

Some recent headlines:

- Amazon drought** generated [as much CO2 as US](#) (Feb. 2011)
- Speed of Greenland ice melt** sets [new record](#) (Jan. 2011)
- Thirty percent** of species could go [extinct](#) from warming (Jan. 2011)
- 2010** emerges as [wettest year on record, ties for hottest](#) year recorded (Jan. 2011)
- CIA** focuses on [security implications](#) of the changing climate (Jan. 2011)
- Researchers** link [climate change to Queensland floods](#) (Jan. 2011)
- Scientists discover** dramatic [increase in methane release](#) (Jan. 2011)
- Study links** [harsher winters](#) with global warming (Dec. 2010)
- Is the Sun about to fizz out? Colder?** [Colder?](#) (June 2011)

Here we call them ‘Climate Deniers’, people who don’t *believe* in Climate Change. They probably have other ideas as well that I cannot share. Not important because most of the rest of us know that the enormous changes in our local weather are not deniable. Climate Change or extreme weather — it’s here. Last summer New York and Washington, DC had temperatures over 100° F. This winter they had one snow blizzard after another. Even a tiny bit of research will lead you to a web site that explains how when the planet warms, the polar ice caps melt. That means more moisture in the air. Normal winter cold makes snow from the extra moisture.

We live on a planet that is alive. Modern humans seem to think the planet is just a thing, the ground we live on. We can move mountains, rivers, dig up treasures and graves, destroy forests. In short, making major changes to this earth. We have forgotten — do not understand — that Mother Earth is a living whole, an ecology, everything interrelated. The ancient Maya are supposed to have had a saying that went something like “the flap of a butterfly wing here can result in a hurricane far from here.” Very true.

We, and all life forms, live in what is called the ‘biosphere’, a thin layer of rock, water and air around the planet. The biosphere is an ecology, a oneness. The changes we make has consequences tomorrow, or far away — usually both. Our atmosphere has changed by what we proudly call ‘industrialization’. There are now more gases in the upper atmosphere that hold in the heat of that industrialization. Much of the heat that comes to us from the sun added to the heat we make no longer flows off into space but stays around our earth. Melted polar ice is now water. What was white snow and ice is now darker water that absorbs heat not reflect it. The world’s oceans warm up. If you have ever cooked something you know that hot water stands higher in the pan than cold water; water expands when it gets warmer (almost everything does). That added to the melted snow and ice raises the level of the ocean.

That is no longer a matter of whether we believe it or not, it's happening. Not important who did it. Whoever or whatever caused this significant and rapid change in all aspects of our Earth requires that we adapt to it, for our very survival as a species. Add to that the equally rapid diminishing of biodiversity — a necessity for a healthy ecology — and we must accept that if we want our children and grandchildren to have a life we must learn a whole new way of living now.

I don't like *how-to* books even though every publisher and promoter has told me that how-to books *sell*. Yep, I believe that because all of us in this twenty-first century are confused, overwhelmed, lost, and we need answers. Tell you a secret: there are no answers or, the same thing, there are as many answers as there are people. Each one of us, every group, tribe, nation, must and will do whatever they have to do to survive. Yes, it is about survival. I cannot tell you how to survive, but I have great faith in human beings because surviving, adapting to changes, has always been our greatest talent.

My slogan for this year, the next few years, is to really understand that

WHAT THERE IS IS ALL THERE IS,

What there is has always been enough for the earliest people to live joyful and good lives. No luxury, no swollen bank account, but enough to eat, a sufficient shelter to stay warm and dry. And above all a group of friends, neighbors, family that was a oneness. We cared and we shared.

I once knew a small tribe of people who lived in the utmost simplicity and had not changed much for several thousands of years. What impressed me more than anything else about them was that they were joyful, they enjoyed life, they shared and cared. True, they did not own a thing. They did not need to. No money, no leaders, no laws except of course the laws of nature and those are few and easy to know. What I learned from them is that living outside of our immensely complicated world with our millions of restrictions and rights, bureaucracies within bureaucracies, is not only possible, but positively joyful. We in our modern world talk a lot about freedom, liberty -- we have forgotten what that means. From my own experience I know that what we call 'primitive' people were truly free.

