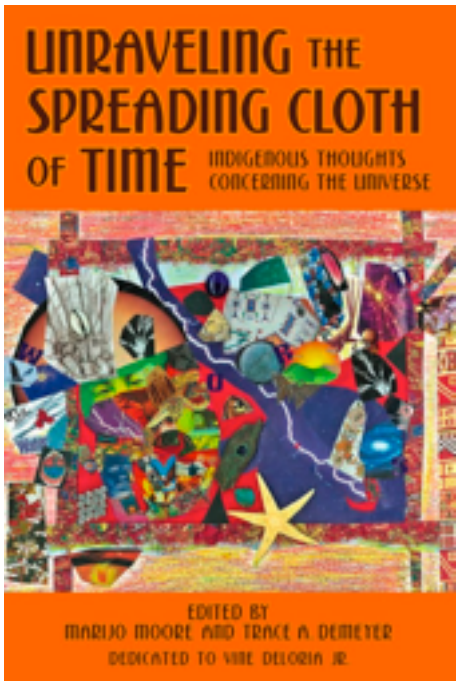
Journal #2819 from sdc 3.29.13

NEVADA MINING TAX CHANGE MOVES EASILY THROUGH SENATE PANEL
Eagle death at Nevada wind farm brings federal scrutiny
FOURTH RUSSELL TRIBUNAL ON THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIANS OF THE AMERICAS
With Shovels and Science, a Grim Story Is Told
What Causes Hearing Loss
Suddenly, They're All Gone
Federal Water Tap, March 25 issue



A friendly reminder that the Mining Oversight and Accountability Commission (MOAC) meets Thursday March 28th at 10am in Carson City, with a video conference to Las Vegas.

PLAN will be asking the committee to recommend that the legislature pass Senate Joint Resolution 15 to remove mining's special tax protections from Nevada's constitution. Our friends at the Comstock Residents Association will be providing testimony on environmental damage done to their community by the mining industry. There will also be a public comment period.

Mining Oversight and Accountability Commission meeting
Click for agenda
Thursday March 28th, 10:00am
Nevada Department of Education, 700 East 5th Street, CC
or
Nevada Department of Education (video conference)
9890 South Maryland Parkway, Suite 221, Las Vegas, NV

NEVADA MINING TAX CHANGE MOVES EASILY THROUGH SENATE PANEL

Nevada Senate Revenue Committee members voted unanimously Tuesday for a potential constitutional amendment that could lead to much higher taxes on the mining industry in 2015.
http://erj.reviewjournal.com/ct/uz3688753Biz16468140
****

Eagle death at Nevada wind farm brings federal scrutiny

By HENRY BREAN LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL 3.26

A single dead eagle could spell trouble for a White Pine County wind farm that sells power to NV Energy.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting an investigation after a golden eagle was killed in late February at the Spring Valley Wind Farm, about 300 miles north of Las Vegas.

San Francisco-based Pattern Energy, which owns the 152-megawatt wind energy project, reported the dead bird and turned it over to federal authorities within 36 hours of its discovery.

“They did all the things they were supposed to because of an eagle death,” said Jeannie Stafford, spokeswoman for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Nevada.

Even so, the wind farm could face a fine of up to $200,000 because it does not hold a federal “take” permit that would allow the incidental death of a golden or bald eagle.

Stafford said the matter is under investigation by the service’s Office of Law Enforcement.

The $225 million facility went online in August as the first utility-scale wind farm in Nevada and the first to be built on federal land anywhere in the United States.

It features 66 turbines, each roughly 400 feet tall, scattered over 7,500 acres at the heart of the vast Spring Valley, which runs north-south for about 110 miles between the Schell Creek and Snake mountain ranges in eastern Nevada.

Stafford said Spring Valley is not a breeding ground for golden eagles, but the large birds of prey do migrate through the area and forage for food there.

Few bald eagles, if any, are known to pass through Spring Valley during migration, she said.

Those two species receive special protection under federal law dating to 1940.

Scott Flaherty, spokesman for the Fish and Wildlife Service’s southwestern regional office in Sacramento, Calif., said wind energy projects are not required to get take permits, but those that don’t open themselves up to investigation and possible prosecution under federal law.

