

## Fukushima on My Mind

by Mina Hamilton

For the past several years I've averted my eyes from Fukushima. (Who doesn't want to make it disappear?) Then, as the sixth anniversary loomed, I wondered, what could one possibly say? Hadn't it all been said?

I pondered - and then made a shocking discovery: In my mind's eye I'd temporarily misplaced Fukushima.

In fact, I'd moved it!

At some unremembered moment, I'd started envisioning the radioactive elements that are still pouring from the crippled plants as washing *towards North and South Korea* and thence down toward the coast of China. I'd even wondered what type of whales swam in those waters and how were they faring?

I'd caught myself, literally, turning a blind eye.

We all have tendencies to warp reality to suit our particular preferences. Members of the grand jury that failed to convict Eric Garner, apparently, did not see the police tackling Garner and choke-holding him to the pavement. Obama enthusiasts missed his feckless policies in Afghanistan. Meat-eaters neatly step around the slaughterhouse and lettuce lovers forget the aching back of some underpaid farm hand.

But move Fukushima? Me? How could I? After all, I've written extensively about nuclear issues for years - including an article on Fukushima back in 2011. I, who have stared hard and long into the face of plutonium, cesium and other deadly radioactive materials, misplaced Fukushima?

Had I succumbed to the near-constant, American drum-beat of propaganda versus North Korea? Had I unconsciously fixated on a way to undermine Kim Jong-un and his 950,000-strong army?

Had I just proved myself deeply racist - preferring to allot harm to the Far East, thereby sparing the US?

Or was it a case of magical thinking?

Was I trying to protect my sister in Hawaii, my nieces and multiple friends in Washington, Oregon, and California? Had I found a way to ward off the toxic brew steadily spewing out of the Daichii reactors? If the crippled reactors were on the *east* coast of Japan (as indeed they are) then those deadly poisons...

True I didn't want to confront the North Pacific Gyre - that's the conveyor belt of ocean currents drifting up towards the Bering Strait, arcing towards Alaska, and then meandering down the West Coast. The toxins moving not only with the current, but up the food chain from crab larvae, to squid, to flying fish, to tuna, to a plate in a trendy restaurant.

Did I love the coast of Alaska with its salmon-gorging-bears more than I loved the coast of North Korea? You betcha. Who doesn't think, one day, I might stand on the deck of a ship, watch one of those iconic Alaskan glaciers glinting in the sun?

Meanwhile not one neuronal pathway lit up when I thought 'North-Korean shore.' What was there? Rocks? People? Beauty? Even asking the question was revelatory.

Was it just that I yearned to eat sushi again - without flinching? How could I be so callous? Or so typically a New Yorker? (And, how could I not be?)

Yes, it was convenient to move Fukushima. Presto, the radiation-spewing reactors were less threatening to me and to my loved ones. Indeed, my mental glitch reminds me of Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan. Pretend Fukushima is over. Well, yes, we do not yet know exactly where the melted nuclear cores are....are they still in the reactors? washed out to sea? mixed with ground-water?...never mind, the 2020 Summer Olympics full steam ahead!

Such blindness also reminds me of the nuclear industry. It's devotees continue to insist nuclear power is safe. (There's lots of money to be made in the over 60 new reactors now under construction world-wide.) Eighteen of these reactors are planned for China and there's the abiding hope - among *some* climate-change activists - that more nukes equal less coal. Ergo less global warming. (That trade-off ignores key safety issues and the virtual impossibility of dodging catastrophic accidents. It also pooh-poohs the fiendish - and unsolved problem of what to do with the deadly poisons of nuclear waste.)

Fukushima-denial also has its adherents deep in the belly of the US war establishment. Who in the Pentagon ever raises the specter: an attack on one nuclear power plant *anywhere* in the world puts the rest of the world at risk?

My voyage into geographic la-la land was sobering. We never know when we might subterfuge our own thoughts, our own better judgment.

I'm guilty. Like other humans, sometimes I hate reality. Quick, press delete. Kill the unspeakable, erase the unbearable.

Yet, deep in my heart, I know. I know we must unflinchingly stare these disasters right in the face. Only then will we be able to move swiftly and resolutely towards a better world. And that is the world of safe and renewable energy, a world of

millions of clean jobs, a world of economic justice and human rights, a world NOT-on-the-brink of yet another Three Mile Island, Chernobyl or Fukushima.

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