

## *From the Kitchen*

9 December 2009



Who are you when it matters?

Who are you when there is a need for each of us to come down off the mountain to where the work gets done? Which side do you come down on – where what you say and do makes a difference or the side where you can pretend it's not important and nothing can be done and it doesn't matter anyway?

Work needs to be done, urgently. We have voted for our leaders or for those we hoped would be leaders. A few of these are truly leading. We have paid money to those who promised they would use their businesses to make a difference. Some are doing so and many are using our largesse to keep things as they are or make them worse.

Most of our leaders *want* to lead us on the most propitious path. They are often stopped – by fear, by misguided advice, by bullies, by timorousness – and we are being complacent and complicit.

We need to take responsibility, starting with ourselves and extending all the way to the entire globe and the space around it.

For every word we utter about a representative or someone else that is discouraging or angry or mean, we can send them two of encouragement or three of praise.

Does your thinking extend beyond your next meal, your next purchase of something you don't need? Do you plan beyond your next holiday to thinking about what sort of holiday may be possible in fifty years for your descendants yet unborn? One hundred years?

A complex garment is put together one small stitch at a time and each stitch allows the placing of the next. A building can be erected one brick at a time and a wall can be dismantled stone by stone. No task is so daunting that it cannot be dealt with in achievable increments.

There is an urgency to the change. Not the weather; not the environment; not other people. There is an urgency to change ourselves. That is the only change that will make survival of *Homo sapiens* possible, as well as the survival of *Cophixalus concinnus* and *Sloanea australis* and *Dittrichia graveolens* and *Paralucia pyrodiscus* and all of the other more than two million species. *Homo sapiens* is just one of these millions of species and, when given its Latin nomenclature, it looks no more important than any of the others.

What we are facing is not just about slowing down climate change. That may or may not be possible. It's about every way in which we contribute to the degradation and destruction of the environment needed to sustain life – below the surface, on the surface and above it. As Julia Butterfly Hill has said: "We keep throwing things away, but there really is no such place as 'away'."

Drew Dellinger, in his poem 'hieroglyphic stairway', says:

*my great great grand children ask in my dreams  
what did you do while the planet was plundered?  
what did you do when the earth was unravelling?*

What are you able to tell *your* great-great-grandchildren?






My wife has reminded me of the research that people's level of concern can be inversely proportional to the imminence of a threat. People living in a valley at the head of which was a cracked dam wall which could collapse, were asked how worried they were. Those living immediately below the dam wall showed least concern; people's concern increased the further down the valley they lived. We do not know how far down the valley we live or when the dam wall will break, but most people act like those living immediately below the wall.

Attitudes to possible disaster have also come out of the Royal Commission into the February 2009 bushfires in Victoria. Many people, though they knew of the risks of a disastrous fire, believed it was unlikely to happen to them. Even the fire-fighting authorities were surprised at what happened, despite modelling.

It can be difficult for us to be sure how accurate the predictions of global warming leading to global disaster are. We don't need to be. Everyone can be sure that we are destroying almost all that is sustaining us, through our attitudes to ourselves and others, and to the Earth and everything on it.

The details are less important than the acknowledgement that what we have been doing increasingly for the past two hundred years cannot continue.

In the end, we are the ones who will not be sustained.

<a href="#"><i>Homo sapiens</i></a>	Human being	
<a href="#"><i>Cophixalus concinnus</i></a>	Tapping Nurseryfrog	
<a href="#"><i>Sloanea australis</i></a>	Maiden's blush	
<a href="#"><i>Dittrichia graveolens</i></a>	Stinkwort	
<a href="#"><i>Paralucia pyrodiscus</i></a>	Eltham Copper Butterfly	

<http://juliabutterflyhill.wordpress.com> (environmental activist and writer)

[www.drewdellinger.org](http://www.drewdellinger.org) (environmental activist and poet)

[www.poetsforglobaljustice.org](http://www.poetsforglobaljustice.org)

[www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org) (action site)

[www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch) (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)