



CleanLaw 50: Caitlin McCoy Speaks with Erin Brockovich About Her New Book *Superman's Not Coming* and Community Empowerment in Environmental Crises, October 28, 2020

To return to our website [click here](#).

Caitlin McCoy: Hello and welcome to another episode of CleanLaw, our podcast at the Environmental and Energy Law Program at Harvard Law School. This is Caitlin McCoy and I'm a staff attorney at the program. Today, I have the incredible privilege of speaking with Erin Brockovich, who hardly needs an introduction since her name has become synonymous with efforts to clean up contaminated water supplies hold polluters accountable and establish common sense protections for water quality. Welcome Erin. We're honored to have you as a guest on the podcast.

Erin Brockovich: Hi. It's nice to be here today. Thanks for the invite and I'm just as honored to be here.

Caitlin: That's really flattering. Thank you. You've written a new book that I just finished reading. It's called *Superman's Not Coming: Our National Water Crisis and What We the People Can Do about It*. First of all, congratulations on a fantastic book.

Erin: Thank you. I hope you enjoyed it.

Caitlin: I really did. When I first got it, I thought wow this is pretty long, but it's worth every page because it's one of the best explainers on water quality that I've read. You break down the laws, the standards, major water quality issues facing the country and throughout the entire book, you're weaving in really moving stories of people who decide to take a stand for clean water in their communities and beyond. You inform readers about the challenges that we're facing and important to me and I think a lot of our listeners as attorneys, those moments of shortcomings where good laws on the books don't always translate into action on the ground. Even though that might sound a little bit intense, the book overall is empowering.

Caitlin: It's an honest look at the reality of continuing problems we have with water quality. It's also a call to action for people to ask questions and come together, and it's a detailed instruction manual really on how to seek answers and make a difference. It's all based on your decades of experience, which makes it so incredibly valuable.

Erin: Gosh, I learned so much in those decades of experience. I started in Hinkley when I was 30. I'm now 60, a grandmother of four. We're still having this conversation, and I've learned so much in the communities and I often see what is missing, or where I lose them, or why they're not getting involved. Oftentimes it's because



they think that they can't say anything because well, I don't have a degree in science, or I'm not good at math or water's political, I don't understand policies. When we get into communities and knowledge is power and we educate them, you can see the light bulb come on. Over the course of the years, I've often figured out and struggled how do I explain this? Water is not a soundbite, it's a story.

Erin: It's everybody's story and they can get involved. I thought a book how to and something inspirational, everything you explain and I was so delighted to hear that. Because when I did the audio on it, I was like, "Oh my gosh, at some points, I swear I think people are just going to put the book down, or they're going to glass over," but you have to take bites at a time, digest it and come back. Once you understand the policies or the laws or the regulations, or where they work, where they don't, how water works, I see communities light up, and then they begin to take their own action.

Erin: Oftentimes they feel like well, the EPA is here, we're fine and it's like, yeah, no, because EPA is not coming and neither is superman, and that's how the title of the book evolved. It's a way to explain things in layman's terms. This is really important to me. I grew up as a dyslexic. I code differently. I'm very smart, but it's how I'm processing and coding that information. Oftentimes, I'm visual and other people are and then if you just have a conversation with them, they just glass over. When I'm in communities with my water expert and he starts talking about organic matter, I see people's faces just drop. I said, "So Bob, what's organic matter?" Everyone thinks it's like some chemical or something scientific.

Erin: He goes, "Um, dirt," and you see them go, "Dirt? That's all? I get that." We just explain things in layman's terms, we can't wait for someone to come fix this. When people know they do more, they do better, the more they know, the more they do, the stronger they feel, the more empowered they become, and we can begin to deal with a lot of our water crisis right at our own local city council and with our own communities. My journey with them has been so inspirational and they inspire me, and the book was a relief to me. I almost felt like I just regurgitate. It's like blaargh everything into a book, because I'm not known to be a patient person, and I don't have a lot of time to explain something.

