

April 28, 2019 UU Green Sanctuary Homily (and Other Voices Readings)

In the description for this service, I wrote that while personal actions are necessary for a better world, they are not sufficient. People also need to work in relationship with others to change the system to make a better world. This service is aimed at showing ways to do that.

Our service was informed by two books: *Coming Back to Life* by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, and *Justice on Earth*, a collection of essays by UUs working at the intersections of race, class and environment. Plus, there is a little bit of *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Brown thrown in.

Coming Back to Life invites us to choose from three stories. The first is *Business as Usual*, where society continues as it has, maybe changing the equivalent of a light bulb here and there, but with no attempts to change the system.

The second story is the Great Unraveling, where society realizes that the path it is on is ecologically, financially, politically and spiritually unsustainable, and panic ensues, with a great many people trading their freedom and principles for the security of belonging to one tribe or another.

The third story is the Great Turning, where instead of panicking about the future, we take its measure, seek solutions even in unlikely places, and pull together to create a world that makes life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness available to all regardless of where they live, what they worship, how they look, or who they love.

To anyone paying attention, it should be obvious that *Business as Usual* isn't a choice at all, even for the tiny number of people whose wealth and power appears to insulate them from climate change, pollution, or the civil unrest fueled by both. No, we are left with the Great Unraveling or the Great Turning, and it is the great turning we are interested in today

Macy and Brown's prescription for surfing the Great Turning is work that reconnects us to each other and to the earth.

The reconnection is essential because so much conspires to deaden our hearts and minds to the pain of the world. Some of it comes from within, our fear of pain, our fear of despair, or spiritual traps like an enlightenment first attitude. Some of it comes from how we relate to others, our fear of not fitting in, of distressing those we love, or contrarily our sense of ourselves as separate. Some of it comes from outside influences, like mass media, job and time pressures, or social violence.

Whatever the factors blocking our ability to feel the pain, they also block our ability to perceive the real danger we are in and our ability to creatively respond to that danger.

The work to reconnect has four stages.

The first is to come from gratitude. Gratitude stirs in us a belief that our lives are under our control. It steadies and grounds us with a focus on the present. It doesn't depend on circumstances because we can be grateful any time in any place. It is subversive because it undermines our craving for stuff.

As part of this service we asked you to express gratitude to the people that made your clothing.

The second stage is allowing ourselves to have an inner response to the suffering and destruction we see around us. We need to be able to respond to bitterness, anger, fear, sorrow, guilt and shame with acceptance and compassion.

As part of this service, we asked you to read and listen to the stories of people whose livelihoods and lives are directly affected by climate change and pollution, by corruption of the public servants who are supposed to help them and the ignorance or indifference of those whose choices harm them.

The third step is seeing with new eyes. That is what this part of the service is about.

Here we shift to the second book, *Justice on Earth*.

Our 7th Principle, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” was added in 1984 in recognition of the growing importance of environmental issues. Yet that “web of all existence” has consistently reflected a 19th century view of nature held by our spiritual forebears like Emerson and Thoreau. This was a nature separate from and unaffected by humans. It was a place where a person went to commune with the almighty and get in touch with himself. Once emptied of its native peoples, nature in North America was where a white man, especially a relatively well educated and well off white man, could go to escape the pettiness, misery and horror of an industrializing world. This view even informed the choice of where to build this church.

But nature isn't a place to escape to, it is a place where we all live. We exist side by side with millions of other species, sharing the same air, the same water, and the same soil. Humans are in and of nature as genuinely as a coast redwood, a giant panda, or a morel mushroom.

The spiritual danger of the idea that nature is “out there”, and we can protect it by not doing anything “out there” is that it makes ‘in here’ fair game for all the damage, waste and pollution of our capital intensive, industrialized lives. But “in here” there is still a lot of choice about where the bad stuff goes, and like anything else in complex societies it follows the path of least resistance. But this path is not the result of natural forces, like water carving out a river bed, it is the result of policies and intentions that systematically strip one segment of society of its political power, economic opportunity, and access to education.

Justice on Earth argues that however insulated we may appear to be from the impacts of pollution and climate change, we are all in this together. Even here in Columbia, which is about as insulated as you can get, we will experience climate change and the effects of pollution. For our own future, we must join with and support those organizations made up of and working for frontline communities that directly experience suffering from environmental damage.

For the Green Sanctuary Team, our frontline community is family farmers and the organization we support is the Missouri Rural Crisis Center.

Today most hogs in the US are owned or controlled by corporations and grown in Confined Animal Feeding Operations or CAFOs. Independent hog farmers are down one tenth of their 1985 numbers, with a predictable impact on rural economies and culture. This change did not happen by accident. Industrialization, technology, corporate strategies, and public policy combined in ways that favored factory operations at the expense of family farms.

A 1994 Missouri law removed the prohibition against corporate ownership of farms. A 2013 law allowed foreign ownership of up to 1% of farmland, and a 2015 law removed the requirement that foreign ownership be reported. No one has any idea how much farmland is owned by foreign corporations. What we do know is that Missouri has CAFOs with tens of thousands of animals run by companies in China and Brazil. And although they are producing industrial level amounts of air and water pollution, they enjoy the same exemptions from regulation we created to protect family farmers.

