

RETHINKING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PLANET

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In 1948 the English astronomer, Sir Fred Hoyle pronounced that “Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from the outside, is available, a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose.”

In 1971 Edgar Mitchell said it best as he looked back to earth on the Apollo 14 mission to the moon. “Suddenly from behind the rim of the moon, in a long, slow motion moment of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth...home.”

Yet today we remain a species with a stone-age mentality and a space age technology wreaking havoc on each other and the planet we depend on for survival.

It is our responsibility and mission to protect and restore the Home Planet if we are going to do more than just survive.

Viewed from space, the most striking feature of our planet is water in both liquid and frozen form. It covers 75% of the Earth's surface and is the evolutionary elixir of physiology. Without water life as we know it would not exist.

The Tijuana Estuary is a microcosm of a macrocosm. It is one of a string of pearls connected through oceans, bays and watersheds around the world. Many remaining estuaries are connected to urban civilization demonstrating the co-benefits shared between communities and estuarine and marine systems. It is a model for integrated urban- estuarine planning and restoration.

“The Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve is one of the most urban reserves in the System. Over 1.8 million people live within a 30 minute drive. This creates both daunting challenges and opportunities inherent in managing sensitive environments within the context of so many people. Though not all Reserves are as urban, all Reserves do share the reality of saving natural systems from the human touch...through the human touch.” (Clay Phillips)

The long trek to protect and enhance the Tijuana Estuary started over 40 year ago.

The road was not easy and was paved with stress and violence. Death threats, bullets and loosening of lug nuts on car wheels were part of the process.

About one third of the Imperial Beach community wanted to protect the estuary and two thirds wanted a marina.

One morning in the fall of 1980, almost ten years after so many people had started the battle to protect the estuary, Patricia and I got a phone call from our good friend Ralph Pisapia, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Ecological Services for the Southern California region. We had been working closely with Ralph for several years in the late 1970's trying to find

a way to save the estuary from development. Ralph asked us to meet with him the following morning on the far end of Seacoast Drive adjacent to the estuary. He did not tell us what he wanted only that he wanted us there. I told Patricia to be prepared for the worst. I hoped Ralph was not trying to let us down gently into disappointment.

Next morning we ventured to the end of Seacoast Drive. There sat a government car with four people inside, Ralph being one of the four. The other three were from Washington D.C. As we talked a pick-up truck pulled up and a man got out. He was wearing cowboy boots, a big rodeo belt buckle and a Stetson. He looked like a real bull rider. Patricia always called him the Marlboro Man. He wandered over to the group. Ralph introduced us: "Mike and Patricia McCoy I want you to meet Larry Dean, refuge manager for the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Imperial Beach, California."

It was truly an emotional moment, one of those once in a life time moments. I could only look back over the years and think of people who had literally put their lives on the line. Some are no longer with us but I will always remember them. The one third had prevailed against what I thought were insurmountable odds. It just did not seem possible. It was a moment that defined a tribute to the Tijuana estuary and the people who dedicated their lives to protect it. Some of the same people continue to protect and restore it today.

Ralph swore us to secrecy when he told us the deed would be transferred from the Helix Land Corporation to the USFWS at midnight Christmas Eve 1980. That was probably the best Christmas gift Patricia and I ever received.

In 1982, continued commitment from many citizens led to the designation of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In 2005, the Estuary became a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. In 2010 the Tijuana River mouth was established as a State Marine Conservation Area guided by The State of California Marine Life Protection Act.

The Tijuana Estuary mirrors the struggles waged across the United States and the world to protect natural areas. We remain encouraged and vigilant today. The estuary is a model of hope and hard work. No effort is ever too small.

I see each of us as agents of change for a better earth to live on and a better world to live in. We must not only work to survive but to address our passion, beliefs and values. One of the great things to come out of our work at the estuary has been to provide meaningful well paid jobs. They restore the earth, provide opportunity to make things better and provide something more besides bottom line economics.

The questions that have always perplexed me, especially with my very personal experience protecting the estuary, is why do some people want to protect life and living systems while others do not? Why would any intelligent creature want to threaten the life support system that protects it? These questions have crossed my mind many times.

The answers to these questions give great insight into who we are as individuals and as a species. We offer hope, opportunity and potential to do better through education and outreach by raising levels of awareness.

It has taken over 3.5 billion years of selection, adaptation and evolution to get to the point where we can even ask these questions.

