

*Passage Nine:
Creating Our Future*

A View From the Mountain Top

Adrienne

It was the end of the school year. We were preparing to take The Learning Community final examination. It was unlike any final I had ever taken. We were asked to find a private place to sit somewhere in the classroom. Some students sprawled out on pillows on the floor; others sat against the wall, feet stretched out in front of them; some chose the couch or soft chairs around the classroom. Two richly melodic, yet ominous, compositions from Vangelis's *L'Apocalypse Des Animaux* set the mood. Gary had just guided us through a visualization in which we were to imagine ourselves in the future; we imagined living in a world that was an extrapolation of our known world. Fifty years had passed and a critical mass of people had not taken action to stop humankind from its path of social and environmental degradation. We were asked to imagine ourselves taking our grandchildren for a hike on a mountain overlooking our community. As I emerged from this closed-eye process, I began to write while "L'ours Musicien" and "Creation Du Monde" played in the background.

My hands are old, I realize as I look down at my granddaughter's supple hand nestled in my leathery palm, our fingers of different sizes intertwined. I suppose the rest of me is old as well. The whole world feels old in fact. The people seem just to settle for the status quo and to lack energy or passion to try to change things. And a lot needs to change.

As I hike up this mountain, child at my side, I think back to the Saturdays I spent planting and caring for the oak trees in these foothills when I was young. On a clear day I could see the entire valley and the buildings in downtown San Francisco in the distance. Smog that once hovered only over San Jose and the Silicon Valley has become dense and now engulfs all of the Bay Area. It is as if someone has poured a thick, brown layer of spoiled milk into this valley up to the tips of the surrounding hills and mountains. Oh, and the smell. The whiff of exhaust emission that I occasionally caught when stuck behind an old car or diesel truck is now the typical smell of a hot day.

Human impact on the land astounds me once again. As if there are no limits, we have crowded the hills and mountains with our many posses-

sions and houses, creating a suburban sprawl that encompasses the valley. This valley, which my grandfather remembered as more crowded with plum and apricot orchards than people, now explodes with people and their cars. Thick, dirty air parches my throat as my granddaughter and I gasp for breath.

Tears begin to cloud my eyes and I bite my lip, hoping my granddaughter will not sense my despair on this special occasion. This is not the world I would like to live in. Where did we go wrong, I ask myself. How could we have let the world come to this?

A gentle breeze raises the wisps of my granddaughter's dark hair off her shoulders and reminds me that it is springtime. I forget easily because there are no flowers around us. I almost overlook the absence of native plants because it has been so long since I have seen the purple lupine and soap plant. They disappeared after a long battle with non-native grasses introduced by the Spanish. The Spanish first brought cattle to this area over 200 years ago, initiating a process of soil degradation and mineral depletion leading to loss of the beautiful California Oak. Many species no longer exist and I know that my granddaughter will know about them only through the memories I share with her. At home we no longer have squirrels or birds; the only animals around are stray scavenger dogs. Most children grow up so distant from nature and animals that their concept of the world includes only people and the artifacts that people have created.

I envision myself among the people and buildings in the landscape below. I often move deftly among them, preoccupied with a sense of loneliness and fear. I rarely interact with strangers during the day; computers have reduced human interaction and the world seems increasingly impersonal. Sometimes I feel like a consumer-pawn of the corporate and political "powers that be." Advertisements bombard me daily and I begin to doubt whether my existence matters at all besides my worth as a consumer. Each day the newspapers glorify the latest fad or report political demise. I search for meaningful experiences and moments in this external world, but everything seems reduced to simplicity. It is so much

easier to hide than to face this desperate world we have created. I look into my granddaughter's deep brown eyes and wonder how she can survive in this world that desensitizes us more each day. I hope that my love will help make her strong enough to see beyond. But what about everyone else?

We gaze out at all the people living in our area and I wonder what price we will have to pay for exceeding the carrying-capacity of the region. The concentration of wealth for the few still makes this country the richest country in the world; yet our needs and material desires depend on the exploitation of resources from far-away places. And the majority in our country is miserable. We are, indubitably, paying the price. As a society, as well as individually, we suffer more now than ever before. People seem to be driven by an artificial desire to achieve material wealth as they have been for years, but wealth is far more unattainable than before because we live in a regimented society with a class system determined by birth, race, and gender. Personal freedom is tremendously restricted. When I walk through the city, I see troops stationed in an attempt to curb violence—violence that has festered because society has failed to provide support and healthy stimulation for its disillusioned youth.

