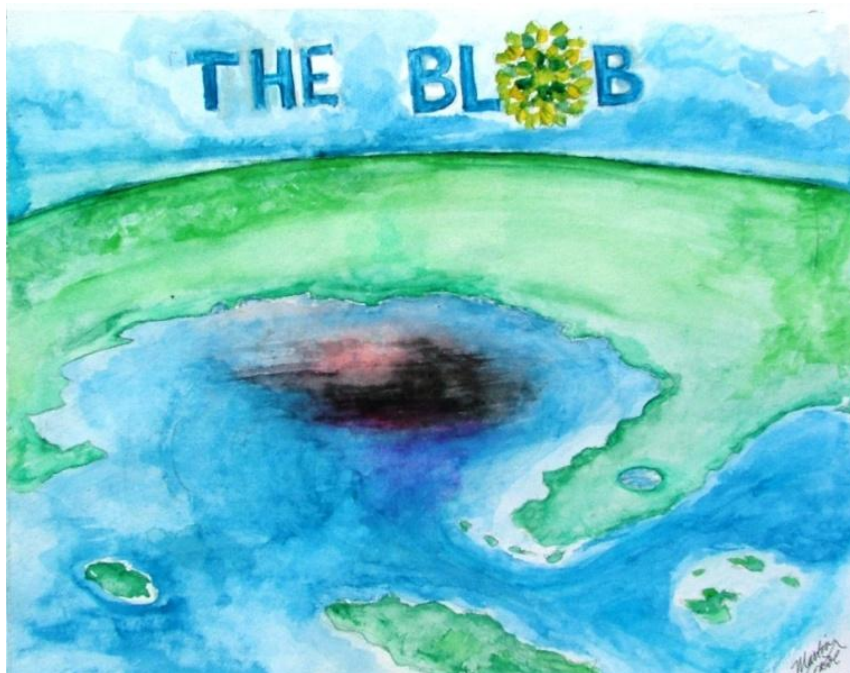


**BP BLOB - DOCKS OF POVERTY**

I lived two years in Bayou La Batre, Alabama – the Forest Gump shrimp town - ground zero of the BP Oil Gulf disaster. There I witness the BP disaster play-out along the wharf of a workin' town; stories of labor disputes reminiscent of the 1930s never reported by the mainstream press.

I knew the people of the coast were in trouble when I had to give directions to the disaster coordination area, a mile down the road, to a senior Coast Guard officer assigned to the entourage of

President Obama who never really got anywhere near the natives I lived with. Besides, I learned that a strong leader makes for a weak people, and a strong people do not need a strong leader.<sup>1</sup>



Bayou La Batre is a poor fishing town with Christian churches and Buddhist temples, and a few struggling ship yards with more lay-offs than hires. If there ever was a colorful, “raggedy” town made poorer – and most are – this one is the exemplar case study. Yes, the fishermen of mullet, oysters, flounder and the shrimp – they have a thickened skin for survival, yet a thin skin for political corruption which is the norm. The poor, they are the good guys who had been blow torching the BP signs on the Alabama freeways – willing to rebel against a “redneck” police state bent on enforcing the will of the oil plantations whose masters have ruined the happiness of whole coastal fisheries and their attendants – the Cajuns, Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians.

Even before the economic collapse of 2008, everyone was already dead flat broke, but now entire towns, cities, and states are dead broke. And there are not enough retail, banking and other assorted “deadbeat” corporate jobs to take up the slack. I went with the poor fishermen to a town meeting called for by the local, corrupt mayor to see how BP obscured their criminal negligence by controlling technology to cap the problem and the funds; the price paid to government that neglected most everyone. But then again, all these corporations run on government connections – cronies who milk it and always get away with the crime of profiteering. Crime does pay – if managed by accountants and lawyers blessed by government oversight. We all know that the world is corrupted on behalf of big money; and government is a bloated enterprise, not due to welfare doled out to toothless people, but to corporate welfare that survives on destroyed environments. It was the mayor who made the deals between the locals and BP spreading the

<sup>1</sup> Steinbeck, John, *Viva Zapata*, Twentieth Century Fox (1952).

BY HUBERT KLEINPETER, PHD

funds about. Obviously, those who supported the mayor got the job. Somehow in this arrangement called just, the mayor, and the governor, and those that voted for both seemed to get those smaller clean-up contracts while most got little or nothing. Like the story of “*The Emperor with no Clothes*” for all to see, government corruption was awarded to the environmental clean-up companies which arrived on the scene like “*flies on fecal matter*.” Needless to say, when Cajuns, Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotian immigrants having been rendered totally destitute had to watch outsiders, “*Yankees*” from Minnesota getting paid for clean-up – it caused something akin to the reenactment of the Civil War and labor riots of the 1920s and 30s.

Along the docks of poverty I heard a song blaring out from an old fishing shack with a mountain of oyster shells and junk boats littered about the grounds - and that is almost every abode; the song resonated the truth that the locals had to “*live... life like there's no tomorrow and all [they] got, [they] had to steal. Least [they] don't need to beg or borrow. Yes [they're] livin' at a pace that kills.*”<sup>2</sup> Anyway, it was an old oyster man I know playing this at maximum volume while the unemployed fishermen en masse tried to shut the town off from outside traffic - corporate clean-up contractors in particular trying to board boats at the docks bound for clean-up. I remember when a wise old man, a flounder fisherman sitting under a tree directing the labor dispute between the town's people and the Alabama power structure said: “*Powerful liars and crooks of the world make men what they are. Big shots are eatin' and we ain't.*” The fishermen, whose families had been at it, the sea for many generations, they reminded outsiders, corporate and political that this port was to be shut down until a deal was made. Without fear of the police-state, they took action by seizing control of the drawbridge that bridged both sides of town and traffic. But sure enough, the mayor was able to call-off the sheriff's patrols trying to force a crossing when the seafood associations brokered a deal so everybody could “*get on board*” politically. And so business as usual in America is political - who eats - who doesn't.

The Cajun and Asian cultures – like most, are a proud and just people- they tend to share what they in need “*commandeer*” - unlike the powerful who steal everything - and if need be - your life! I thought how the fishermen were resentful of the cheap, transient “*Yankee*” labor that got work, but the real culprit was the system that was constructed to employ large scale environmental clean-up companies; the idea of creating problems – then the solutions. The scabs were merely tired, unemployed men themselves from up north. It all makes sense now – that the destruction of the environment and the old ways of living provide two results: (1) it's a corporate welfare model of employment for desperate people, (2), it gets rid of the old independent way of living replaced by dependency of the former onto the matrix of financial slavery.

Besides, big grocery store chains one mile down the road were importing their seafood – though the docks were full of fresh Snapper and Shrimp. Though that economic change seems irrational, the irrational way of conducting social affairs has not; a way of organized stealing, then with a bit of the religious conscience – coughing-up a little to the people. But even then, we all must either stand in a line and beg for shaming welfare, or litigate in anger - in court against a stacked deck. And that is where we stand after the oil disaster: i.e., welfare claims, law suites and of course the long term effects of poisoned waters; but don't worry – there will be many a scientific study researching the obvious – that this economic model is without ethical thought!

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<sup>2</sup> Van Halen. Runnin' with the Devil, 1978.