

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

1. Leave Tree Area, DNR

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) decides which areas of forest will be clearcut. Small signs are stapled to trees, to mark the areas that have been surveyed. Often the decision to clear-cut is made for the economic interests of your state and the timber industry, rather than the needs of the local human-and -wildlife populations.

What can we do? Support your local conservancy groups. There are many options: volunteering for tree-planting or political organizing or fundraising; giving money; even going hiking in your area to keep an eye on the health and usage of your local woodlands.

2. nesting behavior

We humans are not so different from the birds who build this tiny nest. We choose a home because it is both beautiful and functional; near food but away from danger; a comfortable place to raise a family.

What can we do? Don't remove old snags (fallen trees) or all of the dead branches as these help to create safer nesting spots. Place birdhouses and feeders.

3. two years of a tree's life

Fir-Tree seedlings grow very slowly in their first years, maybe only a few inches tall in three years. The tiny seedlings take much time to develop a good taproot.

What can we do? Stay on the trails when you are in the woods. Don't trample small shrubs.

4. Where will you draw the line?

Timber Sale Boundary: one of the small DNR signs stapled to trees to mark a planned clear-cut. The Department of Natural Resources marks these boundaries primarily for profitable timber sales. Timber companies pay very small fees to cut these woods. The services that trees give (cleaning air, cleaning water, habitat for multitudes of critters) are worth far more than the companies pay.

What can we do? Be careful about the wood you use for lumber or paper goods. Recycle or reuse or make do when possible; don't increase demand for timber unnecessarily.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

5. skull of a rodent

We often respond to the word “rodent” with disgust, especially rats or mice, sometimes squirrels and other small mammals. Many people’s first thought is to kill them, without regard to their role in the ecosystem or whether they are actually causing harm. Rat poison causes a slow and painful death, and the slow-moving rodent is likely to be caught and eaten by a hawk or owl, coyote or pet cat or dog. The one-who-catches will also die from the poison.

What can we do? DON’T use poison! If you must kill the rodent (example, for fear that the droppings are bringing health hazards into your home), then use traps. Put dog/cat/chicken feed away at night so that you don’t attract rodents in the first place.

6. What will you wear after Peak Oil has passed?

A jar full of raw sheep’s wool fleece, brown and silvery, shorn but not cleaned or carded. Look at the clothing you are wearing right now; how much of it is based on petroleum products (polyester, nylon, plastic)? If the world has passed Peak Oil (meaning that it will become harder and more expensive to refine oil, until there is no more left), then, what will clothing be made from?

What can we do? For this reason, many farmers are beginning to invest in crops and animals that can give us clothing: cotton, bamboo, hemp, linen, sheep’s wool. As an added bonus, the natural rags can be reused and then finally composted ... whereas polyester can only go into the landfill. Start supporting those farmers now by choosing these fabrics instead of petroleum-based fibers.

7. Alchemical sign for human nature

A spherical lead weight, partially gilded with gold leaf. The alchemists felt that the heavy, dull lead represented our base nature, and that we should strive to spiritually resemble the lovely, reflective gold.

What can we do? Kindness, love, generosity, peace ... you know what to do!

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

8. A popular poison, a deadly chemical

Glyphosate, a golden-tinted liquid in this jar. Glyphosate is the primary chemical in Monsanto's Roundup. It is sprayed directly onto foodplants throughout their growing cycle, and even onto the harvested food (beans and grains) while they are drying. It kills beneficial insects and pollinators, and has carcinogenic effects on humans and wildlife.

What can we do? Eat organic foods and plant beneficial flowers for the insects.

9. Consumer capitalism consuming

Advertising mailers from discount stores. Enormous amounts of tree-based paper is wasted on these mailers, not to mention the petroleum needed to transport them. The products sold at discount stores such as Walmart are almost entirely transported from China and other distant companies where workers are paid terribly low wages.

What can we do? Opt out of the mailings (<https://www.catalogchoice.org/>). Online unsubscribe-services are available, just google the brand names -Valpak, Redplum, etc-. Refuse to shop for unnecessary items at the large box stores. Support small local stores.

10. Not beauty bark

A chunk of fir bark. "Beauty bark" (ground-up bark from the lumber industry) is usually used to keep native flowers (usually called "weeds") from growing. But, all of the native insects (bees and butterflies!) need those native plants for food and shelter, and the songbirds need those insects for their own food!

What can we do? Use low-growing native groundcover plants between your shrubs, and add various-sized rocks for hiding places for tiny critters.

