

# Chrysalis

Volume 8      Fall 2011

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

Dear Reader,

From the beginning, the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World has taken as its leading thought 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.

Over the years, we have worked ever more deeply with this “psychic shift” within the educators themselves, until we now have a mature work that speaks deeply to the inner transformation of the teacher through contemplative practices, readings, dialogue, and reflection – all bringing us into a real and substantial experience of the universe as sacred community.

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



## The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

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Perhaps we have become bolder over the years, in no small measure due to the support of the Kaliopeia Foundation, in affirming the Universe as sacred community. We find that we are now being called to speak to ever-wider circles, as we were this year invited to present a talk on Thomas Berry's "Sense of the Sacred" at a Tribute to Thomas Berry. And, the fullness of the Center's work is now collected in a reader entitled, *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century*.

In the introduction to this reader, we acknowledge that the materialist philosophy that has dominated Western civilization for the past four hundred years is coming to an end and we recognize a sacred universe that is intimately connected to the consciousness of the human being. We pose the question: "Can we, in good conscience, continue to educate our children from within the materialist worldview or are we now being asked, really required, to allow the new life of a more profound world to penetrate the consciousness of our schooling?"

Furthermore, we ask, "What, indeed, would this new form of schooling look like?" We begin to feel the transitions that will need to take place: a psychic shift from an I-It relationship with the world toward an I-Thou relationship with the world; a movement from quantity toward quality, from critical thinking toward receptivity, from analysis toward resonance, from exteriority toward interiority, from matter toward spirit; not a replacement, but a transformation that interweaves our fine-tuned intellect with more subtle realms that are now available to us. As Owen Barfield so eloquently reminds us, "the relationship between the mind and heart of man is indeed a close and delicate one and any substantial cleft between the two is unhealthy and cannot long endure."<sup>2</sup>

This is the journey we embarked on in the year 2000 at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. Not with a plan, not with a program, not with a curriculum, because all of that is part of the old form. No, we started with presence: presence of the natural world, presence of educators, presence of children and co-presence of all.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, (New York: Harvest/HB Book), 164.

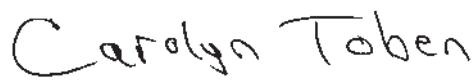
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In this issue of Chrysalis that will be reaching your doorstep on the cusp of the Winter Solstice, we bring you a sense of the sacred. First, through a talk, “Thomas Berry’s Sense of the Sacred,” given by Carolyn Toben at a Tribute to Thomas Berry on November 11, 2011 at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. In this talk, Carolyn shares with us her conversations with Thomas Berry during the last ten years of his life and his deep inner knowing that “the natural world is infused with the presence of the Divine.”

There follow moments of presence of the educators in this year’s “Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program: a moment of presence to a heron, and moments of presence to dawn and dusk. And, finally, we end with moments of presence of middle school students, experienced during one of our Poetry of Nature programs.

Through these moments of *presence*, the universe as sacred community is restored. Through these moments of presence, we feel, with Thomas Berry, “the Powerful Loving Voice that speaks through every cosmic activity.” And through them, we come home to ourselves and to the world in peace.

With warmest regards,



Carolyn Toben, Founder



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, pp. 16-17.

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# Thomas Berry's Sense of the Sacred

by

Carolyn Toben

a talk given at a  
Tribute to Thomas Berry  
Guilford College  
Greensboro, NC  
November 11, 2011

In this evening of tribute to Thomas Berry, there is a real need to hear Thomas Berry, there is a need to speak of the sense of the sacred that infused his entire life and work and immensely expands our understanding of the journey of the universe story.

In the last years of his life, I was privileged to have continuing conversations with Thomas that have led me to this evening. I will share some of these with you . . .

The year was 1999 . . . it was fall and Thomas and I were walking on a trail in the woods on the land where I live. It was a beautiful October day with clear skies and bright sunshine that sparkled on a pond beyond the trail. We walked in silence taking it all in. At one particular place in the woods that was familiar to me, I stopped Thomas and playfully suggested that he close his eyes and open his hands, which he did with great delight.

I then placed a tiny sprig of a ground cover called Creeping Cedar into his cupped hands . . . and then waited for him to open his eyes. In the moment that followed, I can only try to describe what I became aware of. Thomas held the little plant with infinite tenderness and whispered to it: "You are so beautiful." In that translucent moment, I felt the presence of the Divine, the universe, and the earth to one another.

He later told me: "The sense of the sacred is at the heart of it all."

I didn't know it at the time, but that moment was the beginning of a ten-year conversation with Thomas Berry about the new/old sacred story of the universe.

