

# Chrysalis

Volume 7      Spring 2010

*Newsletter of  
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World  
at  
Timberlake Farm*

*Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on the mid noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens.*

~ Emerson

Dear Reader,

This has been a year of expanding circles for the Center, as we reach out beyond our own work to meet with others who are engaged in remembering the sacred quality of life. As we enter the circles of others' work, we see a light that radiates, like a dawn rising, from different places and perspectives from all over the country and the world. And, as we sense the depth of this work, from "under every deep a lower deep opens."

On October 8-9, 2009, Peggy attended a conference in Washington, DC sponsored by the Mind and Life Institute entitled "Educating World Citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Educators, Scientists and Contemplatives Dialogue on Cultivating a Healthy Mind, Brain and Heart". The conference was held at the DAR Constitution Hall just a stone's throw away from the White House where Barack Obama was awakened from his sleep early Friday morning to learn that he had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Twenty years earlier, the prize was given to the Dalai Lama who was the honored guest of the conference.

The conference was framed as a two-day dialogue between the Dalai Lama and a wide range of panelists like Daniel Goldman (*Ecological Intelligence*), Linda Darling-Hammond (Professor of Education, Stanford University), Richard Davidson (Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin), Mark Greenberg (Director, Prevention Research Center, Penn State University), Martin Brokenleg, (Director, Native Ministries and Professor of First Nations Theology at the Vancouver School of Theology), and Linda Lantieri (Director of the Inner Resilience Program and author of *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers*).

Daniel Goldman began by speaking about evolution and the planet, noting that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century of great human discovery, but also a century of destruction - a destruction that is continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He said that the present educational system attends to the physical and material, but it is now time to promote compassion and inner values in the schooling of our children. Linda Lantieri concurred: "We need to find ways to cultivate those things of mind and heart that are intentional, mindful and deep."

The Dalai Lama's question, "How can we find a way of bringing compassion and a quiet mind into the education context?" was at the heart of the two-day dialogue. There was widespread agreement among the participants that one of the most effective ways of teaching children is having the adult teacher embody the qualities we want to impart to the children. Near the end of the conference, the Dalai Lama offered these simple words of wisdom: "One begins with a reverence for all of life – start with the insects, plants, animals, then human beings."



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Closer to home, Carolyn was asked to speak at a weekend symposium, "The Legacy of Thomas Berry: Continuing His Work," sponsored by the Center for Ecozoic Studies, February 26-27, 2010 at the United Church in Chapel Hill, NC. While the Mind and Life conference honored the inner life as a pathway to peace, the Thomas Berry symposium brought the question of interiority into a fuller relationship with the Earth.

John Sullivan (author and Powell Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Elon University, Tai Sophia Institute lecturer) spoke of the "project of individualism" that has permeated Western civilization since 1500 and said that Thomas Berry's work calls out to us to make a shift from a culture of *separation* to a culture of *interbeing*.

Andrew Angyal (author and Professor of Environmental Studies and English, Elon University), in a reflection on Thomas Berry's *Sacred Universe*, called for a new eco-spirituality for our time; one that recognizes that science and religion are part of the same greater reality; one where human reason is informed by love; one that is concerned with the destiny of the Earth as much as it is with the destiny of human souls.

Carolyn brought us into the intimate realm of "Thomas Berry's Sense of the Sacred" through seven personal stories of her conversations with Thomas over the past ten years. In her last conversation with Thomas before he died, Thomas told Carolyn that "the sense of the sacred *affixes* within us in response to the natural world. It is all there in a unity that is different for everyone. . . . In the sacred all opposites are reconciled." And finally, that same day, reflecting on his life's work, he said: "My work was to lead the soul home, for we can no longer endure the loss of the sacred . . . for somewhere within us we remember, in certain moments we remember . . ." Carolyn's second talk, "A Child Awakens" is published in this issue of *Chrysalis*.

Finally, Herman Greene (President, Center for Ecozoic Studies) reminded us that we live with the myth that we know the world through our own senses alone, but that is not true. Rather, he said, it is through our imaginal thinking that we know the world in its depths. A new vision of the Earth will come from all of us as we give imaginal expression to a universe that is meaningful, continually evolving and relational – as we learn how to listen and develop new capacities for dialogue with one another.

As we listened to these speakers, we sensed, with Thomas Berry, that "we are in that phase of transition that must be described as the groping phase. We are like a musician who faintly hears a melody deep within the mind, but not clearly enough to play it through."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 47.

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Then, from March 17-21, 2010, Peggy had the remarkable opportunity to travel to Cavallo Lodge in Sausalito, CA, for a gathering called “Emergence,” sponsored by the Kalliopeia Foundation. This extraordinary gathering brought together the leaders of 115 organizations, funded by Kalliopeia, who are working on the cusp of a transition to wholeness so needed in our time - people like Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation Council of Chiefs, Peter Kingsley of The Primordial Tradition, Orland Bishop of the ShadeTree Multicultural Foundation, Pir Zia Inayat Khan of the Seven Pillars House of Wisdom, and Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Thomas Berry Foundation.

The invitation to the gathering foretold what was to come:

*Each of us might use different language to describe the great work in which we are all engaged. But we all know that the wounds that the earth bears and the wounds that each of us bears are fundamentally interconnected. We also know that amidst a profound wounding of life, healing visions of wholeness are emerging in individuals, communities and the planet.*

*Even as we gather together to reach toward these visions of a possible future, one senses the future reaching eagerly toward us. But we need one another's wisdom; it seems humanity is slowly moving past the conceit that we can do this alone – as individuals, isolated communities, or an elite species. By taking time to be together, hear one another's stories, and animate emergent visions of wholeness, we hope we can help to heal those wounds and find our way to the just and vibrant world that calls us so compellingly.*

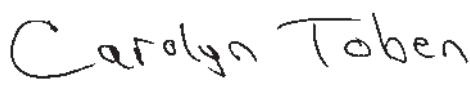
Each morning, we arose before sunrise and made our way to a place surrounded, like a womb, by craggy hills that could barely be distinguished in the dark. We gathered together “to recognize and honor the rising sun and welcome the morning light.” Our main gatherings were held in an old Chapel building, now renamed “Mission Blue” in honor of the mission blue butterfly, an endangered species of the Marin Headlands. Thus, the Earth was brought into our field of vision at every turn as a presence and participant in our conversations.

One of Peggy’s most memorable moments was a talk given by Pir Zia Inayat Khan, who said that a sense of the sacred must now be experienced on the planetary level; that the whole of nature is overflowing with wisdom; that the cosmos is not passive – the cosmos responds; that the infinite and the eternal are right here in this moment; that we are here as delegates of a divine intention – we are a microcosm of all the elements reveling in themselves through us; and that chivalry is sacrificing one’s narrowly defined interests for the sake of the whole.

Reflecting back over the year, we recognize that the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has an important part to play in this time of transition. And so it seemed fitting, in this issue of *Chrysalis*, for each member of our staff to offer a piece about our work. We begin with Carolyn’s piece “A Child Awakens” that speaks of Thomas Berry’s influences on our work for teachers and children. Next, Peggy’s piece, “A Welcoming Presence,” brings you into the circle of our work for teachers. And, finally, Sandy Bisdee’s piece, “Silence,” is a beautiful account of our work with the children. We think you will find, as you read these pieces, that we are developing a work here in the foothills of North Carolina that is a deep practice in Earth as sacred community.

