

Chrysalis

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“Earth Elder Thomas Berry regularly reminded us that children must understand that their home is not the industrial world but the world of ‘woodlands and meadows and flowers and birds and mountains and valleys and streams and stars.’ Thomas counseled us that children must also be enabled to directly experience the Universe. In fact, he believed the child is our guide to how the Universe ought to be experienced by *all* of us.

Caring for the soul of children is one of the keystones of responding, in both a practical and spiritual way, to our current ecological crises.”¹

~ Bill Plotkin, “Care of the Soul of the World”

Dear Reader,

Thomas Berry would agree. When writing *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*, Thomas began with a soul experience from his childhood of a meadow across the creek from his new home:

The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and woodlands in the distance and the clouds in a clear sky. It was not something conscious that happened just then. I went on about my life as any young person might do.

Perhaps it was not simply this moment that made such a deep impression upon me. Perhaps it was a sensitivity that was developed throughout my childhood. Yet 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 to which I have given my efforts, 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.²

This “magic moment” was a moment of mystical rapport, a moment of communion, a moment of affection for all Thomas experienced around him. It was a soul moment, “not something conscious.” Intimate moments such as these, Thomas would seem to be saying, are the *primary* touchstones for our basic life attitude.

¹ Plotkin, Bill. “Care of the Soul of the World.” *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Ed. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (Point Reyes, CA: Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 196.

² Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 12-13.



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Thomas also speaks here of “the sensitivity that was developed throughout (his) childhood” and gives us a feeling for the interior dimension of his meadow experience that was so foundational to his later thinking and action. This deep connection between childhood soul experiences with the natural world and later thinking and action is what leads Bill Plotkin to say, “caring for the soul of children is one of the keystones of responding...to our current ecological crises.”

The soul can lose touch with itself, however, in the ordinary, external communications of the world, especially for children today. Moments like Thomas’s “magic moment” in the meadow allow the child’s soul to expand and become inwardly felt and known. Such moments strengthen the child’s capacity for presence to the natural world and cultivate the kind of sensitivity that Thomas Berry is referring to. They become openings through which the soul of the child experiences itself as belonging to a greater whole.

Thomas spoke of the importance of these inner experiences in his later years:

... one must first acquire a capacity for interior presence to oneself. Through contemplation one sinks deeply into the subjectivity of one’s own being to deepen one’s personal sacred center. This becomes the deepening of the capacity for communion with all things. Through this practice we acknowledge our relationship to the whole of which we are a part; we acknowledge that we are integral with the universe. We then begin to see, to awaken to the universe in all its magnificent differentiation and a new consciousness comes with an understanding of the depth and diversity of things. We become truly present to other modes of being.³

One must first acquire a capacity for interior presence to oneself ... This becomes the deepening of the capacity for communion with all things.

If we are truthful with ourselves, we know that we rarely begin there with children in our culture today. We rarely begin with the soul of the child and ask how we might nurture and deepen the child’s innate capacity for communion with all things.

³ Toben, Carolyn. *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*. (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 60-61.

As a way of opening up a conversation with the wider community, the Center sponsored a day retreat on March 1, 2014 entitled “Toward Wholeness: Caring for the Soul of the Child.” Our intention was to bring participants into the flow of soul-centered ways of working with children and young adults through presentations by master practitioners. Now, in this issue of *Chrysalis*, we bring you the proceedings of this retreat:

“The Soul Development of the Child in Nature” (Colette Segalla)

“Caring for the Soul of the Child in Nature” (Sandy Bisdee)

“Caring for the Soul of the Child at Home” (Marie Nordgren)

“Caring for the Soul of the Child in Illness” (Andrew Levitt)

The retreat was ensouled after lunch by Jennie Walker Brunner, who lifted our voices in song through “Caring for the Soul of the Child in Song.”

We invite you to join us now in this experience. We hope you will feel, as I believe we all felt that day, the enlivening nature of these soul-centered ways of working with children and young adults. Ways that awaken a unitive consciousness within the child, that subtle faculty of soul that unifies and moves the child to a place of deeper wholeness and communion with the world. Ways that open children to life and to finding their place within the larger evolutionary process – an authentic place that comes from a *feeling* for what is real and worthwhile in life.

With warm spring greetings,

Peggy Whalen-Levitt

Peggy Whalen-Levitt
Director



“My star meets your star and I am a We star”

The Soul Development of the Child in Nature

by

Colette Segalla

(Colette Segalla holds a PhD in clinical psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in California. From a depth-psychological perspective, her dissertation investigates how spirituality and its embeddedness in nature contributes to the development of a sense of self in children. Before returning to graduate school, Colette was an AMI certified Montessori teacher in a lower elementary classroom of six to nine-year-old children. Colette completed the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program and serves on the Educator Council of the Center. She is currently a therapist at LePage Associates in Durham.)



I'm very happy to be here with you this morning to talk about the soul development of the child in nature.

I'd like to start out by exploring your experience connecting with the natural world. I don't mean *thinking* about your connection to nature. I'm talking about having an *experienced* connection with the natural world. For some of you it might be very easy to connect right now, in this moment, within yourself, to an experience you've had when you felt the connection – you felt the wonder and joy of being connected to the earth. But for others, you might need a moment to get in touch with an experience of connecting with the natural world. So I'm going to guide you for just a few moments in connecting to an experience you've had.

First, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes. Don't worry; everyone else's eyes will be closed, too. So close your eyes and take a few nice, deep breaths. Give all of the cells of your body some nice, fresh oxygen. Let's shift focus from thoughts, evaluations, judgments, planning, even thinking about a time you felt connected to the earth. We're going to shift our focus from all of that mental activity into the body. Your body. It's time, as Thomas Berry would say, to "come home to yourself."

Just do a quiet scan of your body and see what you feel. Are you tense? Are your muscles being held tight somewhere – your neck, your shoulders, your stomach? Just see if you can relax those places and feel a change

in your level of relaxation in this moment, almost as if you are going to drop off to sleep. This moment is an opportunity to come home to yourself.

Continue to breath gently as you allow a memory to present itself to you...a time as a child when you felt a connection with the natural world. It can be anything, even something very simple . . . the smell of a fragrant flower, the taste of sweet fruit, the soothing touch of a gentle wind on your cheek, maybe the feel of your body immersed in the ocean . . . it can be a sensation, an image, a story, maybe a revelation of some kind. Relax into the bodily memory of connecting to the natural world. We have all had some moment of feeling connected to the natural world in some way. When your memory of that moment comes to you, stay with it...really live into it again as if it were happening for the first time. Enjoy that experience. Let's breathe in a nice, deep breath again to reabsorb that moment.

