



# Chrysalis

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*Journal of  
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World*

*“One of the most regrettable aspects of Western civilization is the manner in which the capacity for inner presence to other modes of being has diminished in these past few centuries.”<sup>1</sup>*

~ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*

*“When we see something, we have stayed pretty firmly in devouring mode;  
when we behold it, we are in a lively conversation.”<sup>2</sup>*

~ Martin Shaw, *Scatterlings: Getting Claimed in the Age of Amnesia*

Dear Reader,

In the year 2000, when the Center was first forming, we brought Thomas Berry together with Richard Lewis, founder of the Touchstone Center for Children in New York City, for a two-part program with educators. What emerged from these conversations became foundational for our work with educators and took the form of a question: “Can we establish a new form of dialogue between ourselves and the extraordinary phenomena that make up our living universe?”

When educators begin our Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program, they are sometimes surprised to learn that they will be asked to devote themselves to a practice of presence with Earth for the whole first year. What could be more simple or more difficult in this time of dislocation from Earth?

Words of guidance for this practice are given during our first retreat:

*Between now and when will we meet again, we invite you to begin a practice of presence with the natural world.*

*Our aim is to make ourselves deeply available to a sacred universe – to offer loving attention to the natural word - to bring ourselves into that deeper Presence that surrounds us.*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Shaw, *Scatterlings: Getting Claimed in the Age of Amnesia* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2016), 4.



The Center for Education, Imagination  
and the Natural World

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*We could think of this as bringing our human souls  
into relationship with the soul of the world. Unlike many  
mindfulness practices in which "attention" is a goal in  
itself, in our practice, the intention is "relationship" and  
"resonance."*

*We are present with the natural world in a deeply  
listening and receptive way.*

*In this practice, we "hold at bay" our habitual ways  
of "knowing about" and accumulating information...*

*Through this practice, we are awakening the unitive  
imagination – that more subtle faculty which unifies and  
moves us beyond the dualism of an I-It relationship with  
the world.*

*We are discovering our own inner capacities to open to  
life in new ways – we are attuning ourselves to the universe  
as sacred community."*

And then, we invite the educators to keep a  
journal:

*We invite you to keep a journal along the way, with this  
caveat from Arthur Zajonc:*

*"In order to discover authentic meaning in these experi-  
ences of the inner life, our thinking must become free and  
mobile in ways that are quite unfamiliar to us. For this  
reason it is extremely difficult to capture in thought and  
give expression in words to that which is within: Thoreau  
wrote, 'We may easily multiply the forms of the outward;  
but to give the within outwardness, that is not easy.' In his  
journals Thoreau struggled daily to capture in words what  
he had experienced so powerfully while tramping through  
field and swamp. He knew how to multiply the inward  
experiences of soul that he so prized, but to write them  
down required so much more. In every meditative moment,  
we meet the temptation to interpret what we experience with  
conventional logic and clichéd concepts, according to what  
Simone Weil calls the 'laws of gravity.' Deep meditative  
experience, however, defies that laws of gravity and appears*

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*under the sign of grace. Only thinking that is free of the logic of gravity, and is itself graceful, can follow the movements of meditation.”<sup>3</sup>*

*Allow yourselves, therefore, to experience an image that lives deeply in your soul...to stay as close to your inner experience as possible...to make a drawing, perhaps, or a poem...or a jotting of words...to discover whatever language comes to you “under the sign of grace.”*

Through this practice of presence, our educators begin to enter into a conversation with Earth. Poems, paintings, words and images arise “in a subtle process of echolocation, by which the deep earth speaks, and listens, and returns to itself, nourished.”<sup>4</sup>

During the second year of our program, each participant births a practice of his or her own in the image of a “communion of subjects.” For the Inner Life of the Child in Nature Class of 2018, this took the form of a continuing work of poetry and visual poetics for two members of the class. In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we share with you their practices:

- ~ Elizabeth Carrington’s journey toward a School of Eco-contemplative Painting in “Beyond All the Doors and Windows,” pages 4-7.
- ~ The poems of Priscilla Webster-Williams in “The Hospitality of the Natural World,” pages 8-21.

In the heart of the educator lies the promise of the future. When this heart embraces an “I and Thou” relationship with Earth and Cosmos, the wounds of the Earth will be healed.

We invite you to join us for “Presence to Living Earth in Autumn” with Priscilla on September 30th (see pages 22-23) and to apply for our next class of the Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program, which is accepting applications through October 1st (see pages 24-25). Our Fall children’s programs begin on October 3rd (see pages 26-27).

In Co-becoming,



Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2009), 151-152.

<sup>4</sup> David Abram, Foreword, in Martin Shaw, *Scatterlings*, ix.



