



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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Land We Love and Respect

by Maxine Pohlman, SSND

A significant step in the evolution of human consciousness regarding land was taken when Aldo Leopold wrote his classic *Sand County Almanac* in 1949. Breaking new ground, he coined the phrase **land ethic** and inspired readers to see the natural world **as a community to which we belong**. He wrote, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics."

Here at La Vista land is treated as a community of life and is loved and respected. I'd like to take you on a virtual tour and point out evidence of the evolution of human consciousness regarding land as community. Please join me, and as we travel I invite you to ponder your own relationship with your special land.

Community

As we cross through the entrance to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate and the Oblate Ecological Initiative and look south we see four and a half acres, the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista*. Since its beginning in 2002, the Garden has been evidence that the Oblates' sense of community has expanded to include Oblates for sure, and also farmers, shareholders, fields, vegetables, soil – all the members of the sacred community of life we call the Garden.

Let's take a look at one of the least explored, least understood members of what we call *land* – the soil. Did you know that soil is a community of life with billions of organisms in every teaspoon? Recently scientists found that there is far more life in *soils* than *above ground!*

Unlike farmers who grow food conventionally, our farmers treat soil as a community, so ours is a sustainable garden, an example of the growing awareness of the importance of locally grown, natural foods. They make the connection between healthy food, *healthy soils*, and

healthy bodies. There is no pollution of soil from the use of pesticides or herbicides, nor is there reliance on heavy equipment to pollute the air and compact the soil. All who participate here can feel good about loving and respecting this sacred land as we build a community of soil, seed, and society, contributing to the health of the whole.

Hospitality

Moving along the drive and looking east we observe a Pollinator Garden in process. Aware of bee colony collapse and threatened monarch butterflies, the Novitiate Community, volunteers and staff of the Learning Center and Garden have begun to create a safe haven for a variety of pollinators in an area that had been a formal garden with an abundance of exotic plants. Since that time threatened bees and monarchs have taught us that *native* flowers, trees, and shrubs are necessary for their survival. Biologists have observed that pollinators vary in shape, size, and length of their tongues. They are matched to the native plants with which they have co-evolved and prefer these over exotics!

Once again, human consciousness is evolving, shifting from gardens designed simply to please the human eye to gardens that serve the broader community of life. Our awareness of the Earth's own hospitality to all species for millions of years is growing, and we are feeling the need to be hospitable in return.

Real Wealth

Back on the driveway we head west where the lovely woods begin. In the year 2000, one hundred and forty three acres of oak and hickory forest were dedicated in the Forest Legacy Program. Selling the development rights to these acres was a prophetic move on the part of the Oblates. As the climate crisis cries out for our attention, we are glad to know that forests act as valuable carbon sinks by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it. Human consciousness is



(Continued on page 6)

Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends,

May this summertime bring you great joy as you revel in all that is growing toward the sun!

With this newsletter comes my hope that every reader can find a way to join the movement to restore gardens, back yards, parks, school yards, church grounds, company green spaces— everywhere possible. Recreating natural landscapes can call us out of a place of powerlessness and into a sense of place where we feel at home as we create home for many species.

Wouldn't it be helpful if parishes, schools, companies, neighborhoods, and individuals would script their own *land ethic* (as noted in the article on page one) outlining principles for mutually beneficial treatment of their special places. Maybe we would then deepen our relationship with the other-than-human world as we embrace the responsibilities that accompany any significant relationship. Please also see the article on page three outlining helpful suggestions for growing natives.

In this issue I have invited two local women to join us as columnists for *La Vista Visions*. Annie Kelley has been involved with the Center for many years, sharing her wealth of cooking, canning, preserving and gardening skills. Reading her food col-

umn below might empower you to be proactive regarding one very intimate relationship with the natural world – eating!

Caitlin Zera is a young woman on fire with ecological zeal and know-how! In her page three article, she brings a special perspective that enlarges our appreciation for land. I am grateful that she is willing to share her youthful vision in our newsletter.

As always, thanks for all you are doing this summer to deepen your relationship with our rare and precious planet.

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



Jack Lau, OMI, Eric Wright, Heritage Biologist, Jim Brobst, OMI, and Sister Maxine during a hike in the Nature Preserve.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

BEAN BOUNTY

by Annie Kelley

This time of year is one of those amazing gardening bounty times, no matter where you live. My garden starts calling me to the green bean patch, and it doesn't stop until sometime in September. Lots of beans are canned and almost as many are being eaten fresh.

My favorite type are the Kentucky Wonder Bush Beans. The pole beans are good too, but I think the bush beans produce better, even though they are a little more work to harvest. They are stringless, too. Like most vegetables, you want beans that are picked early in the day. Whether you grow them yourself or get them from your CSA, quality does matter!

