



Chrysalis

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Today, in this crucial moment of history, we are called to recover the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature, and the urgency of reciprocity of care between ourselves and our environment.

This newly recognized relationship between us and the surrounding natural world rests on our experience of its wonder, beauty, and call to intimacy. In preserving and augmenting these responses, we realize, perhaps never before so vividly, that, as the consciousness of that world, we have an indispensable role to play. More than just protection against pollution and extinction of life forms, that role calls us, further, to revere Earth as that community of which we are a part, the source of our life and livelihood, and, above all, the primary means of our recognition of and communication with the divine.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World . . . restores a relationship with the natural world based, not on a view of other beings as objects to be used, but as subjects to be communed with in an integral and sacred society.

~ Thomas Berry, July 2008

Dear Reader,

There is a growing recognition, in the words of Thomas Berry and others like Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee, that the inner activity of the human being must be strengthened if human beings are not to succumb to the forces of the outer world at this evolutionary moment.

A recognition that our very humanity is being threatened. Not by political upheaval or a universal catastrophe, though these may threaten. But rather present day Life itself has assumed such forms that humanity is on the way to losing *itself*.¹

There are many signs. Thomas spoke in evolutionary terms of the mechanistic fixations of the human psyche that have permeated the human soul at this time. On a personal level, we feel that we are, day by

¹ Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Meditation: Guidance on the Inner Life* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Floris Books, 1987), 1.



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day, claimed and absorbed by our work and the way we live our lives. This absorption threatens to destroy what is fully human in us, to disrupt our real and full humanity, and, beyond the personal level, threatens the future evolution of humanity itself as the consciousness of the Earth.²

As Friedrich Rittelmeyer cautions, when we say today that the human being is in danger of becoming a machine, we recognize that we do not take this danger seriously enough. "The machine eats its way into our lives from without, and finally devours us and puts itself in our place," leaving little room for the free play of the soul and spirit.³

Thomas Berry called us to the recognition that we have grown "autistic to the natural world" and gave us these prophetic words:

"Pragmatic efforts at establishing a viable way into the future are urgently needed and invaluable. They are indispensable in any effort to deal with that future... I do not wish to diminish what is being done. I wish only to indicate that the basic difficulty lies deeper in the human mind and emotions than is generally realized."⁴

The *primary* difficulty, Thomas would say, lies not in our lack of capacity for technological innovation and change, but rather in a certain poverty of our inner world in relationship to the living world around us.

As he says in *The Sacred Universe*, "a sense of the sacred requires recovery of ourselves, a return to the depths of our own being. We must in some manner manage the whole existence in terms of the authenticity of our own deeper self."⁵

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 169.

⁵ Ibid., 55.

This is the work we have undertaken in our Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice Program, a life's work really. On the surface, from the looking glass of our culture, the work goes unrecognized and unseen.

The inner work of the program unfolds in fourfold layers of meaning:

Initially, participants experience the essence of Being through a practice of Presence to Earth...

In contemplation, they enter the world within and recognize a dimension of depth of their knowing...

In practice, they draw deeply from their experiences of the essence of Being and their recognitions of the depth of their knowing to manifest something in the world...

Through the written word, they bring all of this into a form for sharing with others.

It is in this spirit that we create new *deep and in-forming* cultural expressions that can radiate to a wider circle of readers.

The writing process is itself transformative, for we are just now learning in the culture how to speak from a place of Deep Learning. Each Inner Life class is a circle of people who are a nucleus of renewal and who are working from their inmost beings to meet humanity's and Earth's present dangers and challenges. They are, as Thomas Berry has said, "returning to the depths of their own being" and "managing the whole existence in terms of the authenticity of their own deeper selves."

In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we bring you a sampling of the writings of the Inner Life Class of 2017. We dearly wish we could have included them all. For the full circle of writing, you can download the monograph, *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice, 2015-2017*, on our website publications page at <http://www.beholdnature.org/publications.php>.

In Peace,



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

This issue of *Chrysalis* is dedicated to the memory of
Lin Donaldson, Tom Droppers, Melissa Gage, Roger Segalla and Nathan Joseph Stiefel

Two Photos, Stars, Struggle and Boundless Gratitude

by
Kathy Chambliss

“When my star meets your star, we are a we-star”

On a sun-drenched North Carolina afternoon, we made a commitment to our practice in a ceremony where we walked down a path and crossed a bridge, after which we placed our intentions in a woven basket held by Peggy. We continued beyond Peggy around part of the lake and headed off (again) into our lives away from the sanctuary known as Timberlake. Before we began the ceremony, a few photos were taken. I took one of them, a photo of Andrew, Sandy and Peggy together on the lawn, sharing a moment of laughter. Sandy took a photo of the members of the Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, of which I am part, as we assembled across from our three teachers. I am in the front row of that photo, sitting on the ground, looking at my cellphone and smiling. In that moment, I am delighting in the photo I just took of Sandy, Peggy and Andrew. I am thrilled I snapped a photo of the three of them together. In that smiling-at-my-phone moment, I am full of gratitude for what Sandy, Andrew & Peggy created for us. Here is why.

Each time we met for our program, I experienced a warm welcoming circle of sharing and beauty. We shared reflective silences, music and readings that were haunting, beautiful, powerful, resonant reminders to the deep parts of me I forget as I rush through daily “to-do’s.” People spoke courageously from their hearts about their learning and their practices and their trials navigating mainstream culture, and the challenges inherent with the gift of being alive. Each visit to our encircled community was a booster shot, a strengthening of my resolve to become more present and compassionate and mindful in my daily life. A year and a half after we began, what I have learned in North Carolina has become integrated into my life.

For example, I often begin classes with new students in a circle outside, sharing with them what Sandy taught us one afternoon in a short session by the side of the lake. We root our feet into the ground like the trees around us. We breathe with the trees. We look for what is moving around us, and we point to what we see moving for a moment or two or three. We put on our fox or deer ears by cupping our hands around our ears to channel sound into them, and listen intently to the sounds around us. Then we use our noses to notice the scents floating on the air and try to put words to the smells we encounter when we focus on that sense. We use our skin to feel the fluttering wind, the soft rain, the biting chill or the warmth of the sun, and try to describe these sensations also. Before we leave on a walk where we pair up in silence and share beautiful subjects with our partner, we listen to the soft tones of a singing bowl, opening our eyes and raising our hands after the sound has ceased. Primed now to pay attention to the subtle sounds and colors and scents around us, we move to a stream or other ecosystem to discover more about what is hidden within, and our connections to and interdependencies with that system.

Outside of work, I have shared Andreas Weber with a beloved friend and together we read and discussed and ruminated about *The Biology of Wonder*. We also read together, regularly, the enchantingly brilliant words of John O' Donohue. Furthermore, Thomas Berry's words, words that brought me to the *Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World*, are always with us, guiding us. And yet, even with such richness in my life, richness for which I am so grateful, I struggle. Too much of my life right now is being taken up by things that appear necessary but are not meaningful. In too much of my life I feel bounced around by the choices made by others: my autonomy slipping through my fingers. I want to read more and reflect more and write more and be in genuine relationships with people; instead, I am repeatedly taking my car to be repaired, running from one event to another one, trying to balance a budget, and coming up short again and again.