Federal and state regulations regarding animal waste are so weak that the only line of defense against the air and water pollution hazards of CAFOs are county health regulations. And even though 36 Missouri counties have already affirmed that they won't use health regulations to restrict CAFOs, state Senate Bill 391 wants to ensure all counties have to exempt farming operations from local health ordinances so no county in Missouri can choose public health over corporate profits.

Tomorrow MRCC will be in Jefferson City lobbying against Senate Bill 391. Green Sanctuary will be there with them.

At this point, you may be experiencing some feelings that something should be done. It is very important to act on those good intentions.

In 1890, Willam James explored the problem of good intentions in his Principles of Psychology.

According to James, “Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge.

Every situation that aroused the emotions towards some abstract good had to be acted on. One should never “suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in some active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world -speaking genially to one's aunt, or giving up one's seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers - but let it not fail to take place.

If your emotions have been roused towards some abstract good this morning, you need to act. If speaking genially to your aunt is the only thing on offer, do it. But it is possible to channel those good intentions if you do a little advance preparation.

First, learn to surrender your fear of pain (by the way, surrender is April's word, just saying). If you feel anger or sadness about some other person's life, don't stop, keep going. If you start to feel guilt or shame about the role of your own actions, don't stop, keep going. If you start to feel despair, don't stop, keep going. Keep working through the pain.

You might need some help, especially with the despair part. Sometimes you think you have heard it all, and then another wave of stupidity and greed and wickedness knocks you off your feet. So consider developing a spiritual practice to protect yourself from moral harm. The middle section of Justice on Earth deals with this, and suggests a Tonglin meditation for just this situation.

And this will lead us into the fourth step in the spiral, by preparing us to “go forth”. We will also finish up with a rousing hymn that should help with that.

Second, you should have a vision of something that will replace the system of Corporate Capitalism, Patriarchy, Militarism and Racism you want to change. Your vision can't be about fear and loathing, it has to be about a system that is better, one that provides a sufficiency of shelter, food, health and learning for all while sustaining the integrity, stability and beauty of the world.

Third, act in relationship to change the system. Changing light bulbs is necessary, but not sufficient. If you are really going to make a difference, you have to change the source of your electricity as well. And if you are tackling something that big, you have to do it in relationship. The best way to work in relationship is to work with groups on the frontlines of issues because they have the best grasp of how the system works and what needs to change.

Working with frontline communities requires a willingness to take a back seat and accept their leadership. It requires a deep-rooted belief in their wisdom about the issue. It requires deep listening to understand their context. It requires a willingness to take risks on their behalf. It requires doing your homework so you understand the history, law and policies that are channeling the bad stuff to their communities. It requires being in it for the long haul.

This is a big lift. It has been for me, particularly the first thing about taking a back seat and second thing about believing in someone else's wisdom. But the last three years of working for MRCC through the church has been good for me. I am more humble, more accepting of the wisdom others have to offer, a better listener, more of a risk taker, I do my homework, and my commitments are more realistic so I can be there for the long haul.

More importantly, I have learned to see with new eyes. Chapter 12 of Justice on Earth starts with a quote by Lila Watson, an Australian aboriginal elder – “ If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.”

I can see now where my liberation lies.

Other Voices Readings

Kentucky - Tobacco and Beef Cattle Farmer

I'm a tobacco and beef cattle farmer living in South Central Kentucky. On an intellectual level, I can kind of grasp that a one or two degree rise in average world temperature might not be a good thing, but it doesn't fill me with a sense of urgency. Weird anomalies in our local weather often do. This summer, our local weather included 11 consecutive days in late June with temperatures over 100 degrees. The jury is still out on how much that spell cut the corn yield. It all depended on what stage the corn was in. Some fields were cut slightly. Some fields were almost ruined.

For me, the big hurt was to pastures. Mine were in good shape prior to that super hot spell, but by the time it was over, grass and clover were cooked to the ground, almost as if being burned off by a fire.

Then it turned out wet. In a normal year, perennial grasses and clovers out compete most weeds. This year, after being cooked to the ground, grass and clover was unable to rebound fast enough to suppress all the annual weeds that sprouted in the heavy July rains. This was the worst summer ever for cockle burrs. They shot up taller than me in some bottoms and were pretty bad even on hill tops. That amounted to real dollars and cents out of my pocket for a second clipping.

<https://m.dailykos.com/stories/2012/9/26/1136530/-Climate-change-a-personal-story>

Leyte Island, Philippines - Gerardo and Jovita Amantillo

Gerardo and Jovita Amantillo were both at home when Typhoon Haiyan struck on November 8th, 2013. The couple, both aged 74, had been warned that a bad storm was on its way but nothing had prepared them for the intensity of what they faced.

The winds had been battering their home for several hours when suddenly the waves crashed down all around them. The strength of the waves carried Gerardo and Jovita out of their home. They survived only by clinging to the neighbor's roof – almost three meters off the ground.

"We held on to the roof," says Gerardo. "The only reason the roof was not blown away was because there were so many of us lying on it. After around two hours the winds died down and the water receded. Our house was completely gone."

"We stayed with neighbours for a few nights but we plan on living with our son for the next few months," says Gerardo. "I do not know when we will be able to move back." Across the Philippines over 4 million people were displaced by Typhoon Haiyan. Approximately 400,000 are living in evacuation centers, with the rest sheltering with friends or family.