Ok, everyone open your eyes again and let's just do a quick show of hands...how many of you remembered some time or moment or recalled a story or experience of connecting with nature during your childhood?

Most people, at least in the generations represented here, have had some experience of connecting with the natural world. It is important for you to see and be aware of your own sense of connection to the natural world. We want to cultivate that connection, for you, and for the children you might work with or for your own children or grandchildren.

One of my favorite memories from childhood was a time in late spring. My best friend, Billy O'Connell, and I were playing outside after a heavy rain. The air felt so delicious, the trees were all glistening with new rain and vibrantly green. I thought it would be a good idea to take a shower under the trees – to bathe in the shower of rainwater dripping off the heavy branches. We even took our clothes off and hung them up on the branches to make it more like a real shower! What a surprise to feel the cool rain on my warm body . . . I think I just wanted my home to be in nature.

When you come across your own childhood memories of being in nature, enjoy them, live them again because this is a renewal of the *natural bond of intimacy* we have with the earth, every time you have that inner sense of connection.

Now I'm going to talk a little about why this is so important...why this is actually something sacred and has so much to do with the spiritual life of the child and the child's sense of self. I'm going to quickly give you some background on what I'm about to tell you and how I learned about it.

After teaching in a Montessori elementary classroom for about 8 years, I went back to graduate school with a question about how spirituality contributes to a child's development of a sense of self. I was so curious about this from my own childhood experience and I became even more interested in it while working with six to nine-year-olds and having firsthand experience of seeing the child's blossoming spirit in the classroom. So, just when I was beginning graduate school, the most wonderful synchronicity happened. I got an invitation to take part in a program for educators called The Inner Life of the Child in Nature, but I was not familiar with CEINW at that time. This program was offered through The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World. I had no idea what this was about and really didn't think I would have time to participate since I was beginning graduate school. But I was really encouraged to take part in this program and assured I could do both at the same time. So here I was, going back to graduate school to study psychology with a question about children's development of a sense of self in mind, and just then, I'm invited to participate in a program

exploring the inner life of the child. It was perfect timing. The women who invited me had no idea I was going back to graduate school or what I was interested in studying so to receive this call at that particular time was interesting, although I didn't recognize this until much later.

What ended up happening is that my participation in the Inner Life program not only had a profound impact on me as a person, it also had a profound impact on my dissertation research and what I'm about to tell you. I came to learn, through integrating my graduate study with the teachings of the Inner Life program, that children's spirituality, development of a sense of self, and the natural world have a whole lot to do with one another!

As you probably know, it is incredibly important for a child's development to have experiences with the natural world, both in the classroom and outside. You probably also know that a fundamental question at the heart of a child's development and the fulfillment of a child's potential is, "who am I?" This question can only really be *meaningfully* answered in terms of the child's sense of belonging within the larger whole.

My research and experience with the Inner Life program provided confirmation of this but also really brought to the fore the understanding that fulfillment of the *unique* potential of the child and the child's developing sense of self is rooted in an *experienced relationship* with the natural world. This experienced relationship is important for three main reasons that I want to talk about today. The first is that the child's experiences in the natural world nurture the spiritual life of the child, and second, experiences in the natural world shape the development of a sense of self, even more so than we ever knew. The third is that we are living in a time when there is great disturbance in the relationship between human beings and the earth; but when we hold onto the first two understandings I just mentioned, we can begin to heal our relationship with the Earth.

Let me give you some examples now of what I mean when I say that an experienced relationship with the natural world nurtures the spiritual life of the child. A researcher from the UK, Edward Robinson, did wonderful research on childhood spiritual experience. He realized that many adults could recall profound spiritual experiences they had had as children, which stayed with them throughout their lives. He collected many accounts of these experiences and I read these as part of my research. In reading these accounts of childhood spiritual experiences, one of my favorites was one that took place in the natural world.

This was the account of a 63-year-old adult male who recalled something that happened when he was 5 or 6 years old. While outside early one summer morning, this little boy looked around at the beauty surrounding him. He became filled with gratitude at this beauty, and then suddenly he had a profound experience that shaped his perspective on life from that moment forward. I want you to hear that account:

It was a calm, limpid summer morning and the early mist still lay in wispy wreaths among the valleys. The dew on the grass seemed to sparkle like iridescent jewels in the sunlight, and the shadows of the houses and trees seemed friendly and protective. In the heart of the child that I was, there suddenly seemed to well up a deep and overwhelming sense of gratitude, a sense of unending peace and security which seemed to be part of the beauty of the morning, the love and protective living presence which included all that I had ever loved and yet was something much more.¹

¹ Robinson, Edward. *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood*. (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1983), 33

Isn't that beautiful? Did this man, recounting this experience from almost 60 years earlier, have these *thoughts* about the experience as a child? Surely not...it was something much more expansive than an intellectual understanding he could have expressed as a child. But the experience stayed with him and he continued to make meaning of it throughout his life. If spirituality is that which allows us to have a sense of connection to something greater than ourselves, this experience was surely spiritual for this boy. And where do we actually *experience* a deep and overwhelming sense of gratitude? In the heart! We may appreciate something intellectually but when we have a deep sense of gratitude, as he described, usually that is an embodied experience centered in the heart. This is what I mean when I say experiences in the natural world nurture the spiritual life of the child. He had a sense of connection with what he called "the love and protective living presence which included all that [he] had ever loved and yet was something much more."

Experiences in the natural world can also shape a child's overall experience and sense of who he is in the world as well as his sense of what kind of a world we live in. I want you to hear another account from Robinson's work. This one is an early spiritual experience stimulated by the child's sense of wonder at the beauty she experienced in the natural world. Listen as she describes it and see if you can use your imagination to envision it.

As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground. My feet, with the favourite black shoes with silver buckles, were gradually hidden from sight until I stood ankle deep in gently swirling vapour. Here and there just the very tallest harebells appeared above the mist. I had a great love of these exquisitely formed flowers, and stood lost in wonder at the sight.

Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent.²

Now listen to what she says in recounting this experience as an adult, 50 years later:

The vision never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity . . . and an affinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people too. The whole of the experience has since formed a kind of reservoir of strength fed from an unseen source, from which quite suddenly in the midst of all the very darkest of times a bubble of pure joy rises through it all, and I know that whatever the anguish, there is some deep centre in my life which cannot be touched by it.

This experience made such an impression on her that it stayed with her throughout her life. This experience gave her what she called, "a strong, clear sense of identity" and she attributes her love of the natural world to this experience. This was an organizing experience for this woman; her sense of who she is as a person was organized around the profound insight she had at that moment about herself and her place in *the living tissue of life itself*.

² Ibid., 32-33.

One final example from Robinson's work gives a wonderful picture of the attunement between a boy and the natural world around him. This was told by a 68-year-old man as he recollected his early life experience in his tree fort.