The circle of our own work, through these extraordinary encounters, is now interlaced with the circles of many others who are reaching toward conscious and ensouled participation in the world’s evolving. Pir Zia spoke of seeing the moment – taking it in – and sending it back with gratitude. For these new friends and the inspiration they have brought to us, we are deeply grateful.

With warmest regards,

Carolyn Toben

Carolyn Toben, Founder

Peggy Whalen-Levitt

Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

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# “A Child Awakens...”

by

Carolyn Toben

A talk given at the “Legacy of Thomas Berry” program

February 27, 2010

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Thomas Berry had a deep love for children, all children; they were always “closest to his heart,” as he put it.

In his compassionate dedication to *The Great Work* he wrote:

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 and the forest, to  
All those children who roam over the land  
And the winged ones who fly with winds  
To the human children too, that all the children  
May go together into the future . . .<sup>1</sup>

One winter I went to see Thomas at his Hermitage, which was a small apartment over a former stable in Greensboro. I wanted to talk to him about the work going on for children and teachers at our Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. He had given us guidance at every juncture, and I wanted to give him an update on our progress.

I had had the joy of being with those who had not lost their spiritual vision and who participated freely in a real communion of subjects . . . with trees, plants, animals and all living things of the earth. These visitors at the Earth Sanctuary who kept giving us courage to keep on were between the ages of three and eight years old.

At our Center, we watch for those special magical moments that bring children into a direct personal connection with the natural world and I had some of those to share with Thomas. He settled himself into his favorite chair to listen with full presence as I told him about . . .

~ A small group of seven-year-olds suddenly stopping on their trail walk one windy fall day to carefully observe a tiny spider web tossing back and forth, and then watching for minutes in silent amazement at the miraculous movements of the spider to repair it . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

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- ~ Three five-year-olds sitting in rapt attention, watching the movement of tiny golden frogs at the creek on the Creeping Cedar Trail, which he had loved so much . . .
- ~ A group of seven to ten-year-olds at our summer dance camp thoughtfully absorbing shapes and rhythms of the earth and then creating dance and movement patterns in collaboration with one another among the trees . . .
- ~ An incredible moment of intimacy between a gray fox and a group of eight-year-olds with teachers and parents on Timber-lake Trail when in absolute silence there was an encounter of deep communion . . .
- ~ Four-year-olds counting “sun sparkles”: dancing at the lakeside with their Earth Guide . . .
- ~ A six-year-old girl who, when asked to listen deeply to the sounds of the woods, reported: “I even heard the beat of my own heart” . . .

Thomas smiled in deep delight and then began to speak very seriously as I took careful notes:

*The present child is growing up in a geo-biological moment that has never before happened in 65 million years.”*

*The child,” he went on, with great eloquence, “has always been organized for a real abiding world of beauty, wonder and the intimacy of living processes - the wind, frogs, butterflies - not for 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. Children need the personal connection with the natural world first in their early years, for the natural world activates the spirit in their minds . . . what they see in water, the rocks, the movement of insects.”*

“Thomas,” I remember saying to him, “We’re finding that the children seem to know about global warming and climate change, but they often don’t know the sound of a bullfrog or the smell of spring rain.”

He responded by saying:

*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. Relationships are the primary context of existence, and children need to see us practice a sympathetic presence to the Earth as a means for being in a mutually enhancing relationship to it. Parents need to say to the child: let’s go out into the sunset, let’s wade in a creek, let’s go meet the trees. Children need to breathe, to inhale with the whole Earth.*

I told him of the programs we had initiated for the schools: Awakening to Nature, the Poetry of Nature, Native American Journeys and our after school program called Children of the Forest. I told him about our development of a national educators program called the Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice, that allowed teachers from schools, churches, synagogues, therapeutic practices to find ways to bring the work with children and the Earth into their own settings.

Thomas replied:

*You are doing foundational work, which is imperative for laying down enduring value of beauty, wonder and intimacy. A sense of the sacred begins here.*

*All that you are doing for children gives them a sense of belonging, a self-orientation, a sense of imagination and meaning. Out of these experiences they come to know something of the world, which becomes the basis for their thinking. They need the magical idea of creation their whole life long, as they have to create and invent the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*The most basic issue is how we bond with the Earth.*

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I went on and described to him the earth walks we took children on at the Earth Sanctuary, our practices of using silence, deepening the senses, creating “Magical Moments,” and “Beholding.” “These practices have developed out of your understanding Thomas,” I told him. To which he replied, “Oh my.”

I told him how we were drawing parallels between the way the plants and trees and creatures grew and changed and the way the children did. I told him how we gave children an opportunity to express their experiences through art or writing as a means of bringing images of the natural world into the child’s awareness.

I told him how each of us on our staff practiced noticing the natural world every day...the flight of a cardinal, the sound of a barred owl, patterns of bark on the trees, the rhythm of a day and how this practice of noticing had become part of our teacher’s programs.

Finally I told him how, in our organization, the understanding of differences has made all the difference as our small staff struggled to bring forth our own best capacities to birth a new social form in the world.

Thomas listened intently and then disappeared into his office returning with several green bookmarks with a poem on them, which he had written and proceeded to read it with great feeling.

A child awakens to a universe  
The mind of a 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  
It takes a universe to fulfill a child  
And the first obligation of each generation  
Is to bring these two together  
So that the child is fulfilled in the universe  
And the universe is fulfilled in the child  
While the stars ring out in the heavens!



I thanked him, hugged him and left with utter gratitude for the continuing sense of the sacred that he inspired.

# A Welcoming Presence

by

Peggy Whalen-Levitt

September 21, 2006

Dear Inner Life Friends,

*In the stillness of this first day of Fall in which seasonal changes are revealing turnings and ripenings, we write to welcome you to our forthcoming time in creating together a new vision of the inner life of the child in nature.*

*For entry into our beginning time together, we are enclosing three readings: Richard Lewis' essay "Living by Wonder," Thomas Berry's reflection on "The Meadow Across the Creek," and Robert Sardello's "Meditation on Silence."*

*As you enter the land, we invite you to slow down, take in the cosmos field on your right, and stop to read the John Muir sign before the bend in the road. Follow the gravel road to the Magical Garden where you will find a place to park along the fence.*

*You are invited to arrive between 9:00 and 9:30 am on Saturday morning, October 7th. Warm muffins and tea/coffee will be waiting for you at the Farmhouse. Our retreat will begin at 9:30 am and end by 4:00 pm, with lunch served at midday. Solo time on earth sanctuary trails will be part of the day, so please wear sturdy shoes and come dressed for rain or shine.*

*We hope you feel the welcoming presence of the land as we come together.*

*Warm regards,*

*Carolyn Toben*

*Peggy Whalen-Levitt*

So began the two-year journey of our first class of "The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice" in the Autumn of 2006.

It's an unusual beginning for a program for educators in our culture . . . A beginning that invites attention to the natural world before the human participants meet one another . . . A beginning that speaks of warmth and welcome and life . . . An intentional beginning to a program that will invite educators to behold what is before them without bringing in other sources of knowledge beyond their own immediate experience.

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This kind of beginning bespeaks the intention of the Inner Life program to *expand* beyond the kinds of memory that we traditionally encourage in our schools – the kinds of memory that are primarily functional and logical in nature, where students are asked to learn a body of knowledge and information, to be able to recall it and think critically about it.

There are, however, other kinds of memory that are the focus of our work with educators in the Inner Life Program. We might think of two other dimensions of memory as “intimate memory” on the horizontal plane and “cosmic memory” on the vertical plane.