Quick and Beautiful Bean Recipe

1-2 pounds of fresh green beans,
washed with the ends cut off
2-4 cloves garlic, sliced thin or minced
1-2 T. Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Sea Salt
Cracked black pepper

Into a heavy skillet (or wok) pour the olive oil, and over medium heat, add the green beans. I like my beans to be crispy fresh when I cook them, so this dish isn't going to take long. You can cook yours as long as you like. When the beans are getting close, but not finished, add the garlic. Take care not to scorch or overcook the garlic, as it will get a little bitter. Stir it constantly, like you would a stir fry. If you think it needs a little more olive oil, add some. Sparingly. When it is cooked to your taste, take it off the heat. Add the sea salt and fresh ground black pepper. You can also add some red pepper flakes if you like.

There it is. A gourmet - looking, delightfully healthy dish that will enhance the look of any plate you fix. Easy, quick and beautiful. What more could you want when you are busy in your garden and the beautiful days of summer are upon us?

Annie Kelley is a workshop presenter, discussion group participant, chef for our Earth Literacy Program, and now a columnist for *La Vista Visions*. We are grateful for her sharing her down home wisdom with us. Visit her blog: www.dragonwoman'smysticalmeals.blogspot.com.

Adventure Education: Learning from the Land

by Caitlin Zera



It is no secret that the American education system is struggling. Among “industrialized” nations, the United States has the third lowest scores for student performance in math and the second-highest high-school dropout rate.

Inside the classroom, students face challenges of limited academic resources. Outside the classroom, many students live below the poverty line, don’t have adequate access to health services, and battle against inherited socioeconomic disadvantages like homelessness, food insecurity, and joblessness.

While education in America is a large, complex issue not remedied easily with one solution, we may be overlooking one of the simplest, most elegant tools to making our students’ time as formal learners more holistic, critical, and ecologically-minded: engaging students in outdoor education, adventurous learning from unstructured play and interaction with the natural world.

Even small urban green spaces and city parks can become wondrous and marvelous playgrounds where children are students of Earth, interested in its labyrinthine life cycles and seasonal turnings and enchanted by its creatures great and small.

Having the opportunity to experience the natural world in a capacity that doesn’t involve exams, textbooks, or competitive rubrics, gives students a chance to develop into lifelong learners and stewards of the Earth through a love of exploration.

We live and learn from our land. Our mid-western bioregion, rich with prairie lands and river bluffs,

connects us to a unique experience of the natural world, one we cannot find anywhere but in our own backyards.

At 50 years old, environmentalist Rachel Carson adopted her orphaned grandnephew, Roger. She and Roger often hiked and combed the beach together. For Carson, Earth was not simply passed on to the next generation. She wanted to share Earth and all its intricacies. She felt passionately about cultivating young minds to fully explore, discover, and appreciate it.

The benefits of outdoor education are myriad, extensively documented through research and anecdotes. However, we are still discovering remarkable, unintended rewards of outdoor education for children. Fostering a relationship with nature and a sense of place equips students to better understand the immense environmental difficulties we now face. It also provides them with skills to create sustainable solutions.

Films like “School’s Out” and “Into the Middle of Nowhere” give viewers a glimpse into the robust, imaginative worlds of children who participate in forest kindergartens and outdoor nursery care. Books like *Leave No Child Inside* and *Last Child in the Woods* present intellectual conversations about learning outdoors beyond the traditional classroom.

It doesn’t take exhaustive research studies to see the value of outdoor education and how it enriches the lives of students. This type of adventurous learning gives us a new perspective on how much there really is to learn from Earth and shows us that the natural world is the greatest classroom of all.

Caitlin Zera is a documentary filmmaker with a passion for environmentalism. She currently works as a grants manager for an education nonprofit in St. Louis, MO.



Your Back Yard

You don't need 255 acres on the bluffs to make a difference to wildlife! Doug Tallamy, in his book *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* explains how. He is a firm believer that unless we restore native plants to our back yards **wherever they are and no matter how small they are**, the future of biodiversity in our country is gloomy. He also shows us that restoring native plants to landscapes dominated for years by exotic trees and flowers is relatively easy.

His ideas reveal an *evolution in the concept of gardening*. According to Tallamy, gardeners have become **managers of our nation's wildlife**. Providing for insects and the wildlife that depend on them as a food source is now a significant motivation for planting natives.

Last autumn when monarchs were seen feeding on native cup plant by our office at La Vista, there was a sense of having accomplished something for the future. We felt in tune with the fall monarch migration, part of something much larger than ourselves. All we had to do was provide the food the migrators needed.

TIPS FOR GARDENING WITH NATIVE PLANTS

- Choose native plants that flower at different times throughout the growing season to make sure nectar and pollen sources are available continuously
- Plant in clumps to better attract pollinators
- Provide a variety of flower colors and shapes to attract different pollinators
- Make sure the native plants you purchase are from your local area and have not been treated with pesticides

(Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site as well as our farmers' wisdom)

MORE HELP

Visit Doug Tallamy's web site www.bringingnaturehome.net for a list of woody and herbaceous recommendations for the best plants for your area. Also included is the number of butterfly/moth species each one supports.

