a lot about wind, it's windier and the winds have shifted. And more storms. And interestingly, more storms in the summer and in all seasons. So in the winter you're seeing a lot more snow and a lot more blizzards and a lot more snow accumulation. And then in the summers and falls and spring, a lot more rain and fog. And sometimes even rain in the winter. And so all of that combines to not only create a different seasonal pattern, but also really affects people's ability to travel.

In Labrador on the north coast, there are no roads going in and out. So you rely on boat and fly in and Skidoo, depending on the season. And so sometimes planes might not be able to get in and out for days because of weather, whether it's fog or snow. This has big impacts on people.

A lot of people also discussed big changes in animals and plants and the patterns. Of some species leaving the area and going further North, some new species moving in, some species declines, changes in berries and medicinal plants. So a lot of overall changes.

And what's really interesting about the area that I work in is these are cumulative changes that have profound effects. So there's not a single event, like a wildfire or a flooding, very traumatic, acute events that people experience. And then of course, there's the whole range of mental health impacts that come from that because it's a very traumatic moment in someone's life.

These are our daily, weekly, monthly yearly changes, but they have a cumulative effect that still create very strong mental and emotional reactions and experiences. And particularly because people, in this region have really had this connection in this area for hundreds and hundreds of years. And all of that culture and community and land-based knowledge and science is all shifting. So it's very mental and emotional, but it's also existential. It's ontological. It's cultural. It's really everything, but there's not sort of one single moment you can point to

RESH: It's traumatic for their sense of community, but also their sense of self and identity as well, right?

ASHLEE: Yeah. A lot of people talked about that from a very existential self-perspective. Back in 2014 we released a documentary with all five Inuit communities in the region called *Lament for the Land*. And there's a line right at the end by one of the leaders and Elders and in the northernmost community, Mr. Tony Anderson. And he says, "Inuit are people of the sea-ice. And if there's no more sea-ice, how do we be people of the sea-ice?"

And that is such a profound statement, that has so much in it. The people of past, present and future; what that means, if you can't do the things that your parents and your grandparents did. If the ice is shifting, if your ability to participate in these cultural activities and things that are essential to who you are and to who your identity is; like what does that mean?

The climate crisis is also impacting people's place in the world and their understanding of themselves. And really challenging a lot of very deeply held meaning and identity and connection.

RESH: And of course, this is ecological grief. And could you go a bit more into how ecological grief is manifesting for these populations? Also how it's different from other types of grief?

ASHLEE: The really powerful thing that came up was how people of all ages and genders and backgrounds, when they've spoken of grieving, often for many people it was the first time that they had told someone that they were feeling this grief and this emotional loss. Because, I think sometimes people feel we're not trained to grieve at the best of times. And when we move away from humans and we move away into environmental things, I think a lot of people feel shame or embarrassment; so they hold it in. And it's not just where I've worked in Labrador; it's people all over that I've worked with and talked to.

And so I think for a lot of people this was the first time sort of articulating it and sharing it. And that sense of relief and community and understanding that emerged was really, really powerful. But when people talked about it and when you looked at the ways that they shared it, there was kind of these three main areas:

The first is kind of the most obvious, like the loss of an environment or a species. So something is clearly changing. Or a species has moved on or declined or a landscape has degraded or the ice is disappearing. There's that physical environmental, ecological loss.

But then there was a whole range of grief related, as we were just talking about, to the loss of identity, to cultural knowledge and to place-based knowledge systems. And that sense of grieving, your place in the world and your sense of self and what your possible future could be.