Thomas and I met often at the Green Valley Grill, a few miles from here, where high ceilings and classical music provided a perfect setting for Thomas' vast soul consciousness to rise and sweep backward into history and forward into an evolving future.

I kept a pen on a chain around my neck and a notebook to take notes. If I ever forgot my notebook, Thomas would pass a paper napkin across the table for me to write on without missing a beat in what he was saying!

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He would settle into our booth at “the Grill” and begin speaking of the immense journey of the universe from deep *within* the epic story, rather than as an observer outside of it. He and the Great Story had become one.

“From the beginning,” Thomas said, “there was the Mystery, that is still a Mystery, that began a sacred story of the universe with a *psychic-spiritual inner dimension* as well as a *physical-material outer dimension*. Without both dimensions, the story would have no meaning; with both, there is integrity. We have been a part of *both* from the first primordial flaring forth.”

According to Thomas, “as the universe groped forward in its long, long slow evolution through a sequence of irreversible transformations and crises, a Divine Power began to reveal a deep hidden purposefulness, expanding to bring forth one sacred interconnected community of all living forms. And,” Thomas added, “Throughout the long, long, journey, a Powerful Loving voice spoke through every cosmic activity.”

Over the years of meeting with Thomas, I began to understand how the early earth community of peoples, creatures and plants were immersed, as Thomas put it, in a “mystical rapport” within a sense of the sacred. Cultures all over the world kept a “bond of intimacy” with the natural world through ritual celebrations of seasons, of dawn and sunset and of cycles that preserved a covenant with the Divine. According to Thomas, “the universe could be seen as One single sacred expression of the numinous, or the divine mystery, in flowers, birds, rivers, trees, mountains within a cosmological context of sun, moon and stars.” The earth was seen as nourisher and healer to be cared for and respected in an ever-renewing and mutually enhancing relationship.

Thomas went on in subsequent conversations to trace humanity’s loss of a sense of the sacred . . . as the cosmological spatial context of existence changed to linear historical time through the centuries, and as the relationship to the earth changed from one of mutuality in ever-renewing cycles to one in which the earth was seen as a resource to be harnessed and used by the mechanistic, the industrial and the technological. Humans began to see the earth as a collection of objects and themselves as separate from it instead of integral with it in a communion of subjects.

Thomas outlined the tragic consequences of the separation of humans from the earth with great grief in his voice: “We are actually closing down the life systems of the planet; such immense and irreversible devastation has taken place that 65 million years of life that have been developed up until now is being threatened at this time. We are now transitioning into the Ecozoic Era, a time when we must recover the human-earth relationship and a sense of the sacred. In losing the outer world, we also lose the inner world of the soul, the two go together. Both become desolate. That is what we have forgotten. That is what must now be remembered.”

In the months that followed, Thomas Berry went on to tell the new sacred story of the universe that is emerging and bringing new energy and new vision with it all over the world as a story that includes both *outer* and *inner* dimensions. It is a story being told in every culture, every country and by every creature, tree and star . . . It is a story about recovering the human-earth relationship.

For Thomas Berry, the *outer* part of the story begins with the empirical evidence of the sciences that is bringing knowledge of the first primordial flaring forth, the structure and shaping of the universe, the genetic relatedness of every living form, and of the continued expansion of the universe, now at an accelerating rate. But he also spoke of a parallel *inner* story of a vast transformation that is now also occurring in the human soul as we struggle to recover ourselves from our separation from the earth, from the universe, from the Divine, and from one another. “In shaping a new future we are called to be in union, not just with our rational faculty,” he said, “but with the deeper reality of the *soul* that allows us to be truly *present* to the natural world, what we *feel* in the dawn, the sunset, the movement of the tides . . .”

In a universe story that acknowledges both the psychic-spiritual as well as the physical-material, the soul, lost so long in the structure of modern thought, is being recovered in human consciousness. “The magnitude of our situation demands it,” Thomas said.

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He spoke further of the sense of the sacred buried under the weight of centuries that is also being recovered: "We might speak of intuition as a tendril of the heart connected to the heart of the universe when we speak of a sense of the sacred. It is an inner awareness that is the approach to transformation. The natural world in all its divine manifestations of trees, rocks, flowers, stars . . . awakens this intuitive inner awareness, this sense of the sacred, and we see the *oneness* of all life. Separation dissolves and we recover the human-earth relationship."

"Intuition is a distinctive inner way of knowing," Thomas went on, "separate from science; the two do not negate each other but they are not the same. We need both kinds of awareness, the inspiration of the intuitive and the analytical faculty of the scientific intelligence. And," he spoke this next with deep conviction and reverence, "the universe as the primary sacred reality nourishes both."