<https://www.trocaire.org/whatwedo/climate-justice/stories>

Southern Ethiopia – Mechu Dayo

"Drought has been so severe and I didn't have enough flour to bake to feed my children," she said. "I had to prepare a very thin porridge just for them to feel something in their stomach and survive the day."

Like many people in the region, Mechu (40) had relied on cattle farming, but regular droughts were making it more difficult to raise livestock. A Trócaire project gave 170 families in the area the skills and tools to begin growing vegetables.

Thanks to the project, Mechu believes that hunger will be a thing of the past for her family.

"Previously when I went to the market and saw cabbage, I would want to buy for my kids but I could not afford

it," she says. "Now I am able to grow it and then feed my children. I am also making money out of it. Feeding my children and having left with plenty for the market is a big change for me."

As well as helping local farmers to grow vegetables, the project also improved water supply and irrigation in the area. New wells and irrigation methods have helped the people to cope with the extended periods of drought that have sadly become a regular feature of life for people in the area.

<https://www.trocaire.org/whatwedo/climate-justice/stories>

Chuka, Eastern Kenya – Thiga Nanyaga

The 65-year-old farmer has lived his whole life in a village near the town of Chuka, Tharaka-Nithi County, eastern Kenya, but increased drought over recent years was making it more difficult to survive.

Farmers in this region have traditionally relied on two rainy seasons each year. With no other way of getting water to their land, the rain was vital if crops were to grow. When the rains came, farmers could grow enough food to sustain their families through the dry period. When the rains did not come, however, people went hungry.

"We had to wait for the rain for our crops to grow," explains Thiga. "The rains are disappearing so it was getting more difficult every year. Life was very hard. We experienced hunger very often."

<https://www.trocaire.org/getinvolved/climate-justice/no-fossil-fuels>

Kanyera, Malawi – Stephen, Eliyeta, and Enestina Muyeye

Eliyeta Muyeye (32) and her daughter, Enestina (9), make the one kilometer round trip every morning to fetch water for their family of six, returning home two hours later, laden with their precious cargo.

Enestina – "When I have to get water in the morning, there is a queue so I wait and I am late for school. I love school but I didn't do well in my exams. I've been failing because I didn't know how to read and write. The time I spend getting water would be better used to study."

"Life is hard here because we have difficulty with water," says Stephen Muyeye (38), Eliyeta's husband. "The water we drink is contaminated. It's not clean. It's not treated. It's where animals drink and even pass waste – dogs, pigs, goats all drink from the water.

And it's not just drinking water that's affected. The water crisis has caused a perennial food crisis. Stephen and Eliyeta farm a ½ acre of land growing sweet potatoes, maize, and tomatoes. They have no irrigation system and rely entirely on the rain and adjacent river to water the crops. Inevitably, their one annual harvest only feeds them for seven months, leaving a hungry period of five long months.

"Between November and March we have no food," says Stephen. "We work on other people's land as labourers during this time. We get paid maize, sometimes a tin, sometimes a bag.

<https://www.trocaire.org/whatwedo/climate-justice/stories>

Nuevo Eden, Guatemala – Carlos Cano

When a child, Carlos Cano had to migrate to Mexico from Guatemala because of civil war.

In 1998, Carlos' family was among the first group of Guatemalans to return from Mexico. As part of the peace accords, families took possession of the 2,500 acres of mountainous, coffee-producing land that is now Nuevo Eden. But there was a catch. Carlos and most of the other farmers knew nothing about growing coffee and they received little training from the government on how to do it.

"It was very difficult," says Carlos. But still he persevered. And then came 2012 and coffee leaf rust.

So why did coffee leaf rust start causing so much pain for Carlos Cano in 2012? What changed?

"The truth is that when we came here 17 years ago, the climate was quite different. You could feel a little bit cold, the rains were normal. This year, you could see the difference much more because normally the coffee production or harvest in these places begins in September, October, and ends in December. But now, it came a little bit earlier, the harvest began about a month before," says Carlos. "Climate change affects us a lot because it is during this season that rust develops easier due to the heat and humidity."

And those slight changes are causing coffee leaf rust to move up the mountain.

<https://www.crs.org/stories/climate-change-guatemala-coffee-leaf-rust>

Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe – Edward, Tendai Machinuura, and Wise Bush

Edward's favorite part of his job is fishing. He says fish used to be plentiful throughout the lake. But like everything else around Lake Kariba, fishing has been hurt by drought. "The fishing has been affected with this lower level because we used to catch lots of fish. Now, there is nothing," says Edward.

Tendai Machinuura and Wise Bush know exactly what Edward is talking about. They make their living by selling the fish the fishermen bring to them. They say fishermen are forced to go out to deeper sections of the lake to catch their fish, especially the sardine-like fish called kapenta. That costs money.

"The problem now is we don't have enough equipment to go in deeply where we can catch more fish. When the water is low, fish always favor where there's more water. We have to travel far. People used to catch fish nearby," said Tendai.

The lower water levels have also made overharvesting a problem and upped the pressure to produce. People without licenses are turning to the lake as a solution to feed their families, to earn more money, or simply as a last resort for survival.

"It's hard for fishermen. I'm depending on the lake. All what I am getting is coming from the lake," said Tendai.

