

CHAPTER 49

Magical Moments and Places, Part 4

- There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.* John Adams
- Teach the children so it will not be necessary to teach the adults.* Abraham Lincoln
- Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems — but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems incredible.* Salman Rushdie
- Reality is that which when you stop believing in it, it doesn't go away.* Philip K. Dick
- Reality is divinely indifferent.* Richard Bach, Illusions
- I believe in looking reality straight in the eye and denying it.* Garrison Keillor
- It's not denial. I'm just selective about the reality I accept.* Bill Watterson
- Know what's weird? Day by day, nothing seems to change. But pretty soon, everything is different.* Bill Watterson

This requiem to a magical place (Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory [RMBL]) is the result of reading Dr. Mary Ellen Harte's (2012) poignant description of what has happened at the laboratory that her family, ours, and the numerous other members of the extended RMBL family enjoyed for many years. In each late May and early June, as if drawn by a powerful magnet, the new and old residents of the town of Gothic, Colorado, assembled in this awesome setting of snow draped majestic mountains and alpine meadows carpeted by newly emerged wildflowers with a multitude of colorful, vibrant hummingbirds. The long time residents of Gothic resembled the mythical Scottish village of Brigadoon and resumed their relationships with old friends returning for the summer almost as if they had not been absent for most of the year.

The laboratory is discussed elsewhere in this volume, particularly in Chapter 8 – “The Field Station Era,” Chapter 29 – “The Cairns Family Begins Three Decades at Field Stations,” Chapter 34 – “Ecosystems in My Life,” Chapter 46 – “Climb Any Mountain,” and Chapter 47 – “Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory.” In addition, Harte (2012) covers the biotic and hydrologic changes in the high altitude RMBL area that are a warning of the climate changes that are already occurring or will soon occur in the rest of the Biosphere. Even though changes differ in each component of the Biosphere, some share important similarities.

- (1) Most, possibly all, of the changes are irreversible, so return to an earlier ecological condition is unlikely.
- (2) Global climate changes will markedly influence evolutionary processes and trajectories.
- (3) If business as usual (e.g., exponential economic and population growth) continues, a series of new “normals” will emerge until a dynamic equilibrium is reached — probably a new, quite different, Biosphere.
- (4) No sovereign nation or individual human can negotiate with nature (i.e., universal natural laws)!

(5) Food and water shortages already exist at the global level. Even before recent evidence documenting a decline in renewable resources, riots and civil unrest occurred over food and resource wars over water.

(6) "Even before recent predictions that Arctic sea ice would melt before the summer of 2016 in a 'final collapse,' setting off a 'global disaster,' the Pentagon and the Center for Naval Analyses's Military Advisory Board [both US] had already gone on record warning about the impacts of climate change as a threat to national security" (Parsons 2012).

Even as the magical places of our lifetimes are destroyed by climate change, climate change skepticism is highest in three countries (Japan, Britain, and the United States [Gates 2012a]) that should be persuaded that climate change is real and caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

Only a relatively small number of humans have the opportunity to see alpine meadows similar to the ones near RMBL, but most have an opportunity to see forests — "*Forests cover some 30 percent of Earth's surface, and it's hard to overestimate how crucial they are to the functioning of the planet. Forests provide shelter for uncountable numbers of species, hold soil in place that would otherwise wash away, pull excess carbon out of the atmosphere, absorb and re-emit water at such a rate that they literally control the weather, and serve as an economically vital natural resource*" (Lemonick 2012). And yet humanity, which can hardly miss seeing forests, is causing climate change stress that is killing forests (Lemonick 2012) and allowing organized crime to deforest up to 90 percent of tropical forests (Gates 2012b).

Shame on humanity for having a lifestyle that both despoils nature's beauty and life-support capabilities! This situation is not only affecting generations now alive but is a disgrace to intergenerational ethics.

I remain optimistic enough to believe that we can still prevent more irreversible damage to the present Biosphere, but pessimistic about what, if anything, will be done.

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