In “intimate memory,” we recall moments from our own lives between birth and death that have so moved us that they are incapable of being forgotten.

In “cosmic memory,” we move beyond the ordinary consciousness of our daily lives and bridge the seen and unseen worlds.

In our work with teachers, we evoke both of these realms of memory.

On the morning of our first meeting, after we’ve had muffins and tea and a chance to “take in” where we are and who we are with, we sit in a circle in the comfort of the farmhouse living room and ask the teachers to recall an “intimate memory” of the natural world from their own childhoods. We offer up a way of “speaking into the circle,” creating a vessel of trust, before we begin. The educators are invited to speak from the heart . . . to present an image without discourse or commentary . . . to speak one at a time . . . to listen deeply to one another . . . to go in no particular order, until we have come full circle through all who wish to make an offering. And each year, like a new miracle, the whole world comes to us through the heart into the center. One memory evokes another until we have introduced ourselves through these deep moments of connection to places in the natural world. These moments of “intimate memory” bring us into a bond of intimacy with each other and the world. They also bring us back into the kind of beholding that we will practice together for the rest of the year.

On that first day, and for all our days together during the first and second year, we invite the educators to engage in a practice of beholding the natural world. Through guided solos on earth sanctuary trails, the educators make their first sojourn into this realm. This simple invitation to create new “bonds of intimacy” with nature is not without its challenges for contemporary teachers:

*Solo walks on the beautiful earth sanctuary trails of Timberlake Farm were adventures for me, although I must admit they were not always within my comfort zone, especially in the beginning. Quieting my mind and opening my heart to hear the murmurs of a divine presence took time and patience.*

*Ever so slowly I was able to trust that ‘being lost’ in the woods was simply a state of mind. Early in the program during one of my solos, I got completely disoriented in the woods, couldn’t find my map of the grounds, and started to panic not knowing how to get back to the Treehouse for lunch. As I feverishly took one “wrong” path after another and grew increasingly anxious (I could say terrified), all my old thoughts of nature being untrustworthy and unsafe welled up inside of me. These voices were strong and loud, but they were countered by other voices reminding me of my positive experiences with nature as a benevolent source of guidance and support. In a complete act of faith, I made a decision to trust that I was safe and would be guided out of the woods. Step by hesitant step, I repeated my mantra that I was safe and being led by a faithful and loving presence. As I walked out onto the field, into the warmth of the sunlight, I realized with gratitude that the person exiting the woods was profoundly different from the person who entered it. I knew with confidence that this experience had changed me so deeply that my relationship with nature would be forever altered, and for the better.*

On the first day, the educators are given journals in which to record their experiences with the beholding practices over the course of the first year. Most educators find it a formidable task to engage in a daily “meeting” with the natural world:

*I finally stopped and looked up. Sometimes I feel like that’s the best I can do to observe nature – just stop, and look up. The huge loblolly pine trees were reaching up to the sky. It was a still day and there was hardly any breeze that I could feel standing on the ground. But as I stood there and looked up to the clear blue sky the trees were gently stirring, reaching up, slowly swaying in some wind I couldn’t see.*

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*Though I have yet to achieve a daily routine of sitting quietly in nature, I daily reflect on the idea of it and imagine sitting in nature while engaged in some other routine. Reflecting so regularly on a daily basis, realizing the body is not keeping pace with the mind, I anticipate getting closer and closer to the two meeting as daily occurrence in the open air.*

\* \* \*

*Busy, busy, busy. No time to get it all done. Lists, worry, stress. My mind races and fills itself with things to remember and things to do. I sit outside before bed...I don't have time for this. I close my eyes and listen. Crickets chirping, leaves rustling, a dog barking in the distance. This harmony fills my ears, my breathing slows. I look up and see silent waves of white and gray puffs across the black sky. A star shines through, offering a guiding light. Quiet peace.*

Each time these educators find a way to take the time to step out of the busyness of their lives and “see” what is before them, they enter the realm of “intimate memory” and are changed. The inner capacity for “intimate memory” is strengthened, one moment at a time.

Once this practice of beholding is established, we invite the educators to move from “intimate memory” on the horizontal plane to “cosmic memory” on the vertical plane. Drawing upon an essay by Carlo Pietzner entitled “Approaches to Dawn and Dusk,” we evoke “cosmic memory” by inviting the educators to engage in a practice of noticing dawn and dusk. Pietzner guides us in this practice of verticality:

*One could ask oneself: what are we seeing when we look at dusk or dawn? What is it, principally, in its thousandfold variations and vastly different ways? . . . At sunset, at dusk (whether you can see the sun or not), there is always this convergence toward one point. It is sometimes brilliant, sometimes all glory, sometimes subdued. But there is always at least a hint of this convergence to one point. Everything is in a tremendous sweep toward one point, or a point pulls toward itself every impurity of the whole day. The haze and the clouds are always pulled after it. All this impurity and darkness is gathered up from the whole width of the day and, in one more final flourish, is pulled into the center and disappears into the night, in this one condensing point of disappearance.*

*At dawn it is quite different. There is first some kind of tender annunciation of the coming day. Then there is always this unbelievable moment that, in a small way, one can also have if one sits in a dark room and just lights a candle. The confinement and narrowness of darkness is lifted, lit up, spread out and is gently removed and then suddenly it is unlocked. The world is opened, sight is kindled, the day is arising! These two great fundamental moods must be experienced – this gathering up from the widest width into one point and this arising from the center and spreading into the whole unfathomable periphery. This is what speaks to us at the two portals of dawn and dusk . . . For that is what dawn and dusk speak to us. They want us to learn that through them there shines into our life, into our own finite existence, the infinite. The eternal radiates into our transitory existence.<sup>1</sup>*

For so many of our educators, this experience of dawn or dusk becomes a portal to the infinite:

### **Dawn**

*Woke to bright stars this morning at 6:20. When I stepped outside the tent, I could hardly believe that it was near morning—only the vaguest indication of dawn marked the eastern sky. I bathed in this early morning darkness, the western stars bright in front of me. The cold was exhilarating. And even as it chilled me, I felt considerable inner warmth—perhaps connected to the calm centeredness that comes from moving along my own path within the darkness, beginning my own daily rhythm in relationship to the rhythms of the more-than-human world. When I dried myself off, the sky was already golden-peach with morning.*

*A crow caws, now, speeding the midmorning on. Another bird calls as a herald of the brighter day—is echoed in three places, a triangle of sound.*

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<sup>1</sup> Pietzner, Carlo. *Transforming Earth, Transforming Self*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1996, pp. 77-94.