<https://www.crs.org/stories/power-climate-change-zimbabwe>

Gokwe, Zimbabwe – Anderson Tarusenga Mhungu and Alice Moyo

"Most of the families are hard up, especially this year. We are finding it very, very difficult. They cannot even provide food, basic meals for their children. For a mind to function, it has to be healthy. A healthy mind comes from having a balanced diet. If there is no food, the children are affected health-wise. If they are affected health-wise, it means intellectually they won't perform as expected," says Anderson Tarusenga Mhungu, headmaster of Chireya St. Dominic's Primary School.

With 48 percent of the population younger than 18, the impact of the drought on children is particularly high. According to a country assessment, around 1.4 million children are potentially impacted in the 10 worst drought affected districts, where more than 497,000 children are enrolled in 1,150 schools.

“Drought is very connected to education in many ways. To start with, there’s no food if there’s drought. Children concentrate less when they’re hungry, and also there’s a lot of running that takes place at school,” says Alice Moyo, project manager for CRS’ vulnerable children programs. “Eating before you go to school can be termed a luxury. Children leave for school, hoping that when they get to school, during break time, a friend or a peer will share with them what they have.”

The drought and El Nino. Money concerns. Job and schooling worries. Each of these is a piece of the Zimbabwe puzzle. And all of them have a climate change connection.

<https://www.crs.org/stories/power-climate-change-zimbabwe>

Duaripara, Bangladesh - Hena

Hena’s house is located in a low-lying part of the slum that gets flooded regularly in the monsoon season from June to September. The bed in the far right corner was raised with three bricks stacked under each leg to provide Hena and her family a dry place to sleep above the polluted floodwaters.

I noticed we had listed four children for her, but only three were in the house, so I asked, “When will I meet Joti?” Hena stared blankly at the floor while tears rolled quietly down her cheeks.

She gestured for Farzana and me to sit down on the bed and told us of the night when Joti, a toddler of almost 2 years old, fell off the bed into two feet of floodwater. The words tumbled out of her faster than Farzana could translate.

“I heard crying. It was dark; I was confused. Then I heard nothing. I got my phone, so I could see. Joti was floating on top of the water.” Hena tried to save her. “I got into the water; it was up to my knees.” She tried to make Joti breathe, took her clothes off, wrapped her in a blanket, screamed and started praying to Allah, reciting the Quran, repeating it over and over and over again. Joti died.

Then Hena stopped talking and the three of us just sat there, together in the silence. Eventually, she pointed to the spot in the room where she found Joti in the water. “No one talks about it to me anymore. You asked me how flooding affects me, this is how.”

<http://www.californiaadaptationforum.org/2018/01/10/living-on-the-frontline-of-climate-change-the-story-of-hena/>

Kola, Kenya – Joshua Mukusya

Changes in climate patterns in Kenya make it impossible for small-scale farmers to continue growing primary food crops such as maize and beans, says a local farmer. About 50 years ago farmers could expect to produce 25 bags of maize from one hectare—each bag weighing 90 kilograms, said Joshua Mukusya, a smallholder farmer whose family has been farming for generations in Kola, Kenya, 90 kilometres southeast of Nairobi

“Now, you will be very lucky if you get five bags per hectare,” he added.

“The climate is changing—it is very clear,” said Mukusya, a leader of the Utooni Development Organization, formed in 1978 to help rural families improve food and water security by terracing land, building sand dams and planting trees.

Mukusya is hopeful that discussions at the upcoming Copenhagen conference will lead measures that will increase international support to help the country improve food production, restore water tables and redevelop pastures and wildlife habitat. “The majority of people here have no resources to cope with the situation,” he explained. “If we don’t make changes, we cannot survive.”

<https://mcc.org/stories/climate-change-affecting-small-scale-farmers-kenya>

London – Mrs. Adoo Kissi-Debrah

The asthma attack that killed 9-year-old Ella Kissi-Debrah was the 27th over three years that was serious enough to require hospitalization.

Ella lived within 100 feet of the busy London South Circular Road, and walked or drove to school near the heavy traffic daily.

Her home was close to an air pollution monitor, so Professor Stephen Holgate was able to analyze the data. He said there was a "striking association" between Ella's emergency hospital admissions and recorded spikes in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and PM10s, the most noxious pollutants.

Ella's mother was a secondary school teacher before Ella died. For a long time, she says, "I felt her death like a physical pain." Now, she wonders how many other children London's dirty air has killed since her own loss.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-46823309>

New Bern, North Carolina – Tyechia Buck

Tyechia Buck and her 12-year-old son camped out on the second floor of her townhouse during last September's Hurricane Florence—at least at first. The storm surge was so big it flowed over the banks of the Neuse River before the rain even started here. The town slowly disappeared underwater, starting at the Trent Court housing projects, a small collection of brown brick townhouses.

By 11 o'clock the next morning she realized she'd made a mistake not evacuating: waves were lapping up against the building next to hers. "I went out my back door and didn't look back," she said.

Now, the local housing authority has decided that nearly half of the residents of this 80-year-old public housing complex cannot return. Buck is a "squatter" in her own home, permanently evicted but still living there with no heat or hot water.

Public housing residents, along with other poor, disabled, elderly, and vulnerable people, are becoming a first wave of climate migrants in the U.S.—people selectively displaced by increasingly frequent storms and floods, moved because they can't afford to stay.

