

Close Window

"And we would tell you something from the vantage point of this future time. There was eventually a great discovery. A medicinal herb which we had used for over 50,000 years in our healing ceremonies; was found to hold the cure for many of the cancers that afflicted your people. This cure might never have been found if we had disappeared. But we did not disappear. Thanks to you, and to many others, we live. WE LIVE!"

**Voice: *Colymbus glacialis*, the common North American loon**

"Greetings from the future world, O human friends. We know that many years ago, you spent precious hours resting from your labors by the lakes that are our home. You listened to the loons, calling far out across the water.

"Many, many years later, over 200 years later, as you humans count time, we are still here. I am *Colymbus glacialis*, the loon, and I call now, not across the water, but across time, and I call to let you know the sun still rises here on the lake, and the morning mists still lift from the water. The sun still sets slowly in the evening and the call of the loons is still heard by the humans.

"This beauty still exists, and your caring for all this still renders your presence here. Your work to care for all the living things of the Earth has left its vibrant trace. Your spirit became part of these lakes; and here it will reside, lifting with the morning mist, and floating across the water with the cry of the loons."

(Words by Joanna Macy's friend and colleague, Kevin McVeigh.)

BACK

**or**

"I have been reading some of the early reports of the Fire Group created back in the late twentieth century, which is now almost 200 years ago. Through the Nuclear Guardianship Project, you helped create a new method for storing nuclear wastes for the many thousands of years they remain deadly.

"We at the Gandhi Site, and all those in residence at the many other Guardian Sites around the world (my brother works at the Gorbachev Site, where Chernobyl once stood)--we thank you for having the courage to create this new form, for seeing that a monastic community would be needed to hold the discipline of guardianship for centuries. As I leave now for the evening meditation, I salute you with the universal sign for peace and earth caring, now used in every part of the world--two hands raised, cupped, over the head, two hands holding the Earth. We thank and honor you for your vision and courage."

**Voice: Shaman of the Surui Tribe, in the Brazilian Amazon**

"I am Itabira, Shaman of the Surui people, of Rondonia, in the Brazilian Amazon. In the 1990s there were barely a hundred of my people left, though we had once numbered in the many thousands. Our women had stopped bearing children; our people were diseased and no longer had the will to live. My ancestors prepared at that time for the death of our people--we performed the ritual for the end of time.

"But then through the efforts of many people to wake up the world, there came a great change. The destruction of our rainforest home ceased--the logging, the burning, the killing of people and animals--all of it gradually came to an end. My people survived, and now we live--  
WE LIVE!

"We honor the work you did to help in this great cause, the work you called Deep Ecology, and which we know simply as the basic truth of life.

***Hear the voices from the future...***

**Voice: Student at the Institute of Gaian Studies**

"I am a student speaking to you from the year 2189. I am in my second year at the Institute of Gaian Studies, located in the Eastern region of Tibet.

"As I study the early history of Gaian thinking, I am filled with gratitude for the way you applied ancient wisdom, such as that of the Buddhist Dharma and of Taoism, and the later insights of general systems theory, to the problems of global suffering and planetary survival.

"Though you are now long dead, this Institute carries on your work. I speak across the centuries today to tell you that in this, and in many other ways, you will never be forgotten. We try to imagine what it was like back in the time of the Great Turning, the time when you lived and did your work. It must have been a tortured time, a time of fear and uncertainty. I only hope there was also joy, and the warmth of human closeness, for you and those around you.

"We know the threats to our beloved Earth which pervaded your time, and we thank you particularly for creating a new psychology for global survival. We know that Albert Einstein called for a new mode of thinking in the nuclear age, and we feel that you contributed to that task--not just new thoughts, but a new mode of thinking, one that joined mind and heart and spirit.

"Well, I must return now to my report on 'Macy's adaptation of Buddhism to the Gaian System'--it's due Monday morning, and I've hardly begun. You see that some things have not changed! I bid you farewell, and tell you once more, you are not forgotten."

**Voice: A worker at one of the Nuclear Guardian Sites**

"I am a worker at Mahatma Gandhi Nuclear Guardian Site, in the place Where the old Three Mile Island nuclear power plant once stood.

itself."

"We can avoid it, as I have said earlier, by concerning ourselves regularly and vigorously with new beginnings. And we can attempt the even more profound renewal, available I think only to the old, of partially shedding our individual selves and participating in a grander social and biological identity."

"Love...is impossible without the gift of time...We love only when we love across time, when love offered is love remembered and love promised."

"Happiness (as suggested, for example, by the French word for happy, heureux) may well consist primarily of an attitude toward time. Individuals we consider happy commonly seem complete in the present:...They choose and patiently develop lengthy projects, so voluminous in time that the work of a single day is no more than a strand in the weft of a rug. They love remembering past experiences and making plans; they speak of past and future, not as external contexts, but rather as esteemed confederates, quiet extensions of their own being. One almost feels that their lives possess a kind of qualified eternity: that past and future, birth and death, meet for them as in the completion of a circle."

BACK

**"Voices from the Future Time,"** by friends of Joanna Macy (*Journal of Traditional Acupuncture*)

*Friends of Joanna Macy--the author, innovator, teacher, mystic, futurist--prepared and performed this piece in her honor at an award ceremony sponsored by the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age at Harvard University in December 1989. At the ceremony, the speakers, acting as representatives of a future time, addressed their remarks to Joanna. Macy. In the article below, however, they speak to all those in the late twentieth century who were part of the Great Turning--those who worked diligently to solve problems of global suffering and planetary survival. The Journal thanks Joanna Macy for permission to broaden the script to address each of us involved in "world work."*

the death of places, and the death of other species, and despite the many lies we have told ourselves about how and why these deaths occurred, we still have the capacity to envision and enact another way of living. Each day, we have the chance to live differently.

Our relationships to land, whether 1938 be a garden on a city block, the knowledge of where our food comes from, or the deep wildness found in a range of forests, rivers and mountains, is the only enduring human story: 1938 is the only story that we can tell about ourselves, now or long into the future, that will be understood and valued. It is the only authentic time capsule for our children's children. And every day 1938 raises important questions of mythic proportions. ***How do we want to be?*** Do we surrender fully to a culture defined by our own gratification, our own self-preservation and our own death by alienation? Or, do we define ourselves by our tolerance, our sense of self-restraint, and our determination to love and to be loved?

Our most noble and profound time capsule is the daily act of struggling to re-assert our healthy human relationship with the rest of life, to create a new attitude, vision and reality for ourselves. This is the restoration of our lives into the larger story of life.