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# Beyond All the Doors and Windows

by

Elizabeth Carrington



Four Moonlit Nights in the Meadow

*Reflections on the inspiration and forming of part 1 and 2 of Encounters with Beauty, a course in Eco-contemplative Painting, held at my studio in the River Arts District of Asheville, NC, and at Sacred Mountain Sanctuary in Candler, NC, as well as the expansion of my Art practice. This has been profoundly inspired by my studies with The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World.*

As we settle into place, into the quiet power of nature, the power of joy in our seeing into the life of things can set our natural inclination to turn itself towards Art. Giving this time to making Art in the natural world creates, in itself, an open and warm invitation for Nature to come to meet us.

It was during the winter just past that the clear vision for this course, Encounters with Beauty, began to stir itself into being. With it came a deep yearning for me to offer this as a teacher and guide. I have taught classes periodically for 16 years in educational institutions, community support centers and from my studio. Though I have never had any formal training as a teacher, I have found myself often in that role. I have

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taught drawing, painting, and concept and creative development with all different age groups. It has, at times, been a very uncertain road. Sometimes I have felt out of my depth and wished I had the certification to prove myself. Equally, I have felt needed and called upon to offer what I know to be sure, from my own experience as a working artist and the development of my creative process. Students have consistently shown up and asked me to work with them and I have responded to that.

There has been a missing part though, a foundational layer, whose absence I have noted again and again in my reflections on teaching. I have not been sure how to acquire this part or find that enriching layer to what I already offer.

This missing feeling led me to seek out more education in 2016. I looked at masters programs in Fine Arts, Art Therapy and Art Education, but felt they too were missing the element I was seeking. Finally I heard about the Center in Greensboro and enrolled in the *Inner life of the Child in Nature* program, thinking it would be a good starting point.

It was in January, a year and a half into the program there, in the darkest, quietest month of the year, I rested a while after Christmas. My daughter was home from school, out of our regular routine of comings and goings. It was here in the stillness that the missing part became so greatly illuminated and was finally fully seen. It was to work with the great presence of Earth, of course!

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program has been working on me and through me from the moment I began almost two years ago. The initial practices and assignments were very profound for me. They sparked a voracious appetite to learn more and more. I have never read so much in my life as I have in these two years. It seems a door was waiting to be opened for me, to both experience and study eco-contemplative practice and this kind of poetic/deep ecology. From the first day I heard Sandy's flute and Andrew's opening poems, I felt at home and had an inner sense of understanding that I must allow myself to be carried by it. I did often wonder how I would incorporate what I was learning into my Art practices and teaching but the expanse of two years part-time gave me plenty of breathing room to watch and see, with a "let it happen" kind of attitude.

My paintings have always touched upon a sense of human-earth connection without a lot of effort. It has been my natural inclination. As I stepped more intentionally into my Artwork in parallel to the assignments and practices offered by the Center, my paintings took a clear and forthright turn to a much more complete and consistent Earth presence.

I have felt almost as if I was given permission from my studies with the Center to swing open the doors and all the windows, to creating work that is *with* Earth.

This allowance has brought me back to my childhood in more ways than one; to the strength and old kinship I had with Nature then. I have remembered some long forgotten but now vivid memories of playing in meadows where spring lambs were playing by me, to the brown rain-filled rivers of my childhood

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home in Ireland, with a flash of a silvery trout darting by, to the gardens and woodlands I was so keenly involved in and alert to in their aliveness. I once felt I was inside a rolling thunder storm and that I was entirely a part of the sky.

I have felt the threads of this old and beautiful Earth, its deeply felt mystery in those early years return, to be real and alive in me again. Now, they are weaving into a working tapestry of an adult artist's life.

In 2017, I enrolled in the Orphan Wisdom School with Stephen Jenkinson in Ottawa. I have found both to be very compatible. At the second session there, Stephen spoke to us of the alchemy of words and how the word 'spelling' comes to us from old root words for making spells. These books I am reading, the timing in my life path and the teachers and friends I have made in this period are indeed an alchemy that rises far beyond certification and has an ancient quality of learning, as if I am learning for myself and everyone before me and after me. I am spellbound now by words, so many from the Center in the books we were asked to read, in handouts and the *Chrysalis* journal, as well as others I have discovered along this two year path. Included are works of Thomas Berry, Robert Sardello, Wordsworth, Andreas Weber, Teilhard de Chardin, Bayo Akomolafe, Stephen Jenkinson, Toko-pa Turner, Dr. Martin Shaw, Mary Oliver, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Jay Griffiths, Annemarie Ní Churreáin, Seamus Heaney, John Moriarty, Thomas Merton, Virginia Woolf, C.G. Jung and my return to the old love of John O'Donohue. Each book I liken to a friend and one with a plethora of stories to tell, all of which I am very keen to know. They are stacked here beside me in my studio as I write. I am in great company in the echoes of these voices. So trueing they are, of the journey of a human in deep connection with the natural world.