<https://www.scalawagmagazine.org/2019/01/new-bern-hurricane-part-1/>

Warren County, North Carolina – Almena Myles

The Warren, North Carolina, protests of 1982 are considered one of the earliest examples of the environmental justice movement. A manufacturer of electrical transformers dumped tons of cancer-causing PCB waste along 240 miles of North Carolina's highways. When it came time for the clean up, the North Carolina government chose Warren – a small, predominantly African American town – for the toxic waste facility.

There were weeks of protests and over 500 arrests. It was an awakening, showing the country that race and class play a part in who has to live near toxic waste.

Almena Myles was one of the protesters. Even 30 years later, the incident has left a mark. "I learned why we were targeted. They chose us because we were rural and poor and they thought we couldn't fight it," she told me. "They thought we wouldn't understand. It was a crash course in advocacy. We felt we had stepped back in time, like it was the 1960s all over again and we had to fight for our rights as if it was the civil rights movement."

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/08/climate-changed-racism-environment-south>

Houston, Texas – Susan Pacheco

In a recent article in the Journal of the American Heart Association, an international group of researchers concluded that higher temperatures caused by climate change may result in up to 7,000 additional infants with congenital heart defects in Texas and seven other representative states over an 11-year period.

Scientists believe that when pregnant women are exposed to heat early in pregnancy, two problems can occur – fetal death or interference with the process in which cells generate new proteins, inducing severe fetal malformation. In the newer study, those problems appear associated with congenital heart defects.

Dr. Susan Pacheco, pediatrician and allergist/immunologist with McGovern Medical School at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston said, “In many instances, mothers may be unaware that they are pregnant at three to eight weeks. If you do not have access to air conditioning where you can stay cool, you are going to get exposed to those increasing temperatures, which are going to get even worse. Who is most vulnerable? It will be most dangerous in the more disadvantaged populations – minorities and the very poor. They are the ones most vulnerable, and they are the ones we are supposed to protect.”

<http://texasclimateneeds.org/?p=16061>

Clovis, New Mexico – Art Schapp

For months, Clovis, New Mexico, dairy farmer Art Schaap has been watching his life go down the drain. Instead of selling milk, he is dumping 15,000 gallons a day – enough to provide a carton at lunch to 240,000 children. Instead of working 24/7 to keep his animals healthy, he’s planning to exterminate all 4,000 of his cows, one of the best herds in his county’s booming dairy industry.

The 54-year-old second-generation dairy farmer learned last August that his water, his land, his crops – even the blood in his body – were contaminated with chemicals that migrated to his property from nearby Cannon Air Force Base.

The toxins, collectively known as PFAS, have caused rampant pollution on military installations, something the Department of Defense (DoD) has known about for decades but routinely failed to disclose. Now New Mexico’s dairy industry is ground zero in an unprecedented crisis. For the first time ever, PFAS is threatening the US food supply.

“This has poisoned everything I’ve worked for and everything I care about,” Schaap said. “I can’t sell the milk. I can’t sell beef. I can’t sell the cows. I can’t sell crops or my property. The air force knew they had contamination. What I really wonder is, why didn’t they say something?”

<https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/02/19/groundwater-contamination-devastates-a-new-mexico-dairy-and-threatens-public-health/>

Ukraine – Alla Palamarchuk

When the Chernobyl nuclear reactor blew up in April 1986, Soviet TV continued to show happy Ukrainian kids swimming in rivers and in the Black Sea and playing outside. At the same time on Finnish TV, everyone was ordered to stay home. Families were comparing everything with news on the Finnish TV and adjusting their lives accordingly. Parents stopped giving their kids fruits and vegetables and started preparing immigration papers for their children.

Alla Palamarchuk was pregnant when the reactor went. “I was so worried. I spent most of the time inside the house.

My friend was pregnant too; she didn't listen to me and was tanning outside. We didn't have ultrasound so didn't know how the babies were doing till they were born.

My baby appeared to be okay when she was born; I still had to worry about leukemia later on.

My friend delivered a dead baby because of abnormalities of her cord. It was a very sad and scary time."

ironedcurtains.com/2017/06/07/brilliant-blue-sky-eye-witness

Puerto Rico – Maria Gonzalez Munoz

Ramona Gonzalez did not drown when Hurricane Maria drenched Puerto Rico. She did not die in the tempest, or from destruction wrought by the storm's 154 mph winds. Instead, this disabled, 59-year-old woman died a month later, from sepsis — caused, says her family, by an untreated bedsore.

A year after Maria roared across the Caribbean, reporters for The Associated Press, the news site Quartz and Puerto Rico's Center for Investigative Journalism put together a detailed portrait of how Puerto Rico's most vulnerable fell victim to the dire conditions created by the storms.

Disabled and elderly people were discharged from overwhelmed hospitals with bedsores that led to fatal infections. Medical oxygen ran out. People caught lung infections in sweltering private nursing homes and state facilities. Kidney patients got abbreviated treatments from dialysis centers that lacked generator fuel and fresh water....

"I was looking for help and no one came," said Maria Gonzalez Munoz, who spent 30 days after the storm caring for her sister in her blacked-out home.

