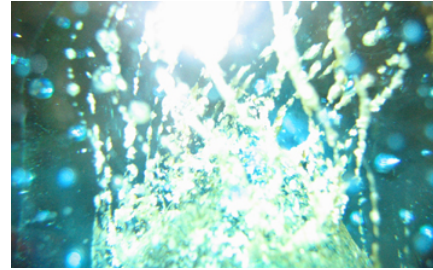


From the Kitchen

22 July 2009

I can't see much through the curtain of heavy rain outside the kitchen window. The rain has the scene look as if it has been given a PhotoShop blur filter: the black and white magpies feasting on drenched insects and worms now look dark grey and light grey.



The wind comes in gusts and shakes water out of the trees.

There's a squabble between the magpies and a pair of minas. Is it over food or territory? The smaller birds prevail and the magpies fly out of view. What makes the minas so feisty? They are able to spook the cat and steal his food from the back veranda.

The rain changes many things: the traffic swishes along the street outside, instead of humming; there is the sound of the furious flow along the creek behind the house. I took the dog out earlier and after ten minutes he wanted to go back home – unlike the birds, he gets saturated. The heater makes the kitchen cosier when it's raining hard.

I love lying in bed, listening to the rain pelting down on the roof and the sound it makes in the trees. Years ago, camping out, I would enjoy the rain drumming on the tent and the wind howling around it. It heightened the sense of adventure, knowing there was only flimsy material and thin ropes between me and a soaking. How can I reproduce that feeling in other aspects of my life?

Actually, it's really only a matter of degree, because, as Helen Keller once wrote:

*Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature ...
Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.*

I can sit in my cosy kitchen with my contented fluffy dog or cuddle up with my wife in a warm bed, but I cannot stop the wind that might bring the tall gumtree crashing through the roof. Nor can I stop an earthquake or a firestorm. I could, I suppose, be like Don Juan in Castaneda's books and just not turn up for dangerous events.

To some degree at least, we cannot control what happens to us. The measure of the bold and the fearful is how each responds. Do I assess what just happened and formulate an action plan, or do I say "that shouldn't have happened and *they* need to do something about it"?

I'm not powerless, however. I can join others in an effort to change circumstances. More than one hundred thousand of us did that in the 1970s, when we all marched in the city and then sat down in Bourke Street, in an attempt to convince the government to bring an end to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. As we sat there en masse, we all assumed we could move the almost immovable object.

There are so many seemingly immovable objects today and we can easily feel that they are to be accepted as givens. Moving them would take so much effort. Some of them seem to be totally beyond our control, such as the apparent influence some groups have over governments.

The fossil fuel industry appears to have the Federal Government spooked so that too few resources are put into developing workable alternatives. With governments worldwide having bailed out many of the institutions that were complicit in the Global Financial Fiasco, nothing

fundamental seems to have changed in that area. The banks and other financial institutions are probably laughing all the way to the ...

The attitudes of too many in the community to possibly imminent, irreversible climate change are akin to my attitude to leaves in the gutter of a house I lived in years ago. 'I'll do it soon', had me eventually dealing with a flood-damaged house for two weeks, after fifteen centimetre of rain fell in one night. Clear gutters would have meant a dry house.

We live more in hope than with action. The millions of people outside the USA who were recently hoping for a change of government there, had no power to bring it about, other than perhaps with their combined emotional commitment. We seem to live with the prospect of climate change in a similar way – as if we do not live on *this* planet and are not totally dependent on it. Even those who do not believe we humans are a major contributor to climate change, should live their lives as if we are, because that may also lead to a slowing down of the damage we are doing to almost every part of the biosphere.

We would do well to remember that of all the bulk of the Earth, we humans occupy, and can only occupy, a very thin outer layer.

The rain has stopped and the late afternoon sun is making a feeble show through breaks in the clouds. I should get the ladder out and clear the gutters before we get more heavy rain. But first I'll make myself a nice mug of hot chocolate.