



Step it up prayer walk

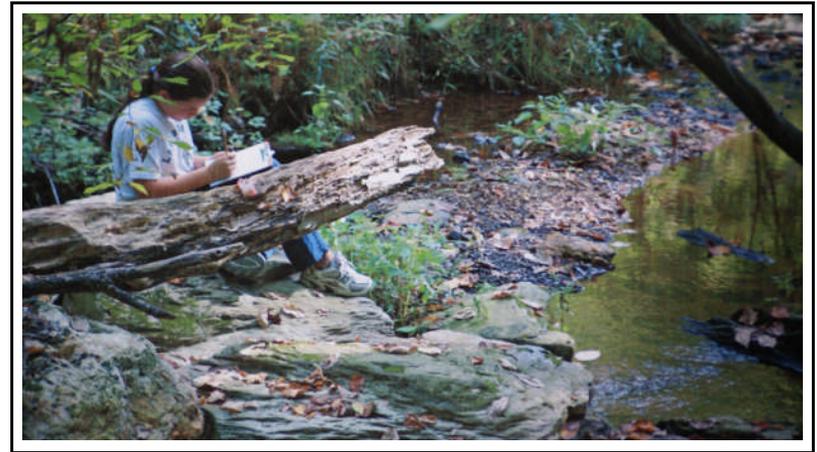


Children's Garden



Children of the Earth Retreat

Dayspring Earth Ministry



Sketchbook/Journal

Spring 2008

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Sacred Space

I have long appreciated the native American flute playing of R. Carlos Nakai (Navajo-Ute), and frequently enjoy my several recordings of his artistry. In recent years I have had several privileged opportunities to see him in live performance, most sponsored by the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). When he plays, he creates sacred space, both through his inspired, sensitive virtuosity and his gracious, meditative commentary between songs.

Mr. Nakai is one of the many Native Americans, living and long gone on, who have enriched and deepened my own spirituality. When Barbara and I first learned

that one final museum, the NMAI, was to be built on the mall of our nation's capitol, we eagerly signed on as charter members. We thus began to receive newsletters on the progress of designing and building this wonderful sandstone monument in the midst of much more formal western architecture.

One report which particularly grabbed my attention described how, when the native ethnobotanist and NMAI landscape architect Donna House (Navajo) installed a wetland and pond on the adjoining museum grounds, ducks immediately came and populated that sacred space. She commented that this area of Washington D.C. had originally been wetland, and she took it as a blessing of her work that the wildlife recognized and appreciated the re-creation.

I, too, appreciate how, as I approach or depart the NMAI, there is a gentle transition from urban street through an enchanting courtyard of rocks, waters, and native trees, shrubs, and grasses. What has been achieved there is nothing short of miraculous, and all the more remarkable because of all that surrounds it.

I experienced something similar here at Dayspring some years ago, when we transplanted thirteen trees

from across the street before a developer clear cut much of the lot to plant eleven new houses. As soon as two or three trees were in place in the meadow near the Wellspring Center, birds were perched in them, singing their delight. I was occupied with directing the great machine that dug and moved the trees, but when I noticed a tear in Susan Morley's eye, I knew something more than just the moving of trees was happening there. We were creating sacred space.

My sponsor into membership of Dayspring Church, and spiritual director for years thereafter, was Bud Wilkinson. Bud proudly claimed his heritage as a member of the Miami tribe of Indiana. He talked often of his encounters with hawks, which he called his talisman. I have come to share his attachment to these magnificent birds of prey, and always pause to watch when I see or hear the hawk nearby. Webster defines talisman as "something producing apparently magical or miraculous effects". That describes exactly how these creatures make me feel!

On Veterans Day, we attended a concert with R. Carlos Nakai and other native musicians at NMAI. It was, as always, more worship than concert for me. It concluded with a grand composition honoring

Mother Earth, with flute, strings, percussion, chant, and narration. Afterwards, we slowly walked out through the *Potomac* - the canyon-like atrium of the museum - in awed silence. As we stepped out into the courtyard, a hawk - perhaps a red shouldered - glided across our path, just overhead. For a moment it was as though time stopped; my finite consciousness briefly infinite. My spirit, already alight from the winds in the canyon, briefly touched the divine, as this winged blessing brought its assurance that all was well, that the experience inside had indeed been holy. With Advent just ahead, I had experienced an annunciation!