Applying for a permit and engaging with the service before any eagles are killed “provides the best possible outcomes for the companies and the wildlife,” Flaherty said.

“We really prefer that wind developers work with the service early on in the process” to identify the best site for a farm and its individual turbines to reduce bird strikes, he said.

The incident in Spring Valley comes as the service considers extending the length of its take permits to up to 30 years, a move that could cut down on some of the red tape facing wind energy projects.

Flaherty said the current take permits are good for up to five years.

“It is not like a license to just go out and kill eagles,” he said. “The goal is no net loss. The service looks at populations, regional and national populations over time.”

NV Energy has agreed to buy wind energy from Spring Valley for the next 20 years.

The state’s largest electric utility is already delivering power from the wind farm to customers in Northern Nevada. The wind farm will start lighting lights and running air conditioners in the Las Vegas Valley with the completion of a new transmission line being built from Ely to Apex.

In a statement late Monday, Pattern CEO Mike Garland called the bird's death "unfortunate" but noted that it is "the one eagle incident" since the start of operations on Aug. 8.

"We reported the incident to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other local agencies and continue to work with these organizations on this matter," he said.

In December, when the Spring Valley facility won Wind Project of the Year at an international power-sector conference, Garland touted the company's "environmental leadership."

That included such "groundbreaking mitigation measures" as "modified electrical lines to reduce risks to birds and an advanced radar system designed to protect birds and bats," he said.

Environmental groups initially tried to block construction of the wind farm over concerns about birds and bats dying in collisions with the turbines, among other issues.

The Western Watersheds Project and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit in January 2011 accusing the U.S. Bureau of Land Management of skirting environmental regulations to fast-track the project.

The two sides settled their differences last year, after a federal judge refused to stop work at the wind farm to allow more study of how it might affect bats and sage grouse in the area.

Under the settlement, Pattern agreed to expand its program for tracking bird and bat deaths associated with the project. The company also agreed to pay $50,000 for a study of nearby Rose Cave, where more than 1 million Mexican free-tailed bats roost during their fall migration.

In 2010, the developers of the wind farm said they expected fewer than 203 birds and 193 bats to die each year from turbine encounters.

Contact reporter Henry Brean at hbrean@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0350.

****

Natalie Drache

Greetings! It is my intention in this group to be able to locate all of the individuals who might still be living who testified and participated in this Tribunal in Rotterdam in 1980 - or who were part of the jury. Your ideas and your assistance would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your interest in joining this group. I hope to post excerpts from the cases presented at the Tribunal for an ongoing and challenging group discussion.

ICTJ: Right to the Truth Day Reminds Us 'Truth Is the Foundation of Justice'
March 21, 2013, New York, NY- The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) is launching a global awareness campaign for the International Day for the Right to the Truth, March 24, to affirm the right of victims to know the truth about human rights violations. Under the slogan, "Truth is the foundation of justice," ICTJ's campaign will highlight the important role that truth commissions can play in societies dealing with a legacy of violence and repression.
http://ictj.org/

“FOURTH RUSSELL TRIBUNAL ON THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIANS OF THE AMERICAS” Rotterdam, 1980
Cases presented: Indigenous Regional Breakdown as per United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Excerpt: DECLARATION OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AT THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL RUSSELL TRIBUNAL GENEVA, 1980
“16.) SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK
We propose that a mechanism should be installed so the Tribunal and its results should be continuous. Permanent observations of, continual media dissemination as well as continuous challenges to the accused dominant governments, institutions and individuals must be guaranteed.
****

(Archives and archeology)

With Shovels and Science, a Grim Story Is Told

By DAN BARRY NYT March 24, 2013

MALVERN, Pa. — They laid his bones in a bed of Bubble Wrap, with a care beyond what is normally given to fragile things. They double-boxed those bones and carried them last month to the United Parcel Service office on Spruce Street in Philadelphia. Then they printed out the address and paid the fee.

With that, the remains of a young man were soon soaring over the Atlantic Ocean he had crossed once in a three-masted ship. His name is believed to have been John Ruddy, and he was being returned to the Ireland he had left as a strapping teenage laborer. In 1832.

