

What Really Matters to Me

A personal reflection by Dr Adrian Adams

I love surfing. I always have. There's something about being in the ocean, catching a wave, feeling the sun on your back and forgetting about everything else for a while.

But you know what makes me even happier?

Spending time with my son. Being with my family.

And sometimes, those moments are rarer than I'd like them to be.

But when I do get to see them, honestly, it makes me so incredibly happy. Just being around them. Laughing together, talking, sharing a meal, spending time outdoors, or doing absolutely nothing special at all.

It's funny how some of the simplest things in life can mean so much.

I don't need everything to be perfect. I don't need some extraordinary occasion. Sometimes, just seeing the people I love is enough to make my entire day.

And perhaps that's another reason I feel so strongly about looking after this planet.

Because when I think about the future, I don't just think about the environment in some abstract, scientific or political sense.

I think about my son.

I think about the world he's growing up in. The oceans he'll swim in, the places he'll explore, the people he'll meet and the life he'll create for himself.

I think about all the other children growing up around the world, and those who haven't even been born yet.

And I want them to experience the same happiness I've been lucky enough to feel.

The freedom of the ocean. The love of family. The excitement of discovering something new. The simple joy of being alive.

That's what this planet means to me.

Not just the trees, the oceans, the animals or the landscapes, as beautiful and important as they all are.

It's the life we get to live here.

And the people we get to share it with.

I suppose that's what I really want to protect.

And the more I think about it, the more I realise just how connected everything is.

We're all living on this one planet, finding our own ways to survive, adapt and make a life for ourselves. Humans, animals, marine life, plants, and millions of other living things. Some we understand, some we barely know exist.

And there are probably extraordinary forms of life yet to evolve that none of us will ever get to see.

I love that thought.

That life doesn't begin and end with us.

That the world keeps changing, growing, adapting and becoming something new.

I like to think that our responsibility is to give it the opportunity to keep doing just that.

And perhaps that means changing a few things about ourselves along the way.

I've never really understood why people have such difficulty accepting that we're all different.

Different backgrounds, different cultures, different appearances, different beliefs, different ways of loving and living.

So what?

That's life. That's humanity.

I don't need someone to think like me or agree with everything I say to appreciate them as another human being.

Actually, I enjoy people who challenge the way I think.

How else do we learn?

How else do we grow?

And when I think about environmental law, I can't help seeing the connection.

Because the way we treat our environment and the way we treat each other aren't completely separate things.

They're both about respect.

About recognising that something doesn't have to belong to us, look like us, or serve our interests to have value.

Of course, life isn't always that simple.

People disagree. Governments disagree. Companies make decisions. Families have difficulties. We all have our own problems, responsibilities and pressures.

I'm certainly no exception.

And I'm not writing this pretending I have all the answers.

I don't.

But I do believe we have an extraordinary ability to change.

Which brings me to something I find fascinating.

Freedom.

We all talk about it.

Political freedom. Personal freedom. Freedom of speech. Freedom to make our own choices, live our own lives and decide who we want to become.

And I believe in those freedoms enormously.

But there's another kind of freedom I've been thinking about.

The freedom that comes from understanding ourselves.

Because sometimes we're our own worst enemies, aren't we?

We get angry. We become frustrated. We react before thinking. We worry about things we can't change. We allow situations and other people to occupy far too much space in our minds.

I know I do.

And sometimes I wonder whether we actually have much control over ourselves at all.

But then I think about what we're capable of when we really put our minds to something.

When we develop the discipline to pause, think, learn, change direction and try again.

Can we do it?

Fuck yeah, we can.

Not perfectly. Not every day.

But we can.

And there's something incredibly liberating about that.

The idea that freedom isn't only something we demand from the world around us.

It's also something we can develop within ourselves.

In our hearts, our souls and especially our minds.

I don't think that makes environmental responsibility any less political. Of course it's political. Our laws, governments and institutions make decisions every day that affect the future of this planet.

And we should be free to question those decisions.

To speak up.

To disagree.

To challenge the people making them.

That's part of living in a free society.

But I also think there's something powerful about recognising our own part in the world we're creating.

What we do. How we behave. The decisions we make. The people we help. The things we choose to protect.

Maybe that's how real change begins.

Not always with some enormous movement or grand speech.

Sometimes with an ordinary person deciding that tomorrow they'll do something a little differently.

And then doing it.

Imagine if we all tried to leave the world just a little better than we found it.

Not necessarily in some enormous, heroic way.

Just a little better.

A little kinder.

A little more understanding.

A little more thoughtful about what we're taking from the Earth and what we're giving back.

I'd love to think that my son and his generation will have opportunities that we never had.

That they'll discover things we never imagined.

That they'll enjoy extraordinary new technologies, new ideas, new freedoms and new ways of living.

But I also hope they'll still be able to enjoy the simplest things.

An afternoon at the beach.

A wave rolling towards the shore.

A family sitting together having a laugh.

The smell of the ocean.

The feeling of being somewhere beautiful with absolutely nowhere else you need to be.

Because those moments matter.

They really do.

And I suppose that's why I wanted to write something personal in this book.

Environmental law can be complicated. There are statutes, regulations, cases, international agreements, competing interests and difficult decisions.

And all of those things matter enormously.

But behind them are real places, real people and real living things.

And a future that none of us will be around forever to see.

I hope the people who read this book learn to understand the law, question it, apply it, and perhaps even improve it.

But I also hope they occasionally look beyond the pages.

Go outside.

Take a walk.

Get in the ocean.

Spend time with someone they love.

Look at the world around them and appreciate just how extraordinary it is that we get to be here at all.

I don't know what the world will look like in a hundred years.

I don't know what new species will emerge, what discoveries will be made, or how humanity will evolve.

But I'd love to think that somewhere in that future, a father is sitting on a beach with his son, watching the waves roll in, feeling just as happy as I do when I'm with mine.

That thought means more to me than I can really put into words.

And perhaps that's enough of a reason to care.

To keep learning.

To keep trying.

To keep loving the people around us, even when life becomes difficult.

And to remember that we share this planet with an extraordinary world of living beings whose futures matter too.

I don't believe we need to be perfect people to make a difference.

I think we just need to care enough to try.

And maybe, with a little courage, a little discipline and a lot more love for one another, we'll surprise ourselves with what we can achieve.

That's the world I'd like to be part of.

That's the world I'd like my son to grow up in.

And that's the world I'd like us to leave behind.

Not perfect.

Just better.

For our children. For one another. For every living thing that shares this planet with us. And for all the life still to come.

With love,

Dr Adrian Adams

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