Through the spring, summer and autumn days from about the age of seven, I would sit alone in my little house in the tree tops observing all nature around me and the sky overhead at night. I was too young to be able to think and reason in the true sense but with the open receptive mind of a young, healthy boy I slowly became aware of vague, mysterious laws in everything around me. I must have become *attuned* to nature. I *felt* these laws of life and movement so deeply they seemed to saturate my whole mind and body, yet they always remained just beyond my grasp and understanding.³

This speaks to what Thomas Berry described as a “deep intuition” and another way of “understanding through the heart.” The experience of observing nature for this man was felt within his own body, as an attunement to the natural world.

The natural world has such a profound impact on the child...on each of us, even if we don't walk around thinking about it or writing down our early childhood experiences. The impact is there. These experiences happened spontaneously, no one, not even the child was trying to have a profound experience, it just happened. Because the natural world ignites the spirit within the child.

So the child needs time in the natural world to have this kind of experience and many others that are perhaps not as profound. Even when there are no revelations or transcendent experiences like these, when we spend time surrounded by nature there is a natural exchange both physically and spiritually between ourselves and the Earth.

I'm sure you have noticed what an amazingly calming experience it is simply to be in the woods, to walk or hike or sit quietly surrounded by trees and leaves and woodland creatures. This is because we are from the Earth – we are made of the same stuff, there is actually no real separation between ourselves and the earth, even though in our minds we sometimes see it that way.

I've tried to give you some simple examples of how the child's experiences in the natural world nurture the spiritual life of the child and how experiences in the natural world shape the development of a sense of self. The third reason I wanted to share with you about why spending time in the natural world is important is in healing the relationship between ourselves and the Earth. It is important not only for the child that there be time in the natural world but it is also important for the Earth that the child spend time in the natural world.

When the child is further and further removed from the natural world as we can see is happening now, our cultural evolution is shaped in such a way that deepens the physical and psychological separation of human beings and the earth. We clearly see this with the greater use of electronics in place of outdoor play coinciding with greater cultural dysfunction and psychopathology.

Think about how many levels of engagement between a child and the natural world – all of the senses, the mind, the body, the self and the spirit – these are all engaged when the child is in the natural world. Now compare that to a child sitting down with an iPad on her lap, tapping icons. The experience with the iPad is

³ Ibid., 32.

much more narrow, less rich, not an exchange between living beings. Electronics primarily engage cognition but all the other levels of what it means to be human are not engaged. There is no natural resonance between a piece of electronic equipment and the heart of a child.

Thomas Berry said:

The child is growing up today in a geo-biological moment that has never before happened in sixty-five million years. The life of the child has always been organized...around a real abiding world of beauty, wonder and the intimacy of living processes—the wind, frogs, butterflies—not a manufactured electronic world of virtual reality.

The child has a natural bond of intimacy with the natural world, a remarkable sense of identification with all living things. There is an ongoing common language between children and the earth; it is a language of living relationships.⁴

We need to protect the child's natural propensity for deep personal connection with the natural world in order to repair the greater human-Earth relationship.

This is why:

The greater the experience of physical, psychological, and spiritual connection with the natural world, the more the sense of self is interwoven with the experience of the earth-human unity and the reciprocal human-earth relationship.

The natural world is for children the primary place to develop compassion, empathy, gratitude, and a sense of the sacred. When this is recognized, the relationship between human beings and the planet, and particularly between children and the natural world, can be nurtured and “allowed” to have their natural interplay.

Children need time in the natural world to have direct, physical contact with the plants, the soil, the rocks, the rivers, the trees, and the animals so their own bodies can attune to the natural world. They need time in the natural world to commune, reflect, and contemplate questions about themselves, their lives, and the world. And they need opportunities to connect with the natural world in order for the spiritual self to emerge in the direction of human-earth unity. When this happens, as Thomas Berry said, we see the natural world NOT as a collection of objects, but we *experience* it as a communion of subjects.

When the sense of self is interwoven with our natural connection to the earth, the spirit of the child is nurtured and the soul of the Earth is cared for. Our relationship begins to heal and we begin to recognize that we're all in this together!

For the past 14 years, The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World has been creating contexts where the reciprocal fulfillment of the child and the universe can be nurtured in living and experienced relationship.

⁴ Toben, Carolyn. *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*. (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 96.

In just a moment, Sandy Bisdee, the Center's Director of Children's Programs, is going to bring you into the life of the Center and its amazing and wonderful work with children. You're going to get to see through the eyes of the child what happens when children have the opportunity to connect with nature in deep and meaningful ways . . . and to develop that reciprocal relationship with the Earth.

So now I'd like to leave you with the words of one of the great spiritual teachers of today, Thich Nhat Hanh. He said:

You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment.

Breathe in and be aware of your body and look deeply into it and realize you are the Earth and your consciousness is also the consciousness of the Earth...so the healing of the people should go together with the healing of the Earth.⁵

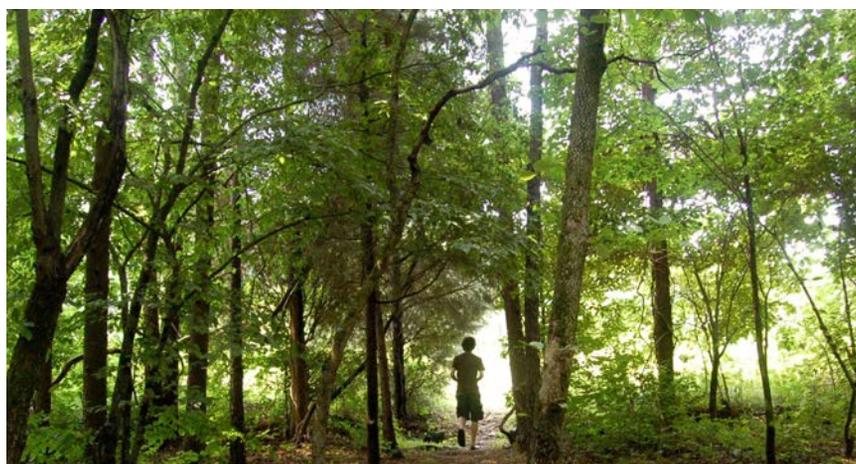
⁵ Confino, Jo. "Thich Nhat Hanh: Connect With and Love Mother Earth to Heal the Planet." (Common Dreams, February 20, 2012), para. 3. Retrieved from <http://www.commondreams>.

Caring for the Soul of the Child in Nature

by

Sandy Bisdee

(Sandy Bisdee is Director of Programs for Children at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. She completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. She brings over 30 years of experience as an educator of children to her work at the Center. An avid gardener, naturalist, storyteller and musician, Sandy has engaged in a deep study of Native American perspectives. She completed the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature program and is certified through the NC Environmental Education Certification Program.)