BACK

***Time and the Art of Living***, Robert Grudin, selected passages (2002, Harper and Rowe)

"They do not easily grow sad or old; they are seldom intimidated by the alarms and confusions of the present because they have something greater of their own, some sense of their large and coherent motion in time, to compare the present with."

"The extent to which we live from day to day, from week to week, intent on details and oblivious to larger presences, is a gauge of our impoverishment in time. Deprived of the continuum, we lose not only the sole valid alternative to a present-centered existence but also the nourishing context which can give substance and value to the present

white paint on red rock saying, "I am alive. I have lived."

Perhaps these beautifully subtle explanations of ancient pueblo life are really no different than the woman's hat included in the 1938 capsule or the samples of hair that were taken for the 2001 capsule. All three certainly speak of our determination to express a record of our lives, but what the Puebloans left us, simply left there in nature exposed to hundreds of years of sun, wind and rain, seems so much more enduring, so much more evocative of what I aspire to for myself. The handprints go directly through my rational mind into an ancient memory space that is still connected to the greater world, that knows no distinction between the outline of the human form and the red rock of the canyon itself. It speaks to the part of me that recognizes my own breath in the constellations of Orion. I stare at the handprints because they reconnect me with my own highest aspirations for living: to be in relation to the world around me. The handprints are powerful because they are there, on the rock, still expressing whatever human emotion created them: awe, laughter, fear, anger. One cannot observe them without also smelling sage and earth, without hearing the soliloquy of the canyon wren. I think of the hundreds of generations of deer and mountain lion, and of the hundreds of humans, who, passing through this canyon, have seen these handprints, and moved on. While they are just pigment etched on sandstone, 1938 is their relationship with that place that gives them life. I, too, am nothing more than water and minerals. It is only through my relationships that I transform that water and minerals into a story. And I aspire for that story to be grounded in truth, compassion and a level of awareness of what is going on around me.

I have faith that most Americans recognize that their *true* wealth or security *isn't* in their bank accounts, but comes from the stories we can tell about the people, creatures, and places that we rely upon. Our prosperity and security as people and as members of the natural world can *only* be determined by the quality of our relationships with the world around us, the degree to which we are embedded in the ecological community. This is true for every species of life on this planet. The only honest and truly enduring time capsule is how we live each day in relation to other life, not what we store in a box or accumulate in a bank account.

I also have faith that even as we have witnessed the death of humans,

neither buried nor physical, yet one that will last at least another 1000 years. Let us show a new way to preserve the past and at the same time speak to new generations of a new day, a day without war and injustice.

The survival of a scroll is not our triumph. Rather, it's our study of 1938, our belief in its vision of a perfected world one day, and our faith in Torah's power to purify and enlighten us. Generations of time capsules have given us a document that has empowered us to be like God, active creators in repairing the world.

We can create a new kind of time capsule, not a container for our vanities, but an authentic source of inspiration for how we might better live. This time capsule would challenge our perception of ourselves by being a mirror of our daily relationships with the life around us. Because 1938 lives with us, this time capsule would demand that we grapple every day with its meaning. Most importantly, this time capsule would not be judged by the fabulous and interesting creations we put into 1938, but by the quality of our relationship to it: by our respect and kinship. We would not place objects of our creation into this time capsule but place, instead, our acceptance of its mystery and our expressions of faith.

Let us think today of how we inhabit the land as the most important time capsule that we might ever create. It shows that we are more concerned about the living heritage we leave for future generations than about any image of ourselves. What we write on the land is a more enduring and accurate reflection of who we are than the artifacts we display. This time capsule says that what we choose to do with the tools we invent is more important than the tools themselves.

Every year I make a pilgrimage to a time capsule. I hike as deep as I can into the red rock canyons of the Cedar Mesa to welcome spring, to hear silence, to briefly escape the mud season of my native New England, and--most importantly--to see one thing. There's a particular natural arch that I always have in mind. At its base can still be seen the evidence of five hundred years of human life: pottery shards, the hollowing in the rock where corn was ground, and the handprints. They always startle me. Hands smaller than my own, still precise with



wholly diminished by the legacy of the past, would say anything other than "damn them." Ultimately, time capsules are about objects as opposed to relationships, and therefore they reinforce the illusion of separation between us and the rest of life. This is an increasingly dangerous notion, one that will certainly kill us. That we can save ourselves while destroying the rest of life is as absurd and immoral as believing that any group of humans could or should create a master race by committing genocide.

Let's take the noble inspiration behind time capsules to ask ourselves how might we truly send forward our celebration of life? How might we create a world, to quote the 1938 time capsule, that the future might cherish? How might we create a time capsule not about objects but about relationships? There are answers in what Rabbi Malka Drucker has written about her people's relationship with Torah:

For three thousand years, Jews have kept their sacred text, Torah. If we'd stopped with the mere preservation of our oral tradition by putting 1938 in writing, it's not likely we'd still be able to read 1938. What saved us was not the physical evidence of our civilization, but the constant reading and wrestling with the text to find ourselves within 1938. We became the holders, the containers of the written text. We became the time capsules for culture, ideas, and dreams of our family.

We've learned that not even bedrock will preserve anything forever. We call God *ha tzur*, the rock, because God is the ultimate bedrock, and that immortal substance can only be carried within our physically frail and temporary bodies, yet the word of God, our stone, is what will last forever as long as we keep speaking 1938. The most precious part of our lives can never be touched. We can touch our noses, but we cannot touch our love, our sense of what is beyond ourselves. Yet we know it, feel 1938, and through Torah we've learned a way to speak to our children 1000 years from now.

Torah is cryptic, problematic historically, not always great literature, and not always moral. Yet 1938 lives and teaches how to live, because 1938 births our deepest questions and dreams in its very mystery. Let our legacy to the world be a new kind of time capsule, one that is

replacing grasslands and woodlands with arable fields, cities, suburbs, malls and roadways. We have exploited dwindling stands of timber and fisheries; we have fouled the earth, the atmosphere and even much of the oceans; and we have introduced alien species around the globe. In short, we bear an uncanny resemblance to those Cretaceous comets...

We need the wild congeners of our increasingly homogeneous domestic crops to replenish their genetic diversity. But beyond such practical matters lies a moral question: how can we condone, however passively, the destruction of our fellow species?

What will be long dead when the times capsule is opened in 3000 according to Eldridge? Tigers, many songbirds, pollock, prairie dogs, mahogany, truffles, the African black rhinoceros, the African wild dogs, the Hawaiian coot, the Galapagos penguin, honeybees, the musk ox, ***among millions and millions of other species of life.***

How do we make sense of our desire to ***send forward our celebration of life*** when we are contributing directly to the death of some 30,000 species of life per year?