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*There is something wonderfully expansive about solitude from human interaction, something very natural about silent movement through the rhythms of the day. So many of earth's beings live in a state of silent movement. When we make thoughtless sounds, we seem to lose our attunement to the rhythms—and the existence—of the world around us. Idle noise-making has a strange way of creating insular spaces for us, spaces of limited awareness. Though I've often found that the sounds of the natural world draw my circle of attention out beyond the reach of my other senses, I guess that even natural sounds can limit the circumference of our attention. We must not be limited to the perception of the spaces they fill, but must listen beyond to the aspects more subtle than those expressed within physical reality.*

### **Dusk**

*Blue on blue on blue on gray, white accent of cloud. The colors of the sky at twilight . . . when all is visible in the light of day, we tend to forget the great mystery, the unseen that lies behind it all, but shadows remind us of the more that is there. The shadow, the darkness, brings the presence of the mystery – more intense.*

Once we have established these practices of “intimate memory” and “cosmic memory” with the educators, we turn our attention to the inner life of the child in nature. We introduce our ways of working with children at the Center and we ask the educators to write a brief description of a young person’s feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight, or deep sense of reverence and love for nature; playful encounter with nature; seeing the invisible in nature, or any other experience at the meeting place between the inner life of the child/young adult and the natural world. We offer as an example Thomas Berry’s recollection of the meadow across the creek when he was eleven years old:

*At the time I was eleven years old. My family was moving from a more settled part of a small southern town out to the edge of town where the new house was being built. The house, not yet finished, was situated on a slight incline. Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in late May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and looked out over the scene.*

*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 the 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 passed 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.<sup>2</sup>*

This kind of deep connection between a child and nature is increasingly threatened today, so the “childhood entry” can be a difficult assignment for our educators, as one so eloquently explained:

*It has not been easy to respond to this entry. There have been few recent times, even as a teacher of science, that I have witnessed a moment of epiphany for a child or children in concert with the natural world. This is a sad thing to admit, and I offer this reluctantly.*

*At two schools for which I have worked in recent years, “outside” meant large fields of grass surrounding the centerpiece of “blacktop” that drew the attention of the children. There were no trees, no bushes, only a vast undefined horizon. Yet specific and intransigent boundaries, boundaries created by restricted imagination and fear, confined the children from nature. Joyfully, at another school, there existed a wooded trail of verdant, lush beauty, but the children were not allowed to use it due to liability concerns.*

*The moments of grace I profoundly recall occurred on a fifth grade field trip to the Sound to Sea program at the Trinity Center on Salter Path. Watching children from the inner city suit up in chest high waders to go “netting” in the shallow yet broad sound, seeing these neophytes become uncannily quiet as they searched with intent stillness for small specimens in the intertidal pond, delighting with them as they re-enacted the births and short journeys of baby loggerheads to their briny home, and witnessing the intensity in their reverential dissection of squid: all of these were a multi-faceted jewel glimmering through the revived imaginations of young people.*

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

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By now, you may be wondering what “intimate memories” and “cosmic memories” are for? They are, as Thomas Berry knew so well, what enable us to unite ourselves with the world’s evolving, to say “I am at peace with the world.” Like Thomas’ moment of grace in the meadow, they are what make it possible for us to know “what is real and worthwhile in life.” They add a dimension of sacred depth to our other ways of knowing and restore us to our full humanity. Imprinted on our hearts, they help us know the difference between nature and virtual reality, between spiritual renewal and materialism, between creative evolution and destructive evolution. Without them, we easily lose our way and take missteps into innovation for its own sake rather than for the sake of the world. They are the touchstones that help us chart our way into a future of love and compassion and peace.

In his closing remarks at the Thomas Berry Memorial Service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Brian Swimme told a story about Thomas. Scholars had gathered from all over the world for a conference to consider the question “Who are the heroes of our time?” After the full panoply of talks by illustrious speakers who spoke of philosophers, seers, saints, and others, Thomas rose to speak as the last speaker. He graciously summarized all that had been said over the course of the conference with astute understanding. Then he offered up to the group that the real hero of our time was the bird who was singing outside the conference window. It is this bird who sings the song of life who is our hero, our teacher, if only we can learn how to listen.

One of our educators, Maureen Matthews, in her reflections on the Inner Life Program, came to this same understanding:

*It was this “sacred sensitivity” that ached in me, but through the Presence and Practice program at Timberlake Farm it found a resting place. Through the time spent at Timberlake Farm I observed the caretakers (Peggy and Carolyn) set the stage to carefully and thoughtfully nurture this “sensitivity” into a conscious felt awareness. It was like having the petals of the heart gently coaxed to slowly open . . . one by one . . . to the light and the rhythm of that place.*

*As time passed I was aware of the beautiful emergence of the deepest understanding of what it means to feel the sacredness of this reality. With care and great patience, each of us was led to a place where it became impossible to deny or avoid our newly emergent sacred sensitivity.*

*At Timberlake Farm the land itself honors and welcomes you. To me, Peggy and Carolyn are gatekeepers, doorway guardians, or somehow keepers of the invitation and introductions necessary to participate in the deepness of the Farm and all her “residents”. It often felt like we were going to meet some Great Being. It was Peggy and Carolyn’s sacred duty to create the appropriate preparations and rituals before meeting this Being.*

*The true spinners of the heart threads were the land. You would set out on your solo walks and “they” would gently tug and pull and weave our heart filaments into a new kind of knowing, or perhaps a more primordial way of knowing.*

*It is the place that welcomes your heart to open . . . that speaks ever so softly. It is this ability, this ability to hear softly and to see softly that is taught by the Farm. In that softness you can feel your being reach out and touch the “others” and to be touched in return by them.*

*To have been a part of and a witness to this process, this deep awakening, gave me a great sense of peace and gratitude, after having spent so much time in a space of fear, frustration, and hopelessness for our continued existence and that of the planet.*

*How my practice will evolve I do not know, but I do know now that I will carry forward the priceless understanding that it IS possible to awaken the human heart from its “mean sleep.”<sup>3</sup> I will be able to hold this space for the children so that they too can feel hope and a soft expectancy of the joy that an awakened humanity will share with this sacred place.*

And so, it ends as it begins. Without perhaps knowing it at first, these educators met their Great Teacher as they entered the gravel road, beheld the cosmos field and rounded the bend to the Magical Garden on the first day of the program. We hoped that they would feel the welcoming presence of the land, and they did. And on the last day, as they streamed out into the world, they did so with a feeling of “hope and soft expectancy” about what they would be able to bring to the children . . . and the Earth . . . and the Universe.

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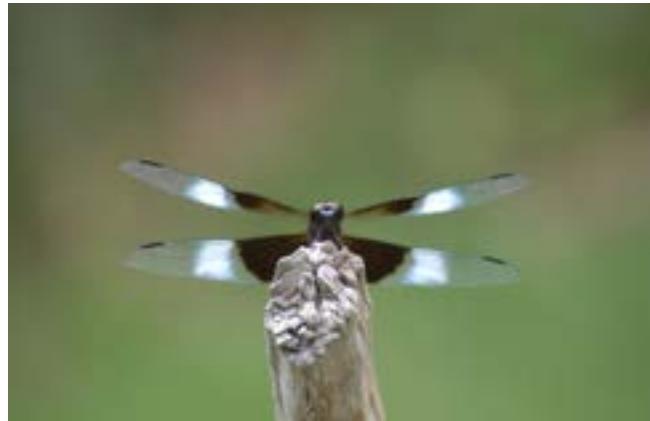
<sup>3</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*. (Excerpted from the following: “I cannot be awake, for nothing looks to me as it did before, or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep.”)

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# Silence

by

Sandy Bisdee



*Silence is the bountiful source of our sensing our self and all creation  
with newfound clarity and intimacy.<sup>1</sup>*

~ Robert Sardello

Before I began working at the Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World five years ago as an earth guide, taking children for walks on the beautiful earth sanctuary trails, I taught kindergarten in a Montessori classroom for over two decades. During my training with the Center, I was told that the earth walks were done mostly in silence, except for the carefully developed practices that we would stop to offer to the children along the way. These practices would awaken their senses one by one to the natural world and help them to develop a bond of intimacy with all of life.

