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# Covid Impacts on Hawai'i's Oceans page 2



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# COVID Impacts on Hawai'i's Oceans

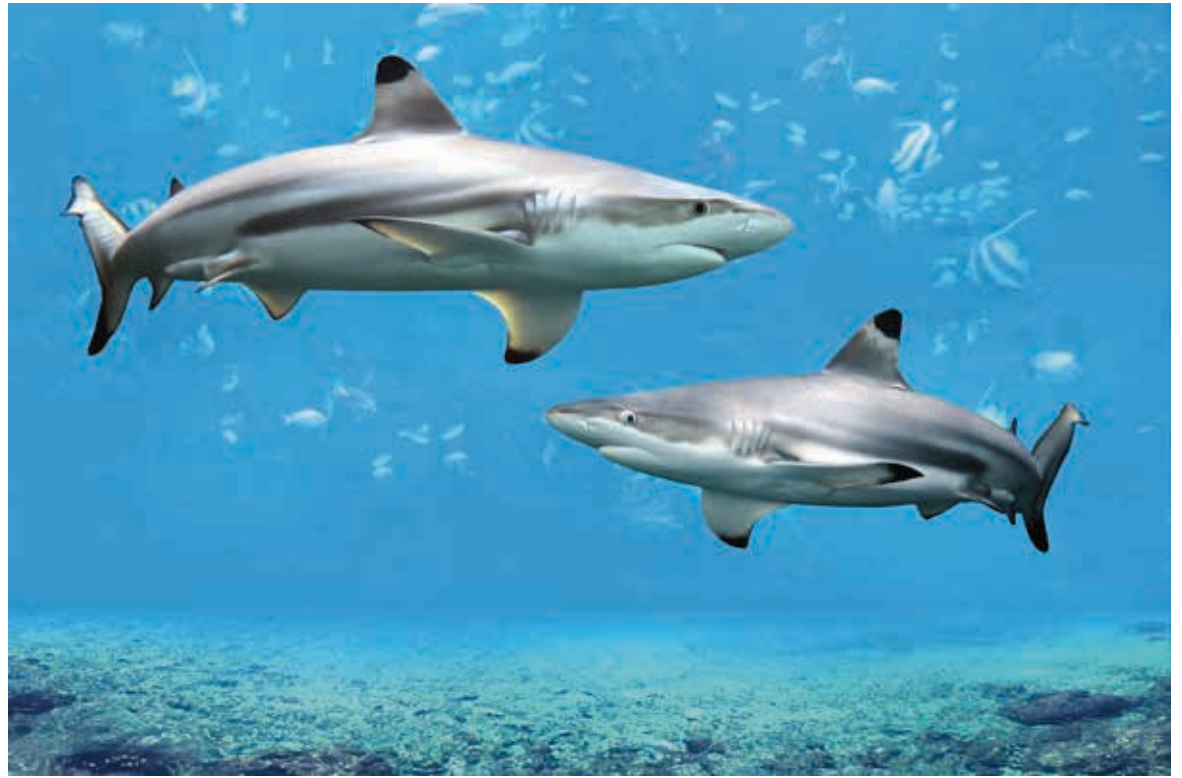
By Aaron Swink

It's troubling to say anything positive could ever come from a devastating pandemic. To say there is a silver lining in the COVID-19 pandemic would be too insensitive to nearly 200 million who fell ill and about four million who died worldwide. But there is. Just ask any fish, turtle, monk seal or any sea creature in Hawai'i. Or even any human who cares about leaving a better world for future generations.

The year 2020 was a year like no other. Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every facet of society. Besides the millions sickened and killed by the disease, isolation and uncertainty levied a heavy toll on the mental health of the world's population. Economies were thrown into chaos, and many people found themselves suddenly out of a job or trying to find new ways to work in this strange new world.



The DAR Kaua'i Monitoring Team, left to right, Aaron Swink, Heather Ylitalo-Ward, Ka'ili Shayler, McKenna Allen and Mia Melamed. Contributed photo



Blacktip reef sharks

Hawai'i was certainly not spared from global economic turmoil. In the early months of 2020, it was looking to be another gangbusters year for tourism. According to the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, from January to March more than two million visitors came to Hawai'i. However, as soon as travel restrictions and lockdowns began, tourism fell off a cliff. Fewer than 600,000 visitors arrived in the remaining months of 2020, a stark difference from the more than 10 million who visited in 2019.