What do we make of this urge, as reflected by time capsules, to preserve a part of ourselves when we are so clearly destroying the world around us? Time capsules can be valuable and enlivening when they honestly challenge us with questions about ourselves. What do we have today that truly endures? What do we want the people of the future to look back and say about us? What might we give to future generations that is real, alive, true? What are we doing today that represents the full possibility of the human spirit?

I struggle with time capsules because they do not discern between fact and fiction, between what we say and what we do, between our real lives on this earth and the lies we allow ourselves to tell. Time capsules strike me as a human disconnect: that in 2001 we could celebrate the enormous diversity in our culture by placing examples of 1938 into a steel box that will last 1,000 years while simultaneously presiding over the greatest die-off of life in 65 million years. We somehow believe that these artifacts, found by a future generation

as usual. Already, today, we live amid an accelerating environmental calamity as we destroy the world's remaining natural forests, wetlands and fisheries, pollute its air, soil and water and approach the limits of our planet's photosynthetic capacity. It already seems likely that all the accessible supplies of fresh water will before long bump up against the needs of the growing world population--even if that growth rate continues to slow

One possible outcome will be familiar to readers of "Riddley Walker," Russell Hoban's chilling depiction of a postnuclear England, bombed back if not to the Stone Age then to no more than the leather-and-wood age. Anyone who has seen a "Road Warrior" movie has a graphic feel for such a primitive society. And that might be the best of 1938. With only salvage metal on hand, much of humanity would be reduced to the state of hunter-gatherers.

Included in the time capsule was also an article titled, "A Field Guide to the Sixth Extinction" written by Niles Eldridge, a paleontologist and curator at the American Museum of Natural History, which began:

Species are built to last. The rich fossil record of marine life over the past half-billion years tells us that the likes of clams, corals and crabs typically endure well over five million years. On land, where environmental change more readily upsets the ecological apple cart, the life expectancies of mammals are shorter (though still impressive, on the order of one million to two million years). And yet, here we are at the brink of the year 2000, asking an unnerving question: what species on earth right now will not be here when people open the Times Capsule in the year 3000?

Yet the sad fact is that we are living amid a sixth extinction event--one that, according to the Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, is costing the earth some 30,000 species a year. Biologists estimate that there are at least 10 million species on earth right now. At this rate, the vast majority of the species on earth today will be gone by the next millennium. Ever since humans domesticated plant crops and barnyard animals beginning some 10,000 years ago, our numbers have shot up from an estimated six million to six billion. We have engaged in a radical, systematic transformation of the world's ecosystems--

pamphlets; Internal Revenue Service Federal Income Tax Form 1040 (2000).

At the installation and dedication of the capsule, Jack Rosenthal, then editor of the *New York Times Magazine* said, "Think of the signals we'd be sending if we had gathered today to bury a barrel: concealment, pessimism, fear of the future, death. Now think of the signals that this capsule sends to the next 40 generations: openness, optimism, confidence and trust. That, finally, is why today is so satisfying. With this capsule, we declare our faith in the future. With this work of art, we send forward our celebration of life."

***We send forward our celebration of life.*** These are indeed meaningful and optimistic words, ideas worth living for. But are they true reflections of our generation? Have we overcome the fear and uncertainty of 1938? Are we living a different relationship with the world around us? Even the most cursory look at our times suggests a world that remains at war with itself and with all of life. In fairness to the *New York Times*, they faced this truth directly with two honest articles that appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* and which were also sealed in the time capsule itself. Jared Diamond wrote about who, in terms of humans, might still be around in the year 3000:

Nuclear conflict, for all its horror, might not kill everybody. Still, bombs or fallout might destroy every big city on every continent. The only targets that no one will bother to bomb are remote oceanic islands. Their populations will most likely survive, but they will face a problem: almost all of those remote islands are formed of volcanic lava or coral; they are completely without metal deposits. Perhaps there will be enough salvageable scrap metal, but if not, the island populations could, imaginably, relapse into the Stone Age. Only New Zealand has metal deposits and is sufficiently large and populous to retain books and knowledge of metal technology. Whoever those post nuclear New Zealanders are, 1938 is they who in this scenario would eventually visit the bombed-out and lifeless continents, poke around in the ruins and discover and open the Times Capsule...

There is another type of holocaust, even more likely to halt business

capsule, a 5' X 5' X 5' sculpture of welded stainless steel, was designed by renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, whose entry was chosen for its startling beauty. It is hopeful that beauty, not a burial underground, might be what will preserve this capsule for the next one thousand years.

Many of the fifty design entrees for the Millennium Capsule were brilliantly inventive, like Jargon Lanier's proposal to load our millennial data onto the DNA of a truly long-lived species, the cockroach, and then simply to allow the cockroach to do what 1938 has already done remarkably well for millions of years: thrive. Maya Lin, architect of the Vietnam memorial, conceived a plan of a metaphor of trees representing the bridge between heaven and earth. She suggested ten English Ivy trees planted at ritual intervals from the capsule, which would be buried deep below Central Park. The pattern of planting would be a proportional spiral used in classical architecture that is found throughout nature--in leaves and trees, the human body and the spirals in sunflowers and seashells, known as the Golden Section. Even after the trees died, their spiral root patterns would remain and lead to the capsule.

The *New York Times* capsule, which set out to "chronicle life in the late 20th century," was two years in the making and solicited the suggestions and the expertise of many thousands of Americans. When the capsule was sealed on April 26, 2001 it included hundreds of objects, books and records, among them:

Anti-shoplifting "Gator tag" from Wal-Mart; barbed wire; firearms registration form; advertisement for a Ford Expedition sport utility vehicle; Motorola cellular phone, battery, and brochure; Protector Plus condoms

from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; Vial of penicillin from Mantes-la-Jolie, France; Section 17 of the Indian Constitution from Bharatpur, India; Nickel LP record containing sounds of the late twentieth century; David Letterman top ten list; wild apple seeds from Kazakhstan; perception of tones: pitch and loudness scales; a copy of the *National Enquirer*, the Holy Bible in multiple translations; 27 hair samples; Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech; Alcoholics Anonymous book and

The creators of the time capsule believed that 1938 was a momentous era worthy of positive record. Surely this must be true of every age that seeks to create a history of itself. But on this occasion, history has shown us that 1938 was the threshold of a horrible story. 1938 was the last year that we had the right to call something "unbelievable." In their most violent display of anti-Semitism yet, German Nazis attacked Jewish people and property in Kristallnacht. Hitler annexed Austria. Mexico nationalized its petroleum industries. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French leaders made the historic "mistake" of appeasing Germany at Munich. Here in America, Woody Guthrie took his one-man, pro-labor folk music show on the road while most Americans were transfixed, instead, by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt Disney's first full-length animated film.

