

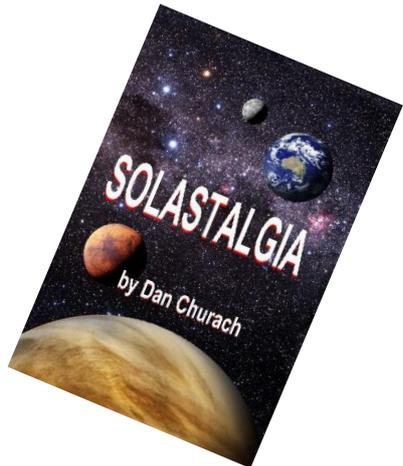
Dan Churach

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SOLASTALGIA by Dan Churach
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FOREWORD

*“They paved paradise, put up a
parking lot
With a pink hotel, a boutique and
a swinging hot spot
Don’t it always seem to go,
that you don’t know what you’ve
got ’til it’s gone?
They paved paradise, put up a
parking lot.”*

– *“Big Yellow Taxi” lyrics by
Joni Mitchell*



Solastalgia (so-lês-tæl-ji-ê), noun

Solastalgia is a neologism derived from the Latin *sōlācium* (comfort) and the Greek *algia* (pain or grief). It is a form of homesickness that one experiences when still at home, but the environment has been altered and feels unfamiliar.

The term was first used by environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht in 2003, referring to the connection between mental health and the impact of environmental degradation on it. Albrecht retired as a Professor of Sustainability at Murdoch University in

SOLASTALGIA

Western Australia. He also held appointments and studied at Curtin University in Perth, and at The University of Newcastle and The University of Sydney in New South Wales.

He initially coined the term “solastalgia” to describe the impact of open-cut coal mining on the biosphere of the Upper Hunter Region of New South Wales, Australia. Albrecht speaks of solastalgia being the “lived experience of distressing, negative environmental change, particularly when the environment is one that the sufferer has inhabited.”

* * *

The novel *SOLASTALGIA* is a work of fiction, a technothriller written for the reader’s entertainment using an imaginary tale with imaginary characters.

However, the word solastalgia is now a clinical term that links together human and ecological health through the collective impacts of climate and environmental changes. It describes the trauma, anxiety and hopelessness one may experience due to a catastrophic transformation of their surroundings, threatening one’s feelings of security, personal value, and sense of home. Of course, humans have lost their homes and loved ones throughout history to war, famine, disease and natural disasters. Still, with a global population approaching eight billion people, never have so many been threatened by such great human-induced ecological disasters as we face today. Consider these stories taken from the newsfeeds in just the past year...

Ursula and Horst Schröder took great pride in the restoration work they carried out for thirty years on their old brick and timber house in the German village of Schuld. They both had great trouble trying to sleep through the storm blowing outside until Horst was roused by several loud bangs and could take it no more. He hurriedly helped his wife get out of bed and – feeling their way

Dan Churach

through the darkness – hurried from their home. The surging floodwater was waist-high by the time they reached the narrow street. Even worse, the turbulent wall of water carried trees, roofing materials and other debris. Ursula heard her elderly neighbour, Angelika Mayer, shouting that she had lost her puppy. She turned to help her climb up onto an overturned delivery truck, but by the



time she turned back, Horst was gone. Until this day, they have never found his body. For Ursula and Angelika, solastalgia is not an abstract concept, but rather a harsh reality they suffer today.

It was summer like no other in British Columbia this year. Pete Baxter was used to the hot weather in July, but nothing like this. The thermometer on the house porch read 38°C (100°F) at 7:00 AM. He tossed a portable cooler, folding camp chairs and his fly rod in the back of his pickup, and he and Sandra headed off to the Nicoamen River. He hoped that on a scorcher of a day like this was going to be, they could cool off and maybe be lucky enough to catch some dinner. They pulled out of their drive, never realising that that was the last time they would ever see their house. Nearly all Lytton burned to the ground that day, with the air temperature setting an unprecedented record for Canada at 49.6°C (121°F). The Baxters are among an increasing number of solastalgia survivors.



Keeping their small herd of dairy cows offered Alexei and Mischa Popov many challenges on their small farm outside of Yakutsk, Russia. Being only 450 kilometres (280 miles) from the Arctic Circle, Yakutsk is acknowledged as the coldest constantly inhabited city on Earth. Yet so far, the Popovs felt fortunate that none of their

SOLASTALGIA

paddocks had burst into flames, but Alexi worried how the choking smoke bothered Helga and daughter Irina's breathing. The wildfires across Siberia continued spewing smoke so thick that it blotted out the sun, turning midday into twilight. Last evening, Mischa heard a radio broadcaster say that the smoke was so dense that plumes drifted over the north pole for the first time in recorded history.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that the global average July 2021 was the hottest month ever over the 142 years from which we have records. The combined land and ocean surface temperature was 0.93 degrees Celsius (1.67° F) warmer than the 20th-century average. It isn't just the record temperatures that lead to problems, but also the effects the increased thermal energy causes across the whole environment. When almost anything is heated, it expands. This reality is evident to the people of the Indian Ocean countries of Mauritius and the Seychelles, the Pacific islands of Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Soloman Islands and much of Micronesia. The expansion of ocean water increases the threat of rising sea levels. Several entire islands in the Australian Torres Strait are no longer habitable, forcing inhabitants to relocate. Likewise, Tangier Island in Virginia and Hatteras Island along the Outer Banks in North Carolina are two American examples of vanishing homelands sinking into the relentless sea. Increasing temperatures... rising sea levels... land loss... it all adds up to solastalgia for millions of people. NOAA models predict that

Americans will see rising sea levels put as much as a trillion dollars of real estate at risk of damage or destruction by increasing water inundation during king tides in the next decade.



