

## WHERE ARE WE?

The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail  
And you are stay'd for. There; my blessing with thee!  
And these few precepts in thy memory

Helena Meyer-Knapp  
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Helena.Meyer\_Knapp@evergreen.edu

## INTRODUCTION — WHERE ARE WE?

As for millions and millions of others before me, New York City offered the first view of the United States. I loved it, quite unreservedly and came back full of enthusiasm for a longer stay. 50 plus years later I still think New York is one of the best places on earth.

Our friend Joanna Macy says we in the USA, alongside all other beings alive now, find ourselves in the midst of a Great Turning. Industrial capitalism has run its economic and ecological course and the ways we respond to that astonishing truth will shape the future for every single living thing. There are a big, big challenges ahead.

Donald Trump's return to the Presidency of course will shape some parts of how the USA answers the challenges, but what he does and how he does it are just one part of how we navigate the onward journey.

This pamphlet, which at the moment, seems as though it might be my last, is a love letter to the best of this country of ours and my individual responses to these challenges. I take great pleasure in reading books by world travelers of long ago, their reflections on the unexpected things they encountered and their tales of struggle and adventure getting from place to place. Two of my favorites have words of wisdom for our precarious times.

The last section is more an offering than a prescription: two quite specific paths ways to define and navigate the very near term towards a better future for all of us.

As I look back on what I've written I have to confess: It seems pretty idiosyncratic. These are my images of where we are and where we are going. I don't imagine any of you would have constructed this particular collection. The very fact that it's all so autobiographical is one reason I think it's the last.

## IN NEW YORK — WELCOME TO THE USA

## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

## CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GIVEN — WE CAN'T GO BACK

## ONWARD — TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE, FOR ALL OF US

Between each section you will find some poetry and a recommended song or soundtrack highlighted in red.

Special thanks to Tim Londergan, physicist, fellow Rhodes and our Best Man. It's he who knows that no matter how difficult the world's challenges, there is always music and enough time to dance,

[on the front cover Polonius to Laertes. Hamlet Act 1 Scene 3]

## IN NEW YORK — WELCOME TO THE USA

The Statue of Liberty is a marvelous being.

Her enigmatic face graces the cover. Is that a tear? I can't tell.

In 2023, a granddaughter went with a school friend. Life size that face turns out to be pretty big,



Later that summer, Rob and I went for the first time ourselves, with two other grandchildren.

There was lots to learn — she's huge and feels that way when you're actually there. She was transported here in pieces and reassembled on site. She's green because she is made of copper. Recently they have had to remake the lamp but the rest is as she always was. She arrived here in 1886, an exile herself, originally destined for Egypt which refused to accept her.

To see the famous poem you have to go into the pedestal. We didn't. But here it is — some key lines transcribed:



HER NAME: MOTHER OF EXILES.  
FROM HER BEACON-HAND GLOWS  
WORLD-WIDE WELCOME. . .

“KEEP ANCIENT LANDS, YOUR  
STORIED POMP!” CRIES SHE  
WITH SILENT LIPS.

“GIVE ME YOUR TIRED. YOUR  
POOR

YOUR HUDDLED MASSES YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE.  
THE WRETCHED REFUSE OF YOUR TEEMING SHORE.  
SEND THESE THE HOMELESS, TEMPEST-TOST TO ME.”

In 1946, my aunt Mia arrived in New York City. She would not be without a bed because her twin had been offered US sponsorship before the Nazi war began. But Mia was indeed homeless. Homeless because Stateless. As were five others on the her page of Tempest-Tost that day.

MARIA	26	F	S	TEACHER	YES	ENGLISH	YES	STATELESS
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IN NEW YORK — WELCOME TO THE USA

# Still I Rise

By [Maya Angelou](#)

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

Nearly eight years have gone by since the first of these pamphlets appeared, words back then pouring out as I, like so many others tried to make sense of Donald Trump's election in 2016 to be President of the USA. And now 2024, here he is again. About to be President once again.

We, Rob and I, have done a good deal of reading in the intervening years, sometimes trying to make sense of Trumpism, more often because something interesting caught our attention. If friends try to make sense of Trumpism (and much, much more) we routinely recommend Jill Lepore's *These Truths*. We also spent time with Morrison and Commager, classics in the American History textbook world, wondering what we had learned about the USA when we were younger (Rob at school and I doing a "Special Subject" at Oxford). It was plenty easy to find reasons to cast doubt on the Trump's suggestion that America had once been "Great" and could be again.

This magnificent country has always also had deep shadows. It became a Nation with slavery embedded in the culture. A very early sign in my time here that likely I would never see a woman President came with the crushing defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. The crushing defeat of Roe, of Hillary and Kamala became, then, just the most recent signs of that particular Truth. In these same years in the UK, from Thatcher onwards the British Conservative party has had four women party leaders. In 2024, Gaza politics has seen three women heads of Ivy League Universities, Harvard, Columbia and Penn, forced to resign. Only Cornell's left by choice.