My experience of silence in the natural world with young children up to that point had been limited to the “silence game,” part of the Montessori philosophy and curriculum. We played this game whenever we entered a forest for a field trip and at circle time inside of the classroom. The silence game was a small part of our excursions into the woods where silence was forced into a form, a game, and a time frame. But now I was being asked to take groups of students K – 12, from all kinds of schools, both public and private, into the earth sanctuary in silence. “Right,” I thought. “Silence.” I remember thinking inwardly that this was not going to work. I remember wondering how in the world I was going to pull this off. I seriously wondered how I would temper my own exuberant enthusiasm for every little detail of our blessed earth that I experienced every time I set foot on the sanctuary paths. How would I be quiet enough myself to set a tone that would serve as a role model and offer an opportunity for silence among the children?

Five years of experience with multi-aged groups has taught me much about the nature of silence. Even before I chose “Silence” as my project for the Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, I began to wonder what would set the stage for silence to come to us during our earth walks and solo times, what it felt like while silence was present and lastly, what made silence withdraw? In the last four years my journey has taken me into subtle realms that I had not anticipated when I began this research. Entering new territory, I began to break out from the confines of the Montessori silence game and into the presence of Silence. As an eager new student of Silence, I was wide open to guidance. I learned that Silence is not the absence of noise. It is not unpleasant or unnatural for children and young adults. It is not something that I do. Autonomously, Silence invites, Silence gathers, Silence enfolds, and Silence permeates. What I discovered by choosing Silence as my dedicated intention for the Inner Life of the Child in Nature program is that I had already been in the presence of Silence at various times in my life without my conscious awareness. There had been very special times during my prayer life and times in the natural world where my inner and outer worlds had merged and I felt as if I were one with it all.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Sardello, *Silence* (Benson, NC: Goldenstone Press, 2006), p. 17.

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During my research I have learned that there are different types of Silence that go with different places and circumstances. I have learned that there are guardians at the threshold of Silence that allow it to be present or cause it to flee. I have learned that Silence can remind us that we are part of a much greater reality than our own narrow viewpoint of life and assure us that we are never alone. I have witnessed and experienced the healing power of Silence and I have come to know Silence as a friend of my heart. The totally unexpected outcome of this work has been the growing awareness of Silence as a living presence.

There are several books that have helped me navigate these various realms and expressions of Silence. *Silence*, by Robert Sardello, has been instrumental in helping me interpret some of my own experiences while in the presence of Silence. His book continues to offer me a new way of thinking about Silence, even during my third reading. He says that “the book is offered to us as an experience that deepens our relationship with the world and all that is within it.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that “Silence is the bountiful source of our sensing our self and all creation with newfound clarity and intimacy.”<sup>3</sup>

*The Wisdom of Wilderness*, by Gerald G. May, has helped me put into words some of my own encounters with the presence of Silence. He calls this presence “The Power of Slowing.” There are certain conditions that invite the presence of Silence when I am working with children. To begin with, as their guide, I must be inwardly silent, relaxed, present and attentive. It takes time for the children to leave behind their regular school day and habits of thought. A gradual shedding of the everyday world begins to occur as they begin to focus their attention on the miracle of life that surrounds them. When the children become more fully present, then and only then, will the guardians of Silence let us through. Gerald May knew how to get in touch with the presence of Silence: “Now, when I walk in the woods and field, I like to stop, sometimes suddenly, sometimes softly. I stand like a tree. I look around and feel my body. I notice my breath streaming in the cool air. I sense inside, my emotions and heart-perceptions. My listening is sharp and my seeing acute. I feel the temperature, the sun or the snowflakes, and what thoughts or images may come to the surface of my mind. If I want to know which way to turn next, I wait, see, listen. My being lives and Wisdom comes.”<sup>4</sup>

I would like to share four examples from my experience with Silence and children that encompass three different age groups: kindergarten, lower elementary and middle school. The first two stories are from “Children of the Forest,” an after-school program that meets once a week over the course of eight weeks at the Center. The second two are from a Special Design program with middle school students.

In *Silence*, Robert Sardello tells us that “Everything, it seems, has its own quality of Silence. It is a unified but many-qualified phenomenon.” He speaks of different qualities of Silence in various locations such as the “immensity” of the “Silence of high rocky mountains,” the “darker, deeper, and more inward” feeling of Silence in “dense forests,” the “radiant but oppressive Silence of the pyramids,” the “magical Silence of the stars” and the “vast interior Silence of the cathedral.”<sup>5</sup> The following experiences are but several of these many facets on the diamond of Silence.

### **Kindergarten Children of the Forest**

*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. Alizse 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*

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<sup>2</sup> Sardello, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald G. May, *The Wisdom of Wilderness* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> Sardello, p. 14.

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*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.*

### **Grade School Children of the Forest**

My second example is intended to illustrate what conditions led up to the presence of Silence during one of my programs with seven and eight-year-olds. The chapter titled “Entering the Silence,” by Robert Sardello, has helped me in my research to be more aware of and witness to the presence of Silence. He said: “We need not do anything to increase the sensitivity of our sensing other than to be present to what happens when we experience Silence in the midst of the natural world. We said that Silence gathers in nature. Instead of simply enjoying nature’s silence, however, our initial practice consists of noticing what happens when we are within the Silence, for we are within a very active presence.”<sup>6</sup>

*It was the first day of autumn and it would turn out to be a day of many new discoveries as four children and I headed out together on the Creeping Cedar Trail by the lake. After reconnecting with each other and playing along the trail for a while, we explored the pond's edge and the teepee area. The children asked to make “blessing wands” out of sticks and thread. They proceeded to shower the day with their love, blessing every little thing along the path: frogs, flowers and mushrooms. They sang songs of love and gratitude for the earth, sun and stars. As we climbed the steep part of the trail, new friends in the form of rocks came to meet us. The children began collecting them to take to the creek where they could be washed. There were longer pauses in their conversations as they filled their pockets and shirts with quartz. As we approached the creek, I noticed that a peace and stillness began to fill the air and that this Silence enfolded us and surrounded us. We climbed the fern laden banks down to the creek's edge. Time stood still as we washed our treasures and the children played by the creek, lifting up rocks only to find salamanders and crayfish hiding beneath them. There was little need for conversation as we shared in the magic of the moment. I sat a short distance from the children on a large rock and cherished the Silence while they played in and by the creek. There were times that one or another of the children, ages six and seven, would pause in their activity and sit very still and look out on the scene before them with soft, slightly unfocused eyes. They looked so still, relaxed and thoughtful. I don't know where the time went, but my watch told me I only had fifteen minutes to get them back to the treehouse to meet their parents. The Silence stayed with us for most of the walk back. Nourished and refreshed, they would soon be driving home for supper and bedtime. This Silence will be etched in their hearts, and as their guide I will be on the lookout for this gentle presence again.*

### **Seventh grade Students**

There is one group of students that has been coming to the sanctuary for three consecutive years now, thanks to a grant that was awarded to their school. They know that they will be with Silence for certain times throughout the program. They know there will be times for outer and inner listening and a silent solo time to reflect on a question that is related to them and to the natural world. Over the last three years, I have watched them change from pre-teens to blossoming adolescents. During their seasonal visits they have openly talked about their hurried and high-pressured lives, sleep problems, heavily booked schedules, and peer pressures. They have also written and talked about the value of having the opportunity to come to our sanctuary and to have a beautiful place in the natural world to slow down and to think their own thoughts. They have told us that this is one of the only places in their lives where they are with Silence. The following two examples are from this 7<sup>th</sup> grade class. The first example is a testament to the healing power of Silence.