As I move through this chaotic phase, I will continue to refer back to our circle, to remember the deep centering wisdom inherent in the music, the words read and spoken, the lunches prepared with much intention, the stories shared. I will remember the commitment I made to further develop a compassionate presence. A presence not only for others, but for myself, also. Lastly, like preschoolers already know, I will remember that when my star meets your star, and your star, and your star, etc., we become we-stars. Together in our practices and the sharing of our practices, we will remain deeply connected, despite the physical distances between us.





I end this piece with heartfelt gratitude to everyone in the program. Each and every one of you has so greatly enriched my life. Thank you.

Kathy Chambliss, who lives with her beloved trees and animals in Maryland, is happiest when working alongside others to achieve shared goals that are regenerative and giving, and when she is photographing, “hanging out with,” and beholding other species in wilderness areas. She is particularly enchanted with birds, and greatly inspired by the phenomenon of migration and the birds that travel vast distances over the seas that connect us all together. She considers periods of reflective silence essential for her wellbeing. As a traveler who likes to volunteer, she has worked on scientific and cultural projects in Thailand, Laos, Canada, Alaska, Delaware Bay, Midway Atoll, and Haiti.

Professionally, Kathy serves NorthBay, a MD organization, as an educator, program co-developer, and coordinator for the Teacher Professional Development Program. Her formal education includes a B.Sc. degree in Plant Science; a M.Ed. in Secondary Education with a teaching certification in Secondary Biology, and an Endorsement Certificate in Environmental Education; and a Ph.D. in Sustainability Education. She co-founded, with members of her Ph.D. cohort, the online *Journal of Sustainability Education*. She taught environmental education to children and adults with Delaware Nature Society, DE, and taught science to elementary, middle, and high school students at Tower Hill School in Wilmington, DE, before joining the staff at NorthBay.

Present to Earth Through Song and Poetry

by
Morgan Josey Glover

I once heard a powerful statement from poet David Whyte, one that I've carried close during my journey through The Inner Life of the Child In Nature program. Whyte said, and I paraphrase, that as humans, we are the one part of creation that knows what it's like to live in exile. However, the moment we name the ways we feel we don't belong, we're already on our way home.¹

His words came to mind during one of the exercises at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary in June 2016. In a moment of frustration, I decided to sing the ways I felt inadequate and disconnected from the natural world around me. Soon enough, the land started to sing back.

Present to you,
Present to you,
Here in my emptiness,
I'm present to you

Why am I here?
What do I do?
Here in my emptiness,
I'm present to you.

Earth speaks to me
But I cannot hear.
Despite my emptiness,
I'm present to you.

Estranged from the land,
No home that claims me.
Here in my emptiness,
I'm present to you.

Too smart to see,
Too deaf to hear.
Here in my emptiness,
I'm present to you.

¹ I heard this in an audio or video talk, but a version of Whyte's statement can be found here: <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/06/29/david-whyte-belonging/>

*Tall and erect,
Rain on our leaves,
Ignored in our fullness,
But present to you.*

*Tiny in size,
Exposed to your world,
Crushed under foot,
But present to you.*

*Greener than money,
Outlasting your wealth,
Sustaining your breath,
We're present to you.*

*Voracious in youth,
Dissolved in cocoons,
Transforming your consciousness,
We're present to you.*

*Dense and exposed,
Red like your pain,
Washed out to oceans,
But present to you.*

*More ancient than worry,
Deeper than dreams,
Cradling all my children,
Earth's present to you.*

I suppose most of us who are on this path of earth listening and tending must grapple with feelings of inferiority before we discover our gifts and callings. Feelings of being too silly, weird or “woo.” Of being too educated or not educated enough. Of carrying too much privilege or not enough privilege. Of being too citified or suburban. Of suffering under the weight of our environmental sins. Of not being “indigenous.” But I’m learning that those inner demons are doorways to discovering the various roles we’ll play in the Great Work.

Facing my grief and inadequacies straight-on have enabled me to recover my poetic voice, one that I’d neglected since my college days. I decided to take up a practice of working with the exercises in Bill Plotkin’s book, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*. The purpose of the book is to assist contemporary Westerners in developing psychological wholeness and the capacity for encountering soul and spirit through a nature-based approach. That wholeness includes capacities to be nurturing and generative (North), emotive and sensuous (South), clear-minded and light-hearted (East), and adventurous and visionary (West).

I spent the most time with two of those dimensions -- the Wild Indigenous One (South) and the Muse-Beloved (West), because those seemed to be areas that need cultivation. Even now, I am still learning to express and embody my emotions, eros and openness to grief, darkness and the imaginary realms.

In the summer of 2016 I traveled to Well of Mercy in Iredell County to spend a couple days relating to the land through the “Wild Indigenous One” archetype.

One walk in the damp woods behind the guest houses, I encountered a dragonfly, which to my amazement sat on a leaf for several minutes while I told it about myself and my various feelings of not being enough. In response, the dragonfly offered this song with me, one I later shared with my daughter:

I don't need much (3X)
To be beautiful

I carry Earth's magic within me
She opens my heart to her mystery
To enter her dream is my destiny
It sets me free

I don't need much (3X)
To be beautiful

On another walk that weekend, I beheld the stones, plants and insects on the trail, the experience triggering memories of my childhood in Jacksonville, North Carolina. And I was gifted with this song:

We're hidden from your vision
Do you have eyes to see
The wildness of creation
That lives in you and me?

We eat, we crawl
We dance, we fall
Our world is brown and green.
As you walk by, reserved and shy
We hope that we'll be seen

Release the over-cultured fears
That keep you bound inside
Learn our ways, you won't be afraid
Let nature be your guide

The comforts of your old world
We offer not to you.
Just the wildness of creation
And the beauty of your truth

I even contemplated Plotkin's use of the provocative phrase "polymorphous eroticism" and how it's reflected in my visceral connection with the plants and animals I encounter both at home and out and about in Greensboro.

I'm learning to relax,
To blush freely at the ripening fig and
Moonflower unfurling at dusk.

The towering poplar in the city woodland
Draws me out of myself. So too,
The spicy aromas of tulsi and lavender,
The motionless blue heron in the bog garden, and
The inscrutable moon traveling the night sky.

Of course, there's grief too.
So many beings I've ignored for too long,
So much wildness banished within and without,
So much suffering to hold within the soul,
So many shadows to coax back home.

Now I'm learning to relax,
To sing, to touch the polymorphous Earth,
And to weep freely.

I've encountered many teachers – Stephen Jenkinson, Brian Swimme, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and others – along the way in my journey toward soul discovery and earth connection. They've helped me sit with the cultural poverty of the modern Western world and explore both practical and creative ways of engaging the times we live in. One of those teachers is Nigerian poet-philosopher Bayo Akomolafe, whose counterintuitive explorations of human agency have spurred me to reevaluate my notions of power and listen for the voices within trees, stones and clouds.

