

## Dancing with the Wind

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

I'm a combination of hydrogen, oxygen, and radon, a single particle of air so infinitely small I haven't even been given a name. But I do get around. I may be shot high from the blowhole of a whale. I may be the tweet in a referee's whistle, the first breath of an infant, the last gasp of an old soldier, or all those things.

I deliver oxygen to sustain Earth's mammals, birds, and insects. I fill the sails that move boats, and spin massive turbines to make electricity. I provide an invisible carpet for kites to ride, and I provide the lift that keeps geese, sparrows, eagles, and jetliners aloft.

I am not the wind, for I have mass, whereas the wind is without substance of its own. But the wind is important, too. It is motion defined, a dance to transport me at its whim to the North Pole, the South Pole, Timbuktu, and points in between. It has taken me around the earth so often American Express has lost track of my frequent flyer miles.

Sometimes I hover motionless over a green meadow just to absorb oxygen rising from the grasses below and the forest at its edge. But it is not only trees and grasses that produce the oxygen I carry for life on earth. In fact, over 70% of the planet's oxygen is produced by phytoplankton in the oceans, a photosynthesizing microalga that also helps to control carbon dioxide.

Then I'm carried off by soft breezes created as the earth's surface warms and cools in various places in reaction to the sun and moon. I am your weather, picking up bits of water vapor to deposit as rain or snow in places downwind. Usually, I am as quiet and pleasant as a summer picnic. Other times I am a dust devil flitting about on a Wyoming prairie.

I am obstinate, however, and not so predictable as you earthlings would like me to be. Occasionally those temperature fluctuations down below get things all riled up and I get caught up in a wind spinning violently over the oceans, eventually becoming a hurricane and wrecking communities at landfall. I am the twirling mass of a tornado shifting homes off foundations in Oklahoma, a typhoon in the Pacific, a Nor'easter slamming the shores of Maine. I am the fury of nature.

I am the wondrous atmosphere that has allowed life to flourish on the earth. I dance with the wind, but I am fragile. You humans have exploited me without regard to the future of your own grandchildren. Whether global warming is manmade or not, it is happening now, threatening the process of photosynthesis in your forests and your oceans.

Please, do something to preserve my ability to capture and deliver oxygen to the whales, the eagles, and your babies. The death knell for life on earth may yet ring in this century, but need not. It is up to you.