His voyage home is the latest turn in the tale of Duffy’s Cut, a wooded patch that is little more than a sylvan blur to those aboard commuter trains rocketing past. It is a mass grave, in fact: the uneasy resting place for dozens of Irish immigrants who died during a cholera epidemic, just weeks after coming to America, as an old song says, to work upon the railway.

For the last decade, a different kind of rail gang — professors and students, scientists and landscapers — has been digging away at the layers of soil, myth and silence to unearth the unlucky inhabitants of Duffy’s Cut and place them in both historical context and consecrated soil.

“The first seven bodies were here,” said Bill Watson, 50, pointing to a brown-gray swath of muck as a downpour battered the dead leaves and another train whined past. A history professor at Immaculata University here in Malvern, he is also the de facto foreman of this erudite rail gang.

“And this is the shanty,” Mr. Watson said, rainwater pouring off the brim of his baseball cap. “This is where the men lived.”

It begins in late June 1832, when the John Stamp docked in Philadelphia, ending a two-month sail from Derry in northern Ireland. On board were dozens of young Irishmen eager to begin their American climb, bearing the names of Devine, and McIlheaney, and Skelton — and Ruddy, at 18 the youngest.

Working for a contractor named Duffy, a crew of about 120 men was soon digging through clay and shale to fill the lows and level the highs for a train line. “A sturdy-looking band of the sons of Erin,” a local newspaper called them.

But an outbreak of cholera caused a Philadelphia panic that hot summer. The disease struck the work site, probably by way of a contaminated creek running past the men’s crude living quarters — their shanty. The local community shunned the sick foreigners, leaving acts of kindness to a few courageous Sisters of Charity who ventured out from Philadelphia.

When the epidemic subsided, the official account of the sad but unremarkable toll at Track Mile 59, also known as Duffy’s Cut, was eight dead, with the shanty burned down and buried by a humane blacksmith.

Life continued along its track. Almost immediately, though, there came folkloric whispers of something not right. Glowing apparitions were said to have been seen dancing down at the cut.

An Irish railroad worker eventually fenced off a spot in the general area, out of respect. Then, in 1909, a midlevel rail official named Martin Clement erected a granite-block enclosure. But his superiors said no to an explanatory plaque, a decision that left generations of hikers to encounter a memorial without context in the middle of the woods.

Nearly a century passed before serendipity finally blessed Duffy’s Cut.

Mr. Watson and his twin, Frank, a Lutheran minister, were sorting through family things in 2002 when they took a close look at an old file. It turned out that this Martin Clement, who later became president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, had kept an extensive file on Duffy’s Cut, and that his executive assistant — their grandfather! — had taken the file after the railroad vanished into a merger in the late 1960s.

These internal records indicated that at least 57 people — not eight — had died at Duffy’s Cut. “Something was off,” Bill Watson said. “It made us dig deeper.”

Working closely with a handful of passionate colleagues, the Watsons did extensive historical research before creating a rough grid of the site. On a hot August morning in 2004, they began their dig with the help of a few college students, all young men of the same age as those who had come with shovels to these woods nearly 170 years before.

For months, nothing. Then a pot lid. Then, in November 2005, Bill Watson uncovered the bowl of a clay pipe — the requisite prop for a 19th-century Irish stereotype — adorned with shamrocks and a small harp. Symbols of Ireland.

“That for us was the holy grail,” Mr. Watson said. **“It meant this wasn’t just an urban myth.”**

The hunt-and-peck excavation intensified when the team enlisted the help of Tim Bechtel, a geophysicist. Using ground-penetrating radar and electrical imaging, he scanned the site the way a radiologist would a body, and directed the team to what he called the “anomalies.”

In March 2009, two students found a tibia, then more. Before long, skull fragments and other remains were laid on a table in a conference room at Immaculata, beneath a crucifix, for an examination by Janet Monge, a physical anthropologist and the curator at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and Dr. Matt Patterson, a local dentist with training in forensic odontology.

A muscular man in his late teens, they concluded, who had never developed an upper right first molar — a dental variance that Dr. Patterson called "exceptionally rare." The skull also had evidence of blunt-force trauma, Dr. Monge said. "He got wonked on the head."