If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder . . . he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.¹

~ Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

I would add to this well loved quote that the adult also needs to inwardly cultivate feelings of love and gratitude for the whole of nature and for the mysteries and grandeur of the universe. And that the adult needs to be present to the moment in nature, to practice a willingness to slow down, to be still and silent at times, and to practice deep noticing without imposing her own interpretations and definitions on the child.

At the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, where I serve as Director of Children's Programs, we have developed many eco-contemplative practices for children and young adults that connect them to the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world. Through carefully designed eco-contemplative practices shared during guided earth walks in silence, children's souls are enriched and enlivened in a mutually enhancing relationship with all of creation.

¹ Carson, Rachel. *The Sense of Wonder*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 55.

When I first came to this work after a long career in early childhood education, I thought that silence would be difficult for the children. But I have learned otherwise. Given the chance, children swim in the sea of silence as naturally as a peace eagle glides in the wind or as easily as a leaf flutters to the earth.

After working with hundreds of children in our programs, pre-school through high school, over and over again I have witnessed nervousness and fears melt away by the end of our earth walks and have seen the countenances of the children transformed by joy, enthusiasm, peace and wonder.

Sometimes, in the silence, I catch a glimpse of the inner life of the child in nature through my shared experience with the children. The following account comes from one such moment that took place in an after-school program called “Children of the Forest” with a small group of kindergarten and first grade children:

The misty autumn rain had fallen lightly all day, soft and feminine like a gentle snow. The Children of the Forest and I were dressed in our rain gear as we walked toward the trail. Hand in hand, we walked through the liquid air with no destination in mind. As the rain began to fall harder, I found it necessary to seek the shelter of the Forest Canopy. Following a small deer path we emerged into a thick forest. Ancient fallen trees covered with moss exposed cavernous spaces underneath. We walked around tangled windfalls and there were serpentine vines hanging from the tall trees that surrounded us. We walked down a steep hill, trying not to slip on the leafy wet forest floor. Aliÿse paused and looked up toward the sky at the steady falling rain and it dripped off her poncho hood freely onto her face. She stuck out her tongue. She had not let go of my hand for the entire journey, but now, she loosened her grasp and stood freely in the rain. Quinn found a little piece of mud, which she rolled into a ball. This had a deeply calming effect on her and she looked through her rain-speckled glasses dreamily into the distance, feeling the mud ball in her palm. And then it happened. With no verbal agreement, the four of us stopped on the slanted hillside in the rain and stood very still. We became part of the forest and the rain and we were still and we were quiet. We were one with the rain and with the Silence that had permeated time and space. There was a palpable difference in the moment: an expansive quality as we merged collectively with the Silence and the rain and the forest and each other. How long we stood suspended in the magical moment, I cannot say. After a while, Nathan suddenly remembered that there was a creek at the bottom of the hill and we slipped and slid our way down to the water’s edge.²

With the older children in our programs, the inner life of the child in nature is often revealed through their own words.

Several years ago we created a special design program for the 4th-6th graders of a Montessori school where the children experienced “The World of the Garden” and “The World of the Forest” throughout three seasons of the year. Within each season, the children spent time in the garden and in the forest, finding a special plant or tree that they visited each time they came. They spent solo time in deep presence and in silence noticing their special place and drawing and journaling. There was one nine or ten-year-old girl who was very quiet. This is what she wrote:

In the Garden

I have entered a world of freedom. I feel like I have the power to choose. I have never felt this way. I don’t really know these feelings but it feels good. I have entered a world of peacefulness. I feel special and unique. I feel sad. I miss special people and animals. I feel closer to earth, closer to . . . my inner self. I feel closer to the plant life. That’s why the garden is special to me.

² Bisdee, Sandy. “Silence.” *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Ed. Peggy Whalen-Levitt (Greensboro, NC: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, 2011), 46.

In the Forest

In the forest I feel welcome to all things, big or small, fat and skinny. I feel free to open my heart and try new things, touch things I don't see all the time. I do seem like I am looking through new eyes. I feel like a whole new person. I feel like I can do anything I want to. I hear my G G's voice saying "open your heart". I hear my Aunt and Uncle's dog's paws running on the floor. Those two are people and animals that have left me.

Feelings of peacefulness, feelings of connection to earth and self, seeing with new eyes, remembering those who have passed . . . all of this is evoked in these intimate moments of silence with the natural world.

It has been through the writing of young people during our Poetry of Nature programs that a window has opened and I have caught a brief glimpse in time of the soul life of the adolescent. Just looking at their outward behavior toward me and with each other, I would never have known about the riches that lay deep inside them, waiting for the right kind of nourishment to give voice to (as Thomas Berry would say) "shoots of goodness" in their hearts.³ At the end of our Poetry of Nature programs, teachers often tell me, "I had no idea that they were thinking about these things." And the young teens tell me that they have no silence in their lives, from the minute they wake up until they go to sleep.

Several years ago, we had the opportunity to work with a school over the course of five years, several times a year. We were able to get to know one group of children consecutively from 4th through the 8th grade. Over the years we came to learn that they were oversubscribed, under a lot of pressure, and that silence during our programs was important to them because they so rarely experienced it in their daily lives.

One 7th grader wrote:

I'm busy with life.
There are so many
tasks that I need to
complete, so many
goals to accomplish. People
expect so much
from me, and I'm
busy trying to give
those people what
they want from me.⁴

At the end of an earth walk that included some solo writing time in a special sit spot by a small creek in the forest, another 7th grader shared with our group that when she had come to the program that morning, she had a lot on her mind and had been thinking of everything that she had to do for school, about all of her extracurricular activities and about an argument she had with a family member at home. She said that while she was sitting in her special place by the creek, she began to realize that she was not alone in the world, that she was part of something much bigger. She looked happier and more relaxed. Later, at the end of the solo writing time, she shared the following poem:

³ Toben, Carolyn. *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*. (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 36.

⁴ Canipe, Marti. "Silence, Thoreau, and a Covenant." *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Ed. Peggy Whalen-Levitt (Greensboro, NC: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, 2011), 159.

Living in the noise I feel alone
Living in the silence I feel at home.
Some silence is heavy, this silence is light.
Some silence is shallow, this silence is deep.
Some silence is mean, this silence is kind.
Some silence is hurtful, this silence is my band-aid.⁵

I'd like to close with three poems by 8th graders, written during one of our Poetry of Nature programs.

