

Bush, Gayle Norton and the Golden Toad

The other day I dreamt of the golden toad. Despite the fact that amphibians are of interest to me I had not thought about the golden toad itself since I was in Monteverde, Costa Rica in 1993. At this point, researchers had started to be alarmed at the pattern of disappearances of amphibian populations around the world. Dr. Alan Pounds spoke to our class about the golden toad, which he had not seen locally in recent years. Since Monteverde was the only location where golden toads were found, the disappearance was not only the loss of a population, but of the entire species.

At the time, Dr. Pounds suggested that, perhaps, climate change was affecting the ability of the toads (and other amphibians) to withstand a variety of harmful environmental factors such as ultraviolet radiation and parasitic infections, leaving them more susceptible. Amphibians have extremely permeable skins and are therefore more sensitive to environmental factors than other groups of land animals. I cannot remember whether Dr. Pounds said the words “canary in a coal mine” but the implication was clearly there.

At the time I believed that there was a chance the golden toad would come back, and maybe, on some future trip to Costa Rica, I would be able to hear their chorus. I returned to the United States, achieved my Ph.D., had two children, and read bits about the various amphibian losses and deformities, but did not think specifically about the golden toad. That is, until this year, until this dream where I saw the image of a single golden toad and this image was one of farewell.

Though many factors enter into the creation of a dream, clearly my fears about the environment and the future of my children were formative in this dream. I believe that there is a substantial disconnect between our understanding about our present actions and their impact on the environment. On better days, this disconnect feels like grief and confusion. On bad days, this disconnect feels apocalyptic and I fear for the future predicted in the Pentagon’s recent report on environmental catastrophe; the report that concludes; “disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life. Once again, warfare would define human life.”

The unwillingness of people to accept the true threat of climate change and the fact that we are partially responsible for it cannot be blamed on the last four years in Washington alone. However, I believe that the Bush administration bears an enormous weight of guilt for our retreat away from any true commitment to a decent environmental future. Our leadership in Washington is the guiding force for the future progression of the country and the present leadership in Congress and, most especially, in the White House either is choosing to remain ignorant of the overwhelming scientific evidence for our complicity in climate change, or even worse, is ignoring the data. I do not understand how responsible people could willingly ignore these data, especially when they come not only from university scientists but from the Pentagon itself.

I am trying not to be cynical, but I cannot shake the possibility that consumption, chaos, disruption and warfare are beneficial to those in Washington. I am trying not to think Halliburton and Enron. And I am most heartily trying to ignore the suggestions that the believers of the soothsayer Revelation John of the New Testament run the government and are trying to inch us towards the rapture where they might, as John (22:14) says, “enter in through the gates of that city.” However since one of the stewards of our environment appointed by President Bush is Gayle Norton, a former student of James Watt the possibility is not entirely far-fetched. As James Watt, former Secretary for the Interior under Reagan, said environmental degradation is not a problem since we “don’t know how many future generations we can count on until the Lord returns.”

Whatever the cause of the present administration’s lack of concern for the environment and for life in general, it is directly impacting our future, and more specifically the future of our children, of MY children. The administration’s successful rollbacks of clean air and water protections, pullout of the Kyoto agreement and stifles of any attempts to reduce emissions harmful to our climatic stability have already changed the future for our children.

All of this has been on my mind for a long time. I think the little golden toad that appeared in my dream is the symbol I wear in my heart for the loss of so much on this earth and the ignorance and cynicism contributing to this loss. I do not think the golden toad is coming back. When I woke up from my dream I was crying because I knew that

the only place I'd ever see or hear a golden toad was in the land of the dead, if there is such a place. As John says, "And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God."
(Revelation 20:12)

835 Words

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