FOREWORD

The grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* and the resulting oil spill in March 1989 was a terrible tragedy. Arguably even more tragic was the Supreme Court decision in June 2008 to reduce the punitive award against Exxon to $507 million, a mere ten percent of the original jury's verdict. These two tragedies should, however, serve as a warning. We the people must demand that such travesties of justice are never again repeated.

As Riki Ott points out, the first of these two tragedies demolished habitats, killed millions of fish, animals, and plants, destroyed communities and families, wiped out businesses, and resulted in untold human suffering—as well as causing the severe economic and ecological losses that made headlines around the world. The second tragedy not only took away the possibility that some of the problems had a chance of being solved, it did something that ultimately may be far more devastating. The Supreme Court decision sent a chilling message throughout the world that was eloquently expressed by the people most impacted, those of Cordova, Alaska. In words painted on placards to post on the walls of willing businesses they announced: GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN WEALTHY and CORPORATIONS WIN. It is up to us—citizens, consumers, parents—to make sure that this message is reversed.

Not One Drop tells some of the personal stories behind the *Exxon Valdez* calamity. As I read about the lives of these people and the land they call home, I kept thinking about my nine-month-old grandson, Grant. I bounced him on my knee and wondered what sort of place he will inherit from us when he reaches my age, six decades from now. If we continue on this path, if we allow corporations to wreak havoc on environments and societies, if we subscribe to a judiciary system that perpetuates these crimes (there is no other word for them), and if we elect representatives who are too cowardly or corrupt to implement policies that support our best interests, then the prospects for Grant and all his brothers and sisters around the globe are indeed grim.

There is an alternative. More than anything else, Riki Ott's amazing book should serve as a call to action. In her closing, after pointing out that Cordova is a community and that she is proud to be from "*that* town," she states, "somewhere in our story, there are lessons to break the falls of other communities and to speed their recovery so that, community by community, we can work together to rebuild a nation that, too, has stumbled."

Exxon, like most corporations, is driven by a single goal: to maximize prof-

its regardless of the environmental and social costs. Like the others—whether they sell oil, tennis shoes, or pharmaceuticals—it is a hierarchical organization, not democratic. However, the marketplace is largely democratic. We the people still have the power to determine which corporations will make it, which must change, and which will go under. We exercise this power every time we shop—or choose not to.

Our history books are filled with examples of civil rights, labor, and consumer movements that have brought corporate giants to their knees. In recent years, organizations like Amnesty International, MoveOn, Common Cause, the Clamshell Alliance, and Co-op America have profoundly impacted boardroom policies. Rainforest Action Network (RAN) alone has forced Boise Cascade, Kinkos, Staples, Home Depot, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, McDonald's, and Mitsubishi to adopt policies aimed at conserving fragile forests. RAN announced in 2008 that it would set its sights on Exxon; it recognizes that when a critical mass of car owners become educated enough to refuse to buy gasoline from Exxon, it will have to change its ways—or close down.

The same can be said for every industry. If enough of us decline to buy clothes made in sweatshops, Nike and its peers will have to transform those sweatshops into legitimate factories where workers receive a fair wage, health care, and retirement benefits—or go out of business. We can—in fact, we must—repeat this process with all the goods and services we purchase. As Riki Ott affirms, "democracy is like a campfire; it needs to be constantly tended or it will die."

The way we vote during the election process is important. Our president and representatives affect the makeup of the Supreme Court and the laws that guide regulatory agencies. We need to insist upon a greater separation between government and corporations, including the implementation of policies that prohibit the "revolving door" that allows executives to become the regulators of the industries they once served and then to return to those industries after their government tenure expires. We need to dramatically shift our concept of corporate personhood, rebalance corporate and individual rights, and restructure how cases like that of the *Exxon Valdez* are heard.

However, we must understand that corporations and their lobbyists have the power to influence even the most determined politicians. We must recognize that major shifts—the end of the Vietnam War, clean up of polluted rivers, enactment of equal opportunity employment laws, removal of trans-fats and hormones from foods, movement toward organic foods and renewable

energy, and so many others—occurred because a critical mass of us demanded action. The political and legal changes resulted only after enough of us insisted that they happen.

We have entered a period of history that is not unlike the time when city-states became nations, except today the power is being transferred from nations to corporations. Until recently, we could look at the planet as 180 or so countries; a handful among these influenced most of the others. Now we might better envision the planet as those same 180 or so countries, but they are surrounded by massive corporate clouds that circle the globe. These multinational corporations position themselves above the laws of any specific nation; they often pay no taxes; they form partnerships of convenience—in China, Russia, Iran, South Africa, Brazil, or whatever country best serves their immediate interests. If they do not like the laws of one nation, they move (as Halliburton moved its corporate headquarters from the United States to Dubai) or sell themselves to a foreign entity (as Anheuser-Busch sold to InBev). They appear to be invincible. But they are not.

Even the most powerful corporations are vulnerable to us—we who buy their goods and services. They cannot survive unless we vote for them in the marketplace. We in the United States represent less than five percent of the world's population and yet we consume more than twenty-five percent of its resources. Our language is the language of commerce and diplomacy. Our art, music, literature, TV, and films reach people in the most remote corners of the planet. We are the global trendsetters. This position gives us power and also imposes on us the responsibility to take leadership. The job of forcing corporations to change their ways falls upon each and every one of us.

We the people have been very successful at forcing corporations to clean up polluted rivers, change their hiring practices, alter policies toward cutting rain forests, and implement changes in so many other specific areas. It is now time to take our demands to a new level. We must insist they modify that single goal that drives them. In order to serve our own self-interests, as well as those of Grant's generation, we must mandate that the new goal be: to make profits but only while creating a sustainable, just, and peaceful world.

More than any time in history, we live in a highly integrated and interdependent world. We are connected through the marketplace, global mass media, and the internet. My grandson cannot hope to grow up in a sustainable, just, and peaceful world unless every child born in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America has that same expectation—and it is realized.

The irresponsible exploitation of human and natural resources is a failed

experiment. It has taken us to the brink of catastrophe. We see the results of such reckless polices in the melting glaciers, genocide, rising food and fuel prices, diminishing resources, an increasing trend for desperate people to turn to terrorism—and in the tragedy of the *Exxon Valdez*.

Cordova, Alaska is a microcosm. By allowing Exxon to get away with the outrageous crime it has committed against a community that represents us all and by supporting such actions at the gas pump, we are accomplices. *Not One Drop* demands that we chart a new course. Riki Ott has given us amazing stories. She has documented a most significant event in human history. Above all else, she has served notice that we—and our children—deserve better.

We must fight this battle on many fronts. It is imperative that we convince Congress to reverse the Supreme Court decision in the *Exxon Valdez* case and that we work to change the laws governing corporate responsibility. And it is essential that we—you and I—recognize that we have a responsibility every time we fill up at the gas pump. Ultimately, the power rests with each and every one of us.

As you read the following pages, allow your heart to break. Imagine Cordova as your home and Prince William Sound as your backyard. When you set the book down, make an absolute, iron-clad commitment to join other men and women who are determined to create a world that future generations will want to inhabit.

John Perkins