And then the third type of grief that people talked about a lot, was this idea of anticipatory grieving and already starting to feel the painful emotions and the sadness over the losses to come. So it's not just what has already been lost and it's not just what's in the process of being lost; but it's people thinking about, *okay, if it's changed this much over the last 20 years, what are the next 10 years, 20 years, 30 years going to bring?* Or thinking about what does that mean for their children and their grandchildren? What does it mean when we see the climate science and you see reports like the IPCC, Sixth Assessment Report calling it "a code red for the planet". And then you think, okay, well if we're already on the front lines and it's changed this much, then what does that mean? And that sense of anticipatory loss and sadness and mourning was so strong and multi-generational. You know, a lot of the younger people talked about feeling this tremendous amount of loss for a future they might never have, that they imagined they did. The older generations were grieving for their own future, but also for the future of the younger generations.

And then as we were doing this work, we connected with a team in Australia, led by Dr. Neville Ellis and Dr. Glenn Albrecht. And they were working with farmers who were experiencing tremendous generational drought in Australia. And so we're talking very different environments, climates, culture, everything. Everything was very different. And when our teams got together and we started to share what we were learning and what we were hearing, what was incredible was their research was also identifying these three categories of how people were experiencing grief. You could substitute, drought for sea-ice or sea-ice for drought.

And the quotes were almost identical in terms of how people were talking and what they were experiencing. And so you start to see that there are these, shared experiences around grief that connect us with the environment, that really haven't gotten the attention that they deserved and really that most of us are completely unprepared for. There's very few of us who've received training or any sort of supports growing up and how you deal with grief until it happens to you; let alone adding on the environmental layers. This is where we really need to start thinking as a human species about the sheer mental health impacts and the sheer ecological grief that's going to be continued to be experienced moving forward.

RESH: There's so many interesting terms that's coming up around this now, and I think out of Australia, they have this term, *solastalgia*. Could you talk a bit about what this means and how it's connected?

ASHLEE: Oh, *solastalgia* is such a beautiful term. I really like it. And it was created by Dr. Glenn Albrecht, who's a philosopher. And Glen and his team have really been working for years and years and years on the climate crisis and trying to create new terms and a new lexicon of how we can describe the environmental crises that we face. So one of the things that is very clear is that the English language really doesn't have the capacity to express some of these very complex, mental and emotional impacts of a changing environment.

And so *solastalgia* is one of those terms and what it means is a homesickness while still at home. And that your place and the environment around you has changed so much that you no longer recognize it. And you feel like you're somewhere new. And

when we found this term as a team, it so resonated with what people were talking about. And we'd bring it forward to people and explain it and they'd say, "that's exactly what I'm feeling!".

A couple of the Elders that were being interviewed talked about when they were younger being forcibly relocated by the government, whether it was because of residential school or being forcibly moved to another community and that incredible dislocation that happened and feeling alienated in a new environment and feeling homesick for the environment that you left.

And so several of the Elders said, "now, I'm in this new environment and I'm in the home, but everything has changed. The environment has changed so much around me that it doesn't feel like home anymore. And I don't recognize it in the same way. And so I'm homesick for what was. While still at home."

And it is such a profound experience that I think many, many people all over the world are experiencing where there are these places that are special to us, that we feel most at home, and we're witnessing them changing. And when they change that affects us on many levels and we can feel alienated. We can feel lost. We can feel sad. We can feel grief. And we can feel this homesickness, while we're still actually in our home.

RESH: It is so incredibly sad. So it's not about when you leave your home, but when your home leaves you. And how do you return to a home that is no longer there. I mean, that breaks your heart. And as you say so many people. And if this continues to get worse, the majority of humanity is eventually going to feel this.

And these, again as you say, are new terms, but what they refer to is not. When I first read this term *ecological grief*, it was in a Guardian article, which incidentally featured yourself and other climate researchers. And I was struck by two things: One, I hadn't thought about this aspect of the climate crisis, to be honest. And then number two, I however realized, and probably like many people, I have been having these conversations throughout my life with parents and friends and grandparents, and I teach, so my students as well, about you know, what certain seasons used to look like. And when you could gather with your community or your family for a harvest or fishing, picking a fruit off a tree or you could actually drink directly from the local river without any fear, because it was fine, you know, it was safe. And now so much of that is lost.

