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Relational learning for a sustainable future: An eco - spiritual model

Mary Elizabeth Westfall
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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RELATIONAL LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE:
AN ECO-SPIRITUAL MODEL

BY

The Rev. Mary E. Westfall
B.A., History and Political Science, Sterling College, 1983
Master of Divinity, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1988

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Natural Resources

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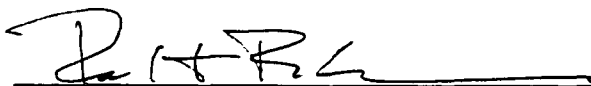
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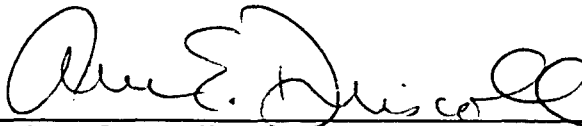
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Professor of Religious Studies



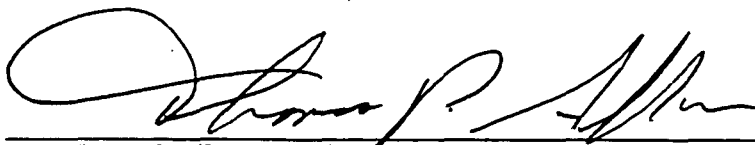
Dr. Ann Diller, Professor of Education



Dr. Ann Driscoll, Assoc. Dir. The Browne Center



Dr. Barbara Houston, Professor of Education



Dr. Tom Sullivan, Chaplain, Babson College

April 9, 2007
Date

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ABSTRACT

RELATIONAL LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: AN ECO-SPIRITUAL MODEL

by

The Rev. Mary E. Westfall

University of New Hampshire, May 2001

We are facing unprecedented environmental challenges as we enter the new millennium as human choices and practices have repeatedly led to environmental degradation. Increasingly there are individuals and groups seeking to address this environmental crisis and move toward more sustainable patterns of living. But in order to make alternative choices it will be essential to draw upon the wealth and variety of human capabilities.

For nearly 350 years Western culture has looked to reason and rationality to provide truth and direction. The affective side of being human, feelings, intuition, love, care, wonder, mystery and hope have largely been devalued. In order to pursue more sustainable and holistic ways of living it will be essential to reclaim these additional human qualities as key resources for the future.

The research for this thesis was undertaken within three sustainable communities in Europe. Because of their commitment to living more

holistically their educational and spiritual practices yield timely information for others who desire to move toward sustainability. Within all three communities emphasis is placed upon deepening the quality and authenticity of human relationships with nature, self, others and mystery. Such commitment may have profound impact on other learning communities as they seek to embody more holistic practices. By reclaiming and revaluing human capacities to care and connect, as well as cultivating spiritualities rooted in wonder and the miracle of being, we may yet discover the capacity to create patterns of living and being that will promote a sustainable future.

INTRODUCTION

FINDING A HOME AFTER SWEET VALLEY: THE SEARCH FOR HEALING, HOPE AND A LIVABLE FUTURE

It was buried on the 30th page of the New York Times, the spring of 1997, hardly noticeable in the bulk of Sunday-paper articles and advertisements strewn across my living room floor. But just after a full page ad for "The Great Shoe Sale. . . featuring the best Spring colors, styles and values!" came a story about a small neighborhood in Anniston, Alabama, ironically named, "Sweet Valley," where dozens of residents were evacuated and relocated due to PCB contamination in the stream that runs through town. Higher than usual cancer rates, birth defects and respiratory problems had finally led health officials to test the water and soil in the area and ultimately determine that the levels of contamination were not compatible with human life. Monsanto, which is the largest chemical manufacturer in the country and which had been operating a large chemical plant nearby since the 1930's, claimed it was not at fault for the problems, but spent \$1.5 million to \$2 million on relocating the residents. One of those who was relocated, 71 year old Eloise Mealing, who used to run the local beauty shop, told the reporter,

We hoped our last days would be our best days. It was comfortable living here. Not rich, not having all the material things we needed, but my family grew up in a home of love. We had our garden, our plum trees, apple, peach and pecans. The children played in the dirt, ate the vegetables, ate fruit off the

trees. There was a ditch that ran past my home, the children played their too, right there, where it was contaminated the most.

Ruth Mimms, 65 years old, another of the townsfolk whose story made it into the Times article, was quoted as saying,

My daughter played in that ditch and my grand babies, both of them live on breathing machines. One is six, the other will be ten. My oldest son played in that ditch. His baby doesn't have any joints in her fingers. It all comes from the chemicals. We lived in it all our lives, and this is the end result."

It was a story that has been told before: Times Beach, Missouri, where 700 residents were relocated, and Love Canal, New York, where a similar number of families was moved due to toxic chemicals. An almost unbelievable, horrific drama that had become small news in a big paper. And yet, I read on, swept up in the tale of the residents of this small town, their pain, loss, relocation, their desire for a place to call "home" where they could carry on. Something deep within me stirred. Sweet Valley was a place, not just a name in the news. It was a place that stood as a silent specter to the madness of these times: a place in which generations of people lived, had babies, swam in the narrow ditch that wound through town, planted gardens, sat on front porches on warm summer evenings, laughed, struggled, loved and expected to have a future. This place was home, a place of refuge, comfort and safety. "Home," the place one longs for at the end of a weary day, or remembers fondly years later from some other distant place. "Home," that place of belonging, was no more for the people of Sweet Valley.

Sweet Valley is not just a story of our times, it is **our** story. For if Lester Brown and the World Watch Institute are correct in their end-of-the-millennium report, "Vital Signs 1999," the world is getting hotter, storms are getting stronger, the presence of toxins are evermore detectable in water, soil and air, and male sperm count is dramatically declining. These warning signs are not new, but serve to remind us of dramatic changes at both the atmospheric level on our planet as well as at the level of human physiology. These are but examples of the far-reaching transformations that are taking place within and around the human community. The PCB's that infiltrated the flesh and blood of the inhabitants of Sweet Valley are only one of the toxins that are daily effecting life on this planet and bringing about changes we cannot fully predict, control, or perhaps even survive. All of us are losing the homes we have counted on, drawn life from, and been nourished by. But unlike the folks of Sweet Valley, there is no new home awaiting us after we have made our planet home, Earth, unlivable.

Such a drama may be too much for us to take in, and so the story gets buried in the back pages of the paper, relegated to the edges of our knowing. Sweet Valley and the challenges posed as we begin a new millennium are daunting and for some serve to signal that there is no hope, that the world will, indeed, end in either fire or ice, sooner rather than later; that there is nothing much that can be done to alter the inevitable course of our own demise. But that drama is not the only story being told. The survivalists, doomsayers and millennialists do not speak for all of us. While recognizing

the uncertainty of the future, one can spend a day hiking in the Appalachians, experience the dazzling fireball sun dipping below the horizon beyond Pt. Reyes, watch geese in V-formation wing their way to warmer climes, drift off to peaceful slumber in the arms of one's beloved and one's heart soars. This is the world we inhabit, this is home, a place of beauty, wonder and awe, the place of our becoming. We will not let it all pass away, for we belong here.

As a pastor and educator, I take in all these things and like many wrestle with hope and horror, without a clear sense of where our efforts and fears may eventually lead us. Over the past decade my work has increasingly involved me in issues connected to the environment, sustainability, and the role of persons of faith in helping create a more just and livable future. What has continued to confound me is **why we are reluctant to change**. We have had compelling numbers of scientists speaking about global warming for over a decade. Book after book, expert after expert, describes the environmental consequences of our current practices, painting a picture of a world out of balance and desperately in need of healing and transformation. A look at my own two young children and I am determined that I will not let their future be utterly stolen from them. Yet, we continue to drive our cars, consume outrageously, and belch out pollutants into the waterways and airways that sustain our very lives. Over time I have come to wonder if the heart of the problem and our own inertia to bring about substantive change has less to do with the amount of information we have than with how we learn, process and integrate that information meaningfully into the whole of

our lives, including how we understand what it means to be human. Is it still possible to engage people in creative thinking about this crisis and use human energies, vision and skill to bring about change?

Nearly five years ago I had occasion to participate in a conference entitled, "The Greening of Higher Education: Transformation to Meet the Environmental Challenge." I was thrilled! What an opportunity to meet with other educators, earth-lovers, visionaries, activists and religious leaders to strategize about an over-due revolution and to set a new course which would help promote a more sustainable future. With such grandiose goals in mind, I was truly shocked when the conference consisted of three long days of sitting and listening to papers in a stuffy seminar room in Chicago. The "experts" that shared their visions doubtlessly were the cream of the crop, and on more than one occasion I found myself jotting a note about some interesting point or perspective. But by the end of three days I felt numb and out of sorts. There had been no celebration, no interactive exercises, no singing or meditating, no open-ended questions left for us to chew upon in small groups. And this was supposed to be about transformation? How could laundry lists of information and policy recommendations possibly "change" anything? No, once again the experts came in and dumped their load on the passive participants who were supposed to gratefully absorb their wisdom and move back out into the world to ponder its truth. It was pretty similar to the educational model I thought we were trying to challenge, the world of objectivism and detachment, the world of experts, the clear

dichotomy between the “one who knows,” and the “one in need of knowing.” It seemed completely cut-off from any real encounters with the fears we feel about the environmental crisis and our own sense of inadequacy at making a difference. No time was spent walking along the lake, just a stones-throw from the campus where we gathered, or listening to a panel of students reflect on their own educational experiences, in terms of what worked and what did not. No, once again we played out an educational paradigm of our time that is all too familiar to most of us, the “learning vacuum,” and it sucked the life out of me in terms of creativity, energy, and hope. Attempting to bring about educational transformation using such a model seemed much like the biblical image of putting new wine in old wineskins. One way or the other the result would surely be a mess and ultimately of little lasting value!

Yet, this is the very world many students inhabit everyday in classrooms across the country, a learning environment grounded in objectivism and detachment. A place, as some of my own students report, where one could sit in a course all semester and never utter a word, never be asked to connect the topic with one’s own life story or personal choices, never be challenged to put into words what difference any of it makes. The same students, however, can describe with passion the feeling of reaching the summit of Mt. Washington, of what it meant for them the first time they really looked through a microscope or a telescope, gaining access to the minuscule and the magnificent, or the peace that spreads over them as they

walk along the Atlantic coastline near our campus. Unfortunately, that world of awe and discovery that so infuses them with delight is too often disconnected from the world of learning that typifies the education most receive.

At a recent faculty gathering on our campus to discuss ways to promote sustainability, it was stunning to note that the discussion focused almost entirely on “what” to teach, with little or no discussion on “how” it might be taught. Still locked into a particular method of learning/teaching, even an interdisciplinary and rather astute faculty group thought primarily and exclusively about what essential information we should be depositing into the minds of our students. At a future meeting, unsatisfied with where we were heading, I asked if people could simply start by sharing what led them into their particular disciplines and what sustains them in their work. Well, we never got back to the curriculum discussion that day, but what ensued was an honest, dynamic and rather revealing look at ourselves and each other. As each faculty member spoke, we were invited into the real world they inhabit, a world of story and passion, a world first and foremost about relationship and connection. Even a rather quiet faculty member in electrical engineering spoke about a mentor who had inspired him and whose own passion for his discipline this faculty member had always envied. Others connected their environmental or sustainability commitments to early childhood experiences in nature, walking through vast fields, observing the magic of St. Elmo’s fire dancing in the summer heat, collecting tadpoles, or

later memories of an inspiring professor or mentor who opened the world for them. A world of detachment and objectivism? Far from it. This was the world of subjective engagement, of intimacy, of transformation rooted in existential reality. Around the table we gave testimony to the deep gladness and sense of connection that led most of us to do what we do.