The discovery prompted more research and more digging. Over the next two years, six more sets of remains were located, although one had been reduced by the acidic Pennsylvania soil to little more than a stain. Here, for example, was a man beneath a tulip poplar. Another man, nicknamed "the tall guy." And a woman, who had probably been hired on as a laundress and cook.

The team also uncovered iron forks and pottery shards, handmade glass buttons and pieces of other clay pipes — and coffin nails. Here was evidence of a shanty community and the burial of caskets, far from any church cemetery.

Dr. Monge found signs of blunt head trauma in three more sets of remains, as well as a bullet hole in another. For the researchers, these forensic clues, coupled with contemporaneous news accounts, conjure a possible sequence of events in which a few workers escaped from an enforced quarantine, were subdued and killed, then returned in coffins to Duffy's Cut, where the rest soon died of disease. Then all were buried in an anonymous grave.

"I actually think it was a massacre," Dr. Monge said.

A year ago this month, the remains of four Irishmen and one Irishwoman, 180 years dead, were buried beneath a limestone Celtic cross in a cemetery just outside Philadelphia. The search for their shantytown comrades continues; Mr. Bechtel has already found a "very concentrated anomaly," 30 feet deep, that the team hopes to excavate sometime this year.

Meanwhile, research by Dr. Patterson and Dr. Monge found that some Ruddys in County Donegal are known to have a certain dental variance: the absence of an upper right first molar. That fact, coupled with the passenger list from the John Stamp, prompted the decision by the research team to ship back to Ireland the remains of the first victim they had found.

Three weeks ago, the Watson brothers joined a small crowd gathered in a church cemetery in the small Donegal town of Ardara. They prayed and sang under a limestone sky, as a young laborer, late of Duffy's Cut, received his delayed but proper burial.

****

What Causes Hearing Loss

By JANE E. BRODY Personal Health March 25, 2013

Noise, not age is the leading cause of hearing loss. Unless you take steps now to protect to your ears, sooner or later many of you — and your children — will have difficulty understanding even ordinary speech.

Tens of millions of Americans, including 12 percent to 15 percent of school-age children, already have permanent hearing loss caused by the everyday noise that we take for granted as a fact of life.

“The sad truth is that many of us are responsible for our own hearing loss,” writes Katherine Bouton in her new book, “Shouting Won’t Help: Why I — and 50 Million Other Americans — Can’t Hear You.” The cause, she explains, is “the noise we blithely subject ourselves to day after day.”

While there are myriad regulations to protect people who work in noisy environments, there are relatively few governing repeated exposure to noise outside the workplace: portable music devices, rock concerts, hair dryers, sirens, lawn mowers, leaf blowers, vacuum cleaners, car alarms and countless other sources.

We live in a noisy world, and every year it seems to get noisier. Ms. Bouton notes that the noise level inside Allen Fieldhouse at the University of Kansas often exceeds that of a chain saw.

After poor service, noise is the second leading complaint about restaurants. Proprietors believe that people spend more on food and drink in bustling eateries, and many have created new venues or retrofitted old ones to maximize sound levels.

When I’m told about a new restaurant, my first question is, “Is it noisy?” My friends and I will never return to one in which the racket makes it impossible to converse with tablemates. Perhaps the young diners the restaurateurs covet “talk” by texting.

The ears are fragile instruments. When sound waves enter the ear, they cause the eardrum to vibrate. The vibrations are transmitted to the cochlea, in the inner ear, where fluid carries them to neatly organized rows of hair cells. These in turn stimulate auditory nerve fibers, each attuned to a different frequency. These impulses travel via the auditory nerve to the brain, where they are interpreted as, say, words, music or an approaching vehicle.

Damage to this delicate apparatus results from both volume and length of exposure to sound. Very loud noises, or chronic exposure to sound even when it is not particularly loud, can wreak havoc on hair cells, causing them to become disarranged and to degenerate.

We are born with a fixed number of hair cells; once they are dead, they cannot be replaced, and auditory sensitivity is permanently lost. Usually, sensitivity to high-frequency sounds is first to go, followed by an inability to hear the frequencies of speech.

