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A Southern Ecojustice Warrior Takes a Road Trip

(a chapter by Mary Hollowell submitted for a military family anthology at Southeast Missouri State University Press - pending)

Few coworkers were listening to my concerns. Only a biology instructor, a chemistry instructor, and a pair of college students were willing to help me. The two professors put Stop Geoengineering flyers on their office doors, and one of them urged me to speak to the science department chair.

“I’m really busy,” the chair said when I tried to tell her about geoengineering. She was in the midst of ordering lab supplies. Even the gravest threat that humanity had ever faced did not concern her!

After giving the woman a flyer, I pinned them on bulletin boards throughout her building. One week later, they had all been removed, including the ones on the two teachers’ doors. The department chair had probably issued orders to take my flyers down. The removal of my flyers made me angry. *So much for free speech.*

The trees on our suburban college campus in Atlanta were carefully labelled with genus and species descriptions, yet they looked absolutely terrible. Stately oaks were losing too many limbs. Glossy magnolia leaves were beginning to shrivel and the tree canopy was thinning. When our campus was called an arboretum, otherwise known as a tree sanctuary, I cringed.

Even the college president faltered in the middle of a speech when he was supposed to tout

the trees on campus. The president, who was also a debate coach, stumbled over his words then he obviously skipped an entire section of his speech of his speech. He knew that the trees on our campus were dying. He knew because I had told him so more than once. I had given him a flyer and had participated in a Walk and Talk with the President around a lake, during which I had worn my Stop Spraying t-shirt.

Two members of the campus recreation department who ran weekend camping trips had joined us. They had been informed about geoengineering too. The recreation staff had less of an excuse for silence about an atrocity because they spent so much time outdoors. They were not sequestered in a vast presidential suite. Too many Clayton State University employees were ignoring geoengineering, and I was deeply disappointed.

On the other hand, a pair of my students had boldly displayed Stop Geoengineering bumper stickers. A music major had put one on his locker in the music building. No one had taken it down because it was in his personal space. Another student had stuck hers onto the lid of her laptop computer. As their education professor and a fellow activist, I was proud of them.

A visiting English professor self-identified as Jewish, and he told me that his father used to be an American Ambassador to Israel. He invited me to speak to his classes about geoengineering. When I finished, he said, “There’s a Jewish saying ‘Leave the world a better place than you found it’.” Together, he and I tried to do that.

Across the street from campus, there was a city park called Reynolds Nature Preserve. I went over to alert my friend, a park ranger named John. When I arrived, I found him doing inventory in a storage closet. It was filled with slabs of wood, jars of nails, and hammers for making birdhouses. I shared bad news.

Geoengineering was seeding clouds to modify weather. It had been occurring since WWII but had been ramped up lately. There were numerous U. S. patents for geoengineering. It was the cause of extreme weather, methane expulsion, species die-offs, and wildfires all around the globe. The elements used in geoengineering, including aluminum, barium, and strontium, settled on foliage and made it more flammable. They also had a desiccant effect.

Geoengineering was being used as a weapon. If a nation did not cooperate, then a typhoon could be created. The covert operation, which was really rather obvious, had to be exposed and stopped. We activists were seeking justice for damaged ecosystems.

“A volunteer’s been telling me about that,” John said and wrapped me in a big hug. My confirmation of the news was obviously a relief to him. Finally, he had an answer for the algal-filled pond on his property, the excess erosion on trails, and the extremely rusted farm equipment. Fallout was coating everything.

In addition to John, something that I liked about Reynolds Nature Preserve was a natural spring in the woods. You could watch water bubbling up between rocks that were surrounded by ferns. How much longer would the spring continue to flow? In the Western United States, underground aquifers were being depleted, reservoirs were shrinking, and rivers were drying to trickles.

The emotional highs and lows of anti-geoengineering activism were tiring. My extended family reacted poorly to news of geoengineering. A cousin raised an eyebrow and gave me a long, drawn-out “Okaaay” response. His young wife, aghast by his cynicism, accepted a flyer on his behalf. My sister-in-law refused to watch a video about geoengineering with the rest of the family. Instead, she lay on a couch in another room during our in-home film screening.

A different cousin was frightened during my film screening. “I can’t watch that,” he said, backing out of the room. He also mumbled something about UFOs.

The man had worked in embassies in Pakistan and Madagascar, and he had a gift for foreign languages for which he received regular training in Washington, D.C. He had even been granted access to special “classified information.” His father had briefly served in the United States Army, as had my own father and brother who were both watching the geoengineering video.