Erin: If somebody can have this in their hand, I think it helps and I think it helps to understand how the system is set up, where the system has eroded, where our laws need to change. We have antiquated infrastructures, policies, and laws. I think that there's great moments because we are a different society than we were 30 years ago when we put some of the laws on the book. We're a different society than when we started the Safe Drinking Water Act. We have laws like the Lead and Copper Rule, which state you test for lead once every four years, and you can average the samples. Well, when you see communities like Flint and Hannibal and New Jersey and the huge lead outbreaks that we have across this country, that type of policy just isn't even applicable, or could it apply to what is happening today?



- Erin: All of this is hopeful for me because I think there's a wake up moment for us, even though we're in turmoil that we realize everything we did to become who we are was all good and well-intended, but over time, things erode, things can get corrupted. There is policies or rules on the book that may have worked then, but don't today, so how do we take that challenge and move into the future? We won't do that until we understand, and we can actually see where these failures are if we can't see the problem and understand, and we won't move in to change them or find solutions to them. All of these things that I just shared is why we ended up doing Superman's Not Coming, so you can start understanding these things yourself.
- Erin: Seeing is believing and seeing things in a book that are vetted and validated and factual I think really helps other people go, "Oh my gosh, that is going on. Wait a minute, that was happening here." They just start putting pieces of the puzzle together, so it's a manual. I like how you said that and if you have a question, I hope it's a place to reference that could possibly help you understand what might be going on, or how to proceed from there.
- Caitlin: All of that is absolutely true and very inspiring, and what you said was a nice introduction to the book and these issues. One of the first things that I was really struck by is a theme in the book and something that I wanted to talk to you about is power imbalance, whether that's real or just perceived. One of the things that you write about throughout the book is that people shouldn't be intimidated to ask their elected officials, or to ask their local water board their questions and share their concerns and their experiences. There seems to be a mix of challenges and opportunities for those people who work up the courage to ask questions and seek answers. Can you talk about that?
- Erin: I touched upon briefly I'm a dyslexic. I was often perceived as different and because I was perceived as different, or didn't fit status quo or standard, I was put over here, or told I couldn't do this, or I was put into a box and you don't know this. I had to maneuver around that my whole life and was always taught the value of stick-to-itiveness, which is a propensity to follow through in a determined manner, dogged persistence born of obligation and stubbornness. I learned early on that I was going to have to punch my way out of that box. My mom taught me that a great deal of that is understanding your psychology, your emotions, and accepting and owning who you are flawed and all.
- Erin: We really don't do that. We're always got a front up about where college should I go to, what degree do I have?
- Caitlin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Erin: All of those things. Judgments, perceptions, it all gets stuck on us and then I think we begin to really doubt ourselves. When I began my work in Hinkley, I was amazed because I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm not alone because they too were experiencing what I was." We would hear things like, "Oh, come on. You're not a



scientist. What do you know? You're being a hysterical mom. You should just stop talking." All of it is just to push you back or push you off your game. I stood there and I'm like, "This is too familiar," and that's what happened to me growing up with the learning disability, and that's what was happening to them. By the way, in every single community I get into, that is precisely where they're at.

Erin: I tell them when I began in Hinkley and I heard all that stuff we were just talking about, you're not this, you're not that, you're not a doctor, you're not a lawyer, you're not a scientist, you're not a politician, give you a billion reasons why I should buy the line that the 2-headed frog you see is a figment of your imagination, a bullshit. I became very rooted in that, and I teach these communities they too see they already know, but they don't have the support and we need support. It's understanding the emotional intelligence and psychology of we as people and how they can find that courage. When they own their health, they own their shortcomings.

Erin: They own what they see, they own that this is my town and my right to clean water, they will respond. For me, that has been the biggest breakthrough, and you ask an excellent question. How do we find that courage when most of our lives we've had a label stuck on us one way or another, or something negative? That became the perception of who we are, and my mom always taught me, just because someone else may see you as a loser doesn't have to be the perception of how you see yourself, and how a person sees themselves plays a great role in how they will respond to a scenario.