I have come to understand my paintings now as visual poems, offering a window of remembrance to a moment of being. They describe the quality of experiencing connection with Earth. Some are literal and others more like myths that work in a kind of multi layering of experience. A friend recently said to me upon visiting my studio, "You are such a complete romantic, your studio and you are like a poem from a bygone age." Though it was meant to be a compliment, I felt it was so essential to remind her that this work was very timely indeed and I was far from alone in my endeavor to express the extraordinary presence of the Earth, the Love and beholding of its beauty, in this very age.

As my understanding has deepened so too has my will to help others to open these same doorways to painting *with* Earth or to what I now call Eco-contemplative Painting.

The structures were very much there from my past workshops and classes, though the content now was shifted and much of the reasoning for it. I felt I had enough experience in how to carry a class that I could begin to design "Encounters with Beauty" in the winter and bring it out in spring. I knew that there would have to be a certain amount of 'trying things out' and learning as I go.

I have offered Part 1 twice now from my studio and offered part 2 from Sacred Mountain Sanctuary, where part three, a two-day residential retreat will be offered in spring 2019. I am also offering workshops in "Drawing with Trees" there this fall and one-on-one classes in drawing with the natural world.



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The dream of an Eco-contemplative Painting School is taking shape, one where children and adults alike are given the tools and support to approach Art with the presence of Earth in every step and every breath. I am making connections further afield, offering a two-day workshop in Eco-contemplative Painting in Ireland this summer.

There is no doubt that something is forming and taking shape in my life and work that was existing previously only in parts. As painter, as teacher, as lover of nature and as parent keen to teach my child to feel her interrelatedness with the natural world, I searched for the missing link. All these elements are threads weaving together now, giving life to each other, quenching each other's thirst for belonging and roots.

My daughter Madeleine reminded me some months ago as we sat on the mossy rocks in the middle of a beautiful mountain river, far into Pisgah National Forest, "that if you stay awhile, long enough for nature to trust you, she will show you her loveliest secrets." This was whispered in my ear as a collection of butterflies, perhaps twenty or thirty, and all different kinds in their color and brilliance, chose to lay their eggs together, fluttering in circles around and about each other by the edge of the river, and us.

I can only wonder what will happen next!

**Elizabeth Porritt Carrington** is an Irish born painter of land and mythology as well as teacher of drawing, painting and creative eco-contemplative practice. She is settled in Asheville, North Carolina where she works from her studio in the River Arts District. Her work is inspired by her relationships to landscape, their stories and people, her archaeological work in the French Pyrenees and her deep curiosity and inquiry of the experience of being human. Elizabeth plays upon the boundaries of the real and imagined, expressing the often unspoken miracles of our aliveness by fortifying their color, light, and form in a liberated palette. She practices a process of focused presence and an unapologetic love of life in all its facets. "It is on the crossing of vital points that I focus my work – the beginnings and the ending of days, seasons, years, generations, and lives too. It is at the great thresholds that I have felt most aware of being. Giving birth to my daughter and standing by loved ones who have died have given a critical and lasting sense of the tender vividness of our actuality. My work is an effort not to forget the gift of life for a moment and to fully experience being in this natural world. My paintings are windows of canvas, wood, and paper. If they can evoke or inspire a moment's rest on the majesty of the universe, they have done their job well."

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# The Hospitality of the Natural World

by

Priscilla Webster-Williams

I was excited and hopeful about entering The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program during a time of transitions and great “ups and downs.” I saw participation in the program as an opportunity to move in new and healing directions; toward the beauty, peace, and beholding of the natural world at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary. I was coming out of a rather intense period of writing and assembling a book manuscript about a family story of illness, brokenness, and the labyrinth of recovery. It was thrilling to have the manuscript accepted by two presses; the book was published, and I’m still experiencing the pleasure of giving readings in bookstores and at other poetry venues in North Carolina. There was, and is, much to celebrate.

However, almost a year before starting the program, I was diagnosed with a second cancer. This was a great shock; my first cancer diagnosis was twenty years ago, and since then I had been told I was free of cancer. The diagnosis brought up huge questions about mortality, trust, and purpose. So, it was a great comfort to turn toward the trees during sapphire pre-dawn mornings and engage with nature. In beholding the stillness of the woods, I could suspend my ego and forget self and concerns over which I had little control. Instead, I could enter into deep silences and stand in awe that a new day was beginning each morning. During moments of deep beholding, I felt nature’s acceptance. At times even nature seemed to grieve with me. Being in The Inner Life program has been a great blessing, in a time of great personal need.

During The Inner Life program, participants were asked to develop a practice of silence in nature that could lead to, as Robert Sardello wrote, “bodily sensing of Earth-Human-Soul presence.”<sup>1</sup> I did my best to do this throughout the program, and my practice was enhanced most recently by explorations of three “H” words— *Hospitality*, *Haiku*, and *Hopkins* (the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins). I chose these topics with the hope that they would offer fresh ideas and add energy to my attempts to write poems in response to Earth’s call. (Several of these poems appear later in this paper in the “Call and Response” section.)