In his last years, Thomas Berry spoke often of HOME, deeply understanding the soul's need for return to origin, to Source, to the Heart of one's deepest values which for him were always about relationships. "Relationships are the primary context of existence," he often said; "the existential question we must carry today is how do I relate to the earth? To the universe?" In a film made about his life after he returned to Greensboro, he said this: "North Carolina, come HOME to yourself" . . . to your *relationship* to the beauty and diversity of this amazing place on earth.

In a conversation at Wellspring about the new sacred story, the awakening of mind and heart taking place at this time in regard to the earth he said: "Now we are beginning to get the smell of home . . . Now we have the energies for homecoming."

Thomas Berry was at HOME within himself, present within his own inner soul/spirit, at HOME with his extended family, which included the entire earth community. "The role and rationale of the human is to be in communion with all living forms," he said. He was at HOME with all the earth, at HOME with the universe, knowing that "the natural world is infused with the presence of the Divine." Through his own soul's journey that was part of the journey of the universe, he was able to guide us to that primary sacred reality where he heard the Powerful Loving Voice that spoke through every cosmic activity saying: "The sense of the sacred is at the heart of it all."



*photo by Teresa Prendergast*

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# Heron

by

Renee Eli

The heron. I hear him first. I say him, because the sound of him is deep, throaty, like the sound that comes from a bassoon. It is a rumbling sort of horn sound that drifts, much as he seems to, from a live oak at the blurred edge of dune with maritime forest. His body, motionless, seemingly weightless, glides afloat some current of air that takes him from tree to dune to water's edge. He is quickly out of my sight, obscured by the tall grasses, the brush, (vegetation I have not yet come to know), and mounds of sand that make the high dunes here. I am looking for a beach access from the walking path that meanders along the backside of the dunes. I find my way to a boardwalk that leads over and across a high dune, empties to the surf side, and flattens across a vast expanse of empty beach. The tide is ebbing. He is standing there – at the water's edge. He is motionless, again. And I am struck by the effortlessness of his being. His essence seems buoyed on his long spindly legs. His head is 90 degrees to me, an offering of his profile. His beak, long and slender, seems to decrescendo to its point. And I understand now why he is the great blue heron, because the color of his head just above the angle of his beak is the same blue as the blue of the ocean behind him. He is magnificent. When he moves, his movement is stealth. Sometimes it is the quick shift of his head, sometimes the slow, methodical lift and lower of his long legs. He turns toward me – his head is so slender behind the point of his beak that it strangely disappears above the long S curve of his neck into the blue of the ocean.

I look to my left. In the sand I encounter a long slender feather such as I have never seen before. I'm quite certain it is the feather of a great blue heron. Perhaps this one. I hold this feather with all of me. For a moment, I am only with the feather. Perhaps this moment is several, because when I return my gaze to the heron, he has moved toward me, and he is still walking. His approach is rather obtuse, as he slowly saunters from an angle, half looking my way, half looking off down the beach. He seems to be pronouncing a sort of nonchalance to me. But this is my expression, not his. Still, I am taken by his curiosity. And something of my own energy shifts away from presence and more toward excitement. Though I don't move, it is a felt sense in me. And, apparent by his stopping his approach toward me, it is an obvious felt sense in the heron. He is so close I see the webbing of his feet and the array of colors and patterns on his feathers. A slight breeze ruffles some of the patterns on his back and then on his breast. We both stand in the gaze of the other, completely and utterly, for a period of time I cannot possibly estimate.



*veil painting by Harriet Saunby at hsaunby@triad.rr.com*

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# O Wondrous Day, O Holy Night

Each year, we invite the educators in our Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program to greet the sun and welcome the night as an essential part of their inner schooling as educators. In this issue of Chrysalis, we share with you some of these moments of grace.

Dawn, February 2011

Pinks and purples line up above the trees  
a mourning dove talks to me in gentle tones  
above the chatter of other birds.

Bright pink and peach now fill the upper sky  
and the paint brush tips of trees dip into the  
yellow yoke of morning now broken  
and beginning to spread out at the base of the sky closest to the earth.

The world is alive with possibility this February  
morning; I drink it into my soul and I am nourished!

Pink wisps now compliment the light blue that begins  
to lighten up the sky-  
More color silhouettes the shapes of pine,  
poplar and oak.  
A squirrel's nest perched high in a distant hardwood  
punctuates the now light orange glow against the rising Carolina blue sky.