Maria and her brother took Ramona to a hospital twice, and tried to get her aboard a Navy medical ship in San Juan harbor, but couldn't save their ailing sister.

"No one was asking after us, no one from the government," said Gonzalez Munoz, 66.

<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/ny-news-hurricane-maria-victims-20180914-story.html>

Shishmaref, Alaska – Percy Naoykpuk

Shishmaref is an Inupiat community of about 600 people on Sarichef, an island north of the Bering Strait. It has been grappling for decades with the loss of buildings and infrastructure caused by storm surges, and it has shrunk over the past 40 years — more than 200 feet of the shore has been eaten away since 1969. Recently the residents voted 80 to 78 to leave (assuming they can find the \$100 million or more needed to relocate).

Percy Naoykpuk, 63, the owner of the Naoykpuk General Store, was not convinced that the relocation would happen.

"I'm going to have to wait to see how all of this shakes down," he said. "There's a number of questions to be answered before we can make a very serious attempt at moving."

Mr. Naoykpuk said that those who voted against relocating were not opposed to moving but were unhappy with two potential sites on the mainland for the village's future home. He said those sites lacked access for barges, which serve a vital role in delivering fuel and other supplies.

"I'm a businessman, and I have to stock up on fuel and building materials, and without good barge access around, that village will not survive," said Mr. Naoykpuk.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/20/us/shishmaref-alaska-elocate-vote-climate-change.html>

Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana – Chief Albert Naquin, Mark Davis

In January 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development announced grants totaling \$1 billion in 13 states to help communities adapt to climate change, by building stronger levees, dams and drainage systems.

One of those grants, \$48 million for Isle de Jean Charles, is something new: the first allocation of federal tax dollars to move an entire community struggling with the impacts of climate change. The divisions the effort has exposed and the logistical and moral dilemmas it has presented point up the massive problems the world could face in the coming decades as it confronts a new category of displaced people - climate refugees.

“We’re going to lose all our heritage, all our culture,” lamented Chief Albert Naquin of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw, the tribe to which most Isle de Jean Charles residents belong. “It’s all going to be history.”

Whether to leave is only the first of the hard questions: Where does everyone go? What claim do they have to what is left behind? Will they be welcomed by their new neighbors? Will there be work nearby? Who will be allowed to join them?

“This is not just a simple matter of writing a check and moving happily to a place where they are embraced by their new neighbors,” said Mark Davis, director of the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy. “If you have a hard time moving dozens of people,” he continued, “it becomes impossible in any kind of organized or fair way to move thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or, if you look at the forecast for South Florida, maybe even millions.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/resettling-the-first-american-climate-refugees.html?module=inline>

Callaway County, Missouri – Shirley Kidwell

With their expansive deck overlooking a pond, Shirley Kidwell and her family used to spend summer days outdoors reading, but the growth of large animal farms in the area is making that more difficult.

“When that odor hits, you’ve got to go inside, and a lot of times we go downstairs to the basement to get away from it,” said Kidwell, the owner of a small farm in Callaway County and secretary for Friends of Responsible Agriculture. She lives within a mile of a farm with 5,600 hogs.

Kidwell and other residents are particularly worried about a new 10,000-hog farm moving to Callaway County. It would be built less than a mile from Kidwell’s home.

There are 450,000 animal feeding operations in the U.S., according to a 2017 report from the Office of the Inspector General. The majority contain fewer than 300 animals, but about 18,000 raise thousands of animals.

https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/local/government-eases-up-on-cafos-as-residents-fight-their-expansion/article_d758dcf2-9c3d-11e8-82ff-271a9483e031.html

Minimata, Japan – Shinobu Sakamoto

Minamata disease is a neurological syndrome caused by severe mercury poisoning. It causes lack of coordination and numbness in hands and feet, muscle weakness, and affects vision, hearing and speech. In extreme cases it can cause insanity, paralysis, coma and death.

It is named Minamata after the city where it was discovered. The poisoning was caused by dumping of methylmercury into the city’s water supply by Chisso Corporation between 1932 and 1968

Shinobu Sakamoto spoke at the UN Environment Conference of Parties on ending Mercury pollution.

“My name is Shinobu Sakamoto. I come from minimata Japan. I was exposed to mercury pollution when I was in my mother’s womb. I was born with fetal Minimata disease in 1956. When I was 15, in 1972, I went to Stockholm as a citizen and a victim of pollution. I went to tell world leaders about pollution firsthand. The fetal

Minimata disease patients including myself are getting worse year by year. Many people are still suffering and struggling with pollution. I must repeat my message, Minimata disease is not over. Pollution must end. We must protect women and unborn children from toxic pollution. We must work together."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN8c98aFQJ4>

Fukushima, Japan – Shizuya Nishiyama

The cleanup efforts in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in northern Japan have revealed the plight of the Japanese unemployed, marginally employed day laborers and the homeless. They are called the "precariat," Japan's proletariat, living precariously on the knife-edge of the work world, without full employment or job security. They are derided as "glow in the dark boys," "jumpers" (one job to another) and "nuclear gypsies." They have even been dubbed "burakumin," a hostile term for Japan's untouchables, members of the lowest rung on the ladder in Japanese society.