Caitlin: Yeah, and I think what can be a second step as you so eloquently spoke about getting people to realize and understand their own power and reclaim that and find the courage to come forward, as the next phase often, people will sometimes run into a little bit of a roadblock with feeling like they don't have enough science or data, or just not having enough science or data. I've worked on water quality issues before I came to my current position here. I worked in Southwestern Pennsylvania for a very small environmental organization there, working a lot on water quality issues. I've seen firsthand what it's like if you don't have enough science and data and how when you do actually have some data on your side, it's a lot harder to be dismissed, but often, it's hard to get at that data, right?

Caitlin: The people need data that might be out of reach, or might be buried by companies which is something you talk about in the book, or you might be in need of studies that have never been performed. I wanted to ask you a 2-part question. You talk about the reality of how we regulate chemicals in this country, which I think for people who aren't familiar with it, that section of the book will be really eye-opening. I wanted to ask you to talk a little bit about on one hand, what can we do to try to create a better system federally to deal with chemicals? Then in the meantime a a stop gap, what can people do on a local level while we try to overhaul a federal system?



- Erin: Okay. Well, first of all, I definitely will talk about the science, and I believe in science and I respect science. Oftentimes and we do share a story with you, science can get bought and paid for, and it does become a shell game. When you're missing information, science lives in front of you all the time, and don't doubt common sense. Don't doubt that instinct, it's not wrong. I can tell you I dealt with the BP oil spill, and I would have followed those fishermen who fished those waters for 40 years over any science, and that's not meant to be disrespectful. I really want to say that, but they are connected. There's a big thing. We are connected to the environment, but we've become disconnected from it.
- Erin: The further we move away from that, the further we move away from ourselves. They know when a storm is coming. They know when the barometric pressures change. They notice observation of what's going on with the fish and a lot of times, people even though they don't have that scientific document, I didn't have any science when I first started in Hinkley, but I will tell you I recognized the pattern. I will tell you that 2-headed frogs, green waters, all the wildlife dying, all the trees dying, and cows covered in tumors. I don't need a scientific paper to tell me something's wrong. I really encourage these communities and I'll tell you 99% of the time when they contact me, they already know something's wrong.
- Erin: If you need that science, listen oftentimes, if you have some information here and it's really easy to find, and now with Superfund sites and Google and doing a little bit of research, then get lawyers on board, they'll start doing discovery. Sure enough, you'll find that information that you already knew, but I think it's really important people don't move away from that, and again, I code a little differently. My first clue in Hinkley was that, and then reading a document.
- Erin: Everyone kept saying, "Well, you know, we have to deal with dose response ratio. We have to look at their exposure levels, but we're testing today and the numbers are low. We shouldn't be worried about them," and that is something we have to look at that just because it's deemed, or has a guideline that you're within the guideline, it's safe is not true. That's just not true, so we'll get to EPA and what we're doing ass backwards that really needs to change, but I started reading a document that was talking about the monitoring wells in 1992 still had five ppm hex chrome, which I knew was legally hazardous waste, and that 90% had already been removed domestic and agricultural use. Wait a minute. If it's 1992 and monitoring walls are at five ppm and 90% has been removed, what was it in '82? What was it in '72?
- Erin: What was it in '62? I started to work backwards and lo and behold, the hexavalent chromium in Hinkley hit the aquifer in 1958 at 58 ppm. That changes everything and the information was there, but it was hidden. Oftentimes see, you come back in and you find that and you're like, "Oh my gosh, those instincts were right," and that's why I just wanted to make that point. I was born and raised in Kansas, and I could be outside playing and I could see 80,000 foot thunderheads, and it's 100 degrees and the barometric pressure feels heavy. If you're paying attention and



picking up on cues in the environment, you know a storm is probably approaching, or we could have a tornado.

Erin: When the sirens go off, it's not a moment where I'm going to call the weather channel and go, "Is it an F4 or an F5?"

Caitlin: Right.