I know—of course I know— that we cannot even imagine living without for instance a refrigerator. When and where I grew up we did not have a refrigerator. There was an ice box, and maybe once or twice a week a truck would bring a block of ice. We lived in the tropics. The ice never lasted until the truck came again. We ate differently, what we ate was cooked on a very clever charcoal burner that had a kind of oven built into the chimney. Food came from the banana trees we grew, a vegetable garden, but also from daily shopping for a few necessities in the neighborhood. Our diet was simpler but I'm sure also healthier: there was no manufactured food. Today, at least in this country, all the food we buy is packaged, wrapped in tight plastic, almost all of it made in factories. Recently farmers markets sprung up everywhere. There I can buy fruit and vegetables as they are, I bring my own bag and stuff it with bananas, a few potatoes, some vegetables if need them. Even bread I can buy now at the market, freshly baked, just as it is, no plastic. I think it may well be illegal to sell anything touched by human hands, but I peel bananas, cook the vegetables. The bread not wrapped — how do you think the bread you buy in stores is wrapped? Touched by human hands of course, but do we know the hands that wrapped all food in plastic?

One of these days there is going to be a big storm,. Power out for a day, two days, three. This has happened and will happen again. Consequence of power out longer than a couple of days: all the stuff in the refrigerator is spoiled.

Yes, I have a refrigerator and I am working on getting it emptier and emptier, and figure out a way to do without. The hardest thing to figure out is how to do without the little freezer in my refrigerator. I have frozen fruit that I like very much (eat every day) but it grows only certain months of the year, so when I can harvest more than I eat, I freeze it. Those of you who live in colder climes have ways to store some foods in underground cellars; here the ground is as warm as the surface. There are many ways to preserve food. People all over the world knew to dry freshly caught meat to make it lasts. We invented canning.

Okay, so you cannot imagine a life without supermarkets, electricity, cars, fast food, smart phones, and flat screen ultra large high definition television. Everybody is younger than I am. You have never known a world without Facebook and texting. No matter. Feel free to not believe me but I know for certain that if it were necessary you could and would adapt. That's what humans are best at: adapting to what is.

You may believe that we live in a world gone crazy. We the people have not gone crazy, but our leaders, our role models, the corporations, our politics, money, have gone crazy, off the track. Yet, as always, it is still you and I who have to find our own path through the maze. There is no guide, the path is not marked; there are no warnings. The path may change under our feet and of course none of that is new. In our long — millennia long — path we have moved from Africa to every last little island on this marvelous planet. We have wandered through nothing but constant changes and mostly we've done remarkably well.

In a few generations of more or less smooth sailing we have fallen asleep. We've been told and taught that things will always be better tomorrow. An ever growing economy, more and better gadgets and gimmicks. We've been urged to buy to keep the economy growing forever and ever. When you think even one moment you will know that nothing grows forever. Turtles are said to live hundreds of years, redwoods for a thousand years. We and our offspring have bettered ourselves — at least a few of us have — for just three hundred years. More than half of all the almost seven billion humans on this planet live in big cities. Mega cities. A large percentage of those city dwellers do not live in apartment houses, certainly not in gated communities, but in slums. Those two or three billion people live in a kind of poverty never known in the entire history of humankind. But they too survive because that is our talent. Whole families, parents, grandparents, children, an uncle or two, all in one space the size of a closet. But somehow they live. They have parties, make music, dance. Probably they don't read this because they have no computer. As it happens I have no internet connection today and since this is early Saturday will probably be without until Monday, if then. Of course I will survive.

Probably we have not kept up with all the plunder of the planet, gambling our future away. Now we're learning that our brainy brawn has gone too far; the planet is pushing back. Our mother Earth is warming, and one of the consequences of our meddling is a stormy unpredictable climate. Hotter in summer, snowier in winter, more storms, wetter somewhere and dryer somewhere else.

The planet is changing. Maybe more rapidly than we can accept, but it is.

Under these circumstances expecting the planet to provide for our ever increasing wants cannot be. It is time that we adjust to the planet again.

And this time adapt to a planet storming and steaming, rolling and rocking, as it has not done in recorded times. But recorded time is only a few centuries; we humans have been on this planet for a thousand centuries. The almost three hundred years of industrialization and now a globalized economy is not even the blink of an eye in planetary time.

