ALICE’S BLOG: ON NOT WRITING THE NEWS

By Alice Loyd

For fifteen years I’ve been writing about current events—the news that news sources report—for people who care a lot about protecting the planet. I’ve weighed carefully the content of these columns in order to balance the bad news with the good. I’ve reported advances in green technology as faithfully as I covered the rise of greenhouse gases and the decline of wild populations. In 2017 I sent out an almost daily report of the most pressing issues facing lawmakers state and national, with the goal of encouraging citizen engagement to shape policy. My recent move to a new living situation interfered for a while with reading the daily online papers and passing on what I read, but as I reach the time when I might resume the pattern of fifteen years, I find I can’t. Something has changed.

Part of the change is certainly my new home. My daughter and I have built a small multi-family home in an intentional community on the Deep River in North Carolina, and the process of selling my former house and garden, shedding household goods in order to pare down and pool belongings, and overseeing and moving into new construction has been a 24-hour-a-day project for many weeks. In addition, the delights of the land here and the good company are happy distractions.

I think, though, a larger factor is the big picture that influenced my decision to move and that is more than a backdrop to anything I might do now: the advance of environmental damage, especially climate change. For example, studies announced April 23, 2018, confirm what the team led by James Hansen predicted two years ago from computer simulation: melting Antarctic glaciers are indeed freshening the ocean around them, thus “blocking a process in which cold and salty ocean water sinks below the sea surface in winter.” This interferes with oceanic circulation, which makes harsher superstorms and dramatically rising seas an ever-more-likely outcome (washingtonpost).

But more pressing on me as a serious food gardener is the evidence of this spring’s cold weather. If the weakening of the jet stream due to a warmer Arctic persists, jolts of northern Canada’s air may hit the North Carolina Piedmont on nights in April and May next year too (NPR). The USDA agricultural zones maps are accurate in showing a longer growing season due to overall global warming, but they can’t indicate when the jet stream will sag down into Georgia long after spring growing season has begun. We lost most of the first spring planting this year; to assure a food supply during the transition months in the future, we’ll have to garden under plastic covers.

Increasingly I’m sensing that the progress we’re seeing in carbon-free technology applications (Florida allows residential solar leasing and Windmills as wide as jumbo jets make green energy mainstream) doesn’t go far enough. Alone, these accomplishments don’t bring in the Ecozoic era. Thomas Berry wrote, “Mitigation of the present ruinous situation, the recycling of materials, the diminishment of consumption, the healing of damaged ecosystems—all this will
be in vain if we do these things to make the present industrial systems acceptable. They must all be done, but in order to build a new order of things” (ecozoicstudies.org). The goal is not to bring windmills into the mainstream, but to bring the mainstream into a mutually enhancing relationship with the natural world. Invisible, if present at all in renewable energy and environmental advocacy circles, is analysis of how these technical applications might help achieve that goal.

But what more should activists do? What could these advocates do to help our culture move out of “the present ruinous situation?” What are the steps a society must pass through in order to move from devaluing the natural world into a mutually enhancing relationship with it?

Perhaps a necessary first step is to recognize the value of all human beings. Black Lives Matter, #Me Too, and the gun control campaign of Parkland teens are efforts by marginalized people to gain value in the eyes of the culture, and validation through law and policy is taking place despite the Trump presidency. On April 18, 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order giving parolees the right to vote in New York (CNN). On April 24, 2018, yet another judge ruled that DACA stands, thus continuing protection from deportation for a generation of young undocumented immigrants whose lives “were built on these protections” (CNN).

A second step in the process might take place when organizations focused on the wellbeing of humans speak out to protect the environment as well. On April 18, 2018, NAACP and Latino Victory Project signed onto an ad calling for Scott Pruitt’s resignation. In that story NAACP’s Hilary Shelton is quoted as saying, “We see environmental protection as an issue that falls under equal protection under the law” (thehill.com). NAACP doesn’t represent the dominant culture, however. We’re waiting for the PTAs and Kiwanis Clubs to take similar stands—or to raise racial justice to a higher priority in their programs.

I might speculate about a third step, and seek examples of how these developments are occurring on the margins. But to find and appreciate such gestures doesn’t convince me that we’re not in deep trouble. Even as I make nice by recounting the good that is going on, the bad breaks through. I can’t deny that the evidence speaks strongly of calamity.

Herman’s comparison of our role in the Great Work to the running of a marathon fits well here (read it in this issue). Arduous labor interspersed with highest elation does characterize this race for those committed to the ecozoic path. The companionship I find makes me buoyant, but when I consider the immensity of the task, as Chris Newman wrote, “I feel as a single drop of rain aspiring to a river. It feels too big. Too much. It makes me want to quit. The enormity and the despair and the fear can, and often do, drive me to tears.”

What I want to write about at the moment is how to live during this period: how what we’re experiencing affects people I know and work with, and how they deal with their grief and fear. Maybe I don’t want to write at all; I just want to be with the suffering of humans and non-humans, only to pay attention, merely to care. My tendency to work to correct wrongs is not as
strong as it was. Instead I’m waylaid by questions. “What is this thing?” I’m asking of all I’m observing. “What is it most like? How will it go? How might it change?”

A quote from Dorothy Dinnerstein that I found on a bookmark relates to this questioning:

> Whether our understanding makes a difference or not, we must try to understand what is threatening to kill us off as fully and clearly as we can. There is no way to feel confident that this struggle can really turn the lethal tide; but neither can we be certain that it will not. And in either case to fight what seems about to destroy everything earthly that you love—to fight it not passively and autistically, with denial, and not unrealistically, with blind force, but intelligently, armed with your central resource, which is passionate curiosity—is for me the human way to live until you die.

I know whose side I’m on and whose part I want to defend, and I will fight what is threatening to destroy us. But while the dust settles on my new life, I think I’ll just sit for a while and ponder. We’ll see. We’ll see how this goes and we’ll see it through.