Poverty, which was so long ignored in America, now affects everyone. Thousands live in perpetual poverty and everyone seems faced with losing everything in an age of such economic instability. Companies merge and downsize daily resulting in fewer jobs. Slums, like the favelas that surrounded Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, seventy-five years ago and that we never thought would exist in America, now encompass almost every major city. These slums consist of people living in overcrowded shacks constructed desperately out of cardboard and scrap tin. Rats and disease are everywhere. People collect paper and scraps to make enough money to feed their families.

I look down at my hands, feeling lucky that, after striving for a good education, I found a good job and managed to live in a small house. But I could not escape all pain. As I run the fingers of my right hand over the

back of my left hand, I wince at the open pustules and cracked skin, skin cancer caused by ultraviolet rays more intense than ever. Cancer seems to afflict everyone, analogous, I suppose, to the cancer we have inflicted upon the earth.

The only good thing, if one took a very global position, is that the population is decreasing. The death rate exceeds the birth rate due to rampant disease—a phenomena that baffled scientists fifty years ago when they discovered that Russians were dying younger than in any other industrialized nation and that each year their life spans were decreasing even more for no known reason. Our own government ignored the decrease in global population when it afflicted the rest of the world fearing that it might cause wide-spread panic.

Globally we face a food shortage owing to the loss of commercial food crops to chemically resistant bacteria and insects. The lack of biodiversity in agriculture has also wiped out the huge meat-producing ranches upon which industrialized nations had become dependent. The economies of many industrialized nations have become less stable than they once were because of their heavy dependence on imported resources and fossil fuels.

Biologically, microorganisms are threatening the human race. Bacteria, which can reproduce and alter genetically thousands of times faster than humans, have rendered almost all antibiotics and vaccinations useless. However, merely to say that the population declines, turns suffering into a statistic. Disease spreads like wildfire. I hear of families that are torn apart as districts impose quarantines in attempt to isolate diseases. Some of my family members and friends have died suddenly of “unknown causes.” Even the illusion of certainty and security no longer exists.

And as I look out at a valley of festering filth, I feel it in myself. Facets of life seem disconnected, and within I feel detached, distraught, despairing. My addictions have manifested in areas of working and running, things which can be healthy when done in a conscious manner. But

these activities have become crutches for me to survive at a speedy pace of life. In public interactions I feel a numbness—a loss of hope and camaraderie. Like others, I carry fear and have learned to avoid eye contact and exchanges of genuine compassion. When I walk the streets, I feel alone. Despite our common suffering, I no longer feel a common bond with humanity.

As my granddaughter and I gaze out at the world, my fear mounts. I feel the pain of all life as my own. As I feel my granddaughter's hand resting trustfully in mine, I experience total realization of my own actions and of the actions of those around me and the fear inebriates my entire body. I am fully accountable for this dearth and utter deterioration of all life.

Suddenly the child at my side breaks the silence with one of those direct, penetrating questions children are prone to ask adults that shake our world of obfuscation and delusion. “Why is it so ugly?” she inquires.

Her question strikes the nerve of acute pain I try to protect. I wonder how I can explain that my peers and I were simply too short-sighted to leave her anything better. How can I explain that fifty years ago, at the end of the millennium, when we needed a critical mass of people to commit to making the world a better place, that a critical mass failed to emerge. And how can I explain that, although I felt that I cared, my actions resulted in this world because I also remained passive.

Suddenly I am brought back into the classroom as Gary guides us out of the meditation and asks us to regroup and share our worst-possible future scenarios. Thankfully, I do not need to explain my visualization to my granddaughter or to the rest of humanity. This powerful image is a reminder; a prophecy of our future if we do not alter the course right now. I leave that world, which seems all too real, and turn to familiar faces, faces that give me hope, for they too have learned by seeing into the horrors.

After writing our reflections on our experiences with our grandchild, Gary asked us to close our eyes and relax, get into a comfortable position, and pre-

pare for another guided visualization. We were asked to imagine that we had just returned home from our hike on the mountain. We had taken our grandchild home, returned to our home, and found a special letter addressed to us containing a summons which said:

As a respected citizen of planet Earth in the year 2050, you are summoned by the president of the League of Global Citizens to an emergency meeting of the Global Council of Twenty-Five. It has been determined that the vital triangle of life—physical health, social well being, and environmental harmony—has become dramatically threatened and is in acute danger of falling into irreparable destruction. It is feared that these circumstances may result in a serious degradation of life or even the extinction of human life on the planet.