Bridge

so soft
the spirit trickles down
filling me
quenching my thirst
the spirit flows from the tops of trees
it scrapes across rocks
below the water of the creek

it soothes
filling everything with its sound
so perfectly imperfect
so quietly brilliant

i want to leap
leap
into its arms

i leap
it catches me
holds me

I fall
deeper and deeper
until we are one

the tree's spirit is my spirit
the birds song my own

and I stay perfectly silent
under the stars
and the light of the sun

⁵ Ibid., 164.

Moving in one simultaneous movement
One soul, one essence, all is one.
Man is one with Earth, Earth is one with man.
Everything made into one entity.
Now, one body, one heart.
The beating heart of Earth is shared with everyone and everything.

* * * * *

Everything is still
I hear nothing but a few chirps.
Crunchy leaves scattered all over
By the lakeside.
Now I wonder.
What really is the REAL world?⁶

(Sandy's talk was followed by a guided earth walk where the Toward Wholeness participants were invited to come into presence, stillness, silence and deep noticing by participating in some of the Center's eco-contemplative practices.)

⁶ Each year, Lisa Saintsing brings her eighth grade students from Our Lady of Grace Catholic School to the earth sanctuary for our Poetry of Nature program. In 2010, she and Teresa Prendergast put together a collection of poems written by the class of 2010 entitled, *Don't Stop Believing in the Wonders of Nature: Poetic Reflections on a Morning at Timberlake*. We are deeply grateful for permission to reprint a selection of these poems here.

Nurturing the Soul of the Child at Home

by

Marie Nordgren

(Marie Nordgren is the Founder, Director and a teacher at The Children's Garden Preschool, a nature and play based early childhood program in Durham. Her training is in Waldorf early childhood education from Sunbridge College. Marie completed the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature program and serves on the Center's Educator Council.)

*The child awakens to a universe.
The mind of the child to a world of wonder
Imagination to a world of beauty
Emotions to a world of intimacy*

*It takes a universe to make a child both in outer form and inner spirit.
It takes a universe to educate a child
A universe to fulfill a child.*

*Each generation presides over the meeting of these two
in the succeeding generation.
So that the universe is fulfilled in the child
And the child is fulfilled in the universe*

While the stars ring out in the heavens!¹

~ Thomas Berry



¹ Berry, Thomas. "It Takes a Universe." *Chrysalis* (Spring 2004), 6.

Here we are, the present generation of parents, caregivers and educators entrusted with the task to “preside over the meeting” of the child and the universe. How do we welcome the child to his “home” in the universe, introduce him to his family home and culture, to his belonging in community, to his home within himself, to a world of wonder, beauty and intimacy?

Behold the image of a new mother with an infant in her arms. Her eyes tenderly gazing into the child’s eyes as she cradles him in her arms. He is swaddled and resting in the rhythm of her breath and heartbeat. Security, connection, warmth and rhythm nurture the child as he begins his journey as an earthly being.

Protecting and Nurturing the Senses

An awakening to the universe begins through the child’s sensory experiences. With his senses fully open to the environment and impressions of his new earthly home, a child is formed and informed. His body and soul house is built with the sights, sounds, movement, warmth, mood and surrounding energy that bathe and become part of him. And we are the mediators of the sensory world and experiences our children encounter.

Our modern culture mistakenly encourages us to *stimulate* the senses of the young child rather than protect and nurture them. Is there a way to continue to offer a warm welcome and gentle awakening to the universe that will serve the child’s soul as he grows out of his swaddling clothes into an upright individual? Can we gently introduce him to a world of beauty, wonder and intimacy through the senses? What sensory “soul food” will we give our children? Will we err on the side of too fast, too loud, too bright, too sweet, and too early? Can our homes be a refuge from too much too soon?

How can we protect and nurture both the physical and soul needs of the child so that he feels at home in himself and the universe, so his soul can blossom and thrive?

Rhythm

We are all born out of and into the rhythms of the universe. We begin our journey with the rhythm of our mother’s heartbeat resonating and permeating every multiplying and specifying cell of our body as we grow in the womb. Our first breath as an earthly being is the drawing in of our earthly environment, and the beginnings of a breathing rhythm that will carry us through all our days on the planet. We are born into the rhythm of the rising and setting sun, the seasons of the year and movement of the planets and stars.

These rhythms are not mechanistic schedules or unconscious routines but life giving rhythms, strength building rhythms, rhythms that bring a sense of security and promise.

What are the soul satisfying rhythms we can offer to nurture a young child? Do our daily and weekly home rhythms offer a sense of breathing in and breathing out? Is there a rhythm to our play and work, movement and rest, speaking and listening, sound and silence, eating and digesting? Or have we created a panting, breathless pace of activity, stimulation and engagement with little time to pause, reflect, digest, process and just be?

Is there a daily rhythm that allows us to greet each day?

*Good morning dear earth,
Good morning dear sun,
Good morning dear stones
And flowers everyone
Good morning dear beasts
And birds in the trees
Good morning to you,
Good morning to me ²*

To pause at meals and give thanks for our food,

*Earth who brings to us this food
Sun who makes it ripe and good
Sun above, earth below
To you our loving thanks we show*

To welcome our rest and sleep,

*The moon on the one hand
The sun on the other
The moon is my sister
The sun is my brother
The moon on the left
The sun on the right
Good morning dear sun
Dear moon goodnight ³*

And how do we come into communion with the creative, sustaining, affirming rhythms of the natural world? A daily walk outdoors, rain or shine?

Big steps, sturdy steps, into the woods we go ⁴

² Belloc, H. "Good morning dear earth." *Gateways*. Eds. Jennifer Aulie and Margret Meyerkort (Stourbridge, England: Wynstones Press, 3rd ed, 1999), 18.

³ *Gateways*, 18.

⁴ *Dancing as We Sing: Seasonal Circle Plays and Traditional Singing Games for Young Children*. Ed. Nancy Foster (Silver Springs, MD: Waldorf Early Childhood Association of America, 1999), 19.

By tending a little garden patch or potted plant?

*Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow
All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground,
Inch by inch row by row, Someone bless the seeds I sow
Someone warm them from below, 'til the rain comes tumbling down*

Perhaps we can create a simple practice of beholding in quiet reverence the large and small wonders of nature.

*A caterpillar creeps and crawls
On twigs and leaves and old stone walls.
He curves, he curls, he climbs to see
What a wonderful outside world might be*

Or create a little nature table or space indoors to honor and behold the gifts from nature we find on our walks (pinecones, shells, colored leaves, flowers, stones).

Or enjoy the magic of nighttime moon watching and stargazing.

Twinkle, twinkle little star

Can we enrich, enliven and bring imagination and joy to our children's experiences of the natural world rhythms with seasonal songs and verses?