ASHLEE: Yeah, these are all such important conversations to have around how we all experience this grief and loss. And I think your piece there around reading the term and then realizing," oh, I, I think I experienced, this," is something that I see with so, so many people.

And there's this sense of relief and community that comes from it, where you realize you're not alone; that this is a reasonable, rational response to the climate crisis. And that's something that I always emphasize and that people working in this area talk about. Like, of course we feel grief, loss, anxiety, pain, sadness, fear with the climate crisis. And if we didn't, that's actually where something is not healthy with us.

And so many people will say to me, I felt so ashamed to feel this, or I thought I was the only one, or how embarrassing or I got to toughen up. But what I think we actually need is being able to speak about this more and being able to open up more.

While they are new terms, they're not describing new phenomenon; but there is a power in having a new lexicon that allows people to have a shared language to say, I feel this too, and I'm not the only one.

And I think though what's also really, really important is to know that for so many people all over the world and particularly Indigenous Peoples all over the world, this connection to the environment, this grieving over the loss of more than humans - whether they're plants or animals or ecosystems - that kinship with other beings and then grieving other beings is certainly not new.

I think it's a skill and I think it's a privilege and an honor to live in that relational capacity. And it's something that much of humanity has actually lost over time and to our detriment. And I think many people are starting to realize they are emotionally connected.

Even just the daily news cycle of how bad climate change is. Or the flooding or the wildfires or the huge storms and the loss of human life, the loss of animal life, the loss of ecosystems; that has a huge impact on people.

And starting to have conversations more and more, to bring it into public discussion, to bring it into policy, to bring it into research. To say, okay, what does this mean? What can we do? How are we experiencing it? And then importantly, how does it bring us together? And can it change our behaviors and our actions when we start to think more along the climate informed grief lens.

RESH: You also raised that point that so many systems throughout the world are facing just historically a massive disruption that has led to this climate crisis, this separation, this almost violent disconnection from the natural world.

And so much of that, is rooted within colonization. Could you speak a bit more about the connection between ecological grief and colonization?

ASHLEE: Well for so many people, the climate crisis is an extension of colonization and empire. Here in Northern Labrador a lot of people talked about how they've survived so much from outside forces, from colonization. And that's residential schools and forced relocation and community trauma and intergenerational pain. And so much has happened and communities have continued to survive and come together.

And now there's this external force again, this time of climate change and climate change being driven by many, many other industries and places and governments than these small Indigenous communities in Northern Canada. And so a lot of people talked about it that this is another sense of colonization. It's another sense of

marginalization. It's another process that takes away and degrades things that matter to you from a cultural perspective and from an identity perspective. And something that people feel helpless to fight on the global scale.

There's some incredible scholars, like Kyle White in the United States who does some excellent work on colonization and climate change. Really focus on the linkages of these global systems and how the systems continue to cause pain and inequitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. People who are reliant on the natural environment, so farmers and fishers. People who are low-income status, for women, for elderly and, of course any BIPOC population. And so what we're seeing with climate change is the perpetuation of these systems of colonization. It is the ongoing development at the expense of so many people.

And one of the things that people had talked about in the research that we were doing is so often the people who are at the frontlines and who have been sounding the alarms on climate change, including Inuit here in Canada, who have the knowledge, who have the science, who have the hundreds and hundreds of years of understanding, and place-based nuance; so often those people weren't listened to and were continued to be marginalized because of these larger systems of colonization, of racial oppression. And so there's that kind of thing that the people who mourn the most are often the people who are marginalized the most by these larger systems of power and politics.

RESH: Could this be part of the reason why it has taken so long, therefore to identify climate grief, to bring in the terminology; because these populations, Inuit, Indigenous, poor, racialized, as you say, those who were on the frontlines, are also those who are routinely sidelined in institutional and policy discourse?