But if this is true, what happens that leads so many of us to teach and act and live as if this rich world of relation and connection were peripheral to the learning process, to the very process of being human and becoming whole? How can it be that we have more information available to us today than ever before, more facts and figures quantifying ozone depletion and soil erosion, explosive population and consumptive patterns, yet all that information seems to have little effect on the choices and attitudes of millions in our country. It is, as one exasperated professor said at a recent meeting on our campus concerning energy alternatives, "We know all this stuff, the importance of solar and wind alternatives. We know what our overuse of fossil fuels is doing to the planet. We know all this. Why don't we change?" Indeed, how can our heads be so filled with information that seems to have little influence on our increasingly bleak future?

Perhaps as we have filled our heads with information we have forgotten that our hearts and spirits have been left untended, that they too need to be filled. It is as if we are finally growing into a startling awareness that Descartes was correct, but incomplete in his understanding of what it means to be human. "I think, therefore I am" speaks only to one aspect of

our being. For it is equally true that "I feel, therefore I am," "I love therefore I am," "I experience a world of wonder and awe, pain and loss, therefore I am." We have lived for nearly 350 years as incomplete beings, accentuating the life of the mind over the real, everyday life of the body and spirit in the lifeworld. Such a fragmented existence has allowed us to believe that knowledge can come through fact and thought alone, while disregarding and often discrediting the rich worlds of knowing that come through the body, the senses, the complex and compelling experiential landscape of intuition, emotion, creativity. Whether looking at data from the Hubbell telescope or spending an afternoon at a swimming hole with a lively group of children, the world is first and foremost about connecting, relating, engaging in the true communion of subjects. And it is there, in the moment or experience of connecting self with other, that our deepest, most complete knowing begins to take form.

For it is there in the crucible of relationality that we become human, that we come to experience ourselves as part of something vast and numinous, wholly present, yet transcending human thought alone. There, beneath the dazzling night sky, or the infinitesimal world revealed by the microscope, there in a moment of discovery, of awe, something deep within us stirs and we come home to ourselves and our place in all of this. In dramatic contrast to a world of objects, a disconnected, mechanistic reality, we experience the world to be a place of wonder and sorrow, luscious abundance and painful loss, but all of it embedded in us and us in it. Whether it is

Barbara McClintock's "feeling for the organism," Vaclav Havel's "miracle of Being," Fritjov Capra's sense of the "ecological self," Martin Buber's "I-Thou," or Chief Seattle's "web of life," we know somewhere in the center of our being that in the beginning is the relation, the connection, the life-giving affirmation that we are part of it all. And does our educational pedagogy reflect this wisdom? Do we truly value the kind of knowing that comes in intimate relation with "other"? Are their alternative teaching/learning models that revere that sense of holy communion, that draw learners into the world of meaning and mystery, where the whole body, heart mind and spirit, is engaged in the learning process?

It was these questions that led me to focus my doctoral work on educational models that might promote a more sustainable world view and that are grounded holistically in lived experience. Early in the process I was particularly interested in creating some sort of guide or handbook for educators to use as they move from more didactic, objectivist teaching methods to more holistic ones which help connect intellect, emotion and spirit. I began experimenting in my own courses, seminars and workshops. I spent several months visiting eco-villages throughout Europe and the US, gathering "best practices" for use in educational settings or with faith communities. I experienced teachers using interactive games and play, dance and dialogue, drama and meditation. In some settings students tended permaculture plots, designed conflict resolution models, explored what it means to live in community. Some of these tools you will read about in later

chapters. But the point that kept coming home to me again and again had to do with connection, relation, reciprocity, engagement. The tools and techniques can be useful, but there are qualities that may ultimately be of greater importance. I have come to believe that effective teaching and learning can take place in a well-articulated lecture as well as in an interactive problem-solving activity. Underlying all those techniques are subject/persons and there must be relationships of trust, wonder, honesty and dynamism if we are to produce the kind of creative, compassionate, critical-thinkers that the future requires. It is here, in this relational connectivity, that we find the basis for successful learning. It is here, whether in classroom, temple, or church that we reconnect fact and feeling, theory and practice, knowledge and faith, where teacher and learner participate in a process that is authentic, dynamic and organic. And perhaps in a larger, almost mystical sense we reconnect with the deep peace and sheer gladness that comes from knowing we belong, that we are truly part of all this, and what we choose does matter, now and long into the unforeseeable future.

The following chapters are my sincere attempt to offer the learnings that I have derived from years of study, exploration and reflection. I feel profoundly grateful for the many individuals and experiences which have shaped my thinking and opened new vistas of understanding to me. Part One continues to explicate some of the challenges of our times with Chapter 1 providing further background as to the history and implications of the split between religion and science that occurred nearly 350 years ago. Similarly, it

provides a brief overview of an emerging paradigm of our time and the ways in which that shift offers new language and metaphor for understanding nature. Chapter 2 describes the qualitative research method I applied for this work. Here, I make the case for expanding the way research is understood and applied as we seek to move into a more holistic, less fragmented way of knowing that truly values personal experience and that is phenomenologically grounded. Both chapters offer a window into the possibilities that even now are emerging within a variety of disciplines.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 offer descriptions of the three primary communities I drew upon for this research: Findhorn, Scotland; Svanholm, Denmark; and Lebensgarten, Germany. Each community has a strong commitment to sustainability and seeks to model more holistic ways of being through their daily practices and educational programs. With each chapter I highlight some of the pedagogical tools employed by the community, interview members and educators, and reflect upon my own experience as a learner in the setting.

In Chapter 6 I offer a model of relational learning that seeks to engage the whole person in the learning process. Such a process emerges out of authentic, dynamic connections to the lifeworld. Chapter 7 concludes with a challenge to rethink the role that spirituality plays in the transition to more holistic ways of living on Earth and with each other, and offers a word of hope about the emerging paradigm of our time that celebrates the sacred mystery in which we live and move and have our being.

In March of 1997 when I read the news article about Sweet Valley, I did not know what direction my own work would take. But the people of Sweet Valley have been present with me along the way. I have thought often of Mrs. Mimms and other grandmothers who have watched their grandchildren be born with horrid defects. I have prayed for those parents who keep trying to build a meaningful future, even as life ebbs out of their own bodies and those of their children. And on more than one occasion I have thought about all the decision-makers and workers at Monsanto, all part of a sad cycle that might eventually lead to their own demise. We all are the people of Sweet Valley and the people of Monsanto, and together we must find a way to save, preserve, and celebrate our home. It is my sincere hope that these pages might add to the growing body of work committed to a sustainable and livable future, that someday we might truly make our way back to Sweet Valley, with healing and hope.

PART ONE

TWO ROADS CONVERGED IN A YELLOW WOOD: RETHINKING THE FAITH-SCIENCE BREACH

Walking along the bustling streets of Florence surrounded by city smells, mingling with the enticing aroma of pasta, garlic and fresh bread from the many sidewalk cafes, I am filled with a deep sense of history, aware of a drama played out centuries ago that still pulsates through these very walkways. Standing in the shadow of Il Duomo, which rises as a visible testimony to human ingenuity and the yearning for the Divine, spellbound by the amazing artwork that fills that immense cathedral, that both delights and intrigues, and so clearly expresses a world view both static and fearful, I feel the spirit of Galileo moving silently through the place. *"Eppur si muove,"* - "Yet, it moves." These words, said to have been spoken by Galileo just after he recanted and was sentenced to live out the remainder of his life under house arrest, affirmed his conviction that despite religious doctrine to the contrary, the Earth was not the center of the universe. This concept was so radical it nearly resulted in his execution as a heretic. How his words mocked the beliefs and world view of his time. That belief system embodied in the artwork which still fills cathedrals and museums throughout Europe, a physical world filled with evil and decay contrasted with the soaring heights of the spiritual heavenly realm. Such a world view further expressed the human struggle to break earth's bonds and soar free where the Almighty

dwells in undiminished perfection. There on the streets of Florence, hundreds of years ago, the struggle to move from one paradigm to another took place and despite the silencing of Galileo the truth of his earth-shattering discovery would still find voice. Even today, walking those very halls and corridors one is swept up in that drama that juxtaposed two particular paradigms. That of 15th and 16th century religious doctrine so evident in vibrant murals and frescoes, and the alternative, newly emerging scientific views represented by Galileo, Kepler and others. None of those involved at the time could have imagined how their struggle would shape human thought and understanding for hundreds of years. Yet even today we continue to experience the vestiges of the world view that Galileo's claims challenged, a static world, filled with brokenness and evil forces, from which one seeks escape in order to join, in some distant place, with the Holy. For the church hierarchy of the time, the challenge of science threatened the very underpinnings of doctrine and dogma and called into question the centrality of the human in the drama of redemption. The two views were incompatible and therefore only one could hold sway. The tensions between religion and science, faith and reason, gained momentum. A several hundred year struggle had begun.

The struggle that took shape in the Italian courts and cathedrals so many years ago is not unlike a struggle taking place in our time, the struggle to once again move from a dominant paradigm to an emerging alternative, thereby reuniting two pathways of belief and understanding that were set

apart so long ago. It is as if the human community, faced with seemingly divergent roads in the wood, took one and forsook the other, to its lasting peril. But in our time we are now faced with the awesome possibility of seeing those roads converge. It is the newly emerging dialogue between religion and science, the worlds of faith and fact, that may provide us the opportunity to set a new course and begin to move down a more holistic pathway. And perhaps that new integrated way of viewing reality has important implications for living sustainably.

CHAPTER 1

SCIENCE AND SPIRIT: A NEW DAY WITH NEW POSSIBILITIES

When Galileo's scientific observations affirmed what Nicolas Copernicus had posited nearly a century before, the way was cleared for other minds of science to explore and expand upon this emerging world view--that Earth was one of a series of planets that orbited around the sun and that perhaps even the sun had its own , even greater, orbit.¹ This amounted to nothing less than a bombshell being dropped on the prevailing views of the time which maintained that Earth was the center of the universe. Despite the cries of heresy and the execution of some of its adherents, these theories lived on, giving rise to an entirely new epoch of human history which we call the Scientific Revolution.

Set against the backdrop of the Black Plague, which killed an estimated 1/3 of Europe's population, the reactionary period of the Inquisition in which the Church sought to forcibly convert and control the pagan world, killing millions of women, children and men, the Scientific Revolution offered a vision of order in the midst of chaos. While one might decry pure objectivity, educator Parker Palmer notes with emphasis that the use of objectivity in science came, in part, due to a reaction against the "evils of reckless subjectivity."

Victims of the Black Death would have benefited from the objective knowledge that their suffering was caused by fleas from infected rats, not by offenses against God. The countless women burned at the stake because someone called them witches bear mute testimony to the cruelties that subjectivity can breed.