Furthermore, the effects of noise exposure are cumulative, as Robert V. Harrison, an auditory specialist at the University of Toronto, noted recently in The International Journal of Pediatrics. Although we start out with a redundancy of hair cells, with repeated noisy insults, enough are destroyed to impair hearing. Thus, damage to hair cells incurred early in life, as has happened to many rock musicians and rock concert aficionados, can show up in midlife as difficulty understanding speech.

Sound volume is measured in decibels (dB), and the level at which noise can cause permanent hearing loss begins at about 85 dB, typical of a hair dryer, food processor or kitchen blender.

Dr. Michael D. Seidman, the director of otolaryngology at Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital in Michigan, told me to use ear plugs when I dry my hair or mow my lawn with a gas-powered mower, and to cover my ears when an emergency vehicle passes with siren blasting. Ear protection is a must for people who shoot guns as well as those who ride motorcycles or use snow blowers, leaf blowers, hand or pneumatic drills or chain saws.

But even noisier than many of these is the maximum output of some portable music players, which can exceed occupational safety levels and produce sound levels in the ear on a par with that of a jet taking off. If you listen to music with earbuds or headphones at levels that block out normal discourse, you are in effect dealing lethal blows to the hair cells in your ears, Dr. Seidman said.

A national study in 2006 by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association found that among users of portable music devices, 35 percent of adults and up to 59 percent of teenagers reported listening at loud volumes.

Dr. Harrison urges purchasers of such "personal entertainment devices" to read and heed the warnings and practical advice on package inserts. Too often people turn up the volume to overcome surrounding noise. A better plan is to set a maximum volume while in a quiet environment and never go above that.

In general, if other people can hear what you're listening to, the volume is turned up too high. Many times I've had to change my seat on the subway or bus because the rider next to me was using a music player as if it were a boombox.

Some portable listening devices come with the ability to set a maximum volume, which may be worth the added cost to parents concerned about protecting their children's ears.

At a given volume level, earbuds deliver higher noise levels than over-the-ear headphones. If earbuds are used, Dr. Harrison suggests selecting ones that fit loosely and never inserting them tightly into the ear canal. Alternatively, when you are alone and not at risk of missing important environmental cues, like an approaching vehicle, consider using noise-canceling over-the-ear headphones that block out background noise and enable you to listen at a lower volume.

Even toys meant for young children can generate ear-damaging levels of noise. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association lists as potential hazards cap guns, talking dolls, vehicles with horns and sirens, walkie-talkies, rubber squeaky toys, musical instruments and toys with cranks. According to the association, some toy sirens and squeaky rubber toys can emit sounds of 90 dB, as loud as a lawn mower.

It suggests that parents with normal hearing test new toys before giving them to a child. "If the toy sounds loud, don't buy it," is the recommendation. For noisy toys already bought, consider removing the batteries or taping over the speaker.

Additional protective information can be found online. Check out It's a Noisy Planet; Keep It Hear; Listen to Your Buds; Hear-It Youth; and Dangerous Decibels.

****

Family Relationships March 22, 2013, 5:33 pm 461 Comments

Suddenly, They're All Gone By CAROL MITHERS

Caring for the old is just like parenting an infant, only on really bad acid. It's all there: the head-spinning exhaustion, the fractured brain, the demands and smells. Only this time with the knowledge that it won't get better.

That was my life for five years. First came my mother-in-law, then my father-in-law, then my childless aunt, then my mother — all needing different kinds of help as they weakened and started going downhill, all the care overlapping, and almost all of the work to be done despite distance.

You're so good, friends would murmur, but I wasn't — there were plenty of days I muttered, "Can't do this anymore," and nights when I threw back too many drinks, feeling how badly I needed for it to be over.

Now, though, it is done for real, everyone is dead, and the surprise is that instead of being relieved, I feel worse.

More than a year after the last funeral, I still have all the numbers on speed dial: my in-laws' neighbors in Texas and my aunt's in upstate New York; the security guard at my mother's gated San Diego community; doctors, hospitals and emergency rooms in three states; two home health agencies; the 24-hour hospice nurse. I still sleep with the phone on and stashed on my night table, where I can grab it fast. It's over, but I can't let go. No, it's worse than that: I don't want to.