11. gilded cranium of a small bird

I found this skull while hiking. It is a small treasure. I felt grateful to have the opportunity to mourn the loss of this tiny life, and to honor it with goldleaf. Many songbird species are struggling to survive, as human developments destroy habitat.

What can we do? Help the small birds survive by putting out birdseed, shelter, and water.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

12. NO BEES, NO FOOD

Beehive Brand matchboxes - cool little relics from decades ago, when the bees were not endangered. Now, they face many threats from insecticides, GMO plants, loss of habitat and diverse meadows of wildflowers. Not just honey-bees either, although we humans tend to treasure them. Honey-bees are imported from Europe, but the american native bees such as bumblebees and mason bees are even more important and just as threatened.

What can we do? Don't use petroleum-based insecticides. Go organic, and support organic farming. Plant native wildflowers wherever possible to provide multi-seasonal food for the bees.

13. salt-sea water from the Salish Sea

Beautiful treasure, the living waters of our Pacific Northwest biosphere. The greatest threat to our Sea is urban stormwater. When it rains, the stormwater washes all of the toxins from our urban area directly into the Sea. Oils and copper from the roads, oily ash from the buildings, pesticides and herbicides from our gardens, etc.

What can we do? Keeping the connection between you and the sea in mind: don't leave trash on the ground, cut back on driving wherever possible, don't dump chemicals in the gutter or in your sink drain.

14. pharmaceuticals in all waters

Once in the jar, now in our water and oceans. When we take our medicines, our body often does not use the entire amount, and excretes the leftover chemicals. Waste-water treatment plants are unable to filter out these tiny molecules, so they accumulate in the ocean or aquifers. Many pharmaceuticals have disturbing effects on water-living organisms,

What can we do? Don't flush unused meds down the toilet ... take them to a pharmacy to be safely disposed..

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

15. Always a good idea, D.N.Resources

Leave Tree Area, DNR sign. The Department of Natural Resources is a governmental agency in each state. It has oversight from numerous boards and councils, where citizens may advise on a multitude of issues. The head of the DNR is an elected official, and the title is Commissioner of Public Lands. The key word here is PUBLIC -meaning we the public own that land!

What can we do? Vote in the elections for the commissioner who is favored by your favorite land-conservancy organization. Remember that the DNR is also responsible to your state government, so vote in all state and local elections. Your local government can put pressure on the DNR regarding the fate of local lands

16. nest of Friend or Foe?

A Paper-wasp nest. This paper-making insect is an important pollinator, and eats many tiny insects that are unwelcome in the food-garden. Many birds also depend on these wasps as a high-protein food source.

What can we do? Don't use insecticide unless absolutely necessary (such as if a family member has a life-threatening allergy to stings). To keep them out of your house, knock down the nests as soon as you see the first signs of building (in the cold early morning is the safest time to do so, as the wasps are slow and sleepy then). Allow wasps to feed on the pest-insects in your garden!

17. Who was number 316?

Yellow cow tag with large numerals. A cow is a sentient being, not a thing -- Who, not what. Large-scale meat agriculture businesses are called factory farms, and the conditions for the animals are often horrific; a lifetime of suffering before the dismal end.

What can we do? Consider cutting back on meat consumption. If you do buy meat for food, try to find a local small farmer or butcher. You might even want to buy an entire half for your freezer; often this is the least expensive way to buy meat and also the best way to support small local farmers who are good stewards of the land and humane caretakers of their animals.

18. two tiny but powerful jawbones, with teeth

What can we do?

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

19. water that steals from all of us

Niagra brand plastic water bottle. Bottled water is destructive to our environment and social health in many ways. Large corporations, such as Nestle, move into a watershed and begin to drill into the aquifer. The laws allow them to do so without providing compensation to the local people. As they bottle the water, they drain the aquifer, taking water needed by the local people for drinking and agriculture. A lot of petroleum is needed to make the bottles and then to transport the filled bottles; then the single-use bottles are discarded. Usually the plastic is of a poor quality and cannot be recycled; it fills up landfills and drifts off into the oceans. The water is much more expensive than tap water and highly profitable to the companies.

What can we do? In most cities and towns, the tap water is free or very inexpensive, and highly regulated and safe. Carry a re-useable bottle.

20. cracked femur, marrow eaten

A natural part of the life cycle of wildlife.

What can we do? Recognize that we humans are animals also, not really so different from any of the others.

21. Who will save us all?

Shattered mirror. Who can change the direction of this world? Ourselves.

What can we do? Never underestimate the power of one person. Do anything, even one simple step, for the one issue you care about most.

