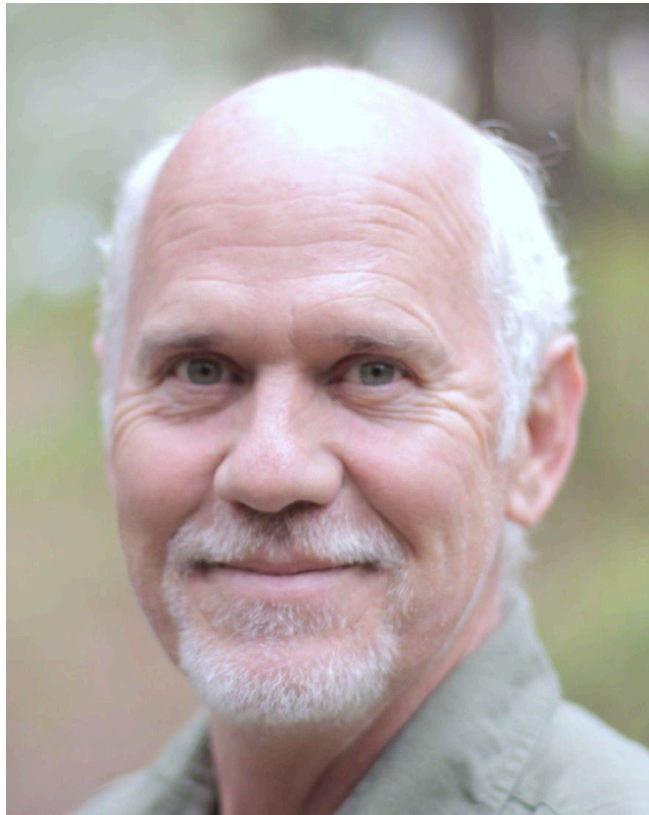

View from the Left: A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

January 16, 2023



And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?

And what did you hear, my darling young one?

I heard the sound of the thunder that roared out a warning.

I heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world...

It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.

I don't pretend to understand the meaning of Bob Dylan's poetry, but I'm pretty sure that this song is not about the weather. Nevertheless, I needed a hook for my story because I want to talk about our recent experience with foul weather.

"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." This is a quote often attributed to Mark Twain. It sounds funny because everyone knows that we are at the mercy of the weather and we are powerless to change it.

We can prepare for it and dress for it. We can curse it and clean up after it. But we can't control it. Sometimes we can predict weather, but I was told after I moved here that the only people who try to predict the weather in Del Norte are newcomers and fools.

I am always impressed with the sheer power of nature. Bomb cyclones and atmospheric rivers are the extreme weather phenomena that we are experiencing. Bomb cyclones are extreme low-pressure systems that generate high winds and atmospheric rivers transport massive amounts of water to us from the tropics.

Old timers say that Del Norte County used to get more rain, and this is a return to normal. For years I resisted the sentiment that some people expressed when they stated, "We need the rain." I was more likely to appreciate any day that the sun shines over a rainy day.

My attitude has softened on this a little bit considering the drought. Now I see the rain coming down and I remind myself that I am on a private well. For me this is drinking water falling from the sky.

Unfortunately, too much water can be hazardous. Recent rainstorms have flooded properties across California. This has weakened the roots of trees and high winds have blown many down. Sometimes falling trees cause power outages. All we can do is hunker down and ride it out until the power is restored.

As a result of the gale force winds that accompanied the storm, huge waves and a storm surge hit our coast on January 5th. Waves washed over Highway 101 and Harbor property. Anchor Way and 101 had to be closed. I spoke with one person who lives in Bayside RV Park who looked out his front door that morning and found the ocean in his front yard. He wondered if he had missed a tsunami warning.

Later that day, people gathered in the parking lot near Battery Point Lighthouse to witness the tempestuous ocean crashing over the top of the breakwater. It was an impressive display of nature's power. There was an emergency vehicle parked to prevent anyone from walking out on the breakwater, though it seemed obvious that this was a truly bad idea.

But there are always new lessons to learn. I saw a picture on Facebook of the street leading to the B Street Pier. The high surf had washed over the access road and in the far background you could see multiple vehicles that had driven out to the pier. They were stranded. I would not have anticipated this exact problem, but it is a questionable choice to drive out into the harbor when there are stormy seas.

Beside the cost of cleaning up the mess there is also an economic impact from extreme storms. Commercial crab season opened on January 1 but most have not been able to go out and set their pots yet. The ocean is too dangerous even for these brave men and women. So, the crab pots remain parked in the harbor and they must wait for calmer seas before they can earn a living.

On a day-to-day basis this is all described as weather. When these weather events are measured and studied over a longer period this is described as climate.

It is not immediately clear whether the increased intensity of storms in our area is caused by global warming, but some meteorologists have observed that bomb cyclones are occurring more frequently. These recent

storms serve as a vivid reminder of the impacts that coastal areas may suffer more regularly in the future if we do not address the causes of climate change.

We cannot do anything about the weather, but we may be able to do something about a changing climate that will make our weather worse. If we do not clean up our act soon, I predict “a hard rain’s a-gonna fall.”

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