*A little brown bulb lay asleep in the ground
In a little brown nightie he slept very sound
Old Winter, he raged and he roared overhead
But the little brown bulb did not stir in his bed
Then springtime came tip toeing over the lea
With finger to lips as soft as can be
And the little brown bulb just lifted his head
He split off his nightie and jumped out of bed! ⁵*

Let us find the rhythms that offer us nurturing, and give our children and ourselves a sense of comfort and security, that bring us into communion with the universe and reveal the universe in us.

⁵ Fairman, A. "A little brown bulb." *Spring*. Eds. Jennifer Aulie and Margaret Meyerkort (Stourbridge, England: Wynstones Press, 3rd ed, 1999), 20.

Warmth and Connection

*Oh Golden Sun in Heaven Blue
Come and warm us through and through
Give us of your gifts of gold
So our blossoms will unfold.⁶*

The child's soul is warmth longing for connection and belonging. When the child's soul reaches out with the warmth of interest, curiosity and attention, it is longing for a meeting of the same.

Where can we bring warmth into our being and our child's being so that it permeates our relationships and actions and brings the soul satisfying experience of connection and belonging?

Physical warmth facilitates comfort and openness. Would a hat or an extra layer of clothing give my child the warmth needed to stretch and move into his limbs and the world?

Warm hands, warm heart

Can we warm our thoughts? Can we bring warmth into our language and our voices? What would warmth in our gestures and touch look like? Do we look at our children through warm and loving eyes and listen to them with open ears? Eyes and ears filled with interest, attention and curiosity? Is there warm soul meeting?

*Two eyes to see, two ears to hear,
Two feet to dance and run
Here is my hand, give yours to me
Now let's have some fun!*

When our children experience the warmth of belonging and soul meeting at home they can extend their curiosity, interest and warmth out into the community, world and universe. And the natural world is longing for us to bring our children's wonder-filled beholding eyes and enthusiastic open love into a relationship.

*My feet are firm upon the earth
The sky is up above
And here I stand so straight and tall
All things to know and love⁷*

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ *Spindrift*. Eds. Jennifer Aulie and Margret Meyerkort (Stourbridge, England: Wynstones Press, 3rd ed, 1999) 61.

Fulfillment

As parents, caregivers and educators we have the awe-inspiring task of presiding over the meeting of the child and the universe. It is a task that requires and allows us to enhance, enliven and nurture our own souls as we shepherd the newest generation into the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the universe. And perhaps as we develop and tend to our own soul's needs and capacities for rhythm, warmth and relationship our soul child will blossom.

*“So that the universe is fulfilled in the child
And the child is fulfilled in the universe*

While the stars ring out in the heavens!”



Caring for the Soul of the Child in Illness

by

Andrew Levitt

(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. In his career life, he has worked with silence and words. He performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years. He 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. As Dr. Merryandrew, he currently works as a cosmic clown in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, NC. Andrew completed the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature program and serves on the Center's Educator Council.

When Andrew was performing in a theater festival in Atlanta in 1990, he was identified among Eccentrics as a "Cosmic Clown." The category was conceived by Benny Riehl, who was then a well-known director of New Vaudeville in New England, and he placed Andrew in the category as its sole proprietor. Dr. Merryandrew is a manifestation of Andrew's Cosmic Clown. In the persona of the doctor, he performs mime, tells tales, transforms into different characters, sings songs, and manipulates puppets.

The element of light plays an essential role in Andrew's work. He takes his inspiration from many sources, especially the writings of Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen. In her introduction to *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*, Dr. Remen writes about her experience of her grandfather, who was a rabbi and a scholar of Kabbalah, the mystical teachings of Judaism. From him she learned of a vision of Creation in which Light was poured into the Vessels intended to receive the Creation, but the Emanation proved too powerful. The Vessels broke and shattered, scattering shards of Light throughout the Universe. From this vision, Dr. Remen observes:

There is a god spark in everyone and in everything, a sort of diaspora of goodness. God's immanent presence among us is encountered daily in the most simple, humble and ordinary ways. The Kabbalah teaches that the Holy may speak to you from its many hidden places at any time. The world may whisper in your ear or the spark of God in you may whisper in your heart. My grandfather showed me how to listen.¹

In the vision of the shattering of the Vessels, the Kabbalah said that the purpose of a life of service was to gather up as many of the shards of light as possible to restore the Universe to the wholeness of its origin.

As we watched Andrew create a "light shield" around an imaginary patient and then transition to telling a story of his own creation, *The Grey Wolf's Wife*, we felt that the Universe was restored to wholeness again.)

¹ Remen, Rachel Naomi. *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*. (New York, Riverhead Books, 2000), 2-3.

The Grey Wolf's Wife



As I have told you before, all my stories are old stories whether they are about things that happened long ago or things that happened yesterday. They are old stories because I learned from the old masters. The old masters knew that life was full of magic and miracle. They knew that animals could turn into people and people could turn into animals; that any path goes down before it goes up and it goes through darkness before it comes to light. They knew we meet many guides and helpers in our lives. Some of these are guides we seek. Some are helpers who show up when we think we are lost, stuck and alone. Sometimes they help us by doing what we ask. Sometimes they guide us by asking us to do something for them. Maybe if we listen to the old stories, we will know what the old masters knew. Maybe if more people hear the old stories, there will be more people around who know that life is full of magic and miracle.

Not long ago, but not so recently either, there was a girl, not too old, but not too young either. She lived with her mother and father on a farm. In the afternoon when her chores were finished, she would go out into the field to feed the birds. She was grateful to the little songbirds whose songs accompanied her in the morning when she went early to her chores. She loved the swallows and the robins and the sparrows. She would sing to them as she fed them in the afternoon. Her father called her Sparrow because she sang so sweetly as she fed the birds.

But when the black crows came to the field in the afternoon to be fed with the other birds, Sparrow shooed them away. "None for you," she shouted at them.

One day when Sparrow went to the field in the afternoon, a man dressed in the clothes of the forest people came walking out of the woods beside their farm. He was cradling a small animal in his arms.

“Sparrow,” the man addressed her.

“How did you know to call me that?” she asked. He did not answer her.

“Sparrow, will you raise this cub? He has lost his mother and will die if he is not taken in.”

Sparrow thought the grey wolf cub looked like a puppy and she loved him right off. So she said she would. The man gave her the cub and without another word turned and went back into the forest.

Sparrow raised the cub and because she was a gentle and caring girl, he was gentle too. Every day they ran together through the field beside the forest. Now and then, the wolf would stop where the man had brought him out of the woods and stare into the trees as if he heard someone calling. But Sparrow would always put her hand on him and coax him back to the fields and farm.