Erin: It doesn't matter, I'm in danger and I need to get to safety. It's the same thing with arsenic, and we've somehow got this idea in our mind that poisons in our water based on one part per billion versus 10 parts per trillion versus 50 parts per million has an impact on how we do, or don't respond. If you read a headline that your municipality is tainted with arsenic, well we just don't call National Institutes of Health and say, "Well, I read the guideline and it shouldn't be more than five parts per billion. I'm at four. Should I drink it?" No, these are the things that were created like the Safe Drinking Water Act were all good and well-intended, but over the time, we just have to be honest about this here.

Erin: Whereas bought and paid for, a cover-up, out of fear or greed and the information gets hidden because somebody's going to lose their job? Then we set these standards and, "Oh, it's in the guideline, it's safe." That's not true. What happens with the EPA is I'm going to give you a perfect example on the largest emerging contaminant in the water today, which is PFOA and the PFOS which is part of the perfluorinated chemical group. It's about 3000 chemicals made into one. PFOA is perfluorooctanoic acid. You would know it as Teflon, most people would. PFOS is another member of that family, and this would be better known as firefighting foam. This chemical is just used in everything. Here's what happens and this is what happened.

Erin: The manufacturer of that chemical notified the EPA decades ago that this chemical was going to be potentially a problem. Well, they already had the science. I don't know where that got lost in the process, but it did. The EPA says, "All right, we'll set a guide line of 400 parts per trillion. I still don't know where that guideline came from when you don't even have any science on it." A, you don't have a science on it. You're setting a guideline and you're going to let it into the system. Okay, so here we go and here comes this chemical. EPA lets municipalities know you can run this through your system up to 400 parts per trillion, and we will commission a study which cost millions of dollars.

Erin: They usually only study a few chemicals per year when we have over 40,000 that have hit the marketplace, and we'll get the funding, and we'll study it to conclude what this chemical does, or doesn't do in the environment, or to public health and welfare. Really? That's what they do. About four years ago, guess what? This is what I've been waiting for and it's starting to happen. It's what I call science is catching up with policy. The science came in on this chemical. It causes cancer and other diseases. The EPA is like, "Oops, oh-oh. Well, now we're going to take



this 400 parts per trillion and we're going to drop it to 70 parts per trillion," and then they notify the municipalities.

Erin: Well, then every municipality is going, "Well, wait a minute, I don't have the budget or the filtration system to bring from 400 parts per trillion down to 70 parts per trillion." They set a national again guideline, and you're just now getting the science on it, and it's been 25 plus years that it's been in the environment? This is a national oversight, and that doesn't mean states can't go lower than the national oversight. They often do. New Jersey went down to 11 and 12 parts per trillion. Now the municipalities have got to notify the consumer. Well, guess what happens on my end? I get inundated with emails from Pennsylvania, from Alabama, from parts of California, all over Michigan.

Erin: I mean this chemical is in every single state and they're like, "I just got this notification. Um, we just got noticed from the Department of Defense that the military base has used it extensively. It's in our well water. Is this why my son has testicular cancer?" Oh, which by the way science has concluded is one of the things that this chemical causes. I have to say this is an ass backwards way to deal with chemicals in the marketplace. I think we need to look at these manufacturers need to have the studies on the up front and apparently, 3M did on the PFOA and deal with it first before you ever put it into the marketplace, because it's just a way to kick the can down the road, and kicking the can down the road is not working out.

Erin: It's not working out feasibly for the companies. It's certainly not working out for the environment, and it's absolutely not working out for the people that are drinking and being exposed to it. It's hard to explain that and it's overwhelming to people and again why in Superman's Not Coming, you can come back and digest that information because it's a little bit of a blow to realize why would we do that, but that has been the process and the guidelines and picking guidelines. What we learned, you picked a guideline, a guideline of 400 parts per trillion and deemed that it was okay to drink up to that amount when you now have actually found out through science catching up with your policies, that was a really big mistake, but we've done that on every single chemical.

Erin: We're still having this fight over a hexavalent chromium, and it's in two-thirds of our water supply. The science is clearly in and we know by inhalation, but there's this whole argument that gets set up by companies that hexavalent chromium can't harm you by ingestion in your drinking water. Oh my gosh, this is ridiculous and this is where I say, and I love the side of the law, I'm always usually with the lawyer, is the challenges that are possible here to look at these policies and get up there and reform them. We don't have to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We don't have to get rid of everything we've built, but what we do need to do is build upon it more efficiently, more sustainable with more ideas of safety on the up front and not dealing with that at the end.



