

Catherine Wissner is a UWO horticulturalist who is the “worker bee” (her term) behind Laramie County’s Cooperative Extension Service. I have taken her LIFE gardening classes; she has visited my home to advise me on my trees. We chat at her Tuesday Farmer’s Market stall; I drop by her Cheyenne office to pick her brains. We see eye to eye on outdoor activities, fresh vegetables, lifestyle choices. Where we differ is on global warming. I have Ms. Wissner’s permission to quote from her email:

“I’ve watched the global-warming issue with the skepticism of years of science training and often wondered about the data coming out of the various environmental groups . . .

“Since time began the climate has been changing. Glaciers receded, leaving behind amazing soil and beautiful topography. Wyoming, parts of Colorado and Utah were once a tropical jungle . . . Worldwide 1.5 million acres of peat bogs give off greenhouse gases as they decompose, as does the backyard compost pile. Peat bogs are a renewable resource, slow but renewable; the cycle continues. Every time soil is turned, some type of greenhouse gas is given off.

“Can people be better stewards of the planet? Yes, of course we can. I’ve changed my light bulbs to compact fluorescent, added more insulation to the house, planted long-term perennial forage. I grow my own food including forage for my sheep, drive a car that gets good mileage and is maintained. I’ve planted trees and shrubs to help clean the air and act as habitat for bees. So, I’m trying to do my part.

“The upside of global warming: longer growing seasons, better seed germination, more crops, tomatoes ripening on the vine, reduced winter heating costs. Granted warm air is unstable, but what really scares me would be global cooling.”

You are right, Catherine. Humans have generated greenhouse gases ever since we began tilling the soil some 10,000 years ago, but these contributions were slight—until 200 years ago. Now huge numbers of people are on scene, often engaged in activities like burning coal that produce such vast amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, it rapidly puts earth at the tipping point. “Almost every scientific academy, from Chinese to Russian to American, the Indian, Canadian, and Britain’s Royal Society, supports this view,” writes Australian scientist Tim Flannery, author of *The Weather Makers* and *Here on Earth and Now or Never*.

Wyomingites may benefit from warming climates, but we also bear the costs. Snowmelt arrives earlier; rainstorms are heavier. Last year, flashfloods washed out roads and cost human lives. Pine trees are dead or dying. To drive between Buford and Laramie, where dead woods flank both sides of I-80, is dispiriting. Ad let’s not even talk Yellowstone Park! The proliferation of pine-bark beetles is the direct result of warmer winters—and the beetle is not the only insect that benefits from what NASA’s James Hansen labels climate forcings. Forty years ago lyme disease was virtually unknown; today, forests crawl with the disease-bearing ticks.

Tim Flannery glumly comments that “From mid-2007 onward I’ve found it increasingly difficult to read the scientific findings on climate change without despairing.” Elsewhere he reflects on an encounter with New Guinea Aborigines: “My ancestors and theirs parted ways at least fifty thousand years ago, when each trooped out of Africa to its different destinations,” yet still, he

managed to communicate with his hosts. Despite this commonality, he notes, humans live as if “our family, our clan or our nation were the only one” that counts.

Richard Faris in *Forecast* mentions a think tank in England whose members include Stanford author/professor Paul Ehrlich and primatologist Jane Goodall. England’s population needs to be halved to be sustainable, the group says, recommending Brits limit themselves to two children. Not having a third child is “probably the most effective action people can take to halt climate change.” But immigration accounted for 66 percent of England’s population growth between 2001 and 2005, writes Faris. Typically, the immigrants are refugees fleeing environmental catastrophes that have dovetailed into warfare, yet woe to the immigrant whose facial features differ, or whose skin is a few shades darker, than that of the prevailing population. This is true also of France and Germany. These countries are densely populated. For example, notwithstanding negative population growth, Germany is home to 82+ million people, in a space one and one-half times the size of Wyoming. “I have a plate of food; ok, I can share with another person. But with ten?”

A nephew of mine lives in England. He was born and raised in California, the son of a brother who immigrated as I did. Our parents lived through two horrendous wars plus the Nazi ideology that “ethnic” Germans would prevail only at the practice of genocide, expansionism, warfare. Accordingly, Nazis lavished ceremonies and medals on mothers of large families, a sort of purple heart for breeding. Karl and I were born during WWII. Our earliest years were marked by postwar famine, but our two youngest brothers fared worse: they killed themselves at different times in their lives. Their suicides caused indescribable agony. Are these deaths doomed to repeat themselves large-scale? In China, Chairman Mao fostered large families to the extent that, notwithstanding the millions who perished of starvation during his insane “great-leap-forward” experiment, overpopulation remains the country’s most pressing problem even now, after decades of draconian enforcement of one-child policies.

The Darfur fratricidal wars are often framed as racial conflict, Arab herders decimating African farmers. The underlying problem is lack of rain, Faris shows, the desert encroaching on range- and farmland. Scarce water is at the heart of Israeli-Palestinian conflicts; of clashes between India, Kashmir, and Pakistan; of global hotspots elsewhere. In Australia, every week some farmer kills himself because lack of water has rendered agriculture moot. Farmer suicide also occurs in parts of China. What of the desertification in Texas, where last year alone 600,000 cattle vanished along with their owners? Texans may not kill themselves, but they may drift northward to Wyoming.

Globally, Laurence Smith’s *World in 2050* envisions starvation, vector-caused diseases, and water shortages on horrific scale. He cites a Pentagon report on abrupt climate change that anticipates “a more than 50% increase in armed conflict.” The report projects huge numbers of battle deaths by 2030, in Africa alone.

When I immigrated to marry my American, the world seemed a big place. California held the

equivalent of one-third of West Germany's population, on a landmass one and one-half times as large. Today humanity is seven billion strong, racing toward ten. Over the long haul three billion people is what the earth's natural wealth will accommodate, resources-research tells us.

I want my grandchildren to garden, hike, enjoy productive careers. So does James Hansen. *Storms of My Grandchildren* is the title of his book on global warming. The storms are bound to get worse, even in Wyoming.