**Audio Transcript – The plot thickens**

*Note: Episodes of Outside/In are made as pieces of audio, and some context and nuance may be lost on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors.*

*Nate: Are you on regular phone or speaker phone?*

*Phyl: I’m on regular phone.*

**This is Outside/In, I’m Nate Hegyi. And this is my friend Phylicia Cicillio.**

*Phylicia Cicillio: Hold on let me stop boiling the water…*

**Phylicia lives in Fairbanks, Alaska. But a few months ago she was visiting my wife and I in Montana. We were on a run…**

*Phylicia Cicillio: I don’t know how we started talking about it… um, I don’t know, we were thinking about death.*

**Death. Specifically, burials… cremation… and…**

*Phylicia Cicillio: You were talking about ashes being spread and I was like there is also the option to be composted.*

**Yeah. You heard that right. *Human* composting.**

**Phylicia guessed that composting a body has to be better than burning it and sending CO2 into the atmosphere.**

*Phylicia Cicillio: You know there’s minerals in your body that potentially be useful for the ecosystem but I don’t really know!*

**So what’s better for the environment, and our planet’s soil? Cremation? Burial? Or human composting? I didn’t know the answer… but…**

**I knew exactly who to call.**

*Ring Ring…*

*Felix Poon: Hello Nate Hegyi!*

*Nate Hegyi:  Hey buddy how you doing?*

**Producer Felix Poon:**

*Nate Hegyi:  You’re like our resident death beat reporter… how many episodes have you done about death?*

*Felix Poon: I think I have to count. There was the decomposing squirrel story, there was the body farm story… there was the psilocybin story*

**Felix has kind of become our expert on all things after… life. So I explained Phylicia’s question**

*[ducked under]… like, what’s the best way to get rid of our bodies?...*

*[fade up] Think you can do this? Think you can handle this assignment?*

*Felix Poon: Can I handle it?? I was born to handle it.*

**[MUX]**

**Today, we’ve got another edition of This, That Or The Other Thing.**

**When we talk about building a sustainable world… we talk a lot about the trash we leave behind. And, not to be crass, but at some point, we will all leave behind  these flesh coats that we call bodies. So what do we do with them?**

**Casket? Cremation? Compost? And do our bodies actually have an impact on the soils and skies around us?**

**Felix is on the job.**

*Felix Poon: I’ll check it out. Call up some experts, see what I find out, and then I’ll come back to you and let you know.*

**Stay tuned.**

**[mux]**

**Felix Poon: Alright, we’re back! And I’ve invited producer Justine Paradis to join us.**

**Justine Paradis: Hey Felix death Poon.**

**Felix Poon: I thought we said it’s, Felix death detective Poon?**

**Nate Hegyi:  Oh you’ve got plenty of names, you’ve got all the names.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah, I think…he’s known by many names.**

**Felix Poon: Glad to have you all here, like I’ve said I’ve done some reporting, um, but I want to say, at the end of the day, obviously, choosing what happens to your body after you die is a very personal decision, right? Regardless of what the science says is best for the planet.**

**Nate Hegyi:  Yes. That said, what does the science say?**

**Felix Poon: I’ll get to that, but i’m curious, what do you think you want to happen to your bodies after you die?**

**Nate Hegyi:  I think I want to be cremated, and have my ashes spread at certain spots that are meaningful to me. I’d like to spend my time at this one little bend of the Clark Fork river in Montana. That would be, that’s a good spot.**

**Felix Poon: So, I do like that idea in the popular consciousness of becoming a tree, like, my afterlife, materially, you know, my body dissolves and gets absorbed into other living things. I think that’s pretty cool.**

**Nate Hegyi:  If you could pick a tree Felix, what tree would you be?**

**Felix Poon: A ginkgo tree.**

**Justine Paradis: Oh sure.**

**Nate Hegyi:  Throwback.**

**Felix Poon: Specifically a female ginkgo tree so I can drop some nuts on people.**

[MUX]

**Felix Poon: Anyways, why don’t we get a better idea of all the options on the scientific side of what's best for the planet. And to do that, I went to a cemetery, called Mount Auburn cemetery.**

*[Footsteps on Mt. Auburn grounds]*

*Regina Harrison: I work out of the office, but I spend a lot of time out on the grounds doing these tours with families.*

**I talked to Regina Harrison, she’s the one loved ones talk to when they’ve had someone die. Typically she talks to one family a day.**