The tourism halt was especially noticeable at our beaches. Waikiki was an empty crescent of sand where only days before beachgoers were packed beach towel to beach towel. On Kaua'i, the only sunbathers at Pō'ipu Beach were a pair of monk seals. The daily parade of tour boats cruising along Nā Pali was gone, and commercial fishers found themselves grounded with no restaurants to sell their fresh fish to.

Negative impacts of tourism on the marine environment are well documented. Even low-impact activities such as snorkeling and swimming can stress a delicate ecosystem when multiplied over hundreds or thousands of visitors per day at prime locations such as Kaua'i's Hā'ena or O'ahu's Hanauma Bay. However, the specific impacts of tourism are often difficult to ascertain experimentally. If you remember from 8th grade science, an experiment requires a "control" treatment. To determine the effect of snorkelers on fish behavior, for example, you would want to examine fish behavior at a location in both the presence and absence of snorkelers. But how to create an "absence" of snorkelers in a place like Pō'ipu Beach Park that sees thousands of visitors a day during peak season?

continued on page 5





Léo Azambuja

A Hawaiian monk seal basks on the sands of Miloli'i, Kaua'i's Napali Coast.



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JULY 2021

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On the cover: During the COVID-19  
pandemic, Hawaiian green sea turtles  
hailed out at beaches normally  
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The COVID-19 pandemic offered a rare opportunity for scientists and resource managers to collect data and study nearshore areas during a time with low human presence.

In this light, 2020 was a once in a lifetime opportunity for scientists and resource managers to collect data on the effects of human activities in the ocean. Biologists with the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources and the University of Hawai'i sprang into action, collecting as much data as possible during this short window.

"The pandemic presented a unique opportunity for DAR to study fish populations and benthic habitat during a time with extremely low human pressure. It isn't often that the ocean can have a break from all the people and boats, especially in Hawai'i where we have such high rates of tourism. We were curious to see if that sudden change had an effect on the number and type of fish observed in nearshore areas and whether we could see any

continued on page 6

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hawaiian green sea turtles hauled out at beaches normally crowded with people.

differences in habitat structure,” said Dr. Heather Ylitalo-Ward, the lead biologist for DAR on Kaua’i.

The data collected during the pandemic is still being analyzed and will be incorporated into future management decisions. However, many of the changes in animal behavior observed during this time were quite striking. On Kaua’i, turtles and monk seals hauled out at beaches normally crowded with people. Schools of surgeonfish, nenu, and ‘ō’io congregated at O’ahu’s North Shore beaches. Newborn blacktip reef sharks were sighted close to shore in North Kona. Water clarity at Hanauma Bay increased by 40 percent, and larger fish were observed coming closer to shore than usual. At Molokini crater on Maui, which saw more than 350,000 tourists in 2018, DAR biologists observed greater fish populations especially among large predatory fish such as ‘omilu, uku, ulua and sharks. Previous DAR research had indicated that these fish are displaced by the presence of tour

boats; this effect was confirmed during the pandemic when a reversal was observed during the absence of tour boats.

Not all shoreline activities decreased during the pandemic. Many residents found themselves spending more time at the beach. Non-commercial fishing, which is primarily done by residents, greatly increased during the early months of the pandemic. From March to May of 2020, an increase in shoreline fishing of 175 percent from the same period in 2019 was observed on O’ahu. More than 1,000 people camped (vast majority of whom were unpermitted) on the beach at Polihale State Park on a weekend in July 2020, prompting the temporary closure of the park.

Now that travel restrictions are loosening, tourism has returned to nearly pre-pandemic levels. Many questions remain on how to make tourism’s impact on marine resources more sustainable moving forward. Several laws passed by the 2021 legislature



and signed into law by Gov. David Ige address these issues. Act 46 created the Ocean Stewardship Fund, a \$1 per-person fee on commercial activities in the ocean to fund DAR projects to enhance, conserve and restore marine resources. Act 48 establishes the creation of a non-resident marine recreational fishing license, with revenue to be used for marine fisheries management. Other new marine conservation laws include protection of sharks (Act 51), lay net permits (Act 45), and enhancing the Department of Land and Natural Resources' ability to quickly respond to and manage rapidly changing resource conditions (Act 49).