## Hospitality

During The Inner Life program, I experienced the hospitality of the natural world as never before, in sickness and in health. Nature’s presence and care has been there—here—offering beauty, steadfastness, and peace. Truly, the Earth/the Universe is the Greatest Host that exists. In

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Sardello, *Heartfulness* (Gainesville, TX: Goldenstone Press, 2015), unpagged.



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sensing the hospitality of the earth, my soul was comforted, and I sensed I was becoming more trusting and open. As a result, I am making changes in my home that hopefully make visitors feel more welcome. I also wrote this poem about the hospitality of the Universe and its Earth:

### **Radical Hospitality**

The Natural World extends  
the Ultimate Extravagant Welcome  
Constant Invitations  
to Commune  
with an Ever-Present  
Magnificent Thou  
and the Human I

It is common knowledge that earth's air, water, rain, and soil make life possible. Humans and other life forms simply cannot exist without earth's beneficence. Yet, earth's invitations to enjoy and care for it go beyond the obvious.

Very early in human history, the Natural World invited humankind *to relate, behold and name* the essences they saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. The magnificence and mysteries of Nature, the subjects and displays in it, caused awe, fear, and curiosity in humans. The Natural World invited and inspired humans to name things, at first by making sounds to echo, imitate what they experienced. In the Genesis myth, Eve names a living thing "snake." She did so by beholding the essence of the creature: its hiss, sway, and glide; its entrancing and sometimes lethal qualities—a thing so magical it could shed its skin and yet continue to live. Humans created words and developed languages— connection through communication is yet another gift from The Natural World.

In *A Dictionary of Symbols*, J.E. Cirlot writes: "Given the symbolic nature of the Egyptian language, it follows that a name could never be a product of chance, but only of the study of the characteristics of a given thing."<sup>2</sup> Most root words are very ancient, stemming from Indo-European languages, and the meaning of many words is deeply fixed in the natural world. For example the words *trust, endure, druid, tray, and tar*—meaning something firm, solid, steadfast—derive from the Sanskrit for "tree." As a root word was transported across the earth by humans, derivatives from many languages were formed. The root of "foot," *ped*, ranged widely as it was adopted into other languages—from Sanskrit, Greek, Persian, Latin, German, French and Old English. A few of the derivatives from "ped" (foot) include *pedal, pioneer, pew, podium, octopus, pajamas, and impeccable*. Horned animals gifted humanity with the words *head, cornea, Capricorn, hornet, cranium, cervix, and carrot*—offshoots of "horn."

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<sup>2</sup> J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 226.

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Many words in everyday use stem from the physicality, the gifts, of the Earth, so that each time we hear, think or speak, it might be said that we are digesting or expressing something of The Natural World. I enjoy exploring the roots of words, and incorporating those words and their derivatives in poems. In so doing, I've found a deepening sense of respect for the earth, and I feel more a part of, and closer, to the natural world. I imagine a word traveling across the earth and being adopted into another language. I imagine people speaking, using words with meanings that spring from the earth. In more ways than one, the Earth, Nature, is the Ultimate Host.

However, in current culture, the concepts of the Earth as Hospitality, or Earth as The Great Host, scarcely occur at all. When I Google the word "hospitality," links come up only for commerce—the hotel industry, or training for it—and a search on my library's website brought up similar responses. To me, this indicates that current culture is in a very sad state.

Wikipedia offers a definition of the word: "Hospitality refers to the relationship between a guest and a host, wherein the host receives the guest with goodwill, including the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt, describes hospitality in *the Encyclopédie* as the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity."<sup>3</sup> I was grateful to see the last sentence above. Clearly, the Universe/Earth is the greatest "soul" or "thing" that exists, as demonstrated by its stance and flowering in many forms, including being the models for the formation of words and languages.

Earth's silent but visible "call" to those it hosts, its residents, invites—and requires—a response to how we relate to water, soil, air, etc. It of course behooves humans to be conscious of, and monitor, their responses to what Earth has to offer, for without these gifts humanity simply cannot live at all. Likewise, humans cannot be on earth without responding to it, either by caring for it, or by bringing it to the edge of distinction. Thankfully, the works of Thomas Berry and other great writers recommended by The Inner Life program teach, and remind humanity, that Earth is The Great Host, and that it invites its global guests to behold, develop a sense of wonder, and an "I and Thou" response to it:

*"Wonder is that which arouses awe, astonishment, surprise, or admiration: a marvel, a feeling of glory. Glory is described by Saint Thomas as clara notitia cum laude: clear knowledge with praise; to express strong approval or admiration for; to applaud, extol, commend; to exalt. This is the great challenge of the human at present - to recover the language of wonder and praise. Then we can give expression to the deep reciprocity and relatedness at the heart of the universe. In this way we may take up the immense challenge of restoring our world."*<sup>4</sup>

~ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia's definition of "hospitality" is found at: <https://www.wikipedia.org/> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitality>

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 150-151.