Objectivism set out to put truth on firmer ground than the whims of princes and priests, and for that we can be grateful. ²

In the midst of a world of chaos and uncertainty came the “father of modern science,” Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who has been both glorified and vilified for his role in serving as a major architect for the emerging new science of the time. While Palmer and others emphasize the miasma of ignorance dispelled by Bacon, Descartes and the rise of scientific objectivism, Carolyn Merchant is among another group which see the disastrous consequences of such a movement in science and culture. In her now classic *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Merchant describes Bacon as laying the foundation for the mechanistic world view in which nature was stripped of sacredness and instead came to be viewed as a machine to be exploited, controlled and dominated. She quotes Bacon as saying nature must be “bound into service” and made a “slave,” put “in constraint” and molded by the mechanical arts. The “searchers and spies of nature are to discover her plots and secrets.”³

Feminist theologian and educator, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, also looks to Bacon and subsequently Rene Descartes as the architects of a world view that led science to pursue a course that involved control, manipulation, domination and a distancing of humans from the inert world of nature.

Drawing upon the work of contemporary physicist Fritjov Capra, Gray describes the rise of dualistic thought:

The birth of modern science was preceded and accompanied by the development of philosophical thought which led to an extreme formulation of the spirit/matter dualism. This formulation appeared in the seventeenth century in the philosophy of Rene Descartes who based his view of nature on a fundamental division into two separate and independent realms; that of mind (*res cogitans*) and that of matter (*res extensa*). The Cartesian division allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and completely separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assembled into a huge machine.⁴

Added to this emerging world view was the thinking of Sir Isaac Newton, with his emphasis on mathematical formulations providing the tools for discerning cause and effect relationships, or the details of “mechanics.” From this emerged the prevailing world view that nature was a machine, as was the human body. The parts could be disassembled to be studied and examined to understand the rule or order they followed.

New forms of order and power provided a remedy for the disorder perceived to be spreading through culture. . . .The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature -- the most far-reaching effects of the Scientific Revolution. Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature.⁵

It serves little purpose to either glorify or vilify those who helped construct the mechanistic world view or made possible the rise of modern science. They used their skill, wisdom and historical location to help shape a way of understanding existence that brought about innumerable positive and

negative consequences. Perhaps it was more the elevation of the mechanistic paradigm than its articulation that led to the exclusion of any other valid ways of understanding and interpreting phenomena and has such dire and far-reaching ramifications. However, it is essential to understand that though it was constructed hundreds of years ago, the dualistic, mechanistic world view has remained the prevailing world view of science, and indeed, of Western culture since that time. While Carolyn Merchant, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Evelyn Fox, Joseph Des Jardins and others are quick to note the ways in which this thinking resulted in views of nature and humanity that are reductionist, inaccurate and dangerous, even Fritjov Capra admits that “the Cartesian division and the mechanistic world view have thus been beneficial and detrimental at the same time. They were extremely successful in the development of classical physics and technology, but had many adverse consequences for our civilization.”⁶

However one interprets the historical and cultural significance of the Scientific Revolution, it cannot be denied that the path that was taken has made all the difference, and unwittingly paved the way for beliefs, attitudes and practices that now threaten the survival of the planet. For it is a world view which elevated the life of the mind and the world of reason while diminishing the life of the senses and the world of emotion, intuition, spirit and everyday human experience. One ramification of this split is that science became the ruler of the domain of knowable, verifiable Truth, while religion, philosophy and ethics were relegated to the airy-fairy realm of personal belief

and morality. This kind of unnatural split has led to the war against nature and the disassociative way humans live upon the planet.

Ecological Consequences of the Mechanistic Paradigm

Though the previous description of the mechanistic paradigm is brief, it points to a particular view of reality that continues to be reflected in contemporary culture. Today we are living through some disastrous consequences of the primacy of this world view, reflected environmentally as well as within the human community. Noted deep ecologist, Bill McKibben, believes that because of the prevailing paradigm which continues to see nature as inert and non-living, yoked with a consumer-oriented market based on exploitation of earth's resources, we have already stepped over the threshold to the end of nature, altering and changing the very reality of nature.

By the end of nature I do not mean the end of the world. The rain will still fall and the sun shine, though differently than before. When I say 'nature', I mean a certain set of human ideas about the world and our place in it. But the death of those ideas begins with concrete changes in the reality around us—changes that scientists can measure and enumerate. More and more frequently, these changes will clash with our perceptions, until finally, our sense of nature as eternal and separate will be washed away and we will see all too clearly what we have done.⁷

McKibben, in *The End of Nature*, describes the ways in which our world view and the way we embody that world view is having disastrous and clearly demonstrable environmental consequences. Similarly, Lester Brown notes that "Nature's limits are beginning to impose themselves on the human agenda, initially at the local level, but also on the global level."⁸ Unlike the

prevailing views of the past few hundred years, the world's resources are not limitless and their exploitation without some commitment to restraint and balance has led us to a critical point.

Using the tools of science to aid their analysis, Dennis Meadows, Donella Meadows and Jorgan Randers, provide compelling evidence of the numerous ways we are living beyond Earth's limits. Write the three,

In 1971 we concluded that the physical limits to human use of materials and energy were some three decades ahead. In 1991 when we looked at the data . . . we realized that in spite of the world's improved technologies, the greater awareness, the stronger environmental policies, many resource and pollution flows had grown beyond their sustainable limits . . . The human world is beyond its limits. The present way of doing things us unsustainable."⁹

Even as a growing number of members within the scientific community are describing a world out of balance, providing startling figures on the negative effects of human activity on the ecosystems of the world, we concurrently find ourselves in a western culture based on over-consumption of these very same limited resources. The United States, with only 5% of the world's total population, consumes about 30% of the worlds resources. By 1987 the number of shopping malls outnumbered high schools, with the average American spending six hours weekly shopping.¹⁰ Noted geologist, Thomas Berry, describes this current way of living as a deep "cultural pathology," in which we have come to view the universe as a collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects. This pathology, Berry believes, is derivative of a paradigm in which nature is desacralized and humans see themselves as separate from nature. And similarly contemporary poet and

environmentalist, Wendell Berry, claims that the most fundamental problem of our time is that we live as if the finite resources of the planet were infinite, continually robbing and plundering that which cannot and will not last forever. Our lives and consumptive patterns, he notes, are based on inaccurate understandings of our world and the consequences are disastrous for all.¹¹

The warnings about environmental catastrophe coming from scientists, philosophers and politicians seems sadly familiar to the warning sent out by Rachel Carson over three decades ago. For it was she who, as far back as 1962, challenged western culture to consider its current path and to make choices that could lead to greater health and wholeness for the human community and for Earth itself. Her, now classic, Silent Spring, was the first major critique of U.S. agricultural practices and heavy use of pesticides and other chemicals to “control nature.” She understood these very practices to be rooted in a kind of attitude about nature that needed to be altered, rooted out, transformed. The final words of her book still ring with timely truth:

The “control of nature” is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man. The concepts and practices applied to entomology for the most part date from the Stone Age of science. It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth.¹²

Her concluding chapter invites the human community to seriously consider its course and in the words of Robert Frost to take “the road less traveled,” and in so doing move away from a paradigm that eats away at the very fabric

of life in favor of one that will preserve earth and earth's future. Meadows, Meadows and Randers also call for such a shift, as do McKibben, Brown and others who have made it their task to work toward a livable, sustainable future.

Indeed, even as some are calling for a change in the mechanistic, reductionist paradigm, there is arising from science and philosophy the language and metaphors that may make this necessary change, not only possible, but probable. Yet as one delves more deeply into the attitudes and assumptions that have led to contemporary views regarding humans and their relationship to the environment another important facet of "disconnect" becomes apparent. The scientific revolution and in particular the Cartesian split between subject and object (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) has had profound and lasting consequences upon the value attributed to human experience. In a world view that elevates the objective and devalues the subjective, what becomes of the world of relationships, meaning, spirit, and daily lived experience? Underneath the current destructive patterns of relating to the world is an even more profound violence toward the human spirit and psyche. For it is at this very subtle level that the basic experiences of human existence are devalued with disastrous personal and communal consequences. The underlying pathology of which Thomas Barry speaks, is a pathology embedded in such an attitude. By continuing to perpetuate a world view based on the split between the world of objectivity and that of subjectivity, while simultaneously devaluing the latter, we set the course for

further environmental degradation. But even more so, we keep ourselves forever cut-off from the very sources of power that might transform our actions, the insights gained from personal experiences of love, fear, hate, passion, compassion, beauty, mystery, hope and despair. Though denigrated in the past these forces that will have profound effects on the course of the future if we but find ways to harness these energies and reassert their value within our lives.

To move toward a paradigm that will more accurately reflect emerging scientific perspectives it will also be essential to reassert the value of the subject world. We will probably never find a way to live in harmony with our surroundings until we can reclaim the basic value of our own experiences within those surroundings.

Making the Shift: An Emerging Paradigm for a New Millennium

Werner Heisenberg, one of the most noted physicists of this century, who helped lay the foundation for what has become modern physics, was also one to note that the idea of the atom as the smallest, indivisible building block of all matter first came in connection with the elaboration of the concepts of Matter, Being and Becoming being explored by Greek philosophers 2500 years ago. The idea lay dormant for almost another 2000 years before a French philosopher, and contemporary of Galileo and Kepler, Gassendi revived the idea. Heisenberg understood that science and philosophy do not exist in totally separate domains but instead noted that philosophical thinking plays

a powerful role in shaping the direction of science by creating the basic metaphors that science then sets out to prove or disprove.¹³ The early concept of the atom was materialistic, based on observable referents. Such atoms were thought to be exceedingly small bits of matter that, when added in particular configurations, constituted the physical world. It was not until the 20th century that scientists like Heisenberg, Plank and Bohr revealed to the world a very different view of the atom and subsequently the make-up of the universe. Their stunning theories and observations led to a dramatically different understanding of matter, paving the way for an emergent New Science with far- reaching implications.

Relativity theory, quantum mechanics, Big Bang Cosmology, chaos and complexity, human genetic engineering, transfinite mathematics and artificial intelligence are challenging, even tearing down, the rigid and simplistic Enlightenment assumption that the world is a closed network of cause and effect, an autonomous machine made entirely of tiny bits of matter in motion.¹⁴

It has only been within the past fifty years that physics has begun to articulate an understanding of the atom that is radically different than that conceived of by the ancient Greeks and the astute “fathers of modern science.” Paul Davies, physicist and theoretician, writes that because of the changes in science we are living in an age where the traditional cause and effect rule of science is being questioned and in its place is emerging quantum mechanics. At the subatomic level reality is not what science had predicted. Building on Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle Niels Bohr observed that the “fuzzy, nebulous world of the atom only sharpens into concrete reality when an

observation is made. In the absence of an observer, the atom is a ghost."¹⁵

What was being discovered was that the physical world was not made up of discreet entities which could be viewed, measured and determined to fit certain rules of cause and effect. Instead,

...every time the physicist asked nature a question in an atomic experiment, nature responded with a paradox. . . It took a long time to accept the fact that these paradoxes belong to the intrinsic structure of atomic physics and to realize that they arise whenever one attempts to describe atomic events in the traditional terms of physics . . .the concept of quantum theory was not easy to accept even after mathematical formulations were completed. Their effect on the physicists' imaginations was truly shattering. Rutherford's experiments had shown that atoms, instead of being hard and indestructible, consisted of vast regions of space in which extremely small particles moved, and quantum theory made it clear that even these particles were nothing like the solid objects of classical physics . . . Quantum theory has shown that particles are not isolated grains of matter, but are probability patterns, interconnections in an inseparable cosmic web.¹⁶

These findings and the emergence of quantum theory call into question many of the basic assumptions that serve as the underpinning for western, mechanistic thinking. It is as if the scientific resolution of nearly 350 years ago is being mirrored in our own age as one dominant world view begins to be replaced by another. Paul Davies writes that in the face of these momentous changes and paradigm shift, "the common sense view of the world, in terms of objects that really exist 'out there' independently of our observations, totally collapses in the face of the quantum factor."¹⁷ He goes on to describe the way in which the wave-particle duality (in which an atom can appear as a wave or a particle, depending on what instrumentation you are using to make your observation and what you are trying to measure) creates a

world that is constituted of probability patterns, meaning that all subject-object dichotomies melt away, as the observer participates in reality with what is being observed. So much for the Cartesian split that has defined reality for hundreds of years! Davies further notes, "It will be evident from the foregoing that the quantum theory demolishes some cherished common sense concepts about the nature of reality. By blurring the distinction between subject and object, cause and effect, it introduces a strong holistic element into our world view.¹⁸ The world of Galileo, Descartes and Bacon, the western understandings upon which most of us have built our sense of reality undergoes a dramatic shift as quantum theory dismantles the division between the world of object and subject, and profoundly challenges the cherished notions of the clear dichotomy between inner and outer, body and soul, matter and spirit. The mechanical model fades in order to make way for the birthing of a scientifically-based model characterized by fluidity, wholeness and the ultimate connection and unity of all things.

