

# **The World is "Our Oyster ?"**

*by Hank Guarisco*

In this modern age filled with people who both consciously and unconsciously assume the world is there for them to dominate, consume, and exploit, there appears to be limited room for wild places and their inhabitants. We need look no further than the exploitation and extirpation of the last big animals of the Great Plains, as described by Dan Flores in, "American Serengeti." Bison, pronghorn, wolf, mountain lion, and the grizzly bear were all decimated. After market hunters killed off most of the bison, they "turned their rifles on pronghorns. The story is too familiar: sporadic but relentless and remorseless rifle fire echoed across a western landscape gradually emptying of animal life from the 1870s into the 1890s, and what had once been millions of wild creatures fell for a pittance in returns. ...Hunters desperate to keep their lifestyle going sold pronghorn meat to butchers in Kansas for 2-3 cents a pound."

This same attitude of viewing nature as a commodity was extended to people as well. Slaves became valuable

possessions on growing plantations of the South. Today, companies view their employees as "human resources." This rapacious orientation reminds me of the alien race in the Star Trek and Voyager series called, the "Borg." Half machine and half humanoid, the borg drones resemble workers in a termite or bee hive. Instead of pheromones guiding their coordinated behavior, each drone hears the minds of all the others in the collective. When first encountering other civilizations, instead of extending a greeting the Borg declare: "Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated." The drones go about their task with Nazi-like precision, and soon the people they encounter become drones and their knowledge is added to the collective consciousness. Feelings are irrelevant.

Now, let us leave the drones and go back to "The Garden." The Garden of Eden, and creation myths around the globe describe the dawn of the world, all of the plants, animals and people issuing from the mind or body of God or the gods. The breath of life was sustained in a paradise full of sunlight, water, trees, plants, animals, and us all living in harmony. We were grateful for these god-given gifts, obeyed natural laws, and understood our place in nature. When anyone transgressed these laws, their life

became much less harmonious - they incurred the "wrath of the gods."

This harmony can still be found deep inside each one of us. We are a part of nature, and we can take steps to hear her message in our heartbeat, in our breath. In order to function in the world today, much of our time is spent performing various tasks as efficiently as possible - "time is money." We go about our daily routine in a predictable manner, and actually believe that we are in control - control of our lives, and much of the world around us. This is a convenient illusion we accept to get things done. However, the unexpected death of a friend or close relative can open our eyes to a deeper reality. We are vulnerable and ultimately not in control! At first, we react with surprise, sadness, and anger, but eventually we may regain an understanding of nature deep within. Quoting Lao-tzu: "...Nature is executioner. When man usurps the place, a carpenter's apprentice takes the place of the master: and an apprentice hacking with the Master's axe, may slice his own hand."

In the world today, we are definitely slicing our own hands as we execute whole ecosystems and the creatures

within them, for our own gain. Even the US Department of Defense recognizes human-mediated climate change as **the** major national security problem, and is formulating plans to cope with it.

So what will it be - The Borg or Paradise? Awareness is growing: sustainable living, permaculture, wind and solar power, green building. But what can one person do? Walk in the woods, the prairies, near a creek. Look up at the sky and ponder the heavens. Then with a harmonious heart, make decisions that can create Paradise for us all.



**Hank Guarisco** is a biologist and came to Lawrence 48 years ago to study ecology at KU. He has studied spiders and snakes and published a number of scientific and popular pieces, the most recent being "*Pocket Guide of Kansas Spiders.*" Hank continues to be amazed at the natural world and revels in sharing this experience.