ASHLEE: Yeah, absolutely. I think back to this really transformative moment in our research. One of the Elders that we were working with, Sara Bakke in Rigolet, she was one of the project advisors. I was having a conversation with her in her home and we were talking about all the things that she's seen change over her lifetime .But it was sort of, itemizing and documenting, what have you seen what's happening? And then, I said to her, and how does that make you feel? Like, how do all these changes make you feel? And it was such a profound moment because she just stopped and stared outside for a long time time. And then she started to cry and she talked about how all of these researchers who always want to talk to Indigenous Peoples, they only want to document things. They never asked people how they feel. Like they only want to say, "well what have you noticed in the environment or the sea ice?" But nobody had ever asked her, "how do you feel about this?"

And that was such an important moment for the research, but also an important understanding of often what we know in the research is framed by Southern, predominantly White, predominantly colonial systems. So in the North for example, a lot of the research that has happened over the years is Southern questions about the North, not necessarily Northern questions or Northern priorities. And that's shifting. But there is this long history, particularly in climate change of a lot of research happening, but not necessarily the research that people themselves would have maybe wanted.

I really liked how you said, you know, people who are on the front lines are also sidelined. I think that's exactly what's happening.

And so having that reminder that people have their own questions that need to be answered and they're having their own experiences connected to climate change that wasn't being focused on at all in the research. And so sometimes people will say, "oh well this is new." You know, "it's only in the last couple of years." Well, we don't actually know if it's new, because no one ever asked these questions or did this type of research. And what we do know now is that people's lived experience has far outstripped what we actually know in the published research.

RESH: And it sounds like that was a moment. That's saying we need to bring the humanity into the science as well and recognize these people as scientists too.

ASHLEE: And scientists with thousands of years of knowledge in place. That have that connection, that have that understanding and that live complex emotional lives.

In the early days of doing this research, our team often had a lot of pushback from other natural scientists saying "there's no place in the climate science for human emotion, or for mental health impacts". And you know, this is like but people are already experiencing this. There has to be room for it; because inevitably this will be the discussion of where we are.

Back in 2009, there was a really important article that came out in the Lancet, major health journal. And it said climate change would be the biggest public health threat of the 21st century. And now what we're looking at is actually the mental health impacts of climate change are likely to be the biggest public health threat of the 21st century. Because there's huge health impacts, absolutely! But we're also seeing just this widespread sadness, grief, anxiety, depression, fear, hopelessness, helplessness. It's so profound for so many people, whether or not you're at the frontlines and whether or not you have experienced an acute or traumatic event.

RESH: Well, this is huge. I mean it can't be overstated how huge this is; because what more and more people are saying is that this is the age of the Anthropocene. And I wonder if you could just speak to that. What is the Anthropocene?

ASHLEE: Well, it's a term that a lot of people use to differentiate this era that we're living in as one that was directly impacted and altered by humans. So there's all different kinds of start dates for it, but essentially it's considering around the Industrial Revolution. And when things really started to grow from this large-scale global network that we're seeing. And of course that coincides with the large-scale emissions and the contributions to climate change.

So a lot of people use that term just to be very specific that this is not a natural time. Yes, the Earth has always gone through these natural fluctuations, but this the speed and the severity of it is being driven by human behavior and human action.

RESH: It's incredible! I mean, it's becoming so normalized to say, "oh yeah, it's the climate crisis. It's the climate crisis". But when you step back and you look at this is the only earth age or geologic age - because Anthropocene literally means the "Age of Humans" or the "Age of Man" - that a lone species for the first time has been able to bring such a devastating planetary shift in such a short period of time. Industrialization was what within the last 200 years that it started. And this also includes the current Sixth Age of Mass Extinction. So the sheer amount of loss is almost incomprehensible. And as you say, people are feeling it all over the world. So where else are you seeing this ecological grief?