Perhaps there is a fair connection between the 1938 time capsule and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; both offered cartoon-like, peaceful, happy visions of the world. Perhaps that capsule is better described as a time "balm" than a time bomb, in that we used 1938 to make us feel better about or deny what we were doing to the world around us. Even the objects chosen to be included in this time capsule--the lady's hat, the Holy Bible, the reels of microfilm--seem woefully inadequate representations of American culture. The time capsule was the creation of leaders that some have called "our greatest generation," but what was left out was the evidence of the destructiveness and violence of this generation. Not only Walt Disney but also Edward Teller, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb, represented this era. Teller believed that, "we would be unfaithful to the tradition of western civilization if we shied away from exploring what man can accomplish, if we fail to increase man's control over nature." The last sixty-five years have brought about more human death and species extinction than any other time since the ice age. Time capsules are mirrors, direct evidence of our illusions about ourselves, the evidence of our blindness. Sixty-five years later, what are we still blind about? How might we continue to be deluding and diminishing ourselves?

The second millennium inspired renewed efforts at creating time capsules. The *New York Times* launched the most ambitious effort yet, which can be seen, theoretically, for the next 1,000 years above the ground in front of the American Museum of Natural History. The

Like a poodle burying a bone in the ground, these leaders sank their time capsule fifty feet below the surface of the earth in order to protect 1938 for future generations. But the two atomic fission bombs that America dropped on Japan in 1945, only seven years later, exploded craters 100 feet down and 800 feet across. These leaders were apparently also unaware that natural changes in the earth's axis and continental drift would change the location of the capsule by hundreds of feet during its internment. They went to great lengths to record the precise coordinates of the capsule's 1938 location--40° 44' 34".089 North Latitude, 73° 50' 43".842 West Longitude--in the ***Book of Record***, printed on permanent paper with special ink and reproduced in 3,000 copies that were sent to libraries, museums and monasteries throughout the world. Copies were sent to Shinto Shrines in Japan where a powerful military regime was swiftly planning the conquest of the rest of Asia. The ***Book of Record*** also made its way to India where religious unrest was overshadowed only by protests of colonial rule. And in North America the ***Book of Record*** was sent across the nation, from the Library of Congress to small libraries in farming towns of Nebraska and North Dakota and others along the shores of New England.

On that autumn day in 1938 the "Capsule of Cupaloy" began its journey five thousand years into the future--not to be disturbed until the year 6949. With this time capsule, its creators hoped "that we might leave records of our own day for five thousand years hence; to a day when the peoples of the world will think of us standing at history's midpoint." They made it a massive, noble, solemn gesture that captured the imagination of the country in 1938, and which now, with the perspective of history, strikes us as freakishly absurd.

To the people who might find this capsule centuries or even thousands of years hence, they inscribed on its side, "let him not wantonly destroy it, for to do so would be to deprive the people of that era of the legacy here left them. Cherish (the capsule) therefore in a safe place." These words, and the act of burying the capsule fifty feet under the ground, accurately reflect the fear and uncertainty that our leaders felt underneath their own bravado. Nothing could create a safe place in 1938, short of a totally different way of living and being in relation with the world, and they must have known this deep inside themselves.

culture being memorialized in the 1938 time capsule. George Westinghouse, born in 1846, was an inventor who created more than sixty companies and was responsible for the development of alternating current, or AC electricity. Westinghouse Company was chartered when George was forty, founded on his innovative notion that a transformer could supply lighting over a wide area. Four years later the Westinghouse Company had installed over 300 central power stations. Westinghouse Company, which is now owned by British Nuclear Fuels, aspires to be the leading global nuclear company. Half of all of the world's nuclear power plants today are based upon Westinghouse technology.

The best technology 1938 had to offer was used in creating the capsule, which consisted of 99.4 percent copper, .5 percent chromium, and .1 percent silver. Likewise, the engineers specified exact physical dimensions: seven feet, six inches in length, eight and three-eighths inches in diameter. The cylinder very closely resembled a rocket, and more than one journalist of the day referred to this new creation as a "time bomb" rather than a "time capsule," a name that later stuck.

"Time bomb" is an interesting explanation for what the men and women of Westinghouse had created in 1938; bombs, of course, were on their minds. Stories of that day--September 23, 1938--suggest that Albert Einstein had arrived secretly from Europe early in the morning and was taken by car to Flushing Meadow where he placed a private letter into the capsule moments before 1938 was sealed. Though no one knows for sure the contents of Einstein's letter, it's very likely that he used 1938 to express privately the same concerns he would express publicly nine months later when he wrote to President Roosevelt, warning that Nazi Germany was building an Atomic Bomb.

Time capsules are, of course, nothing more than mirrors of their creators. What the capsule looks like and where 1938 is deposited are as revealing as what is placed inside. Just these leaders' intention to create the time capsule makes apparent their strong belief in their own achievements and moment in history. But the 1938 capsule is particularly interesting because 1938 exposes so clearly how Americans seemed to consider themselves in relation to the world, including the far future world. It spoke volumes about our sense of invincibility and narcissism. And also our painful naiveté.



Moore and Scott Russell Sanders. Peter is a conservationist and writer and the founder of the Center for Whole Communities. You can order this book or learn more about Peter's work at [www.wholecommunities.org](http://www.wholecommunities.org).)

If anyone should come upon this capsule before the year A.D. 6949 let him not wantonly destroy 1938, for to do so would be to deprive the people of that era of the legacy here left them. Cherish 1938 therefore in a safe place.

- message written on the exterior of the 1938 time capsule

ON SEPTEMBER 23, 1938, as the sun reached directly overhead, five thousand people who had gathered at Flushing Meadow fell into silence. It was the autumnal equinox and the day was unusually clear and cold. They stood on bleachers facing scaffolding that was positioned over a hole dug in the ground. At exactly noon, an ancient Chinese bell was sounded in the background and the scaffolding's steel cables began to pop and groan as a rocket-like, shining cylinder was solemnly lowered fifty feet below the ground.