When I return now to the NMAI, I can feel the presence of that hawk. Will I see it again? How unusual or ordinary was that experience? Was the hawk drawn there by the native plantings? By the music? By an ancient memory of sandstone canyons? Do others experience there, as I do, something akin to C.S.Lewis' children passing through a wardrobe into an other-worldly realm? In our busy, demanding, consuming world, we need all the sacred space we can create, and I am profoundly grateful whenever I find myself in these places.

Our Simple Gifts staff cottages are very much sacred space for me as well; increasingly so as we landscape with native plants. Soon we'll begin construction of a beautiful, multi-purpose greenhouse. As time and funds permit, we'll eventually build an eco-teaching building, and transform the current driveway into a lovely courtyard. All sacred space for we blessed ones who live and work here, and we hope for our many visitors as well. We hope you will find opportunity to come visit, and receive the healing of Dayspring's many beckoning niches.

I'll conclude this rambling with a poem I wrote to the hawk which left me a perfect feather while I was mowing the paths through Dayspring's meadows last spring.

-- Gale Quist

Prayer with a Red-Tailed Hawk

Greetings, oh
red-tailed flyer! You, hanging
effortlessly on the warmth of this
afternoon, performing for hours on
end your high-wire act upon a mere
thread of air, your graceful winged
body floating there, evidence of the
power in that which, to my dim eye
is invisible, thank you for your buff
beauty, your skill, your peaceful at-
one-ness with your world. Oh sharp-
eyed hunter, your view of this fra-
gile planet is at once more broad
and more keen than this earth-
creature can imagine. Even grind-
ing noisily through the sky in our metal con-
traptions, I can see only dimly, through a glass, the
wonder of your daily routine. Help me know the grandeur of
this world as you know it. Though my feet remain, by holy design,
firmly planted on this earth, your easy flight lifts my
spirit, and fills my imagination. Your lofty gliding
is both playful and survival-serious. You take
from the land only what you need, and
re- turn what is yours to give. Without
even need to know the words or grasp
the concept, you live in perfect eco-
logical balance. We over-busy, con-
suming humans can barely formulate
a working definition of such sustainable
living for our species. And thank you,
red-tailed one, for this feather, pluck-
ed from your body and dropped be-
fore me, as a visual reminder of your
beauty, of our differentness,
and our sameness.

Simple Gifts Phase 2: The Greenhouse



Sometimes I think that building a community greenhouse to help us grow food at Dayspring is the craziest idea we've had yet. Especially one with good insulation for winter use (warmed by the sun), a large cistern inside, an entry/potting shed, and a covered outdoor space as well. After all, there's food aplenty in the box stores just up the street, or better, from farms nearby, or the Co-op in Frederick, 20 miles up the road. Why grow food here at Dayspring?

The ethical/moral answer to that question would take a book. Fortunately it has already been written -- *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: a Year of Food Life* -- the story of how the author, Barbara Kingsolver, and her family exited the industrial-food pipeline, resolving to buy only food raised in their own neighborhood, or to grow it themselves, or to learn

to live without it for one year. Her daughter Camille reflected on the Year this way:

My college education may or may not land me a good job down the road, but my farm education will serve. The choices I make now about food will influence the rest of my life. If a lot of us felt this way, and started thinking carefully about our consumption habits just one meal at a time, we could affect the future of our planet.

For now, we will build a greenhouse. Perhaps, like a little seed, it will grow into something none of us can yet imagine. I'm a gardener of limited repertoire, but I have a dream of a life and a community growing up out of this land, and I'm not afraid to ask for help.

Together we will dream into being a renewed and sacred relationship between people and the food they eat -- community gardens, children's gardens, gardens for herbs and medicinal plants -- new ways of living bountifully, yet within the limits that our small planet will allow. As Wendell Berry envisions:

fields and gardens rich in the windows. .. The abundance of this place, the songs of its people and its birds, will be health and wisdom and indwelling light.