The new physics and the evolving understanding of its implications are stunning when one considers what possibilities this emerging paradigm offers. Building on the work of Edward Hubble and Albert Einstein, contemporary physicist Brian Swimme looks at the significance of this shift. He speaks of a universe that has been coming into being for some 15-20 billion years. "And yet, every moment of this universe is new. That is, we now realize that we live not in a static Newtonian space, we live in an ongoing cosmic story."¹⁹ Indeed, Hubble's 1929 discovery of an expanding

universe challenged prevailing theories and gave rise to a new way of viewing "the heavens." Many noted physicists now join Swimme in describing a universe billions of years in the making, arising out of energy concentrated in a region smaller than a dime that began to expand and cool, giving form to the universe as we know it and creating vast spaces in the process. The present day universe with its billions and billions of stars is a far cry from the universe conceived of by Galileo from his Italian observatory!²⁰ This image of an expanding universe describes at the macro-level, what subatomic particles reveal on the micro-level, an emergent reality "more subtle, numinous, interconnected than we have known for centuries. In the emerging world view of the 'new science' our existence as evolutionary creatures gifted with life, self-consciousness and moral agency no longer separates us from the universe around us."²¹ Looking at the night sky in all its vast grandeur, we are reminded that we are star dust, we are the universe thinking out loud about itself. No longer isolated, no longer separate from all that is, we are provided the opportunity to re-envision what it means to be human and what it means to be part of this unfolding cosmic story.

As we further immerse ourselves in quantum reality it becomes apparent that many assumptions about reality as we have come to define and experience it necessarily must be scrutinized with new lenses. Capra notes that as our understanding increases and we continue to question the mechanistic reality in which we have been immersed, we find that much of what we have taken for granted is no longer meaningful or accurate.

(T)he view of the universe as a mechanical system compiled of elementary building blocks, the view of the human as a machine, the view of life as a competitive struggle for existence, the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economic and technological growth and last but not least the belief that a society in which female is everywhere subsumed under the male is one that follows the basic laws of nature.²²

In contrast to such outmoded ways of thinking and living, Capra offers the “theory of living systems,” which originated about 1940, but emerged fully only about a decade ago. In this theory

. . .all natural systems are wholes whose specific structures arise from the interactions and interdependence of their parts. Systemic properties are destroyed when a system is dissected, either physically or theoretically, into isolated elements. Although we can discern individual parts in any system, the nature of the wholes is always different from the mere sum of its parts . . . a shift to a new world view and a new mode of thinking goes hand in hand with a profound change in values . . . a shift from self-assertion to integration . . .from the rational to the intuitive, from analysis to synthesis, from reductionism to holism, from linear to non-linear thinking.²³

To engage in such a shift is truly to undertake a cultural transformation. When one considers the ways in which the dominant, western, Cartesian paradigm continues to exert itself in the modern era, it becomes abundantly clear that a change in such a static world view will touch upon all aspects of life and culture in ways both surprising and exciting.

Such a shift in our fundamental way of understanding reality and ourselves within that reality is an immense undertaking, but there are clues and guides all about us to help us take that perilous and necessary journey. Continuing the description of the shift from linear to non-linear thinking, feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether invites us to take our

learning from the natural world. We can continue to live out of balance, disregarding what nature shows us to be right and harmonious ways of living or we can convert our energies and intelligence to Earth. Ruether challenges western thinkers to take responsibility for our choices by first

understanding the integrity of the existing ecological community and learning to build our niche in that community in harmony with the rest . . . undoing linear thinking and choosing relational patterns . . . Linear thinking simplifies, dichotomizes, focuses on parts and fails to see the larger relationality and interdependence. Ecological thinking demands a different kind of relationality. . . Converting our minds to the earth means understanding the more diffuse and relational logic of natural harmony. . . The remaking of our relation to nature and with each other, then, is a historical project and struggle of recreation.²⁴

Unlike the dominant paradigm, the emerging ecological, quantum paradigm does not have as its major theme the "control of nature." Rather its theme is the reclaiming of our own embeddedness in nature and seeking to work within nature's balance, not against it. As Thomas Berry so poetically and provocatively states, "we bear the universe in our being even as the universe bears us in its being."²⁵ Viewing nature as a living system in which we are a part allows us to avoid the myth of separate, discreet entities. As quantum physics continues to reveal, at the subatomic level there are no clear-cut distinctions between object and subject, between "this" and "that." Rather we are part of a living, relational system, dynamically interacting in a web of inter-connection. And in such a world the nature of the whole will always be greater than the sum of its parts.

In such a worldview the lines that have divided the world of reason and intuition, objectivity and subjectivity begin to blur making way for holism. The implications of this in regard to actual lived experience are profound. Much of the work of the coming years will necessarily require a reassertion of the value of the subjective, the world of day to day experience and the learning and wisdom found there.

The scientific understandings of the latter part of the 20th Century invite us into the rare opportunity of re-visioning nature, humanity and how we can live in ways that are life-giving and sustaining. We are living through a scientific revolution to rival that of the Copernican Revolution. The transfer from one paradigm to another will not happen all at once, but will consist of an unfolding process that will touch upon all aspects of life. It is as the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn reminds us, "a conversion experience cannot be forced."²⁶ Indeed we are in need of conversion, a shift of understanding, a renaming of values and sources of power, a new way of seeing things. Such things cannot be forced, but rather lived into. This conversion, like any other, will be a process, sometimes abrupt, sometimes lengthy, a process in which we come to see with new eyes and learn to live with a new sense of self.

Implications for the Way We Live: Putting Flesh on the Bones

The emerging world view described in the previous section is already upon us and yet, not quite here. We live in that "in between" time when our ability to conceive of a new world view may outstrip our ability to put it fully

into practice. It is in the coming decades that the human community will be called upon to vivify this new paradigm and to give it life through our choices. Already the articulation of this alternative has brought about a new round of religious discourse, as once again religion seeks to find its place in this epoch of great change and social transformation.

Even as the scientific thought of the Enlightenment produced mechanistic, reductionist thought, the Christian church tended to also embrace the concept of a world that was non-living. But rather than drawing its hope from control and influence of the natural world, the church emphasized flight out of the world and into the heavenly realm. Greek dualism, which exerted great influence on early church theology, was reaffirmed in the age of science and became an even more entrenched aspect of the life of faith. Even up to the present there are many Christians who are unmoved by the ecological crisis and continue to view Earth as merely the backdrop for the human drama of salvation. For adherents to this theological perspective, wholeness will come only when one achieves closer union with God in death and departure from the earthly sphere. This theological understanding leads to the belief that there is no need to care for Earth nor any reason to explore the implications of the new science upon faith. There is no need for a renewed dialogue between science and religion or a convergence of these two major forces. Their relationship simply has no bearing, no relevancy. However, and most fortunately, this is not the only religious perspective.

With the advent of process theology, emerging out of Whiteheadian thought several decades ago, Christian theology began an irreversible process of re-visioning creation, the holy and the role and purpose of the human. John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki, both process theologians, have been on the forefront of the renewed dialogue with science, drawing heavily from the new science to reformulate a theology that is relevant and appropriate in the face of a changing dominant paradigm. Their theology speaks of the deep inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of all things, and a God who is in the process of becoming God. This movement away from a static universe and an omnipotent and unchanging God challenges most traditional Christian theology, yet resonates with the thinking and believing of many who already feel disenfranchised from the older, increasingly outdated tradition. Such challenges have provided new avenues for theological reflection especially in light of ecological crisis. These theological articulations have broad and far-reaching implications and are finding their way into greater circles of discussion and acceptance.

One such articulation comes from feminist theologian, Sallie McFague. Though rooted within the Reformed Protestant tradition, McFague is sharp in her criticism of the ways in which the Christian church has embraced and embodied the values of the dominant paradigm. She rejects that hierarchical, dualistic, atomistic, unchanging paradigm. Instead, she articulates a holistic perspective that favors openness, caring, inclusiveness and interdependence.²⁷ Her theological perspective is characterized by the inter-relatedness of all

things and of the human connection to the farthest reaches of the cosmos. For we are, after all, claims McFague, “distant relatives to the stars and kissing cousins with the oceans, plants and other creature on earth.”²⁸ She also emphasizes that it is time to de-center God as Almighty Kingly Ruler, and to re-center God as “source, power, goal” of the fifteen billion year cosmic history. That means that the time has come to re-center humans, not as mere subjects of the King, but as co-creators with God.²⁹ She offers fresh new language and metaphor to replace that of the old. She draws on terms that speak of the universe as God’s Body, emphasizing a new level of engagement in the world and careful attentiveness to the world’s wonder, mystery and beauty. Her work is perhaps most compelling for the way she articulates the need to abolish the constructed division between the material and spiritual, humanity and nature, fact and faith, and makes way for a theology of embodiment and relationality. Such a theological perspective seems to offer countless possibilities as human communities seek to find more appropriate ways of relating with nature, the ineffable, as well as one another.³⁰

Additionally, as people of faith seek to make their belief relevant in light of the emergence of a more holistic and relational paradigm, creation spirituality has become a moving force both within and without the church. First articulated by former Roman Catholic priest, Matthew Fox, and drawing heavily on the mystical tradition, creation spirituality is an intentional move away from a fear and control-based spirituality to one that emanates out of a sense of wonder at the sheer mystery that has brought the cosmos into being

and that is present in all things. Drawing extensively from the new cosmic story being articulated by science, Fox encourages people of faith to take seriously the power of this new creation story for its ability to:

ground us in the history of how we arrived here and it awakens awe and wonder that we are here . . . Awe and amazement are the results of a rich creation story, and the awe we feel should encompass our very selves, since every self is part of the unfolding creation story. We feel our interconnection with other creatures and peoples on this surprising planet in this amazing universe of one trillion galaxies, each with 200 billion stars . . . all origins are sacred. To hear stories of our origins that are fresh and true is to awaken reverence and awe among us.³¹

Fox is part of a growing number of religious thinkers that see the story being offered by science as having the possibility of reconnecting the human community to the sacred within and around us, transforming forever the way we think theologically and express ourselves through myth, symbol and ritual. Creation Spirituality offers an enlivening and engaging alternative to spiritual traditions steeped in Cartesian dualism, and makes way for new possibilities of worshiping, working and living, all grounded in a commitment to wholeness, justice and an awareness of mystery.

