



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Cartoonist goes “Heart to Heart” on new Dalai Lama book

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The award-winning illustrator behind the comic strip “Mutts” appeared on the International Campaign for Tibet’s podcast and video conversation series last week to share the “little jewel of a book” he created with the Dalai Lama.

“A world where everyone were as kind and joyful as His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] would be a whole different world,” Patrick McDonnell said on ICT’s “Tibet Talks.” “And we can do it. This book is telling us it’s time for us to do that.”

“Heart to Heart: A Conversation on Love and Hope for Our Precious Planet” features illustrations by McDonnell, alongside simple yet profound words from the Tibetan spiritual leader delivering a powerful message about solving the Earth’s environmental challenges and practicing compassion toward all living beings.

The book, published by HarperOne and released Jan. 24, 2023, is available now at major bookstores and online retailers. Proceeds benefit the International Campaign for Tibet.

“Heart to Heart” conversation

During ICT’s Tibet Talk, recorded Jan. 26, McDonnell spoke with ICT Board Member Pam Cesak and Interim Vice President Tencho Gyatso, two people who were involved in the creation of the book.

He offered the audience a brief glimpse into “Heart to Heart” by sharing over a dozen slides from the book’s beginning, with images of climate destruction around the globe and a panda surrounded by the stumps of chopped-down trees in a Tibetan forest.

The panda decides to make a pilgrimage to Dharamsala, India, the exile home of the Dalai Lama, to “get some answers about what is going on in his world,” McDonnell said. His Holiness greets the bear with a bow and a scratch under his snout. “I welcome everyone as a friend,” the Dalai Lama tells the creature. “In truth, we share the same basic goals: we all seek happiness and do not want suffering.”

“Then His Holiness and the panda go on a little walk in the nearby forest,” McDonnell recounted on Tibet Talks, and “have a heart to heart on the ways of the world.”

Favorite illustration

McDonnell shared his “favorite page from the book,” which depicts the Dalai Lama kneeling before the panda, with the ghostly outlines of deceased animals arrayed behind the bear.

“Perhaps one day,” His Holiness says, “we will kneel down and ask the animals for forgiveness.”

McDonnell said a friend of his who is an animal activist broke into tears after seeing that illustration.

Although “Heart to Heart” pulls no punches about the devastation humankind has caused the planet, the book offers a message of hope.

“We humans are the only species with the power to destroy the earth as we know it,” the Dalai Lama says on one page. “Yet if we have the capacity to destroy the earth, so, too, do we have the capacity to protect it.”

With his arm wrapped around the panda’s shoulder, His Holiness talks about how real change in the world can only come about through a change of heart.

“What I propose is a compassionate revolution,” he says.

“Everything we do has some effect—even a simple act. Although it might seem insignificant, when we multiply it by billions of others who might do the same thing, we can have an enormous impact.”

How the book was born

During the Tibet Talk, McDonnell spoke about the origins of “Heart to Heart.”

The idea for the book, he said, arose when he joined Cesak, the ICT Board Member, and her husband Jerry, who served with McDonnell on the Humane Society of the United States board, on a trip to Africa to see the continent’s majestic animals.

“One night under the stars, we were talking about how beautiful Africa was but, more importantly, how fragile it is,” McDonnell recalled.

He said Cesak mentioned to him that protecting the environment is a major concern of the Dalai Lama. “I think Pam and my wife Karen started saying, ‘Well, maybe Patrick could do a book with His Holiness.’”

Cesak shared the idea with Gyatso, ICT’s Interim Vice President, who reached out to the Dalai Lama’s office, which gave its consent to work on a book to share His Holiness’ message through McDonnell’s much-loved artwork.

Meeting the Dalai Lama

McDonnell—who took his first sabbatical in nearly 30 years of working on “Mutts” to create “Heart to Heart”—is doing extensive promotion for the book. He will speak with ICT Chairman Richard Gere at

Warwick’s, a family-owned bookstore in La Jolla, Calif., on Thursday, Feb. 2. Interested attendees can register online now to take part in the event virtually.

Gere has offered written praise for “Heart to Heart,” as have other notable figures, including Jane Goodall.

Although the pandemic has prevented McDonnell from visiting Dharamsala till now, he plans to travel to the Tibetan exile capital in April alongside Cesak, Gyatso and others.

There he will share “Heart to Heart” with the Tibetan community—and finally present it to the Dalai Lama.

McDonnell said with a smile that he might even ask His Holiness to name the book’s panda protagonist, who, McDonnell said, might find his way into some of the “Mutts” strips.

“We’ve been waiting for that trip [to Dharamsala] for a long time,” Cesak said, adding that McDonnell should create a sequel to “Heart to Heart.” “We have to work on book number two.”

“I would love to do a second book,” McDonnell said. “If we can make that happen, count me in!”



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