One nuclear gypsy cited by Reuters in December 2013, summed up a near hopeless situation. "We're an easy target for recruiters," Shizuya Nishiyama, 57, says. He briefly worked at Fukushima clearing rubble. He now sleeps in a cardboard box in Sendai Station. "We're easy to spot. They say to us, are you looking for work? Are you hungry? And if we haven't eaten, they offer to find us a job."

<https://intpolicydigest.org/2015/08/21/japan-s-nuclear-gypsies-the-homeless-jobless-and-fukushima/>

Memphis Tennessee – Echole Cole and Robert Walker

For years, black sanitation workers had complained about unsafe working conditions and poverty wages. At least three times—in 1963, 1964 and 1966—they'd faced retaliation from bosses while trying to unionize or planning to go on strike.

The deaths of Echol Cole, 36, and Robert Walker, 30, on February 1 were the last straw. On Feb. 12, 1968, hundreds of sanitation workers failed to show up for work. They demanded a raise, better working conditions and union recognition. A few weeks later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Memphis to support the 1,300 strikers. The rest is history, although Cole's and Walker's names are rarely included in the retelling: On April 4, 1968, King was gunned down on a motel balcony.

Historical accounts and interviews from that time suggest Cole's and Walker's deaths could have been avoided for at least two reasons.

First, there was the racist city policy that forced black garbage men into the backs of trucks in bad weather. "City rules barred shelter stops in residential neighborhoods—after citizen complaints about unsightly 'picnics' by the Negro sanitation workers,"

Second "Instead of junking the old garbage packer, the sanitation division of DPW (the Department of Public Works) had tried to extend its life by putting in a second motor to run the compactor after the first one wore out. Workers jump-started it in the morning and let the motor run all day long, pouring in fuel periodically. It was an accident just waiting to happen."

<https://mlk50.com/memphis-had-another-shameful-tragedy-in-1968-it-could-have-been-avoided-ef828f0f5091>

Bhopal, India – Mehboob Bi

On the night of December 2nd, 1984, a Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, began leaking 27 tons of the deadly gas methyl isocyanate. None of the six safety systems designed to contain such a leak were operational, allowing the gas to spread throughout the city of Bhopal [1]. Half a million people were exposed to the gas and 25,000 have died to date as a result of their exposure. More than 150,000 people still suffer from ailments caused by the accident and the subsequent pollution at the plant site.

'My husband warned me how dangerous the chemicals were. If by mistake you put your hand into them your hand would dissolve.

'The day after the tragedy when we came back home our utensils were covered with a green coating. Chand Miya did not let us come into the house; he cleaned everything up, washed every corner of the house before he let us come in.

'The days just before the disaster were the last few days I saw him happy. Our miseries began on that night. All of us had breathed the gas, but he most of all. When he got really ill and could no longer work...I...we ran short of money and I started work for the first time. He apologised to me for putting me through this.

'I said, "jaan hai to jahaan hai," if we have life we have the world.' He often told me not to spend the money on him and his illness.

'I will die,' he said, 'don't waste your money on me.' 'And he did. He left me alone.'

<http://www.bhopal.org/what-happened/peoples-stories/mehboob-bi/>

Brumadinho, Brazil – Patricia Maia

In the first of the many funerals that will take place in Brumadinho after last week's deadly mining dam disaster, dozens of attendants could only externalise two feelings: pain and anger.

"Vale will have to pay because it killed my brother," sobbed a red-eyed Patricia Maia. A printed photo of her brother, Renato, was taped atop his closed wooden casket. "Why? Why?" she cried. He was eating lunch at the mine's refectory when a tailings dam belonging to Brazil's Vale burst, spewing millions of cubic metres of waste, killing at least 84 people and leaving hundreds missing.

Most of the victims, like Renato, are either employees or contractors of the world's largest iron ore producer, Vale, whose shares have tanked since the accident on Friday. As the wooden coffin of Renato was taken to the burial site, wrapped in a flag of the Minas Gerais football club, his niece Adma Souza said she wanted "Vale to pay a hefty price for this, because it is dealing with human lives". "For them these lives have no worth, they are putting profits before them," she added. This is a country in which we have no value."

The group's second deadly dam accident in just over three years will put to the test not only Mr Schvartsman's leadership skills, but also those of Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, who is in hospital recovering from surgery on Monday, and whose agenda sows fear among environmentalists.

<https://www.ft.com/content/d11aa4d8-2310-11e9-8ce6-5db4543da632>

Donora, Pennsylvania – Charles Stacy

"While the zinc works was in operation there was no vegetation at all on these hillsides. The air would kill all the vegetation," said Charles Stacey, a Donora native who was a senior in high school that year, gesturing towards the landscape where the zinc works used to be. It was a dreary day in early October 2017, and a light drizzle on the desolate scene added to feeling that we were staring at a site of tragedy. The white shells of zinc works buildings are all that stand there now.

Back in the 1940s, the area by the zinc works was sometimes suffused with a cloud of bright yellow. The days in Donora typically began in a hazy fog; by afternoon winds would sweep through Donora's little valley and clear the air.

No one thought anything of it. The impacts of industrial pollution on human health were not yet widely known among the general public. Plus, says Stacey, "You didn't step on US Steel's toes, because your dad had to go to work there."