*Regina Harrison: Some days it’s 4 a day and that’s not really manageable, but you know if people have had a death, it is what it is…*

[MUX]

**So let’s start with the options people are probably most familiar with – first, conventional casket burial. This is when you embalm the body, put it in a casket and bury it…and while embalming goes way back, it only became standard practice from the civil war, because they embalmed the bodies of Union soldiers to send them back home for burial.**

**Nate Hegyi:  That’s fascinating, that’s a very practical use of embalming.**

**Justine Paradis: That is wild, yeah.**

**Felix Poon: But let’s talk about the environmental downsides to conventional burial. First, the embalming…**

*Regina Harrison: there’s a lot of chemicals, they do have a very harmful effect on the funeral directors who work with them.*

**Nate Hegyi:  Really, what kind of risks? Like health risks? Are they getting sick from this stuff?**

**Felix Poon: So research has found that embalmers are much more likely to** [**get cancer**](https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/101/24/1696/937606) **(**[**see also**](https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/102/19/1519/2515976)**, and** [**also**](https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/substances/formaldehyde)**), as well as** [**neurological diseases like ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s disease**](https://jnnp.bmj.com/content/87/7/786)**.**

**Nate Hegyi:  Jeez.**

**Justine Paradis: God, wow.**

**Felix Poon: So that’s the human health side. There isn’t a ton of research on what those chemicals can do to the soil, but there’s *some* research that shows that they *can* leach into groundwater.**

**But it’s not just the body we’re burying into the ground: there’s the casket, which is typically steel or wood - AND a concrete vault, which is like a casket for the casket.**

**Nate Hegyi:  I didn’t realize we had a casket for the casket. It’s been a while since I’ve been to a funeral. And I always just imagined that we just dug a hole and just put the casket in there.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah, same. So concrete is like, super intensive.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah the reason for this is landscaping, right? Because if you didn’t use a concrete vault, like, eventually there would be these little depressions in the soil, and so like…**

**Justine Paradis: Because of the way that the soil kind of settled down.   
  
Felix: Yeah, because the casket and the body *will* eventually break down and decompose.**

**Nate: You really don’t think about stuff like that when you’re walking through a cemetery.**

**Felix Poon: And yeah, like you said Justine, just like anything else, making all that stuff, the caskets, the vaults, it takes energy and has a carbon cost.**

**And there’s another problem with these concrete vaults.**

*Regina Harrison: you know, an area of a cemetery that's just full of these concrete liners, you know, water can't go anywhere…*

**Felix Poon: Which means less water can be absorbed back into the ground.**

**Nate Hegyi:  Of course.**

**Felix Poon: And because of those lawns we just talked about, there’s also all that water we’re using, and lawn fertilizers, and that can run off and pollute groundwater.**

**All this adds up - I tried to find some reliable figures on how much of the U.S. is taken up by cemeteries and graveyards…**

**Justine: Oh my gosh.**

**and while I couldn’t find any studies,** [**a figure that gets repeated is up to about 2 million acres**](https://journals.library.wustl.edu/urbanlaw/article/7893/galley/24726/view/) **- which is bigger than the state of Delaware.**

**Justine Paradis: The trouble is that sometimes it’s affiliated with specific religious beliefs, so I don’t want to insult anyone’s background or, that caveat, but yeah land use, that’s a major land use decision.**

**Felix Poon: I do want to mention that Regina rebuffs the idea that cemeteries are a waste of space.** [**Mt. Auburn Cemetery is a Mass Audubon important bird area**](https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/birds-wildlife/bird-conservation-research/massachusetts-important-bird-areas/iba-sites/mt.-auburn-cemetery)**. And she also mentioned, you know, for folks who live in the city it’s one of the few green spaces.**

**Justine Paradis: I just wish it was less lawny.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah, a lot of cemeteries are lawny, but the nice thing about Mt. Auburn, is that it is less lawny, like there’s a lot of trees,** [**it’s actually an accredited arboretum**](https://www.mountauburn.org/mount-auburn-receives-level-iii-arboretum-accreditation/)**.**

**Nate Hegyi:  That’s really cool.**

[MUX]

**Felix Poon: Next I wanna move on to talk about cremation, and before I do that though I’m curious like, what are all your hunches on cremation and whether it’s any better?**