Within the cylinder, engineers had placed a Pyrex tube, which was first pumped free of air and then filled with nitrogen gas. Into this tube went a lady's hat, a safety pin, a copy of the U.S. Constitution, newspapers, magazines, a copy of the Holy Bible and hundreds of documents of literature and historical records stored on reels of microfilm. Also included was a guide for future civilizations (who, it was assumed, would have moved beyond the English language) to be used in reconstructing our 1938 American speech and communications. Finally, the cylinder contained letters from leading men of the time: Noble Prize—winning physicist Robert A. Millikan, German novelist Thomas Mann, and theoretical physicist Albert Einstein.

The 1938 time "capsule" was the creation of the Westinghouse Company, a corporation that personified America's unharnessed love affair with technology and commerce and that continues to shape the

Washington for a week three times a year, say in early January, spring, and summer, evaluate bills before Congress and suggest new legislation. During the balance of the year its members would still be heard from, as they point to the priorities they see appropriate for a healthy and decent future.

Our goals and values are increasingly shaped by our experience of time, and as this becomes more evident, the spectrum of political identifications will be reconceptualized--from spatial to temporal terms. Jeremy Rifkin suggests that political persuasions and loyalties formerly assigned to categories of "left" and "right" will sort themselves out more accurately and usefully in terms of their orientation to rhythms and duration of time. He sees the emerging political spectrum as moving between "power rhythms" at one pole and "empathetic rhythms" at the other. The latter, oriented to an ecological vision of life, would reintegrate our social and economic tempos with the tempos of the natural world so that the ecosystem can "heal itself and become a vibrant, living organism once again."

Since we as a species have no future apart from the health of that organism, this return to a more organic, ecological experience of time is a matter of survival. And we don't need to wait till we have created new institutions. We can begin now; by choice and mindfulness of our experience of time, we can become friendly with time. We can watch its rhythm in the breathing of the moment, and sense how its very passage, far from robbing us of life, connects us with the past and future ones. They become to us like unseen companions, as we reinhabit time.

Adapted from a presentation at the Conference on the Post-Modern Presidency, Santa Barbara, California, July 1989.

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**Lifting the Veil** (Excerpted from *Coming to Land in a Troubled World*, pp 27-41, 2003, Trust for Public Land by Peter Forbes, Kathleen Dean

## **Politics of Time**

If, for a livable world, we must learn to reinhabit time, what changes are required in our system of self-governance? What political practices would reflect and encourage a sense of responsibility to coming generations? Such questions prompt a wide range of proposals. Extending the length of terms of legislative office would relieve harried representatives from the pressures of bi-annual electoral campaigns and allow them time to think. Alterations in executive budgetary requirements would free disbursements from having to be hastily made in a given fiscal year.

Let's create structures that would give voice to the interests of future generations. This is totally in keeping with our principle of no taxation without representation. Since we are taxing future generations by the exploitation of their resources, they should have their say in the process. Because they are not born yet, or too young to vote, offices should be instituted where pronouncements can be made on their behalf.

One possibility has a precedent in the Congressional offices of representatives of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Though without a legislative vote, they are provided the means to bring views and needs of their constituencies to the attention of Congress. I propose a similar nonvoting representative for the people of the future, to promote their needs and bring a larger perspective on time into legislative debates. This representative could be selected at a special three-day convention in Washington, which would in itself be a salutary exercise in raising awareness of the effects of our present policies on coming generations.

A second possibility has even greater potential for changing our society's consciousness of time. Consider the establishment of a third house of Congress, a House of Spokespersons for the Future. Though without the power to pass laws, it would speak for the rights of coming generations. Its members, or "Spokes," would be high school seniors, two from each state, chosen at statewide conventions on Congressional election years. The House of Spokes would convene in

live and work at a nuclear "Guardian Site." (See Chapter 21.)

Another experiment with time involves an enactment on the same theme, where we play the roles of the future ones, speaking for them instead of to them. At audio-visual presentations my colleagues and I take our audience with us on a fantasy journey to a Nuclear Guardian Site a century or two from now. From that vantage point we look back at the post-World War II generations teat left behind the legacy of radioactive waste. We seek to understand what is required of those generations, in terms of creating institutions and practices for its responsible care. This exercise provides a fresh perspective on what our own generation has done and can do. This perspective can evoke a new sense of shock and shame, which is not inappropriate, and it is accompanied by a new sense of hope. Hope comes from glimpsing the possibility that we humans have the capacity to be faithful to life in dealing responsibly with what we have created.

The point I want to make here is that we have the ability, through our moral imagination, to break out of our temporal prison and let longer expanses of time become real to us. We can do it, we are good at it, and we like it.

Our radioactive legacy has had for me another peculiar effect on my experience of time. Suffering from the big squeeze as much as anyone, time's main meaning for me was scarcity and haste. Especially in social action, the clock was always ticking. Hurry, hurry to stop the next escalation of the arms race, to block the B-1 bomber or the Trident II. Make those calls, circulate those petitions, hurry to keep the world from blowing up, the countdown has started. When I began to focus on nuclear waste, when the longevity of its terrible toxicity dawned on me, when I glimpsed what this challenge would mean in terms of sustained human attention, the demands of time reversed themselves. The question of how fast one could get something done was replaced with the question of how long--how lo-o-n-n-ng--a period one could do it in. Will we actually be able to remember the danger of these wastes and protect ourselves for a hundred years, a thousand, a hundred thousand? As I pondered the likelihood of this, the challenge became duration not speed, the long haul, not the quick move. My breath slowed, the rib cage eased. The horror of the waste was helping me inhabit time.

nuclear wastes is, of all our behaviors, the most appalling display of our denial of the future. For their radioactivity produces not only disease, death, and sterility, it affects the genetic code itself. Likened to a madman in a library, it can scramble and lose forever the blueprints for life crafted by our long evolutionary journey. Yet, knowing this, we dump millions of metric tons of this waste into open unlined trenches, into the sea, into cardboard boxes, into tanks that crack and corrode within a decade or two.

The only permanent solution for high level waste that our government will provide is to hide it, out of sight and out of mind, in mammoth, deep geological repositories-although this strategy makes the leaking containers inaccessible for repair. The posture frequently taken by anti-nuclear citizens who protest the presence of this waste is in some ways analogous. For the NIMBY, or Not-In-My-Backyard, syndrome suggests a reluctance to acknowledge that our generation has really produced this material.

To see if we can come up with an alternative response to nuclear waste, I have experimented with ways that would help people experience on an immediate, intuitive or gut level its ongoingness through time. On one memorable occasion at an ad hoc "People's Council" near Los Alamos, when discussion about the waste was limited to wishing it away, I pulled out a small tape recorder. "Let's assume," I said, "if we can't stop the waste from going into the Carlsbad repository, that we can at least place this cassette there on the surface for future generations to find and listen to. What do we want to say to them?"