Two world travelers 100 and more years ago help me understand and come to terms with the USA in our times. Both are superb writers. The famous one is Rudyard Kipling. The other, Mabel Loomis Todd, is narrowly famous as one of the editors who brought Emily Dickinson to the wider world. Both travelers were afoot during the Gilded Age. Christopher Benfy, Kipling biographer and professor at Amherst, sees parallels between their time and ours this way:

. . .the American Gilded Age, that fraught period first named, indelibly, by Mark Twain. It was an era, like our own, of vast disparities between rich and poor, of corruption on an appalling scale, of large-scale immigration and rampant racism, of disruptive new technologies and new media, of mushrooming factories and abandoned farms, of vanishing wildlife and the depredation of public lands. Kipling took up many of these topics in his writings. In his friend Mark Twain's view, this was not a Golden Age — that utopian dream of a perfect society in the remote past — but merely a Gilded Age, concealing the dross behind a glittering facade. (Christopher Benfy, "IF" page 7.)

### **Rudyard Kipling – a maker of worlds**

Rob and I first met Kipling the travel writer as an exceptionally astute observer of Japan, a country he passed through on his way, eastbound, from his youth in India to mature adulthood and a life in the England. This route of course took him across the United States as well, a place that fascinated, appalled, engaged and intrigued him. His US letters, commissioned as articles for his hometown newspaper in India, are as astute as were the letters from Japan. Also, having begun his travels on the west coast, there's a certain wildness in his tone.

## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

Trump would not have surprised him. He sees bombast everywhere even though he quickly learned that there's often more substance behind the bombast than we discern these days riding down the golden escalator at Trump Tower or as enlightenment glittering from chandeliers at Mar a Lago.

Kipling's most heartfelt admiration was directed towards that hero of the anti-bombast, Mark Twain, but he loved Bret Harte raconteur and romantic too. He was stunned by US scenery, went salmon fishing in the Northwest, deplored Chicago even as he recognized it as a great center of capital and economic energy. Above all the nation he saw was such that if he saw the USA today: he's likely say we haven't changed that much. His own words in **American Notes**. (lacking page refs because they are from an e-book)

All manner of nourishing food, from sea-fish to beef, may be bought at the lowest prices, and the people are consequently well-developed and of a high stomach. They demand ten shillings for tinkering a jammed lock of a trunk; they receive sixteen shillings a day for working as carpenters; they spend many sixpences on very bad cigars, which the poorest of them smoke, and they go mad over a prize-fight. When they disagree they do so fatally, with fire-arms in their hands, and on the public streets. I was just clear of Mission Street when the trouble began between two gentlemen, one of whom perforated the other.

When a policeman, whose name I do not recollect, "fatally shot Ed Hearney" for attempting to escape arrest, I was in the next street. For these things I am thankful. It is enough to travel with a policeman in a tram-car, and, while he arranges his coat-tails as he sits down, to catch sight of a loaded revolver. It is enough to know that fifty per cent of the men in the public saloons carry pistols about them.

We still eat very well here in California. The food available really is exceptionally fresh and high quality, and too many of us, me included have a "high stomach." Mike Tyson earned millions from a crazy prize fight broadcast by Netflix just last week. Gun violence in the USA remains notorious. An armed police force doesn't feel like protection to many of us. Nor did it to Kipling. In that essay about San Francisco Kipling unreels the same racist talk one could have heard from any prosperous white American at the time. Trump and his unraveling diatribes about Haitians in Springfield, Ohio would fit right in.

In another essay Kipling describes a small business man's confidence that tariffs on imports are the path to profit. It might just as well be Trump speaking:

I had chanced to pay about six shillings for a travelling-cap worth eighteen-pence, and he made of the fact a text for a sermon. He said that this was a rich country, and that the people liked to pay two hundred per cent, on the value of a thing. They could afford it. He said that the government imposed a protective duty of from ten to seventy per cent on foreign-made articles, and that the American manufacturer consequently could sell his goods for a healthy sum. Thus an imported hat would, with duty, cost two guineas. The American manufacturer would make a hat for seventeen shillings, and sell it for one pound fifteen. In these things, he said, lay the greatness of America and the effeteness of England. Competition between factory and factory kept the prices down to decent limits, but I was never to forget that this people were a rich people, not like the pauper Continentals, and that they enjoyed paying duties.

## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

Despite its many flaws, Kipling loved this country of ours. He even fell in love with two American women, one after the other, and settled in Vermont, happily married, for over a decade. Vermont was where he lived while writing what many people consider quintessentially Kipling: the first draft of **Kim**; the **Just So Stories** and **Captains Courageous**. Mark Twain deemed his essays about America brilliant. Kipling was adopted as a friend by many of the famous people of his time, including the powerful; Theodore Roosevelt for example. While still in his 30s, Kipling was already the most famous writer of his era, extraordinarily well paid and the first English language writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. The language issue stands out to me, because in the 100 years since his death, English has become so omnipresent in global culture.