As we emerge from the worst of the pandemic, many of us have found ourselves re-examining the things that are most important to us and looking for silver linings amidst the gloom. Will our social and economic future be the same as before? Or are new directions needed? One thing is for sure, our actions in the ocean have consequences and we must work together to conserve, protect and restore our island home.

• *Aaron Swink is the Kaua'i Education Specialist with the Division of Aquatic Resources/Department of Land and Natural Resources. He is responsible for implementing education and outreach programs on Kaua'i and conducts school programs, field programs, fishing education, aquatic science education, and general public outreach. Aaron is an aquatic biologist and also works on monitoring and research for the division. Contact [aaron.swink@hawaii.gov](mailto:aaron.swink@hawaii.gov) for education inquiries.*



A nearly-empty Hanalei Bay in August 2020. Contributed photo



Hawaiian green sea turtles. Contributed photo



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# The Visitor and the Tourist

By Léo Azambuja

As soon as COVID-19 restrictions came into effect in March 2020, the visitor industry came to a screeching halt. It wouldn't take long for us to witness several local businesses shutting down for good. It became very clear the vast majority of island residents are dependent on tourism, whether directly or indirectly.

With the loosened restrictions back in April, most of us were ready to embrace the revival of our visitor industry. But as much as I am stoked to see the light at the end of the tunnel for our economy, there is something I'm not happy at all to see: the return of the tourist.

Before going any further, let me make a clear distinction – there is the tourist and there is the visitor. A tourist comes to Kaua'i to enjoy our weather, beaches and mountains, to spend money on gifts, activities and dinners, to stay at hotels, vacation rentals and bed and breakfasts. A visitor, well, a visitor does the same things. But their attitude reciprocating our aloha, our welcoming, is quite different. And as such, they get a much more fulfilling experience.

A visitor follows the rules of our island home. A tourist disregards them. You would expect that when a guest enters your Hawaiian home, he would take off his shoes, since it's the custom here on Kaua'i. Your visitor is simply following your home rules. Our island is very small, with very limited resources. We consider every public place an extension of our home. Kaua'i is our island, our home.

It's bad enough that the Kapa'a traffic is already over-saturated with cars, but it makes the traffic much worse when tourists bolt across the road in Old Kapa'a

Town ignoring the countless marked crosswalks. Seriously, how many crosswalks can we have in Kapa'a? Yet, tourists still ignore them and slow down the traffic even more by crossing the road in all the wrong places. Some even defiantly walk across the only traffic light in Old Kapa'a Town while it is still green.

And then there are the tourists driving around like they own the island. Since April, I have witnessed countless near-accidents caused by sheer arrogance, ignorance of traffic laws and a couple other things that wouldn't be appropriate to publish. I've seen tourists stop their cars on the middle of the road to look at the scenery, check their phones and who knows what else. Getting lost on the island (which takes some effort) doesn't give anyone the right to stop on the road and just stay there until they figure out what to do. Normal people pull over.

One of the most common and dangerous behaviors I see is when tourists driving southbound just past Wailua Bridge during contra-flow hours just stop on the highway to make a left turn into the Hilton hotel. Everyone behind them buzzes their horn, but they just park right there in the middle of the highway, when there is actually an extra lane to their left specifically marked for them to safely pull over before making a left turn.

One of the worst things I ever saw on that same spot was just a few weeks ago. A car full of tourists just crossed the entire highway – all three lanes – to reach the other side of the highway. I've seen chickens do that, but it was a first for tourists. It was contra-flow hours, with traffic backed up on both directions.

Such bizarre move lasted several minutes, with the driver inching his way across the highway despite a symphony of horns. It was a miracle there wasn't an accident.

These erratic driving behaviors can cause a lot more than annoying other drivers; they can result in serious injuries and death. Years ago, a tourist coming out of a hotel abruptly pulled out on the highway in front of a friend of mine who was riding a motorcycle. To avoid hitting the car, my friend laid down his motorcycle. As his helmet skid the asphalt, he could see the rental car driving away, the driver washing his hands off of any responsibility.

Right now, there is a shortage of rental cars on the island. I can only imagine what will happen as the supply meets the increasing demand.

