

Sustainability: A Love Story

Nicole Walker

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Nicole Walker's dilemma is eye-opening: She cares about the environment, but she is hard-pressed to figure out how to reconcile that concern with modern-day living. With a sense of frustration, she writes that "to truly sustain the planet, not our lifestyles, we would have to give up a great deal ... that we have been trying so hard ... to sustain." This perceptive statement forms the basis of an extended essay that concerns the messy relationship of one woman and her family with a fragile, embattled Earth.

There is no true beginning or end to Walker's soliloquy; rather, her book is part memoir, part reflection, and part rant about the challenge of sustainability. She wonders, for example, "How do you train the children about danger without turning them into anxiety-ridden doomsday-sayers?" She discusses environmental issues with an awareness of irony: "Balance isn't easy. Maybe the Hummer driver balances out his life by planting trees in the forest." She recognizes her own shortcomings in the fight against climate change: "I am preaching from my self-righteous perch but it's also a hypocritical perch. I've got the natural gas blowing in my living room. I have not committed to the solar power gods quite yet."

With her sobering and at times darkly humorous writing, Walker brings a refreshingly original perspective to sustainability. She is at once pessimistic and optimistic, somewhat fearful and cautiously hopeful. Her intention seems centered on loudly voicing an environmental warning rather than proposing specific solutions; her book is a challenge to others to think about the unique role they can play in sustaining the planet. As the title of the book's last chapter advises, "You Can Choose What You Remember." After reading Nicole Walker's intriguing if troubling book, chances are one will remember quite a lot.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (September/October 2018)

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