*"To touch the universe is to lose one's ground. To arrive is to be dismembered. To be born is to be reborn – and not in a neat way. I like to say that 'we are coming down to earth, and we will not arrive intact'. In saying this, I lunge at different expressions of hope that embrace shadows and the promiscuity of the world. A hope that situates us as part of a tapestry of sympoietic emergence, whose logic is always in the making. A hope that troubles and redeems all at once."*²

I too am still in the making. And I'm coming together in new ways, through following an earth-based spiritual path, and writing poetry and singing more (perhaps one day with other people!). I'm committed to learning soul as "psycho-ecological niche"³ and to teaching my daughter the Universe Story and how to approach life from ecocentric and soulful perspectives. My 9-year-old daughter and I have worked on a Universe Story

² Bayo Akomolafe, "The Edges in the Middle." <http://bayoakomolafe.net/project/the-edges-in-the-middle/>

³ This novel and timely definition of soul comes from Bill Plotkin in his book, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* (2008, New World Library).

journal for the past year and we plan to participate in eco-contemplative fly fishing lessons with a former Inner Life graduate later this spring. I realize that I cannot genuinely encourage or affirm my daughter's encounters with the natural world if I have not developed my own capacity to be present to Earth.

I sometimes waver in my commitment to the "Great Work" and to entering Earth's dream during this time of political instability, social stress and environmental catastrophe. But programs like the Inner Life of the Child in Nature are like a beacon, leading back to this path through the cultural darkness.

You're needed now.
Don't be afraid to set out
Into the dark night.
Be curious.
Be conflicted.
Be uncertain about the revelatory
Powers of your peculiar dreams.
The fire will consume it all.
You once needed guarantees.
Now, each moment of
Becoming is your light.

Morgan Josey Glover lives in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has been on a path of discovering her place in the earth community since encountering the work of Thomas Berry and other cultural visionaries a decade ago. She previously wrote about green living and sustainability at the News & Record and has facilitated related discussion groups at Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. She now considers herself an apprentice to the plant world and her bioregion. A former journalist, Morgan works as a communications specialist at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Transformations

by
E. David Garcia

On a warm and clear Sunday in the Spring Season of 2007, I was unprepared for an event that would change the course of my life forever. For a brief instant of time, my eyes pierced into a scene that made me witness a moment of unspeakable beauty. I thought about that event long after it happened, returning each Sunday for weeks and months to the same location at the same time in hopes of getting one more glimpse. But although I never witnessed it again, the event became the power that would thwart my career as a business executive and fully transform my life purpose; redirecting me into a new and meaningful relationship with Earth and the natural world all around me. For the past two years, the “*The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice*” has been an important part of my new journey; it has given me the ample room to observe and reflect on the deep transformation I’ve experienced within.

When observing a tree, one can often be taken by its striking attributes – the vibrant colors during the Fall Season, the grandeur of its size when fully grown, or even the benevolence it offers to the community that it lives in; offering food and shelter to the hundreds of living organisms throughout its lifetime. To me, however, a tree amazes me by the simple, miniature and unassuming seed it produces. Holding a tree’s tiny seed can often reveal magic if reflected upon long enough. Sure, one can contrast the enormous size of a tree that can emerge from a small seed, but the real magic lies in that a tree begins its emerging process in the darkness of the soil. And as it grows, a tree seems to grow from nothing; sequestering chemicals from the air and the ground that are all invisible to us humans. “*The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice*” felt somewhat like that emerging process of a tree. During my time in the program I sensed I was in a special period of incubation, nurturing a seed within me that was longing to express itself. For the most part, it was a solitary process and as a result I would occasionally receive a new glimpse of understanding by doing nothing more than being out in the woods. My constant forays into the forest soon brought forth a series of inner transformations leading to greater awareness and a deeper connection to the natural world.

Part of my practice centered on seeking to discover the inner wonders and depths of nature through a range of contemplative methods. I recall how one transformative cycle came to me when I paid attention to what felt like Earth’s invitation to the power of sounds. In the past, the distant sounds of bird songs, cricket calls and croaking frogs were but mere “sounds of nature”; the background noise that signals a place of pretty sceneries or recreational retreats. But my deepening awareness soon revealed that I was being invited into a new form of conversation. It was a new form of communication that was not based on verbs or nouns, but on a more powerful yet subtle way of communicating. It was a surprise to discover that the silence in between the sounds was as equally important as the sounds themselves. Silence, I soon learned, is not so much the absence of noise, but rather, allowing the presence of what is already there. The more I listened, the more

I felt part of a bigger community. The more I walked in the forest, the more I understood it – the sudden silence from a croaking frog spoke of danger, the call from a bird was often its recognition of my presence, the rain at night communicated a fern’s moment to lunge spores to the moist soil to reproduce, and so forth. Slowly, I began to feel that I too belonged in this community, not because I offered the woods any type of load-bearing ecological value, but rather, by simply being there to participate as a mode of existence that is capable of observing and reflecting on Earth’s wonders. At such times, I’m reminded of the iconic nature photographer Ansel Adams. Surely, he seemed small and insignificant in comparison to the grandeur of the landscapes he would capture. But that tiny aperture of the camera and Ansel’s eye gave meaning and context to the enormity of the scene.

The Earth, as I soon began to understand, is revelatory. It is the primary teacher, the primary healer, the primary inventor, the primary provider, the primary artist, the primary source to the mysteries we seek to understand. Once I began to internalize how it was a primary source of life, it only followed that it was also the driving force behind my transformation. Thomas Berry in his essay “The Meadow Across the Creek,” describes how his life was profoundly shaped by an experience he had as a young boy in the presence of a meadow. He writes:

As the years pass, this moment returns to me, and whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes that I have given my efforts to, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life.¹

Similar to Thomas Berry’s moment, my experience on that clear day in 2007 is one that continues to return to me. At the time, I was living on the Dutch-Caribbean island of Curacao and playing in the ocean at my usual surf beach. As I caught the energy of the ocean and began to race down the face of a wave on my board, the bright orange and red colors of the sunset reflected on the water all around me. Maybe it was the combination of the pelican gliding just above the water ahead of me, the sounds of distant seagulls, the taste of seawater in my mouth, and the red hues of sunset inside the wave. I don’t know what made the moment so special, all I know was of the unspeakably beautiful moment that was revealed to me.

Another important practice I undertook during “*The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice*” was to craft creative and innovative presentations in my work as a naturalist and nature interpreter. As I began to change, so did my presentation style. I relied less on diffusing scientific information to the public and aimed more at engaging people with inspiration, humor and clarity; helping people connect their lives with the wonders found in nature. My only aspiration in my role is that I serve as a conduit to the magic and marvels the Earth wishes to reveal. One day, just maybe, one of my programs or a phrase I say in a presentation may lead someone onto their own road of self-discovery and life-purpose by way of nature exploration.

It’s evident that the Earth has entered a time of great transformation. So much of Earth is rapidly changing, mostly driven by human presence. As anthropocentric influence has begun to change the composition of the air, the water, the land, affecting all of Earth’s life forms, we are beginning to realize that we humans

¹ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 13.

have become a planetary force. We are now at par with the forces that brought about the emergence of life on Earth; the atmosphere, the hydrosphere and lithosphere. To the many of us who have been called to this great work of transformation, a key step will be our ability to discover and acquire the wisdom needed to function at the level of a planetary force. As such, and in the midst of our present day uncertainties, our path to the source of wisdom leads us once again back to nature itself. Earth's revelatory promise can guide us through this transformation if only we, as a collective species, are willing to listen. "*The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice*" program is an important step along our path.