No need to take my word for it that we can learn from Kipling about the degree to which we Americans have the experience and skills to live with and live greater than a man like Trump. Every public library in this country likely has dozens of copies of his books, children's ones that are read aloud, as well as ebooks for adults who want to be able instantly to download one. His essays about America can be found under the title *American Notes* though they are also published in *Sea to Sea* and in *Letters of Marque*. Read and enjoy and know that Kipling would likely say about Trumpism "you were ever thus." But know as well that the USA welcomed, nurtured and intrigued Kipling. The Statue of Liberty may have been left behind when he set off for home in England the first time, but she welcomed him back and the next time he stayed. Years later Kipling encountered tragedy in New York's Harbor, a tragedy so profound that he left and never did come back. That was personal, not political.

### **Mabel Loomis Todd – many worlds were inviting and she accepted**

Though I can date my first encounter with Mabel Todd back at least 10 years, I only truly noticed her name a few weeks ago. She appears in another Benfy book, *The Great Wave*, which is about US and Japanese encounters in the late 19th century. Given that as the central topic in my last pamphlet, it won't surprise that I have recently reread Benfy which is what allowed me to notice Mabel as a person with stature of her own, not merely a woman with an astronomer husband, a husband who "took" her to Japan.

What a FIND!!! One book, that about their SECOND Japanese eclipse, is particularly magical. For this second excursion, they sailed in a schooner/yacht, (precursors of Greta Thunberg?) even though they could have gone by steam. They made an extended stop in Hawaii on the way. Among the delights for me, personally, was her yearning to see a volcano in mid-eruption, a yearning I share. She missed the red hot lava, both on Moana Loa and on Kilauea but ventured down into the Kilauea crater, on a mule no less.



## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

In these times, our world's various energies chaotic, often wildly destructive, and in urgent need of resilience and correction impel many, particularly the young, to search for clues to what individuals should be trying to do. College students often bemoan a lack of clarity about their own agendas, to which these days I respond: "listen to the world around us. Allow yourself to hear what the world needs. The world's needs are a great guide to a rich life."

Mabel Todd was particularly good at hearing what her worlds had to say. Her attentions ranged widely and her publications regularly reached a wide audience.

So what caught Mabel's attention?

— she lived in Amherst, neighbor to Emily Dickinson and, after the poet's death, along with a more often credited man, had the editorial insight and persistence to carry the first volumes of Dickinson's poems from hand written bundles through to print and publication. There's drama a-plenty in Amherst surrounding the publishing, but for our purposes what matters is that she saw the poems, held the poems in her hand and knew she must get them out into the world.

— she married David Todd, a reasonably cutting edge academic in astronomy, specializing in the ways every total eclipse of the sun presents an opportunity to see the corona. In his case "seeing" involved an array of different kinds of telescopes, connected by technology he invented, to cameras that made a moment by moment detailed record of each event. Mabel understood, cared about, helped arrange and then "tolerated" very complex journeys to far off places, to enable the astronomy to hit the spot at just the right time on the right day.

Cloudy? We'll go back to Japan in several years time to catch the next eclipse.



EXPEDITION HEADQUARTERS IN JAPAN SHOWING PORTABLE HOUSE AND 20 TELESCOPES

— She was discerning and respectful writing about these far off places. Oh she was also a member of her generation, wondering whether Italy might be the best of the European nations to colonize Libya. Not the kind of thing we'd wonder about now. Regardless, in our truly "post-colonial" era, even if we are not all "post colonial" in our attitudes, the tone Mabel Loomis Todd adopted as she wrote about Hawaii, about Japan and about Tripoli stands out: thoughtful, respectful, engaged, enriched, delighted. She is in dialogue with places that are, from her perspective, as worthy of careful and interested attention as any part of Massachusetts.

— She wrote article after article for major magazines, *The Nation* and *Harpers* among others. Her most famous, probably, describes climbing Mt. Fuji, where it is suggested that she was among the first women ever to have done so. Perhaps important to us, but not the most important thing to her, which was that on foot it's inescapable how stark the mountain feels. Seen from afar, on board her sailing ship, one evening its unfolding loveliness was what mattered: "Until darkness Fuji was magnificently in evidence, constantly changing foregrounds made new pictures all the evening. Sometimes a steep sharp

## TRAVELERS TALES — KIPLING AND TODD

bluff, then a line of soft green hills; once a large fleet of fishing boats seemed lying at its feet. Even the clouds in this artistic land are decorative, their long, wavy, golden lines like the conventional cloud-shapes of kakemono or embroidery or carving. Once a huge dragon in brilliant yellow lay just above Fuji's sombre crown."

— Among Mabel's last acts was to collaborate with her daughter and indirectly with a neighbor in setting up an island home in Maine for the National Audubon Society. The Todd family, living in central Massachusetts "summered" by the sea, first further south and then in Maine. Land that mother and daughter bought originally for themselves is now home to Audubon's Seabird Institute. As well as enabling significant research in ornithology, the island is still host to summer visitors, these ones intent on maximizing the number of birds they can see and identify. That the Institute's projects are scientific, Mabel would have lauded. Acquisitive personal "Bird Lists?" Perhaps not so much.



Mabel Loomis Todd embodies skills and attitudes we would do well to adopt and develop in our complex times. She was adventurous, practical, curious, hardworking, ready to bargain with anyone and also happy to make the best of her advantages, which were many.