This is what I dreamed of:  
To be alone in a hardwood forest after a rain  
as the sky comes alive with birds  
and the glow of sun shatters the horizon,  
spilling the ecstasy of life into the landscape.  
Balance is mine, my sense of humor remains!

~ Ross Andrews

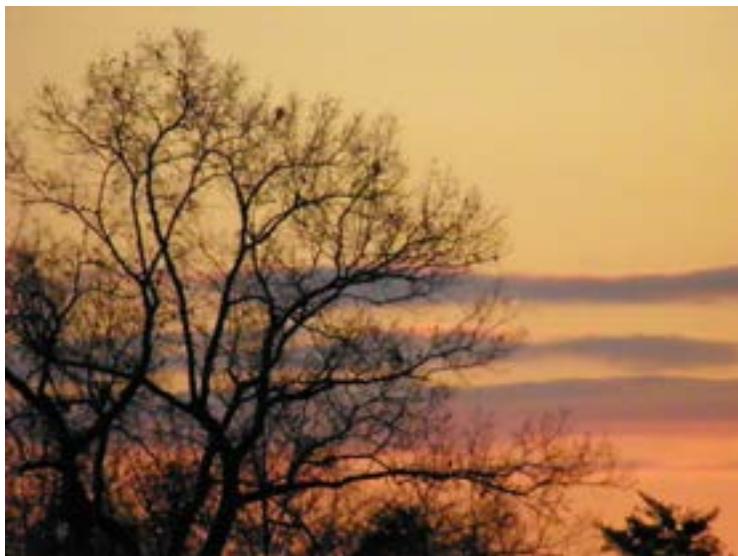


photo by Lisa Tate

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## SUNRISE

I left behind the city glow, and drove the winding uphill route through an endless silhouette of trees. I left the car roadside, continuing on the trail until I found a clearing and settled onto the black ground and sleeping air. And even hidden there, I felt society's discomforting gaze, and it didn't easily shrug off. But as the sky grew from violet into tints of blue and red mist, its light sharpened into view what lay around me: grounded leaves and tall gray trunks of trees that attended to the East, and as they did, I recalled Carlo Pietzner's description of the goddess Aurora "spreading dew all over the world in colors of red and orange." I imagined Aurora to be the size of the city, to be over the city, her consoling arms outstretched, her words heralding what might yet come.

But even with this, my bones soon felt the cold restless air, and to warm myself, I wandered and let my dazed eyes fall to the bright spots that ran along tree tops, and soon I began to dream of sleep, when unexpectedly a patch of crackling flame spilled over the horizon, a flame that invoked and melted forgotten defenses so that there I stood, open to myself, wanting only to grow closer that I might better hear the words. And as I left the woods, I drifted between this fire and its peripheral haze, until the fire had dissipated into the clear blue day, a jet streaking contrails overhead. The next morning, I lay in bed and, through my window, the same light sought me out. This was a start.

## SUNSET

The late afternoon clouds were a billowy blanket overhead, and we knew they would block our view of sunset. We also knew that we had no flashlight, and the new moon night would make difficult the return route. But from this ridge, I could see that the cloud-blanket ebbed at the horizon, and that between this blanket and the land's edge, there stretched a horizontal line of clear blue sky across which I knew the sun would pass. I sat hidden among the rocks and scraggly evergreen, and the wind drew attention to the taller pines, which looked west with farewell: thank you goodbye, friend.

And then it passed - the molten sun lit up the stretch of blue as it slipped between one world and the next, leaving in its wake a contracting violet so that the world was left in shades of gray, and the contented trees, purple flowers, nodded off into a still sleep. In this encroaching dark, we had enough light to find our way back. As I stepped out of the woods, I recalled the stretch of blue before it was swallowed by darkness, how it momentarily appeared as a long living strip that absorbed and gushed forth currents of recycled ether, the very substance of our existing. As we walked, no flashlight was necessary, no obstruction even.

~ Mel De Jesus



photo by Sandy Bisdee

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## Reflections at Dawn

The horizon, a muted purple gray. The outline of a distant city building bejeweled with the touch of the rising sun. But today, it is the surface of the lake that draws me in. She is mostly cloaked in a thin mantle of ice, richly stroked with deep purple tones. The birds are already in full song, all except the ducks who are still nestled in their ruffled feathers, adrift in the ice cold waters.

This dawn has a certain boldness. The sun's rays, crisp, narrow and low reach across the ice, illuminating a roughened surface, rich in grays, mauves and orchid. The wafer thin edges of the ice pattern a delicate brocade, like the laced bodice of a woman's dress. The water transforms in an instant to a tropical hue, alive and shimmering now in response to the ducks' movement. The glow of the rising sun only now reveals the fairy-like cloud wisps liberated at the water's surface. Giddy with their newfound freedom they drift and dance together. A gentle gust of wind sets them in motion. With exuberant twirls they spiral outward and away. I am familiar with their dance. It is a part of me, tucked deep.