**Nate Hegyi:  My assumptions is that it doesn’t have that big of a carbon footprint.**

**Justine Paradis: I think it does, I think it’s a a lot of natural gas.**

**Nate Hegyi:  Oh, yeah if you’re burning that way.**

**Justine Paradis: I’m pretty sure that’s how they burn… well Felix, why don’t you tell us.**

**Felix Poon: No, but this is something people don’t really think about. I think they think, oh we’re getting rid of that toxic embalming, we’re not burying all these metals and wood. And maybe for these reasons, cremation is kind of having a moment – In 2015, it overtook burial as the most popular option in the US (**[**NFDA**](https://www.nationalcremation.com/cremation-information/why-is-cremation-becoming-more-popular-in-the-us)**,** [**CNN**](https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/22/health/cremation-trends-wellness/index.html)**) and by mid-century, the National Funeral Directors Association thinks that *8 out of every 10 funerals* will be cremations**.

**Felix Poon: Cremation involves some serious heavy duty furnaces. They burn natural gas, which is a fossil fuel. And temperatures can get up to one thousand eigh hundred degrees F…** [**that’s hotter than molten lava.**](https://www.britannica.com/science/lava-volcanic-ejecta)

**Nate: That is very hot.**

**Justine Paradis: I’m just gonna say it, there’s still chunks of bone in the ashes still. Bodies are resilient.**

**Nate Hegyi: I wonder how long it takes to cremate, to cremate a body.**

**Felix Poon: Actually, uh, Regina has an answer to that question.**

*Regina Harrison: Our previous equipment took about six hours for a cremation. And this equipment is under two. So it's a lot, lot faster. And that's all the way to cool down.*

**Justine Paradis: Two hours, though. Yeah.**

**Felix Poon: So, estimates vary on the amount of fuel used in an average cremation, some put it at the equivalent of 13 gallons of gas, some put it at 27 gallons – so about one to two tank fulls.**

**Justine Paradis: Do they ever put you in a little ship and burn you while sending you over a waterfall though?**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah, exactly. That's what I was.**

**Thinking when I said cremation. I meant that what's the carbon footprint of that?**

**Felix Poon: Well, anyways, back to modern cremation. It's not just** [**CO2 going into the air, it’s also carcinogenic fumes and particulate matter**](https://www.cremationsocietyofmilwaukee.com/what-is-the-environmental-impact-of-direct-cremation#:~:text=Cremation%20creates%20air%20pollutants%20such,the%20pollution%20of%20the%20air.)**, and even mercury from dental fillings…**

**It sounds bad, but** [**there isn’t good data showing that living near a crematorium makes you more likely to have cancer or anything.**](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7728964/)

**Nate Hegyi: Okay, so I've as as someone who likes to be more sustainably and environmentally minded, I am. I am taking back my cremated card.**

**Felix Poon: No take backs.**

**Justine Paradis: You committed to your afterlife here on this podcast.**

**[MUX TRANSITION]**

**Felix Poon: Okay but let’s zoom back out – because Nate, your friend Phylicia was asking about whether our remains can be useful for the soil.**

**Cremation is at best a neutral act for soil – ashes are inert, they’re not organic, so when we’re talking about the circle of life idea, it’s not actually happening with cremation. In fact there’s** [**some evidence it might be bad for freshwater because ashes contain high levels of phosphorus, which can pollute bodies of water and cause those toxic algae blooms**](https://www.funeralnatural.net/sites/default/files/articulo/archivo/environmental_impact_of_different_funeral_technologies.pdf) **(**[**additional link**](https://carolinamemorialsanctuary.org/cremated-remains-options-green-burial-scattering/#:~:text=Even%20scattering%20of%20ashes%20can,high%20alkalinity%20of%20cremated%20remains.)**).**

**Nate Hegyi: I thought phosphorus was also good for the soil.**

**Justine Paradis: It's a limiting nutrient. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Like you need those three things to to make a plant for plants to grow, okay. And so if one of them is not in enough amount like the the plant won't be able to grow. But** [**it is the limiting ingredient limiting nutrient in freshwater systems.**](https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/indicators-phosphorus#:~:text=Phosphorus%20is%20usually%20considered%20the,soil%20microbes%20for%20normal%20growth.) **So once you like pump phosphorus into the water it's like bam, you know.**