ASHLEE: Yeah. There's really amazing research happening all over, on most continents. And really exploring the large-scale ways in which climate change impacts mental health and ecological grief and loss, and then the place-specific ways.

There was a really amazing study that just came out not too long ago from a researcher and mental health professional in the UK, Caroline Hickman and her team. And they did a global survey of 10,000 youth from 10 countries, looking at all the ways in which people are being mentally affected by the climate crisis.

And it was, very humbling to see 60% to 70% of youth were feeling very, very stressed- out and very worried. you know, 80% were scared. The numbers are just huge when you start to think about it.

Also seeing a lot of great advocacy and a lot of work, particularly among youth talking about this and that this is their future and they need supports. And they're scared and they're anxious and they're sad. And this is something we need to take incredibly seriously.

I think too, when you look at these, terms that come out to try to explain this broad experience that we're having; it also then gives people power to come together and to acknowledge it. And so you know, it's this,concept of validate it, you know - so acknowledge that it's there - and then elevate it and move it forward so that you don't get completely paralyzed or lost in the grief. But you can actually experience and hold space for the grief and it can connect you to others.

And, again, going back to something I said earlier, it's also to know that it is a completely reasonable, rational response. That of course we are going to be scared. When a report comes out on biodiversity and it says 1 million species are at risk. How do you even begin to comprehend the magnitude of that loss?

So a lot of people talk about we're living in an era of loss and damage. We will lose a lot and it's going to be human life and more than human life. There's a wonderful quote from writer, Joe Confino from a few years ago where he was talking about climate change and mental health. And he said ,"How do we carry the grief of the world without getting absolutely crushed by it and curling up in the fetal position?"

How do we do that? Because that is actually the signature labor of our time. I've written a lot about that. That this grief and this labor, the work of mourning is something that is going to characterize us because if we are facing, "code red for humanity", if we are facing 1 million species at a risk of extinction and decline; that is an era of loss and damage. And that is an era of grief. And we're going to be called to grief-work. And we're going to have to do this together. And do it hopefully in a way that doesn't cause more harm, but actually might bring together for big ethical and political changes. And for really uniting people to create a different future.

RESH: Like so much of the world, more and more of our population are living in cities and cities that are both the industrialized centers contributing to the climate crisis. But depending on where that city is, some of them can also feel somewhat incubated from at least the direct impacts of the climate crisis. Can city dwellers, who may not be on the front lines, also experience ecological grief?

ASHLEE: Yeah, definitely. And I think we're seeing this more and more, and especially in urban areas that are experiencing heat waves; if you think about the heat dome experience. And also a lot of urban areas in Canada and other parts of the world have been experiencing severe floods. So you've got the heat, you've got the floods, also severe storms.

A while ago, it would have just been isolated to certain regions or certain people who rely on, for cultural or economic means, to the natural environment. But now I think more and more people are starting to realize that they are impacted. Wildfires, floods, severe storms, drought, heat-waves; all of that doesn't differentiate between urban and rural and remote.

And sometimes in the urban areas there can be more severe impacts from it. Or more lives effected because of density or more infrastructure damage. And so I think that we've moved into a place now where people are no longer isolated or protected against changes in climate in the way that they might've been before.

So they might not be on the front-lines, but it's now becoming a realization that we're all vulnerable and that this is something for us all.

RESH: And it's a grief that's wrapped up in fear. You talked about that anticipatory grief and we're certainly, as you said, seeing a great deal of this within our young populations. Climate anxiety is another term that we use.

ASHLEE: Yeah. A lot of people use *climate anxiety* or *eco-anxiety*. You see those terms sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes used separately. I tend to use the ecological pieces, because it includes the climate crisis, but it also includes other human inducing.... So like, resource extraction or ongoing industrial pollution. So it kind of gives that broader piece than just climate change, even though obviously climate change is the major, major piece in there.