The lake continues to birth the clouds. They begin their long journey with such obvious joy and so little hesitation. The water ripples in complex patterns beneath them. I know they are talking. I listen further with my eyes, my ears, my nose and the softness of my face. The wind rippling the water stirs in me a wordless response full of the joy of inclusiveness, the expansiveness of gratitude and the sadness of an endless longing.

The fairy clouds had been dancing all along but only the sun's touch revealed their presence to me. The same sun that now warms my face and reminds me that I am loved too.

~ Joanne Rothstein



photo by Lisa Tate

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Beholding, March 4, 2011

Reflecting on my journals and the readings, I have noticed several ideas that appeared repeatedly. They are elaborations on the idea or experience of speech or conversation and story and how these contribute to imagining. This first journal was written after the sunset. During the sunset I had consciously expressed gratitude to the sun and had been thinking about how we depend on the sun to live. Walking home after the sunset...

12/14/10: The thought occurs to me of the story being told and the wisdom gained by the observance of this story. I realize we are observing the same story as we partake and acknowledge the sun set, as we partake and acknowledge our breath, as we partake and acknowledge the change of life. The practice of observance yields wisdom of this story and a familiarity with the nature of it.

1/3/11: I think of this observance and communion with the sun as a normal activity and how that would be. It is a conversation in need of continuation. Words that speak in our hearts and bodies. This is a language- an interplay- an orientation of ourselves to what surrounds and effects us. It expands and elaborates our consciousness and our experience, this conversation. It weaves us into our place and deepens our sense of home and knowing.

2/13/11: sunrise (conversing with the sun): the “conversation” we have is about our coexistence and mutual story. We know one another and have been together for a long time, so to speak. To speak together is to reference and celebrate our shared story and evolution, our shared creation and existence.

I am attempting to understand this speech through the beholding practice. I describe it in this poem:

Beholding. Being and holding. Space and air breathing. Thoughts and fears and questions. Birds singing. Light fading and shifting to the west. Trees stanced. Listen to the trees with open heart and feeling with the body. Being and holding. We are being, the trees and I. Breathing, the trees and birds and I. My mind, my heart, my body beholding. Space. Sky. Light. Life. Vibrant energy in me ~ perhaps from the visions of trees and sky and clouds and sun I held inside myself. I held inside myself. That is all. It's that. Being. Holding. Beholding.

~Kevin McDonough

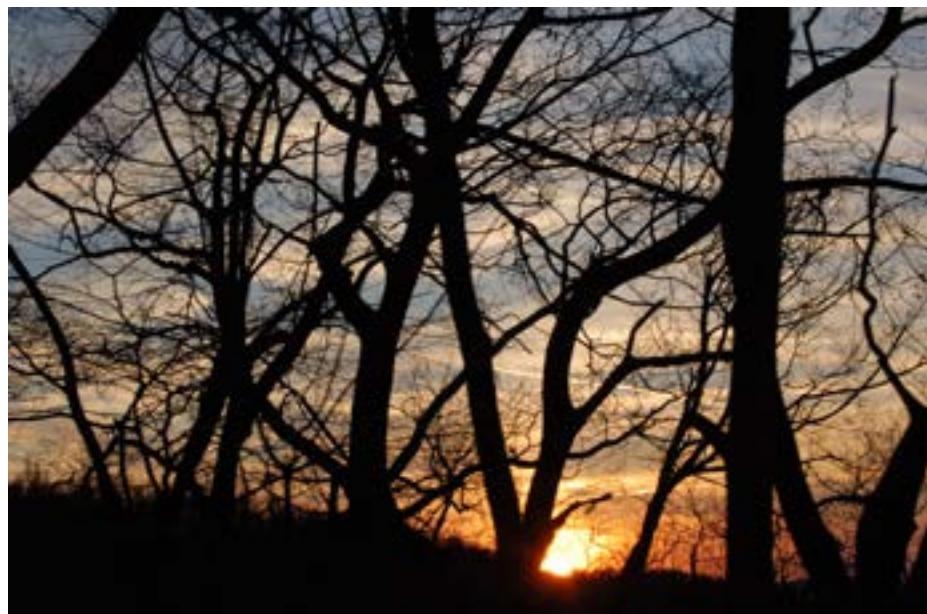


photo by Sandy Bisdee

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Sunrise  
January 15, 2011

This morning's dawn is a ribbon of color behind the hills. A lavender cast over the hills with trees and snow, pale gray lavender, next the palest coral diffusing into pale cream, then a faint green that turns to pale indigo. A spectrum. As I sit and watch, the lavender rises into a diffuse pink coral. This is dawn, sunrise is just before 8 a.m., a short while from now.