**Nate Hegyi: Which is why we have like those algae blooms in the Mississippi because of all the farming.**

**Felix Poon: So that's cremation. With conventional burial as we talked about already it’s potentially not good for the soil because it can leach embalming chemicals.**

**But there's another version of burial that your friend Phylicia might like, AND it solves some of these problems with conventional burial and cremation, and it's called green burial.**

**Justine Paradis: Sounds sustainable!**

**Felix Poon: because it has the word green in it.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah.**

*Regina Harrison: fundamentally it's the burial of an unembalmed body in a biodegradable container. So that biodegradable container could be as simple as a shroud or a plain pine casket.*

*[footsteps]*

*Regina Harrison: So we're, uh, we're going to walk down Acorn Path here into an area that has a few different types of natural burial graves.*

**Felix Poon: Regina takes me out onto the grounds of Mt. Auburn. We’re walking in between old gravestones in the historic part of the cemetery, and we’re looking for green burial plots.**

*Felix Poon: So you’re saying there are two plots here that are adjacent?*

*Regina Harrison: Yeah they’re side by side…*

**Felix Poon: And unless you know exactly what to look for, you’d have no idea there’s burial plots here.**

*Regina Harrison: So really they can kind of triangulate off of other existing monuments…like if they know to look for the name on that stone.*

*Felix Poon: Right, William, MH. Waterfall.*

*Regina Harrison: Yup. So if they know they’re just to the left of William Waterfall then they know they’re in the right place.*

*Felix Poon: If they know their neighbors…*

**Nate Hegyi: So you can't tell on just from looking at it, whether it's a green burial or not, but it's got to be doing something better, I imagine, considering the namesake.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah. So, you know, you with Green Burial, you do get rid of most of the carbon emissions. There's no fancy casket, no concrete vault. Plus, you're not exposing people to toxic embalming chemicals. But you do still have the land use and landscaping issue at Mount Auburn. A green burial plot still takes up space in perpetuity and comes with some of the trappings of cemetery lawn maintenance that we talked about.** [**But there are a growing number of green burial cemeteries that don't have lawns. Instead, they're located in woodlands or meadows, so that problem could be solved in that way**](https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/cemeteries.html)**.**

**Justine Paradis: I'm under the impression also that, that you can bury yourself, that you can get buried on your property.**

**Felix Poon: That’s technically true in most states.** [**. There are a few that outlaw it outright: California, Washington, and Indiana**](https://www.romemonuments.com/home-burials)**. But everywhere else, there’s still rules you have to follow, like you’ve got to be X number of feet away from dwellings, businesses, etc. and you’ve got to add it to the property deed, stuff like that.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah, because if you didn't know or if like later it came up that there was a body buried there.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah it'd be like, oh My God, I found a body on my property.**

**Justine Paradis: was there a murder?**

**[MUX TRANSITION]**

**Nate Hegyi: Okay, more green options for human body disposal are coming up in a minute - but before you get into all that, just a reminder that we’ve only got about a week left for our dollar-for-dollar match, and remember - it’s your donations that keep this podcast alive… Give $5 per month and we’ll send you an outside in baseball hat, or for $8 a month, you get a pair of some of the coziest wool socks you'll ever wear.**

**All right, we'll be right back.**

**<<MIDROLL BREAK – SECOND HALF>>**

**Nate Hegyi: Hey, hey, welcome back to Outside In. I'm Nate Hegy here with producer Justine Paradise. Hey, hey. And producer Felix Boone.**

**Felix Poon: That's Felix death detective proven to you.**

**Nate Hegyi: Sorry.**

**Nate Hegyi: Death. Detective Poon is here telling us all about funeral options and what's best for the planet. So? So, Felix, you were about to tell us about some new green burial options that don't take up, like, hardly any space at all.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah, well, first, I want to say that there are a lot of gimmicks out there that folks should watch out for when they're looking into this. Like when I told some of our coworkers that I was reporting on this, they were like, oh, like the mushroom suit.**

*Jae Rhim Lee: So I’m here to explain why I’m wearing these ninja pajamas.*

**So there’s this Ted Talk where the inventor of this suit says it detoxifies your body from heavy metals and pollutants, and speeds up the decomposition process.**

*Jae Rhim Lee: I’m an artist, so I’d like to offer a modest proposal at the intersection of art, science, and culture. The infinity burial project, an alternative burial system that uses mushrooms to decompose and clean toxins in bodies.*