We give aloha from the heart. Kaua'i has a strong pull on people, and I believe a major cause of this pull is the aloha we spread. It's mostly because of aloha that so many visitors become island residents. Additionally, many first-time visitors to the state of Hawai'i go island-hopping, but a lot of them return only to Kaua'i during subsequent trips.

We want people to come to Kaua'i. We want to share what we have, not just our island's natural beauty, but our friendship, our culture and lifestyle. We have more than enough aloha to spread. We are just asking for respect. Please be the visitor, not the tourist when you step off the plane. Our island is our home.



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# Kūpa'a Kaua'i



By Tommy Noyes

Kūpa'a Kaua'i is a multi-faceted economic recovery program coordinated by our mayor's office. Kūpa'a Kaua'i's logo reflects the people of Kaua'i pulling together, committed to a common goal. It represents our resilience, strength and aloha spirit. Throughout this unprecedented time, our Kaua'i community has continued to rise above and support each other in so many inspiring ways. The program's motto is "Together, let's move Kaua'i forward."

Local nonprofits were recently encouraged to identify people who have excelled in community strengthening efforts during the pandemic. Twenty-four nonprofits nominated 62 individuals meriting our gratitude.

## Community

Many of these outstanding individuals are profiled on Kūpa'a Kaua'i's Facebook and Instagram sites. This story draws your attention to a few deserving participants whom you might know. If so, please share your personal appreciation for their constructive actions.

Nourish Kaua'i nominated three outstanding individuals who supported community members in need. They are Cozy Bowl owner Dominique Chambers, volunteer Debi La Blanc, and Mark Willman. Nourish Kaua'i asked Willman, Kaua'i Bible Church's administrator, to be a partner in distributing food. Willman readily agreed, has built relationships with the kupuna on his route, and cares for them deeply.

Youth engagement service provider Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kaua'i nominated Kyle Luken and Chris Molina, while the Boys & Girls Club of Hawai'i nominated Evan Jesse Zamora-Babila-Schrader.

When pandemic-triggered travel bans stranded Silicon Valley developer Wissam Ali Ahmad on Kaua'i, he donated his technical skills through Mālama Kaua'i to develop food distribution systems. These seven people were also recognized for refining and implementing various support and recovery effort systems: Triana Baclayon, Erin Cobb-Adams, Darryl Kua, Terry and Tracy Liu, Rachele Nam, and Samantha Souza.

Understanding economic stimulus policies is challenging during the best of times, and the pandemic has only complicated matters. Addison Bulosan of the Rice Street Business Association plus Joanna Carolan, Lynn Danaher, Judith Page and Keiko Napier of the Hanapepe Economic Alliance all stepped up to help others to benefit from available fiscal support initiatives. As a retailer and restaurateur, Napier not only supported Westside communities in remarkable ways, she also kept her Hanapepe businesses open and expanded her location to create a safe place for both employees and guests.

Raising awareness of environmental concerns is a crucial on-going endeavor. Nominated by the Anaina Hou Community Park, Mehana Blaich Vaughan, a professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management at UH Mānoa, studies the interactions between people and the environment, particularly how people use, care for, and make decisions about natural resources at the local level. Kaua'i Animal Welfare Society volunteers Jessica Drent and Casey Vandor demonstrated the best traits volunteers can bring to a nonprofit: reliability and enthusiasm. Agriculturalists Carrie Laatsch and Julia Matsehe contributed to advancing The Monkeypod's mission of helping Kaua'i grow, create and utilize sustainable resources so that our island will be less dependent on unsustainable commodities. John Kaneholani serves as a mentor and cultural advisor at Kapa'a High School's Lāulima Garden Project.

Visit [www.kauaiforward.com](http://www.kauaiforward.com) for news of Kūpa'a Kaua'i current affairs.



**Top:** Cozy Bowl owner Dominique Chambers, seen here at the new Aloha Market at NTB, was nominated as an 'outstanding individual' for her support of community members in need. Photo by Léo Azambuja

**Right:** Japanese Grandma restaurant owner Keiko Napier, of the Hanapepe Economic Alliance, was part of a group that helped others to benefit from available fiscal support initiatives. Photo by Léo Azambuja



• Tommy Noyes is Kaua'i Path's executive director, a League of American Bicyclists Certified Instructor and active with the Kaua'i Medical Reserve Corps.



# Wasting Time Is Vacation

By Virginia Beck

The Ways I love to spend my time, instead of writing.