Erin: I look at PG&E who destroyed Hinkley who have a 100-year cleanup on their books. They got sued for \$333 million. They probably had 50 million in defense cost, and their ongoing cleanup costs I'll low ball it at 50 million. We're pushing a billion, and then they did it in this another town in Kettleman. Now we're looking at \$2 billion failed infrastructures and safety be damned, let's just do it anyway. Then I followed this company through the San Bruno fires and again, I'll be damned, kicked the can down the line. We're not going to worry about safety, we want that money on the upfront. Then you blow up a town and you get sued for another \$30 billion. Then you burn down a third of the state because of failed infrastructure because you won't deal with safety first.

Erin: We're talking billions and billions and billions of dollars that have now been paid out, and had you just taken that money and invested it on the upfront, you'd still be making money as a company. You'd probably have more money as a company. You certainly would have saved the environment and to boot, you would have saved some lives. I think we need to re-look at some of our business models and our policies, and how it is we're running our operations. I think we're past the time to do that.

Caitlin: Well, I just want to say it's really refreshing to hear the way that you talk about these things. I think the idea of policy reform is so dry and so much of these conversations just get lost in jargon and are hard to understand and made to be exclusive to experts, but at the heart of it all is a common sense need as you're expressing for safety and taking care of public health and the environment, and that really should be the top priority of all of our environmental agencies. I just want to say it's refreshing to hear your take on this, because we don't often hear these issues described the way that you describe them in such a compelling way.

Erin: Well, I hope that helped. It's been years of experience watching and seeing this myself. We do talk at the end of the book and maybe we'll get there, there's so much to talk about on climate change, but it's sticking out of my mind right this moment about Johannesburg, South Africa. They were going to have day zero, no water and pollution is one of our issues with water, but I'm telling you, climate change is going to be an issue with our water and all these legionnaire and bacterial outbreaks, and the fact that we're going to have too much water, not enough water or no water. This is bringing me to a point in the community how they worked together, how they rationed together, how they worked with their governments together to divert day zero, and they did.

Erin: We are able to do the same, but what we're not doing is something that I learned when I had the absolute privilege of getting the Julius B. Richmond award from Harvard in around 2002 or 2003. That was about preparedness, and that is one thing we're still not doing after the conversation you and I have had, that the idea of writing Superman's Not Coming, which I even open up with Rachel Carson and in 1963, she wrote man has now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature, but a destruction upon nature is inevitably a war upon ourselves. Rather



than try to master nature, we need to begin to master ourselves and how we're responding. The Cuyahoga River in 1960 was on fire.

Erin: My gosh, then Hinkley happened in the '90s and the movie came out in 2000. Here we are having this conversation today and nothing's gotten better. In fact, it's steadily gotten worse, and we continue to kick that can down the road. We need to be prepared and what's the worst case scenario if doomsday never arrives? Fabulous, but what if it does, how you're prepared and how you move towards that solution drives the outcome of where we'll be tomorrow. All the fighting, it's like are we kidding, republican or democrat? None of you want to be poisoned. We don't want to have to deal with these disasters, but not dealing with them and kicking the can down the road and just the finger pointing, I could blame everybody for everything all day long, but where is that going to get any of us?

Erin: We have a problem, and I can't think of anything greater than our environment and our water supply because when it's done and gone, we're done and gone. I truly believe we are at a moment, a real wake up where we the people... You know that old seal, by the people for the people, we the people. We the people have forgotten to believe and we the people. We don't have to wait for all these magical oversights that get corrupted for a whole host of reasons or lost, and not every single thing will be diabolical. It could just be something that we've learned, we have to take a look at it and there may be no one to sue.

Erin: That can't be the end game and how we are able to just say, "Yeah Houston, we have a problem and we need to deal with it, and we need to find a solution to it. We are inherently great. We're just not solution driven and we have every single means to turn the corner on this and to clean up the environment, and to understand these chemicals and the science on the up front before it ever enters the system."