E. David Garcia has a passion for nature education and interpretation that emerged out of an unusual route: an early career in the resort industry that took him to live in nine countries. He now works as a bilingual naturalist for NOVA Parks in Northern Virginia. David delivers outdoor interpretive nature programs for thousands of people each year in NOVA Parks' 12,000-acre system of 32 parks, which serve the most populous region of the Washington, DC, area.

Animal Arts

by
Joy Kennedy

This morning was a beautiful, cool, rainy morning with fog covering the mountains and just enough rain to feel it's touch but not enough to feel like your hair was getting wet, just damp from the gentle drizzle. The Beaver Clan (first grade) helped me feed the horses, filling the grain buckets and handing them out to each horse. We observed the silent language of the horse. Hart, the lead horse, pinned his ears and with this one swift gesture he told the rest of his herd to stay back while he ate and we all *listened... Boundaries*. Then we sat in silence, watching, listening to the horses chew their food. Crunch, crunch, crunch... Sitting on the other side of the fence we began chatting quietly about how incredible it is that horses chew up to 40,000 times a day! After some time, the Beaver Clan thanked me and the horses, and we began to talk about what we would be doing for our Animal Arts class that afternoon as we walked back towards the red Yome to start their school work. Last Thursday we spent the afternoon lying in the grass observing our new baby chicks as they foraged on a sunny day while we protected them, building a fence with our legs and bodies. We had so much fun talking about how big they look when we lay down and look up at them and how different the perspective is when we make ourselves as small as they are. Each child took a turn sharing what they loved about each baby chick. Some were silly, some were so tender with their comments — admiring their beautiful feathers, beaks, and wings... Today, I told the Beaver Clan, we will be learning about our new Livestock Guardians, two sister Great Pyrenees puppies, Virago Pearl and Lyra, who just moved to the Sanctuary to protect the horses, sheep, chickens, bees and bunnies. I can't wait for today's class.

At the foot of Young Pisgah Ridge is 90 acres, a Heart-Moving place called Sacred Mountain Sanctuary where a circle of individuals are dedicated to the recognition, cultivation and preservation of sacred connection with self, others and the natural world. Our mission is to provide an environment and immersive experiences that awaken one's being to the sacred nature of all things. Here we have a kindergarten and four learning circles up to eighth grade (High School starting in the fall, 2017). Beyond the four Yomes, which are home to the grades children's learning circles, there is a field that is a couple of acres, surrounded by forest. The field is oblong in shape and is home to horses, sheep, chickens, bees, bunnies, two livestock guardian dogs, and a garden. This is Rumi's Field. The horses live on an outer ring that makes a completed kind-of circle; there is an outer fence and an inner fence that spans anywhere from 12 to 20 feet apart in width, which creates a track system, called a Paradise Paddock that our horses live on. This system allows the horses to always be moving and grazing on hay, this mimics their life grazing in the wild, before we domesticated them and put them on highly cultivated grass fields. They travel along this track all day, moving and eating at different hay 'stations', spending time in the shade of trees or under one of their shelters or down at the trickling creek that carries the overflow from our delicious spring, known as Moira's Well. Inside the horse track live the sheep, where they are rotated through to graze, giving other pastures a rest, to re-seed and grow again. Inside the sheep pasture will be a garden and a beautiful structure that provides shelter for our bunnies and for our Animal Arts classes. Here in the very center we will also have bees and a garden. It is also where our two guardian dogs live. Describing this gives me chills and brings tears to my eyes thinking about the fact that this exists and in some cases is currently being born into existence — the bunny habitat is almost finished and the bees are moving to the center over the next few weeks. I can hardly believe that I am a part of co-creating this experience that is a part of the children's daily education. Every morning the children of The Learning Village tend one of the

aspects of the animals and land, completing their morning chores. Each morning of the week a class will feed the horses, next day the bunnies, the chickens, the sheep, etc. They also rotate caring for the spring and the land or gardens. In the afternoon I have the privilege of teaching Animal Arts classes to each learning circle.

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase “each other” doesn’t make any sense.”¹

~Rumi

I’m not entirely sure I have a full understanding of how I came to be where I am doing what I’m doing but somehow I was offered an opportunity to start an Animal Program for a small homeschool cooperative. A door opened for me to do something that rang a bell so loud and so clear that not even my greatest fears or doubts could have stopped me from following this path. No obstacle was too big... and still isn’t. The program thrives and lives within me and on the land and within the children in ways that I could never have imagined. I am brought to my knees day and night with a deep and overwhelming understanding that this unfolding was beyond myself. I can feel something so deep within me acknowledging a truth so awesome, a knowing that this is right where I am supposed to be. I know I dreamt of this possibility when I was a child, when everything was possible, before so many told me that so many things were impossible. It’s just not true. Everything is possible, the dreams you dreamt of as a child, the things you loved the most should and can be a part of your daily life, unfractured, whole and complete. The seeds of dreams that were planted in your youngest imaginations are real and they should never be ignored.

When I began this journey two years ago to start an Animal Program for The Learning Village, I knew with a deep soul quivering knowing that this was ‘it’, the big ‘IT’. So, here I am co-creating an Animal Arts program for children, teaching Equine Forest Yoga and managing a Community Supported Horsemanship program for those who want to ‘own’ a horse in community, in Sanctuary, in an environment that holds sacred every living thing and holds sacred every living moment... the experience of riding a horse through the woods is a spiritual experience, sitting in a field watching sheep graze brings a smile to your face, finding eggs every morning brings excitement and anticipation of a daily gift, holding a bunny calms your nervous system, hearing the humming of bees is enlivening, the dogs bring joy to your heart and digging in the dirt makes you feel real, watching things grow and die and grow again. I had no idea that my path, my deepest work would be to create an Animal Arts Curriculum, to birth it into being, to share it, live it and literally never put it down. This is my life, my love, my passion. It is deeply humbling work.

It is so hard to translate the real life Animal Arts curriculum that occurs every day. The moments when a child walks up to a horse in the field all by themselves or when a child holds a newborn bunny for the first time, or when they can not spend enough time with baby chickens because they love them ever so much. I consider these moments the real curriculum.

¹ Jhalaluddin Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997), 36.

Each class does have scaffolding, a structure — little mini- lessons that are about 10 to 25 minutes. Every class, even my riding lessons and equine yoga classes open with this verse:

“I am here in this time and place
The Earth is below me the Sky is above me
Air, Fire, Water and Earth surround me
I am rooted in the Earth
I reach through the Stars
I come to my center
Within me Earth and Sky entwine.”²

We begin our classes with topics that teach us about the animals, giving us a deeper understanding of how they ‘work’ anatomically and how they think, why they live in herds or dens or hives. We learn about teeth, digestive systems, diet, basic needs, animal psychology, anatomy, safety, husbandry, we polish tack, and mend structures. These lessons are short, 10 to 25 minutes based on the age/grade of the children. After the mini-lesson we may spend time Beholding the animal, be it bee, bunny, sheep, horse or dog, making our own observations about what we’ve just learned. Then we have the opportunity to ride a horse or care for the animals, administering medicine if needed or completing a chore, filling water troughs, mucking manure or grooming the animals. This is the ‘academic’ work. Most importantly, each class teaches us how we can relate to the animals and connect with them, approaching the animal’s boundaries with reverence and respect, love and understanding. We learn the silent language of the animal and they in turn learn ours, building a deep inter-species community through daily communion.