It was obvious that when my cousin heard the word “geoengineering,” he immediately suspected the Deep State intelligence community in America, and he was worried about retaliation. Later, he slipped me a piece of paper listing various tactics that the FBI, CIA, NSA, and other alphabet soup agencies used to try to silence enemies. It was a long and sordid list ranging from reputation destruction to financial ruin to sting operations to threats to family members to poisoning, torture, and assassination. If I had not already stumbled across the list myself, I would have been frightened.

I was not, however. I was an award-winning human rights activist turned environmental activist, and my experience and Christian faith kept me grounded. My cousin’s attempt to warn me about severe consequences was appreciated. Fear was a reaction that I understood. Cynicism and apathy were different matters.

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By the spring of 2017, I was more than ready for a vacation. I phoned a friend, a retiree who lived in a new home on stilts overlooking St. Joseph Bay in Florida. She and her husband had a spare bedroom. They agreed to my visit, and I looked forward to spending time with the

couple.

It just so happened that the wife had previously been married to my cousin the American diplomat. It was good that she and I were still friends after their divorce and that her new husband was friendly towards me. He could easily have been unwelcoming.

I drove my car through the pine forests of Southwest Georgia to the isolated western panhandle of Florida. It was aptly named the Forgotten Coast. Compared to the Florida peninsula, the region was relatively uninhabited. The space between Panama City, FL, and Apalachicola, FL, was filled with saw grass, and it was vulnerable to hurricanes.

Apalachicola Bay had long been known for its oysters, but oyster harvesting was declining. The water in the bay was too warm, and it was becoming deoxygenated. The danger of disease from eating bad oysters was high. As bottom-feeders, the shellfish absorbed heavy metals that fell down through the water column.

A small fleet of shrimp boats that left from Apalachicola Sound to fish in the Gulf of Mexico were not doing well either. Despite some job opportunities in the hospitality industry servicing tourists, there was not much employment in the region. Tourism was dependent on the economy which was dependent on natural resources that were dwindling. A large paper mill west of Panama City still provided some employment, but it also spewed fumes of its own for miles.

Decades ago, the Forgotten Coast had been pristine. I had vacationed there many times as a young woman. The barrier island named St. George Island had boasted wide beaches. The sand was white, not golden or black as it was in Hawaii. The beaches around the Gulf of Mexico were soft rather than stony as were in the beaches of the North Atlantic Ocean.

It had been wonderful, back then, to sink my toes in the white sand and watch pods of

dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes there were giant manta rays and sea turtles in the clear water. Sand dollars, colorful periwinkles, and ancient horseshoe crabs were easy to find on the Gulf Coast beaches. The horseshoe crabs in tidal pools were unchanged since the Paleozoic Era some 500 million years ago.

Seabird populations along the Gulf coast were maintained during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Ospreys dove into the surf to catch fish. They would take their catch back to fledglings in nests on high platforms that were provided by birdwatchers. Brown pelicans had made a comeback from the 1950s when their eggshells were thinned by DDT.

Occasionally in the 1990s, vacationers to Florida (known as snow birds to the locals) had stepped on patches of tar, hardened oil that had bubbled up from beneath the sea. Further west in the Gulf of Mexico, there were numerous oil rigs. A British Petroleum (BP) disaster in 2010 had sent 200 million gallons of oil into the sea. It was still out there, deep underwater, waiting to be stirred up by a severe hurricane.

I wondered what would I find on the Forgotten Coast in 2017. How badly had the coastal ecosystem deteriorated?

I took back roads to Port St. Joe, as directed by my friends. Two roadside vendors were parked at an isolated crossroad. A man was selling t-shirts from the trunk of his car, and a woman was selling honey from hers. I stopped my car to speak to them.

Beekeepers and honey salesmen were generally receptive to information about geoengineering. My having some personal beekeeping experience usually enhanced my credibility with them. I approached the woman selling honey and introduced myself.

“There’s a study showing bees are packed with aluminum,” I told her. “It’s the number one

element used in jet spraying operations.” She sat listening in a lawn chair. “Researchers have found high levels of aluminum in rain water,” I added.

“Hal, come over here. Listen to this,” the woman shouted to the other salesman, and I waited for him to join us.

“Bees can’t function properly because they almost have a form of Alzheimer’s,” I told them. “We can’t lose our pollinators.”

“All we can do is pray,” the woman said. I understood her feeling of being overwhelmed, and I did not discount the power of prayer.

I bought some honey out of sympathy because business was not booming, and it might be one of the last jars available. If I had purchased something from every vendor whom I’d alerted to geoengineering, however, I would be completely broke.