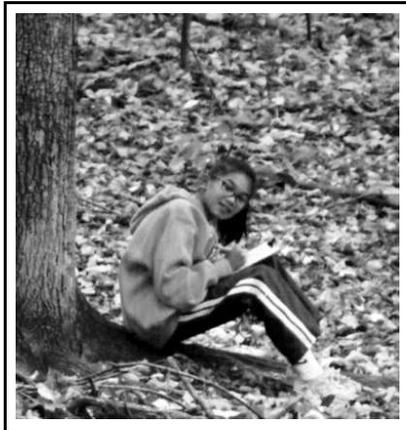
-- Jim Hall

The Creek Group

Praise God all the Creek:

*You water bugs and frogs,
You deer and striped raccoons,
You buzzing gnats and swimming fish.*

- Jackie Nelligan



Some Sunday mornings when the "Creek Group" in our Earth Sunday School makes its way down to Dayspring Creek, we just play. What a rare, now almost countercultural, experience! Sometimes we pick up the trash that inevitably washes downstream into this secluded little stream valley. Sometimes we just sit quietly for awhile in our special places along (or in) the creek and write a short verse or psalm for the scrapbook we are making.

This experience has led to school projects like studying the effects of overdevelopment on the environment in Montgomery County. Who can say to what else it may lead in these children's lives?

-- Jim Hall



The Music of Hope

At Christmas time, 1953, during the eighth year of her imprisonment in one of Stalin's labor camps, a Latvian woman, Marta Zalaikalns, received a Christmas carol from home--music by an unknown composer, words from a poem by the Latvian exile writer Valda Mora.

Here, in English translation, are the opening lines of the carol:

*On this holy night earth and heaven shine,
In this night the heart and stars commune
And enmity fades, each loves the other,
'And o'er the stillness warm wings hover' . . .*

Fearful that the guards would confiscate the piece of music, Marta stitched the sheet of manuscript paper into her clothes. The carol bore both beauty and hope. She needed it close. She kept it where it could not be taken from her.

. . . This night transfigures doubt to hope. . .

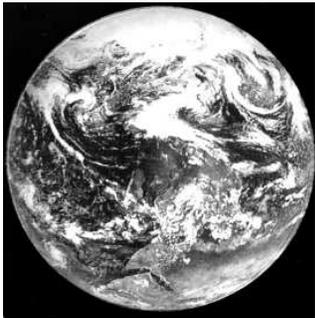
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I was only three at the time Marta stitched the sheet of music into her clothes. But the events of the Cold War mark the contours of my childhood landscape. The only world I have ever known, the world into which I was born, is the world where the power to destroy the world--through nuclear weapons--rests in human hands.

Through my father's life work in the Pentagon, in Defense Intelligence, the tensions of the Cold War came home to me each night in my father's face, his eyes. In the subtle but true to the bone ways of a child's knowing, I felt the terror implicit in the secret work he did and could not share with us. And so despair and sometimes depression, became my life long companions, sometimes held farther off--in happy times--sometimes close in, hovering over my days.

Since the end of the Cold War, that despair has been keenly and most often aroused by the ecological destruction of the earth--the unweaving of the very fabric of Creation:

We are changing the chemistry of the planet, for the first time, on this scale. We're changing the biosystems of the planet. We're changing the geosystems of the planet. This is power the like of which has never been known throughout the whole course of planetary history. (Thomas Berry)



Our mountains and rivers, the great oceans of the earth and all the life within them, every living being and every living thing now bears the imprint of our industrial age.

When the ground--stripped and treeless--beneath the newly constructed houses in my childhood neighborhood shifted and slid toward the street; when a sea gull suffering from pesticide poisoning flew hard into our kitchen window; when my 19 year old brother developed a tumor on his back--melanoma that claimed his life three years later--the result of exposing his bare skin to the sunlight, I began to understand that there is no such thing as "the environment."

The earth is not a backdrop to our human affairs; a collection of raw materials for our use. There is only one Life, and it streams through everything. To pollute the rivers, as Miriam MacGillis says, is to poison our children's tears.

In 1994, I began working on a long poem called, "In the Time of the Ruin of Creation," and when I had finished it something in me had turned. I entered the poem haunted by despair. Despair for the beautiful creek I loved and the slow death it was experiencing, despair for the woodlands, old farm fields and remaining open spaces of my county-- uprooted, paved over. But I came out of that poem work with a new and soul deep question: What does it mean, what

does it look like, to come alive in this particular moment of Earth's long story?

Having carried that soul question for more than a decade, having planted it in the soil of all my earth ministry work, I found that hope was not what I'd thought it was. I found hope, abiding hope, in the last place I ever expected to find it--within myself, in the way I choose to live my days, in how I give the counted, measured hours of my life away.