Program Calendar June – December, 2015

Summer Solstice Celebration and Native Plant Presentation

Saturday, June 20, 2:00—4:00 pm

Summertime! All around us nature is blooming, bursting, budding, flowering, growing. But what have we planted? Join us and learn more about the vital importance of native trees, flowers, plants and shrubs as we celebrate the beginning of summer. Oblates Jack Lau and Rudy Nowakowski will share their love of native plants with us.

Please bring a summertime snack to share. Donations to support La Vista's programs will be accepted. To register call 618-466-5004. Please leave your name and the number attending.

Papal Encyclical on the Environment: Study Sessions

This summer Pope Francis is expected to issue a rare Papal Encyclical on the environment in which he is expected to declare climate action a moral imperative for the world's Catholics. This papal letter will be the first in the church's history that addresses environmental issues specifically. Many think that it has the possibility of transforming the global climate debate for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Join us for stimulating discussion and conversation! Dates and times will be determined after the encyclical is published.

Autumn Equinox Celebration and Pollinator Party Fundraiser

Saturday, September 19, 4:00—7:00 pm

Don't miss our Pollinator Party Fundraiser to support the creation and maintenance of our newest garden.

The beautiful monarch butterfly migrates yearly from Canada to Mexico, passing through our area around the time of the autumn equinox. Threatened by loss of habitat and use of insecticides, the monarch migration is in danger. In response, La Vista is planting a Pollinator Garden to provide a safe haven for monarchs and many other pollinators.

This outdoor event honors the monarch migration across the continent with Mexican appetizers, live music, and a great view of the Mississippi from the bluffs at La Vista.

Donation: \$15. Registration: Please send your check with the form on page 5 by Wed., Sept. 16.

PLEASE HELP US WITH OUR MAILLIST

We appreciate your generosity over the years; however, to mail this newsletter is costly to the environment and to us. We are hoping more people will be able to receive it online. We intend to continue printing some hard copies for those who prefer it and for those who share it with others.

If you would like to continue to receive this newsletter we need to hear from you.

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- * e-mail us with your request: info@lavistaelc.org OR
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- Thank you for your attention to this request.

Enclosed is my donation to support the newsletter and the programming at La Vista.

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La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035



Rumi and the Spirituality of Cooking

Saturday, October 17, 10:30 – 12:30 am

Rumi wrote a beautiful poem about the teacher, making a metaphorical comparison with the work of a cook. In his spirit, Anu and Ishani will read and interpret the inspiring poetry of Rumi and create a nutritious, delicious lunch with the ancient chickpea as the guest of honor.

Anu and Ishani Trzaska, our presenters, are Rumi enthusiasts and marvelous cooks. To everyone's delight, they have been bringing their Indian dishes to our seasonal celebrations for years. Anu has inspired us at each Winterfires Coffeehouse with her reading and interpreting of Rumi.

Cost \$15. Registration: Please send your check with the above form by October 14th.



Ishani and Anu enjoying World Water Day

Winter Solstice Celebration

Saturday, Dec. 19, 7:00—9:00 pm

On this festive night, the longest one of the year, we mark life's forward progress as we continue travelling around the sun together. This celebration includes a time of re-commitment to caring for our precious home planet, merriment, delicious holiday treats, and the favorite Mexican hot chocolate!

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and the number attending. Please bring a treat to share.



Crystal and Cayan Stevens

The Oblate Ecological Initiative
is a ministry of the
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate



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moving from treating forests as commodities toward appreciating their value to the broader community of life, even an antidote to climate change.

David Korten, author and co-founder of the Positive Futures Network, reminds us that real wealth is a far cry from what many economists think. He says that real wealth is “cooperative, caring human communities and Earth’s natural living systems.” In preserving these woods, the Oblates have made a huge deposit in the bank of real wealth.

Treasure

Moving southeast along the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River we come upon the Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve, sixteen acres dedicated in the Illinois Nature Preserve System since 1993. This beautiful area, preserved forever, includes a limestone cliff, a variety of forest communities and a lovely rocky stream. It protects and preserves habitat for the timber rattlesnake, a state-threatened species. The bald eagle, formerly state and federally-threatened, has an established winter roost nearby and occasionally uses the Oblate Woods. The site also contains habitat for Whitlow grass and Great Plains ratsnake, also state-endangered species, which are found on adjacent lands.

Some in our day would consider these acres a treasure if they could be used for fracking or if an oil or nat-

ural gas pipeline could run through them. Protected by law, that will never happen here. Instead, we consider this area a natural treasure, worth protecting for the species that call it home as well as for the peace and serenity it offers to viewers and hikers.

Communion

And now we return to the entrance to this land that we love and respect. It is easy to see how it has evolved to be much more than background to human activity. It is a communion of beings. Each step along the way we have actually been in communion – with soil, humans, pollinators, oak and hickory forest, precious ecosystems, and also the Divine manifested throughout. I am reminded of these special words by Teilhard de Chardin, “There is a communion with God, and a communion with the Earth and a communion with God through the Earth.” He wrote this years ago, and we are gradually evolving to appreciate this awesome reality.

Maxine Pohlman, SSND, is the Director of La Vista Ecological Learning Center. She has explored, loved and respected the land known as La Vista during her ten years at the Learning Center.

