

2019-20 Climate Change Chronicle 8

The Child-Mother

The title of this Chronicle might be confusing. How can a child be a mother? I'll explain in just a moment.

In many of these chronicles I've stressed the need for us to help young adults deal with climate change. Most of the time when we adults try to help young people we call upon our own personal experiences. But most of us don't have experience dealing with climate change. We are trying to figure that out for ourselves. So is there any other experience we know about and can share with them? I think there is. I think we can get some insights from war zones.

When I look at the pictures of devastation in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, or the floods in the American and Canadian mid-west, or the monsoons in African countries, or droughts in other countries, or the terrible fires in Australia and our own West Coast I think there's a lesson in these. They remind me of war zones. Everything in the communities is affected and everything people need to survive is no longer readily available. In many cases war brings a complete breakdown in society and its institutions. There are a number of similarities to wars in these climate changing events.

They both can bring about total devastation. There were often warnings in advance but they were often ignored. They both manifest forms of violence to people and things. They affect all members of families, regardless of age, and all members of local communities. They both are the result of systems-, our economic systems and political systems that have been a major cause of our problems.

Some of us old folks remember World War 2 and what it was like to put our communities and our countries on what we called "a war footing". As a child I remember seeing the pictures of planes and ships that came in adults' cigarette packs. We were taught in school to recognize the planes that were flying overhead. And I'll never forget the sound of those huge heavy bombers with their deep growling engines. The government sent those bombers over just to re-assure us that we were winning the war.

But there are several more significant differences. Most wars in the last century lasted for a dozen or less years. Scientists are telling us that the climate change war will last for generations.

Also, in previous wars we were able to distinguish the Good Guys from the Bad Guys. In the climate change war we are both the Good Guys and the Bad Guys. It is the systems we have created since the industrial revolution that are the major cause of the

climate change problem. To quote Pogo, “We have *met the enemy and the enemy is us.*”

We and our communities must do what we did in the last Great War. We must go on a “climate change footing”. But as I have noted above, winning this war will not depend upon us. It will depend upon our children, their children and future generations. Greta Thunberg motivated millions of young people. That gives me a great deal of hope.

But here is the story of another young girl who is unknown. She was a child-mother but no one knows her name. I will close with her story, a war story. If there has ever been a proof that a picture is worth a thousand words this one is it.

Several months ago I received an article about how war has decimated a particular area of the northeast part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the article there was a picture of a six year-old girl fleeing with a baby on her back and her right hand grasping the hand of her younger brother. The picture has haunted me for days. I can’t get it out of my mind so I decided to share it with you. This is the young mother’s story.



A village has just been burned in the vicinity of Beni in North Kivu, accompanied by a massacre of its inhabitants. This group of three children on the run just lost mum and dad. As a result, the elder of the fraternity is forced, at the age of six, to become the mother of two others. She has the youngest at her young back and holds her younger brother by hand. With the fear visible in their eyes, they set out to flee death. They do not know where they are heading or the hardness of life that the future holds for them. They also know that there is no one waiting for them at the end of the road.

I got this story from David Zarembka, and he got the story from a colleague working in the Congo. David is a former Peace Corps member living in Kenya and a member of the Quaker-Friends community. For many years he has lived and worked on a number of community projects in Kenya.

David's "Reports from Kenya" are accessible through his email.
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I'm sure David would love to hear from you.

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