And it is an anxiety for the future. And as you said, for many youth this is particularly strong. If you're 15 years old now, and someone's telling you that in the next 10

years all of these terrible things are gonna happen. This is the generation that has, grown up with that. And one of my colleagues, Britt Ray just released a wonderful new book and it's called *Generation Dread*.

And growing up in this generation that is all about doom and gloom and the climate crisis and what we can do and how we can find strength and solidarity and how we can come together, is huge. And for many youth, even if they haven't experienced it directly, they see that others have. And they know what's a potential, they see others suffering. And that brings a lot of both immediate emotions and thinking ahead to the feature, that anxiety and that grief.

RESH: How do people cope with ecological grief? Are there supports that exist? Are we seeing that medical and mental health professions are taking this more seriously or integrating supports? What's happening around that?

ASHLEE: Yeah, there's so much good work happening on this right now. Because people realize how we need to proactively support people's mental and emotional responses to climate change.

There's these things called Climate Cafes that originally started in the UK and now are all over, where youth can get together and share their experiences and their concerns in a space that understands and recognizes that yes, there are mental and emotional impacts and that the future can be scary. And then trying to create that solidarity and those networks to be there for each other. And so look for avenues of change.

There's an online community called the Good Grief Network, that's really focused on creating programming and resources to support people in their ecological grief. So actually walking through it. Having supports at all different stages. Helping people to make sense of where they're at.

There's excellent work happening in both Canada and the United States, with climate psychiatry and climate psychology and looking at creating programs around understanding climate change and mental health and ecological grief and anxiety. And creating training programs for mental health professionals.

There's work to integrate this into medical, nursing and health profession curriculum at the university level. So training the next generation of health professionals to really understand, not only how these things manifest, but what they might be able to do.

And in terms of "treatments", it's interesting because as I said before, people's lived experiences have far out-stripped what we know. So what people are really going on now, is what we know that supports mental health, resilience and adaptation in general. And then applying that to people who are struggling with the climate crisis. Things like "nature prescribing"; spending more time in nature, finding that connection, being outside, finding places that are special to you and really having that time.

Talking about it. Coming together in groups. Talking to your friends and family. Having strong social networks. Getting involved in things that matter to you, particularly around supporting movements to help the climate crisis. Anything that people can start to feel a sense of value in that, they have ownership over doing things.

Also, seeking mental health supports and counseling, because this is like any other mental health experience. And often what we're finding is people who are experiencing ecological grief and anxiety are more embarrassed to seek out professional help because they think it's not real or it's silly, or they should just get over it. And so it's normalizing it to say "yes, what you're experiencing is important to you. And it is something." And it's that, validate and elevate and understanding is reasonable and rational.

RESH: And we know that there has been, just a deep division and under-serving again of Indigenous Peoples and racialized populations by mainstream health systems. We see this all the time. And yet, so many of these elements that you're talking about also really sound like what you would find within Indigenous health systems within Indigenous ways of knowing.

So are we seeing more, or could we see more of an integration of Indigenous approaches and health systems into the mainstream when it comes to dealing with ecological grief and those issues that are attached to it since they are on the frontlines and they are in fact experts on this.

ASHLEE: Yeah, and I think more and more you're seeing people realize how much knowledge, how much science, how much wisdom, how much experience there is in Indigenous and other communities who live closely in the natural environment. And how much the marginalization and the sidelining of those communities has been to everybody's detriment and has caused tremendous harm all over. And I think you've seen a lot of, well, a lot of Indigenous Peoples taking over their own health systems and ensuring that it's Indigenous-led healthcare in a way that's locally appropriate and culturally responsive. And saying that the Western system hasn't been good to us. It hasn't been always what we need. And so you're seeing a lot more integration in general of multiple health systems into one. And I think in the climate crisis, more people talking about changing your fundamental mindset to understand your relation to the natural world and to other beings. And that other beings are alive and animate and that you owe them respect and reciprocity.