I have no idea *how to*. What's more, I am certain that nobody can tell you how to adapt to any new now. Each one of us must find her or his own path. Bon voyage. Have a good trip; *and a trip it will be!* Invent new ways to find food, shelter, friends. Forget goals and objectives; the only goal is survival. To survive we must look to our sides, behind us, below and above. That is how we lived some thousands of years ago, and how we survived when a few of us left Africa to explore the world, settling where we found enough to eat. Our offspring explored the next valley, the next island. Until we covered the planet.

That is how remnants of the original humans lived half a century ago when I happened to come across a few of them. Others have written about other remnants of the original We: the San in the Kalahari Desert, the Mbuti in the Ituri Forest of Central Africa (pygmies—yes, all of us were shorter once), tribes in the Amazon, Eskimos in the Arctic. *All* writers of these remnants wrote of the unusual joyfulness of these First People. They loved life despite its dangers and hurts, 'working' maybe three hours a day, always singing little songs, laughing, dancing, sharing stories around a tiny fire in the evening.

I've been trying to share this joy with you in all my writing. Living without money, without a boss, without any and all the things we think we cannot do without, is the only to be truly free. When we settled down and imagined we owned the land, and the plants, and the animals (and people), we tied ourselves down. We talk endlessly about liberty and democracy and this system and that. We were free of any and all systems. We can be free again.

In fact, we have no choice. The planet is shaking us awake.

Yes, it may well get very unpleasant, but it is happening. It's now.

Not important any more whether we *caused* climate change or not. It's here.

I'm enough of a modern western man to know that the coming years will be catastrophic and not all the seven billion humans will survive. For too long we have ignored, or denied, the laws of nature. One of those laws is that we must live within our means, living with what is. A very simple 'law'.

Scientists who measure everything have counted that we use five times what the planet provides. Obviously that can only be either for a very short time, or because a few of us use up what is meant to be shared by all. Both probably. We all know—and it's in the news every single day—that those in power, who "own" the wealth of the planet, also have the weapons of the planet, and do not hesitate to use those weapons against us.

Western culture is intrigued by predators, but we don't understand that predators and prey go together. Predators need prey, and prey need predators. Predators without prey starve; prey without predators overgraze and so also starve. Predators do not rule an ecology, they are part of it. I strongly suspect that for very much the same natural reason ruthless rulers can never sustain power. Ecologies are about balance, harmony, never about control.

We humans must learn again that our place in the whole of Life is not on top. The planet, Mother Earth, cannot allow one species to dominate all other species. That is the lesson we are going to learn again when the house of cards we call civilization collapses.

Modern scientists have learned much about ecologies and it is unquestionable that the planetary ecology is severely stressed and, as all ecologies, will do

what it takes to regain a balance. Not the balance we grew up in, but a new balance we have to learn to live in. That does not mean that ecologies have a will, it is not a matter of designing a planet as IBM proposes to do. It is what ecologies are.

Scientists have discovered that during the millions of years the planet has had Life, there were five "Extinctions," relatively short periods when a great number of species totally disappeared. The last one is well-known: the extinction of dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. Scientists have also learned that after each Extinction there was a period of very rapid, almost frantic evolution leading to the making of new species. That fits what we know of ecologies: the more varieties there are, the stabler the ecology. A fish tank with a few plants and a few fish is not sustainable as we all know. We must feed the fish and scrape the green stuff off the glass. And even then it only lives for a short time. The world ocean is a womb of life, with an as yet unknown number of species, from single cell organisms barely "living" to whales and dolphins who have larger brains than we have.

Because of the current rapidly diminishing biodiversity scientists talk about the *Sixth Extinction*, the one we are causing with our ruthless plunder of the earth and a consciousness that has forgotten, denied, or ignored, the simplest laws of nature. We, as well as all life, have to live within our means, and we cannot be apart from all other life as we think we can. We not only share the planet with all other life forms, we are ONE. We cannot be more important than any other life form..

So, I think, it is inevitable that we, humans, will have to learn again what we knew for the first hundred thousand years on this planet: that we are equal and interrelated to all other species. Together we make the planetary ecology: *everything related to everything else*.

Keep in the back of your mind the thought that to live with family and friends and nothing but what grows and lives in your neighborhood is not only possible but actually joyful. Caring, sharing. It is real freedom to live within the simple and easy-to-know laws of nature, without the millions of man-made rules that strangle us and make us more and more unsustainable.

Look forward to a tomorrow after tomorrow.

robert wolff, february, april, june, september 2011