Echoing some of these same themes are cosmologists such as Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry who also see the new science as providing us with an entirely new orientation for understanding the cosmic journey and the human role within it. They challenge people to take up the joyful, arduous task of moving from the Cenozoic age to the Ecozoic age and of reclaiming our rightful place, not at the "top of the heap," but as one more joyful revelation of divine mystery.

The environmental crisis and the changes taking place within science are having profound effects upon the Christian church. More and more theologians, preachers, pastoral counselors, and people of faith are drawing upon the emerging understandings of quantum reality to inform their teaching, preaching, writing and relating. Yet, the scientific revolution in which we now find ourselves is equally a spiritual revolution as humanity once again is confronted with the task of reinventing itself from within the context of this new story. Christianity, as merely one of many global religions, will continue to adjust and adapt to these larger cultural shifts, and in fact may even inform and help provide leadership through the transition by offering spiritual and ethical dimensions to the scientific ones. But there is an even greater need to come to the awareness that it is not science alone that will take us into a new day of more sustainable and humane living. We are living in perilous times, times in which the horrid reality of Sweet Valley may be reproduced again and again. A heightened scientific awareness still needs to be yoked with the energies of the human will and spirit, the capacity to love and feel, the inner longings and passions which form the ethical framework upon which humanity will weave a new and life-embracing paradigm. Vaclav Havel reflects the thinking and passion of an increasing number of people when he asserts:

It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience. It's not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true

purpose of our existence on this earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behavior and a new set of values for the planet.³²

Havel speaks of a kind of change that emanates from the very center of where people live. What he describes is grounded in the real world of relationships, choices, emotions and conviction. These are not the traditional tools with which science has executed its craft. Instead, these are the values and qualities that have historically rested within the spiritual sphere. If Havel is correct then our next revolution involves the convergence of two roads, the paths of science and spirit making possible a future that need not neglect one for the other. Through reasserting the connections between these paths we may yet uncover worlds of knowing that make possible new patterns of living sustainably.

New Patterns for Living: Sustainability and the Promise of Community

The word "sustainability" has become evermore popular in American culture and is used to describe any one of a growing number of perspectives and commitments. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the ways in which we have chosen to live and interact with the planet have not been sustainable, to the point that change is evermore necessary if we are to have a planet on which we might survive as a species. Meadows, Meadows and Randers are among those who offer some description of the kind of sustainable living that will be required if we take seriously the lessons from science and the growing awareness of earth's finitude. They note that the change to sustainability need not be a "going backwards" to some simpler

time. Instead they call for finding appropriate ways to utilize science in the service of sustainable values. "Technology and markets serve the values of society or of the most powerful segments of society. If the primary goal is growth, they produce growth, as long as they can. If the primary goals are equity and sustainability, they can also serve those goals."³³ They suggest that the time has come to make deliberate social choices that will result in alternative ways of living more lightly on the planet. They voice the commitment of a growing number of scientists, religious leaders, educators and lay persons who are beginning to work intentionally toward the creation of communities based on sustainable values that take seriously natural limits and balance. They call for a Sustainable Revolution--"a societal transformation that permits the best of human nature, rather than the worst, to be expressed and nurtured."³³

Physicist Fritjov Capra does not stop at describing the new paradigm, and like those just mentioned has put his energy to work toward the realization of that paradigm in the very ways humans live and relate. "Reconnecting with the web of life means building and nurturing sustainable communities in which we can satisfy our needs and aspirations without diminishing the chances of future generations. For this task we can learn valuable lessons from the study of ecosystems, which are sustainable communities of plants, animals and microorganisms."³⁵ For Capra, David Orr, and others within the eco-literacy movement, it is by reeducating ourselves, becoming well-versed in the basic principles of ecology, truly

coming to know the home planet, that we will find the means and methods of reordering our lives in the direction of sustainability, living in balance with the natural world.

Communities that take seriously “living in balance,” and that model the convergence of good science with authentic spirituality already exist and may serve as useful models and “living laboratories” as we seek to embark upon uncharted terrain. Some of these communities will be discussed in future chapters for what they can teach about sustainable patterns of living.

Synthesizing

Standing in the shadow of Il Duomo on that hot summer day several years ago, I was reminded of the power of language and metaphor in shaping the way we conceive of ourselves, each other, and our relationship to nature and Ultimate Mystery. The metaphor of the machine brought a sense of order to a world that seemed random and chaotic. That metaphor helped construct a basis for understanding reality that touched every aspect of life for nearly 400 years. But that metaphor can only take us part way on the journey, and we are now, as a people and a planet, moving into new pathways of understanding that will make all the difference for ourselves and for the future.

As we stand on the threshold of a new epoch of human and planetary history, the metaphors being offered today of “living systems,” of “an interconnected web of life,” will shape the way we understand science, technology, the tools employed for research, how we understand and

configure everything from the family and interpersonal relationships to classrooms, boardrooms and social systems. In the following chapter I will explore a research methodology that seeks to take seriously the emergence of the previously described new paradigm, a qualitative method that may prove useful in describing and exploring the very kinds of spiritual and personal transformations this era requires as we move down the path toward sustainability.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ROOTED IN THE EMERGING PARADIGM: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

As noted in the introductory chapter, the further I began to explore the emerging dialogue between religion and science, spirituality and ecology, the more I became aware that an underlying problem in the eco-crisis of our time is not a lack of good information, but a means of truly integrating that knowledge. Scientific data can describe soil erosion, ozone depletion, and the loss of species. Theology can develop language and metaphor to describe the holy and give form to that theology through ritual and all manner of spiritual practices. But the facts and figures become numbing and the religious language fails to fully satisfy or compel. With all sorts of knowledge, we still don't change. The more I pondered this dilemma, the more aware I became of the ways in which all my studies were missing a vital element that had to do with actual human experiences of transformation. What is it that opens the human heart and mind to change, enabling one to move toward a new world view or paradigm? Why is that some people "get it" and others do not? And how could a researcher ever attempt to quantify "fire in the belly," a song in the heart, the passion of the soul, those very

qualities that often are the impetus, the starting point for bringing about substantive change in one's choices and actions.

My work as an ordained clergywoman has provided me with years of experience in dealing with people in the midst of their highest highs and lowest lows. Through these encounters I have come to greatly respect the learnings that come through human experience. Being with others as they move through birth and death experiences, times of crisis and transformation has provided me with much to consider as I construct a research method. Some of my most profound encounters with others have come through moments of lived experience, as silence, tears, music, or a simple touch conveyed worlds of meaning. Yet how to speak of this? Indeed, how to describe or write about these powerful passages that add texture and substance to our lives? If the past several hundred years have been marked by the devaluing of the subjective how might one go about lifting up the silenced themes that constitute so much of life? How indeed can one begin to give voice to the rich texture of lived experience or come to value the lifeworld? With a deeply held conviction as to the value of this kind of knowing, I set out to find the voices and experiences that might have something important to offer as we journey toward sustainable living.

In order to prepare appropriate data for such research into sustainable living I began to look for individuals or groups that are already experimenting with sustainable practices and might offer insight and new perspectives. Over a period of months I began researching a newly emerging

network of sustainable communities committed to personal and global transformation. These communities were actively seeking alternatives to the materialistic paradigm and each in their own way was striving to live with ecological and spiritual sensitivity and to help others do likewise.

Discovering the existence and variety of these dozens of communities gave me hope. Just knowing that throughout the world men, women, and children of varying cultures and backgrounds were seeking to live more compassionately and gently with each other and with Earth reconfirmed my deep conviction that humans are, indeed, capable of revisioning, restructuring, and recreating their relationships, values and orientation toward life. It became clearer to me that these very communities might have tools, perspectives and educational processes to assist others who also desire to make such changes. I began exploring how best to glean information from these communities that might be useful to educators and ministers, parents and business people, consumers and caretakers who might also be striving toward sustainability in their own lives, families and communities. As I considered how best to collect data at these various sites, I was again confronted with the ways in which the dominant scientific paradigm has shaped the sometimes stifling way research is approached. For such a project as this, I needed to draw upon the wisdom, knowledge and experience of those who find validity in the many non-objective dimensions of human existence that are not easily quantifiable. I was certain I did not want to develop data that gave facts, figures or formulas. Rather I wanted to be

descriptive, evocative and somehow lift-up the voices and experiences of those already in the midst of major transformation. For such an endeavor I needed to craft a methodology that would be useful in describing and exploring educational, spiritual and personal transformation. The following pages describe the methodological approach I used for this undertaking. This research method reflects a deep commitment to including human lived experience as a valid source of knowledge and information. My research goal included exploring educational and spiritual practices that might lead to transformed ways of living. Additionally, it is my sincere hope that the collected data might be useful for others desiring such transformation in their own lives, schools, workplaces and communities.

A Methodology for the Human Sciences

The human hunger to acquire knowledge may very well have been part of human history for millennia, but only in the past few hundred years have humans sought to create accepted systematic approaches to the process of knowledge acquisition. As far back as the early 1600's, with Bacon's emphasis on the inductive-experimental method, and Galileo's conviction that mathematical formulae held the key to describing natural order, the groundwork was being laid for what was to become the scientific method of inquiry.¹ From these early understandings emerged the positivist tradition, which, as described by Max Van Manen, focused exclusively on detached observation, controlled experiment and mathematical or quantitative measurement.² Positivism looks only to natural phenomena and the

relationships between these phenomena in order to yield the kind of factual data that provides the basis for knowledge. Donald Polkinghorn further describes the primary themes of the positivist or single-method tradition in this way:

- 1) All metaphysics should be rejected and knowledge confined to what has been experienced or can be experienced. Thus science should restrict itself to discovering reliable correlations within experience.
- 2) The adequacy of knowledge increases as it approximates the forms of explanation which have been achieved by the most advanced sciences.
- 3) Scientific explanation is limited to only functional and directional laws (Comte) or to only mathematically functional laws (Mach).³

This perspective has been dominant since the 1700's and still is the primary research methodology within the physical sciences. This standard scientific or quantitative research method has provided the basis for an immense amount of knowledge and understanding in the physical sciences. But with an increased desire to better understand the human experience, the limitations of this method for use within the human sciences began to be articulated. The major challenge came from the anti-positivist movement that began in the late 1800's and gained force in the twentieth century with the rise of modern physics. The anti-positivists attacked strictly quantitative methods of inquiry because these methods discounted the value of human experience. Thinkers like Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert and William Dilthey, drawing upon neo-Kantian understandings, began to articulate a distinction between methods for studying and understanding mystical/natural phenomena and human phenomena. They and others began calling for methods that could also include areas of human experience

that involved meaning, values and culture. Dilthey, described by Polkinghorn as “the principal architect for the anti-positivist movement in the human sciences,” believed that far from being a machine that can be described and classified in mathematical formulae, the human being, with its capacity to feel, reflect, think and act, required alternative methods of inquiry to bring forth deeper understanding and knowledge. For the first time, categories such as faith, meaning, hope and religion were included in the range of human experience worthy of consideration and further research.⁴

In this century, though positivism is still seen as the normative approach for the study of physical, natural phenomena, there continue to be many voices that offer alternative perspectives. Acknowledging the limitations of positivist or strictly quantitative methodologies, many contemporary researchers in the human sciences are focusing their energies on methods that seek to do more than “tell us how many, how much and how it is distributed.”⁵ New avenues for studying human experience have emerged among researchers who value knowledge attained through embodied or lived-experience (Merleau-Ponty). Such approaches reject the traditional assumption that there is a “single, objective reality. . . we can observe, know and measure” but that there are multiple realities where “belief rather than facts form the basis of perception.”⁶

