

The Future has a Face and a Name

by

Greta Matos



Some might consider it a risky decision to travel hundreds of miles across the remote backcountry of Patagonia on horseback with your 17-month-old daughter. Some might also consider it risky to bring a child into the world in the first place amid the Anthropocene – when the sixth mass extinction (escalating in pace and scale thanks to humans) is already underway.

Both of these paths are uncharted territory, with plenty of dangers and uncertainties; however, both of these paths also hold within them the way back to remembering what we are made of and why we are here.

My husband, Alejandro, and I are both members of The Long Riders' Guild, the international association of equestrian exploration. In 2016, we became associated with the Guild after completing our first long ride, traveling on horseback more than a thousand miles across Patagonia.

When we set off on a “little long ride” across Northern Patagonia in 2022, our daughter Sofía Alegría, then 17-months old, joined us. Upon her completion of this latest ride across Patagonia, Sofía has become the youngest person ever to be made a Member of the Long Riders' Guild – and she's the first second generation Long Rider.

Without ever intending it, over the years we've grown into a family of Long Riders who are guardians of a herd of seven Long Rider horses (3 from our Long Ride across

Patagonia and 4 from another couple of Long Riders who rode across the coast of central Chile).

Relating with Nature as a Little Long Rider

Sofía has grown up alongside our herd of Chilean Criollos in the remote mountains and ancient forests of southern Chile, so she was already well acquainted with living in the rhythm of nature; however, shifting from being a house-bound toddler to a horse-bound toddler is no small thing. Despite the doubts cast by many, Sofía took to daily life in the saddle like a fish to water. She really loved the life of a Long Rider.

Rather than going outside for brief rainy-day walks, she spent hours in the saddle riding through pouring rain, day after day. Instead of naps on the bed, she napped in the saddle. For more than a month, every morning she woke to see the horses grazing outside the tent, and kept up her newly established teeth brushing habit while brushing the horses. She never threw a tantrum in the saddle, nor would she fuss without reason. If she was hungry, she snacked in the saddle; if she was tired, she nursed as Blacky's steady pace helped me rock her to sleep.

Early on it became quite clear how adaptable she was. And how brave.

Between Blacky's ears, Sofía soaked in the elements of nature in their most untamed forms. As we rode slowly through the forests, her outreached palms would gently slide along the massive trunks of ancient alerces, some of the oldest living beings on the planet. As pumas hovered high above us, making the horses dance and skid down the trail, she stayed calm and quiet as I co-regulated her nervous system (and Blacky's) with my own calm breathing. Without ever being told to do so, she watched the pack saddles of each packhorse with eagle eye attentiveness, alerting me every time she noticed the slightest imbalance or sensed discomfort in the horses.



Zalig, one of our packhorses, enjoys Sofía's gentle drumming as we all settle back into the slow rhythm of a Long Ride.

People thought we were crazy. You might think I'm crazy. But as soon as we set foot and hoof on that trail, we felt what I had suspected we would – reconnected with a very ancient way of being humans in natural relationship with the rest of the planet. In some ways it felt as though she was more horse, more forest, more water, stone and air than human...she was so constantly relating to everything around her.

Climate Change or Human Change?

“Soon the world will be unrecognizable” *The climate is changing for the worse far quicker than predicted by early climate models. We have passed the point of no return and can expect a future in which lethal heat waves and temperatures in excess of 50C (120F) are common in the tropics; where summers at temperate latitudes will invariably be baking hot, and where our oceans are destined to become warm and acidic. “A child born in 2020 will face a far more hostile world than its grandparents did,” McGuire insists.* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/30/total-climate-meltdown-inevitable-heatwaves-global-catastrophe>

Prior to the arrival of my own daughter, I definitely had my moments when I felt people were crazy to have children amidst our climate crisis. I'd spent more than a decade working up close and personal with the impacts of social and environmental degradation connected to every product we produce, buy/sell and eventually throw “away”. The scale and depth of the damage being done to the Earth that I witnessed firsthand was enough to make me cynical and angry at my race. It took me years and repeated burnout to discover that beneath that anger was grief; so much grief for all that we have lost and are losing, and stand to lose. All because of the ignorance, greed, and fear of humanity.



