**Climate emergency**

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Wednesday, Jul 19, 2023

This piece will be a touch more personal than most, because the past couple of weeks have felt personal.

I wrote the first book on what we now call the climate crisis way back in 1989, and it feels like I’ve spent the subsequent three-and-a-half decades warning that eventually we’d get to this particular July: the hottest day and week and month on record. And long before records too: It seems almost certain that this is the hottest weather on our planet in 125,000 years; Jim Hansen made a quite reasonable case Friday that it is already or soon will be hotter than it’s been for a million years, which is to say before the evolution of homo sapiens.

In other words, this is what climate change feels like – still in the earlier stages since we’re less than halfway to the temperature our current trajectory will produce. But more than enough to, all of a sudden, start understanding that it’s entirely intolerable.

Here’s The New York Times Thursday, reporting on the heat in Laredo where the current hellish spell has killed at least 10 people. One man found his brother dead in a bedroom with two broken air-conditioners. They were used to heat, of course; they’d grown up on the border. “But this was a different kind of heat. This is magnifying-the-sun-on-top-of-ants kind of heat. This is beyond anything we’ve had before.”

And here’s The Washington Post today, reporting on the heat in Phoenix, which will soon break its record of 18 straight days of heat above 110 degrees F. (The average temperature forecast for all next week, across all 24 hours, is 104.6 degrees F, which would crush the city’s previous warmest week on record, which had an average temperature of 102.9 degrees F.) What happens when it gets that hot? People get savage burns when they walk a few barefoot steps across a patio, or let a seatbelt buckle touch bare skin. They scald themselves with water that’s been sitting in a garden hose soaking up the sun.

“On Wednesday, firefighters encountered a man sprawled in the street in north Phoenix…When firefighters arrived, the man was unconscious. There were burns all over his body. His skin was coming off and his internal temperature was 107°F, they said. They delivered him to the emergency room. “Basically, his brain was fried,” said firefighter Brandon Kanae, who responded to the scene.”

When I read things like this, I weep for the people involved, and I also weep at my own failure. I’ve known about this crisis longer than almost anyone on earth, and I’ve done what I can think of to do, and some of it has been useful, but it hasn’t been enough. Others have done more and better, but that hasn’t been enough either. ‘I told you so’ is, in this case, just a different way of saying ‘I couldn’t figure out the right words’ or ‘I couldn’t mobilize enough others.’ Kind people say ‘you tried,’ and I have, but that’s also another way of saying ‘you blew it.’

I couldn’t even keep the crisis off my own damned doorstep. My beloved Vermont was one of many places that took it on the chin this week–huge flooding in Japan and India and China and Spain, but also in Montpelier and Ludlow and Barre and a dozen other places I know intimately. And this weekend, a second round of bucketing rainfall across the Green Mountains unleashed a landslide a half mile from my house; we’re fine, but another family saw their home buried in a roaring wall of mud. They escaped with seconds to spare because the volunteer fire chief of our tiny town arrived to warn them – a more effective warning than I’ve been able to muster.

I understand that this kind of thinking is grandiose bordering on narcissistic, and I won’t indulge myself in such pathos again. Obviously I couldn’t have stopped climate change; it is the ultimate collective problem, with only collective solutions. But to keep ourselves going we indulge in the fantasy that we will win important fights – India freed itself from British rule, after all; the Voting Rights Act passed. And so it’s okay – probably necessary – to mourn when we come up short.

The current horrors are not a reason to stop working. We know from a recent study that every 10th of a degree in temperature rise that we prevent keeps 140 million of our brothers and sisters in habitable zones on this planet.

Excerpted: ‘When It Comes to the Climate Emergency, It’s No Fun Saying, ‘I Told You So’’. Courtesy: Commondreams.org