There's also needing to be really careful that it's not inappropriately or inauthentically taking things from communities and applying it without their consent or without their leadership. So the key really becomes to have Indigenous Peoples leading, obviously in their own communities, but also leading the creation of, other things in other places.

RESH: Now, another group likely feeling the psychological impacts of the climate crisis and loss would be your group, Ashlee. Those climate scientists and researchers and policy-makers and activists whose life's work, your everyday focus

is squarely on this crisis. So, can you speak to how this has impacted you and how do you cope?

ASHLEE: Yeah, I mean, you don't get into this research or, working with any environmental topics or species or climate change, if you don't have a deep love and passion and connection to the environment.

I mean, when you look at scientists or biologists or climate scientists or social scientists working in the area, we're all drawn in because we love things and we care and we have this innate connection. And so it's scholarly work, but it's also driven by passion and emotion.

There's amazing testaments of climate scientists and ecologists all over, who are openly sharing how difficult it is. You know, there's groups that talk about Reef Grief, for example; studying the coral reefs and then going back and them being entirely bleached and dead and the trauma that comes from that.

And people talking about setting a species and then it disappears or degrades and the pain. Many scientists have been doing this for decades and given their life and still feel like there was no change or their research didn't make an impact.

For so many people, it is such hard, hard work. You're surrounded by the sadness, the pain and the loss, and yet you also, see this urgency in your science and your research and the urgency in getting the information out.

And for me, that's something that I have struggled with. for decades .For me, when I was little, my first experiences with grief were with the natural environment. And then learning at a very young age that wasn't something you could necessarily talk about or there weren't kind of the rituals that we have when human lives pass. That this was just something I needed to kind of hide, I guess.

And as I got older and then started working in environmental fields and as an environmental protestor in my younger days and was always working in the environment and always having a fear of climate change.

And then you end up in these professional spheres. And then for me in particular, you know, ending up working in Northern Labrador and being surrounded by the pain of people who are at the frontlines, Who are experiencing tremendous change and tremendous loss. And being surrounded by the pain of others, being surrounded by my own pain, my own fears about what's coming. And then becoming a mother, I have two boys, and being afraid of their futures. It's just, it's so much. It's what I read. It's what I study. It's what I research. It's what I look for in the news. So, you know, you're kind of surrounded by it all the time. And so sometimes, the coping becomes what we talked about, about trying to spend time outside and trying to find places that I can connect. Finding a community and people that I can talk to about these things. Particularly other scientists and mental health professionals working in climate change and mental health. And being able to have that group that we can tell

each other the things. That we can say how hard it is. That we can shore each other up and we can support each other. And then also recharge ourselves to go back out.

And then sometimes I just need to shut the news off and I need to take a break from the research and I need to just have a little bit of time where I'm not immersed in it.

You know, trying to live with grief is one thing and embracing grief. But when you can feel it creeping in, in a way that's actually going to shut you down or make it hard for you to cope; that's when I know I need to step away and need to take a bit of a break and turn off the news sometimes!

RESH: Which is healthy, I mean, if this is, and it truly is, a labor of love for you, then the language of love is poetry. And the reason I bring that up is that I've been reading your writings and you write lyrically and you write poetry, especially when you're talking about ecological grief. What does that mean to you to be able to do that? What is the power of writing in that way?

ASHLEE: Well, I think writing, for me has always been a coping mechanism. And a lot of it too, is the urgency of making sure that I get the words right so that it's accessible to people; but also it does justice to the many, many, many people who've shared their stories and their emotions and their grief with me. So I feel a tremendous amount of responsibility around that. And of making the research and the science beautiful and accessible.

Sometimes when you read the really technical writing, it can feel devoid of humanity and devoid of emotion and it's just very factual. And I find that if we can communicate the same types of research, but also bring in the beauty of writing, the art of writing and bringing the emotions to it, then what we start to get is people coming into it.