Back in the car, I cranked up the air conditioning and drove deeper into pinewood forests that were interspersed with patches of saw grass. The roads in South Georgia were surprisingly smooth. The minimal traffic kept them from being badly cracked. In the distance, heat waves created mirages above the asphalt.

Over a roaring air conditioner, I could still hear cicadas. The insects emerged from the ground, climbed up trees, and emitted an incredibly loud hum. In the spring and summer in the Deep South, cicadas provided a mournful background noise from high in the trees. At night, they were replaced by chirping crickets. Cicadas and crickets’ sturdy exoskeletons probably protected them from aluminum longer than the bodies of bees.

I crossed the center line of a two-lane highway to pass a truck hauling pine logs. I cruised faster than I should have, anxious to leave the isolation and reach my friends on the coast.

The few homes that I saw had paint that was peeling from the hot sun. They also had tin roofs so tropical storms would not blow away shingles. The noise of torrential downpours on tin roofs would be particularly loud. Balls of hail that were especially common because of geoengineering would sound like gunshots on tin roofs.

I reached route 30A on the coast and drove east. I phoned my friends to say that I was almost there, so they were waiting outside for me. The couple stood at the base of some wooden steps which led to their home on stilts. Their driveway was covered by crunchy oyster shells. We hugged and went upstairs to a multi-purpose room.

The house overlooked St. Joseph Bay which was across the street. It had a large central kitchen, an adjoining living room, a wide front porch and a screened-in side porch. There were several bedrooms and a shared office. Carol and Jack even had an elevator so they could take groceries upstairs with ease. Downstairs, there was a carport beneath the house.

The couple was comfortable, and they were staying busy during retirement. I wanted to be retired too. They were ten years older than me. I had a decade to go; I could retire with a pension at the age of 62, provided mankind lasted another decade. I had my doubts.

When we were alone, I asked Carol a burning question about her ex-husband. “Do you think he ever worked for the CIA?” I hated to doubt my cousin and hoped that he had really been a diplomat in foreign countries, not a spy.

His ex-wife was preparing dinner, and she took her time answering the question. “Well, he was always good with languages,” she said, and we changed the subject.

We ate a candlelight dinner, then I headed for bed. An unusual device was plugged into an outlet in the guest bedroom. “Is this a sonic deterrent?” I asked.

“It keeps mice away,” Carol said. Initially, it was surprising that a new home on the coast had mice. Mice invading from the scrub, however, was more likely when I recalled that black bears were foraging in lower regions in the dry Appalachian Mountains and sharks were swimming closer and closer to shore in the warm Florida waters. Animals were just desperately trying to find food. The sonic device was the size and shape of a night light. I closed the bedroom door and unplugged it.

In bed, I listened to the faint crackling and popping in my ears that was audible during moments of silence. It had begun suddenly on March 7, 2014, five months after I’d had a bad reaction to a flu shot. The two experiences were connected. The strange sounds even oscillated back and forth, sometimes, and I had been diagnosed with chronic tinnitus.

Gulping a glass of water distracted me, and I turned on a bedside lamp to read my Bible. There were framed Bible verses in the guest bedroom and all around the beach house, as there were in my own home.

In the morning, a whippoorwill called from the bushes beneath my window. The birdsong matched the bird’s name as did the calls of towhees and chickadees. The novel birdsong was delightful, and the whippoorwill turned out to be a small, plump, brown bird similar to a partridge. It was amazing to me that there were any birds left considering the extent of environmental damage.

“You don’t have to entertain me,” I reminded my friends during breakfast. “I’ll explore on my own.” They suggested that I help with some yard work. They needed to install a fence and plant a flowerbed. “Of course,” I told them. It would be nice to work side-by-side. Plus, it was important to be a helpful guest. I cleaned the table and placed our dishes in a dishwasher.

A brochure described an ongoing art festival in nearby Apalachicola, a bayside town. Beyond Apalachicola Bay, there were a few barrier islands then the vast Gulf of Mexico. It was definitely a picturesque location for landscape painters. During the festival, visiting painters spread out across town, and tourists could watch them work outdoors. Docks, Victorian homes, and tall shrimp boats were additional attractions for the painters. I looked forward to attending the event.

I left and drove the remainder of rural route 30A. Beyond the house, there were just a few more homes and a junkyard that was filled with nautical items. 30A came to an abrupt end at a sand dune. A few sea oats were on top of the dune. With my window rolled down, I could hear the surf on the other side of the big dune.