“Human to Animal Communion is unfailingly a bridge to our reunion with Earth Soul. Within the human-to-animal communion here, lies the purest return to the totality of our Belonging.”³

Sigh, I am here in this time and place...

“All the birds and creatures are unutterably themselves. Everything is waiting for you.”⁴

Joy Kennedy lives and works at Sacred Mountain Sanctuary where she stewards the Animal Program for The Learning Village, teaches Animal Arts classes, gives private horsemanship experiences for all ages, teaches Equine Forest Yoga, manages a Community Supported Horsemanship program and offers guided trail rides. She is mother to Henry and wife to Ben.

² quote from contemporary astrologer Diotima Mantinea, who wrote this verse for guided meditations and is aware of the fact that I use it daily with my classes.

³ quote from Septimbor Lim, Founder of The Learning Village at Sacred Mountain Sanctuary.

⁴ David Whyte, *Everything is Waiting for You* (Langley, Washington, Many Rivers Company, 2006).

Children, Ecology and Spirituality

by
Betsy Thigpen

Beginning

I will celebrate my 80th birthday in October of this year. So what possible rationale could I have devised for enrolling in the program, *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature*, with not only a two-year commitment of time, but high expectations for new learning and even personal transformation? How could I, at my age, possibly expect to meaningfully contribute to a shared experience with a group of otherwise young, highly intelligent, creative, and visionary professionals committed to resurrecting the natural world as a critical necessity in the lives of children?

I continue to experience delightful amusement with my decision to participate in the Inner Life program at my age. I chuckle and even laugh outright at the thought of enrolling in a two-year program at age 78. Surely this must be one of the most humorously, optimistic ventures one could embark on at this time of life. But here I am near the completion of the program and, indeed, so grateful for the experiences, learning, and growth that have focused, changed and inspired me in so many ways.

Throughout these two years and participation in *The Inner Life of the Child in Nature*, my focus has been consistent with my professional life and work to enhance the lives of young children. During the last ten years of my professional career, I specifically worked out of a wonderful “ah ha” moment of inspiration that occurred in 2003: **We need to reconnect children with the natural world.** The ah ha moment led to a one-year stint as a Visiting Scholar at The Natural Learning Initiative in the School of Design at NC State University and a resulting briefing paper, *Head Start Growth and Readiness in the Outdoor World (HS-GROW): Linking Research to Practice*.¹ The briefing paper proposed “to set in motion in the national Head Start community adoption of a new **HS-GROW** child development paradigm that would enhance the development of young children in all developmental domains as set forth in The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes”² by moving learning and development outdoors in well-designed, natural learning environments. Following the personal awakening to the need to reconnect children to nature, I spent the final 10 years of my professional career providing training and technical assistance to Head Start and other early childhood teachers and child care providers with the goal of shifting their paradigms of classroom learning and development from indoors to outdoors.

My two-year involvement in the Inner Life program has been concurrent with an opportunity to serve as Chair of the Children’s Ministry Committee at my church, Umstead Park United Church of Christ (UPUCC), thereby providing me with 60+ easily available “subjects” to learn with and several acres of beautiful, wood-

¹ Nilda Cosco, Betsy Thigpen, Robin Moore, Marce O’Brien, and Colleen Mendel, *Head Start Growth and Readiness in the Outdoor World (HS-GROW): Linking Research to Practice* (Washington, DC: Head Start Bureau, 2004), 1.

² *The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes* (Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Head Start Bureau 2003).

ed, natural land adjoining the church property that provided an ideal “lab” setting for experimentation. In addition, the church sits next to Umstead State Park, which provides even greater potential for children and parents to interact and commune with the natural world.

So as our 2015-17 class began to articulate individual, specific practices for our two-year period, I, not surprisingly, chose a practice focused on the learning and development of young children. I articulated my specific goal and practice as follows:

To identify ways to communicate and share with children the joy, awe, beauty, and surprises of the natural world and concretely conceptualize practices for children to experience Earth as Sacred Community in a church or religious learning environment.

As I worked over the months to ponder and eventually began to operationalize my goal and practice, I was significantly influenced by the wisdom of the Inner Life faculty, their recommended readings, discussions, direct experiences with the 2015-17 participants, as well as my own personal reflections during this time.

I continue to reflect on the rich experience at The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World and acknowledge my indebtedness to the *Inner Life of the Child in Nature* program for key, thought-provoking ideas and concepts that have now settled and become a natural part of my own thinking, being and seeing related to children’s development and learning. Following are some of these expanded thoughts as well as a bit of new and extended learning. In my conclusion, I will share how this enhanced learning has been used to provide specific opportunities for children at UPUCC to reconnect with nature and experience *Earth as Sacred Community*.

Thomas Berry

Thomas Berry, who assumed numerous life roles as monk, scholar, priest, mystic, cultural historian, shaman, and storyteller, was one of the key visionaries for The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. The Center holds programs at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, a beautiful wooded and primarily undeveloped expanse of land that offers its visitors unlimited opportunities for direct contact and interaction with the natural world. Exploring that land has brought fresh and deep meaning to Berry’s writings, especially as I focus on religious education for children and children’s spiritual development in general.

Berry’s inspiration and involvement in the creation of The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is reflected in the Center’s mission, “*to bring into vision a new relationship between the inner life of the child and the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the universe.*”³ Berry recognized and confessed that “my generation has been an autistic generation in its inability to establish any intimate rapport with the natural world.” He proposes that “our present need is to know just how to move out of this alienation of the human into a more viable mode of presence to the natural world.”⁴

We learn through multiple sources that Berry’s strong commitment and encouragement to love, care for, and preserve natural environments was influenced by his deep and abiding sense of the sacred as it relates

³ Carolyn W. Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 94.

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 79.

to the natural world. Wayne Teasdale in his book, *The Mystic Heart*, reflects on Berry's observations of "how much our understanding of God is based on our experience of the natural world."⁵ Teasdale who knew Berry well, writes that "Tom Berry calls the aesthetic and spiritual values of the natural world modes of divine presence."⁶ Berry says that "the natural world is not simply a usable thing, not an inert mode of being awaiting its destiny to be manipulated by the divine or exploited by the human."⁷ And he emphatically states that "we should be clear about what happens when we destroy modes of divine presence."⁸

In his book, *The Sacred Universe*, Berry explores divine presence and ecology not only in traditional western religion, but using his extensive study and knowledge of major world religions, religion in the global human community as well. Berry lays out a bold and clear vision for all 21st century religions, which he calls "*an ecologically sensitive spirituality*."