22. how to kill an albatross

Shotgun cartridge wads. Don't they look rather like squid? An albatross dives quickly into the ocean to catch prey, never realizing these are inedible plastics. The parent birds return to the nest and regurgitate the plastic into the hungry chicks, who will die. How do these wads get into the sea?

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

What can we do? Whenever you go to the beach, take a bag and pick up some plastic trash. Lobby duck-hunting groups to remind hunters to be extremely careful to pick up ALL of the wads left over from their shot. Organize local beach clean-up parties.

23. a vital fluid, drained and dehydrated

Blood meal: drained, dehydrated, and returned to the soil.

A link between our pagan horticultural past to our modern industrial agricultural system
A highly nutrition soil amendment. Also, an organic way to keep rabbits and deer out of the garden.

What can we do? Perhaps we can use organic blood meal from small farmers, thereby giving them one more income stream and chance at economic survival as they strive to compete with large-scale industrial agribusiness.

24. cold embers

Black burned coals are an excellent additive to the soil, full of carbon.

What can we do? Notice that even the ashes of a fire may have a use. Waste nothing.

25. call of a trickster

Raven skull (reproduction). A very intelligent bird.

What can we do? Celebrate our similarities to the corvids. Have compassion for the needs of the creatures who share our ecosystem, on the backyard scale and the bioregion scale.

26. pinecones, not patented

Singed Pinecones from the forest floor. need fire to be prepared to reproduce.

Monsanto, patenting,

What can we do? When planting a landscape, use native trees. Understand that we cannot and should not prevent natural forest fires -small, frequent, safe.

27. Home-made Black Gold ... true wealth

healthy compost humus

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

What can we do? Many towns and cities are starting compost programs. Get rid of the garbage disposal, and feed those earthworms!

28. Archaic communication technology

Wooden pencil stubs. Technology has helped us to reduce our need for paper, but still requires resources and eventually needs to be recycled or becomes garbage.

What can we do? Use what you need but always question whether you need the next new device.

29. plastic trash NOT eaten by seabirds

Plastics in the ocean soak up POPs - persistent organic pollutants - and bind them chemically. The longer a piece of plastic is in the ocean, the more polluted it becomes. When a sea critter eats the plastic, the fat in the critter's body attracts the pollutants from the plastic and holds them. Eventually, the toxic load in the fat stores will cause disease and death.

What can we do? Don't use single-use plastic. Avoid purchasing plastic items if the item can be found in a more durable material (such as metal waterbottle instead of a heavy-duty plastic one). Reduce, reuse, recycle, repurpose.

30. the air that we breathe

Literally: a jar full of precious atmosphere.

What can we do? Keep it clean.

31. mummified amphibian. Extinct or not?

A small frog, desiccated. Amphibians are a "canary in the coal mine" for our watersheds.

What can we do? Pay close attention when scientists tell us that amphibians are being affected by the toxins in the environment.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

32. Powerful flap of butterfly wing

Monarch Butterfly wings (a replica).

The Butterfly Effect is a nick-name for a concept in Chaos Theory in Physics. The idea is that the tiniest action in one part of the world, even the flap of a butterfly's wing, can start a ripple effect that could lead to a hurricane in another part of the world. Every tiny action counts in the larger perspective.

The Monarch Butterfly itself is highly endangered, and could be extinct within a few years. This butterfly absolutely requires one plant, the milkweed plant, during a crucial part of its life-cycle. Milkweed, once common in the Southwest USA, has been largely exterminated by agricultural spraying of glyphosate, known as Roundup, herbicides.

What can we do? Plant native plants. Monarchs absolutely require the milkweed plant.

33. Timber Sale Boundary

DNR sign

What can we do? As the trees go, so do all other living creatures.

34. skull of a raptor

Bird skull. A raptor is a bird of prey, one who eats meat, whether it catches the prey live or consumes the dead. The group includes owls, hawks, vultures, eagles. Birds who consume carrion are doing a special service in the ecosystem, helping to limit the spread of disease, and so vultures are highly regarded in some cultures. Any raptor who eats poisoned prey (such as a mouse killed by rat poison or pesticide-laden grains) will also die from the concentrated toxins.

What can we do? Avoid the use of poisons and toxins wherever possible. Supporting the population of small birds, with feeders and nestboxes, will also support the populations of the raptors who need these birds for food.

35. common cents or greed?

How much is enough? Is money really the source of a good life? In a disaster, would money save our lives or would it be the community we have built around us? How should we balance the need for a healthy ecosystem against the economy?