Our global civilisation is based on the over consumption of fossil fuel. A recent study showed that for the past 50 years, the oil industry has made profits of more than \$1tn a year, close to \$3bn a day.

“I used to think the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we scientists don’t know what to do with that.” – Gus Speth

I eventually realized if I wanted to really face our climate and cultural crisis and have the capacity and resilience to actively engage it (and the uncertain future before us), I would need an active practice of working with my grief and sorrow. I would need to learn to let my grief flow through me, to feel my fears and sorrows and see what was beneath them, so that a deeper sense of Earth intelligence could be related with.

Wildfires of unprecedented ferocity have inflicted massive damage in Australia, North America, Europe and Siberia. And in July 2021 Kazakhstan endured the highest temperatures on record. The blistering heat wave killed thousands of horses.



I couldn’t stop climate change, or the sixth mass extinction, or influence the massive human change we needed. But I could turn toward my own spiritual and cultural transformation...and so that is what I did.

The Road Ahead

My daughter was born in 2020. Soffa’s future, the future of every single child all across the world, is uncertain. We have no way of knowing what her generation will face. Things are changing so rapidly, far faster than every prediction that scientists all across the world have made. Many of the animals, insects, and plant species that I grew up with will be endangered or have gone extinct by the time she is old enough to correctly pronounce their names. When I share stories about them, I will also teach her about grief and sorrow, and how to be with the great loss of our collective relationship with our dear Mother Earth.

Should she choose to continue our little family tradition of taking long, slow journeys with horses across the Earth, she and her horses will have to grapple with even higher temperatures, more extreme storms and flooding, life-threatening droughts and wild fires, as well as countless other expressions of human unrest that will result from the pressure of too much rapid change.



In June 2016 horses sought shelter when a Texas river rose 54 feet in a few hours. In July 2022 Pakistan endured 133% more rain than average and Kentucky was devastated by a "1,000 year flood."

Being a Long Rider naturally builds your capacity to befriend the unknown. Every day is an adventure into the unknown, and you have to surrender to the fact that you can't control what crosses your path. The journey is a pure, authentic collaboration between horse, human and Earth. We find our way together, usually slowly, and always by listening and following the intuitive pull. I think this is ultimately the underlying motivation that we shared when we decided to do another long ride with our 17-month-old daughter. We wanted her to learn early in life how to feel comfortable in the unknown, how to dance with life's ever-changing aspects and to feel in her own body how courageous and resilient she actually is.

"Alejandro, his horse Aysén, our packhorse Zalig and one of our dogs Cury Cuyen are just about to disappear over the horizon as we traversed a remote glacier pass in southern Patagonia during our first Long Ride in 2016. If Sofía chooses to retrace her parents' hoof prints along this route later in life, this glacier will undoubtedly be smaller, if it even still exists."



Risk, Fear and Curiosity

As a mother, I am no stranger to considering risk, and as a horsewoman I am no stranger to consciously working with fear. Long ago horses taught me the power of bringing curiosity alongside my fears - to investigate them and get clear if there is reason to be afraid or not. Fear that is not acted upon takes up residence in our bodies as chronic anxiety, which wastes energy, exhausts adrenal glands, and depletes nervous systems.

When it comes to horses and fear, right action or inaction, can mean life or death. I think the same will ring true for fears that arise related to climate change. Our inaction because we don't want to feel the fear, the shame, the sorrow; because we don't know what to do with it, because we don't want to face it – it is already having life and death consequences as our mass extinction continues. If we sit idle and only think about the loss of habitat, loss of life, and unfathomable challenges our future generations will face, we can easily become stuck in our fears. Fear requires action to move toward safety. If we face our fears, we must also be willing to actively respond to them.

There is plenty of danger on the path ahead. We are wise to keep close a practice of responding to the dangers that are immediately within our grasp; and for those that we know are coming, to ready ourselves with the knowledge we have and invite curiosity to travel alongside us as we navigate the unknown.

When the cars don't work. Puerto Rican refugees seek shelter after Hurricane Irma devastated that country in 2017.



