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**natural resistance** BY MARY O'BRIEN

## No More, No Less

We are what we allow.

**W**hile people are dying in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India from the Earth shuddering and the ocean heaving, the 45-year-old brother of one of my friends is dying of lymphoma in a Utah neighborhood that was downwind of Nevada atmospheric nuclear tests in the 1950s. He's the fourth person to die of cancer around that age in that neighborhood in recent years. Each day on Earth, approximately 35,000 children under 5 die of malnutrition or starvation. As we speak, men are dying under torture by our government.



How do we hold all this?

The instant mass, community death, caused by no one, evokes mass sympathy and an inspiring mobilization of aid.

The delayed individual adult death, caused by a nuclear arms race, is largely denied.

The daily mass death of sparrow-like children, caused by desperation, greed, and deliberate policies is largely ignored.

If all humans were to agree on one phrase each year to share in common and live by, my nomination for 2005 would be this: "We are no more and no less than the life at any given place on Earth."

The death of a person we never met from purposely administered, hideous pain is accepted for "national security."

I see no way to grieve more for one early death than another. I do not intend to downplay Southeast Asia's current agony. I cannot help placing it alongside the agony of my friend's brother and that of the 35,000 children who starved to death today and that of a mortally beaten prisoner, far from a newspaper's front page.

Somehow a tsunami helps us remember that we are all sisters and brothers; while colorful flags, particular phrases, or vast differences in wealth help us forget. If all humans were to agree on one phrase each year to share in common and live by, my nomination for 2005 would be this: "We are no more and no less than the life at any given place on Earth."

We are no more than the whale dying of PCBs we have dumped in the ocean. We are no less than the person who delivers fresh water to a thirsty Indonesian. We are no better than the conditions in a Guantanamo or Libyan prison, and we are no poorer than a song being played perfectly on a flute.

If we thought this way, wouldn't "No Child Left Behind" finally mean something compassionate? Wouldn't we take care of each estuary, each forest, each spring? Wouldn't we stand between the perpetrators of violence and the victim? Wouldn't our "bottom line" become the health of all rather than monetary profit for some?

OK., the phrase isn't going to be adopted by everyone. But in fact we *are* no more and no less than the life at any given place on Earth. May the best of life on Earth this year give you strength to bring hope and change to the worst.

Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist since 1981. She can be reached at [mob@efn.org](mailto:mob@efn.org)

Find out why TIME MAGAZINE names this "one of the 10 best plays."

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