Each morning, I climb out of sleep and up the stairs to the one great room that holds our life.

## Mālamalama

A wide open, huge room in which we spend our days. Vaulted wood ceilings and a complete wall of windows, facing the sea.

I know it's the ocean, but when we were first introduced, it was

called the sea. Cold and beautiful, it surrounded England. It will always be the sea to me. It seems more intimate, calling it by its first name, since we love and know each other well.

The horizon orients me each day – showing me my relationship to this whole rolling planet and our whirling passage through the skies and stars.

It always calls me to go beyond the narrow confines of a single human body, a point of view. I embrace the largeness, the





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immensity. It is always asking me something. Some question I can barely hear.

Only my silent regard, the steady witnessing of how the clouds migrate westward, a high multi-hued canopy this morning. The leaves rustle. Birds sail past, busy with affairs too lofty and fast for me.

It all happens, unfolds without me lifting a finger. No responsibilities, except to observe and let this great unfolding also unfold in me.

I steep myself in peace, in freedom. Three clocks are stopped. There is no urge to wind them up.

I don't believe in time. It is an unnecessary fiction that drives people mad. It isn't needed in the Big Eternal, so why should I disturb myself now?

"When the waiting is in fullness" (Robert Heinlein) is one of my favorite notions. I let time fill itself.

Then it fills me.

How can I rush off when a patch of light is emerging from the skydark ocean? The scrim of cloud cover slides apart to drop silvery gleams in an expanding net of light over the spreading expanse of indigo vastness. It keeps travelling, ever widening to the horizon.

Mesmerized by the world, I am content to just be. Nature

enfolds me in its perfection. What action or word could add anything but distraction from the all important Creation; Nature creating itself?

I never miss the chattering idiot in my ranting pre-historic monkey mind. Ever alert for the saboteur, the predator. Always has the exit plan, the escape and survival strategy. Smart ass remarks, pedantic advice that no one wants. God, I never miss her.

What additional words are needed in the Noise of words flooding the Internet? That electronic gibberish of maniacs talking faster and louder, faster and faster, drowning out the song of the world.

What words can I add that will honor the perfection before me? I worship here.

The world does not need another word. I once thought I could save the world with words.

But over 70, I only have the songs in my soul, and the words that may save it. Aloha!



• Virginia Beck, NP and Certified Trager® Practitioner, offers Wellness Consultation, Trager Psychophysical Integration and teaches Malama Birth Training classes. She can be reached at 635-5618.



# Pale Blue Dot

By Larry Feinstein

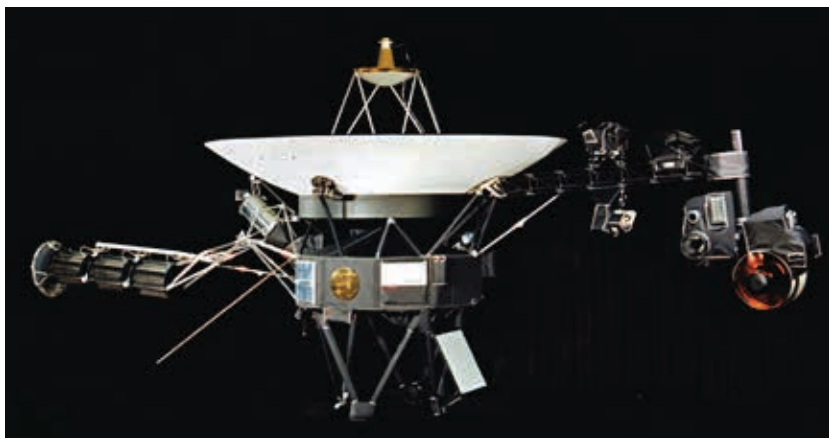
*“This is a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours.”*

– President Jimmy Carter

Around six months ago, my grandson and I took a stab at forming a long distance, book club, which sounded like a terrific idea to me. He told me about a book he was really interested in, called *See You in the Cosmos*. You know, when you have spent your life in marketing and promotion, there are just some things that come naturally to you. Of course, I immediately got in touch with the author, Jack Cheng, and we had a great exchange. I even got him to write an email to my grandson, which was a huge hit.