Facing Our Uncertain Future

Our future has a face – it is the face of every tree, of every drop of water, of every wonder-filled child basking in the soft warmth of sunshine on a cold winter's day. Our children, just like our Earth, hold the key to our collective future; and that key is their

innate sense of wonder, resilience, kinship and connectedness to this natural world that we are an integral part of.

Some have called this latest chapter of existence the *Century of Sofia* – a time of the awakening and return to the sacred feminine. We didn't know that before we settled on a name for our daughter. We actually came up with her name while lounging around in the field with the horses, toying with the idea of wanting to give her a strong name that was also gentle and beautiful. Her second name, *Alegría*, meaning joy or happiness, worked its way into the mix subtly, without Alejandro or me even discussing it.

When I think about how it feels to walk into a meadow filled with wild flowers, or feel the splash of raindrops on storm interrupting a hot day, or harvest an over-abundance of berries from wild bushes, I feel the generosity and love of our Mother Earth. I feel this gentle yet strong essence of her being. I feel her joyful wisdom.

“To be alive at this time means to be caught in the great unraveling that strands us near all the loose threads of creation; but it also means to be close to the revelation of the new design and the next paradigm.” – Michael Meade

Joyful Wisdom

I genuinely believe that everyone alive today is meant to be. And that every day we each make hundreds of choices that make a difference. The more choices we make that bring us back into relationship with nature, the more chance I believe we have to move our species toward the possibility of mass restoration rather than mass destruction and extinction.

We are all born brave. Witnessing my Little Long Rider calmly take in so many wild experiences with the horses taught me this. We are all born so brave, and I think if more of us remembered this, we would be more willing to face our fears - to face our fears of an uncertain future, our fears of the losses for futures generations, our children, will face.

As I watch my daughter growing into deeper relationship with herself, the horses and the Earth daily, I feel the joyful wisdom of their relationship bubbling up to the surface of our lives. I see the joy and wonder in her eyes as she awakens to every new day. I see the wisdom of her innate desire to be in relationship with all forms of life and death on this dear planet, and I believe it is within that desire that she will find all the resources she needs to face the difficult road ahead.

Sofía Alegría, always in her element outside in “the elements”



It is within that space that I rest, and tend to a grounded sense of Earth-bound trust that we can find our way forward, if we are all more willing to remember how brave we are, to face our fears, and to do better when we know better. If there was ever a time to reconnect with the bravery within our hearts, face our fears about our uncertain future, and turn toward the unknown with curiosity, it is now.



Greta and Sofia Alegría prepare to ride Blackie across Patagonia. Greta Matos and her husband Alejandro Matos became Members of the Long Riders Guild in 2016 upon completion of their first long ride traversing more than a thousand miles across Chilean Patagonia with their equine partners Picante, Aysén and Zalig. She is the Co-Founder of CuraKuda, which partners with horses and nature to nurture the inner transformation of individuals and collectives. She considers herself to be a “horse listener”, deeply committed to a life of intentional relationship with Earth, Horse and Human.

You can learn more about Greta's life, work and efforts connected to spiritual and cultural transformation through the following links:

Cultivating authentic relation with Self, Horse and Earth: www.curakuda.com

Read more of Greta's writing and reflections: <https://quilaquina.com/writing>

Greta is also connected with several other environmental projects in Chile, including acting on the Board of Directors for Fundación Llancahuel, whose mission is to create restoration sanctuaries where ecosystems are able to regenerate and thrive, and where the human spirit and imagination is ignited and inspired with possibility.

In Patagonia, the Long Rider herd and family live within a "carbon sink", on ranch land that is dedicated to restoring the health of the soil and drawing carbon out of the atmosphere through regenerative land management practices. This land is tended to in relation with another project that is building community through earth-based relationship with land and one another, in order to contribute to the resilience and regeneration of our health and the health of the planet. More about these projects can be found below:

Learn more about protecting and rewilding old growth forests:

<https://fundacionllancahuel.org/about>

Learn more about Fundo Panguilemu and holistic land management:

<https://www.fundopanguilemu.com/>

Learn more about the Patagonia Ecoliving Community:

<https://www.patagoniaecoliving.com/>