

Letter to New Las Vegans from Old Las Vegans

Margie B. Klein

The filthy city

Is buffered by

Ranges of mountains.

Is it to keep the refuse in

Or keep nature out?

Where once mammoths and saber-toothed cats roamed

Where earlier a sea washed over the land

And tectonic plates rose from underground

The succession of nature progressed in its own time.

Water once sprang from the center of town

The people flocked to it

Making an old trail

Planting orchards

Watering passers-by

Pumping it out till it flowed no more.

Miners found treasures in this valley

Silver, gold, and turquoise

Drew out the mother lode

and left their asses behind.

Then the railroads came
Ripping through the delicate crust
Of the Mojave's surface
Its natural protection gone.
The tracks of tanks in later years
Lie imprinted in sandy memory.
Today giant blades continue the assault.

Poppies and coyotes grew freely
Beneath the rain shadow
Till they were trampled and run off
Now cameras document their erratic sighting.

The habitat has changed
Desert sage green and tan
Turned bright emerald and gleaming
Now humidity and mosquitoes
Swarm ponds that shouldn't exist.

Cattle and trucks moving through
Spread a wildfire of weeds.
Strange animals, too, invade the landscape,
Altering food chains and resource supplies.
To make the desert better

They brought in game species and insect pests
Now we battle them for control.

The air is also altered
Haze no longer caused by temperature inversions
But smog, dust and gluttony
Hanging like a dirty curtain on the valley
It raises its ugly head from the polluted stench.

The mountains around stand strong
Feet planted for eternity
Speaking their warning,
“Stop, stop the onslaught.
You can lay waste to the basin
But nature holds strong around its outskirts.”

Humans with their customs and their trappings
Have perturbed the native landscape
When they all have gone
Will the wild return?

Keep a ring around the valley, predictors say,
Carrying capacity doesn't extend beyond the desert floor.
The lake that sustains two million plus
Lowers as years go by

Ghost town they'll call it

Was it an oasis or merely a mirage?

Arrogant men, trying to prove they can sustain themselves

With their own ways.

Conquer the desert?

Beware, human, it will conquer you in the end.



Photograph by Margie B. Klein