**Justine Paradis: When you're referencing Jonathan Swift, I feel like you should do it with more precision. I'm just. Just saying.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah, exactly. I was thinking the same thing.**

**Felix Poon: really, the first issue with this claim is that the amount of toxins in a human body, to begin with are pretty negligible (see** [**link**](https://connectingdirectors.com/56089-mushroom-burial-suit-called-into-question) **and** [**link**](https://memorialecosystemswordpress.wordpress.com/2016/05/20/part-3-why-mushroom-suits-wont-work-and-how-to-apply-forensic-taphonomy-and-cemetery-studies-to-make-green-graves-one-use-composting-machines-part-1/)**). But I think the most convincing argument to me that the suit is bogus is that** [**the suit uses shiitake and oyster mushroom spores**](https://edmortimer.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/mushroom-death-suit/)**. Any decomposition expert, or even mushroom forger will tell you that the fungi involved in breaking down your body are not shiitakes and oysters.**

**Justine Paradis: Those grow on wood.**

**Felix Poon: Exactly. Shiitakes and oysters don't grow on rotting flesh. They grow on wood. But anyways, you know, I looked into this myself and the company's website where you could reportedly buy it. It doesn't even exist anymore. So to eulogize the Mushroom Infinity suit, it looks really cool. And it got a lot of people thinking and talking about green burial options, but may it rest in peace.**

**Justine Paradis: Cremate that suit.**

**[MUX]**

**Felix Poon: Let's move on and talk about serious green burial options. So I'm going to share a video with you two.**

*[*[*https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zw30PbBASBjWn0oolmUeTfOwVCCNdEVc/view?usp=sharing*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zw30PbBASBjWn0oolmUeTfOwVCCNdEVc/view?usp=sharing)*]*

**Justine Paradis: It's like a wall of, um, that's like a, like a beehive lattice work. But each cell has a big orb on it.**

**Felix Poon: Taylor's son Phin watched this video, and he said, like, they look like big space age laundry machines. To explain what these are, let me introduce Katrina Spade. She's the founder and CEO of a Seattle based company called Recompose, which she started after thinking about her own eventual death.**

*Katrina Spade: I don't really want to be cremated because to me it feels a bit wasteful, something I've got left in my body, you know? Could I give that back somehow?*

**Felix Poon: So these are human composting vessels. And Katrina says human composting is just mimicking what we see on the forest floor when something dies, whether that's animal life like a chipmunk or plant life like a dead tree, there's microbial and bacterial activity that breaks it down** [**as long as it's got the right amount of oxygen, carbon and nitrogen**](https://compost.css.cornell.edu/chemistry.html#:~:text=Of%20the%20many%20elements%20required,the%20mass%20of%20microbial%20cells.)**.**

**And what Katrina is doing at recompose is they're taking all those ingredients, and they're putting them into these vessels. For the funeral service they lay the body inside the vessel on a bed of wood chips, straw and alfalfa, which provide the carbon and nitrogen. And then they lay more of that material over the body, which is something that loved ones can participate in, too. And they can even put flowers or clippings from their own garden if they want, sort of like what you might do at a graveside funeral.**

**Justine Paradis: That's really nice.**

*Katrina Spade: So the body's cocooned inside of the vessel*

**After the ceremony is over, the vessel gets to work.**

*Katrina Spade: And the ratio of carbon and nitrogen… plus the body is the perfect mixture to in make enthusiastic microbial activity*

**Nate Hegyi: Enthusiastic microbial activity.**

**Felix Poon: So then they rotate the vessels about every week. And after about two months, the body's transformed into about a cubic yard of soil, which is enough to fill an average truck bed. Wow. The bones get ground up using what's called a cremulator and that gets added to the soil.**

**Justine Paradis: You know, that's great because we have transformed a lot of the planet to be extracting from the soil that has been created over thousands of years, and we should probably be returning those nutrients back to those fields, you know.**

**Felix Poon: So there are a few different ways people can use the soil. Katrina told me about a sister of somebody who died and was composted, and she came to recompose with a trailer in tow.**

*Katrina Spade: And our team helped her load that trailer up with her brother's soil. And he had lived in Seattle for his for much of his life and was an avid gardener. She brought that trailer back to the neighborhood where he had lived and her, his friends and neighbors met. The trailer. Brought five gallon buckets. They all took some of that soil home to their own gardens. And so there's this concept that this person is still gardening with his friends and neighbors, you know, even after he's died.*

