



Gill Deacon hopes to help individuals live green with new book of eco-ideas

By Lauren La Rose

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO — Prior to taking to the airwaves on her recent eponymous CBC talk show, Gill Deacon was a longtime champion of green living long before eco-consciousness became buzzworthy.

In addition to sitting on the board of directors of World Wildlife Fund and writing extensively about environmental issues, Deacon has made a point of walking the eco-walk in her own life, like packing her kids' lunches in reusable cloth napkins and using non-toxic sealants to lay down her flooring.

The environmentalist badge is one the award-winning broadcaster and writer wears with pride, and she said she believes Canadians are also green at heart.

"I like to make the case that I think we're all environmentalists really; we just don't use that word to describe ourselves," said Deacon, who hosted "The Gill Deacon Show" on the public broadcaster before its cancellation last spring.

"Look at the calendars we print off and the scenes we feel united by: the beautiful Rocky Mountains and pristine lakes and sunsets and wooded forests. That's part of the makeup of who we are."

"I don't think I'm alone in the desire to protect nature."

With her new book, "Green for Life: 200 Simple Eco-Ideas for Every Day" (Penguin), Deacon is hoping to make the transition easier for individuals seeking to embrace eco-living

The 41-year-old said the book is in the same spirit of her previous how-to guide, "Green Tips: How to Save Money and the Planet," loaded with suggestions on doing everything from laundry to washing windows while keeping the good of the Earth top of mind.

Deacon recalls some surprising revelations that emerged while researching the book on things she admits she hadn't given much thought -- like the kind of toothpaste her three sons used.

"I was researching about all these dangerous dyes, colourful dyes that are used in all kinds of processed foods and food products which I certainly hadn't been feeding my kids and I'd been avoiding



them very consciously whenever possible,” Deacon recalled during an interview from her downtown home. “But then I realized, ‘Look at their toothpaste! It’s this bright red and bright green.’”

She later started paying more attention to the chemicals used in commercial toothpaste, citing research in the book that found certain ones can create chloroform or dioxins depending on whether they’ve reacted with sunlight or water, and opted to switch her children to natural toothpaste.

Deacon also tackles the issue of having sex in Earth-friendly fashion, from switching to vegetable, soy or beeswax candles to set the mood to using natural lubricants.

When it comes to contraceptives, one option Deacon asks women to consider is a copper intrauterine device.

Deacon said her intention is not to be the judge of people’s lifestyle choices, particularly with something as personal as birth control, but rather to ensure they are informed on the issues.

“It’s a really big problem, the hormones that women are excreting into the water system, and I don’t think it’s something a lot of people are aware of,” she said, speaking about the estrogen found in the Pill, patch and hormone injections.

“I guess I just wanted, in all aspects of this book, to help people make informed choices. (It) is all you can really ever hope for.”

A five-month investigation by The Associated Press released this week determined that trace amounts of many pharmaceuticals, including sex hormones, are seeping into U.S. drinking water supplies, with a growing body of research indicating that this could harm humans.

While Deacon said organics are “frustratingly expensive,” people can opt to start incorporating them by choosing to buy one product they consume a lot of, like milk.

The other more affordable and available alternative that’s also environmentally friendly is trying to buy local.

In addition to supporting the local economy and helping farmers to keep diversified crops, it’s healthier in the long run since foods don’t need as many preserving chemicals and non-ripening chemicals sprayed on them, she said.

Deacon said it’s important that eco-conscious consumers are judicious about their decisions and aware of the “greenwash” that exists.



“When something becomes as popular and as top of mind as the environmental movement is, there’s always going to be those who want to capitalize on that for marketing purposes or for image-branding purposes without an actual sort of authentic eco-agenda.”

“It’s really important to look at ingredients. Just because something says ‘natural’ on the package doesn’t mean it’s what you think it means.”

“It’s really important to pay attention to the whole story.”

Ultimately, Deacon said she finds the experience of living green “fuelling.”

“It’s so fulfilling and rewarding to take steps on your own and do something you know is making your family healthier or your home less toxic or your small personal footprint just a little smaller,” she said.

“It feels good and it makes you feel like you’re part of a solution, and that’s very empowering.”