What can we do? Build connections with your neighbors, your community. Share skills and stories and gardens and tools.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

36. Something to piss on

Pine shavings are used for animal bedding, from pet mice to horses. While they do make a nice bedding for the animals, the shavings are used and then discarded rapidly, leading to a large demand for the shavings.

What can we do? If you do use pine-shavings, compost them as a wonderful garden amendment. Switch to straw if it will work for your pet. Encourage our lawmakers to support alternative fiber-farmers: bamboo, hemp and similar faster-growing plants could make more sustainable substitutes.

37. salt which has been blessed

Kosher Salt. Once upon a time, salt was a highly valued condiment.

What can we do? Let us be grateful for the comforts of our modern life, the simple items such as salt which add so much pleasure. Perhaps if American culture were more focused on gratitude for our first-world lives, we might be more careful to preserve our beautiful world, and less compelled to exploit our resources.

38. skin of an alder tree

Bark is a skin.

What can we do? Think of a tree as a sentient being, living in community with all the other trees nearby. Trees communicate with each other via the fungal mycelium underground, and probably in other ways that we humans don't even understand as of yet.

39. ghost poop

Styrofoam packing peanuts. A few years ago, these were ubiquitous in shipping boxes. but fortunately they are used less often now as alternatives take their place. Often shipping

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

stores (like the UPS centers) will take your ghost poop for free, and reuse it for shipping other packages.

What can we do? One common alternative is to use biodegradable peanuts made from cornstarch or mushrooms. Reuse and recycle packing material from other shipments.

40. wooden matches: an irony

self destruction.

What can we do? A good refillable lighter can last forever. Flint and steel still work, also!

41. A feast to die for.

Plastic fibers unraveling, which resemble sea-mammals' food. As the plastic rope disintegrates, it looks and moves like small fish or squid. Sea mammals are being found dead with stomachs full of plastics. the longer the plastic remains in the sea, the more it tends to absorb petrochemical toxins also, which will be absorbed by the fat of the sea-creatures who eat it.

What can we do? Use natural and biodegradable fibers whenever possible. Be careful to pick up small pieces of plastic from the ground or beach.

42. tree inventory tag #154

These tags are often nailed to a tree so that foresters and scientists can study the health of the woodlands by taking measurements and observations of individual trees.

What can we do? Don't pull them off.

43. proverbial hornets' nest

What can we do?

44. Who profits from over-stimulation?

A can of Redbull.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

What can we do? Ask whether you really need to participate: do you really need to do more, buy more, drive more, accomplish more? Could you manage to slow down at all?

45. an unheeded warning

Do not touch.

What can we do? Leave our natural resources as they are, or contribute to their health. Recognize that we all live in an ecosystem together, from the annoying ant to the annoying human.

46. several slender hopes for the future

Squash seeds. Some of the earliest agriculture included squash. It has been said that in the year 1900, 50 percent of the population in the USA were farmers, and that in 2100, fifty percent will again be farmers. Our current systems for feeding our growing populations are unsustainable; we require too many chemical fertilizers, too many pesticides, too many oil-driven machines. Our cities are very vulnerable to any kind of disaster. A safe world is one in which food is easily available and abundant.

What can we do? Grow a garden, even if it is only one tomato plant.

47. Planned obsolescence

A non-recyclable printer ink cartridge is a perfect symbol of our office-oriented first world life: are we workers just as expendable as the printer inks we use to print onto paper made from the expendable trees?

What can we do? Damned good questions.

48. Picks for teeth

Ancient dental health product.

What can we do? Be wary of the modern plastic dental products, which sadly contribute to pollution. Many toothpaste brands are putting micro-beads into the paste; micro-beads are tiny plastic balls which cannot be filtered out of the water easily by the wastewater treatment plants. They become dangerous tiny balls of toxins in the ocean, filtered by all of the sea-creatures who eat filtered algae., including whales.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

49. remnants of the death of a rodent

A collection of tiny bones, probably killed by a hawk or eagle

What can we do?

50. wishful thinking

Wishbones. Stop wishing, must start doing.

What can we do? Take one step. We can travel the entire journey in the deep fog: as we take each step, we can see just a little bit further to make the next step.

51. skull of an Insectivore

Skull of a bird which eats insects. We can tell what a bird eats by the perfectly-evolved shape of the beak.

What can we do? Insecticides kill insects which may be considered a pest by humans, but might be a crucial food-source for a songbird. Do you really need to kill this other species? Is that the only way? Might we somehow coexist, just deal with a bit of annoyance, change our behavior or use a non-toxic solution?

52. lens for self-examination

Broken glass lenses.

