

The Wisdom of the Environmentally Ill

By Norie

As someone with an environmental illness, I initially saw my affliction as an issue to take up with the world at large that so blindly allows the destruction of the earth and contamination of its precious resources. I could have begun by blaming the medical “specialist” who brainwashed me into relying on meds that made my body more vulnerable to the everyday toxins and led to my crash. Then, I could have moved on to the company where I was employed that allowed smoking in an insufficiently ventilated building with non-operable windows, even after the AC was shut down after hours. Next, there'd be the public smoking policies to contend with... However, it was clear to me that expending the energy of petitioning and protesting would only fuel my anger and drain my soul. It was also obvious there'd be no end to the fight. Besides fighting the medical and tobacco industry, there were the ever conniving and scheming pharmaceutical /pesticide /fragrance /beauty “care”/ health

“care” /oil /agricultural /telecommunications /advertising

/news/media industries, along with the political organizations run by all of the above that are powered by war and greed. And then there'd be a need to educate friends/family at large about all the evils that result from allowing such powers to control our lives, a duty which comes with the territory of being environmentally ill.

Due to our physical limitations from an inaccessible chemically run world, such an enigmatic illness not only ostracizes and alienates the people afflicted from society, but also from family and close friends. Thus, we must learn how to find solace in isolation and grow from solitude. But after all, as the esteemed poet, Ranier Maria Rilke, professes in his Letters to a Young Poet, solitude is the best way to develop one's “character”. It was to this path that I had resigned myself—to remain in solitude and live out the rest of my life in isolation in my heart and mind to the extent bearable. That is, until magic guidance led me to an El web community, “Planet Thrive” (founded and maintained by the brilliant, multi-talented Julie Genser) which allowed me to find my voice and become part of a unique society—one I have come to consider “elite”.

People have (with the help of conventions) oriented all their solutions toward the easy and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must hold to what is difficult; everything alive holds to it, everything in Nature grows and defends itself in its own way and is characteristically and spontaneously itself, seeks at all costs to be so and against all opposition.

Ranier Maria Rilke,
Letters to a Young Poet

We are the wizened few who have learned not to compromise our health for the sake of remaining status quo and who can see through greed, money and power.

Here, among this community of like-minded souls who have all suffered as much or even more than I have, I'm able to completely let down my guard and share what I've learned through life living with an environmental illness, how I've been improving my health against all odds and growing wiser and more self-empowered with

the wisdom of our ancestors and the truly civilized civilizations that came before our highly uncivilized, unsustainable, chemically dependent, earth-destroying one. We are the wizened few who have learned not to compromise our health for the sake of remaining status quo and who can see through greed, money and power.

In fact, this is an illness that gives great wisdom to those it afflicts. It has turned us into a privileged group that can see beyond the lies of our leaders, our “superiors” in every walk of life, and that is empowered with the all-encompassing knowledge of what is right and just. We have learned how to trust in the earth and have developed a deep kinship with the trees, the sky, the ocean, the rivers, the rocks and every living creature that will listen to our story and help restore our spirit. It has filled us with the keen discretion of what is good not only for us, the people so afflicted, but what is good for all of humankind. We are the marginalized elite who through the hard lessons of listening to our bodies have been gifted with tremendous insight and power against being brainwashed, manipulated and cheated by a society that has little compassion.

To our sisters plagued with chronic fatigue, hormonal imbalances, alcoholism, MS, breast cancer, endometriosis, depression, fibromyalgia, miscarriages, gastrointestinal dysfunction; to our brothers with diabetes, lymphoma, schizophrenia, manic depression, colitis, addictions, obesity; and to our children with life-threatening food allergies, eczema, asthma, leukemia, ADHD: Perhaps someday with our rich knowledge of natural healing, of the secrets of plants, the language of the earth gained from the ability to survive through great adversity, you will come to us as the “wise elders”, who can aid and guide you with your own self-empowerment to find a life in harmony with the earth to bring about your own healing. Until that time, you will likely continue to marginalize us as alarmists and fanatics. But in another light we can be held as the privileged few—the elite ill.

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While of course even with our hard-earned knowledge, we Els still long for that magic bullet to have another shot at “being healthy” again—to go back to being oblivious to the damage being brought upon our environment by seemingly innocent products and lifestyles, and the concomitant harm to our bodies. But perhaps what sets us apart from others is that unlike others with chronic illnesses, we have learned a potent lesson that certain key aspects of the way we had been living were terribly wrong and disharmonic with the universe. And as those stricken with such a profound message, perhaps we are not so much meant to “get well” again to re-join in the mass destruction of the earth, as to live out our lives as harmoniously as we can and to universally make a collective difference to bring the earth back in balance. Perhaps this is part of the mystery—and one could even say the poignant beauty—of the lives of people with environmental illness.

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