Above all, evident even in her writings there's a special spirit described here by her daughter.

*"Love of beauty certainly was a dominant trait. But there was another that had in it perhaps more drive, one which everyone who knew her felt and realized, and that was her joy in living. It fused every experience, however spectacular, however obscure, into vitality...an abounding joie de vivre which no slings and arrows of outrageous fortune could quench or dim...She had as much fresh enthusiasm for chaperoning each promenade, each cotillion, as for a new expedition to an unknown country. She loved to use her powers and to see results, of course. But she had besides a tireless zest for just living, and enjoying."*

Calling all playwrights among friends and family:

I give you Mabel Loomis Todd — Script and pictures ideally suited for a "one person" evening show, that is fascinating, worldly-wise and full of joy. A lot of sifting and editing required.

**If—**By [Rudyard Kipling](#)

If you can keep your head when all about you  
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
 But make allowance for their doubting too;  
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;  
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
 And treat those two impostors just the same;  
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
 And never breathe a word about your loss;  
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
 Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common  
 touch,  
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
 If all men count with you, but none too much;  
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,

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Kipling's last two lines don't well chime with these times.

Hence an invitation to add your own. Options from the musical *Hamilton*:

“If you stand for nothing [Burr]  
 What will you fall for?  
 or from *Hamlet*: Polonius' advice to Laertes  
 This above all: to thine ownself be true,  
 And it must follow, as the night the day,  
 Thou canst not then be false to any man.

## CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GIVEN — WE CAN'T GO BACK

For months, this year's US presidential election campaigns lobbed a hostile and critical disagreement back and forth.

From Trump: We WILL go back AGAIN, to the AMERICA when WE were GREAT

From Kamala: We WON'T go back, no further reduction in the freedoms we fought so hard for.

Neither message meets the test of truth. The truth is we CAN'T go back. The past we once inhabited is drifting behind us. It is already far out of reach.

A digitized media landscape, “global power” nations that now generally tally at four, financial transactions in currencies completely outside the reach and control of nation states, newly delegitimized domestic and international political organizations. Each one of these is reshaping our futures. Within the narrow confines of this pamphlet, and knowing that any item on that list makes going “back” impossible, the changes in the earth's Climate are for me the mega issue, the transformations that make it absolutely clear: WE CANNOT GO BACK..

I am capable of nostalgia for the past too, in my case for the time in the 1990s when it was possible to get alarmed by the WTO. The initials meant World Trade Organization, and it looked as though we were on the verge of officially surrendering huge segments of global governance to the biggest corporate powers. For us in the Pacific Northwest in the US that meant Boeing and CocaCola, Microsoft and Walmart.

The power that climate change has over all of our lives is much, much bigger. The challenges that loom are immeasurable and the impact on my children and children's children unknowable.

So in this segment . . . images, that is photos and a few words, enough substance I hope to hold up my claim that going back is not even an option any more. It feels very sad to have to say that.

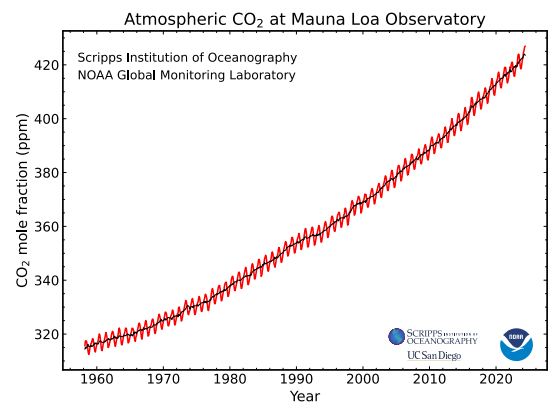
But then, the last segment of this pamphlet moves toward the positive, with tangible options for action on behalf of a better future.

### Being Convincible

I was not among the earliest prophets of climate doom. So attuned to weather in the Lake District which normally changes several times a day, I found the idea of steady change in a linear direction hard to conceive.

I changed because of a picture, the picture on the right.

Its data goes all the way back to 1960. Blessings on the scientist, David Keeling, who started measuring CO<sub>2</sub> on a volcano on Hawaii, way back then, a man forced repeatedly to protect his project from other scientists grasping for even his small amount of NSF money.



# CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GIVEN — WE CAN'T GO BACK

CO<sub>2</sub> data has been integrated into public consciousness these days. Lots of people know there's too much carbon dioxide and some of them are working on making money by getting the "extra" carbon which has already been set free from ground storage back into storage once again. They, like Trump are, in their own manner trying to find a way to go back. We can't. The "extra" water which has already been mobilized by the hotter air has been changing day to day life in huge ways.

## Water is the softest, strongest thing on earth.

This graph has become my go-to evidence that going back is not an option. It was in Bloomberg News just a few weeks ago.

### Billion Dollar natural disasters in the USA.

All varieties of climate-driven disaster are on the increase, just as the prophets of doom prophesied they would be. But the balance among the variety of disasters has changed, and changed really visibly. Oh there were a couple more intense fire years, and several three-severe-hurricanes years in a row, but the thing that has increased massively is that purple block. No need to count precisely. It's visible with the naked eye.

