



## SEA WORTHY

# NOTE TO SELF: CONNECT

BY CARL SAFINA

I am a scientist and naturalist, a person who looks through binoculars, but also who uses nature directly, by fishing for food around Montauk and in Gardiner's Bay and along the south-side beaches, and cutting wood for heat. Each activity orients me within the East End's ever-changing cycles of nature. All seasons are exciting, but my spirit is particularly lifted by the promise of spring and the fishing that will surely follow.

And that's good news because lately, I—and nearly every person I encounter—have suffered a degree of spiritual malaise in a season of discontent. Coast to coast, we have been consumed by our country's fiscal woes, a mortgage crisis that will force people from their homes and other economic devastation that will take years to heal.

Sadly, the emergency extends past East End shorelines and far-

ther than financial institutions resting on the solid ground of our nation's main streets. In many more ways than we realize, our actions on land affect the ocean, the bays, our seashore sanctuaries and retreats. In truth, the exact same thing that created the mortgage catastrophe also created overfishing, declining coral reefs, pollution and global warming. But before I work my way back to the intersection of a landlocked mortgage catastrophe and an ocean in peril, I'll silence the drumbeat of environmental gloom and doom.

Here, on the coast, our continent confronts our ocean. This place brims with power and awesome beauty. In the migrations of birds and monarch butterflies, in the fish and whales that come and go along our coast, we feel the driving energy inspiring all living things to strive to survive.



A morning walk along Napeague Bay. A predatory battle between snail and clam is immortalized by a tiny borehole in a shell I discover. A vision of sculptures appears in my binocular gaze across the water: in the mouth of Napeague Harbor, graceful harbor seals rest on a nearby shore, bodies gracefully bowed, heads and rear flippers up off the sand, air-cooling themselves. A pageant of birds parades plumage that runs from sleek black-and-white to red and ragged crests. Morning light reveals the soft pink tips of their bills. Beneath the waves beyond the shore, blues and stripers are surely gathering.

The morning view across to Gardiner's Island is glorious. But there's also gloom in the forecast. While earlier writers could extol wilderness, nowadays it's hard to follow animal tracks without coming quickly to the human footprint. Bigfoot is out there after all. In personal travels to tropical islands and polar regions, I've seen problems facing people *and* a natural world being depleted. I see a world in which people have not yet realized that nature, civilization, peace and the human spirit are *facets of the same stone*.

Which brings me back to the question of the connection between our mortgage crisis and our ocean. Here are my thoughts: Since the first human chipped the first stone tool, we have always kept what we liked and discarded what we didn't want. This was fine when our garbage was stones and bones. But we are still using the same million-year-old system, even though our leavings are no longer stones and bones, but cancer-causing chemicals, an empty ocean, stumps of thousand-year-old trees, melting polar ice, and unpaid mortgage debt. Whenever we keep what we want and discard what we don't want, we're privatizing profits and socializing costs.

The way we do business has not caught up to new realities. Only in the last century have we come to understand the related-

ness of all life, the carbon and nitrogen cycles, the dynamics of animal populations, the replenishment rates of groundwater, and so forth. Our institutions—Western philosophy, religions, capitalism and banking—were developed before we understood the workings of the world. Consequently, they are now so out of sync with reality as to be essentially irrational. And, boy, it shows.

We're not going to make the right decisions while it's so cheap to make the wrong decisions. And it's so cheap because we're not paying the true costs as we go—whether we're filling our oceans with plastics or coping with an overextended economic system.

We say we don't want to make the sacrifices required to change. We've begun to believe that *solution* is sacrifice. As though losing polar bears, ice-dependent penguins, coral reefs, and thousands of other living companions is not a sacrifice. As though pollution and the social costs of oil aren't sacrifice. But sacrifice is what we're doing by perpetuating problems that only get worse and avoiding the solutions we know but fail to pursue.

We're all tied in to a network we must come to understand: a shared life-support of air and water, our seas and fish. Not just here on the East End. We are woven into the same fabric, strands in the same net of life that reach and gather around the world.

We may learn valuable lessons from failed banks where we deposit our money. But banks like the Grand Banks, Georges Bank and all the life support systems of our planet truly cannot be allowed to fail. The bankruptcy of nature will be the end of our quest for peace. For us, it's suicide. For our children—it is murder.

Each time science tightens some of the slack in our thinking it emphasizes its most basic discovery: connection. Because the greatest thing a human being can experience is a sense of connection, there is a joyful coincidence here. It means that what we need to do is what our soul and spirit tell us they want us to do: connect, connect, connect.

Start simply by watching nesting horseshoe crabs along the bay in moonlight, hearing returning migrants along the ocean beach, and recognize your sense of place. Disappear into the mysteries. But then...act. The 21st-century environmental crisis brings with it a moral imperative to make choices—at a seafood counter, in your home, at your workplace—that respect and revere our connection with the living world. Solutions exist, from all different arenas. There is still much vitality and abundance left to protect and preserve.

Our ocean is too big to fail. And the bailout it needs comes from our actions, our choices, our pursuit of solutions that we recognize as moral necessity, not sacrifice. Let the chorus of spring peepers and the promise of striped bass in the roiling currents sweeping past the Montauk Light remind us that we are all here together, and that all fates are one. 🌊

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