

## Levin: Ancestors and Descendents

By Guest Commentary **Lois Levin**  
Wednesday January 15, 2008

NEWTON - Just after liftoff from Logan, I reflexively glanced down at a small cemetery in East Boston. The family plot was easy to spot from the air. My grandfather purchased this tiny piece of real estate in the early '50s, about 30 years before my parents took advantage of the free rent. Suddenly it dawned on me that that historic cemetery will become an early casualty of Arctic ice melt, as it is now mere yards from the waves lapping against the shoreline.

In a world facing rising seas, it is of little consequence that my parents' graves will be inundated with seawater. (It seems fitting; they were elegant swimmers, so at ease in the water.) But it is more than a little disquieting that the consequences of global climate change are seeping into every aspect of our lives, eroding treasured landscapes and historic places, undermining customs and traditions.

In 1962, thanks to Rachel Carson, we started addressing the serious health and environmental implications of chemical contaminants in our environment. It took two more decades before a few visionary thinkers began to consider the possibility that, as a result of industrialization and the destruction of the world's rainforests, we humans were not merely dumping poisons into the air, water and soil, we were actually destabilizing the world's climate by dumping so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. As the environmental costs of industrialization have become clearer, the public has begun to grasp the fact that we are not just polluting, we are playing Russian Roulette with our grandchildren.

Global warming is "unequivocal", according to the latest IPCC report. Coastal erosion is visibly accelerating, and the world's biodiversity is under grave threat, increasing the risk of pandemics. Governments are being warned by scientists to act now, and to mobilize, as we mobilized in the past for world war, to create sustainable communities and institutions. Humans have devised many effective strategies to create renewable energy, to practice sustainable forestry, agriculture and fishing, and to minimize waste.

While politicians are being tutored in these subjects, directors and managers of large corporations are learning how to green their operations in order to remain profitable as the climate system unravels. But in order to prevent backsliding, the public must continually exert pressure on public officials and companies.

Our local community, because it is blessed with natural, economic and human resources, may be shielded to some extent from the most devastating local effects of global warming. And our species is resilient, able to adapt even to profound environmental changes. But we are going to see millions of "climate refugees" before we transition to non-carbon emitting forms of energy. Meanwhile, my parents will finally be buried at sea.

*Lois Levin is the TAB's environment editor.*