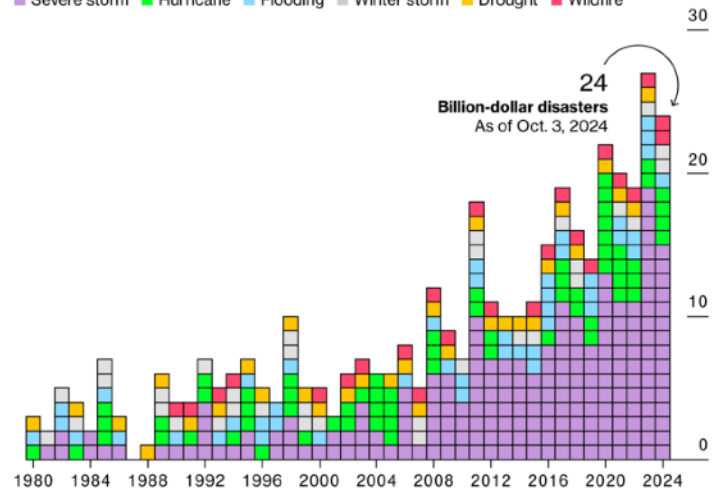
And what are those "purple" storms? Look at the other categories. What we are talking about here is water. Rain water. Water everywhere. Water coming down in vast quantities, the 100 and 500 and 1000 year storms which nowadays happen somewhere every year. The

causal chain isn't even a mystery: Hotter air can carry more moisture evaporated from the ocean. That extra moisture is what is coming down everywhere. And as it falls it makes a hitherto incredible trail of costs ... billions of dollars worth.

### Costly Storms Are Happening More Frequently

Natural disasters causing more than \$1 billion in damage, by type

Severe storm (purple) Hurricane (green) Flooding (blue) Winter storm (grey) Drought (yellow) Wildfire (red)



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

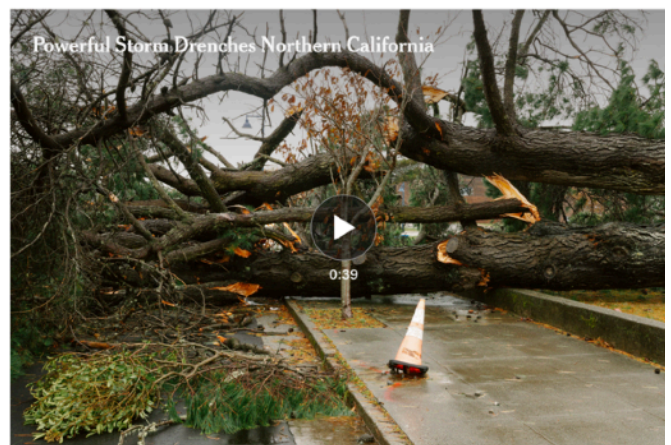
Water events in just the last few months, media coverage these days being worldwide.

SPAIN Nov 2024

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA Nov 2024



A pileup of cars in Valencia, Spain, on Wednesday, after catastrophic rains. Alberto Saiz/Associated Press



The first major atmospheric river of the season flooded roads and vineyards, brought down trees and damaged houses and cars. Mason Trinca for The New York Times

## CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GIVEN — WE CAN'T GO BACK

The rains in Northern California last week gave Berkeley where we live about 4" of rain in three days. In the same time period, Guernville, about 80 miles north got 22 inches

### ASHEVILLE NORTH CAROLINA Sept 2024



Catastrophic flooding in Asheville's River Arts District in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene on Sept. 27, 2024. Colby Rabon / Carolina Public Press



Asheville residents gather on a bridge overlooking the French Broad River after catastrophic flooding in Asheville's River Arts District in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene on Sept. 27, 2024. Colby Rabon / Carolina Public Press

### TAIWAN Oct 2024

#### Tropical Depression Krathon as of 3 a.m. T.W.T. >

Wind speed ☼

**29 m.p.h.**

Max. sustained

Location 📍

**NE of  
Kaohsiung  
Taiwan**

45 miles away

Taitung County, in the southeast, has received up to 4.2 feet of rain since Tuesday, while nearby Pingtung County has received about 3.9 feet in the same period.

### THE UK Nov 24 2024



Last Monday, just before Thanksgiving, Ulverston, the nearest town to our UK home, learned that its railway line right at the station had been washed out. Turns out the damage was surface damage, so by the next night our son Alex was able to get into that very station.

The Lake had also risen of course. Normal low readings on the official gauge ride around 0.5m. After the storm this week it read at 1.5m. We keep on our boathouse door a marker showing what happened on Nov 20th 2009. The worst day ever. In our boathouse, the boats were riding 2 full meters above what we think of as "normal." That year, the official gauge on Coniston, 6 miles long, was reading over 3.09 meters. Only 1.5m above this week's rains.

# CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GIVEN — WE CAN'T GO BACK

## What about Trump?

When people asked about Trump before the election, I found myself saying that his climate denialism was the thing I most feared. Whether my fears are justified we will discover soon enough. There's the Biden climate bill just crying out to be dismantled but investments in climate-oriented factories have already been made all over Trump territory. Trump used routinely to dismiss electric cars but now Elon Musk is his bro. Trump's instinct for chaos will collide with Global Climate realities. Who knows what will result when these two kinds of chaos interact? This being chaos, it is very likely that small events will have disproportionate, and perhaps irreversible results.

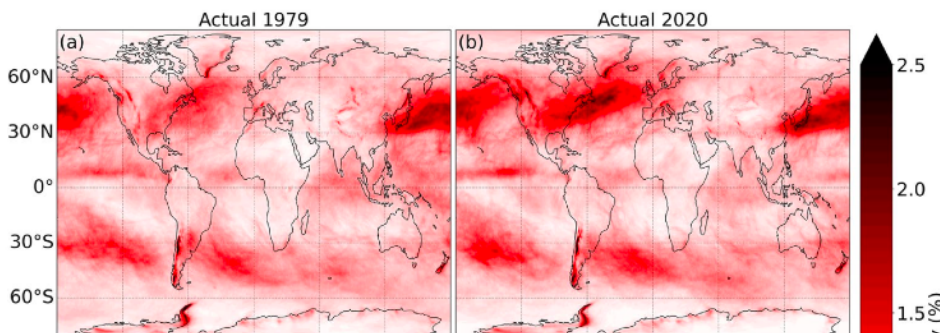
## Why focus so much on water?

As I said, water is strong. Very, very strong. The effects of the 2011 Tsunami in Japan were grim. Entire houses swept off their foundations. Boats marooned high up on sea walls. Tile roofs months and months after still covered in blue tarpaulins to keep out the summer rains. There would have been no protection at all if rain from one of Japan's typhoons had happened to sweep in later that year.

Water breaks through any opening so easily and when it drains away it leaves mud behind, all over the debris contaminating household goods and clothes. Communications get cut by downed trees and power lines. Store owners face bankruptcy, their stock ruined. Mould and smells build up in just a few days, becoming incredibly hard to eradicate. The list could go on and on. Entire communities, as we saw in the Asheville NC Arts can be decimated.

## Anything else?

Of course climate change has other effects. As a very frequent flier, these charts about increased clear air turbulence in the USA captured my attention. The scientists being statistically oriented, focus on



increases in the probability that one encounters clear air turbulence: The largest change in probabilities is over the NE seaboard in the US and the North Atlantic.

## And So??

In the short term, as private individuals, there's a good deal to be said for each of us getting to know the flood and water risks that might alter our private and working lives.

## And also

I spent a full 10 years as a scholar and an activist working on existential-scale crises embodied in nuclear weapons and international Cold War hostilities. In 1989 those shifted abruptly, radically, unexpectedly. We should assume that climate change momentum can shift... in any direction.

## The Hill We Climb — part 1

Amanda Gorman. January 20, 2021

When day comes we ask ourselves,  
'where can we find light in this never-ending shade,'  
the loss we carry,  
a sea we must wade?  
We've braved the belly of the beast.  
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace,  
and the norms and notions  
of what just is  
isn't always just-ice.  
And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it,  
somehow we do it.  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken  
but simply unfinished.  
We, the successors of a country and a time  
where a skinny Black girl  
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother  
can dream of becoming president  
only to find herself reciting for one.  
And yes, we are far from polished,  
far from pristine,  
but that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect.  
We are striving to forge a union with purpose,  
to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors,  
characters, and  
conditions of man.  
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us  
but what stands before us.  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside.  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms  
to one another.  
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.  
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:  
That even as we grieved, we grew;  
that even as we hurt, we hoped;  
that even as we tired, we tried;

that we'll forever be tied together, victorious,  
not because we will never again know defeat  
but because we will never again sow division.  
Scripture tells us to envision  
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and  
fig tree  
and no one shall make them afraid.  
If we're to live up to our own time  
then victory won't lie in the blade  
but in all the bridges we've made.  
That is the promise to glade,  
the hill we climb  
if only we dare it,  
because being American is more than a pride we  
inherit —  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it.  
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation  
rather than share it  
would destroy our country if it meant delaying  
democracy.  
And this effort very nearly succeeded.  
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,  
it can never be permanently defeated.

## ONWARD — TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE, FOR ALL OF US

Our world right now can set one to feeling pretty discouraged. Gaza. Billion-dollar election campaigns. Private wealth, yet more billions of dollars, select individuals having a disproportionate say in our onward lives as Americans, or indeed as residents any place in the world.

Sometimes I think I had a charmed childhood: wartime recovery already underway under-pinned by purpose-built social, economic and political institutions designed explicitly to try to make ours a “better” world. These days those very same, 75 year old institutions hold less promise. The British National Health Service is severely weakened. Workers’ lives in the USA have been battered repeatedly since Thatcher/Reagan launched their “me first” economic “reforms.” And the UN, whether facing wars in Gaza and Ukraine, or the COVID epidemic or global climate change, always seems to fail to build anything remotely resembling a global consensus.