*It was a crisp clear autumn day. The little girls that I had met three years ago were now young women. Our theme for the day centered on a relationship with water in our lives. The assignment would be done by a remote creek in the deep, dark forest. The students would be asked to observe the flow and stagnation of the water in the creek, and then would reflect on their own inner flow and obstacles in their lives. My group of five girls was very talkative that beautiful fall morning as we headed out on the mossy path. One girl lagged behind. She had always enjoyed the silent nature of our earth walks in the past and I thought that she was distancing herself from her chatty classmates. As we walked, the chatter died down and I noticed tears on her cheeks. I was unsure what to say in the moment, but her jovial classmates responded by surrounding her in a big group*

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<sup>6</sup> Sardello, p. 31.

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hug. We then began the climb up the hill on the narrow little path that would take us into the darker part of the forest and down to the wide shallow creek. The chatter had subsided during the steep climb up the hillside and all the way down the leafy, dark carpeted floor to the creek's edge. I could feel Silence begin to surround each girl, like a beloved and familiar crocheted shawl, as they settled down by the creek, anticipating the precious solo reflection time and the writing assignment. We observed the way that the creek flowed and the obstacles in the water that held up and diverted the stream's path. We observed stagnant pools. After I gave them their assignment, they silently split up without a word and found their own special place by the creek to sit and to write. I was humbled by their surrender to total stillness and silence. I found a comfortable place to sit that was clearly in view in case they had a question. I hardly moved a muscle as I gazed at the sunlight dancing along the surface of the creek and imagined that a chilly salamander was nestled under the rocks. What blocked my flow? The girl who had been crying pulled her hood over her head and wrote for a long time. The girls spent their time alternately writing and gazing at the water. After they had finished writing, they said not one word, but sat quietly and peacefully in their spots. Nobody wanted to leave the compassionate embrace as we flowed together in a river of peace and silence. After some time, one of the girls rustled in her spot, another threw a pebble into the water and as quickly as we had accepted Silence's embrace, we let go. Tears dried, the girl that had been sad looked noticeably lighter. She shared the contents of her writing with the group, much of it about peer pressure and individuality. A healing had flowed through all of us. It was time to walk to the garden. Tears dried and with a smile on her face, the once troubled girl let her hair down and skipped ahead.

When we are in the stillness and Silence comes, we are reminded that we are not alone in the world. This student later wrote a poem, found at the end of this segment, that illustrates her inner recognition that Silence releases us from feelings of isolation and, as Sardello says, "cures us of the disease of dualism."

*It was a cool winter day and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade group had returned to the sanctuary. The assignment for the day was to find a special place where they could contemplate the nature of a covenantal relationship with an animal or a person in their life and what the unspoken promises between them might be. After a happy and somewhat brisk walk we stopped to center ourselves by observing the movement and colors that surrounded us. We felt the temperature of the air on our skin. We came into a quieter frame of mind as we noticed what had remained unseen. By the time that we got to the Creeping Cedar Bridge, the group dispersed and found private and comfortable places to contemplate its assignment and to write while sitting along the mossy creek bed and the wooden bridge. The Silence was immediately welcomed and natural. No one spoke. After the students finished their writing, they gazed thoughtfully out at the landscapes (both inner and outer, I assume) and some noticed the tiny kingdoms that surrounded them. They remained in the Silence. When I saw that they had finished their writing and our time was coming to an end, I gathered the group together to share what they had written. The students were notably more thoughtful, mellow and peaceful. Paige shared with the group that when she had come to the Center today she had a lot on her mind and had been thinking of everything that she had to do for school, extracurricular activities and relationships at home. She said that while she was sitting in her special place 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 she wrote this poem.*

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.

Our children live in a noisy world. Their days are overly structured and their senses are overloaded. The quiet moments of reflection and contemplation in the natural world that were taken for granted when we were growing up are disappearing. Robert Sardello says it well: "Happiness and Silence belong together just as do profit and noise. So long as we live in a commercialized world, noise reigns. All the distractions that keep us from the center of our being, where stillness of soul can resonate with Silence, belong to the world of profit."<sup>7</sup>

Now I know that, given the chance, children swim in the sea of Silence as naturally as a peace eagle glides on the wind or as easily as a leaf flutters to the earth. I am convinced that Silence is what our children and the earth will require for our mutual survival for seven generations to come.

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<sup>7</sup> Sardello, p. 8.

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# Center Programs 2010

## Programs for Children

### **Children of the Forest**

**An Afternoon Program in the Natural World for 6-9 year olds**

**3:45 – 5:30 pm**

**Fall and Spring Sessions: TBA**

**\$80 per session**

Once a week, rain or shine, a group of 8 children explores the forests, fields, creeks and organic garden of Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary. Unhurried by the pressures of time, they are guided in natural play and exploration by Sandy Bisdee, staff Naturalist/Educator, who brings over twenty years' experience with children and the earth to her work at the Center. The program is entirely outside in the fresh air, sunshine, wind, rain, fog and all kinds of weather! Parents may drop off their children or stay for solo time on woodland trails.

### **Make New Friends: A Nature Camp for 5-7 year olds**

**June 14 - 18, 2010**

**9:30 am – 3:00 pm**

**Cost: \$250 a child (limited to 12 children)**

**Staff: Sandy Bisdee**

In this magical week together, we will make new friends deep in the forest, bubbling in the brook, blossoming in the garden and living in the open meadows. Our days begin with music, natural play and sharing time, and continue with nature walks, where we experience "magical moments" on woodland trails. In the afternoons, we gather in the story circle, make time for artistic expression, and go creek exploring off the Creeping Cedar Trail. The week will close with a joyful "Children of the Forest Festival" on Friday. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

### **Exploring Secret Places: A Nature Camp for 8-10 year olds**

**June 21 - 25, 2010**

**9:30 am – 3:00 pm**

**Cost: \$250 a child (limited to 12 children)**

**Staff: Sandy Bisdee**

In this week of adventure and imagination, we will explore woodland trails, but also venture off the beaten path into the wilder areas of the natural world. Join us as we share in the wonder of these experiences together! Each day we make new connections to secret places in the natural world, and new friendships with each other. The week includes poems, stories, songs, rhythm games, music making, and exuberant sharing in the feeling of community with the natural world. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

### **Earth, Air, Fire, Water: A Nature Camp for 11-13 year olds**

**July 5 - 9, 2010**

**9:30 am – 3:00 pm**

**Cost: \$250 a child (limited to 12 children)**

**Staff: Sandy Bisdee**

Join us in exploring the elements of earth, air, fire and water with new eyes. Each day begins with stories and songs from many cultures followed by expeditions into the mysteries of the magical garden, woods, creeks and rocks of our earth sanctuary. Together we will discover an inner relationship to the elements. In the afternoons we give imaginative expression to our individual experiences of the morning through poetry, art and journaling. Healthy snacks are prepared daily. Please plan to bring your own lunch.

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## Programs for Schools & Groups

### **Awakening to Nature**

**Grades pre-school – K, 9:30 am –12:00 noon, \$200**

**Grades 1-5, 9:30 am - 1:30 pm, \$250**

**Number of Children: maximum 24**

“Awakening to Nature “ brings the inner lives of children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world. Throughout the changing seasons, children are invited to slow down and experience the fullness of each moment at the earth sanctuary; to take in the sounds, the smells, the feel of the air, the colors and movements of forest, creek, pond, garden and meadow. Through story, music, movement and visual image, inner experiences are deepened and shared. The day ends with a heartwarming circle of reflection. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades pre-K-5.