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*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all.*

Emily Dickinson

In this short four line poem, Emily Dickinson describes hope as being like a bird, *the thing with feathers*. And what are birds? Winged creatures glimpsed for a moment then gone from our sight. Hope, the poem suggests, is about movement; not a fixed thing. Hope is alive, winged and moving.

That perches in the soul

To "perch" means to alight or rest, to descend and settle. I love this sense of hope as alighting, as coming to rest, as "perching" in my soul; the way a bluebird comes to perch on the clothesline outside my study window.

And sings the tune without the words

Hope sings "the *tune without the words*." Hope is not hope for any one thing that can be laid down, figured out, known. Hope is beyond our thinking, our scheming, our words. Hope is a living thing, an energy, a spirit, a vitality; close kin to that other lively mystery we call vision.

Hope is the daily and practical participation in a deeper, richer vision; a dream that is wider than our despair. Hope is not a feeling. Hope is the choice for a way of life informed, fired, shaped by vision. No filmy romanticism, hope sees the world, clearly, as it is, and is willing to risk everything for how it could be. That is the secret of how authentic hope can arise even in the midst of the most desperate circumstances.

And never stops at all

A Latvian woman exile, in a forced labor camp, sews a Christmas carol--a hauntingly beautiful music of hope--into her clothes. Perhaps she sewed it along the worn seams of her skirt. Perhaps she wore it close against her hip bone.

Hope is the music that *never stops at all*.

In a time of ecological peril, when life itself seems so endangered, I pick up my daily work--my teaching and tending. I maintain bluebird nesting boxes. I monitor and tell the story of the struggle of our local tributary stream. I plant trees, native wildflowers and a community garden for organic vegetables. I help design and build a cottage powered by the sun. I companion young children on their adventures out into the living world around them. I knit prayer shawls. I write poems and weave meditations on earth, beauty, hope.

As I do, *the music that never stops at all*, the music of hope, sings in my soul.

--Cheryl Hellner

Notes:

1) This story, "From Stalin's Labour camps to King's College Chapel" accompanied the Christmas Eve 2007 broadcast of A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College Chapel, Cambridge, England.

2) Thomas Berry -- address at the 1995 Common Boundary Conference, "Inner Ecology, Outer Ecology."



Here's a partial list of earth ministry classes and retreats for 2008:

Earth in Peril: A Moment of Grace -- 2 day silent retreat.

At each critical turning point in the long evolutionary story of life in the Universe there is what Thomas Berry calls a *moment of grace*. Everything seems to hang in the balance. It is a time of great danger and immense possibility. In this retreat we will reflect on the nature of transformation -- these moments of grace -- using examples drawn from the Universe story, scripture, spiritual biography and the living world around Dayspring. April 26-28, Dayspring

Dear Children of the Earth -- 24 hour retreat for children ages 6-12 and an accompanying parent, grandparent or mentor, begins Friday night May 9 and ends with supper on May 10. At Rolling Ridge Study Retreat, Harpers Ferry, WV.

Ember Days at the Dayspring silent retreat center: Feb 12, May 21, Sept 24, Dec 9. 10:00 - 4:00.

Simple Gifts Tours -- We continue to schedule group tours of the cottages periodically; if you would like to arrange a tour, or join with an existing scheduled tour, please let us know.

Let us know if you would like to be sent announcements for other classes & retreats in the fall.

We also continue caring for the land at Dayspring through a variety of activities including: planting trees, native flowers and shrubs, and removing invasive plants; periodic stream monitoring of Dayspring Creek; maintaining and monitoring twelve bluebird nesting boxes. Let us know if you'd like to be involved in any of these hands-on conservation activities.

If you would like a copy of the Simple Gifts/Earth Ministry annual report to the Church of the Saviour Ecumenical Council for 2007, let us know and we would be glad to mail/e-mail one to you.

If you would like to help us with the stonework, carpentry, straw-bale construction, or other aspects of the greenhouse construction this spring/summer please let us know and we will keep you posted on the dates when we could use your help, as they are finalized. We estimate that the greenhouse project, which includes a long retaining wall, cistern, potting/storage shed, and covered outdoor space, as well as fencing for the terraced gardens below will cost \$40,000. We have half of that amount in hand, and need to raise an additional \$20,000 over the next few months. We welcome your continuing prayers, gifts, and participation.

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