We humans, *Homo sapiens*, have been part of this process for only about 200,000 years. About 14,000 years ago we started to domesticate animals and about 10,000 years ago we settled into agrarian societies. The pastoral and agrarian societies have probably transformed the planet more than anything else in our entire history.

Agriculture has enabled our species to far exceed the natural carrying capacity of the land allowing our numbers to grow to unsustainable levels putting the planet at risk. The population reached 1 billion by 1804 and 209 more years to reach more than 7 billion today.

Human urban civilization began about 5000 years ago.

250 years ago we embarked on the Industrial Revolution and began to transform the atmosphere. At the beginning the atmospheric CO₂ concentration was between 260 and 280 parts per million (ppm) reaching 391 ppm today. We live on a different planet today than the one I grew up on. Now storms wreak havoc, wildfires burn out of control, forests transform, glaciers and ice sheets melt, sea level rises, the oceans expand, coral reefs die, land is inundated, biodiversity is at risk, rivers shrink, spring comes sooner, summer is hotter, drier and longer, permafrost melts releasing methane leading to a tipping point of no return. The list goes on.

We humans are enabling an aberrant combined force of water and energy formulating a new and unfriendly planet. Yet we

continue mountain top removal to extract coal, we drill in remote wilderness for oil, we destroy Alberta for tar sands and we use hydraulic fracturing for natural gas. The environmental down side of all these technologies is often devastating and the impact on water is significant. The product only exacerbates climate change. Denial threatens generations of species to come including our own.

Climate change is one of the most difficult problems humanity has ever faced. We must move forward swiftly and decisively to reduce fossil fuel emissions preventing catastrophic positive feedback loops that are uncontrollable. Don't be impulsive when you put a key in the ignition. Think about the future. We know the solutions. We must implement them now.

The implementation of research on climate adaptation and mitigation through restoration and carbon sequestration at the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve will enable us to deal with climate change. This will serve as a model for the restoration and adaptation of other estuaries in the United States and around the world.

Today we are in the age of cyber-communication and globalization. We can communicate with anyone anywhere on the planet at nearly the speed of light. It is the message we send out and the way it is received and interpreted that counts.

We put far too much money, too many resources and effort into war, war on ourselves, the land, water and other species.

We can transfer our resources and billions of dollars into restoring and protecting the inextricably linked ecological, sociopolitical and economic systems.

The Tijuana Estuary is on the international border demarcated by the border wall, a tribute to the politics of fear.

The wall encapsulates injustice, economic, social, and ecological disparity and the inability to distribute wealth and opportunity equitably.

At the Reserve we are trying to promote a seamless boundary, working toward a better understanding between two nations. Poverty, bad planning and the force of water make trash, sediment and water quality a threat to the estuary. The solutions to these problems are dependent upon negotiation, agreement and international participation through the International Boundary and Water Commission, other agencies and people on both sides of the border.

We need to move forward to the next frontier. Not the frontier of outer space, but that of understanding the brain, the mind and how we think and relate to one another, to other species and the planet. If we are to do more than survive it is critical we understand our own patterns of behavior.

Life is the gold standard, that thin veil that covers the planet from its highest to lowest point. It is fragile and finite.

We have become a force of nature. We are capable of protecting, restoring and enhancing life and living systems. You have already demonstrated this. You are committed to it. It is your passion.

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Jonas Salk at the Salk Institute in La Jolla. He told me that we must change our priorities and thinking. If we do not, we will

transform the planet and put all life in jeopardy. He went on to say that we must institute some way for people to take silence, become more mindful and take more time in natural settings. We must remove ourselves from the constant day to day stress. Take time to empty the mind and get rid of all the chatter.

Many of the big universities and teaching hospitals around the country are doing research and instituting what Dr. Salk was talking about in the new field of integrative neuroscience.

Human behavior rooted in ignorance causes many of the serious problems we face today.

We can work our way through what E.O. Wilson calls the bottle neck. It is possible to change our attitudes and perceptions moving away from war, materialism, consumerism and resource extraction to inner development leading to fulfillment.

We can use intention, free will and choice to forge a new evolutionary path reconnecting us with nature. We can restore rather than destroy using technologies that are supportive not destructive of nature and society.

The huge potential of understanding full utilization of the mind/brain as a process of evolution will be our most important technological break-through.

Exercise, silence and connection with nature act as a catalyst to integrate the mind. This translates to a higher level of awareness or consciousness. It leads to what we describe as compassion, empathy and altruism leading to the neurosynthesis of an integrated peaceful co-existence.