As wolves grow quickly, soon he was full grown and ran silently like the wind. At a short distance, he could sprint faster than a horse and he liked to run. At night when the distant forest was alive with the howling of wild wolves, her wolf would wake in her room where he slept, go to the open window and look out at the distance across the field. But he was always settled beside her when she woke in the morning to do her early chores. They would go out together and listen to the chorus of the songbirds each morning.

Sparrow loved the companionship of the grey wolf. He had become her partner and friend in everything. He did not avert his eyes like wild animals do even when they have been raised in domestic circumstances. He held her gaze when she looked at him and she often found him watching her like a protector when they were doing something in the field or the forest. Once he pulled her away from a copperhead snake when Sparrow was bringing wood in from the woodpile. Another time on a mountain, he caught her when she slipped on a rock ledge and would have fallen hundreds of feet into a chasm. There was something in her grey wolf’s eyes when he looked at her that seemed almost human.

Then one day in the fall of the year when Sparrow and her wolf were running through the fields, the grey wolf stopped at the old spot by the woods and listened again. As she kept running, Sparrow called him to come, but he didn’t seem to hear her. She turned around. He was looking directly at her. Later she could not remember whether he looked like he was saying goodbye or like he was calling her to follow him. The next instant, he turned and darted into the woods at the place where the man had brought him out of the woods.

Sparrow ran after him. She ran and ran but he was faster and could more easily run through the brush and trees of the forest. Soon it grew dark in the forest and Sparrow could not see where her wolf went. She realized she had followed him deep into the forest and would have to wait where she was over night or she would lose her way wandering in the dark.

In the morning when she woke in the woods, Sparrow did not recognize where she was. But as the sun rose, she walked deeper into the forest in the direction away from the rising sun. She knew the farm was the other way, so her wolf must have been going away from the farm. About noon, when the sun was high overhead, she came to a small hut in the woods. She approached it to see if there was anyone to speak to in the hut. When she rapped at the door, the door swung open and Sparrow went inside. Inside an old woman, wrapped in a shawl, sat in a rocking chair by the hearth.

“I am looking for my grey wolf, mother. Have you seen my grey wolf?” Sparrow asked.

“Come closer, dear. I am Mother Wind. I have been out in the forest all through the night, but I have not seen your grey wolf. But if you will do me a service, I will send you to someone who may know where your grey wolf is. Could you bring me the first leaf that fell in the Fall? I want it for my leaf collection. Find that leaf and I will help you on your way.”

Sparrow went out of the hut. Many leaves were drifting from the branches of the forest to the ground and many more were already spread over the ground. How would she ever find the one that had fallen first, she thought. She sat down on the edge of the well in Mother Wind’s yard and started to cry.

“Why are you crying, child?” asked a very old turtle at her feet.

“What? Oh, it is you who asked.” Sparrow looked down at Old Turtle. “I am looking for my grey wolf. Mother Wind said she will help me find him if I find the first leaf that fell in the Fall. But I don’t know how I will ever do that. There are so many leaves down already. How could I know the first?”

“I think I can help you if you will pick me up so I can sit beside you,” said Old Turtle. “That’s better; now I don’t have to scream. Well, I saw the first leaf fall in the well when Mother Wind was blowing through the forest last week. Lower me into the well and I will bring it up for you.”

Sparrow lowered Old Turtle into the well and brought him up again. When he came up, he was holding a brown leaf that looked like any water-logged leaf you might find under water. Sparrow took it from him. When she held it in her hand in the sun, it suddenly turned red, then gold, then all colors of the rainbow.

“Oh, Old Turtle, look at the leaf. How wonderful it is,” Sparrow said. “How can I thank you?”

“Never mind that,” said Old Turtle. “Just put me back down on the ground and I will be on my way.”

After she said goodbye to Old Turtle, Sparrow ran inside with the leaf for Mother Wind.

“You have done well, dear. Now I will tell you who may know where your grey wolf is. Follow the path that leads behind my cottage until you come to the meadow beside the stream from where you can see the mountains rising in the distance. There is a giant pine tree there. Climb to the top of the pine and call to Sister Cloud from there. If she is not in a dark mood, she will come down to speak with you and she may be able to tell you where your grey wolf is.

“Now here, dear, take this whistle with you as a gift from me. I am sure the path ahead for you will be difficult and dangerous, but you are a brave girl and can master by yourself most of the challenges you will face. But if there ever comes a time when all seems lost, your life is threatened, and you can imagine no escape, blow this whistle. I will hear it wherever you are and I will send one of my offspring to help you.”

The giant pine was just where Mother Wind said it would be. The branches started low to the ground and Sparrow climbed easily to the top as if she were climbing a ladder. At the top, she called to Sister Cloud.

“Sister Cloud, have you seen my grey wolf?” she called to the sky.

“Grey, indeed. These are indeed grey dark days for I have lost my most beautiful jewels. And what have you lost, dear, that you come bothering me when I have lost something most precious to me?” said Sister Cloud.

“I have lost my dear grey wolf. I raised him from when he was a cub and he has been my companion and friend. Then suddenly he ran off into the forest and I cannot find him,” said Sparrow.

“Did you do something to drive him off?” asked Sister Cloud.

“No, I swear I did not,” said Sparrow.

“Well, I don’t know. Maybe if you help me find the precious jewel necklace I have lost, I can help you,” said Sister Cloud. “The last time I remember that I had my necklace, I was in the mountains.”

Out of the tree, Sparrow looked up at the peak and started to climb the mountain. There was no trail and the way was hard. She saw nothing that looked like jewels or a necklace. When she grew tired from the climb, she rested. But she had not rested long when jays on the branches beside her in the mountain forest cried out, “Higher.”

When she got to a knoll at the edge of the tree line, Sparrow rested again. This time a red-tailed hawk high overhead called to her, “Higher.” She climbed until she reached the rocky summit. Still no necklace of jewels. She sat down on a rock too tired to cry. As she sat, she watched a spider go in and out of a crevice in the rock. As she watched him go in and out over and over, she began to think he was doing his little dance for her. Maybe he wanted her to look where he disappeared into the rock each time. When she tried to look for him, she saw what looked like a little patch of snow. She thought the snow must not have melted in the sun because it was hidden under the cover of the rocks. But as she looked more closely, she saw that what she thought was a shining patch of snow was really a chain of white gold in which were set amethysts, sapphires and topaz. This, she thought, must be Sister Cloud’s jewel necklace.

“Sister Cloud, Sister Cloud, I have found it,” she screamed to the sky.

Still dark with gloom, Sister Cloud came hurtling toward her from a ways away, descended like a mist over the mountain peak, gathered up her necklace and then lifted, opened and brightened into a smile. “And what did you say I can do for you?” asked Sister Cloud.

“I have lost my grey wolf. Can you help me find my grey wolf?” answered Sparrow.