*We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world, from a spirituality of the divine as revealed in written scriptures to a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the visible world about us, from a spirituality concerned with justice only for humans to a spirituality of justice for the devastated Earth community, from the spirituality of the prophet to the spirituality of the shaman.*⁹

This new spirituality, Berry believes, "will need the guidance of the prophet, the priest, the saint, the yogi, the Buddhist monk, the Chinese sage, the Greek philosopher, and the modern scientist."¹⁰

He says, "We now have a new understanding of the universe, how it came into being and the sequence of transformations through which it has passed. This new story of the universe is now needed as our sacred story."¹¹

In addition to Berry's recognition of the divine in the natural world, the need for a new sacred story of the universe, a new spirituality that will result in a strong commitment to the care and preservation of the earth, he had strong opinions and recommendations regarding the education of young children and its role in creating "*an ecologically sensitive spirituality*" for society. In addressing these issues in his book, *The Great Work*, Berry concurs with Montessori that "only when the child is able to identify its own center with the center of the universe does education really begin."¹² In discussions with Carolyn Toben, Berry further reiterated that, "the long-term survival of our children will actually depend on a new relationship between the natural and the human worlds."¹³

⁵ Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart, Discovering A Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 195.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1998), 132.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 133.

¹⁰ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 135.

¹¹ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 135.

¹² Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 16.

¹³ Carolyn W. Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*, 94.

Berry's deep love and hope for 21st century children, all children, human and otherwise, is reflected in the dedication of his book, *The Great Work*.

To the children
To all the children
To the children who swim beneath
The waves of the sea, to those who live in
The soils of the Earth, to the children of the flowers
In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to
All those children who roam over the land
And the winged ones who fly with the winds,
To the human children too, that all the children
May go together into the future in the full
Diversity of their regional communities.¹⁴

Carolyn Toben

Carolyn Toben, founder of The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, reflects on personal conversations with Thomas Berry regarding his ideas on children, ecology, and spirituality in her book, *Recovering A Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*. She shares that on one occasion after giving Berry an update on the Center's mission and progress, he said, "Children need this deep personal connection with the natural world, first in their early years. If we observe them closely, we can see how they are instinctively attracted to profound experiences of the natural world... Out of these experiences they come to know something of the world which becomes the basis for their thinking... Their minds begin to make relationships. They need both the physical and the psychic-spiritual; the earth gives them both."¹⁵

Carolyn shared with Berry her observations and concerns that today's children are not typically experiencing or developing close and intimate relationships with the natural world. She says Berry's response was, "Children need to develop within a whole cosmology of the sun, moon, stars; they need to experience mystical moments of dawn and sunset. They need to awaken to a world to relate to as a communion of subjects, not to use as a collection of objects."¹⁶

Since 2012, The Center has been "guided by a Council of Educators as the working embodiment of its mission to recover the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature through its publications, educator retreats, consulting, and programs for children and schools."¹⁷

Additional Thoughts and Inner Life Influences on Children's Spiritual Development

Continuing to identify and reflect on specific influences of my two-year experience at the Center, and as I envision practices for children that will enhance their experiences of Earth as Sacred Community, I want to

¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵ Carolyn W. Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*, 96.

¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹⁷ <http://www.beholdnature.org/mission.php>

call attention to the following additional thought-provoking ideas and concepts now embedded as a natural part of my own thinking, being and seeing related to children's development and learning.

Clay Lerner's, *Opening Forgotten Sanctuaries: Recognizing Education as Sacred Encounter*, has probably elicited more audible amens from me than any book I have ever read! I so agree with his statement that "generations ago, we accepted certain assumptions about knowledge and learning that artificially contextualized the relationship between educators and children, and those assumptions have continued governing pedagogy ever since."¹⁸ Unfortunately, religious education has followed suit with the larger education community.

Lerner clearly examines and shines a bold light on so many issues and concepts, it is impossible to do justice to even the naming of them here, much less their meaning. They include institutional blindness, systemic malfunctioning, teacher-child relationships, inappropriate standardized testing, our lack of sacred connection to the Natural World, and a continuing failure to recognize children as "baskets of treasures" before and during their educational journey. He clearly questions our definitions of educational success and calls attention to the unhealthy, "discordant, highly competitive, ego-stroking, psychologically and socially dysfunctional commodification of the learning process."¹⁹

Truly Lerner opened many of my own forgotten sanctuaries, as well as providing a vision that we might do the same for children and future educators. He offers appropriate and promising pedagogical recommendations that we can only hope will influence and inform 21st century education for our children.

Two additional influences on my thinking and practices during this two year period are Colette Segalla's research described in her book, *I Am You, You Are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality, and the Natural World in Childhood* and Robert Sardello's writings on *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness*. While Segalla's writings inform my understanding of children's spirituality, Sardello has strengthened my personal "currents of Silence" and spiritual growth.²⁰

Segalla expanded my understanding, shifted my perspectives, and raised my consciousness regarding the early development of self and spirituality. In her book, she explores "ways in which spirituality contributes to the development of a sense of self in children"²¹ and through her unique research explores how "connection to the earth nurtures the spiritual life of the child."²²

Sardello introduces Silence as an ancient "ever-faithful companion-presence."²³ He encourages us to personally invite and cultivate an inward Silence of solitude that "meets up with the great Silence of Cosmic Wisdom."²⁴ He reminds us that we "experience Silence in the midst of the natural world."²⁵

¹⁸ Clay Lerner, *Opening Forgotten Sanctuaries: Recognizing Education As Sacred Encounter* (Greensboro, NC: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, 2015), ii.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰ Ibid., 37.

²¹ Colette Segalla, *I Am You, You Are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality, and the Natural World in Childhood* (Greensboro, NC: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, 2015), xii.

²² Ibid., 168.

²³ Robert Sardello, *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press, 2008), 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁵ Ibid., 31.

And so, I near the end of my Inner Life experience. I am a different person, a more grounded person, certainly a more informed person. And the inspiration of the 2003 ah ha moment that children need to be reconnected with the natural world remains and is even stronger as it enlarges my vision for a future that will significantly improve the lives of children.

Breathing Life Into My Practice

To identify ways to communicate and share with children the joy, awe, beauty, and surprises of the natural world and concretely conceptualize practices for children to experience Earth as Sacred Community in a church or religious learning environment.

My church, Umstead Park United Church of Christ, and most especially the church's minister, Doug Long, has not only been supportive of my efforts to provide opportunities for UPUCC children to experience Earth as Sacred Community, but has collectively embraced and lived out that vision these past two years. In 2015, our minister and the Children's Ministry Committee focused three Sunday morning worship services on children and nature. Children were not only highly visible in the services, but assumed leadership in providing bulletins as congregants entered, reading liturgy and scripture, and passing offering baskets. Sitting on the floor surrounded by the children, our minister delivered sermons for those three Sundays on *God Made a World of Wonder*, *The Miracle of Water*, and *The Truth of Trees*. Following each of the Sunday worship services, children and their parents enjoyed lunch and earth walk adventures at Umstead State Park.

Last Fall children planted daffodil bulbs around a serviceberry tree planted earlier in memory of a well-loved member of the church. Children have regularly monitored the area for signs of growth, green, and flowering. Each child insists that he/she knows just which daffodil is a result of their planted bulb.

Several months ago, a request was made to congregants for a large number of tree cookies to create an outdoor classroom for children in the wooded area adjacent to the church. The request was quickly filled and children helped plan and organize the tree cookies to create a special meeting space for weekly children's church activities.