Caitlin: I wanted to turn to your Community Healthbook project that I saw you're launching on your website, where people are submitting information about what they're experiencing on the ground. Would you explain more about what that is?

Erin: Community Healthbook became for me again I'm visual, and I need to see things and for me seeing is believing. I think most of us are visual, right? That's the one thing I did in Hinkley. If somebody wasn't sure, I'd take him a document. I'd take him information. I gave them something in their hand that they could look at. Again, that's what we were talking about in the very beginning, Superman's Not Coming. It's like a manual, something you can have in your hand that you can reference, that you see. I would get an email and ever since the movie came out, I was getting emails from 126 different countries and territories. When I began my work in Hinkley and hex chrome, I thought it was a one-off.

Erin: I certainly learned in my map by looking up one day and just tracking everybody that was contacting me about chromium-6. Well, it was definitely throughout the



US, but it was also Australia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, South Africa. I'm like wow, that gives me a picture of the magnitude of what I'm looking at. I get emails from people and a mom would write me. She'd say, "I don't know if I should be writing you. I don't know if I'm on the wrong track. Maybe you can help me, but we've been told we have this in our water, and I think it's odd that my son at nine was diagnosed with a rare cancer, could be leukemia." You do think, "Oh that's a tragedy and it's odd, and it's one child."

Erin: Statistically, someone's going to come in and say that's not statistically important, or significant. I have it in my mind and then a week later, I have another email. I'm like, "That's funny, that's from the same town." I would start running queries on my emails, and I'd put in the name of the town St. Joseph, Missouri just off the top of my head. Unbeknownst to me, I had six emails from the same community, all complaining of a chemical they learned was in their water, or something they were told, but all these children and unbeknownst to them have a similar disease pattern. I started to plot it on a map, and I turned around one day and there was like 350 dots on the map from me plotting it that way.

Erin: The minute I saw that visually, I saw a big picture and I'm like, "What the hell is going on out there? What is a common denominator? Water, air, soil, land?" I started to recognize a pattern and state by state has registries, but we don't have a national registry database, which blows my mind and we can't because of HIPAA. When I first showed my map up on the hill, it was when Senator Boxer was still there and it was her working group, her environmental working group. I was testifying if you will with the NRDC, National Resource Defense Council and a young boy named Trevor Schaefer. Trevor beat a brain tumor that he and numerous of his friends from Boise, Idaho had.

Erin: They didn't make it, he did and he vowed he'd do something about it. Then I shared my map and the senators were like, "What? Okay, so I didn't know that was going on out there. Why would they not report that to us?" I'm like, "Well maybe they had, maybe they felt that they couldn't." They created what's called Trevor's Law under the Obama administration, which is not being implemented at this point, but it is that we need to create a national registry database. I have already seen the patterns just with people reporting to me, but no one else can report it to the other state. We have energy facilities in three different states all having the same pollution issues and yet, each community within those state is experiencing the exact same health issues.

Erin: If we could look at this and see the bigger picture, we could make the associations with chemicals, we could eradicate chemicals. We might start knowing that this chemical in fact has an effect on why we're getting a cancer. Maybe we can find a medicine. Again, this is where I said we are inherently great. We're not solution driven and we need the tools, and we have the tools for us to see the big picture. What I also see with people is as they migrate away from somewhere, chemical exposures can have long latency periods. You could be exposed to a low level of a chemical for 15 years and maybe not see any effect from it for 10 more years.



When they get sick or they have cancer disease, it gets reported to the state in which they reside, but not where they're from.

Erin: We had a community in Minnesota that has a huge TCE contamination, and I'm pleased to announce the governor has now banned the use of TCE in that state, but they couldn't get any help. The law wasn't involved because there was five major defendants. We're going to be in court for 30 years, and they were desperately trying to get awareness. The media got involved, and they created a Facebook group. They blasted it out and just by word of mouth, or a friend of a friend, or picking up the phone, thousands of people got to that Facebook that were from that area that had lived and grown up there and graduated from there, but moved away. What was fascinating about that was 900 had cancer.