“Oh, I see,” said Sister Cloud. “No, I am sorry I cannot help you. I have not seen your grey wolf. You must really go ask Sister Moon. She sees more than me. If you go down to the shallow ford in the stream that runs through the valley, you will find the path of light that leads to Sister Moon. Follow the path through the ford and beyond and it will lead you to Sister Moon. Be brave and prosper. And thank you for finding my necklace. I will remember that.”

That night Sparrow crossed the ford on the path of moonlight and kept following it on the other side of the stream. As she walked in the light, she felt the land to the right and left of her drop away. She sensed she was suspended high in the air on a ridge of light, bordered on either side by chasms of darkness. Cold air from either side brushed her skin. Behind her there was a buzzing and whirring as if an army of wasps or stinging demons were swarming after her. She started to run, keeping her feet on the light so she did not slip into the abyss that opened on either side. Then suddenly she stopped. There in front of her, blocking her progress, stood a darkly robed giant with the hood on his robe pulled up so it hid his face if he had a face. In his hands there was a club that looked as thick as an uprooted tree trunk with a boulder lodged in its roots. He heaved the club up over his head, preparing to strike.

Sparrow turned back toward the swarming mass of stinging demons. As she turned, on the back of her neck she felt the giant's hot breath. She smelled its sour odor. Sparrow was alone, stuck, and terrified. Then she remembered the whistle that Mother Wind had given her. She reached in her cloak, found the whistle and blew a long loud blast above the noise of the buzzing swarm behind her. The whistle blast sounded shrill. Then as it drifted into the dark, Sparrow was lifted gently on an up-draft of wind. She sailed over the hooded menace and was set down again further along on the path of light. Fearing for her life, she ran until she nearly crashed into the shining gates of the palace of the moon. They opened for her and then closed again as soon as she passed over the threshold. In a room that smelled like a Spring river flooded with melted snow and ice, Sister Moon sat on her shining silver throne.

Sparrow knelt down the way she thought you are supposed to do when you come before royalty and said, "Sister Moon, I am looking for my grey wolf. Have you seen my grey wolf?"

"Stand up please. No need to kneel in my presence. I have been watching you on your journey, Sparrow. You are a brave girl to come through the perils of the path of my light. I think you will find your grey wolf. But I have not seen him yet in the course of my monthly journey. I am sorry, Sparrow. You must journey beyond me to Father Sun. Only he can tell you where your wolf may be. It is a difficult path to Father Sun. Stay alert. If you fail to concentrate for an instant along the way you will be in grave danger.

"Here, take this dark mirror. Only with a dark reflecting glass can you find the path to the Sun from here. When you step outside my palace through the gates by which you entered, turn around immediately or you will be blinded. Face the gate again. Then hold up the looking glass until you can see a golden light shining in the center. Walk backward holding the glass and keep the golden light in the center. The glass will be your compass guide. So long as you keep the golden light in the center, nothing will happen to you. But if your mind drifts and you let the light slide away from the center, there will be danger for you. Go directly and safe journey, Sparrow."

Sparrow did as she was instructed by Sister Moon and kept the golden light in the center of the glass as she went. Several times, she caught herself when her mind started to drift. But then somewhere along the way as she walked backward while staring at the reflection in the glass, her foot hit a snag. She tottered and almost fell. The glass slipped from her hand and started to fall away from her as if it were flying weightlessly into space. She leapt to retrieve it and she too began to float weightless in space. She caught the handle of the mirror just before she started spinning and spinning head-over-heels through what seemed like endless darkness. She clutched the glass, but it was no use trying to look for the golden light in it. Had she remembered it, she could not have reached for her whistle as she was spinning. Nor could she have caught her breath to blow a blast on it. She was hurtling uncontrollably through darkness.

But as she spun uncontrollably, Sparrow found a quiet harmony in the spinning. It was as if she were in the center of a protective cloud where she felt no difference between inside and outside herself. Even though she was spinning it seemed to her that she was absolutely still. And then for no reason of her own, she said to herself, "Sparrow is flying to her nest in a storm."

As soon as she said that, she stopped spinning, and landed on her feet in a dazzlingly bright garden ringed all around with sunflowers. The gardener came toward her with a spade in his hand and said in a gentle tone, "Don't step on the cabbages, child."

"Father Sun?" asked Sparrow.

"Yes, Sparrow, how can I help you?" Father Sun asked.

"Oh, Father Sun, I have lost my grey wolf. He ran away and I want to beg him to come back to me. I went to Mother Wind, Sister Cloud and Sister Moon to ask if they had seen where he went, but they had not. Father Sun, can you help me find my grey wolf?"

"You have shown courage, little Sparrow, to have flown so far in pursuit of your grey wolf. Now you must go home and wait. Wait for him to return. Go home and feed the birds again, little Sparrow. And do not shoo the crows away. The crows are my messengers. Be generous with them and they will tell you when your grey wolf is coming.

"Here, I will give you some seeds from my garden to grow a garden for yourself so you will always have sunlight in your garden."

Father Sun gave Sparrow a little pouch in which he poured sunflower seeds from his garden. He hung the pouch on a silk ribbon and tied the ribbon around Sparrow's neck so that she would not lose it on her journey home. When it was tied around her neck, Sparrow seemed aglow with sunlight. Then Father Sun twirled her around and sent her down to earth on a sunbeam where she landed an instant after she left his garden. She was home.

Sparrow returned to feeding the songbirds in the afternoon. But as Father Sun suggested, she also fed the crows. A year and a day from the time her grey wolf ran away, crows in a great cluster made a tremendous commotion in the oak branches where the grey wolf had entered the woods and the man had brought Sparrow the wolf cub before that. Sparrow looked up to see if the crows were yammering about a hawk in the forest. But they were not circling anything in the trees. Then what was all the commotion about? Sparrow ran to see.

Out of the woods came a man dressed in the clothes of the forest people. He was a ruggedly handsome man. He walked with a remarkable grace as if he were gliding soundlessly over the ground the way a wolf moves. As he came toward her, Sparrow immediately recognized something familiar in his eyes.

"Sparrow," he said, "are you ready to come with me?"

"Yes," she said, "Yes, I am ready, my Grey Wolf."

I have heard some people say when Sparrow said yes, they both turned into wolves and disappeared into the forest. Others have said they lived as human beings in a simple cottage in the forest where all the animals and birds served them and they never lacked for anything. Outside their cottage was a luxurious garden ringed by sunflowers that bloomed all year round. If Sparrow gave you seeds from her sunflowers to eat, you were assured of good fortune for a year and a day. The story of their lives together, however, will have to be told in another tale for another day's telling.

All I can say now is that Sparrow's mother and father told me she visited them regularly. And when she came, she and her children carried themselves with the grace of Nature and always spoke to them of wondrous things.



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