You have been chosen to be a member of the Council because of your commitment to the well-being of all life forms on the planet, and because you have maintained a thorough and continuing knowledge of planetary issues over the past fifty years.

Gary asked us to imagine ourselves packing our bags, being transported to the airport, and beginning our flight to Geneva, Switzerland. On the plane ride, we were to consider what global solution we might have to share with other people of the world. We were also to think about the personal strengths that we had cultivated over our lifetimes to prepare ourselves educationally and professionally for this calling. The music of Vangelis—"Le Singe Bleu" and "La Mort Du Loup"—permeated my thoughts as I imagined what I might have accomplished over the past fifty years.

In spite of the general apathy in the society, I devoted much of my energy building bridges between disparate groups and bringing people together to solve social and environmental problems. My education and experience as an activist helped me gain communication skills for mediating conflicts and striving for solutions that worked for everyone rather than decisions that created winners and losers. I became involved in policy building regarding environmental issues from logging to implica-

tions of the Endangered Species Act on private property. I also worked with neighborhood communities to restructure education to better meet the needs of students and the changing world, sometimes helping to build exciting partnerships between corporations and classrooms. Often, I felt discouraged because the general population was too engrossed in material things and pleasure seeking to notice that something needed to be done to protect society. As societal conditions worsened, people became even more greedy and self-serving.

After taking time to reflect on what our personal lives may have been, we continued our guided visualization:

Imagine that you have arrived at your destination. An official of The League of Global Citizens meets you at the airport. As you drive through the streets of Geneva, you recall your visit to the city as a youthful traveler during college. Every aspect of the city shows the effects of fifty years of societal neglect. Now you are the hope of the future.

Then we opened our eyes and began a simulation of the **Council of Twenty-Five**. Gary read the welcoming introduction:

The Council of Twenty-Five will convene shortly. After you have introduced yourselves to other members of the Council, you are to define together the problems facing our planet. You are to identify, describe, and prioritize these problems by degrees of severity. Then you are to create a comprehensive global solution to five of the problems you have singled out as the most serious.

In addition, each member of the Council will commit to a set of specific actions in his/her life that will make a difference in the world. The specific actions should include both changes in the member's personal lifestyle and professional contributions.

The process became more personal as each of us imagined what our lives might become in the next fifty years. These imagined outcomes took form

as we interacted as if we had just met for the first time in the Council of Twenty-five. The roles gave each of us a credible position of expertise on the Council. As experts with a wealth of experience and a global perspective, we had been summoned to assess areas of world crisis and propose solutions to the problems we identified. Our roles reflected our unique interests and talents.

Tamika, the civil rights lawyer, had devoted her life to challenging individuals and corporations that breached or impinged upon the rights of others. She had set up a non-profit foundation that provided homes and educational alternatives for inner city kids.

Jeremy had used his influence as a successful corporate CEO to write and promote an Ethical Practices Pledge which several major corporations had agreed upon. The Pledge provided that corporations would pursue more healthy, humane, and ecological practices in bringing their product to market.

Greg had become known as the Zen Master Harlequin and traveled all over the world giving performances. He had an array of masks that helped him portray ways of being in the world. His performances were engaging and humorous, but, more than that, they helped transform the awareness of the audience.

Shawn, the truck driver who had gotten skin cancer from exposure to the environment, had turned his solar-powered trucking company into an advertisement on wheels. From coast to coast, people could read posters on his big-rig trucks that warned of environmental health risks and supported political solutions. His enterprise hauled only products that were environmentally safe.

Jenny had graduated from the university in International Relations. She had helped develop a non-governmentally sustained organization that support landless people in Central America. She gained financial sup-

port for her projects by writing books, giving public lectures, appealing to people's altruism.

Kristie worked as a wildlife biologist in the northern Rockies. She was an advocate for Natural Habitat Zones. These were regions in which people using only passive forms of energy and practicing sound environmental principles could live in forested watershed preserves.

Angel had used her song writing talent and her voice to gain support for interfaith conferences. Attendees shared in one another's spiritual celebrations, performed inspirational music, and funded grass-roots social action proposals.

