

# NOTES ON THIS YEAR'S EXPEDITION

BY LOUIS ALVIS

America is enormous. I have spent much of my life traveling across this country and it wasn't any smaller this year. It is miraculous that we can cross the vast distances of our continent so easily. This past winter I was able to routinely travel in an hour what had taken the Native American and the pioneer days. Unlike these forebearers I stayed warm, clean and well housed. But the rather outdated nature of my motorized transport served to remind me of the fragility of our god-like leaping across these immense tracts. Looking for twenty-one year old replacement parts in Drypool, Arizona is not unlike finding a new wagonwheel hub in Monument Valley, 1885.

I was also reminded of how much of our country, and for that matter the world, is unsuitable for current uses. Stark, barren, poor. A lot of our planet is doing the best it can just being left alone. But if you look through other eyes, you can see the incredible fertility of some places in the mild blush of moss clinging to shade under a rock. These two images may seem mutually exclusive, but are just sides on a coin. A coin we can use, perhaps, to buy our way out of the corner the world is in.

Our ability to foretell events is dependent on our ability to assume the most perspectives on the world around us. The more viewpoint you can assess, the better your understanding of What Is Now. The better your understanding of What Is Now, the more you can apprehend What May Come.

Wintering across the sunnier parts of America gave me a good chance to find out how our neighbors are faring, gain their perspectives, sharing ours. The reviews are mixed. I found four recurring viewpoints.

— "Well, things are a little fluid now, but all in all I think things are pretty much fine the way they are. Yeh, it's a little harder to get ahead, but I'm ok. And I understand that the Important People are doing a pretty good job. Yes sir, I have faith, things are gonna stabilize, and we can go back to living in the 'Good Old Days'. Yep, any day now."

The bulk of these people are of the professional and white collar classes, or the better indoctrinated blue collar and lower income workers, if they are employed. Many Americans are trying desperately to believe that they can go on living as they always have. Wasting, spending, using up, ignoring of the world around you. These are the people who went to Earth Day, ate lots of fast food, and threw their forgotten ecology literature on the ground. (I know, I spent the next day picking it up.) This belief system is getting scarcer. I'd say it is no longer a clear majority, now, though those who adhere to it are willing to ignore even the most persuasive arguments. Disturbingly, many also seem willing to fight to retain this illusion.

— "Well, you know, I think there is something going on here. And it don't look pretty. I've worked hard all my life, saved, tried to raise my family right. I fought for my country. I vote. I believe in America. But then, how come it seems like it doesn't pay off. My savings are inadequate, my family is shaky, the bank is weak, half the businesses in town are closed. There is plenty to buy, but you need credit to do anything. The politicians are just crooks or fools, they don't understand our problems. I'm afraid it's time we took a good look around, take stock, see what needs to be done. No, I don't have any answers. Not yet."

In some ways this was one of the most heartening things I heard. And I heard it a lot. It came from all classes, all places. It came from honest, plain thinking folks. People who have carried their weight, and willing to help out a stranger. Many were blue collar workers, or farmers, miners and the like. But a significant number were office workers, educators, some professionals as well. The people uttering these thoughts are proof that there is progress. En masse the Average American may still set political flavor. And when they ask enough questions, you can be sure that someone will listen. A lot of ordinary folks are wising up. A tangible positive sign at last.

— "It's Fucked Man! The whole country/planet is ruined. The air is bad, the water's bad, the food's poisoned, Mr. Big owns it all and plays it away. We just get the bill, and the shaft. There ain't nothin' you can do man, just give it up. Here, have another pull on this Ripple — or maybe call your broker and sell off something else."

The low and the high say this one. And they are right about the symptoms but don't have the answer. A lot of people have bought into the Hopeless World Syndrome. The low, of course, are often the victims. Many have turned to drugs or TV or alcohol, anything to distract them from the world they are afraid to face. The high variety that holds this belief is well placed. Business executives, "managers", financial advisors, attorneys, brokers, and others in the wealth manipulations field.

DRAWING BY LISA ALVIS



They see this time as their last chance to "get theirs". Sort of a National Liquidation Sale. It's very hard to get them to talk about it, but the belief often lurks under a jocular glad-hand attitude. "Look, somebody's gonna do it, why not me?" Some of these people are among the most destructive forces on our planet.

— "I think it's Time. We are in trouble, but there are more people, ideas, resources, options, energy and answers now than at any time in history. We have in our reach the choice to pull ourselves, our country, and our world out of the mess it's in. Never has there been as much potential for a safe sustainable world with enough for everyone than right now. We may have to change our very lives around to do it. But the result, a world where each person could make the most of his and her own potential would be welcome."

There are more of these folk than I have encountered before. They do not conform to any definable class. They are ubiquitous. True, they are the fewest of these four viewpoints, but they are almost always effective persons, capable of doing what they say. Some are in positions of great, though subtle power; some are living simple, detached lives. They come from all cultural and religious backgrounds. Many are concerned that their viewpoint is rare. It is. But it is more prevalent than ever before. Fewer of them are eccentrics or mystics. More of them are the capable and competent.

Self-fulfilling prophecies occur most often to groups and individuals that effect the world around them, rather than those who are acted upon. Choice for tactical inactivity is in itself an action.

I have heard many Authorities declare what is and is not possible. "You can't do this or that, at least practically," they naysay change. Yet I saw many homes and work places that were doing all the things that the Experts say can't be practical. I saw miles of wind generators. They fluttered along the hillsides like

orchards of gargantuan birds, flying, though earthbound. They ran constantly, pumping kilowatt after kilowatt into the greedy grid of the southern coast. They could easily have spread around the whole southwest, along the ever present power lines. They could have marched their way up the west coast to our own windy locale, providing lots of clean safe power to our homes, increasing real productivity and creating jobs. Everywhere.

I saw a lake in the desert shimmering like a mirage. A mirage that materialized into reality. A lake of solar cells, quietly harvesting energy from our 93 X 10<sup>6</sup> miles distant, self-regulating Fusion Reactor Star. If production capacity were dedicated to manufacture of these and other technologies, the economic and environmental costs of electric power would plummet.

On a more personal front, I saw many private installations. Houses and farms, off the grid, producing and storing all the electricity they could use. Not "Do It Yourself Science Kit" technology but simple efficient operations. You can go to a store, buy what you need, and any electrician can install it in your home. For much less than the cost of a new car. Off the shelf answers abound.

The clean up and restructuring of our world is the greatest opportunity for full employment, maximum life support, and personal satisfaction that we have ever seen. There is work enough for every displaced logger, fisherman, assembly-liner or other jobless person in the country. All it takes is a little personal bravery. It is scary to realize that you have to start over again. But that is what folks are beginning to do. Across America, people and towns are beginning to choose for a new future and enacting lasting sustainable change on many levels. In too many places I have seen the resistance to change stifle and kill. Dying towns clinging to outdated beliefs. In others I have seen the phoenix rise from the recession. They had the courage to stop politicking and adapted to a changing world.

Our own North Coast is a microcosm of our country. On the whole, we and it are at this same crossroads. Everything we need is available. If more of us can put away old programming and adopt what of it we need with what we must learn, then all will be well. We can, any of us, look forward to traveling anywhere in freedom and safety. Or we can stay at a secure and wholesome home. For as long as we want.

But if we choose to cling to foolish notions and turn a blind eye to the changes around us, we will slip away, like the empty storefronts that dot Mainstreet, Anywhere USA.



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Louis and Lisa Alvis recently returned from a nation-girdling (almost) expedition that began last fall. They are back in Astoria, and both have resumed volunteer broadcasting for KMUN-FM, Radio Free Columbia/Pacific.