Giving Voice to Human Experience

To move from quantitative to qualitative research methods in the pursuit of studying human phenomena allows for research that is

fundamentally descriptive, interpretive, self-reflective and allows for the exploration of non-objective realities. One approach, phenomenological methodology, is described by Van Manen as one that seeks

. . .to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching-questioning-theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better to *become* the world. Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of 'intentionality'. In doing research we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. ⁷

Van Manen offers the possibility of exploring and researching vast areas of human experience that were previously discounted or at least severely undervalued. It is only in the past few decades that this desire to turn to qualitative research has received much focus and represents a profound shift in philosophical thinking. This shift is an intentional move away from the dichotomies of the past that resulted in the forced distinctions between subjective/objective, mind/body, spirit/machine and offers an inclusive approach that sees all these aspects as interconnected within the lifeworld. Moving away from fragmented, reductionist thinking in order to consider "emergent qualities"⁸ within experience has allowed for the growing recognition that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. This shift has made possible a more holistic approach to research, which according to M.Q. Patton, makes it more possible to

. . . understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting - what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting, and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding.⁹

What I began to find in the works of people like Merriam, Patton and Van Manen, were methodological tools that took seriously the lives of human beings as a valid starting point for understanding. Such emerging methodologies sought to describe the breadth and depth of human lived experience, those qualities and dimensions that have been beyond the purview of the classical positivist approach. Without such tools how indeed could one ever seek to research the vast worlds of knowing that come through giving birth, surviving a near death experience, or awakening to a profound sense of awe, wonder, or deep connection? For my purposes, traditional quantitative methodologies seemed inappropriate, and instead I opted to construct a methodology directed toward the study of these very real and very human experiences of transformation. I was not seeking to quantify or make predictions about these transformations, but rather describe and reflect upon them in order to explore the deeper meanings and underlying universal themes they contain.

Life Story, Reciprocal Ethnography and Phenomenological Attentiveness

In the opening pages of *The Gift of Stories*, Robert Atkinson writes about the power of story, the ways in which the sacred stories of our past draw us right into “the timelessness of human experience by connecting us with what is most essentially human, at the same time enabling us to see our own experience more clearly.”¹⁰ He continues to describe the powerful force stories are, not only stories from the distant past, but the stories of our lives that we continue to reflect upon, reconstruct, and use as maps with which to chart our future course. Atkinson sees the life story as serving four functions “of bringing us more into accord with ourselves, others, the mystery of life, and the universe around us.”¹¹ Through deeper and more intentional reflection on these life experiences we gain understanding of the ways in which they have shaped us. Atkinson, along with Abe Arkoff, author of *The Illuminated Life*, view the researcher who is intent upon studying human experience as one who necessarily must value the inner tale longing to be told, explored, and retold, in order to derive its deepest meanings.

Story was the original form in which a community remembered and told its history. Story was the original form in which a community passed on its values and spiritual lessons. Story is an essential archetype of the human experience. And today, stories still tell us who we are while connecting us to a world much larger than ourselves. They can transform our lives if we are open to their power, if the time is right, and if the person telling or hearing the story is ready.¹²

The transformative power of stories is reenacted each time we gather for Passover or Holy Communion, or reminisce around the Thanksgiving Day table. The story that we tell, be it the story of our ancient ones, Moses or Jesus,

or even our dear old Uncle Henry, are stories that give us a deeper understanding of who we are, and connect past to present and present to future. Across varying cultures and continents stories are told from crib side to grave side because we are creatures that draw depth of meaning from the drama that has shaped us and continues to guide our becoming. It seems that as deeply embedded in story as humans are that a researcher wanting to understand human experience might find it more than a little useful to find ways to draw out life stories that describe and illuminate transformative times that have led to new patterns of living. My challenge as such a researcher, then, became how to effectively hear and give voice to these stories.

In traditional scientific research, the smaller the sample, the more questionable the findings. However, qualitative researchers like R. Bogdan and S. Taylor hold the firm conviction that research on one subject can be just as illuminating as a large sample. They emphasize depth of subject over breadth. They too value the life story method and emphasize the need for in-depth interviews in order to arrive at life stories that stand as rich sources of understanding in and of themselves. Through the use of questions that are thoughtful and probing, asked in a relationship of trust, "the skillful researcher can usually learn how the informants view themselves and their world. . ."13

In his work on life history methodologies, Gareth Jones has come to view stories and life history as the quest for humanness and the process

through which humans come to structure and understand the world around them. When we truly listen to the stories they reveal profound truths that need not be manipulated to fit some preexisting theory.

The life history methodology offers an interpretive framework through which the meaning of human experience is revealed in personal accounts in a way that gives priority to individual explanations of actions rather than to methods that filter and sort responses into predetermined conceptual categories."¹⁴

Echoing a similar commitment to articulating life stories as a valid source of knowing and understanding, Elaine Lawless, in her multi-year ethnographic study with women clergy, expressed her goal as a researcher in the words of Nell Morton, "to hear them (her subjects) into being."

Underlying her work is the deeply held conviction that each person is the best source of knowledge about his or her own life, and that when shared this knowledge can present compelling and far-reaching insights. Lawless, as researcher, engages in what she calls "reciprocal ethnography," which she interprets as inherently feminist and humanistic, and takes reflexive anthropology one step further by foregrounding dialogue as a process of understanding and knowledge retrieval . . . "this approach seeks to privilege no voice over another and relies on dialogue as the key to understanding and illumination."¹⁵ In her own fieldwork, Lawless met over a two year period with a group of nearly a dozen clergy women who gathered monthly for discussion, dialogue, and story telling about their lives, perceptions, fear and dreams. Lawless is quick to note that her methodology necessarily transforms her into an "observer who participates as learner," and acknowledges that her

own life story colors all she does. However, she makes no apology for this and instead constructs a methodology in which researcher objectivity is not even remotely a goal. Her method is based on a reciprocal method of “sharing and building knowledge based on dialogue and shared/examined/reexamined knowledge.”¹⁶ Her approach is reflective of the growing commitment to understanding how women come to know what they know which began to be articulated well over a decade ago with the publishing of *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*. That book and the on-going efforts of many researchers, scholars, theorists and practitioners have continued to open new understandings of the value of human experience and the knowledge attained through those experiences. Lawless grounds her methodology in a collaborative group effort in which one story informs and illuminates another in a lively, dynamic reciprocal process. Van Manen also describes the benefits of being in this sort of group setting in which themes can be related and connected, adding dimension to the dialogue, story-collecting process.

As I began to seek appropriate methods for this type of “intentional reflection,” the perspective arising out of existential phenomenology appeared to be a useful guide. Merleau-Ponty and Van Manen both emphasize that the starting and ending point of phenomenologically-based research is the lifeworld, for it is through phenomenology that the lifeworld is evoked.¹⁷ Such an endeavor requires a great deal of attentiveness to one’s actual experience. Writes Van Manen,

. . .if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then that word is 'thoughtfulness.' In the works of the great phenomenologists, thoughtfulness is described as a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement (Heidegger, 1962)—a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life. For us this phenomenological interest of doing research materializes itself in our everyday practical concerns as parents, teachers, teacher educators, psychologists, child care specialists, or school administrators . . . so phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are.¹⁸

In a culture such as ours that spends much of its time flying through our experiences at a pace that precludes thoughtful reflection such heightened levels of attentiveness and introspection may pose a joyful challenge.

Distractions and interruptions of all sorts can limit the kind of thoughtful reflection currently needed. T. S. Eliot once wrote, "We had the experience, but we missed the meaning." Such a statement may say much about our times. We are living through the experience of environmental degradation, of paradigm shift, but we are missing the meaning of these momentous dramas because we do not pause long enough to reflect and draw-out a sense of meaning. Yet, it is there in the process of such a search for meaning that the seed bed of a new day lies waiting. Research that takes seriously drawing out and voicing the meaning of human experience may very well serve as a useful antidote to the thoughtlessness with which many move through their lives.

Applying the Appropriate Tools of Qualitative Research

In the previous pages I have sought to describe some of the current wisdom about qualitative research methods that make possible the

uncovering of human experience in order to more deeply understand and learn from those experiences. Giving voice to a life story through reciprocal ethnography and attentiveness are approaches I began to embrace as I considered traveling to alternative communities. From the outset, I had a commitment to “being with” my subjects, members of these communities, those active in leading educational programs, and others, who like me were guests and learners. My intention was to immerse myself in the communities and ground myself in that world through observation, participation in their educational programs, interviews, and extensive reflection. Regarding the interview process, I sought to explore dimensions of life story through one-on-one encounters, which ethnographer James Spradley calls “the friendly conversation.”¹⁹ Such a conversation acknowledges the back and forth nature of a kind of interview in which researcher converses with openness and inquisitiveness, always remaining aware that the responses shape the direction of further questions and direction.

I also drew upon Sharan Merriams’ extensive work using case study research, research in which the researcher becomes the primary instrument for data collection. In order to yield more useful information, the researcher needs to have tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity both to the uniqueness of the setting and to one’s own biases, and be a good communicator, able to establish good rapport with subjects and develop a sense of empathy toward them.²⁰ “The most sophisticated instrument we possess is still the careful

observer, one who can watch, listen, probe.”²¹ It was the honest desire to carefully “watch, listen and probe,” that became my basic purpose, then, and came to shape my role within each community and with each subject.

At the center and core of this process lay, not the intent to measure anything, or to predict or direct, but rather to describe, portray and create images that would provide useful insights into the experiences themselves and offer those reviewing this “data” a very real sense of “having been there.”²² Through in-depth interviews and close interactions with my subjects I sought to explore such phenomena (not always easily observable,) as thoughts, feelings, moments of awakening or transformation, situations that led them into new understandings of themselves or their place in the world. By participating in educational courses and joining in the rhythms of the communities, I sought to paint a picture that offered a glimpse into the persons, choices, settings, and practices I experienced. Through these conversations and reflections I have tried to bring forth the rich and varied experiences of my subjects with the ultimate hope of describing and exploring the meaning of those experiences and noting ways in which the particulars are potentially universals²³ that may offer helpful insights to others.

Like Elaine Lawless, I do not claim objectivity as a goal. Instead I have sought to use my own experience and that of my family with whom I traveled, to describe and illuminate. My own story, my life as a minister and mother, a child of the 1960’s, a liberal democrat, a sexual assault survivor, one who meditates and loves singing, all of these qualities and all my life

experiences have certainly shaped and colored what I saw and felt.

Throughout my research I listened to my own story and it too is reflected in the following pages through journal entries and self-disclosure. Gareth Morgan calls this the “reflective conversation” in which the researcher must be genuinely and deeply engaged. Through this process, he claims, the researcher again and again meets herself and is better able to stay aware of biases, blind spots, and the threat of depersonalizing the research itself.²⁵ And meet myself I did, again and again!

Of particular interest to me in my research was also the way in which the values of these sustainable communities was woven throughout the educational practices. How do people who are committed to a just and livable future construct and carry-out educational programs? Close attention to those programs, the teachers/practitioners, the setting and the students reactions/interactions would all be a crucial part of my observations.