Continual stress is cumulative and leads to severe pathological imbalances. This leads to the neocortical circuitry of fear, anxiety and intolerance or the neurosynthesis of violence.

We see this daily all over the world including the Middle East, our streets in the United States, the destruction of wildlife and living systems and climate denial.

If I were Czar I would start preschool children with a curriculum including the tools of mindfulness, exercise, regular trips to natural areas like the Tijuana Estuary and a good diet. If we built upon a foundation such as this, the benefits to society would be exponential.

Perception is our reality. It formulates our beliefs, values, attitudes, awareness, thoughts and actions. Perception acts as a sensory input, processing, and motor output system. Perception, consciousness and awareness are all part of the same.

Perception changes as awareness and consciousness change. As the level of integration within increases, so also does the motor response to the outside world. This creates levels of integration from within which transfer to the outside. Our relationship with other people, other species, the land and the planet are a product of integrative neurophysiology.

“WE ABUSE LAND BECAUSE WE SEE IT AS A COMMODITY BELONGING TO US. WHEN WE SEE LAND AS A COMMUNITY TO WHICH WE BELONG, WE MAY BEGIN TO USE IT WITH LOVE AND RESPECT.” ALDO LEOPOLD

You cannot do harm to another human. Not if you are connected. You cannot do harm to another species. Not if you are

connected. You cannot do harm to the land, water or the planet. Not if you are connected.

The way we treat the earth is an indicator of the way we treat ourselves.

Our actions impact our moral and ethical standards motivating changes in the larger society. We here today, become a force for positive change.

As Hans Selye said - "We are given guidelines for transforming natural egotism and the instinct to hoard into altruistic behavior. It turns the will to be strong and unassailable by accumulation of money or power into the desire to accumulate an even more effective and precious capital- love, respect, gratitude and usefulness to all life." He defines this as "altruistic egotism."

In my lifetime I have seen the installation of organizations like the United Nations. I have seen the passage of key environmental and social legislation including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Civil Rights Act and the California Coastal Act. The list grows day by day as we strive to improve society.

John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer and Rachel Carson's actions and writings have led to positive change in the larger society. They represent highly integrated self actualized human beings. I am sure they have influenced many of you in this room today. They acted on their inner feelings of what they knew to be right.

There are many unsung heroes in every community and you know who they are.

When you return home take time each day for silence. Shut off your computer, the background din of telephones, cell phones, and iPods. If you don't think you have the time, change your priorities. 3.5 billion years is a long time to wait. Take time to go out to your sanctuary of life. Marvel at the great migrations of geese, shore birds, waterfowl, raptors and monarchs and the great rhythms of life. Don't just observe. Become a part of not apart from the natural rhythms around you.

Go out at night and look up at the universe, that star studded sky and appreciate the still before the dawn. You will feel better, you will do better, and you will get along better.

When you go shopping buy what you need not what you want. You will never fill the longing in your mind with stuff. You will only deplete and convert the earth to stuff to be stored in an attic, garage or land fill. It is counterproductive to work to restore and then buy to deplete. Elegant frugality is certainly preferable to the prodigal waste of natural resources and your time.

As awareness, connectivity and consciousness change so do needs and wants.

Do what you believe to be right. Continue your work to protect and enhance the environment, other creatures and other people. It is a noble cause. It is one you have proven well worth doing.

Since the dawn of modern man we have manipulated the environment in our favor. Technology, resource demands and population have become a force competing against the stability of planetary ecosystems. We fail to understand complex inter-relationships between economic, socio-political and environmental concerns. We must address these issues with

changes in attitude, awareness, beliefs and values through thought and action.

Change is difficult to incorporate into daily life. Transformational change required to deal with global ecological issues seem insurmountable yet essential. New technologies in neurophysiology make it possible to understand the interrelationship between the brain and body or the mind body connection. We are beginning to understand integrative physiology or the physiology of consciousness. The challenge lies in incorporating physiological consciousness at the social, biological and ecological level. The gulf between cognitive understanding and experience can be closed when we use techniques like identifying with nature, meditation, mindfulness, silence, and other modalities. These permit integration and transcendence of rational, intuitive and emotional thought. Incorporation of these methods into society will require scientific legitimacy. Conflict resolution will result as object and observer become integrated.

We can raise our level of awareness, our level of consciousness, the messages we send across our world. We can integrate with humanity, other species, the land and the planet. We can become a positive intentional force in the process of evolutionary biology. This is what rethinking our relationship with the planet is all about.

Thank you.