## Mind and the Motorcycle

I don't read books, something I've always had difficulty with, because it is challenging to get my mind to stay in one place too long. It's funny, because I write, it is assumed I am a book reader, which I am miles away from. Well, as some of you



may know, I started this whole writing business around 10 years ago, because of my grandson and reading a book with him felt like such a gift, in spite of my tome terror.

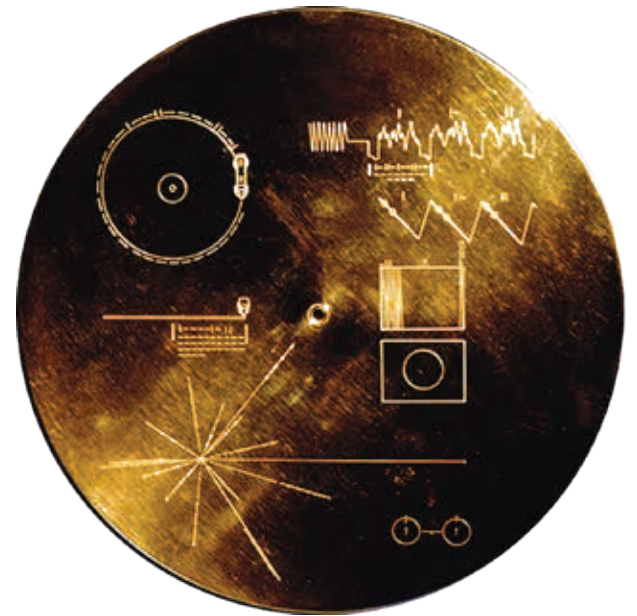
The book ended up being its own blessing. Central to the story is the Golden Record, a fascinating undertaking, produced by one of the greatest minds and richest spirits in the world of astronomy, Carl Sagan. A decision was made to create a record that shared the story of this planet, with the remote possibility that some extraterrestrials would eventually find it.

A gold-plated record was placed in both Voyagers 1 and 2, launched back in 1977. This record contains images of life on Earth, with greetings in hundreds of languages, all sorts of animal sounds, plus music from Beethoven to Chuck Berry. It even has graphic instructions on how to play it. It's reminiscent of the message in a bottle, but instead of being thrown into the ocean, it was launched into space. At this time, the Voyager is 14 billion miles from earth and the record's creators imagined it would not be found for at least 40,000 years. I am not making up either of those unfathomable numbers.

Years of sitting on a cushion have made me vulnerable to some crazy ideas and one of them certainly has to be being part of something so much greater than myself, well beyond my capacity to understand. The big one is the interconnectedness of absolutely everything, past, present and future. Facts are shunted aside, allowing faith to create a vision blind to my eyes, deaf to my ears, fleetingly focused in my mind.

Honestly, I had been going along, one decade melting into the next, periodically having my Alfie moments. “What's it all about? What does it mean?” The unwanted, unstoppable passage of time has brought greater direction for me. The need to write is my deeply personal way of trying to answer those questions, knowing the exercise is in the effort, not in some brilliant elucidation to come from it.

Most of the time, I like to look for a quote to start off my stories. I did the good ole search for “Golden Record” and found the above from President Jimmy Carter, a guy who was better suited to be a saint than president. There was something



about the optimism that caught me, deep in the throes of what I have been wrestling with for several years now.

When I look at where we are today, I can't think passed this century and that even feels too remote to me. The terribly optimistic projection of when this precious record could possibly be found represents about half the amount of time our species has actually been on this planet. It puts wishful thinking to shame and falls deep into the morass of mindless meandering, fiction at its best.

I spend a fair amount of my time these days looking at the incredibly dire predictions regarding the deadly fallout from our complete inaction addressing our climate emergency, whether reflected in the record-breaking carbon dioxide in the air, the seemingly unstoppable rise in our temperature, or the mind-blowing reduction in the number of species of all kinds, imperceptibly and ultimately causing the collapse of the house of cards that supports all life here. The deck is marked, and we are cheating ourselves.

The precious record propelled into deepest space is like a prayer from a time long before its potential retrieval. The record of my own that I am leaving behind, while meant for my grandson, is also its own epitaph to a time that once was. What is the story we want to tell from this time? We are at a crossroads; of that I am certain. We have, within our grasp, the ability to create a new record, one that shares how we overcame the adversity of our own making, to meet the future. We are both the enemy and the savior. The choice is ours and the time is now.

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