A Weaving

I am grateful that there are people of science who can enter a laboratory and engage in the particular forms of research that have yielded such wonders as penicillin and treatments for cancer and HIV. In no way do I want to suggest that such methods should be replaced. I do not purport to offer a research methodology for all seasons and all uses. But I have come to believe that the very method we use will profoundly shape the outcomes and their uses and will make all the difference in the direction we move. It need not be an either/or proposition. There is always the temptation to become

myopic, seeing things from one limited perspective crowding out all the others, as if only one were enough to offer an accurate description of reality. Within research this has led to the elevation of quantitative research, while devaluing the vast amount of information and understanding that can arise through a qualitative approach. I believe, however that the time has come to make an intentional move away from that bias and acknowledge that there may be more than one way to learn, to gain understanding, to undertake valid and useful research. Similarly, there are categories of human experience that cannot be quantified, but that still contain meaningful information that leads to deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

As we move along the path of the emerging paradigm and come to see that even as light can be wave and particle, perhaps in other aspects of life as well, there can be different or complimentary approaches that add to our understanding and deepen our experience of living.

In my work I have sought faithfully and creatively to weave together a variety of qualitative tools in order to connect with the deep human passion to relate meaningfully with self, other and world toward establishing a more sustainable future. My intention is to offer insight into how other people and communities have found ways to fend off despair and instead live with hope and commitment, working within themselves and their particular locations to live lives of respect, balance, wholeness, and celebration. As such my field work and reflections, my scholarship and personal perspectives are woven together, not to create *the* weaving for our time, but *a* weaving. In what

follows I seek to present a bold, vivid tapestry from which others can learn and find new vision for doing their own work of teaching, parenting, living and loving with a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

PART TWO

EMBODIED ALTERNATIVES: HOLISTIC LEARNING IN THREE INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

We have become accustomed to living isolated lives exacerbated by competitive work both inside and outside the academy. The humane community has been sacrificed to the demands of skills development and the ascendancy of external goods. We share little more than parking lots and blackboard. Many of us who have had a positive community experience feel the need to restructure our environment in such a way that it fosters feelings of belonging and sharing. A climate that counteracts hostility, and conflict, racism and extreme individualism is necessary.¹

In their book, *Learning for the New Millennium: Challenges of Education of the 21st Century*, Carlos Hernandez and Rashmi Mayur offer a vision that is not unlike that being articulated by many educators and others committed to seeing an alternative more sustainable future. Our isolation and our narrow definition of what constitutes education, they argue, will always prevent us from moving into more holistic ways of learning and living. In the closing days of this millennium more voices are adding to the chorus calling for new ways of being communities of learners. There is growing recognition that we are at a critical time in which we are both invited and required to reinvent the learning endeavor in order to ensure a livable future.

The following section describes three particular communities that are living alternatives to the type of education most of us received and that is still

occurring in most North American colleges and universities. There are certainly dozens of additional such settings, but I have chosen for this work to focus primarily on three, while adding supplemental material from a few other settings. The three communities I visited in the Spring of 1998 were Findhorn Foundation in Northern Scotland, Svanholm in Denmark and Lebensgarten located in Lower Saxony Germany. All three communities differ greatly in size, history and internal functioning. But all three are committed to the embodiment of ecological and spiritual values in their life, work, education and relationships. These are not utopias, and in my travels and extended stays at each, I came to see them as very human places, filled with the imperfections and at times contradictions that are woven through all of life. My intention for my deep immersion into these communities was not to prove that they are superior to other ways of forming communities, but instead to use them as living laboratories in which I the student/researcher could observe and describe the educational practices they employ that might be transferable to other settings for use by others concerned about sustainable educational practices.

During my stay at each community I lived with the members, often sharing meals, engaging in some kind of daily work to assist the community, participating in a course or seminar and interviewing teachers, participants and other community members. I tried to be an observant researcher, noting both the explicit and implicit messages, listening carefully to both the words and the silences, and always aware that my own life and previous experiences

profoundly shaped what I heard or did not hear, what I saw or did not see. I took copious notes on my own reactions and also tried to speak with others about their impressions and reactions.

Another rich dimension to these travels was the inclusion of my family. For four months I traveled and interviewed, worked and observed, cooked, cleaned and meditated, sang, danced and hiked with my partner of seventeen years, Dale, and our children, Emma age seven and Zachary age four. Along with my own individual experience I had the added benefit of experiencing these communities and their practices through the lenses of these three people with whom I share life. On many occasions it was their questions, observations, or insights which provided added depth to my own query and pushed me to a new level of exploration and reflection. I take this to be a further reminder that "In the beginning is the relation. . .,"² the essential connections that form the crucible for all life learnings.

CHAPTER 3

FINDHORN FOUNDATION, SCOTLAND

The Findhorn Foundation, a charitable trust, is part of an international spiritual community of about 350 people living, studying and working together in the northeast of Scotland. It was founded in 1962 by Eileen and Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean in a caravan park a mile from the fishing village of Findhorn. First known for our work with plants and communication with the nature realms, we have since become a centre for spiritual and holistic education as well.

In the 1970's the community expanded to become a centre of education, drawing many hundreds of visitors to learn about its life and work. A trading company called NFD Ltd. was formed to oversee commercial activities resulting from the community's work. The Foundation is actively engaged in environmental projects, including the construction of innovative ecological housing, the use of renewable energy systems, community-based recycling schemes and environmental education.

While we have no formal doctrine or creed, we honour and recognise all the major world religions, believing that there are many paths to God. Our focus is on learning to bring spiritual principles into our daily lives through our work, the way we relate to each other, and how we express our caring and concern for the Earth.³

The previous description provides a simple introduction to the Findhorn community. Located in the northern part of Scotland, it was a most unlikely place to start a garden, more than thirty years ago, but the vision of its founders and the commitment of early members made it a model that continues to draw upwards of 10,000 visitors a year. From the beginning, the founders were unapologetic about their desire for a community founded upon "love." Peter Caddy was known to describe the early founding

principles as “Loving who you are, loving who you’re with , and loving what you are doing.”⁴ Over the many years, as the times and the faces changed, much about Findhorn changed too. The small struggling group of just a few, grew into hundreds. Business and commercial enterprises were developed within the community, additional houses were built, along with a beautiful community center. But through it all, what Findhorn has sought to maintain is a commitment to “building and demonstrating a viable social model, thereby encouraging mainstream society in its evolution towards a better world.”⁵

Over the years, education became an evermore important aspect of community life, in part because more and more people came to experience Findhorn for themselves as short-term visitors, and also because the community members came to see that along the way to creating a new way of living together there was the necessity of gaining new tools for reinventing the human project. The educational programs now offered at Findhorn Foundation range from conflict resolution to gardening, and from ecological building to sacred dance, and a great deal more. College students travel from the United States to learn about living in community. Mid-lifers come to gain perspective and perhaps new skills as they search for personal wholeness and professional satisfaction. Families from throughout the world come in order to “taste” another way of living, and to have a brief antidote to the prevailing cultural values of competition and consumerism. The content of these courses varies from week to week and course to course, but at the core

of all the programs and activities is the sustaining educational philosophy of Findhorn articulated by Ike Isaksen, Education Co-Focalizer: "Education here at Findhorn is based on a recognition that learning is about personal transformation. It is something you do, not something done to you. Most of all it is about self-discovery." ⁵

In a book compiled by the Findhorn Community in 1994 and edited by long-time member Alex Walker, *The Kingdom Within: A Guide to the Spiritual Work of the Findhorn Community*, several past and present community members reflect on the evolution of that educational philosophy. Michael Lindfield, emphasizes the unlocking of learner's innate knowing.

Education in its original sense derives from the Latin 'educare' which means 'to draw out from within' that which we essentially are. What we seek to evoke or draw forth from our residents is their innate spirit and wisdom, neither of which may be taught in any conventional sense. They may only be inspired and nurtured within a supportive, loving environment. ⁶

He and others in this collection of essays on the spiritual dimension of education speak of the daily classroom as a "university without walls," a place that makes possible the deeper integration of body, mind and spirit. They emphasize self-discovery and are committed to the explication of inner knowing through a blending of work, discussion, meditation, service, laughter, joy, and crisis. The goal here is to help awaken learners to their own wisdom, creativity and responsibility that they may use those in service to the planet.

A Space for Learning and Living

It was late afternoon as we pulled into the Park (the local term for the Findhorn Community). It was February in northern Scotland so though it was only 4:00 pm, it seemed much later. The sign at the main entrance telling us we had arrived came as a welcome relief after several days journey. As our car drove slowly along the one main road, I was struck by the number of people milling about, or grouped together talking or laughing. Later I would find out that this was typical of the end of the work day, and that most of the community members I was seeing were leaving their work and heading home or just spending time together before the evening's common meal shared in the Community Centre. Without even knowing this was part of the daily ritual, I felt a deep sense of comfort in merely observing what appeared to be unhurried, pleasant social interaction.

The following morning, along with my family, I got the grand tour. Along with the usual descriptions of how the place came to be and the age and history of most of the major buildings and landmarks, our engaging guide, Carmella, also showed us the numerous meditation spaces, some indoors others outdoors, and the many places where one could do art, make pottery, learn dance. And everywhere there were gardens that even in the closing days of winter were well tended. It was clear that much attention was given to "place," for whether in the meditation sanctuary or walking along a well hidden, tree lined pathway, everywhere there were signs that someone cared for the space. . . rocks placed in circular designs, sticks woven into

beautiful patterns, floral bouquets, candles and shells adorning ledges and table tops. The importance of place has been written about extensively by American Environmentalist and educator, David Orr.

Other than as a collection of buildings where learning is supposed to occur, place has no particular standing in contemporary education. The typical college or university is organized around bodies of knowledge coalesced into disciplines. Sorting through college catalogs you are not likely to find courses dealing with the ecology, hydrology, geology, history, economics, politics, energy use, food policy, waste disposal, and architecture of the campus or its community. Nor are you likely to find many courses offering enlightenment to modern scholars in the art of living well in a place. The typical curriculum is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's comment after reading the vast, weighty corpus of Hegel's philosophy, that Hegel had 'taken care of everything, except perhaps for the question of how one was to live one's life.'

Orr, along with a growing number of others, invites us to consider various elements of space and place that may have significant impact upon the learning process. The design of structures, the decoration of a place, the flow, color, textures and attention to detail all speak volumes about what is valued. It was clear that here in this place beauty, aesthetic and a gentle spirituality were valued and well-integrated into all aspects of daily life. This, I would find, was also reflected in the classrooms themselves, and was well-integrated into the overall relational and educational life of the community.

After being at Findhorn for several days, having settled into the cozy bungalow my family and I would call "home" for the month, I began my course and got to experience "the Findhorn Way." The course, "Experience

Week,” had 20 participants, mostly in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties, from many different professional backgrounds, and from twelve different countries. The week-long course varied in content and structure, but was a mixture of experiential games, work, projects, and times for reflection, silence, time outdoors, and small group discussion. The following is the course description that appears in the Findhorn Programme Catalog April-October 1998:

Experience Week. If this is your first visit, we ask you to take part in Experience Week before joining in other workshops or courses. As the name suggests, this is a week full in scope and content that gives a unique experience of and introduction to the spiritual principles of the Findhorn Foundation. It also provides an opportunity to practice these principles. In spending time together, working, playing games, meditating, sacred dancing and being in nature, we create an atmosphere which encourages us all to connect and allow Spirit to work its transforming effect within the group context. We ask you to come with a willingness to participate fully in a group, giving of yourself openly, and meeting others with love and respect.

