

SOLASTALGIA

“[Solastalgia] is the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation.” Glenn Albrecht

In the early spring of 2020, or the beginning of the CE, covid era, when no one knew what was happening, the sense pervading that one’s feet might be stepping on shaky ground at any moment, I felt at the same time a strange sense of well-being, deeply so. I did not know what it was. How could these two contrary feelings take place at once? Then I knew; looking up, the sky was shockingly clear, and I heard nothing, no mechanical rumbles. Air and noise pollution had stopped. The birds were speeding around making nests and insects were buzzing. Were they “happier,” too? By dint of a horrible disaster, we had done it.... fantastically reduced, in one month, the carbon footprint which is our human hallmark. But already we are back to “normal”. While we share the deep-set need to bury our dead, ironically we give no ceremony to the passing of an entire species, a landscape, or an atmosphere.

I have loved many places, not as a tourist taking photos and then hurrying on, but intimately and at a slow pace. My heart aches for some of these places. They will be plowed under by bulldozers, flooded, or burnt, chopped down, plasticized, or embattled. Whole populations, whether human or animal, insect or plant, are pushed out of the homeland. Home, or sense of place, is not a provincial mind set.