Given my climate focus here, the UN’s COP 29 is particularly dispiriting. All kinds of people pumped tons and tons of carbon into the atmosphere to gather in person to talk and talk. There was nothing to show for it except more promises of imaginary cash flowing from richer to poorer, seen as reparations due from richer nations for decades of disproportionate carbon desecration. Experiences after postwar reparations offer little hope for this climate system. Post war varieties have too often done real harm. Pick your own example. There are quite a few.

COP probably once offered hope. Now it’s just as hollow as decades and decades of “disarmament talks,” talks that were good at managing an on-going building program for new nuclear weapons systems deployed by the US and the USSR but, I would argue, did nothing whatever to bring the Cold War to an end. And yet it did end. There came a time for peace. These days some say “be careful what you wish for.” Confrontations across Europe’s “eastern” edge are truly dangerous once again. I for one do not yearn for a renewal of that thing we called the Cold War. Nuclear weapons, armed, targeted and aimed round the clock year after year, hostilities on the ground both hot and cold perpetrated by both sides.

Is working towards a better climate situation hopeless? Will achieving something simply prompt a new terrible thing?

That’s not my way of talking about and acting in the world.

### **After the election**

There we were, about 30 of us, the founder members of this group all aged 80 and older, gathered for the weekend right after the election on The Queen Mary ocean liner, now permanently moored in Long Beach Harbor.

The timing was intentional. This crowd has many lifetimes of public service behind it. These were people to be with, no matter what the election’s outcome. In the event we were grieving not relieved as we’d hoped to be, but still focused on making a better future for all.

## ONWARD — TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE, FOR ALL OF US

One of us offered an encouraging thought: that in the United States public power is very, very widely distributed, across government jurisdictions at all levels, through corporations and via private funders in non-profit projects. Richard's reminder makes me particularly aware of recent concerted attacks on universities as sites for free speech (echoes of McCarthyism) and aware that the US House has just this week passed legislation that further constrains non-profit groups. Don't lose sight of that legislation under Trump, I say.

Another said she was ready to stand forward, taking risks if necessary, to protect the rights of an asylum-eligible family affiliated with her congregation in Maine. She will be right there if Trump's "mass deportation" comes for that family.

We 80 year olds I would describe as a "policy based on predictive statistics" crowd.

Looking back from today, we can see that some of the beneficial statistical predictions we leaned on turned out in reality to be contributing causes of America's present-day anguish.

Over 50 years ago one worked successfully and with pride, to urge the dismantling of our nation's grim State Hospital system of care for the mentally ill. The promised community-based mental health care never having materialized, far too many of the afflicted now live for decades in and out of jail or on the streets.

My own family was among the very, very early adopters of computers as devices for home and individual use. Infiltrating private life with modern day digital powers has turned out to be at best a mixed blessing. One of our granddaughters, whose commute is complex, hates to carry a phone. If she must have a phone, better a "brick" than anything one might call "smart." And yet, I am a skilled writer only because I can continuously edit and easily correct my frequent typos, precisely because I am using a similar machine with digital powers.

"Ten minutes for regret." That's all the Buddhist Pema Chodron allows. Then move back into reality. So here, then, a couple of rather different ways any of us might head out and onward into futures unknown.

### **Finding the Future**

Our son Malcolm has always had his eye on ways to make this a better world. It is no surprise that someone in his generation might have a preference for story-telling over predictive statistics.

His "Finding the Future" team is small, personal and completely committed to the work. They have been meeting, via zoom, every Friday at lunch time for a few years. A 21st century version of my weekly Rotary lunches. The group's numbers grow by tiny increments and as the months pass, the details of what they are trying to do become clearer. In December 2024 they are almost ready to "launch" by which they don't mean CREATE A WORLD WIDE MOVEMENT. That's what we, the 80-year-old generation did . . . over Vietnam, on behalf of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze, even eight years ago when women in pink hats came out to repudiate Donald Trump's first election. This generation not so much. Start and stay tangible, networked and specific is their framework.

## ONWARD — TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE, FOR ALL OF US

Malcolm and his group are pretty certain that none of us can really begin to make the changes needed for a better future until we can make stories about the future we are trying to reach. A near term future. No more than 30 years ahead, no techie magic bullets. They share information about websites that help story-tellers ground their narratives in realities but what they advocate is that each of us think about a particular person, in a particular setting, whose days pass with particular activities and relationships. Not stories that unfold at Thomas Hardy's length, but like Hardy's they have a strong local feel.

Story-telling is one way the TikTok-generation/Instagram Reels-generation will make a better world. Make it detailed. Make it tangible. Set it down so other people can see it and add their futures to your future.

**Here's a story:** to improve resilience in the future given our local climate. This part of California has already been mapped according to fire zones. Our house is in an evacuation zone called Albany 6. If there's a fire we are supposed to listen for that number and go where they tell us.