It has been years since I have had time to write and make art at home, I find I want much more of it. Now all the colors have lightened. When the weather is warm I must remember to open the doors and listen to the sounds of dawn. Right now through the glass I can hear a couple of crows, talking maybe about getting some of the corn the deer have left. The sky is a little brighter over where the sun is coming up, a little out of my view. Well, now HERE is the sun rising not where I thought it would be but right in front of me, almost in the south! The color of fire, it is fire. Burning. Fire in the sky! Nearly too bright to look at it. Sunrise! The ball of fire has made his presence. It is fully visible in its orb state just now. It moves pretty fast, night and day. The sun is shining right into my studio through the windows, on my bathrobe and making orange rectangles on the back wall. This is exciting! I rush to take a picture and, pressing the wrong button on my camera, make a two second movie instead. The sun is well up in only a few minutes. The sky spectrum is dissolved, barely discernable now as pale apricot fading to full sky blue. The sun is out, today we'll have sun.

Sunset  
January 9, 2011

Christmas was mostly gray and cold, the sunset not much visible, the clouded sky simply darkens with no color. But as I round the last corner toward home, driving in this gray sunset, I leave town, streets and cars behind me. Ahead is a long wooded hill, brown in the sunset, the familiar hill that tells me I am home, town and job are behind, ahead is home and nature. The  $\frac{3}{4}$  moon is crisp, rising. A few turkey buzzards on their way home, deer tracks beside the road. Sunset.

~ Katherine Ziff



photo by Lisa Tate

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# In the Silence: Poems from the Earth Sanctuary

*Each year, Lisa Saintsing brings her eighth grade students from Our Lady of Grace Catholic School to the earth sanctuary for our Poetry of Nature program. This year, she and Teresa Prendergast put together a collection of poems written by the class of 2010 during their time at the earth sanctuary. Entitled, “Don’t Stop Believing in the Wonders of Nature: Poetic Reflections on a Morning at Timberlake,” the collection is testimony to what lives within young people and what can be expressed when they are encouraged to walk in silence and be fully present to the world around them. We are deeply grateful for permission to reprint a selection of these poems here.*

I sit on this hill with the sun to my back.  
I feel its warmth  
As it sinks down,  
    Down,  
Through my skin to my bones.  
It warms me throughout,  
    Warms my spirit,  
    Makes me glad.  
I look up to the sun.  
Feeling in my face returns.  
    It warms my head,  
    Clears my thoughts.  
Where does the feeling come from?  
From the warmth of the sun.  
It spreads through my body  
    To my fingers and toes.  
    Like a warm drink,  
    Sunshine inside me –  
    Warming me,  
    Healing me,  
Warmth like a blessing from above.

~ Curt Davis

## I Am Present

I am present  
I have looked past the image –  
The sun, bending through the shadows  
    Of the weary branches and vines,  
The breeze, hugging every angle of my vision,  
What lies beyond the tall blurred grasses and  
    the canopy of the wooden giants?  
What lingers past my imagination?  
    Only God can judge.

~ Victoria Edwards

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## Bridge

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

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

i want to leap  
leap  
into its arms

i leap  
it catches me  
holds me

i fall  
deeper and deeper  
until we are one

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

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

~ Sebastian Lucek

## Wishing Rock

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

~ Jason Standen

## Coalesce

I ponder upon another soul's thought,  
That we all  
Beat with a single heart,  
And I believe  
That this is true,  
That we are all united  
Under one sky looking down upon us,  
One breeze that pushes us onward,  
And one common cry,  
To save what we love,  
Through this one longing,  
We search for strength  
To save the beloved  
And after searching,  
We find it not in solitude,  
But in unity.

~ Sydney Cottingham

## The Smell of Water

Water smells  
You can't smell it?  
It smells fresh and pure,  
Like renewal, or birth.  
It smells like happy memories; some  
sad ones too.  
There's just a hint of future,  
just a splash of hope.  
What? You still can't smell it?  
Maybe you need to stand closer.  
Maybe you need to feel  
the surface, lightly,  
with your fingers, let it flow  
through your toes.  
Drink, now, the stories within it.  
Can you smell it?  
I thought so.