Janna had helped establish a set of charter schools across the country that were governed democratically by their students, staff, and parents. Graduates of her schools were known for their compassion and activism. Some of her graduates were carrying on the tradition of establishing activist schools.

Each of the other students in the class created a role for him or herself. Andrea had helped encourage a regional interest in growing nutritional and healing herbs in hydroponic gardens. Wendy had become a social worker who pioneered systems for ending the need for welfare. Joe had set up urban homesteading projects after studying effective practices around the world. Julie had set up international conflict resolution teams to serve regions of the world which were in turmoil. Each student linked his or her core interest to some need in the world, then extrapolated a life of service around that interest. As experts with a wealth of experience and global perspective about the state of the world, we talked.

Each of us shared our concerns about the world and offered major issues to be considered by the group. Some students addressed health issues: water pollution, lack of good nutrition, the failure of infectious disease control, and dependency on alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Some students addressed social issues: teenage suicide and alienation; social issues such as abortion,

crime prevention, rehabilitation, and the death penalty; rape, genital mutilation, and other crimes against women; racial prejudice and inclusion; political oppression and treatment of political prisoners; the effects of imperialism and war on indigenous people; and the fair distribution of the world's resources. Other students addressed environmental issues: effects of pesticides on the ecology; ozone depletion and global warming; protection of endangered species; threat of nuclear energy and weapons. One issue seemed to fit in all three categories: the effects of over-population.

In our roles we faced many of the struggles that diplomats face trying to formulate and apply international policy. Sometimes the group process became frustrating. We felt that it was absolutely essential that everyone take the initiative to speak and that the group respect every idea. Our process of sharing our career paths and our major issues was exciting and infused high level energy into our group. However, when we attempted to sort out, to prioritize, and to find solutions to the issues, we fell into confusion and disunity. I wanted things to work out. I wanted our year to end in great harmony and be perfect, but our experience showed me just how thin the veneer of civility can be.

We finally agreed on a fairly universal approach to the problems that faced us. The solutions were broad and long-term. We saw the value of public education programs which emphasized the arts in communicating global messages. We saw the value of community-based partnerships which brought citizens, industry, and government together to solve problems. We agreed on the value of encouraging individual choices in selecting products and food and in using resources and eliminating waste. We realized that governments could provide laws and regulations but that people had to be committed to outcomes in order for real change to occur.

Then we jumped out of our roles as citizens of the year 2050. For some it was the first time for envisioning the future, picturing oneself in the grand scheme, and committing to a solution. We made lifestyle commitments affecting our current lives. Shawn agreed to recycle at home, at school, and in the community. Brenda agreed to volunteer to help in a community health

abuse program. Andy agreed to work in local environmental clean-up projects. Personally, I felt that, in the process, I reaffirmed my responsibility to take a positive role in the evolution of the planet.

Sometimes the group strayed from the focus and debated trivial details. When Andrea proposed ways she would change her actions she said she would stop using the clothes dryer and the microwave. We discussed the potential energy conservation benefits and dangers, and, unable to come to a decision about microwaves, we concluded that it is imperative that people be educated so they can make conscious decisions about their actions.

My level of personal optimism ebbed and flowed. Sometimes I doubted the sincerity of our group's commitment. I wondered if people felt obligated to say something or if they were saying things that sounded nice. I do not give much credit to words or promises, perhaps because I don't trust my own words. In my life, I need to see action and I need to live my values. As I sat there listening to my peers speak, I wondered why I felt such distrust in my own words. I thought about my childhood:

I was an extremely quiet child and my mother used to wonder why I did not play with the other kids at the playground. My mother decided that I should be exposed to more adults when I was young so that I would not become dependent on her and she would not be an overbearing force in my life. So, early on she went off to work and I was shipped off to day care centers. I think that leaving so abruptly probably affected me a lot and created a distrust. In a sense it severed our bond. Fortunately, I ended up at a nurturing school—Peninsula—where I had met Kristie, and gradually engaged in play with the other children and became more assertive. But again my security was shattered when my parents sent me to public school at the end of the fifth grade. They wanted me to be academically prepared for public high school. I remember the day they told me I was changing schools. I was to leave my extended family. The little girl in me was so devastated. At the new school people didn't care about each other in the way that I had grown accustomed. To make matters

worse, I was confronted with an emphasis on right and wrong, rather than on learning.