Maybe there is nothing new to say about the nightmare of shepherding the old through the time that is the prelude to death but not active dying. I knew it would be bad, but you don't really understand until you're there, any more than the childless can grasp why a new mother goes three months without shaving her legs.

"Drowning" was the word that came to my mind as the endless crises unspooled. My terminal mother-in-law, abandoning the 50-year pretense that she could stand her husband to demand: "Put him in a nursing home! Get him out of here!" My father-in-law, newly widowed and alone in an early Alzheimer's haze, barricading himself in the house against caregivers. My aunt, her lungs destroyed by a three-pack-a-day cigarette habit and reeling from one hospitalization after another, begging me to send morphine so she could end it all.

Alerts peppered every hour. Do something! Your father-in-law's behind the wheel again. Your aunt's in the hospital with pneumonia; she's recovering; no, she's failing, come quickly; no, she's been yanked back from death into a life of oxygen concentrators and cognitive crash; find a nursing home — wait, are you in New York? Because your mother's in the hospital in San Diego and it could be serious, can you get on a plane?

Frantic was my new normal and normal the new never, because when someone is old, especially if dementia is involved, nothing is routine. Even the answer to a straightforward question, like "What day is it?," vanishes on the wind; every patched-together arrangement works only until it doesn't.

"Drowning" — also buried, shredded, torn apart. Helping my daughter prep for the SAT, cooking family dinners and maintaining a professional life, while also paying three sets of bills, running three houses in three cities, either planning a trip to see how things were going or recovering from that trip, and never living in just one place.

I started keeping my cellphone on my desk, then leaving it on all night, and finally didn't even risk putting it down because the one time I did, to watch my child in a high school soccer game, there were five frantic caregiver messages by halftime: Where are you, what should I do, she can't breathe!

And yet: Parenting on bad acid is still parenting. I wasn't one of those women who went all dewy-eyed the second she gave birth. "I don't feel anything," I remember thinking in dull panic as I looked at my squash-faced, just-born daughter. "How can I love her? She's a stranger." Within two weeks, though, I was transformed, flattened by a passion I had never even dreamed existed, and it was the grunt work of motherhood that did it to me, the holding, touching, watching, feeding, smelling — the getting to know the specifics of this little creature in a way that went down to my bones.

I had always imagined that you put up with the job of caring for a baby because you loved her, but for me it was the unfathomable, slightly terrifying intimacy of caregiving that brought the love.

And with my old people, it was the same. The fried-brain resentment that gets you drinking at night fades when you are with someone in the living room or kitchen. Just as it is with a baby, your job is tending, and the comfort you bring is simple and physical. You sit for hours, the heat always cranked up high, doling out pills and pouring water, changing the nitro patch, combing hair. You fix lunch, rub in skin cream.

You come to know the precise texture of thin, dry skin, the kind of touch that pleases, the small things that bring a smile. My father-in-law had to have vanilla ice cream every day, but only Blue Bell brand and in a waffle cone. Even with her thinking garbled, my aunt needed the New York Times crossword puzzle and endless games of gin rummy. My techno-challenged mother wanted written computer instructions to consult the next time the infernal machine swallowed her text.

More than anything else, when you're with the old, you listen. My Greatest Generation/Army veteran father-in-law, whose interest in the world essentially ended in the late 1950s, talked in endless circles about his small-town childhood and the World War II campaigns of Italy and North Africa. My aunt, obese and isolated for years in a small upstate town, had spent her 30s and 40s single, teaching history in New York City public schools for nine months a year, then buying elegant clothes and setting out for Europe and Africa.

The giraffes came down to the water hole every night, right in front of where I stayed…. One night, in Turkey, in a cafe next to the sea, we danced in the moonlight….

When the present is unbearable and there is no future, the past comes rushing back: family history, secrets and buried memories rising out of the ether. My relentlessly forward-thinking mother never dwelled on sorrow or regret, but my Aunt Belle committed suicide by jumping in front of a subway train, she told me one night as we sat among the empty cups and crumbs at the dinner table.

I was home alone when someone called. I had to tell my father that his sister was dead. I'd never seen him cry before.