**[MUX]**

**Justine Paradis: That's so nice.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah. The other thing you can choose to happen is have your soil be donated to conservation land, uh, which people point out like that can actually be absorbed into the trees. And speaking of carbon emissions, like, you know, be a part of the trees, uh, sequestering carbon.**

**[MUX SWELL]**

**Okay, so does anybody want to guess what the downsides of human compost might be?**

**Justine Paradis: I bet there are some emissions. I bet, I mean, I bet there's like methane and.**

**Felix Poon: It does take electricity to run these vessels. So it's only as clean as the grid is. But, researchers that I talked to said that we might want to look at the alfalfa and woodchips that need to be produced and then transported to human composting facilities. But honestly, there’s not a lot of data on this because it’s pretty new - so it’s hard to calculate.**

**Uh, but the biggest problem I can see is the fact that this is currently only available in a few states. So some people are flying in their loved ones from out of state, which is about 30% of Recomposes clients. And that sort of negates a lot of the carbon benefit of doing it in the first place. Hmm.**

**There is one last green option that I want to talk about, which is a new version of cremation. And it's called alkaline hydrolysis, better known as water cremation.** [**So this also involves putting the body in a vessel. But this time it's submerged in a water and potassium hydroxide solution. And it takes about 16 hours. And what you're left with is a sterile liquid which is just poured down the drain.**](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/could-water-cremation-become-the-new-american-way-of-death-180980479/) **(also** [**link**](https://www.wired.com/2017/03/bath-turns-dead-bodies-coffee-colored-water/)**)**

**Justine Paradis: This is just essentially lye. They put you in lye.**

**Felix Poon: Yes it is actually water and lye.**

**Felix Poon: And then the bones are ground with a cremulator into a white colored dust, which are the ashes. You know, it's also a pretty new option. So there's not a ton of data, but of course, this also requires electricity to run the vessels.**

**Nate Hegyi: Feels pretty minor, though, like we're getting pretty nitpicky about the different little tiny bits of carbon footprint that's happening with this. Like, I am curious, like, does this even matter?**

**Felix Poon: You know, comparing all these different methods? Uh, we are kind of splitting hairs here because even if you don't go green and let's say you went with like, traditional burial or cremation, like whatever, the most, uh, carbon intensive process is, it's still just a tiny fraction of a percentage of the impact on the planet you have when you're alive.**

**Like, just to put cremation into perspective - I mentioned it’s the equivalent of about one to two tanks of gas to cremate a body. I mean, most Americans use double that amount every month just driving around, commuting and whatnot. (**[**1,123 miles/mo**](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/onh00/bar8.htm) **at** [**24.2 miles/gallon for cars**](https://afdc.energy.gov/data/10310)**)**

**Justine Paradis: I was thinking it's like if you get a piece of pottery, a kiln has been roaring for a few hours. That's like the same thing.**

**Nate Hegyi: Totally is. You're right for hours.**

**Felix Poon: To me, that means, like, it matters less what you do with your death, than what you do with your life.**

**Nate Hegyi: That's a great point. That's a really good takeaway.**

**[mux here]**

**Felix Poon:**

**I guess that’s what makes these segments complicated. Like, it’s easy to get pre-occupied with these problems of “what’s worse for the environment - this, or that?” Cloth diapers, or disposables. Real Christmas trees, or fake, plastic ones?   
  
But those questions are kind of an anxious, negative way of looking at the world - like, “no matter what I do it’s bad, so what’s less bad?”**

**So I wanted to talk to one more person to steer us away from death, and talk a little bit about what we can do for the planet while we’re still alive.**

*Matt Scott: I very often share the the story of my dad and his passing as an example of what motivates me so others could see that there are deeply personal things that could motivate you to make an impact when it comes to climate*

**So this is Matt Scott. Matt doesn’t really think of himself as a climate guy or environmentalist. The number one issue he’s always cared about is racial justice. That’s because his dad grew up in the civil rights era as a black man.**

**Then Matt learned about this nonprofit initiative called Project Drawdown, which is where he works now.**

*Matt Scott: when I learned about Project Drawdown, what it really showed me is that I could apply my own interest in storytelling and my own interest in justice, my interest in supporting and amplifying underrepresented communities to this climate issue.*