I backtracked and crossed a bridge over to a barrier island, St. Joseph Island. Immediately, I spotted a military installation. A motel or a tiki bar would have been reasonable, but a military base was not. Who would build such a thing on a narrow strip of sand? *Why, the federal government.* Most barrier islands in the Southeastern United States had state parks, lighthouses, or populations of wild horses that were descendants of horses which swam ashore, centuries ago, from sinking Spanish galleons.

There was not one around, so I pulled over and walked up to a chain link fence that was topped with barbed wire. “No trespassing” signs were posted all along the fence, and the front gates had a simple padlock. Beyond the fence, there were a few buildings. An enormous pair of white satellite dishes pointed south. There were no vehicles on the premises; neither were there any security cameras or guard dogs.

Naturally, the pair of satellite dishes piqued my interest. They were approximately fifteen

feet in diameter. I shaded my eyes to assess them and considered squeezing under the fence for a better view. It was a low security place. The facility appeared to be deserted.

Tall grass near the fence scratched my bare legs, and my shoes sank into sand. I heeded the signs and stumbled back to my car. The steering wheel burned beneath my palms. The black dashboard was fading to gray, although it was a fairly new car.

Past the quiet military base, thick mangroves grew on both sides of the road. The island widened, and I could see both the bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Finally, I spotted some other people.

Ahead, there was a Florida state park with both a bay side and a sea side. People sat at a picnic tables beside the bay. I parked and spotted more people. They were kayaking in the bay. Another surprise was all of the dead matter in the water. The bay water was steeped brown from clumps of dead palm fronds and mangrove leaves. It was not a pleasant place for kayaking.

Immediately, I crossed the road to assess the beach. Wooden steps went up and down a large sand dune. On the beach, piles of dead seaweed were scattered as far as I could see in both directions. No fresh salty breeze blew inland. Instead, I caught whiffs of rotting fish.

What I was seeing was heartbreaking, and it reinforced to me that the ocean was dying. People might not recognize it if they were newcomers to the beach, but I was a regular beach comber. I walked along the beach and searched for bubbles that indicated the presence of mollusks in the wet sand. There were none.

An F-35 jet approached me from behind. It was flying east and parallel to the beach from an Air Force base in Pensacola, FL. The jet was incredibly loud. I covered my ears but could still hear the noise, especially when it made a sonic boom. Undoubtedly, it bothered sensitive

dolphins that used echolocation.

There used to be many dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico. They would hunt by circling around schools of fish; small fish that would leap out of the water in silver flashes while trying to escape. There were no clusters of dorsal fins rising and sinking on the surface of the sea on May 10, 2017, however.

There were no crabs scuttling across the beach. *We've managed to kill the crabs!* Despite their resistant shells, they had succumbed to pollution. The absence of any crabs was a very bad sign.

The devastation, the ecocide from geoengineering, was hard to face so I left the beach. It fueled my anger and made me determined to continue my anti-geoengineering activism. I hustled to my car where I always kept Stop Geoengineering flyers and started giving them to visitors in the park. Several families at picnic tables were interrupted, but there was no park ranger to stop me.

Further down the island, a crab shack was located beside a rustic bar. They probably had to import the crabs. The parking lot was filled with motorcycles. Waitresses were serving crab legs to outdoor diners at more picnic tables. I approached a cashier behind a counter and could feel heat from boiling pots of water in the kitchen. "This pollution is going to hurt your business," I told the cashier, handing her a flyer. Sometimes, activists just had to cut to the chase.

In view of the cashier, I gave flyers to take-out customers and to others who were eating at picnic tables. Over at the beach bar, burly bikers who were covered with tattoos accepted Stop Geoengineering flyers. I ran out of them and returned to my vehicle.

Taking some deep breaths helped me calm down. Good advocates did not lose their cool. I

had swung from being curious to sorrowful to simmering within a very short period frame.

There were no homes on St. Joseph Island that I could see. It was a long, narrow island, and I reached the tip. It provided a hazy view of the brown bay, the seaweed-covered beach, and a neighboring barrier island.

The odd military base, the murky water, and the lack of coastal creatures had combined to make my day trip rather unnerving. When I returned to the house and complained about the ugly facility, Jack told me it was for missile deflection. Although he was an intelligent man with a doctorate in geology, I did not buy his explanation. The huge equipment was probably used for communications.

I did not want to argue about the facility with a retired scientist. If he wanted to think it was for defense rather than offense, then that was his choice. I swallowed some aspirin to allay a headache and took a nap before dinner.

