

## **Bruce Piasecki and Andrea Masters Annual Award on Business and Society Writing**

### Statement of Future Plans

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Addressing climate change—in prose and in politics—is going to be my life’s work. I wouldn’t say this is something I’ve chosen. The world, in its increasing precarity, has made the choice for me. Nearly everything I hold dear—every person, every principle, every plan, every pleasure—depends fundamentally on averting catastrophic climate change. I will continue to engage deeply in the global climate movement, organizing for concrete policy change at a scale commensurate to the crisis. But I also plan to devote myself to the artistic but no less consequential project of making meaning in the face of that crisis. Because we must do both things at once: we must radically turn down the global thermostat, and we must also find the wells of beauty, courage, and solidarity that will see us through the warming we’ve already baked in.

First, to stabilizing the thermostat. Over the next two to four years, I will continue in my role as Campaign Director for the [Climate Jobs National Resource Center](#), where I work with labor unions across the country to secure policies that tackle climate change, reverse income inequality, and create millions of good, green jobs. My focus will be primarily on our Carbon Free and Healthy Schools campaign, which seeks to retrofit and solarize every public school in the country, slashing carbon, boosting jobs, and saving money in the process. Working alongside teacher, service sector, and building trades unions, as well as parents, students, and local business communities, I am currently in the process of getting the campaign off the ground in a dozen states and four of the country’s largest municipal school districts (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Houston). Having already had several middle and high school teachers approach me about reading *Warmth* in their classrooms, I want to do everything in my power to make sure those classrooms are mitigating—not exacerbating—the Problem they’ll be reading about.

I am also working closely with many of the largest national unions to advocate for ambitious climate investments in the upcoming federal infrastructure and reconciliation bills. My ongoing plan is to help pass as much bold climate policy as possible during President Biden’s first term—and in particular before the 2022 midterm elections. It is crucial we secure large public investments that will help supercharge and incentivize the private sector’s shift away from fossil fuel energy.

My partner is an Australian citizen, and when Biden’s first term is up, we plan to relocate to Australia for several years so she can be close to her parents. In many ways, Australian climate politics mirror our own: though they remain one of the largest coal exporters in the world, an increasingly large majority of Australians want to see their government and corporate leaders take aggressive action on climate change—especially as it ignites unprecedented wildfires around their major population zones. I wrote *Warmth* on a Fulbright Scholarship in Australia, and already have strong connections to climate movement leaders there. I hope to take what I learned passing historic climate investments in the U.S. and help do the same in Australia. The current government is arguably the most recalcitrant on climate policy among Western democracies, so there is much work to be done. Given the proportionately small size of their activist community, I’ve had several Australian climate advocates express that it would make a real difference having another experienced campaigner in the mix—especially one that brought strategic insight from the states.

Through all of this, I will be writing. I couldn't stop if I wanted to. Writing is the best means I've found of processing the emotional and metaphysical weight of the climate crisis. It feels invaluable to my organizing work, but more than that, it feels necessary to staying attentive and alive through the remainder of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I also believe that literary writing is a vital component of successful social movements. With his exacting prose, James Baldwin buoyed, deepened, and gave voice to the modern civil rights movement. Ta-Nehisi Coates has done something similar for Black Lives Matter, as has Susan Choi for #MeToo, and Maggie Nelson for queer liberation. Though I don't presume to compare myself to any of those extraordinary writers, I want to play a small role in contributing to a similar project: taking the raw politics of the climate movement and investing them with a spiritual sounding board.

Since the release of *Warmth*, I've had several friends reach out to say they were inspired to write letters of their own to their actual or hypothetical children. I can imagine pursuing a writing project that solicits, edits, and curates these sorts of letters—letters to future people, to other species, to specific places; letters of apology and commiseration and redemption. In *Warmth*, I write about “all the letters being composed simultaneously to this one, all the “you's” they must address.” I want to find those letters and give them a platform. With the publication of *Warmth*, some of them have already started to find me.

Another project I think about arises out of my exhortation, in *Warmth*, to “grab grit from the dirt that outlasts us.” I'm interested in exploring a new kind of nature writing, one that lifts up, not the pristine and preserved, but the compromised and unraveling. As extreme weather events get more and more frequent, how can we learn to live in—and even still to cherish—the world they leave in their wake? The hills razed by wildfire, the valleys swept clean by flooding. I don't want to look away from these places. I want to attend to them closely, to write testaments that are equal parts eulogy and paean—a sort of literary recommitment to the planet, even as it changes drastically under our feet.

Most importantly though, if I do end up having children—either biological or adopted—I want to write about raising them in the Anthropocene. How do we talk, or fail to talk, about the crisis? How do we hold each other across generations through a period of immense upheaval? I imagine this book as a natural extension of *Warmth*, grappling with the parental reality my first book could only conjecture at. As I write in the final chapter, “When and if you are born, the actual you will break through the hypothetical you in ways I'll never be able to control or anticipate, and this to me is one of the chief appeals of parenting.”

In fact, I can imagine a series of books, each tracking a different stage of life (early parenthood, middle age, old age, senescence), that give voice to what it will feel like to live through a climate changed century. Though I can't compare to his prolific memory or realist gravitas, I see this in somewhat the same vein as Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* series: a deeply personal account of the elapse of a single life, with resonances that, hopefully, reach far beyond its boundaries.

Whatever my next project, I want to write out of reality but against despair. Artistically and politically, this is in the only way I see forward.