

What a Gift, This River of Mine

By Sheila Johnson

As we traveled near the banks of the Mekong River, which runs west to east in Southeast Asia, it was apparent to us that our small boat was driven and directed by a life-giving force stronger than any country or nation to the Tai people. The Mekong River sustains everything. Daily, the Thai loggers utilize a wide section of the river as they move long, bundled trees from forest to shore. These roped-up treasures are used for a variety of mercantile products such as napkins, toothpicks, chopsticks, paper goods, furniture, riverboats, neighborhood temples, and a plethora of other goods and commodities. In addition, the Mekong is tapped daily for irrigation, power generation, fisheries, drinking water, washing clothes, bathing, and transportation. It is more than a cliché for Asian nationals to pray for the clouds to “cry a river of tears.”

For many countries that rely on rivers and bodies of water to sustain their livelihood, climate control is more than a political debate, more than a moral responsibility, more than scientific “proof-is-in-the-pudding,” it is *essential*. I recently viewed an IMAX feature of “Extreme Weather,” and it was alarming. The video was composed of actual footage of nature’s tornadoes, melting Alaskan icebergs, floods, and other natural occurrences. It demonstrated the actual effects of global warming.

I am deeply disturbed that the leadership of the United States appears to place little value on the ginormous negative effects of unmanaged global climate change by pulling out of the pact that is working towards attainable solutions. I am even more disturbed by the fact that the depth of action-based concern is heavily out-weighed by the apathy of some of our world citizens.

I am not a soothsayer, I have not been given any spiritual visions concerning climate change, I don’t know any of the world’s leadership personally, and I certainly intend to remain an optimist. But I do believe that the death of our caring is sure to be the death of our soul. The death of our caring has led us into many wars. Rivers like the Tigris, Euphrates, Pishon, and Gihon gave birth to the rest of the flowing waters. They created and hold life; not death or war.

In the words of Maya Angelou, “Across the wall of the world, A River sings a beautiful song. It says, ‘Come, rest here by my side. Each of you, a bordered country, delicate and strangely made proud, yet thrusting perpetually under siege. Your armed struggles for profit have left collars of waste upon my shore, currents of debris upon my breast. Yet today I call you to my riverside, if you will study war no more.’”

What a gift, this river of mine.