~ Megan McAbee

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## Cattails

The birds are chirping –  
they softly serenade each other  
on this bright sunny morning  
in which the sun, our brother,  
can show us  
the glistening beauty –  
oh so glamorous –  
of the water falling quickly,  
into a murky stream.

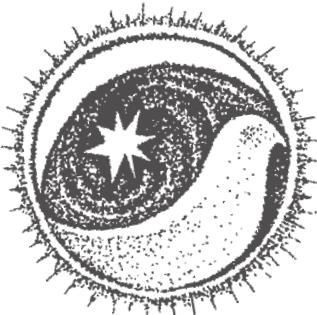
This stream is placid; it isn't running rapidly,  
not needing to promptly get to its destination like the White Rabbit.  
Although it seems not to flow and just rest,  
that is merely an illusion.

Everything flows,  
in this peaceful place  
where the bamboo and the cattail grows.

~ Joseph Farley



*photo by Teresa Prendergast*



# Center Programs 2012

## Programs for Children

### **Families of the Forest**

**Saturday, March 24, 2011**

**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

**Cost: \$15 per person**

**Staff: Sandy Bisdee**

**Group Size: 24 maximum (Please bring a healthy lunch in reusable containers)**

The ever-accelerating pace of change is leading families to a hurried existence that separates them from their connection to the Earth. Join us for this family day at the Earth sanctuary where we will gather around the fire circle, go on a guided earth walk, enjoy the fellowship of a meal together, and share our experiences from the day.

## 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.

*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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## Programs for Early Childhood Educators

### **Nurturing A Sense of Wonder:**

**A Program for Parents and Pre-K through 2nd Grade Educators**

**Saturday, February 25, 2012**

**10:00 am to 4:00 pm (Please bring a bag lunch)**

**Place: The Treehouse at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World**

**Limited to 16**

**Fee: \$65**

**Led by Sandy Bisdee**

We will begin our day by exploring the growing separation between the child and the natural world and the consequences of this separation for the healthy development of the human child. Following our dialogue, we will shift our attention to nurturing our own inborn sense of wonder. How do we nurture a sense of wonder amidst the hustle and bustle of our everyday world? How can we bring the natural world inside our homes, centers and classrooms through storytelling, hands-on materials and games? We will end our day outdoors, engaging in sensory practices that will awaken us (and the children we serve) to the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the natural world. These are practices developed at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World that can be experienced in any setting.

### **Nurturing A Sense of Wonder: A Staff Development Day For Preschool and Kindergarten Faculties**

**Fee: \$500 for a 4-hour program, \$750 for a 6-hour program**

**Led by Sandy Bisdee**

**To book a program for your school, please contact the Center at [beholdnature@aol.com](mailto:beholdnature@aol.com).**

**(We are happy to provide CEU credits through your school)**

“Nurturing a Sense of Wonder” is a staff development program for the faculty of Preschools and Kindergartens that can take place at the Center or at your school. The day begins with an exploration of the growing separation between the child and the natural world and the consequences of this separation for the healthy development of the human child. Following our dialogue, we shift our attention to nurturing our own inborn sense of wonder. How do we nurture a sense of wonder amidst the hustle and bustle of our everyday world? How can we bring the natural world inside our centers and classrooms through storytelling, hands-on materials and games? We end our day outdoors, engaging in sensory practices that will awaken us (and the children we serve) to the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the natural world. These are practices developed at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World that can be experienced in any setting.

**Sandy Bisdee**, Director of Children’s Programs, completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. She brings over thirty years of experience as an educator of young children to her work at the Center. A gifted storyteller and musician, Sandy has completed both “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice” program at CEINW and the NC Environmental Education Certification Program.

## Outreach Programs for Schools

Beginning in the Fall of 2012, the Center is interested in offering new outreach and consulting programs for schools in keeping with the Center’s mission to bring to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child and the wonder, beauty and intimacy of the universe. If you would be interested in arranging an “Awakening to Nature” or “Poetry of Nature” program at your school, please contact the Center at [beholdnature@aol.com](mailto:beholdnature@aol.com). Or, if you would be interested in consulting with the Center about how to bring a sense of the universe as sacred community more fully into your learning community, we would be most happy to have an exploratory conversation with you.

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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).