Then Jenny spoke and I redirected my attention back to the group. Jenny always spoke consciously, and I knew that I could trust her. Our group process continued and we eventually arrived at consensus on certain goals. Then we concluded our four-hour final with another guided visualization accompanied by music. I assumed a comfortable position on the floor, closed my eyes and relaxed. Gary asked us to repeat the walk up the mountain with our grandchildren. This time we were to view a world in which a critical mass of people **had taken** responsibility for the vital triangle of life. We had learned the lessons of balancing personal power with responsibility, balancing group action with harmony, and balancing our use of the planet with care for the environment.

As the music of Vangelis's "La Mer Recommencee" blended with my thoughts, I imagined smelling the freshness of the air, seeing the beauty of the flowers, and hearing the songs of the birds as we ascended the mountain. This time, I could point out to my grandchild all the things that I had helped to create in the world over my lifetime. Now I could talk about the health of the people, the cooperative spirit of the citizenry, the vitality of the land, the plants, and the animals. I began to envision the world as it could be if a critical mass had emerged and empowered themselves to make a difference.

My granddaughter holds my hand in hers as we move up the mountain in silence, mindful of each footstep and aware of our surroundings. She moves with natural grace, communicating a sort of old familiarity with the outdoors and respect for the sacredness as she carefully examines the life we are among. Sometimes we just stop to observe and experience the movement of a creature or the stillness of a tree. We are gentle with one another in our touch and with our words. We have traveled this mountain many times—sometimes alone, sometimes guided by others, sometimes ascending in harmony guided by a common vision and loving one another.

The air is clear and a zephyr rustles the leaves on the trees. When we stop to gaze out at the valley I feel connected to the movement below. I know that beneath us people have come together in a common venture to improve life and the environment. People have learned, for the most part, to identify with a global community and see the need to work together rather than compete. At some point in many people's lives, their care manifested into action and like a drop in a pool the active energy of this change rippled out and affected a change within the hearts of others.

More and more individuals became mindful of the way they consumed both natural resources and the energy around them and directed their energy in unique ways to create a healthier community. Recognizing that individuals shape and are shaped by the institutions we create, some committed to making institutions such as schools, government, and business more humane.

Small changes in living brought about dramatic change in the environment. Having long been aware of pesticide contamination of water and potential health dangers, people truly committed to buying local, organic produce and created gardens in the cities and suburbs. Many found ways to live more simply and to do their own household tasks reducing the class division exacerbated by the sort of domestic servitude common in some suburbs. People chose to live closer together, creating dense pockets of population and strong communities and preserving open space. Living in close quarters, people naturally joined together for community events, shared or traded their resources, and chose to bicycle or use mass transit.

I remember the point at which I realized that every one of my actions and every moment of my life must be directed toward creating a better world. My life was transformed. Suddenly the way that I got to my destination and my experience along the way became as important and invigorating as the rest of my life. Getting somewhere in a hurry or spending the journey distracted by my racing thoughts or the radio no longer felt satisfying. I renounced my car for the fresh air of a bike ride or

walk to work or the smile and conversation with a stranger on the train. I became even more scrupulous about what I consumed, both internally and externally.

I removed myself from situations that were not in accordance with my vision and I directed my energy towards actions that would open me and those around me towards freedom. I strove to live every moment with openness, with exhilaration as if it were my first and exaltation as if it were my last. With each action I tried to consider if I would like to live in a world in which everyone was acting as I was in that moment. Gradually I learned that I could act mindfully, without imposing rules and restrictions on myself. As I began to meditate and find inner peace, my choices were guided by a wise inner voice that felt natural and joyful.

Then we took time to share our visualizations. Tamika shared a common frustration: it was easier to imagine and write about the most negative of futures; it was harder to imagine and write about a positive future. As we shared our visualizations, I realized that we shared a common fear. We feared that we might live in a world where people did not care about one another, about the environment, or about humanity as a whole. I felt discouraged: here we had spent the year together, found trust and love in ourselves and one another, and learned to see the world in a larger context and care for it, and yet we did not see it in our future that people would care.

Frustration swelled within me as I forced myself to step back and reflect further. I relaxed as I inferred that it did not appear that we had lost faith in humanity. We did not view humans as malicious or vindictive. Instead we envisioned a passive fate. We saw people caught up in materialism and becoming numb to an innate sense of oneness with the world. Perhaps we feared this most because we saw it in ourselves. We were in our visions of the world at its worst and we were culpable merely by being passive.