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## Gerard Manley Hopkins

During the last months of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, I read about Gerard Manley Hopkins, now widely known as a nature poet, and often called “The Praise Poet.” Hopkins (1844-89) lived his life in Britain and Ireland. He was a Jesuit priest and led a very disciplined life. He was often ill; scholars now think he suffered from crohn’s disease, an extremely painful medical condition not named until the 1930s. In addition to attending to his priestly and parish duties, Hopkins observed nature intently and drew sketches of plants and landscapes. He believed that God as Creator imposed an inner core of individuality on each species of rock, plant, animal, etc. He also believed that life forms could express themselves through their inner energy, and that the essence of subjects could be perceived in moments of insight by an onlooker who was in full harmony with the subject being observed. The idea/belief that life forms can express themselves, and their essence be perceived by humans seems very close to “the beholding of nature as a subject,” a core teaching of The Inner Life program.

In order to write poems about what he beheld in nature, Hopkins adopted language and syntax that was extremely innovative, dense, and energetic. Hopkins’ poetry is now very much appreciated, but during his lifetime it was not understood or valued by his friends, including other poets. Hopkins considered his life a failure. He wrote only a few poems during his lifetime, and died of typhoid fever at age forty-four. His poetry was first published twenty-nine years after his death. Since then, scholars of science and literature have recognized Hopkins’ intricate understanding of nature and his poetic genius.

In reading about Hopkins, I came across a curious fact about him: When he was growing up, he forced his younger brother to eat some flowers “so he [the brother] could understand them.”<sup>5</sup> I think this says something about how important the natural world was to Hopkins, and how much he valued it. I wrote a poem about this story, in Hopkins’ voice:

### Channeling Gerard Manley Hopkins

To understand flowers, you must eat them  
I tell my brother, as he chews with doubtful thought.  
Why do sweet-looking petals taste so bitter,  
he questions, and gagging, spits. Look, I say,  
the hills and meadows overflow with flowers.  
Rocks, streams, bobolinks feel their powers.  
Winter hay is mowed, the farm’s first fruits—  
who can stand by, blind, deaf, mute?

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret R. Ellsberg, ed. *The Gospel in Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selections from His Poems, Letters, Journals, and Spiritual Writings* (Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2017).

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I squint, explore, study the tiny to comprehend  
the Big. I practice duty, live with restraint  
until eyes-brain-heart-hand-pen-ink collide  
in delirious dance. Silent trees shimmer  
in velvet nights, until blue-black stillness  
signals dawn's emerging light. Wrens and robins  
stir in curly nests, whirring-chirping bird song  
their heaven-born quest: Praise Him. Praise.  
Praise.

### Haiku

Toward the end of my time in The Inner Life program, my poetic interests turned toward haiku, an ancient form of Japanese poetry traditionally focused on expressing moments of clarity or revelation while beholding nature. Recently, several members of The Carolina African American Writers Collective published a groundbreaking book, *One Window's Light: a Collection of Haiku*, edited by Lenard D. Moore.<sup>6</sup> I was able to pursue haiku by attending three readings, and a workshop, given by the book's authors. The Nasher Museum of Art featured the poets during the opening of a new exhibit of art by African American artists; the poets read their poems from the book and also a poem written in response to viewing a painting in the exhibit. Another reading I attended, in Wake Forest, featured three of the poets reading their haiku, plus one of them told the story behind the art on the book's cover, an image of a nine-square quilt she created in memory of the nine church members murdered at Mother Emanuel, Charleston, SC. The third reading I attended was at "Walking into April," an annual poetry event cosponsored by Barton College and the North Carolina Poetry Society. Two members of the Collective read their poems and gave a brief workshop about haiku.

I am very grateful to have been able to be at the above events and learn more about haiku from the perspectives of these excellent African American poets. In the future, I hope to attend the NC Haiku Society meetings, learn more about haiku as a poetic form, and write in that mode. Here, I offer a haiku sequence that I wrote before entering The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program:

#### Haiku, one for each season of the year:

crocuses  
purple pushes through gray snow  
winking

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<sup>6</sup> Lenard D. Moore, ed. *One Window's Light: A Collection of Haiku* (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 2017).