Dan Churach

Global stores of ice are disappearing at accelerating rates. In Antarctica, Thwaites – nicknamed the ‘doomsday glacier’ – is larger than the United Kingdom and is disintegrating faster than predicted because of warm water flowing beneath it. Greenland is also experiencing unprecedented ice melt due to the same Arctic temperature rise fuelling the aforementioned Siberian wildfires. And lower elevation, smaller volume glaciers such as those in the European Alps or New Zealand melt at twice the speed of the larger ice masses.



Again, the stories become more personal... Binh Tran and his family have lived in the Mekong Delta for more generations than anyone in his family can remember. From the time he was a little boy, he helped his father and grandfather tending the

paddies in Vietnam’s ‘rice bowl’. Today, Binh has experienced one crop failure after another as increasing levels of saltwater seep into his fields. He and his wife, Hai Van, dread the thought of moving to the city. The only life they know is working the rice paddies, and their children have no skills, no means to earn an income if forced to move to Ho Chi Minh City. Binh, Hai Van and their family live knowing solastalgia on a personal basis.

Miguel and Maria López’s ancestors moved into the San Joaquin Valley near Fresno, California, more than a century ago. They grew cotton there originally and added alfalfa to their land after World War Two, long before Miguel was born. When he was a child, his dad added groves of pecan trees because profit potential promised better returns than other crops. All that Miguel has ever known is agriculture, and so long as the family had the sun, good soil and water, they earned a decent living farming the land. Over the past few decades, however, one well after another has run dry. Without

SOLASTALGIA

irrigation, there is no water, and without water, there are no crops. The Lópezes are leaving the land they love and moving to a factory job in Oregon.

Kallik and Tapeesa Neevee are indigenous Inuit and live within a few hundred metres of their birthplace in Sachs Harbour, Canada. Almost forty years ago, Kallik's dad and other Inuit elders taught him to fish and hunt, searching for caribou, musk oxen, whales, seals, fish and birds. He learned to read the cloud patterns, the wind directions and how to predict the fluctuations of 'shoulder seasons' that might lead to the hardening of the slumping permafrost and the freezing over of the sea. The elders showed him



how to test the ice with his harpoon. He knew that if he hit the ice once without breaking through, it would support his body weight. If it didn't break after three hits, it would support a snowmobile... Until it didn't. A few years ago, his father dropped through a patch of thin ice, and his life was swallowed by the Beaufort Sea. Rising temperatures have taken more than a vanishing homeland from Kallik – they've also taken his father.

More than 300 families of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indian tribe lived on Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana just fifty years ago. Their ancestors settled the island in the 1830s escaping from the Indian Resettlement Act and Trail of Tears heartbreak that is part of American history. Today less than two dozen families remain on their island as rising sea levels and erosion drown their paradise under the Gulf of Mexico. Many have called the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians the world's first climate change refugees, but others may claim that distinction.

Displaced residents from Kiribati and Tuvalu in the Pacific also

Dan Churach

claim refugee status, but those numbers pale in contrast to tens of thousands of Hondurans, Guatemalans and South Americans. The movement of peoples out of Africa and Asia seems almost limitless. Bangladesh has ten million refugees displaced today, though most flee internally to the slums of Dhaka. These people experience solastalgia not as an abstract concept but as a cold, cruel fact of life.

Bruce and Sharon Bateman were born and grew up in northern Queensland outside of Cairns, Australia. Bruce's father worked on the Great Barrier Reef his entire career, first as a commercial fisherman and then running a business taking tourists sportfishing for billfish and tuna in his later years. Bruce worked with his dad as a kid but enjoyed scuba diving more than line fishing. He followed his heart, developing his love of snorkelling and scuba into his own dive company. He and Sharon grew their business to three tourist boats until a few years ago. The endless stories reporting coral bleaching began scaring visitors away, eventually forcing the Batemans to sell two of their vessels and downsize the company. If the poor publicity wasn't bad enough, both Sharon and Bruce knew firsthand that the old dive spots they loved and shared with customers for much of their lives were changing. The



bleaching events now happen one year after another, and the reef has less and less time to recover. Now in their mid-40s, they understand how critical having a 'plan B' was if their business dies. The Batemans experience anxiety and hopelessness of solastalgia as their seaside home and business slowly disappears.

This is only a small survey of the global phenomenon of solastalgia. The condition is serious, widespread, growing and intensely stressful. Most importantly, solastalgia is only partly about climate transition, but its effects are one hundred per cent about people.