



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN  
NUCLEAR DANGERS & A SAFE,  
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

November 2018

## IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL PLANET A Letter to Help the Year End

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Dear Friends,

**PARADISE BURNED DOWN.** So blared the headlines. At the same time as the Santa Susana Field Lab erupted in flames in Southern California, the “Camp Fire” to the north was on its way to becoming the most destructive fire in state history. The town of Paradise, in the Sierra Nevada foothills, was destroyed, with many of its residents killed.

While the causes of the initial ignition of the fires that raged through the state may vary, the extraordinary spread of the flames has an underlying cause: climate change produced by human activity, particularly our out-of-control burning of fossil fuels. As greenhouse gas levels increase, temperatures go up, and with more energy in the global system, extreme weather events like the recent fires in California and the hurricanes in the Southeast increase in frequency and intensity.

These are not acts of God but of people and institutions. A major study prepared by thirteen federal agencies over four years was just released showing the devastation that climate change will bring about if significant efforts are not undertaken to markedly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. In response, Mr. Trump said about the massive study by the federal government’s own scientists, “I don’t believe it.” Science, facts, reason are all under assault.

In response to the Paradise and SSFL fires, his Administration blamed environmentalists and he said the fires were due to the failure to “rake” the forest floors the way he (falsely) claimed Finland does, leading to jokes about “Make America Rake Again.” At the same time, the Trump Administration was energetically at work to undo virtually every existing policy designed to control carbon. He is trying to force more use of coal, the worst fossil fuel from a greenhouse gas standpoint; roll back efforts to control methane emissions; reverse requirements to reduce carbon dioxide released by the transportation sector; increase drilling and fracking on public lands and off the coasts. He is in essence pouring gasoline on the fires.

Because greenhouse gases reside in the atmosphere for centuries, the damage the current Administration does to environmental protection may be irreversible. The recent devastating fires in California and hurricanes in the Southeast are just a portent of what is to come. And none of this touches on the Trump Administration’s actions to revive the nuclear arms race—by tearing up the Reagan-Gorbachev Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty, dramatically increasing construction of new nuclear arms, etc. We are on course to either burning or blowing up the planet, or both.

In our annual newsletter two years ago, I wrote an article entitled “It’s Far Worse Than You Think.” It is disturbing to read now what I wrote then; the situation is somehow even worse than I had feared. A coal industry lobbyist runs the Environmental Protection Agency, taking a sledgehammer to hundreds of rules designed to protect the environment and public health. The news media have been attacked as “enemies of the people.”

*continued on reverse*

The President's demonization of refugees, minorities, and the poor is beyond anything we could have imagined. They are being used as pawns to demagogically stir up hatred of the weak and vulnerable. The enmity being fanned has contributed to tragic results: pipe bombs sent to the news outlets and leaders of the party attacked by the President, the mass shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburg and the spray-painting with Trump slogans and burning of a black church in Mississippi, and dozens of people injured while protesting a white nationalist demonstration in Charlottesville.

Poor people, fleeing for their lives from violence in their countries that we often have had a role in creating, are being denied the fundamental right of even applying for asylum guaranteed by both national and international law. The recent photo of a poor woman with two young children in diapers, one barefoot, all running in terror from U.S. tear gas, rips at the conscience, but conscience has become a scarce commodity today.

Where is the conscience? It is said that a primary part of the Administration's political base for these heartless policies are evangelicals. I simply do not understand how so many people who consider themselves religious can be supporters of, or at least silent about, this demagoguery, the rapid slide to autocracy, the destruction of Creation, the fomenting of hatred of the least among us. The teachings, by contrast, are filled with compassion: "Treat the foreigner as the homeborn. You are to love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." "What is hateful to you do not do unto others," or more affirmatively, "Love your neighbor as yourself." "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees their brother or sister in need, yet closes their heart against them, how does God's love abide in them? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Many years ago the woman I loved accused me of liking the Sermon on the Mount too much. I confess my guilt. I do believe that blessed are the poor. I do believe that blessed are the merciful. I do believe that blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. I do believe that blessed are the peacemakers.

For almost half a century Bridge the Gap has tried, haltingly, difficultly to live by those principles. These are the most trying times for the world we have ever experienced. Yet we acknowledge the small miracle of being permitted to strive for "tikkun olam," to be allowed to work to repair a torn world.

It is astonishing that for forty-five years Pauline Saxon and Shel Plotkin (now in their nineties!) and Jack Miles have worked with us; for thirty years Susan Clark and Catherine Lincoln; for fifteen Laura Giges and Tony Zepeda; and for ten Cindi Gortner and Megan Garrett. The extraordinary researcher and documentarian Michael Rose, who forty years ago helped us bring to light the SSFL meltdown and so much more, continues to help. And Tyrone Taborn, who came into our lives as such a joy (when he was in his early teens!), forty-five years ago, has helped keep us afloat these many years with remarkable material and spiritual support. Now we have a large cohort of extraordinary young people as staff and interns, expanding and invigorating the work.

This world was never fully a Paradise, but it is nonetheless very beautiful and worth defending and protecting. Help us in that work if you are able.

Peace, and other responsibilities,



Daniel Hirsch