Passing the recorder among them, the men and women began to speak into it. "My name is George, I'm back in 1988 and trying to stop them from burying this radioactive waste. If they do and if you hear this, listen. This stuff is dangerous, don't dig here, stay away. It's really deadly, take care."

As the words came, the distant, unborn ones to whom they were addressed became more and more real and present to us. We began to inhabit large stretches of time. The NIMBY response evaporated and was replaced by a willingness to care for the waste in order to protect future generations. Several young people there even volunteered to

Perhaps only by seeing the permanent destruction we have inflicted upon the Earth Community can we come to the realization that the Earth Community is in fact a dimension of ourselves. Perhaps only when that loss is felt personally, can the human realize the grandeur of the human in the grandeur of the Earth. Perhaps only by feeling directly the folly of destroying Earth's beauty can we awaken to the simple truth that we are destroying our macrophase self.

To appropriate the story of evolving Earth as our own can radically expand our consciousness of time and our felt continuity with past and future. In Deep Ecology workshops we set about this deliberately and experientially. We engage, for example in "evolutionary rememberings." We expand our sense of time to include the life span of our planet. (See Chapter Twenty-two.) Our purpose is to deepen our sense of what is personally at stake for us in issues of planetary distress, and also to strengthen our sense of authority when we act in defense of life on Earth. We act then not from the private whim or personal nobility of our short-lived individual ego, but clothed in the full authority of our five billion years.

### **Bridge to the Far Future**

While the use of imagination to remember our evolution and reconnect with our ancestors can expand our awareness of the past, analogous practices can extend our time consciousness into the future. Ecological restoration work brings a strong connection with coming generations. To plant a tree extends one's sense of tenure on this Earth. Careful, compelling novels like *Ridley Walkers* by Paul Hoban, or *Always Coming Home*, by Ursula Leguin, can make far distant generations and their claim on life seem more real to us. For me the most lively link to beings of the future centuries and millennia is provided by nuclear wastes. My involvement with this issue has altered my experience of time. This is not surprising; for the radioactive isotopes generated by our nuclear energy and weapons production extend the effects of our actions into vast reaches of time, into their life spans of thousands and even millions of years.

Surely the way we and other countries have produced and disposed of

to conquer time, we are, thanks to our technology in great danger of succeeding. A distinctive feature of our nuclear war-making capacity is speed. The technological design thrust is ever to shorten the time of response to attack, and make launch-on-warning as instantaneous as possible. The time allowed for human appraisal and intervention--to see, for example, if the attack is real or the result of a computer misreading--is continually reduced. It is now reduced to the point where computer scientists at Stanford University have concluded from their models that the risk of an accidental nuclear war caused by computer malfunction will rise to 50% by the end of the 1990s. Our nuclear missiles may be the logical unfolding of our "spiritual" desire to escape from time--and the final, time-stopping blast the ultimate expression of that desire.

So we ask, how can we break free of our fear of time so that time may continue? Can we become friendly with time and reinhabit time, that our days on this Earth may be long?

### **To Reclaim Time, Reclaim Story**

To fall in love again with time, we need narrative. "It's all a question of story," says Thomas Berry. "We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story." Though they are ineffective for us now, we had some good stories of our world in the past. "They did not necessarily make people good, nor did they take away the pains and stupidities of life or make for unfailing warmth in human association. They did provide a context in which life could function in a meaningful manner." And that is all we ask right now, that life function in a meaningful manner--or even function, period.

Berry and his fellow cosmologist, Brian Swimme, hold that the new story we need to guide us through the perils of this era must include the whole universe and all its beings. Only in that context can we perceive the long panorama and web of kinship that is basic to the creative commitment we are called now to make. Story nourishes, as they point out, a "time-developmental consciousness." And our particular story, Earth's and ours, has, of necessity, both grandeur and pain.

future.

This mindset among people of different religious backgrounds was evident at a workshop where we discussed our experience of time. All the participants spoke feelingly about the frenzied and fragmented pace of their daily lives. When I invited them to hypothesize alternatives to the pace and pressure, only one alternative was voiced: escape into timelessness, into the mystical moment. The only way out they saw was a search for cessation through spiritual practice, aloof from chronological time.

This bothered me a lot, because I was working hard on the issue of nuclear wastes. I was looking for ways to relate to time that could help us face up to the challenge of their incredibly long-lived radioactivity. I wanted us to find the ability to inhabit time, longer stretches of time, not escape from time altogether.

It occurred to me then that our fear of time is, like our fear of matter, a legacy of the hierarchical, patriarchal mindset. As many have pointed out, this essentially dualistic mindset has tended to view the spiritual journey as an attempt to extricate spirit from the toils of matter. Setting one at odds with the very element on which one depends, it engenders a love-hate relationship with matter, where one seeks to conquer that which one fears. Has this mentality devalued chronological time in the same manner? Has it led us to perceive it as the enemy, fostering a love-hate relationship that enslaves us to futile efforts to conquer and escape from time? Can we not see an equation here? The formula would be this: As spirit is to matter, so eternity is to time. Each side of this equation represents that which we seek to escape *from* in relation to that which we seek to escape *to* and which we imagine to be more valuable.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{SPIRIT} & & \text{ETERNITY} \\ \text{-----} & = & \text{-----} \\ \text{MATTER} & & \text{TIME} \end{array}$$

That equation triggers other reflections. If in our fear of time we strive



as a glacier does to us. Our own accelerating speed puts us out of sync with more and more of the natural world and blinds us to many of our effects upon it.

By speed we strive to conquer time, we imagine we can escape the pressures of time. It doesn't take much subtlety to see that we get caught thereby in a vicious circle. The time-pressures we create in our computerized world, and the time-pressures we consequently experience, further inflame our desire to escape from time. In cybernetic terms, this is a classical deviation-amplifying feedback loop--and we are all victims of it. No matter how we writhe and turn to free ourselves from time, we twist ourselves more tightly in it. We become enslaved by what we would master, devoured by what we would consume, and increasingly view it--yes, view time itself--as the enemy.

### **Spirituality as Escape from Time**

Increasing numbers of us turn to spiritual practices, such as meditation, to find release from this rat-race. Closing our eyes, breathing deeply and slowly, we seek to rise above the pressures of our days into a timeless calm. This behavior can be helpful in slowing us down a bit, but it often perpetuates the notion of time as an enemy to be conquered or outwitted.