But the week before Halloween (which fell on a Sunday that year), the morning haze came and never left. The little town, built in the basin of the Monongahela River valley, began to fill up. By Wednesday, the air was thick and visibility was low. "You put your hand out and couldn't see the tips of your fingers," Stacey remembers. Plants began to die, then pets. By Saturday, it was people.

<https://qz.com/1117029/the-sudden-death-of-26-people-in-a-tiny-american-town-on-halloween-weekend-shows-the-bleak-reality-of-life-before-clean-air-laws/>

Hazaribagh, Bangladesh – Saiful

The smell catches you from blocks away: a throat-tightening mix of bad egg, rotten meat and acrid ammonia. Among the rickshaws, barefoot men push carts piled with grey-blue skins. In the open gutters a tide of the same unearthly blue slowly pushes through a scum of animal hair, bits of skin and rubbish.

This is Hazaribagh. The name means "a thousand gardens", but there are no flowers here. The slum is the most polluted place in Dhaka, itself one of the most polluted cities in the world. According to the World Health Organisation, 90% of Hazaribagh's tanning factory workers will die before they're 50. Half - some 8,000 - have respiratory disease already. Many of the workers are children.

Two men in their 20s, Monir and Saiful, were perched on the rim of a tank, wielding long tongs to pull blue whole skins from a stew of sodium metabisulphite and ammonium chloride. All the pair had on was short rubber boots on their bare legs, below their loincloths. They were getting splashed by the acids and stopped to hose water into their wellies. They are usually paid 8,500 taka (about £60) a month, for a seven-day week, though they never know how much work there will be. The boots they have to buy themselves - they rarely wear gloves and never goggles. Some of the workers sleep on a shelf above the vats.

"We start at 7am, and sometimes we work till 3am the next morning," says Saiful. "When I started four years ago, I hated it. I wanted to quit, but I got used to it. I have no option, I am poor and I have to support my family." Both laboured in the rice fields before they came to Dhaka, but their wage in the tannery is not much better - only enough to cover food and living costs. "I have a daughter, just five months old," says Monir, scratching at the dermatitis that affects most of the workers we met. "I hope she doesn't come to work here."

<https://www.businessinsider.com/your-luxurious-bengali-leather-comes-from-these-pits-of-hell-2012-12>

Cambodia – Ren Eim

The garment industry is the largest sector of the Cambodian economy, representing Cambodia's 95% of the country's exports. It employs over 500,000 people, the majority of whom are women who have travelled to the city to find work in the industry.

Working six days a week, 8 hours a day, the minimum wage is just US\$80 (including a \$5 health bonus), barely enough to meet their basic living expenses. For many the lack of a living wage means risking malnourishment, which in recent years combined with poor working conditions has caused numerous incidents of mass faintings and collapses in the factories over recent years.

Three to six women share just one room, not bigger than 8 square metres, often even without a window or any fresh air. No furniture, simple plastic sheets on the floor to sleep on, a toilet and portable gas stove with some pots for cooking. The women share the cost of the room, of water and electricity which amounts to about US\$ 30-40 per person per month.

Ren Eim has worked in the garment industry for 12 years and her health is suffering because of it. She suffers from headaches and heavy coughing. She is afraid of getting sick and having no health insurance to cover her needs which is the reason why she is working as much overtime as her health allows it.

<https://cleanclothes.org/livingwage/workers-lives>

LaPlace, Louisiana – Geraldine Watkins

Geraldine Watkins sits at the kitchen table in her ranch home, rattling off the names of friends and relatives in her small Louisiana town who've died of cancer over the last 40 years.

Her grandchildren suffer an array of ailments, from skin conditions to breathing problems. Her 7 year-old great-grandson's breathing is so labored, she says, "you can feel his heart trying to jump out of his chest."

Watkins lives in the shadow of a plant that spews chloroprene -- a chemical so toxic the Environmental Protection Agency says nearby residents face the highest risk in the country of developing cancer from air toxins.

"You gotta live here to try to breathe the air, drink the water, see the children so sick and watch people die," Watkins says. "Industry is wonderful to have, but if it's killing the people in the area that they live in, what good is industry?"

Watkins is a worthy advocate, a 76-year-old great-grandmother challenging those in power. Her words are often punctuated by folksy aphorisms: "Nothing beats a failure but a try," she says.

And try she will.

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/20/health/louisiana-toxic-town/index.html>

Bonne Terre, Missouri – Steven Anderson

About 55 miles southwest of St. Louis, Steven Anderson — who owns an outfitter called Cherokee Landing in Bonne Terre — routinely takes his customers to St. Francois State Park.

To a trained observer like Anderson, the beach where he launches his kayak trips offers clear signs of lead contamination. Before taking off recently, he scooped up a handful of gravel.

"See these gray and black specks?" he said, pointing at the tiny dark rocks in his hand. "There's a lot of heavy tailings on this beach."

The tailings are discarded mine waste from the lead mining that long took place in St. Francois County. The Environmental Protection Agency has a plan to clean up the waste along the Big River, which runs through the heart of Missouri's Old Lead Belt.

But Anderson and other residents worry that the EPA's plan to clean up parts of the Big River, the Flat River and nearby streams will disrupt recreation. Environmental groups fear that the strategy won't be effective enough to protect people and wildlife from pollution.

<https://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/recreationists-environmentalists-wary-epas-cleanup-plan-rivers-old-lead-belt#stream/0>