**Felix Poon: You've all heard of Project Drawdown, right?**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah, it was one of the the first really solutions focused. Okay. Like what would we do though. And not just we are against climate change, but it was presenting ideas. Yeah.**

**Felix Poon: [read as if simultaneously browsing website] Yeah, and if you look at their website - you’ll see they’ve got all these different climate solutions, listed by category, or by ways you can help…**

**Justine Paradis: Drawdown solutions library.**

**Nate Hegyi: Alternative cement.**

**Justine Paradis: Bicycle infrastructure. I see.**

**Nate Hegyi: Nuclear power. Nuclear power. Nuclear power.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah. It's a political statement to pronounce it nuclear.**

**Felix Poon: So one way to look at this, is to say - burial, for example, is a land use issue. But so on Project Drawdown you can see that a lot of the land use solutions have a lot more to do with agricultural practices than they do with cemeteries.**

**So like, assuming you’re not a farmer yourself, changing your diet to eat less meat. that’s still a negative framing. Like it should be less about restraining yourself from eating meat, and more about, getting into vegetables because they taste good!**

**Justine Paradis: learning about vegan food, I don’t ever think of it as Vegan, it’s just like…learning how to use a specific kind of vegetable, it’s like, exciting.**

**Felix Poon: Yeah exactly, and I want to push this even more, toward systemic things. Like, get to know your local farmers and ask them if they’re doing any of these land use solutions…which, I’ve actually done myself with like, the community supported agriculture programs around me.**

**Felix Poon: Or like, Justine, you mentioned bicycle infrastructure is one of the Project Drawdown solutions (which I would say is a land use issue), and I’ve been getting involved with local organizations working with my city on getting more bike infrastructure, and it’s been pretty satisfying.**

**Felix Poon: And you know, this is just a couple of examples. If you’re not sure which of the hundreds of ways that you could enter this that you want to get involved in, Matt has a suggestion for figuring that out.**

*Matt Scott: So there's this concept called ikigai.*

**Felix Poon: Ikigai is a Japanese concept for that which gives your life meaning and purpose. Marine biologist Doctor Ayana Elizabeth Johnson popularized a climate version of this called the climate action Venn diagram.**

**Basically, you draw three big circles that overlap in the middle.**

**One circle is what you’re good at.**

**The next is what gives you joy.**

**And the third one is “what needs doing?”**

**And it’s a way to find the places where your passion overlaps with your talents, and apply them to climate solutions that make sense for you.**

*Matt Scott: It's nice to know that none of us are doing it alone. And each and every day at least, I'm reminded that there are so many other people who I'm standing alongside who are making a meaningful impact in this work.*

**Felix Poon: So at the end of the day, I'm not saying you shouldn't care about your death.**

**Nate Hegyi: You should, but maybe not for the reasons we initially went into this.**

**Justine Paradis: Fight the real enemy.**

**Felix Poon: Maybe we can definitely say, don't have your ashes shot into space.**

**Justine Paradis: Yeah, yeah, I think we can say that.**

**Nate Hegyi: Yeah. I mean, just.**

**Nate Hegyi: That's a little hubristic, to.**

**[MUX]**

**Nate Hegyi: So, you know, in this vein, we’re curious to know from our audience, how do you want to live? We’ll put more info about climate venn diagrams in the show notes. And if you do do one, you know, take a picture and send it to us. We might share them in our newsletter and on social media you can email us at outsidein@nhpr.org.**

**Felix Poon: Or if you post yours to social media, you can tag us. We're at Outside-in radio.**

**Nate Hegyi: And I should say okay. We are also curious about how you want to die. Uh, as in what you want to happen to your body afterwards? You know, not literally how you want to die. Uh, I have my idea, but it's pretty. It's pretty wild. And again, our email is outside in at nhpr.org.**

**And you can find us on our socials at Outside-in radio.**

**<<CREDITS>>**

**Nate Hegyi: This episode was reported and produced by Felix Poon. It was edited by Taylor Quimby. I'm your host, Nate Hegyi.**

**Our team also includes Justine Paradise.**

**Justine Paradis: Hee hee hee.**

**Nate Hegyi:  That was a great laugh. Rebecca Lavoi is our executive producer.**

**Special thanks to Ruth Faas (FASS), who makes green burial caskets in the Boston area – you can find pictures of them on our website at outsideinradio.org, and to Troy Hottle (HAW-duhl) for explaining life cycle analysis studies comparing different burial methods.**

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