I also think in many ways, writing has been my own form of coping and adaptation. But sometimes I think too, it's, if I'm really honest with myself, it's also a bit of an avoidance; because if I can write it, I don't have to feel it. Although, sometimes to write those things, you certainly feel it. It's almost like trying to create a distance between my own feelings and the paper to get it out. So it's both coping and avoidance at the same time, somehow, you know.

But I think there's this importance in sharing the human stories I really, really value ensuring that there are so many quotes from so many people that I've worked with. That people can share their experiences in their own words. And that we can hear all the other voices out there because that's essential for us to learn from each other. And to have that sense of shared humanity.

RESH: As you said, this type of grief can be a paralyzing grief, but also an activating one. Could you talk about what you mean by the power to be found within grief or the "gift of grief"?

ASHLEE: Well, grief is really amazing in its capacity to bring people together. And the other side of grief is love. And that we only love things that we are connected to and that we value. And so grief actually tells us a lot about who and what we are in the world and who and what we value.

And if we can remember that while we're grieving, we can also tap into that love; that's powerful, that's something different.

In my younger years, tapping into anger and rage seemed like the way to go. It seemed like this was the way you could harness your anger and you go out and protest and all of those things. And it would get stuff done to a certain extent, but I always found it really draining. Like endless political rage, which I still carry; so don't get me wrong. It's still there, but in different capacities. And then, these experiences with grief where it brings you to a different place than anger. Where the anchoring emotion of grief is love. And that can motivate and connect and break down barriers.

I think the other thing about grief. It's such a human condition. And well, not just humans actually; we know that other species and beings grieve. But you can't be human and not have grief. You will grieve people and people will grieve you. That's just part of the cycle of our lives.

So, it does have a capacity to bring people together. And it's something that we can understand when we see others grieve, we can feel it. When we grieve others can feel it. And there's rituals around grief. It brings us together. It creates community. And I think that's where the political and ethical opportunities exist.

In that work of mourning in those spaces where people are coming together. And where you can make substantive change. And change that might be painful because obviously it's grieving, but also comes from a strength of connection, of love. And of this desire to mourn what's been lost, but fight like hell to protect what hasn't been; so that we don't lose anymore.

RESH: Just a couple of years ago in Iceland, they held a funeral for the first glacier to die. And that was the OK glacier. But way back in the 1970s in Toronto, there was a funeral for the Don River. And within this ceremony of grief, these really were about political mobilization. That within the mourning and shared mourning, there was a powerful political message.

ASHLEE: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, it's political, but it's also personal. And I think it's also showing that we have this innate desire for ritual, whatever that may be and whatever form it takes. But something that can recognize the loss and that it's not just human loss, we're ritualizing; that there are many, many other types that we need to understand.

And it is a political statement. To grieve, if we really think about it, in many ways is an act of politics. Because it is showing what we care about and what we love. And that is a very profound, powerful act. And so when it's people coming together in grief, coming together to make these statements and to have these funerals and to

remind people these are important things to mark and to grieve. That is an incredibly powerful political message.

RESH: Indeed. Ashlee. Finally, what would you say to those listening to this podcast who are feeling just overwhelmed by the climate crisis, who are feeling this fear and this loss and this ecological grief?

ASHLEE: Well, you're not alone. This is something that many, many, many people are experiencing and grappling with. And that it is absolutely reasonable, natural, rational response.

We're facing a major crisis, with serious ramifications for many, many, many lives and species. And that is okay to grieve. And the key is to find places and people that you can talk to and connect with and look for those resources. And to never be afraid to seek the supports you need, because this is an important impact.

So, you're not alone. Many, many, many of us are in this together and there'll be many more along the way.

RESH: Thank you so much, Ashlee. It has been an absolute pleasure.

ASHLEE: Well, it's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

RESH: That was Ashlee Cunsolo, leading voice on climate change, mental health and ecological grief.

I'm Resh Budhu, host of the *Courage My Friends* podcast. Thanks for listening.

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