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evening pond mirror  
full-throated bullfrogs  
heavy with heat

mountain trees sway  
in full color, each leaf singing  
joyful calliope

trees in fog at dusk  
wispy presences whisper  
cold to the bone

### **Call and Response**

The following poems and journaling notes were written in response to moments of beholding The Natural World / The Ultimate Hospitality / The Welcoming Host. During The Inner Life program, and well before entering it, my goal as a writer of poetry has been to pay attention to life in its many forms and respond by expressing what I sensed through language. As stated earlier in this paper, The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program's invitation to behold nature as subjects instead of things, brought me into even deeper silence and closer to nature than ever before.

#### **This Morning, a Carolina Wren**

chirps an incessant and loud message  
as it rests on the deck railing  
outside my window. Wren seems to say:  
"I am here, make room, I belong  
in this world and I claim my spot—  
Wake up! You belong here, too!"

This little bird of loud voice,  
this few ounces of feathers,  
this blessing, startles my soul awake.

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## Hymn to Dawn

Collage of opposites,  
you break through night,  
scatter pink across sky  
and your luminous ways  
shimmer into airy day.  
You push gently into being,  
yet are strong as sun's coming.  
At times, you emerge slowly,  
cast colors of amber and honey.  
You hum with mystery. You hurry.  
You dawdle, yet your pace is steady.  
You are ethereal, refined.  
You come clothed in stardust  
or as bold as fire. You are delicate wisps,  
purple and orange. You are light,  
grey and heavy. You weave gold  
into air, become brassy and shine.  
You glare like glass, and you gently  
glisten earth's skin with dew.

### Journal Entry:

I am looking again at a leaf I brought into the house a few days ago. I brought in two, but can't find the companion leaf. The one that remains has one hole pierced in its structure. The lost leaf had two holes in it. I am feeling a sense of loss because I can't locate the lost leaf. I wonder if the two leaves could have communicated with each other as trees do, through their root systems? Perhaps when a leaf lets go, or pushes itself off a tree, it loses the ability to interact with other beings like itself.

But, this leaf speaks to me now, its variegated shape piercing the air, veins spread in an original yet organized way. And the colors of it, commonplace brown and green, take on a dramatic effect when back-lit from the lamp on my side-table, some parts a deep brown or dusky green, and another, almost-hole revealing itself as a dark-brown crumpled circle. The stem with its fan-like tip is beautiful in its sturdy, woody way. I pick up a "family field guide" to identify the tree the leaf came from. The guide states "When we identify a tree—call it by its own name—we become more closely linked to our forefathers, who would no more have confused a Maple with a Sycamore than would we, say, mistake a vacuum cleaner for a computer."<sup>7</sup> A surprising thought, a revelation—trees, leaves, forefathers now linked by this leathery, sharp-toothed survivor that rests in my hand.

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Aronson, *Fandex Family Field Guide #47* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1998), 1.

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## At Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

*Thy silent form doth tease us out of thought.* – Keats

Earth, the great equalizer  
to which all will return.  
Earth, its stone offered to all  
to pick up, admire, and return  
to soil's indentation.  
Structure, size, sutures,  
colors or cracks to trace.  
Stones to choose.  
Stones to leave alone.

Earth, the great equalizer,  
offers stones to toss  
into the open air,  
and human action is received  
without comment,  
except for the thud  
and truth of gravity.

Huge gravel boulders rest in Idaho,  
carried there by a massive flood  
during human pre-history.  
Unmovable black gravel,  
etched with petroglyphs  
carving by ancient cultures—  
wanderers, like us all.

---

**Before Dawn, the Backyard  
is a Bird's Nest of Blue**

Sapphire saturates the trees  
and snow-covered ground.  
Even the air is imbued with blue.

Cupped in nature's cathedral,  
I hold my breath....Time ticks,  
the yolk of morning cracks  
and dapples sapphire with light,

sapphire blue thinning  
to the color of robin's eggs,  
delicate as just-born birds—  
until blue in air takes wing.

**This evening, the moon is low**

large and luminous.  
It dips over the tops  
of trees and houses  
as I pass by in a car.

The huge silvery disc  
is at play. It skips  
from house to house,  
bounces over rooftops.  
Moon, doing a jig.



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## **“Clear Knowledge and Praise”**

~ Thomas Berry

Trees teach how to be, they offer  
leafy hands to the light. They talk  
amongst themselves, roots to canopy.  
They know when one of them is sick,  
send healing through their roots.

Trees sway, adjust to wind and weather.  
In night slumber, they dream sad dreams,  
remembering red oak and sweet gum,  
cut down because they were “too close  
to the [human’s] house.”

How mighty they were, seventy feet tall,  
twins in height, full grown but leveled  
by raspy chain saws, their perfect stumps  
ground up for fodder to feed the earth.

Those trees live on as prized boards  
cut for building sheltered by the same species  
that borrowed them from the earth—  
their living home—where sun and rain  
feeds trees that communicate,  
and perhaps still remember their kind.