Needless to say, the future promises even more exciting opportunities for children at UPUCC to experience *Earth as Sacred Community*. An example was the beautiful celebration of Earth Day at the worship service this past Sunday. It began with a meditation written by a UPUCC member, Eleanor Smith. Thanks to Eleanor for allowing me to share it here.

Sanctuary

Moss-soft paths lead
to a place of rest,
wooden seat, fallen tree.
Sit, be silent, be still.

Sweet notes soar, singer-birdsong,
music falls in cascading harmonies.

Golden light, sun-flames, flickers;

Green fire glows through transparent leaves.

Turning leaf-pages rustle,
wind-psalms-sound rise
as a wave, then still,
rise, and
still.

Many-layered murmurs,
breath-prayer-spirit braided,
merge and fade to a hush...
a sigh

Amen

What a great contribution Umstead Park United Church of Christ is making to provide children opportunities to experience *Earth as Sacred Community* and how promising that this church community echoes Thomas Berry's words:

It takes a universe to make a child
Both in outer form and inner spirit
It takes a universe to fulfill a child
And the first obligation of each generation
Is to bring the two together.²⁶

Betsy Thigpen has directed both Head Start and Smart Start programs. She has provided training for early education programs across the country, and during the last 10 years of her career focused primarily on training to transition traditional playgrounds to natural learning environments and to move learning and development from indoors to outdoors.

²⁶ Carolyn W. Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*, 102.

I Stop to Smell the Roses

by
Stephanie Nixon

I stop to smell the roses.
I pull over and listen to the Spring Peepers.
I hold up traffic to watch a rainbow.
I wander from the path to feel the moss
and taste the Violets..

But it is not enough...

I want a world where our senses are drenched in the earth's beauty without pause.
A world where the forest is not an escape but our home.
Where children are born, welcomed by the scent of local flora,
raised under the stars,
and grow with the waxing moon.

I sense it is coming.

We are remembering..
we are not here to keep doing;
the human race is not a race.

We are awakening..
listening to the wisdom of the trees.
Lying our weary hearts upon the Earth.

Magic is returning to this place.

Stephanie Nixon has been a teacher for twelve years, working with children from 6 weeks old to 12 years old. Stephanie is a kindergarten assistant at Rainbow Community School while beginning to work on her dream of creating a community early childhood support center for families in the Asheville, NC, area. Her hobbies include reading, learning plant medicine, and hiking and camping with her 3 children.

Programs for Children and Families

To register or reserve dates for our children's programs go to
<http://www.beholdnature.org/programsforchildren.php>



Awakening to Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades K-5, maximum 24 children

Cost: \$250 per class (bring a bag lunch)

The Center's "Awakening to Nature" programs are intended to foster reverence for the natural world, develop the inner capacity to attend to the world around you, and create a deep, personal connection with nature. The programs bring the inner lives of children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world.

"Awakening to Nature" programs begin in a circle where children are invited to slow down and make themselves at home in nature. Guided earth walks follow, led by experienced Earth Guides, with groups of 8 children. The small size of the group and the "beholding" practices of the Center enable the children to enter into a living and loving relationship with the natural world. Throughout the changing seasons, children are invited to enter into silence and experience the fullness of each moment – to take in the sounds, the smells, the feel of the air, the colors and movements of the world around them.

Children then return to the circle where they enjoy a bag lunch together. The day ends with a heartwarming circle of reflection. The rhythm of the day enables the children to assimilate their experiences and to enter into community together as they share what touched them about the day.

We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades Kindergarten-5.

We especially like to work with schools year after year so that the children can have sustained and meaningful connections with the natural world over time. From the returning children who have experienced our program over the course of several years, we have learned how one day spent in our program has lived in their memories and in their hearts for a whole year in between visits. They remember the peaceful sounds of the Native American Flute, the relationships with various creatures that they have encountered, the beauty of nature, and our practices, especially our Behold practice. We have also learned how much the children appreciate being in an atmosphere of peace and quiet.

Empathetic Listening

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades 4-8 (maximum 24 children)

Cost: \$250 per class (bring a bag lunch)

Our children live in a fast-paced, competitive and high-tech world, in a culture where continuous partial attention and multi-tasking are becoming the norm. Are we losing our ability to truly listen to each other? Do we carry an attitude of respect that allows us to listen to the meaning and feeling that come through another's words?

The “Empathetic Listening” program engages children in a practice of deep listening to each other and to the natural world. The program begins with an introduction to empathetic listening, a way of listening that creates mutual understanding, trust and respect. Can we learn to listen without judgement? Can we listen without interrupting? Can we reflect back what we think we have heard? Can we sense the feelings behind the words? These are some of the practices that children have an opportunity to explore together in pre-selected pairs.

During the second half of the program, the children are invited to listen deeply to the natural world during a solo writing time in their own special sit spot within a beautiful earth sanctuary. They are invited to become still, to deeply notice the place where they are sitting. What makes this particular landscape special and unique? What are you hearing in your special place? What might nature reveal to you? In the rare experience of silence, a voice begins to emerge, their own, inspired by the wonders of nature. Our highly experienced staff members carry an attitude of deep respect for all life. We seek always to embody new ways of listening to nature and to each other, ways that are respectful, reverential and relational.

The Poetry of Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades 6 – 12 (maximum 24 children)

Cost: \$250 per class (bring a bag lunch)

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

~ Mary Oliver

Poetry is a language of deep seeing that reveals dimensions of the world inaccessible to discursive thought, and so it is to poetry that we turn for our programs for middle school and high school students. Our Poetry of Nature program is a passage through three landscapes in the natural world where students listen to a poem, are asked to be fully present to the place, the moment and the feelings and images that arise within them. At each site, students are invited to find a solo spot, enter into a practice of presence, and record their inner experiences through guided writing practices. The poems and landscapes are carefully chosen to resonate with one another. The day culminates in a poetry reading after lunch where each contribution is deeply connected to the student's experience in nature and to his/her inner life. The students read poems, ask questions, and share reflections on the day and on their sense of belonging to the natural world. This program taps a deep wellspring within young adults that rarely is accessed at school.

Presence to Living Earth in Autumn

*“This earth we are riding keeps trying to tell us something
with its continuous scripture of leaves.”*

—William Stafford



Date: Sunday, October 1, 2017

Time: 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Place: The Treehouse, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$50

Register online at <http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth.php>

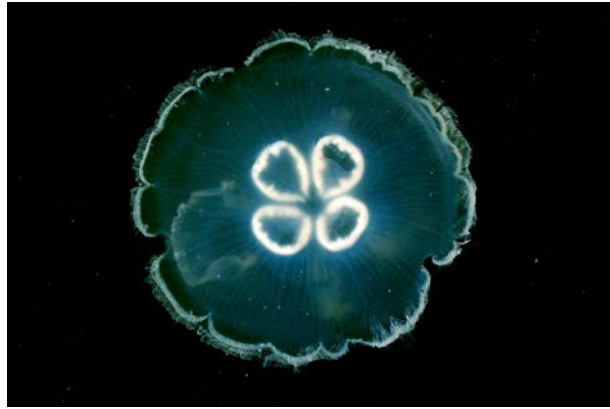
Led by Margery Knott and Marnie Weigel

Every moment is change. Earth is a continuously emerging story. During this season of autumn — as exuberant ripening transitions into a gentle letting-go to prepare for what will come — we will listen for what Earth has to tell us. Through the sharing of poetry, solo time in Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, and meditative making with burlap, yarn and gifts from the earth, we will enter into contemplation and explore how the season is speaking to us at this moment in our lives.

