

#148 Solastalgia, Soliphilia

One of the best benefits for me in writing this column is receiving suggestions from readers and the learning I gain from these connections. This column is the result of a suggestion to read the article, *Is there an Ecological Unconscious?* published in the New York Times Magazine Section, 1/31/2010. I hope many are already familiar with it or will soon read it.

In this very limited space, I want to focus on the issue of why people do not act to live more sustainably and why some people do. This question is directly related to the need to replace gas drilling and casinos as the economic engines of our area with the commitment to top priority to investing in human and environmental health and quality of life. While there is a stirring of interest in the latter, the powers that be continue to invest more in the former which promote environmental, human and economic degradation.

Of course, there are the elements of greed and the very real requirements of hard work to bring about the sustainable future. But sustainable economic activity is more profitable and does provide us with a future while the social and industrial technologies of casino gambling and gas drilling degrade human and environmental health and quality of life. That is the answer to those who say, well let's have both. This column stands on the premise that we can and must do more with less - less casino gambling and less drilling and consumption of gas - where more yields less and make radically larger investments in sustainable practices - where less equals more and keeps the Sullivan region authentically green.

The NYTimes article about an ecological consciousness suggests that humans are hot wired with a direct relationship between their mind and the natural world; that when the natural world around them is devastated or under assault, their heart is in pain just as when they return to the place they love after being absent from it, their heart is at ease, at comfort. Everyone who experienced Rita and Katrina in New Orleans understands this very well. We see it now in the images and facial expressions of people in the tragic aftermath of the quake in Haiti. We are familiar with the superb literature on the Afro-American experience in the horrendous United States participation in slavery and the continuing blight of racism and read of it in the NYT article about the desperate calls for help to fight the widespread depression and other psychological illness of large numbers of people in a section of Australia as a result of their environment changing around them, disturbing their patterns and success in food production, industry and general prosperity. This is solastalgia.

The lesson here is that this experience shapes our thinking and action. It may help us explain why we do not act in our own best interest often enough or are so confused that the majority of the time we continue to invest in economic activity that assaults every life support system on planet earth while claiming this is the preferred and best way for everyone to realize a positive future.

According to the NYT Magazine article, soliphilia - the profound awareness of the interconnectedness of the human and the natural world, the loving, honoring and providing for all forms of life in the place we have chosen for our lives, is just as available as the pain and mourning over the degradation of future's hope. Everyone participates in this fabulous gift. That is the opportunity for gaining a consensus to invest in the positive future of sustainable economic activity.

Some will there is a fundamental flaw here due to romanticizing nature by discounting how wild and brutal nature is. Not at all. Destruction and death occur billions of times a day. But the arrangement is there is no waste. Each act, each event, provides life support. We have changed that most important exchange. We produce waste that nothing on earth can use and so we injure ourselves and all other creatures and things.

One of the things we waste the most is time. Time, like love, is what the world needs now, what there is too little of.