Throughout my life my parents had high standards for my behavior. When they saw me making decisions that took me away from my studies and toward my friends, they threatened to take away things that I cherished—

even The Learning Community. They wanted me to do well in college and feared that I would not be prepared. My parents took note of how miserable I was and realized the delicate balance inherent in my social and academic development. Still, I was frightened and confused. I became insecure, feeling that everything is transient and nothing is mine because things and privileges were constantly being taken away. I suppose I figured out early on that if I couldn't trust the people around me, I couldn't trust myself. As I grappled with my frustrations I realized that some of my childhood scars had followed me here.

Then Gary asked that we close by writing a reflection of our day. As Vangelis played “La Petite Fille De Lamar,” I couldn't help but to reflect on my entire year. I looked around the circle and I saw individual faces. I looked into the eyes of people who had committed to the group—who had committed to me. We had shared an incredible year. These people had not let me down. When it mattered the most we had been here for each other. We were a group, a unit, a family. I thought about the instances in which people had emerged as warriors—Tamika in her struggle with the sadness and trauma of her childhood, Greg in bringing us back to the heart of an issue and back to our own hearts, showing us gently and by example how to care for each other, Wendy in standing up to Shawn and Jeremy with such honest passion.

And as I saw each person again, I saw the individual strengths that had emerged over the year through love and support. Kristie had really recognized her intellectual potential and become more assertive. Angel had come out of her own world, joined the circle instead of disrupting it, and, as she committed her energy to the group, contributed incredible insight.

I looked around the circle again. This group had supported me fully when I had been weak and struggled against my own inhibitions and when I had been strong and taken risks emerging as a leader in the group. And I remembered how each of these beautiful people had touched me so deeply in life outside the group: Kristie being so honest and open; Wendy being with me one afternoon and just holding me when things had been so hard at home;

and Steve magically bringing out my laughter and love and helping me to dance. We were a group, a unit; this was my family away from home.

As I looked at everyone I realized that I had a special relationship with each person in the group. I felt their love, and in that moment, trusting the group, I trusted myself. I thought of a Taoist story that Gary had shared with us about a farmer who, in his desire to help his plants grow, went into his fields each day gently pulling on each seedling; and how the farmer inadvertently killed his plants by rushing their growth process. We can love and nurture each other while we each develop and learn in our inherently natural way.

I realized that nothing in an individual's education could be more important and relevant than the process we were engaged in: recognizing our potential, liberating ourselves to become the learners we wanted to become with the support of a group, and becoming inspired to take an active part in the conscious evolution of the planet.

Yes, I thought, education is stepping outside oneself and connecting with humanity through literature and history; it is learning by experimenting—the process of science and math; it is being in nature and feeling the connection between oneself and all of life; it is interacting with others and learning to share and to love; and it is the vital step in which all of this culminates into action. It is recognizing that the state of humanity and our environment depends on how we act and interact right now. And it is this process over and over again within the individual and within a group. As I made my personal commitment to work actively to improve my community and the environment, I let go and allowed myself to trust the group and in doing so I liberated myself.

Our learning community started out as a group of diverse personalities. We were separate as boys and girls and we were made even more separate by being regarded as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. We experienced, interacted, became aware, and agreed to seek the higher intellectual ground in arguments. We re-directed our focus from self-indulgence and

the confrontation that produces winners and losers; we transformed “my concerns” to “our concerns” to “global concerns.”

As the year ends, we take the awareness that we had worked so hard to transform and prepare ourselves for the next step: to walk alone once again into the world and face the challenges that our lives presented. We are ready to create our future. We need more education and more experience, and we need to create opportunities in which to become involved and bring our new consciousness into action.

I carry all these thoughts with me as I begin my new journey alone. The process makes me both excited and afraid. I am left with questions: Will I be able to live up to the challenge? Will I find others who will join me in setting their differences aside and commit to common causes? Will we be able to make a difference? I don't know the answers; sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the questions.

I know that at times I will be filled with loneliness and doubt. And I know that at other times I will be excited and uplifted by the optimistic spirit and the camaraderie that I will share with others. I know that when I open myself to my greatest vision of the future, I am energized and feel totally alive. I have control over my willingness to help create a better world and I intend to exercise that control. It is the only certainty that I have.