What can we do? Self-reflection. Mindfulness.

53. exploited power cells

Batteries. Old batteries are toxic; if thrown in to a landfill they will leach heavy metals into the drinking-water aquifer. Every time there is rainfall, the water carries toxins from the landfill down into the aquifers or to the surface waters (rivers, lakes, seas).

What can we do? Thankfully, technology is developing better options for storing electricity and supplying it on demand. Take old batteries to the household hazardous waste collections in your region, along with printer ink cartridges, old cleaners and solvents, etc. Yes, I know it's a pain in the butt, but just do it.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

54. heritage food, not patented

Popcorn, dried hard corn. Monsanto's sweet corn has been altered in a way that could never happen in nature — the corn actually produces its own pesticide to kill the bugs that try to eat it. GMO (genetically modified organism) is NOT the same as natural cross-breeding or hybridization. If the corn will kill living creatures like insects, what will it do to us, since humans and insects share about 60 % of the same DNA.

What can we do? Use your vote, your support, and political action to pass laws that require agribusiness to label GMO foods, so that we know what we are buying and eating. The USDA is the regulating agency, so we can put pressure on our government officials. Buy organic whenever possible. Plant your own garden.

55. plastic memories of birdsong

Old-fashioned toy whistles. Rachel Carlson wrote “Silent Spring” in 1962, in which she documented the terrible effects of environmental toxins on birds. Her research and accusations against the chemical corporations jump-started the modern environmental movement. Roughly 1300 species of birds are endangered now (out of roughly 10,000 known species world-wide), with 200 critically near to extinction.

What can we do? Seek out your local bird conservancy or Audubon groups to find like-minded folks with a passion for protecting regional species.

56. Unlucky hare

Rabbit's foot charm, dyed red. Many human attitudes toward animals are based on ignorance and taboo. Research proves that animals have intelligence, emotions, dreams, thoughts, memories, language. Humans are animals too.

What can we do? Reconsider your relationship to all kinds of animals, looking at them as equals, not as property or pests.

57. Best garden companion ever!

Duck eggs! Ducks are an excellent member of a garden community. They love slugs and snails and keep the soil aerated, patrolling up and down the rows with tenacity. The eggs are very nutritious, and the poop and bedding make excellent compost. Plus, they have funny personalities. No more pesticides, and no more early-morning slug-hunting, needed!

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

What can we do? If you have a small garden, a couple of ducks can easily and inexpensively live in your yard in a organic, permaculture lifestyle.

58. ground bones of Hope

Hope is the name of an Orca whale who beached herself. A Marine Science center saved and re-articulated her skeleton and studied the cause of her suicide. She was found to have extremely high loads of petrochemical toxins in her fat -pollutants from automobile residues, oils, pesticides, flame-retardants. She also had horrible abscesses and disease in her skull, likely inflamed by the toxins. She was unable to eat, and dies of starvation.

What can we do? Avoid polluting water in every possible way. Urban stormwater carries heavy loads of toxins into the sea. Changing from single-passenger gasoline autos to cleaner methods of transportation (bicycling, monorails, electric cars) will make a big difference.

59. proof that a child survived her first year

My own baby teeth. Child and infant mortality rates are an important indicator of the overall health of a community. The current world average is about 49 babies per 1000 live births, who will die by age 1 year. Japan is the healthiest, losing only 2 babies; Afghanistan loses nearly 200. GMOs (genetically modified organisms, as food), herbicides and pesticides have proven links to infant mortality. These agricultural chemicals lead to death by causing birth defects that are not survivable.

What can we do? When you can, eat organically-grown food. Vote locally to force agribusiness to label GMO-tainted foods. Vote nationally to force our government's EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) to move toward safer methods of farming.

60. A First Responder to deforestation

Moss is a First Responder, key to the healing of clear-cut forest. When a forest is clear-cut, the land is laid bare and quickly dries out. Any seeds that do fall on this ground cannot sprout without cover and moisture. Mosses help because they hold water and provide a spot for the first seedlings to gain a holding.

61 Mortal Decisions

*Moments, stolen from the narrative of our lives,
preserved for future self-reflection.
A scavenger hunt to discover the impact of tiny choices.*

- Deanna Pindell

What can we do? Purchase lumber from small sustainable lumber companies. These companies harvest trees carefully and always leave some trees in place, some habitat still remaining for the flora and fauna. The forest recovers much more easily.

61. Best advice ever, from the DNR

Leave Tree Area.

What can we do? Trees are the lungs of the planet.

Leave them to grow, whenever possible.
