

## denial

The orchestra played *Nearer my God to Thee...* until the tilt of the Titanic made their chairs slide from under them.

I know that the planetary ecology is very seriously damaged — not just global warming, but the increasing reduction of biodiversity on a global scale is even more dangerous. Dangerous for the health of the planetary ecology and so to our own survival as a species. I can accept that the damage that we have done and are doing to the planet cannot be undone.

At first women and children went first into the lifeboats but soon frantic men pushed them aside to get a seat or even a standing place in the lifeboats. Huge confusion because nobody had foreseen that an unsinkable ship could sink.

I accept that by now there is not much if anything that we, humans can do to avert what now is called the Sixth Extinction. The big corporations are now running the world and they seem blind to consequences of their greed.

I must, but very reluctantly, expect a collapse of the eco-system which means very rapid changes. Either at that time, or before, I also expect the collapse of a world civilization that, more and more, moves the wealth of the earth into the hands of a very few humans. More and more asymmetrical and therefore dangerously unstable.

The unsinkable Titanic sank because their makers had not foreseen — or ignored — Nature. After all, it is natural for icebergs to be in the Atlantic at that time of year.

We too ignore, or deny, Mother Earth. I know that it is more than probable that we have in our unthinking ways caused the dangerous deterioration of the planetary ecology. Not intentional, of course, but unthinking. Maybe not that unthinking either. Fifty years ago we knew the consequence of our frantic rush to what we call progress. We learned to think of progress as something *forever*. We should have known better. Nothing is forever, and our so-called progress is based on the stupid idea that oil, for instance, can be drilled forever. Our sciences and technology are of course impressive but all too often we use them unwisely, pretty much regardless of what side effects there might be, or how things might be 20 years from now.

Native Americans and Africans, perhaps others, used to consider how an important action might affect seven generations into the future. Today the movers and shakers of this world think ahead not even a year.

The first 150,000 years of our being a species we knew ourselves to be a part of nature, each group sharing their corner of the earth with its local animals and plants.

I have known a small group of people that anthropologists think has remained more or

less as they were fifty-thousand years ago. Since then I have read what is written about other meetings with First People, These accounts are amazingly similar to my experiences. The few remnants of first people that survive, always in the most inhospitable places, are joyful, seem unencumbered with our worries. All of them — the same goes for most indigenous people — intimately aware and knowledgeable of all nature around them. They do not know the concept 'owning'.

People say, "That may well be, but what is it to us? We cannot go back to being primitive. Our brains are more refined and larger than the brains of lower animals. Why should we not use the sciences and technologies that have gotten us to this world, where —at least here and in Europe and perhaps a few other countries — some of us live with wealth, convenience, and freedom from the restrictions of nature. Why change?"

The only answer to that must be that our life style is utterly unsustainable. Or, someone reluctantly accepts Climate Change, but "What can I DO?"

Here a few of my answers to *What can we DO?*

— We are so enamored of our sciences and technologies that we ignore the enormous damage that has been, and is being done to our planet by aggressively pushing on without much concern for consequences. When DDT first came on the market we thought we had found the magic powder that would infinitely increase crops. Some years later we outlawed DDT because of its lethal side effects. By the way it is outlawed here, but the chemical companies are still making it for desperately poor countries that were never told of its dangers. The oil well a mile below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico is a good example of profit-motivated advanced science that can drill for oil a mile above the bottom of the Gulf, and however many feet further below the bottom of the ocean to get at oil — but very obviously we don't know what we are doing. The technology for stopping a runaway bore hole is the same as it was 30 years ago when we could find oil under our feet.

— Still answering *what we can do*. We here, on the island called Hawai'i know for a certainty that any minute lava could find a new opening somewhere on this island; the entire island is one enormous volcano, 36,000 feet high measured from the bottom of the ocean to the top. We don't know where and when lava will come out of the ground, but we know it has happened for ages, and the volcano is still "active" — has been for the past 28 years..

And then our frequent earthquakes. Many dozens a day, but usually too small to feel. Our earthquakes are not caused by colliding tectonic plates, as almost everywhere else. Ours are caused by the volcano. Sometimes, suddenly, a large area slides down. One such slide happened about 175 years ago, when the piece that slid downhill was so large that it made a tsunami that wiped out most of the coastal villages of that time. Not long ago a large chunk near here slid down 6 inches.