I could see it all: my father-in-law's bungalow in Crandall, Tex., whose open front door proved irresistible to a contrary billy goat one day in the 1920s. The 10-cents-an-hour wage my aunt earned tending a booth on the Coney Island boardwalk during the Depression — *I was saving to buy myself a new pair of shoes, but my mother took the money and I still can't forgive her for it.* My mother's quiet, wild joy during her first winter in Ithaca, N.Y., when a Cornell scholarship let her escape the dirt and smudge of Queens to a snowfall that stayed white.

All the years I was young, the center of life's drama, I barely saw these people. Now they were simultaneously disappearing and becoming unbearably real to me, heartbreakingly diminished and yet still powerful, deeply rooted trees that against all reason would not let go.

There was my 98-pound mother, befriending the immigrant podiatrist who tried to relieve her painful, bunion-crippled feet; limping to her desk and squinting her one good eye at that maddening computer, so she could finish an article for her community newspaper. There was my wheezing, demented aunt, frowning at the sign "Don't Toutch" that her caregiver had placed above a complicated new hallway thermostat, and pushing her walker to it so she could correct the spelling.

Their singularity dazzled me. Their selves, revealed in all their layered complexity, could never be replaced. I came to know them — and I fell in love.

When you care for the old, life can go on unchanged for years. Then suddenly, without much warning, everything shifts. Six months after her cancer diagnosis, my mother-in-law died; 18 months later, my father-in-law fell, had a small stroke, fell again and lasted only two months in the Alzheimer's unit of a nursing home.

Two years after she survived near-death by respiratory failure, my aunt's breathing got so bad she couldn't even make it to the bathroom; she wanted only to sleep, to talk to her long-dead sister, who she insisted she heard on the stairs. *You'd better come quick.* Minutes after my plane landed at Kennedy Airport I got the call saying she was gone.

Not long after my mother, radiant in a sun-colored jacket and pearls, celebrated her 90th birthday with a huge party, she said her stomach hurt. A week later, I was in a hospital room sobbing against her cold, still shoulder.

I have my life back now, but that fact is less simple than it was before. When I look at the mementos I've inherited, the crumbling photo albums, cookbooks that smell of cigarette smoke, '50s furniture and cut glass, I also see where they used to sit, in other places and rooms. I miss the quiet afternoons, the houses that eventually came to feel like home, in cities I'll never again have reason to visit. I miss it all. I miss them.

Sometimes, when I'm out, I catch a glimpse of a short, gray-haired man in a baseball cap or a skinny old woman in a tailored bright jacket and my heart stops. I see my old people everywhere, which only reminds me that I'll never see them again.

When you have a baby, it's as if your whole self shifts, reshaping itself around a presence that later you can't even remember living without. You reach down and take a small hand, and joined, you hurtle toward the future. Death just offers stasis, absence, dissolving shadows.

None of that was a surprise, but it's still a shock. While you're caring for the old, you can't believe what you're called on to do and where you find yourself, can't believe that your time with them will ever end. Then one day, it just does.

Carol Mithers is a Los Angeles-based journalist and the co-author, with the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee, of "Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War."

****

Federal Water Tap, March 25 issue:

Water Stress
Only one of every five miles of river in the United States is ecologically and biologically healthy, according to a first-of-its-kind assessment of national water quality. The Environmental Protection Agency used random sampling to estimate river and stream health in the lower 48 states. Based on data from 1,924 sites monitoring rivers, streams and ponds, the EPA found that phosphorous and nitrogen are the most common pollutants. Public comments are due by May 9 and should be sent to *nrsa-hq@epa.gov*.

Oil Shale
The Bureau of Land Management put a final stamp of approval on its plan to designate more than 324,000 hectares (800,000 acres) in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming for oil shale and tar sands development. For now, the BLM's plan allows companies only to test production methods and tinker with the geology. Before any individual lease is granted, the agency will undertake an environmental review of that particular project.

Yet this is arid country. Since an October 2010 report, the Government Accountability Office has warned that developing oil shale in the Green River Formation could use significant amounts of water. A full analysis was not possible. The GAO did not have enough information on the region's hydrology, the oil shale technology, or the scale of development to be able to say.

Kerry Made a Statement
Water is "fundamental to our diplomatic and development goals," said Secretary of State John Kerry, in a brief, generic statement to mark World Water Day.