In many forms of Hinduism, time is considered to be unreal, a trap of illusion, a form of maya from which to escape into the greater reality of timelessness. In Buddhism more reality is accorded to time and change; yet Buddhist teachers often use the central notion of impermanence as a prod to practice--to arouse revulsion, or awareness of the unsatisfactoriness of life. See, what you prize soon passes. Flowers wilt, paint peels, lovers leave, your own body sags, wrinkles, decays. Ah, woe! Better fix your gaze on what is free from the ravages of time.

Western religions as well reveal this animosity to time. Reach for eternity Keep your eyes on the pie in the sky New Age spiritualities with their oft-repeated admonitions to "Be Here Now" can also serve to devalue chronological time and encourage disregard for past and

predictable in the unfolding of trust and self-disclosure. Even classroom relationships suffer, the age-old relationship between student and teacher... "My teachers talk slower than my Atari," complains a nine-year-old, "so slow they make me mad sometimes. I think, 'Come on, enough of this, let me go home to my Atari. It tells me things faster.'"

The *Kali Yuga*--the "age of iron"--is ancient India's name for the final degenerative era of the world's cycles. One meaning of Kali Yuga is "the dregs of time": a temporal density, gritty and bitter as used coffee grounds. In this end-time, time gets extreme, speeding up, clogging our pores.

My second visit to my son on a wilderness farm in northern British Columbia was only one year after the first. As I trekked the last part of the twenty-five miles from the nearest public road, I looked up at the surrounding mountains and saw changes so startling they stopped me in my tracks. The once beautiful, wild, unbroken slopes and ridges of cedar and Douglas fir were now defaced by huge square areas--clear-cut, shaven, unsightly. "Pampers," said my son, when I asked, "it's a company that makes paper diapers."

All week, as I helped with the haying and the milking of the goats, I would look up at those slopes in anger and grief. "I never put paper diapers on *my* children," I muttered. Actually, there weren't any being mass produced, so as a matter of course I used cloth ones, soaking and washing them, as my mother had before me. To be honest, I have to admit that if I were a young mother today I'd be tempted to use the disposable ones, because, of course, I would be in a hurry. To save ten or twenty minutes, we cut down an old-growth forest.

Speed and haste, as many a wise one has pointed out, are inherently violent. The violence they inflict on our environment is not only because of our appetite for time-saving devices and materials, but also because they put us out of sync with the ecosystem. The natural systems that sustain us move at slower rhythms than we do. The feedback loop is longer, takes more time, than our interactions with our machines. We are like the hummingbird that moves so fast, with a metabolic rate so rapid, that it cannot see the movements of the bear coming slowly out of hibernation. To it, the bear appears as stationary

## The Time Squeeze

These developments are imbedded in and aggravated by a contemporary lifestyle of increasing speed. We suffer ever more chronically from the loss not only of past and future, but of the present as well. We hurry. We complain about crowded schedules and the pressure of commitments, then check our watches and rush on. We experience burn out and work hard to earn moments where time can cease and we can relax--then take our laptop computer along on vacation. For we cannot waste the most precious commodity of all.

Time itself, both as a commodity and an experience, has become a scarcity; and many are aware of the irony that we who have more time-saving devices than any culture at any period appear the most time-harried and driven. The paradox is only apparent, however, for our time-scarcity is linked to the very time-efficiency of our technology. As Jeremy Rifkin chronicles in *Time Wars*, our measure of time that once was based on the changing seasons, then the wheeling stars, and then the ticking of the clock, is now parceled out in the nanoseconds of the computer--and we have lost time as an organically measurable experience.

The hurry in which we live invades our thought processes, our bodies, our relationships. In the present economy of time, "we suffer from a remarkable illness, a hectic fever. We don't take time to ponder things, to think them through to the end." Those are the words of Alfred Herehausen, chairman of the Board of the Deutsche Bank, assassinated by terrorists.

Larry Dossey, physician and author of *Space, Time and Medicine*, points out that this causes "hurry sickness." "Our perceptions of speeding clocks and vanishing time cause our own biological clocks to speed. The end result is frequently some form of hurry sickness--expressed as heart disease, high blood pressure, or depression of our immune function, leading to an increased susceptibility to infection and cancer."

We find ourselves moving too fast for the cultivation of friendships, which have their own tempo and is not always time-efficient and time-

individual well-being.

### **The Future Cancelled**

The sense of biological severance of which Lifton speaks found form and reinforcement in U.S. Government policies of the 1980s. It was reinforced not only by the saber-rattling of the Cold War, but even more by the frontier mentality that came to the fore in the Reagan and Bush administrations. This mentality denies any need to husband the Earth for the future, because there would always be fresh, unlimited land to move on to. Tyrone Cashman explains the connection:

When the frontier was over, when there was no more empty land, no more unexplored territory, the engine of American ambition had no place to go. What we have done, and elected Ronald Reagan to stand as symbol for, is to cancel the future.

Reagan essentially assured us, through his personal lack of concern for the future, his escalation of nuclear weapons production, and his own public comments about Armageddon and the end of history, that the future was cancelled, that we needn't concern ourselves about it any more. Thus, it became morally permissible to treat the lands we live on and the rivers and the soils and the forests much as we had treated them when we knew there was an unlimited open frontier in the West there for us to move to when the lands we were exploiting were exhausted, destroyed, and befouled.

When the future is cancelled, there is no need to care for the lands we live on. As former Secretary of Interior James Watt so clearly stated, we can use it all up now because we are the last generation. The great feeding frenzy of the 1980s when the economy was partly deregulated and the leveraged buy-outs and hostile takeovers were a daily occurrence--this resulted in part from the sense of the end of the era, and those who had the power to salt the stuff away before the whole thing went to hell, were out to do that.

individual, the future is wired in. There is, as systems-thinker Tyrone Cashman points out, "this spilling out into the future that is the entire essence of organisms. Any plant or animal for whom, throughout its species history, this was not its most essential characteristic would not exist at all. This wired-in relationship to time is alterable only at the price of extinction. Of course, this time-thrust, this into-the-future-ness of all living beings can be lost by a species. But then, immediately, the species itself disappears, forever."

### **The Broken Connection**

This systems design common to all organisms is clearly evident throughout human history. At great personal cost men and women have labored to create monuments of art and learning that would endure far beyond their individual lives. It makes our present generation's disregard for the future appear amazing, indeed. What developments can account for it? What has happened to our relationship to time?

For one thing, the bomb has happened. The advent of nuclear weapons has ruptured our sense of biological continuity and our felt connections with both past and future. Arguing this point, Robert J. Lifton says, "We need not enter the debate as to whether nuclear war would or would not eliminate *all* human life. The fact that there is such a debate in itself confirms the importance of *imagery* of total biological destruction, or radically impaired imagination of human continuity." This impairment reaches backward as well as forward, "since our sense of connection with prior generations...depends on feeling part of a continuing sequence of generations. The image of a destructive force of unlimited dimensions...enters into every relationship involving parents, children, grandparents, and imagined great-grandparents and great-grandchildren....We are thus among the first to live with a recurrent sense of biological severance."