---

## **A Note to Dawn, Dusk and Sky**

Each day you arrive or bid adieu  
in a different scene.  
Sometimes you are melting colors,  
other times streaks.  
Ethereal, luminescent,  
you become sky, vivid collage of colors.  
At times you glare with inner fire,  
or become floating dust, grey and growling.  
Sometimes you are double rainbow,  
singing a duet to the sun.

## **Fog**

Morning emerges after snowfall during the darkness.  
Street view from window— shrouded veils of white.  
Cars roll by, thick fog parts, then closes like a curtain.  
Fog's visual voice bellows, tumbles, swoops, hollers  
down a street I once viewed as "reality."

## **Tonight, in dusky light**

three trees whisper,  
branches stretching.

It's easy to eavesdrop among trees.  
They don't seem to care,  
don't rustle leaves  
or drop limbs, as if to say  
go away, you are too nosey.

How patient, how old they are.  
They knit wise wooden rings  
and send healing messages  
and other signals through their roots.  
In sickness and in health  
they repair, and invite me  
to behold stately magnificence.

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## Winter, and a New Cancer Diagnosis

The oaks relinquish their leaves that spill like rubble,  
a brew of russet that resists raking. I see the great discard  
and feel earth's deep freeze—nature's snare to sway  
my restless mind toward winter slumber. But there's no peace  
this inconsolable season—only mystery. Thoughts stumble  
to the brink of darkness, scent of wormwood chokes the air.

Brilliant sun darkens to bourbon hues. Even distant stars  
seem to stare with insolence at earth's poverty, which I share.  
Feeling utterly without, I challenge earth to join me in my grieving,  
but nature will not stop, earth orbits on without my consent.  
Pale yellow dawn appears with flecks of gold and two-faced Janus  
twists his leathery neck to watch time march again through an ancient gate.

I wait and wait for greening, for deciduous trees to bud.  
I breathe in, exhale, and lean toward any available light.

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## Indigo Morning

Trees in a quiet hover.  
Soon they will yawn  
and stir in their canopies.  
For now, stately branches  
stand in blue darkness.

Perhaps the beingness of trees  
taught the ancient prophets  
to see, perceive, believe  
“The dark and the light  
are the same to God.”

Like fabric dyed with indigo,  
sapphire blue air transforms  
from deep darkness to sunlight  
through the life-giver’s power .

Transformation. The trees,  
the air, show, teach, declare—  
change is not only possible,  
it will always come.

Be like us, trees whisper:  
embrace possibilities,  
embrace change.



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### At Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

Lying on a plank of wood, I wanted to push  
my fears and anxieties onto the trees  
standing near, but I could not lose them  
until I noticed the under-side of green leaves,  
and mottled, brighter ones above,  
swaying in the canopy.

The plank of wood became a place of death  
for what troubled me, and as I shed  
my worried self, the trees began to stir  
and whisper— and I knew I had been changed  
by an upside-down world of visions.

**Priscilla Webster-Williams** is a practicing poet who lives in Durham, North Carolina. She has also lived in the landscapes or cityscapes of Iowa, Chicago, Connecticut, and Boston. Her poems have been published in journals and anthologies, and displayed at art exhibits, including the Disappearing Frogs project. During her time in The Inner Life program, her poem was selected to receive the 2016 Rash Award in Poetry, sponsored by Broad River Review and Gardner-Webb University. Her book of poems, *The Narrative Possibilities of Coral*, was chosen by former North Carolina Poet Laureate, Cathy Smith Bowers, for publication in 2017 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company.

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## Presence to Living Earth

*“We no longer hear the voice of the rivers, the mountains, or the sea. The trees and meadows are no longer intimate modes of spirit presence. The world about us has become an “it” rather than a “thou”. . . We continue to make music, write poetry, and do our painting and sculpture and architecture, but these activities easily become aesthetic expressions simply of the human. They lose the intimacy and radiance and awesome qualities of the universe. We have, in the accepted universe of these times, little capacity for participating in the mysteries that were celebrated in the earlier literary and artistic and religious modes of expression. For we cannot live in the universe in which these celebrations took place. We can only look on, as it were, as at something unreal.”*

~ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Please join us for our seasonal Presence to Living Earth programs that open a space for being present with Earth in an intimate manner through poetry readings, solos within the sacred space of Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, and time for reflection.

We are especially graced this year to welcome three poets whose poetic expressions reunite us with the intimacy, radiance and awesome qualities of the universe. Their books of poetry will be available for purchase at each program. Register online at <http://www.beholdnature.org/livingearth.php>

### Presence to Living Earth in Autumn

“The Hospitality of the Natural World”  
with Priscilla Webster-Williams  
Date: Sunday, September 30, 2018  
Time: 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm  
Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary  
1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.  
Whitsett, NC 27377  
Cost: \$50

**Priscilla Webster-Williams** is a practicing poet who lives in Durham, North Carolina. She has also lived in the landscapes or cityscapes of Iowa, Chicago, Connecticut, and Boston. Her poems have been published in journals and anthologies, and displayed at art exhibits, including the Disappearing Frogs project. During her time in the Center’s Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, her poem was selected to receive the 2016 Rash Award in Poetry, sponsored by Broad River Review and Gardner-Webb University. Her book of poems, *The Narrative Possibilities of Coral*, was chosen by former North Carolina Poet Laureate, Cathy Smith Bowers, for publication in 2017 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company.