### **The Poetry of Nature**

**9:30 am – 1:30 pm**

**Grades 6-12**

**Cost: \$250**

**Number of Students: maximum 24**

*“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*

Students are led along earth sanctuary trails on a journey that deepens their connection to the natural world through silent practices and poetry readings at special sites. While taking in the images of each new place, students are called to write their own poetry of nature. The day culminates in a poetry reading after lunch where each contribution is deeply connected to their experiences of the earth sanctuary and to their inner life. They read poems, ask questions, and share reflections on the day and their sense of belonging to the natural world. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of students in grades 6-12.

### **Native American Journeys**

**9:30 am – 1:30 pm**

**Grades K-5**

**Cost: \$250**

**Number of Children: maximum 24**

“Native American Journeys” is a program about Native Americans that begins around the fire circle. Original and traditional stories, Native American poetry, songs in various tribal tongues, original and traditional flute music, artistic activities, guided earth walks in smaller groups, exposure to everyday artifacts, discussion about food, medicine, shelter, clothing, stewardship and spiritual beliefs can be woven into this day together. Our time together is centered around gratitude, respect for all creation, silence, giving and receiving, sensorial awareness and individual gifts. The children come away with an experience that is deeply connected to the natural world. We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades K-5.

### **Special Design Programs**

Since 2004, the Center has created a wide range of Special Design Programs for schools, churches, and universities that bring children, young adults and educators into a deep personal connection to the natural world. The Center welcomes inquiries from teachers and schools, pre-school through college. We offer many possibilities for educators to partner with the Center in creating a compassionate human presence to the Earth.

We are happy to set up an exploratory meeting with you to consider ways in which the Center might tailor a program to the particular needs and values of your learning community. If you are interested in exploring a Special Design Program with the Center, please contact Center Director Peggy Whalen-Levitt at (336) 449-0612 or e-mail her at [beholdnature@aol.com](mailto:beholdnature@aol.com).

*Applications for Children’s Programs may be downloaded from our website at [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org). Please call the office at (336) 449-0612 to arrange a date for a school group before sending in your registration forms.*

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## Site-based Educators' Programs

The Center offers an opportunity for educators who are familiar with the philosophy of the Center to offer their own programs for students at the earth sanctuary. Educators who have attended either the Seventh Generation Teachers' Program or The Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program are eligible for this opportunity. In keeping with the mission of the Center, we ask that participating educators design programs for children, young adults and college students that call upon their inner faculties of imagination and intuition and enable them to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world. The fee for a Site-Based Educator's Program is \$125 per day. If you are interested in this opportunity, please request an application from Center Director Peggy Whalen-Levitt at (336) 449-0612 or e-mail her at [beholdnature@aol.com](mailto:beholdnature@aol.com). Once we have reviewed your proposal, we will contact you within a week to confirm a date. Programs are limited to 30 students.

## Programs for College Students

### **Garden Apprenticeship Program**

The Center seeks college students who are interested in working in our organic garden under the direction of our garden volunteer coordinator, Sandy Bisdee. If you are interested in making a commitment to a weekly schedule of service during the Fall, Spring or Summer semester, please contact Sandy at [sandybisdee@hotmail.com](mailto:sandybisdee@hotmail.com) or e-mail the Center at [beholdnature@aol.com](mailto:beholdnature@aol.com).

## Programs for Adults

### **At the Crossroads: The Intersection between the Poetic and the Natural World**

*A Saturday Retreat in Honor of Thomas Berry in collaboration with The Touchstone Center*

**Featuring Thomas Rain Crowe and Richard Lewis**

**November 13, 2010**

**9:30 am – 3:30 pm**

**Fee: \$65** (organic lunch included)

**Group Size: 20 maximum** (applications can be download at [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org))

Inspired by Thomas Berry's concern for the importance in childhood of the numinous and poetic experience of the natural world, this full day retreat will offer participants an opportunity to reflect how such experiences can become the source of their own interest in understanding, and expressing, the very life that is both nature – and ourselves. Thomas Rain Crowe – and Richard Lewis – will each share their different childhood experiences of the natural world – and the ways these experiences have sustained and inspired them as writers and poets, and as teachers and advocates of our relationship to the natural world.

**Thomas Rain Crowe** is a poet and translator who lives in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. His published works include *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods* (a nature memoir), *The End of Eden: Writings of An Environmental Activist* (essays), *The Book of Rocks* (poems), *Drunk on the Wine of the Beloved: 100 Poems of Hafiz* (translations).

**Richard Lewis** is the founder and director of The Touchstone Center for Children in New York City. His published works include *When Thought is Young* (reflections), *Shaking the Grass for Dew* (poems), *Living By Wonder* and *Taking Flight, Standing Still: Teaching Toward Poetic and Imaginative Understanding* (essays).

### **At Nature's Pace: A Nature Retreat for Adults**

**Fee: \$250 per four-hour retreat**

**Group Size: 16 maximum (bring a bag lunch)**

*Please call the Center to schedule a date before sending in your registration form, available for download at our website: [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org)*

The ever-accelerating pace of change is leading us to a hurried existence that alienates us from our deepest selves and our connection to the earth. This day for renewal and reflection among the quiet woods, meadows and lakes of Timberlake Farm offers time in the present at nature's pace.

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

*A Two-Year Co-Research Program for Educators funded by the Kalliopeia Foundation*

Since its beginnings in 2000, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has worked closely with ecotheologian Thomas Berry to re-imagine the child's relationship with the natural world. Seminal to these conversations is the following quote from Thomas Berry:

*There is a certain futility in the efforts being made – truly sincere, dedicated, and intelligent efforts – to remedy our environmental devastation simply by activating renewable sources of energy and by reducing the deleterious impact of the industrial world. The difficulty is that the natural world is seen primarily for human use, not as a mode of sacred presence primarily to be communed with in wonder, beauty and intimacy. In our present attitude the natural world remains a commodity to be bought and sold, not a sacred reality to be venerated. The deep psychic shift needed to withdraw us from the fascination of the industrial world and the deceptive gifts that it gives us is too difficult for simply the avoidance of its difficulties or the attractions of its benefits. Eventually, only our sense of the sacred will save us.<sup>1</sup>*

In considering the education of children and young adults in our culture, we have come to believe that this “deep psychic shift” that Thomas Berry refers to is the central task of our time. To what extent does the schooling of children contribute to their view of the natural world as a commodity? How might we create a context within which children awaken to the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the natural world? What might be done to restore a sense of the natural world as a sacred presence in the lives of children? These are the questions that have concerned us.

In response to these questions, the Center initiated a two-year program in the Autumn of 2006 entitled “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” designed to prepare educators to develop capacities to nurture the deep inner faculties of imagination and intuition in children and young adults, and to create contexts within which children and young adults are given the opportunity to develop a bond of intimacy with the natural world.

Each year, the Center accepts a new class of twenty educators into “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program. The group is comprised of teachers, parents, child psychologists, guidance counselors, religious educators, child care providers, naturalists, college professors, and others who are entrusted with the care of children or young adults and who indicate a deep interest in developing capacities for nurturing a relationship between the inner life of the child/young adult and the natural world.