Hawaiians who have lived on these islands for 2000 years are quite laconic about the volcano. In fact, they revere the The Lady Pele. When Pele chose to wipe out a village

near here, a few years ago, Hawaiians moved out of the way.

What then can we here DO? The answer of course is: we can only accept that the land is unstable, we accept that lava streams down to the ocean where the hot lava interacts with salt water, making what we call *vog*. A year or so ago one of the holes where lava had not been fluid for a long time suddenly began to smoke. So far no lava, but a few quakes. And the gas, sulfur tri-oxide. Those fumes, we call *haze*, go where the wind pushes it of course. I am allergic to it; many people are allergic to *vog*.

There is nothing we can do about the volcano. We learn to think differently.

Scientists know that the planetary ecology is much more unstable than it has been for as long as we existed as a species. That instability is felt differently in different parts of the world. There are islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans that already experience the rising level of the world ocean. Those islanders know that their islands are disappearing. The predictions for the rise of the ocean change yearly. Scientists now think the level of the oceans may increase by a meter (three feet) some time between the middle and the end of the century. More ocean, and also more drought. The southwest of mainland America will be increasingly dry, water sources will dry up.

And yet, polls tell us that more than half of all Americans think that Climate Change is a hoax. We seem to be alone in not "believing" something that is already happening.

Are there then no things we can do as individuals?

Yes, we can change *how we think*. Accept that major and unpredictable changes can, will, happen all over the globe. Be mentally prepared for... who knows what.

In the meantime we can change our life style in order to make the air a little cleaner. Use less oil, less driving, and use less electricity which in most areas is generated by burning oil or coal. Eat no, or only a little, meat. Recycle what can possibly be recycled. Make do when before we would have bought new. Simplify, simplify. All my bulbs are that spiral kind that use a fraction of the electricity used by incandescent bulbs. I have an electric water heater that is on only ten minutes a day for a shower. All washing (dishes and clothes) is done with cold water.

There are endless ways we can simplify our life style, but most important is to change out thinking.

What I am doing could be called *joyful acceptance* of an uncertain chaos. I accept every day; there is only today. Not a bad way to live at all. Each day, each hour, has the joy of living, being among all kinds of life around me.

When I began this writing I named it Denial. I'm frequently surprised by how many people I know who deny that anything is out of the ordinary. Of course I have learned that my voice is less loud and visible than the information that we are allowed to know. From my point of view much of what the main Media give us is misinformation, sometimes outright lies. I cannot escape the notion that we are manipulated deliberately by

the people at the top, They mean to keep us uninformed. An uninformed population is easier to control — ultimately with the purpose of hiding from us the theft of the planet's as well as our own wealth. Moving more of the wealth to the hyper rich, rather than rescue the millions of people who have lost jobs and homes. We can object, protest, but they have the guns. Okay, we (not I) too have guns, but their guns are bigger.

Denial is everywhere; I don't get it.

Maybe you are one of the many people who don't want to know.

I prefer to know. I've thought about my own mortality, who hasn't? I accept death as one of those things that just is; *life is not possible without death*. And so I can also accept the vulnerability of our species. The unique thing of what scientists now call "the Sixth Extinction" is that we are doing it to ourselves. We, humans, only one of the millions of species of this earth, yet we think our rightful place is at the top of the heap. We are sure we can control nature.

No, we cannot.

It seems we cannot stop the ruthless exploitation of what we call *resources* of the planet. As if all the riches of the earth belong to us — no, not anywhere near all of us, only those most aggressive who imagine themselves the owners and rulers of the planet. Hubris (look it up).

The opposite of denial is *joyfully being in the now*. Clearly "now" is all there is. Yesterday is past, dead. Tomorrow has not been, so we cannot be in tomorrow. Today of course can be thought of as the child of yesterday, but today is all there is.

Imagine us on a fancy cruise ship we think unsinkable. The Titanic was hailed as unsinkable. Yet it sank, and all it took was a simple and obviously predictable collision with an iceberg; it did not take much time to slide into the deep. To the many of us still on a cruise ship with all the comfort of home I say, It is all right to know that there are icebergs, we cannot predict a tsunami, our cruise ship may get hung up on a recently disappeared atoll. Accept that our lives will change according to how the Sixth Extinction affects our particular home.

Change is what life is all about. Why not accept it and enjoy the ride...

Today is all I have, and it is good.

robert wolff, 3 june 2010