*photo by Lisa Tate*

## Programs for Adults

### **Thomas Berry's Sense of the Sacred**

*A Saturday Retreat in Honor of Thomas Berry*

**Led by Carolyn Toben**

**March 31, 2012**

**9:30 am – 3:30 pm**

**Fee: \$75** (organic lunch included)

**Group Size: 22 maximum** (applications can be downloaded at [www.beholdnature.org](http://www.beholdnature.org))

Join us for a day of contemplating the life and work of Thomas Berry, centered in his deep understanding that a recovery of a sense of the sacred is the essential task of our time. This daylong retreat is intended to be an oasis in time within the frantic pace of contemporary life in which we may reconnect with our innate capacity to be fully aware in the present moment, with its transforming possibilities for the earth and for ourselves. Carolyn will be drawing from her work on a book that comes out of her companionship with Thomas in his last ten years entitled: *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*. Readings, silent solos on earth sanctuary trails, and time for reflection will be part of this quiet day away.

**Carolyn Toben**, Founder of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, has taught in public and private schools and colleges with an emphasis on alternative and interdisciplinary education and served for 18 years as a seminar leader at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching in Cullowhee and at the Center for the Advancement for Renewal in Education in San Francisco. Carolyn has pursued post-graduate studies at The Jung Institute in Switzerland, The Institute of Creation Centered Spirituality in Chicago, The Guild for Psychological Studies in San Francisco and The School of Spiritual Psychology.

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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.

*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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## *A Day of Gratitude*

*Saturday, April 21, 2012*

*for*

*Friends of the Center*

*At this time of transition in the life of the Center, we have much to be grateful for.*

*In the year 2000, the Center's Founder, Carolyn Toben, opened the 165-acre earth sanctuary where she lives to the work of the Center, devoted to Thomas Berry's vision of the universe as sacred community.*

*Since then, countless children, teachers and friends of the Center have walked the earth sanctuary trails, engaging in a new form of presence to the Earth.*

*We are grateful for all the living realities of the forest, of the meadow, of the creek and garden who allowed us to share their home for a time and taught us how to listen and go deeper.*

*And, we are grateful for the deep support of Carolyn and all the friends and foundations who have given so generously in support of the work of the Center over the past twelve years.*

*We now enter a new phase in the life of the Center where the work will move out more fully into the world. Due to the financial realities of this time, Carolyn is no longer in a position to provide a permanent home for the Center and must create a space for new revenue streams at the earth sanctuary in support of the maintenance of the land.*

*Beginning in the Summer of 2012, the Center's administrative offices will be consolidated in the home office of the Director and the Center will begin to operate without a permanent home. From that point forward, the Center will offer programs at the earth sanctuary on a program-by-program basis and will also seek other locations, near and far, where our programs will take place.*

*To mark this transition, we invite you, as a Friend of the Center, to join us for a day of gratitude for all that has been given and received. On Saturday, April 21, 2012, Center staff will welcome you at the Treehouse, where light refreshments will be available throughout the day.*

*On this day, we invite you to take a solo walk on the earth sanctuary trails, to visit the places that have called to you deeply in the past, and to experience the Earth as "a communion of subjects."*

*As you walk, we ask you to enter into a remembrance of all that has been accomplished over the Center's first twelve years and to enter into a meditation for the work in the future. You might want to take a moment to stop by the outdoor chapel and offer up this meditation in a moment of peace.*



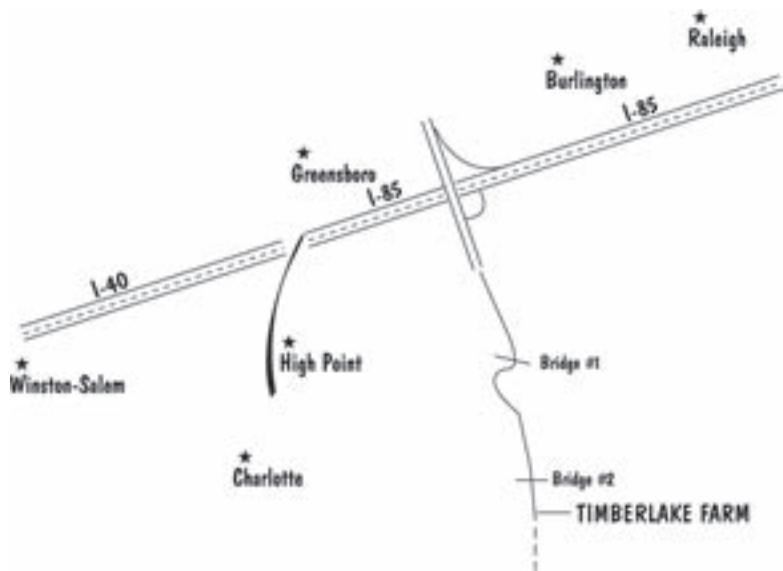
*photo by Teresa Prendergast*

## 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.*

Center for Education, Imagination and The Natural World  
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1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road  
Whitsett, North Carolina 27377

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