That evening, members of a Bible study class came over for a session. They were all senior citizens, retirees, and transplants from the North. Being with them made me experience more retirement envy. I broke the tenth commandment by coveting their retirement.

The next morning, we installed fencing and planted a flower garden. On the afternoon of May 11, 2017, I headed east on Highway 319 to the town of Apalachicola. Wide lawns on the outskirts of town had oak trees dripping with Spanish moss. I parked my car and walked around the town. I shared Stop Geoengineering flyers with a town librarian and a visiting artist on a street corner who was painting a Victorian home. The stately house faced the bay, and it had probably once belonged to a ship's captain.

I sat in a gazebo in a town square and watched some Florida prisoners in white jumpsuits.

They trimmed bushes and cut Bermuda grass, and they were very efficient. It appeared as if maintaining Lafayette Park was part of a regular routine. Occasionally, the men stopped for some water from a cooler.

The park, which had looked fine before, began to look even better. There were no more weeds beneath park benches. The few palm fronds that had fallen onto the grass had been removed. One man even tested an automatic sprinkler system.

Most American prisoners who helped maintain public places had only committed minor crimes. Before they left, I strode over to the single guard with a flyer in my hand. "I'm trying to let people know about a pollution problem. Maybe you've seen this while working outside."

The guard listened and accepted a flyer. The dozen prisoners listened too. Some of them smiled in appreciation. I thought that giving flyers to prisoners would be pushing my luck, but I definitely sensed their approval.

They're a band of angels for the guard! I thought, suddenly. He was a middle-aged man with gray hair, and the prisoners in his efficient, supportive work crew were all young men.

I recalled the African-American spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." It was based on the story of Elijah being retrieved by fiery chariot that descended from the sky (2 Kings 2:11-13).

The song implied that regular people who were not prophets had bands of angels too.

I looked over Jordan and what did I see,
Comin' for to carry me home
A band of angels comin' after me
Comin' for to carry me home.

Where was my band of angels? They certainly were not at my workplace. Only

momentarily while standing beside a wide body of water, Apalachicola Bay, did I feel sorry for myself.

A lone man was fishing at the end of a pier. He showed me the single flounder in his bucket of water. I told him about geoengineering, gave him a flyer, and left him to his solitary pursuit. I marched up Main Street and gave flyers to store managers. Some bored husbands who were waiting on benches in front of shops appreciated my reading material.

Many seagulls circled over the town dock seeking tidbits left by fishermen. Another artist was painting them, which was challenging because the birds were not stationary. On a whim, I tried to flag down a shrimp boat. It surprised me when the captain actually pulled his boat over to the dock. He came from behind his wheel to speak to me. “Don’t fall in,” he joked, as I stretched out over the water to hand him a flyer. It was my hope that news of aluminum, barium, and strontium poisoning would sweep through the small fleet of shrimp boats.

Essentially, I had walked around town in a big square. I’d headed south, east, north, and west. It had been a productive day. Many people had been alerted to geoengineering. My feet were sore despite comfortable shoes.

I slid into my car with a sigh of relief. On the outskirts of town, I stopped for a cold drink at a grocery store. The flounder fisherman was ahead of me in the check-out line. He stood with a pretty young woman and two small children. “This is the lady I was telling you about,” he told his wife, sounding pleased to see me.

“I’m Mary,” I said and shook the woman’s hand. I was glad to have had a positive impact. Banking on the friendly atmosphere, I shared more flyers with grocery store cashiers and baggers.

Before leaving the Gulf Coast the following day, I wanted to give my geologist host one of my few 20-page fact and photo booklets. I had ordered them directly from [geoengineeringwatch dot org](http://geoengineeringwatch.org) site. The website had many visitors. It provided a great deal of solid information including a list of patents for geoengineering, film footage of spraying at altitude, witness testimony, and legal documents.

In a startling maneuver, Carol intercepted the booklet between my hand and her husband's. She was aware of my anti-geoengineering activism and had praised me in a letter, but when push came to shove, it appeared that she did not want her scientist husband to know the details of the matter. Her hesitancy was probably due to fear.

I was able to interpret the moment, which was disappointing. My friends were well-educated world travelers, as was I. If they remained uninformed, then they could continue their international traveling. They could honestly say that they knew little about the matter if a cartel tried to arrest them. Geoengineering was global, and I had witnessed it on three continents: Asia, North America, and Europe.

Her intercepting my brochure led me to a startling realization. If religious people were frightened, then agnostics and atheists must be even more scared. In the meantime, written support of my work would have to suffice. The couple had done a fine job of hosting me, but we parted on a slightly awkward note.