From the workshops I have facilitated with thousands of people, designed to overcome psychic numbing and feelings of powerlessness, I know this to be true. When people feel safe to express their inner responses to the nuclear and the ecological crises, it is the threatened death of all life that surfaces as their deepest and most pervasive anguish. It is an anguish far deeper than their fears for their personal,

In contrast to this prayer, our true regard for the beings of the future is portrayed in a recent cartoon by Tom Toles of the *Buffalo News*. To a group sitting before him expectantly, a lawyer is reading a will. It says:

Dear kids,

We, the generation in power since World War II, seem to have used up pretty much everything ourselves. We kind of drained all the resources out of our manufacturing industries, so there's not much left there. The beautiful old buildings that were built to last for centuries, we tore down and replaced with characterless but inexpensive structures, and you can have them. Except everything we built has a lifespan about the same as ours, so, like the interstate highway system we built, they're all falling apart now and you'll have to deal with that. We used up as much of our natural resources as we could, without providing for renewable ones, so you're probably only good until about a week from Thursday. We did build a generous Social Security and pension system, but that was just for us. In fact, the only really durable thing we built was toxic dumps. You can have those. So think of your inheritance as a challenge. The challenge of starting from scratch. You can begin as soon as--oh, one last thing--as soon as you pay off the two trillion dollar debt we left you.

What is staggering about this cartoon, to the point of being funny, is not any exaggeration, for there is none, but the sheer enormity of the reality it portrays and our apparent insouciance in the face of it. This state of affairs can be approached, of course, from a moralistic perspective, in terms of the selfishness of our generation. But I find it more helpful to understand it in terms of our experience of time; for it reveals a blindness, a pathetically shrunken sense of time, that amounts to a pathological denial of the reality and ongoingness of time.

This disregard for the future is all the more astonishing since it runs counter to our nature as biological systems. Living organisms are built to propagate, and to invest a great deal of time and energy in the complex set of behaviors that effort requires. Through these behaviors, which usually have no direct survival value to the

perceive or adequately address the crisis we have created for ourselves and the generations to come. Yet reflections on our relationship to time and some promising new approaches for changing it suggest that we may be able to inhabit time in a healthier, saner fashion. By opening up our experience of time in organic, ecological, and even geological terms and in revitalizing relationship with other species, other eras--we can allow life to continue on Earth.

### **The Beings of the Three Times**

Let us begin as we often begin our workshops on empowerment for social action--with an invocation of the beings of the three times. We invoke them because, at this brink of time, we need them.

We call first on the beings of the past: *Be with us now all you who have gone before, you our ancestors and teachers. You who walked and loved and faithfully tended this Earth be present to us now that we may carry on the legacy you bequeathed us. Aloud and silently in our hearts we say your names and see your faces...*

We call also on the beings of the present: *All you with whom we live and work on this endangered planet, all you with whom we share this brink of time, be with us now. Fellow humans and brothers and sisters of other species, help us open to our collective will and wisdom. Aloud and silently we say your names and picture your faces...*

Lastly we call on the beings of the future: *All you who will come after us on this Earth, be with us now. All you who are waiting to be born in the ages to come, it is for your sakes too, that we work to heal our world. We cannot picture your faces or say your names--you have none yet--But we would feel the reality of your claim on life. It helps us to be faithful in the task that must be done, so that there will be for you, as there was for our ancestors, blue sky, fruitful land, clear waters.*

### **The Reading of the Will**

on exponential "runaway"--accelerating toward its own collapse.

Even as we see its consequences, we must remember that this relation to time is not innate in us. As humans we have the capacity and the birthright to experience time in a saner fashion. Throughout history, men and women have labored at great personal cost to bequeath to future generations monuments of art and learning, to endure far beyond their individual lives. And they have honored through ritual and story those who came before

To make the transition to a life-sustaining society, we must retrieve that ancestral capacity--in other words, act like ancestors. We need to attune to longer, ecological rhythms and nourish a strong, felt connection with past and future generations. For us as agents of change, this isn't easy, because to intervene in the political and legislative decisions of the Industrial Growth Society, we fall by necessity into its tempo. We race to find and pull the levers before it is too late to save this forest, or stop that weapons program. Nonetheless, we can learn again to drink at deeper wells.

BACK

### **To Reinhabit Time** (Chapter 20, *World as Lover, World as Self*)

Both the progressive destruction of our world and our capacity to slow down and stop that destruction can be understood as a function of our experience of time.

We members of post-industrial societies in the closing years of the twentieth century have an idiosyncratic and probably unprecedented experience of time. It can be likened to an ever-shrinking box, in which we race on a treadmill at increasingly frenetic speeds. Cutting us off from other rhythms of life, this box cuts us off from the past and future as well. It blocks our perceptual field of time while allowing only the briefest experience of time.

Until we break out of this temporal trap, we will not be able to fully



## **DEEP TIME, Joanna Macy**

The healing of our world entails a wider perspective on time. To take part in the Great Turning, we liberate ourselves from the short-term thinking that drives the industrial growth society. Moving beyond anthropocentrism, we learn to "act our age," and experience the vitality of our interdependence with past and future generations.

"Deep Time work" refers to an expanding body of exercises that refresh our spirits and inform our minds by bringing them into larger temporal contexts. See Chapter 9 of *Coming Back to Life*. This work brings us both immediate gladness and lasting resilience.

- The Relevance of Deep Time (**selections from *Coming Back to Life*, Chapter 9**)
- To Reinhabit Time (**Chapter 20, *World as Lover, World as Self***)

### **The Relevance of Deep Time** (selections from *Coming Back to Life*, Chapter 9)

People of today relate to time in a way that is surely unique in our history. The technologies and economic forces unleashed by the Industrial Growth Society radically alter our experience of time. It is like being trapped in an ever-shrinking box, in which we race on a treadmill. The economy and its technologies depend on decisions made at lightning speed for short-term goals, cutting us off from nature's rhythms and from the past and the future, as well. Marooned in the present, we are progressively blinded to the sheer ongoingness of time. Both the company of our ancestors and the claims of our descendants become less and less real to us.

This peculiar relation to time is inherently destructive of the quality and value of our lives, and of the living body of Earth. And it will intensify because the Industrial Growth Society is, in systems' terms,