When it began raining last week and went on raining and raining for three solid days, I realized that it's just as important to get to know water patterns around here. We're on a dead-end street. Behind the last fence is a gully with a stream in it. Codornices it's called. How deep is that gully anyway? I went to look. 15 feet or so. It would take more than three days rain to flood from that. But the street had active running water part way to the middle anyway . . . runoff from every house and driveway. And on our side of the street the drain at the end, the one labeled "empties directly into the Bay," was blocked. The street was beginning to flood on one side. Luckily the drain at the other end of the crosswalk was working just fine.

Memo to self. Call the City to get someone to look at that drain, one day soonish. In a good future, 30 years hence, everyone understands how water flows in and around their regular places. There's a city employee one can reach. And yes, we have to be careful we don't turn ourselves into a Chinese dictatorship with a cadre managing every block,

**Here's a policy proposal:** This too might make a better future. I am of the 80 year-old generation after all — it comes naturally to think in terms of policies and institutions: States in the USA are the regulators of private insurance whether for health, home or car. California has already made itself the insurer of last resort for fire insurance because corporate insurance has been abandoning private homes all over the state. Nation-wide, as suggested in my earlier graph with all those purple blocks, something similar will be happening a result of other disasters. Our 150 year old model of insurance is collapsing.

States and the Feds need to think about their role in resilience and recovery in ways that are bigger, more varied and more skilled than FEMA.

Americans are pretty wonderful about stepping forward collectively in disasters. That's why we already have a speedy and substantial government funded disaster relief program, while also having far too little in the way of relief for chronic suffering. The private power my friend alluded adds considerably here: Rotary's Club to Club support, Shelter Box's housing supplies and the Red Cross are all knowledgeable and active in disasters. This could be the time to set up state- appropriate disaster funding everywhere:

## ONWARD — TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE, FOR ALL OF US

Tornadoes in Arkansas and blizzards in Colorado and Massachusetts, a good time also to better integrate non-profits into local emergency planning.

There are futures ahead, as many as there are plants, animals, people, planets and stars in the universe. None of us has the same future. Just as a new day always follows night, what that new day will actually bring, breath by breath, moment by moment, we cannot know.

### **If our future is unknown, imagine being Mabel Loomis Todd**

Your husband is packing 20 telescopes. He's planning to build special wooden houses for them in the furthest possible NW corner of Japan. Though you've been to Japan you have never been to Ainu Japan. Nothing like urbane Tokyo. The voyage will be comfortable, as good as it can be given that the ship belongs to one of the richest men in the United States. Is any ocean comfortable for weeks on end? Almost certainly not. Too slow if the winds die down in the tropics, that's for sure. You know that the worst part is around the southern tip of South America. Luckily you don't have to do that bit. You can go by train and join up with the boat in San Francisco. Where your husband will be on pins and needles waiting to find out whether all that equipment survived its sea voyage. Thank goodness it did.

Mabel Loomis Todd is said to have approached all these unknowns with joy. Judging only from the words in that book about the trip to Japan she was curious too, as well as joyful. She loved the adventure of being alive and seeing new things. A similar zest has always emanated from Joanna Macy, despite being as enmeshed as she is in the daunting challenges of the Great Turning.

I am not either of them. My particular contribution is to sustain capacity to be curious, involved in the world, while fully aware that the times ahead are alarming and dangerous. I have protective instincts. I think most people have them. Mine focus on the people, the plants and animals for whom the weather's patterns in years to come will be more extreme and more volatile than the patterns I have always known. Heavy weather is often so very dangerous. The Pacific Ocean was dangerous in Mabel Loomis Todd's time. Every day that passes tranquil and easy is perhaps not a basis for trust in a tranquil future, but it is the basis for gratitude for a past lived with plenty of joy.

It's Thanksgiving Day today.

So let gratitude be where I stop.

## The Hill We Climb — part 2

Amanda Gorman. January 20, 2021

But while democracy can be periodically delayed,  
it can never be permanently defeated.  
In this truth,  
in this faith we trust,  
for while we have our eyes on the future,  
history has its eyes on us.  
This is the era of just redemption  
we feared at its inception.  
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour  
but within it we found the power  
to author a new chapter,  
to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.  
So while once we asked,  
'how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe,'  
now we assert,  
'how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?'  
We will not march back to what was  
but move to what shall be:  
a country that is bruised but whole,  
benevolent but bold,  
fierce, and free.  
We will not be turned around  
or interrupted by intimidation  
because we know our inaction and inertia  
will be the inheritance of the next generation.  
Our blunders become their burdens.  
But one thing is certain:  
If we merge mercy with might,  
and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy  
and change our children's birthright.  
So let us leave behind a country  
better than the one we were left with.  
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,  
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.  
We will rise from the gold-limned hills of the west,  
we will rise from the windswept northeast

where our forefathers first realized revolution,  
we will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the  
midwestern states,  
we will rise from the sunbaked south.  
We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover  
in every known nook of our nation and  
every corner called our country,  
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,  
battered and beautiful.  
When day comes we step out of the shade,  
afire and unafraid.  
The new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it,  
if only we're brave enough to be it.

The last three lines of Gorman's ode would  
make a fine ending to Rudyard Kipling's **IF**