Designed as a co-research among participants, the program unfolds over the course of two years. During the first year, participants come together for Saturday retreats in the Fall, Winter and Spring, as well as a two-day retreat in the summer. In the second year, participants develop a practice in consultation with Center staff and reunite for a retreat in the Summer during which practices are shared. The program is intended to be a meaningful sequence of experiences that build one upon the other. Therefore, we request that participants make a commitment to attend every session and complete readings and assignments prior to each retreat.

In the first year, we focus on “Presence” - the development of inner capacities, both in ourselves and in children and young adults that enable us to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world. In the second year, we focus on “Practice” – the development of new ways of working in the world.

At the Center, we try to 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 Center is now accepting applications for the class of 2010-2012. First year retreats will take place on Saturday, September 25, 2010, December 4, 2010, March 25, 2011 and Tues-Wed, June 28-29, 2011. The cost of the two-year program is \$350.*

*Applications can be downloaded at [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org) or requested by contacting Peggy Whalen-Levitt at the Center at [natureword@aol.com](mailto:natureword@aol.com) or (336) 449-0612.*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, Foreword, *When Trees Say Nothing* by Thomas Merton, edited by Kathleen Diegan, Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003, pp. 18-19.

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# The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

## A Brief History

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World was established as a non-profit organization in March 2000 in a public/private partnership with Timberlake Farm, a 165 acre earth sanctuary located in the foothills of North Carolina. The earth sanctuary was placed in a conservation easement with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina in 2001.

During the 2000-2001 academic year, the Center invited a group of educators to participate in a series of retreats with ecotheologian Thomas Berry (*The Dream of the Earth*) and writer/educator Richard Lewis (*Living by Wonder*) entitled “The Biological Imperative: Nature, Education and Imagination.” These retreats marked the beginning of our work with educators in which we considered the question “Can we establish a new form of dialogue between ourselves and the extraordinary phenomena that make up our living universe?”

From 2002-2006, the Center offered a yearlong intensive program for educators entitled “The Seventh Generation Teachers’ Program.” Through a series of three retreats, teachers shared their own ecostories, kept a nature journal, and transferred new ways of listening and responding to the natural world to their practice as teachers. Seventy-nine teachers participated in this program during its first four years.

During the Fall of 2006, our work with educators took the form of a new two-year program, “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” funded by a grant from the Compton Foundation. Now in its third year, this co-research program continues with the support of the Kalliopeia Foundation and attracts educators from all over the country.

The Center’s Programs for children and young adults have served over 7,500 young people from more than 50 public and private schools in the foothills of North Carolina since the Center’s inception in the Fall of 2000. The Center’s approach to working “small and deep” with children and young adults is realized in our present offerings including “Awakening to Nature,” “The Poetry of Nature,” “Native American Journeys,” “Children of the Forest,” and our one-week nature camps in the summer.

In the Fall of 2004, the Center initiated Special Design programs for schools and groups. Through programs tailored to the needs of a particular learning community, the Center has created a wide range of Special Design Programs for schools, churches, and universities that bring children, young adults and educators into a deep personal connection to the natural world. These programs offer many possibilities for educators to partner with the Center in creating a compassionate human presence to the Earth.

The Center publishes a biannual newsletter, *Chrysalis*, which reaches an international audience. Published since the Fall of 2004, *Chrysalis* is a forum where thoughts on the relationship between the inner life of the child and the natural world are exchanged, as well as a vehicle for making Center programs visible to the general public.

Now in its tenth year of existence, the Center was invited to make a presentation about its “Inner Life of the Child in Nature” program at the Child/Spirit Conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee on November 8, 2007. In recognition of its distinguished service in carrying forward the work of Thomas Berry, the Center was awarded the Thomas Berry Award by the Greensboro Public Library on November 10, 2007.

The Center’s work is now reaching wider audiences through publications and television. An article about the Center’s work with children, “Ten Caterpillars Yawning,” appeared in *Earthlight: Spiritual Wisdom for an Ecological Age*, edited by Cindy Spring and Anthony Manousos in 2007. In the summer of 2008, the Center was featured in a North Carolina Public Television segment of Simple Living on the child’s relationship with the natural world that included interviews with Thomas Berry, Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, and Joseph Cornell, author of *Sharing Nature with Children, Journey to the Heart of Nature*, and *Listening to Nature*. The Center’s work will soon be featured in the forthcoming book, *For the Love of Nature: 101 Solutions for the Restoration of Biodiversity*, by Briony Penn and Robin J. Hood with Guy Dauncy.

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[www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org)



## Mission Statement

The mission of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is to bring to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child and the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the universe.

Presently, the natural world is viewed as a commodity to be used rather than as a sacred reality to be venerated. A shift in our way of relating to the natural world is essential if we hope to participate in nature's unfolding rather than in its demise. This shift is nowhere more crucial than within the field of education where the child's way of relating to the natural world is formed.

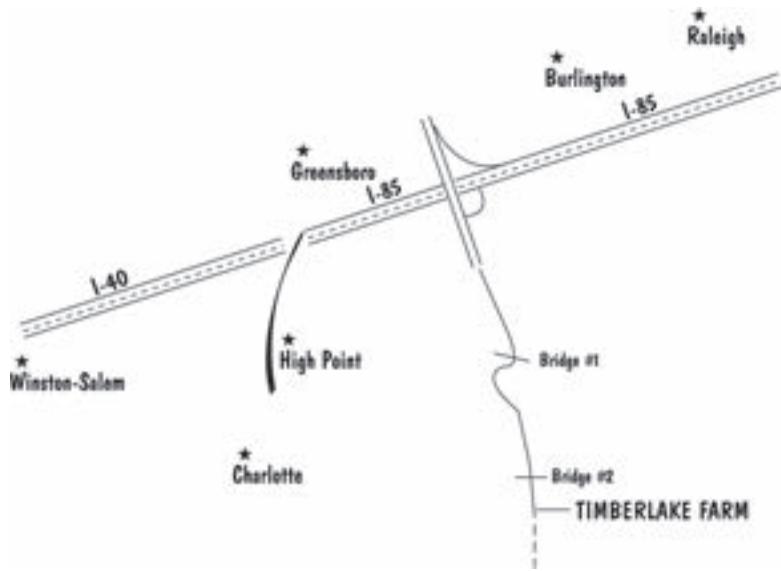
Located within the beauty of a 165 acre earth sanctuary, the Center's way of working is threefold: First, the Center offers a setting within which national presenters explore the relationship between the inner life of the child and nature from diverse perspectives. Second, the Center provides a context for teachers to deepen their own personal connection to the natural world and to be co-creators of ways to bring nature awareness to all paths of teaching. Third, the Center designs programs for children, young adults and college students which call upon their inner faculties of imagination and intuition and enable them to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world.

## FROM WINSTON-SALEM/ GREENSBORO

Take I-40 East to I-85; continue about 13 miles beyond Greensboro towards Burlington. Exit at Rock Creek Dairy Road (Exit #135). You will go under the overpass and loop around. Turn left at the top of the exit and go just over two miles. The Timberlake Farm entrance is on the left at the top of the hill.

## FROM RALEIGH/DURHAM/ CHAPEL HILL

Take I-85 South towards Greensboro. Continue on I-85 about 10 miles past Burlington. Exit on Rock Creek Dairy Road (Exit #135). Turn left at the top of the exit and go just over two miles. The Timberlake Farm entrance is on the left at the top of the hill.



*The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a non-profit organization that champions inclusiveness and actively discourages discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or any other factors that deny the essential humanity of all people. Furthermore, the Center encourages a love and respect for the diversity of the natural world.*

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