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## Presence to Living Earth in Winter

“At First Light”

with Wende Essrow

Date: Sunday, January 13, 2019

Time: 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$50

**Wende Essrow** has been writing and telling stories for as long as she can recall. Her father was a great storyteller and would spin a tale as the sun dropped low in the sky and welcomed in the night with the magic of his words. It was only natural for Wende to do the same for her children, students and now grandchildren. She is thrilled to have followed in the tradition of sharing stories, surrounding children with books and adding two beautiful picture books to the world of children’s literature. Her latest book, *At First Light*, is her first title for adults. It is an exquisite coffee table photography and poetry book designed to be enjoyed several pages at a time over that first warm cup of coffee and reread over the years whenever there is a quiet moment to relish. It is her passion for the natural world that keeps the ink, paint and photography flowing.

## Presence to Living Earth in Spring

“Heron Mornings”

with Andrew Levitt

Date: Sunday, March 31, 2019

Time: 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Rd.

Whitsett, NC 27377

Cost: \$50

**Andrew Levitt** holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. Andrew performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years and then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. Andrew co-created a performance piece, “The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry” for the Thomas Berry Centennial in 2014 and is the author of *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante’s Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry* (2015) and *Heron Mornings* (2017), his first book of poetry. Andrew received the Greensboro Public Library’s Thomas Berry Award in 2016. As Dr. Merryandrew, he currently works as a clown doctor in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro.

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



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

~ Morgan Josey Glover, Class of 2017

**We are now accepting applications through October 1, 2018 for  
The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice, 2018-2020**

Now in its 10th year, The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program cultivates an "I and Thou" relationship between human beings and the natural world. Contemplative in nature, the program evolves through eco-contemplative practices and reflective readings and gives evidence, through practical applications, of ways of working with children that bring to life a sense of belonging to Earth as sacred community.

In the first year of this two-year program, 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" - on new ways of being and working in the world. The program culminates with the publication of a Collection of Practices that is downloadable on the Center's publication page.

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program is an in-depth process of inner development and group sharing. Thomas Berry's image of the Universe as a "communion of subjects" permeates every aspect of the program. Participants find themselves in new territory and form incredible bonds of intimacy with one another and the Earth.

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We invite you to apply for the next class that begins on November 17, 2018. Applications are now being received on a rolling admissions basis.

**Cost:** \$750 (payment plans can be arranged)

**Place:** Timberlake Earth Sanctuary  
1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road  
Whitsett, NC 27377

### **Calendar of Retreats:**

#### **First Year 2018-2019**

Retreat 1: Saturday, November 17, 2018 (9:00-4:00)  
Retreat 2: Saturday, February 2, 2019 (9:00-4:00)  
Retreat 3: Saturday, March 30, 2019 (9:00-4:00)  
Retreats 4-5: Tuesday-Wednesday, June 25-26, 2019 (9:00-4:00)

#### **Second Year 2019-2020**

Gathering 1: Sunday afternoon, October 20, 2019 (2:00-5:00)  
Gathering 2: Sunday afternoon, February 9, 2020 (10:00-3:00)  
Graduation: Sunday afternoon/evening, June 28, 2020 (2:00 pm-8:00 pm)

### **Faculty**

**Peggy Whalen-Levitt**, PhD, Center Director and Program Coordinator. Peggy is the editor of *Chrysalis* and *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century* (2011).

**Sandy Bisdee**, Director of Children's Programs at the Center. A born naturalist and Native American flute player, Sandy has developed the Center's eco-contemplative practices for children since 2005.

**Andrew Levitt**, PhD, Co-Creator of the performance piece, "The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry" and author of *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante's Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry* (2015) and *Heron Mornings* (2017).

**Colette Segalla**, PhD, a practicing therapist in Raleigh, NC and author of *I am You, You are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality and the Natural World in Childhood* (2015).

For more information and a downloadable application go to:  
<http://www.beholdnature.org/ilcn.php>



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## Programs for Children

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



### Awakening to Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades K-5, maximum 24 children

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Empathetic Listening

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades 4-8 (maximum 24 children)

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

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

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

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

## The Poetry of Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades 6 – 12 (maximum 24 children)

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

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

~ Mary Oliver

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





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

CEINW  
P. O. Box 41108  
Greensboro, NC 27404

We deeply appreciate your support of our work!

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