Erin: Those 900 cancers got reported somewhere else, but not to where they were from. You almost miss a dataset, and I learned this in Hinkley. They did a lot of studies and it came out, 'Erin Brockovich was wrong, there's no cancer cluster in Hinkley,' and I didn't start that case for the fact that there would be a cancer cluster. People were being poisoned. It was that simple, and I actually ended up talking to the reporter and I said, "I'm intrigued on the study and so what amounts of cancer were you expecting to find?" The number was 221 and I said, "Okay, well, I'm not sure where you got that number from, but okay, so how many did you find?" They go, "196." I'm like, "Yeah, close. What years were you looking at?" "92 to 96."

Erin: I'm like, "Why were you looking in the years when the numbers were certainly the lowest. Did you bother to track people's movements for where they had moved?" "No." I go, "Well unfortunately, I had and it was just by mistake, but I'd had over a hundred people reach out to me after the film to say, hey I grew up there and I have this disease or cancer. If you add that to 196, I think you exceed 221." We have ways to miss these datasets, and the people hold those answers if we can give them a place. Think about this, we don't have any self-reporting and if we self-report and the people want to provide the information and share it, so they can see a bigger picture, so maybe in the future they don't have these diseases, you can get around HIPAA.

Erin: We can begin to look at the big picture, what is a common denominator? Is it the water? Is it a chemical? Is it happening in other communities? Is it an anomaly, but see, this is where we are better than this and we can find the solutions to this, and absolutely with the help of the law. They are the front fighters of all of this in getting this information together and getting Trevor's Law enforced, which is a requirement of an administration in our government to do and begin to implement it. I think there's always this fear that there's no money to be made in the solution, and nothing could be further from the truth. We must address this, and it's our water and it's our health and welfare.

Erin: Again, I've said it and I'm going to say before. You can't keep kicking the can down the line, you got to pick that can up and own it. We just have to take a deep



breath and look at it, and start maneuvering our way through it, but we're never going to get there if we can't see the big picture, or see where that community is and how we can begin to infiltrate ourselves if you will into that community with knowledge and information and inspiration, so that they'll pick up that banner and they'll get in and fight in their own backyard. If every one of us did that in our own backyard, in our own city council across the board, we'd actually get something done.

Caitlin: Wow, well that was incredibly inspiring.

Erin: I'm sorry, I talked so much.

Caitlin: No, no, no, I'm thrilled that we're recording this. That way, I think myself and the listeners can all benefit from coming back and listening to this when we have our dark days and these problems feel too big. I think you really do a great job of showing how important it is to just take that first step and get started where you can. I want to wrap up today by just telling you that as I read the book, I was marking it up, I was flagging pages. I was making notes and I felt bad at first like, "Oh no, this is such a beautiful book. I'm defacing it," but the more that I read the book, I realized this is what this book is meant for.

Erin: Yeah.

Caitlin: This is how people should treat this book. It should become well-worn and well-loved. It should be something that goes with you to your community meetings, and something that you can also go to when you're feeling overwhelmed for words of encouragement, like you just shared with us, for stories of everyday people who are working to make a difference. There's so much practical information in here, how to find water reports, how to read them, how to write a petition, how to create a successful media pitch. It's just an incredible resource and even if you are someone like me who's a lawyer, or if you're someone who's a scientist, it's an incredible look into science communication too from my perspective.

Caitlin: The way that you break all this down and make it accessible for people, and really just get to the heart of the issues and the most common sense approaches that we need to take. I just want to say this is not a book that you read once and you put on shelf. This is something that people are going to want to keep going back to. Thank you so much for writing it, and thank you so much for being our guest today.

Erin: Oh, thank you. I really appreciate it and I have to say so many of us are afraid of or the sciences or our numbers, and we shouldn't be. It's been a journey for me to learn that I had it all along. It's the story and I'll close with this real quick I've just been stuck with it for quite some time and people close to me will tell you, "Oh, here she goes again," is the book the Wizard of Oz and L. Frank Baum wrote it at the pre-height of the industrial revolution. You can go Google all this. It's been



studied by many a scholar. It's got a huge political allegory. We are in that moment again, and he wrote the book at the pre-height of the industrial revolution as a way to teach his children the power of individualism and thinking for oneself in a world that would increasingly begin to speak for them.