Margery Knott is a weaver and teacher of all ages from kindergarten to college, who recently moved to Greensboro after raising llamas in the woods of Nelson County, VA. Margery has led workshops in ecotheology and fiber arts, including weaving. In 2003, delicious serendipity led her to several amazing years of study with Matthew Fox’s University of Creation Spirituality.

Marnie Weigel is an eco-contemplative artist who enjoys knitting, making pottery, journals, and jewelry. Her creations are inspired by her reflections in silence and beholding in the natural world. Marnie received a BA in Environmental Studies from Warren Wilson College in the beautiful Swannanoa Valley in Western, North Carolina in 1995 and an AAS in Professional Crafts: Clay from Haywood Community College in 2000.

An Evening with Andreas Weber



Date: October 25, 2017
Time: 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm
Place: Porter Byrum Welcome Center
Wake Forest University
1834 Wake Forest Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27106

The event is free, but registration is required at <http://divinity.wfu.edu/forms/rsvp-matter-desire/>

Andreas Weber asks a radical and challenging question: Could it be that our planet is not suffering primarily from a financial crisis, or even an ecological one, but from a critical lack of love? In speaking of love and of eroticism, Weber is not referring to sentimental feelings, but to a new basis for ontology itself, based on a mix of cutting-edge biological findings and philosophical insights.

A German biologist and eco-philosopher, Weber delves deeply into the continuity and connections between our bodies and those of all living beings. In this talk he will discuss his new book *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*. Written in the tradition of John Muir and Rachel Carson, the book weaves personal narrative and lyrical descriptions with a discussion of ecology and psychology as part of Weber's larger project of developing a "biopoetics."

Andreas Weber is a Berlin-based philosopher, biologist, and writer. He holds degrees in marine biology and cultural studies, and has collaborated with brain researcher and philosopher Francisco Varela. His books in English include: *Enlivenment: Towards a Fundamental Shift in the Concepts of Nature, Culture and Politics* (2013); *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science* (2016); and *Biopoetics: Towards an Existential Ecology* (2016).

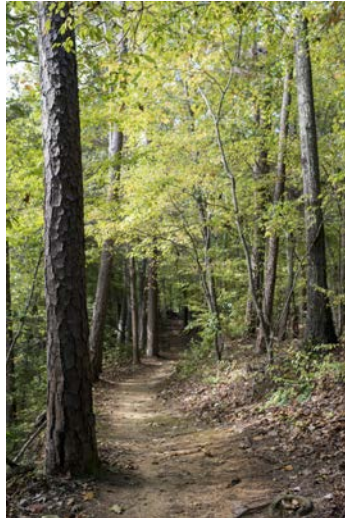
There will be a book signing following the lecture.

This lecture is co-sponsored by the Food, Health, and Ecological Well-Being Program at the School of Divinity and Wake Forest University's Center for Energy, Environment and Sustainability, the Wake Forest Humanities Institute, and The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. It has been made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice

*“The destiny of the children and the planet is going to depend on us
to respond to their deeper mode of being.”*

~ Thomas Berry



The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program, class of 2017-2019

A two-year co-research program for educators, therapists, parents, naturalists, health care providers and others with children and young adults in their care.

From 2000-2009, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World worked closely with ecotheologian Thomas Berry to re-imagine the child’s relationship with the natural world, guided by his deep wisdom and understanding that “only a sense of the sacred will save us.”

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program unfolds over the course of two years. In the first year, we focus on “Presence” – on the cultivation of inner capacities in children, young adults and ourselves that bring us into a bond of intimacy with the natural world. In the second year, we focus on “Practice” – on new ways of being and working in the world.

We create a meaningful context for our programs by paying close attention to the rhythm of the day. Retreats begin with a moment of silence intended to quiet the mind and create a field of receptivity for the group. Every retreat includes solo time in the natural world, time for reflection and sharing, the fellowship of shared meals at lunch, and presentations related to the theme at hand.

The program calls for deep inner work on the part of participants as well as a commitment to attend every retreat during the first year of the program. Between retreats, participants engage in a weekly practice of presence to the natural world and reflective engagement with selected readings.

Dates: Day Retreats will be held from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm on Saturday, November 18, 2017, February 10, 2018 and April 7, 2018 and on Tuesday/Wednesday, June 26-27, 2018. The second year includes informal gatherings on Sunday, October 1, 2018 (2:00-5:00 pm) and Sunday, February 10, 2019 (10:00 am - 3:00 pm), culminating in a graduation retreat on Sunday, June 23, 2019 from 2:00 – 8:00 pm.

Cost: \$750 for the two-year program (includes materials, lunch and individual consultations).

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, 1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd, Whitsett, NC.

Faculty

Director, **Peggy Whalen-Levitt**, has been with the Center since its beginnings in 2000. Working closely with Center Founder Carolyn Toben and cultural historian Thomas Berry, Peggy has been deeply engaged in the formation of a work for adults and children, based in intuitive, imaginal and contemplative ways of knowing, that recovers the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature. She holds a Ph.D. in Language in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, where she co-created a graduate Course of Study in Childhood Imagination. She has written widely on aesthetic communication in childhood and is the editor of *Chrysalis*, the Center journal, and *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*, a Chrysalis reader. Peggy coordinates the “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program.”

Director of Children’s Programs, **Sandy Bisdee**, completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. A born naturalist and Native American flute player, Sandy has developed the Center’s eco-contemplative practices for children since 2005. She completed her certification in the North Carolina Environmental Education Certification Program in 2009. Sandy brings to her work a lifetime of loving children and of loving the earth and of finding ways to bring the two together!

Andrew Levitt holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. Andrew performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years and then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. Andrew co-created a performance piece, “The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry” for the Thomas Berry Centennial in 2014 and is the author of *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante’s Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry*, published by the Center in the Fall of 2015. As Dr. Merryandrew, he currently works as a clown doctor in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, NC.

Colette Segalla holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in California and is a practicing therapist in Raleigh, NC. Before returning to graduate school, Colette was an AMI certified Montessori teacher in a lower elementary classroom of six-to-nine year old children. The work of Steiner and Montessori has contributed to her current Jungian-based exploration of children’s spirituality and how a relationship with the natural world contributes to the child’s spiritual development. Colette is the author of *I am You, You are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality, and the Natural World in Childhood*, published by the Center in the Fall of 2015.

To read more about the program and download an application go to <http://www.beholdnature.org/ilcn.php>
Applications are reviewed on a rolling admissions basis



Please consider becoming a Friend of the Center by making a donation today. All Friends of the Center receive two issues of our newsletter, *Chrysalis*, per year. To donate online, go to our website at www.beholdnature.org or send your check, payable to CEINW, to:

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We deeply appreciate your support of our work!

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