Erin: I'm from Kansas, so I was fascinated with the film Wizard of Oz. I always thought I was Dorothy, and Dorothy in the book is a representation of the American girl and the girl next door. Aren't we all on that journey to want to find our life? I was always Dorothy in my head, and the book fascinated me with the political allegory. As she ran away from home, she's got to go find herself. Haven't we all been there? The twister comes, and the twister is actually a representation in the book of disruption in Washington DC. The house carries her away and they land on the munchkins, which is a representation of the people who are frustrated because they're not getting the answers, but she can get them if she'll go find the Wizard.

Erin: Off she goes to follow the yellow brick road, follow the standard of money because the yellow brick road represented the gold standard, the path of money. The scarecrow was a representation of the American farmer, who had no brain because at that time, the banks were buying up all the land. Look what's happening with our farmers today, and the Tin Man was a representation of industry, who lost his heart. I really take a look at some of our American workers today. They've lost their heart, and then the Cowardly Lion was William Bryan's Jennings, L. Frank Baum's best friend who was always running for president, had a lot of fiery rhetoric, but had no courage.

Erin: That makes me sit and think about some politicians that I know, but you get the gist. This is a representation of L. Frank Baum's book of the American people, the American dream, the industry worker, the politician, the farmer, the girls next door. Here they go on the yellow brick road, but what happens? The wicked witch put him to sleep, and I think did that happen? Did we buy an illusion? Did we get comfortable? Did we get complacent, but you know the moral of the story and where I'm going with this. Sure enough, they get to the wizard and what happens? They pull the curtain back and they're like, "Wait a minute, there is no wizard, but oh we, the people, we have a heart, we have a brain, we have the courage.

Erin: When we find that again and I think that we are and that wake up moment is here, we're going to find our way back." I'm fascinated with it. I think we're in that parallel, and I think we are waking up. I think by the people, for the people, we the people. We the people need to believe and we and who we are again, and find your voice, find your courage. You have a brain. You know right from wrong. You got that common sense set of skill. Use your heart, wake up, get involved. We're in a fork in the road. It's time for us to shift gears. I think we're going to get there.

Caitlin: Well, that's I think the perfect note to end on. Thank you so much.



- Erin: That's my little inspiration for the day, as simple as it sounds. Sometimes, we overthink things and I know we know. I do think everything I've said was all good and well-intended and over decades, like a mass of water that can erode hills and valleys and create and change formations. We are that and we are the environment, and we need to reconnect to it. When we do, we'll refine ourselves. No, that's not a legal thing, but to understand the law and to understand politics and to understand the environment, you need to understand yourself, and you need to own who you are, shortcomings and all. Not one of us is perfect. Embrace those flaws.
- Erin: They can be your hidden gift and find that courage right there in your solar plexus, and grab it and go make your life when I'm banking on these next gens that they're going to do just that.
- Caitlin: Oh, well it's just so wonderful to hear something so uplifting when we spend a lot of time feeling very concerned about what's going to happen next, especially in this moment. I should mention we're recording this on October 28th, so we do have a big election coming up in this country that I know is causing a lot of people anxiety.
- Erin: Yes.
- Caitlin: I think as you said, I mean we need to remember at the end of the day, this all comes back to people and we, the people and connecting with ourselves and understanding why we've created the system that we've created, and why we're in some of the situations that we're in.
- Erin: We can change that again and it's not ever throwing. I think people will think about me, I'm all about throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Absolutely not. Everything we've done has gotten us where we are today. We do need to reinvest in our infrastructures, and we as people have got to start believing again we actually do have a say. When you wake up superman's not coming, it shouldn't be that scary because tag you're it, we're here. We can make these changes.
- Caitlin: Well, thank you again. This has been wonderful and I really appreciate your time.

To return to our website [click here](#).