In our first session together we went through all the various rules and guidelines that necessarily are part of a group learning process and some that were particular to this setting and community. The leaders for the week, Bruno and Ute, described their role as the “focalizers” for the group and led the opening discussion about the process of the week, confidentiality and other guidelines.

Perhaps what is most notable about the Findhorn educational model is the use of varied tools and techniques which are used throughout the courses offered. Each activity is aimed at helping learners “meet themselves” again and again in new settings and new situations in order to facilitate an

enriching self-discovery process. Ike Isaksen, a part of the Findhorn community since 1976, shares responsibility for coordinating and overseeing the dozens of courses offered yearly at Findhorn. In our interview he spoke of the commitments that underlay the pedagogy which I experienced during my own course:

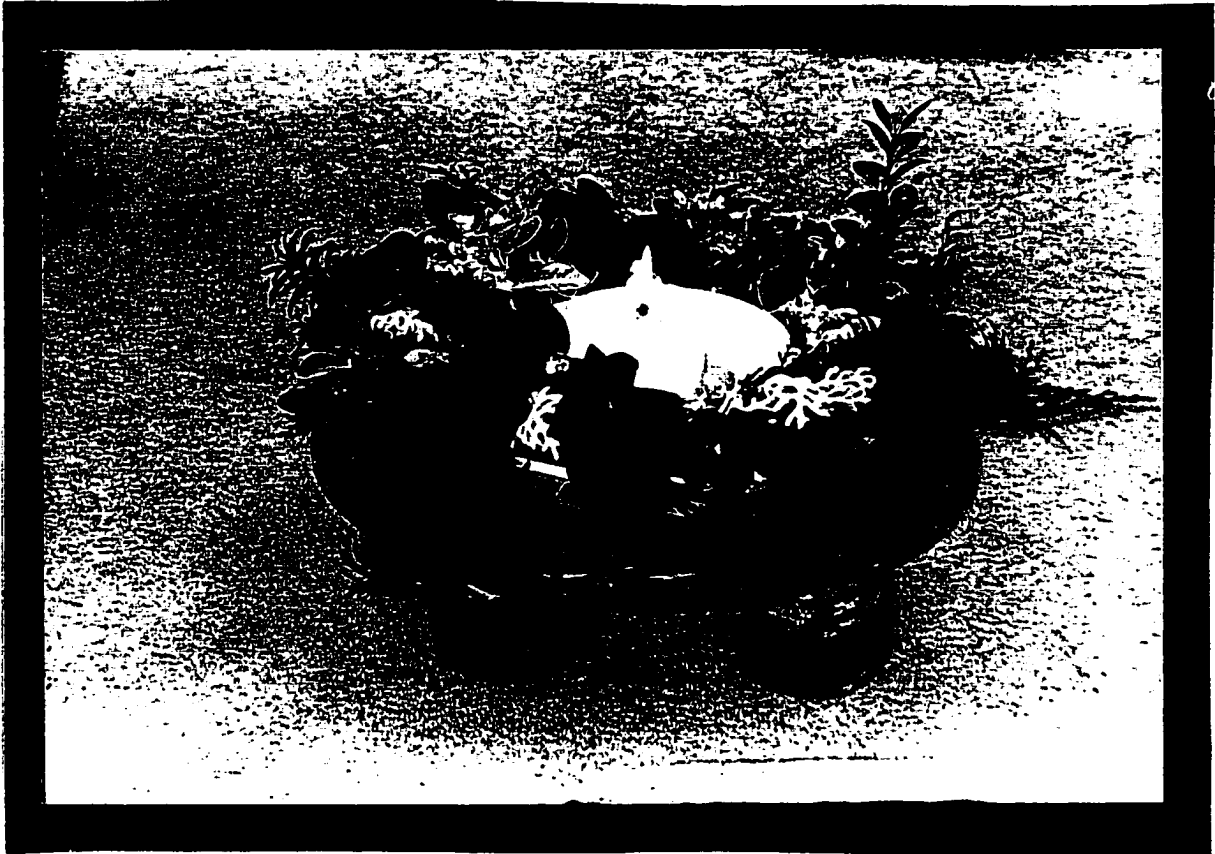
The process we use really has to do with a basic commitment to change, to transformation, personal transformation, and a belief that education is something you do to yourself, not something done to you. All our programs and events are predicated upon the belief that education is fundamentally about personal transformation and that will occur differently for different people. So all our programs are designed to have a range of experiential exercises intended to help learners meet themselves. You might say it is really, at its core about self-discovery. Certainly there are things that can be learned from outside oneself, from others, from one's setting, from anyone of a number of sources, but our courses focus on the personal discovery process within the context of a community. It's that piece that makes a huge difference, because then the self-discovery is always being shaped, enhanced, and affected by others who are similarly in a self-discovery process. Learning as an individual, yet within the broader context of community. Ours is a process of discovering how you relate to world, to spirit, to others, to self.

And meet ourselves we did! Throughout the week, whether laughing uproariously over a discovery game, sitting in silence in a dark forest, facing tense moments while one group member "unloaded" on the rest of the group, or digging together in the fresh early-spring soil, the week provided many opportunities for exploring the self and becoming reacquainted with the hopes and hurts that often get silenced in the harried pace of daily living. Several others taking the course reflected their mixed reactions to some of the particular activities, but spoke of deeply appreciating the varied format. Ann,

a teacher in London, has been working within education for a little over a decade. She spoke candidly about what worked for her, and what was difficult during her week:

I think all the various activities held a lot of meaning for me. There haven't been any that I haven't gotten something out of. The highlight for me was the nature walk and I think one of the things that made it so good, or made me appreciate it so much was the nature sharing and information the night before. It built on the night before, which made me more open and aware. The games were not my favorite. I just don't like relating with people in that way so soon after meeting them. I found it rather intimate and I did not know people well enough to feel comfortable with that, so I felt myself put up some barriers. Maybe one can learn a lot by having their comfort zones pushed, but it felt like too much too soon and caused me to shut down a bit. . . But I also feel that I have come more into contact with myself here, just having the chance to be more self aware than I usually am at home. I really want to take that sense of greater awareness with me. I think it is the mixture of formal sessions and free time and the work that increased my sense of self-awareness. I found that during my work or free time I have really been noticing what has been happening in nature and around me. The variety of formats, I think, has helped that process.

Peter, a Scotsman from nearby Aberdeen, has been working with people with disabilities since 1972, and came to Findhorn to see if he could find tools that would help enhance the working relations of his staff. He, too, found the varied format to be useful and helped create an openness within him that enhanced the entire experience and provided him the opportunity to become more aware of things within and without.



Meditative Focal Point in a classroom at Findhorn

Photograph 1



A group of learners takes a break for morning tea.
An opportunity to relax and converse.

Photograph 2

The experiences that have engaged me the most this week have been partly in the program and partly incidental to the program. Like going into the sanctuary in this building for the first time and having a short meditation. I felt a strong sense of presence. I think that has been one of the themes for me throughout this week, the perception of a presence, an awareness of something around and within. I find myself often wondering 'is it inside of me, is it outside of me, is it in the activities, in the people'. . . .The session in the group room with Nils doing the nature sharing, when we went on the walk and had discussion. At the end of the session, the members of the group continued to sit, even though things had ended, many of us still stayed behind. There was an atmosphere, something I just wanted to stay with, to feel, to share with the others. . . .So I think the experience making contact with people through the week, moving from being strangers to actually finding many ways we could connect, that I have enjoyed. But even more than that, I think, going back to the thing about presence, awareness, spiritual awareness, in my life that kind of awareness has really come and gone and come and gone but it is with me a lot of the time here. It is like my mind having more space in it than it usually has. I have been more present. Also I am noticing my dreams more and my fantasies, just a lot more of my own presence in the moment. Part of it has to do with the timetable here (at Findhorn). It has been highly structured, yet with much time built in for quiet reflection. The rhythm has worked extremely well. I felt there was a flow that made sense, not something I could expect or predict, but it flowed nicely, a real organic feel.

Peter and Ann had come to Findhorn for different reasons, yet both expressed that they were looking forward to the chance to reflect upon their own lives and see where they wanted to go next. In our interviews they both highlighted that the process used here, both sharing of information yoked with providing an experience really helped them move into deeper issues, rather than stay on the surface. Both spoke of how their process of deepening self-awareness also made them more aware of what was taking place around them and allowed for explorations of meaning that otherwise might have been missed. The great educational theorist John Dewey expressed long ago

the value of experiential learning and the need for reflective opportunities for learners. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey develops concepts that both Ann and Peter spoke of out of their Findhorn experience, and underscores the need to be present in the moment for real learning to take place.

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. . . . All this means that attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worthwhile meaning.⁸

The Educational Value of Work

Throughout the Findhorn Foundation there is a very apparent commitment to being present in the moment, being mindful, slowing one's pace enough to be open to the deeper learnings that may emerge. Even at the work sites, where community members fulfill their assigned community responsibilities, whether in cooking meals, tending gardens, cleaning common spaces or caring for the young, intentional steps are taken to ground all the work in a spiritual practice of mindfulness and attentive love. One of the central spiritual tenets of the community states that "work is love in action."⁹ Even for those just visiting the community the ground rules apply. To be part of the community means to participate in the daily functions that maintain the health, sustainability, beauty and energy of the community. During our course each of us, along with the other activities we were engaged in, were assigned a work site where we spent several blocks of time through the week. My particular assignment was with Home care, which oversaw the

cleaning of common spaces. This had not been my first choice, as I had hoped to work in all the lovely gardens. But it became a place of much learning.

The work sites are not seen as something “other than” the educational or communal life of Findhorn, and many exercises, attitudes and gestures are incorporated into the daily rhythm of work so that, it too becomes a place of mindfulness and love. One mindfulness exercise that is used at Findhorn and that always provides the starting point for the workday is called “attunement.” In the following paragraph Terry, a former teacher from Australia, living at Findhorn since 1987, describes the basics of the Attunement Process.

Basically, the attunement process is a coming together of people, where somebody is looking for an insight on something, what kind of work to do, where to live, etc. It is a combination of talking and expressing feelings, and also quiet time to actually allow one to get beyond the chatter, to hear and to feel, and for some even to see, and to get an image that will help the person decide what to do. Then the various images are discussed among those present, and hopefully a clear path emerges. I have been part of the process many times, it is how I came to work in this building. But it can be used for all sorts of situations and is based on a group being open to guidance that may come from the spirit within, among, and around them.

The attunement process is used to make decisions within the community and is also used at the start of the workday in order to ascertain what tasks will be undertaken and who will assist. The purpose is to center and focus the group on a common issue or task, inviting the members to be open to what ideas and images emerge, trying to let go and listen. The group may sit in silence for a few moments or much longer. When the silence ends, the group members listen to each other’s ideas and images and then uses those to help

provide clarity and direction. The following lines from my own journal entry describe my first experience of this process.

This afternoon we went off to our work assignments. I got Home care, which had not been my first choice. I really wanted to work in the gardens. But no one seemed to want to do the cleaning, so I agreed. As I gathered with the other four crew members I would work with through the week, we did a group attunement process. A very interesting process of discernment. We sat in a circle around a low table that had a lit candle and a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers. After listening together to what tasks needed to be undertaken that day, each group member sat in silence, visualizing what work they saw them self doing that day. Breathe, focus, ground. Become aware of attachments. Listen, let go, be open. What is it that you need?" After a few moments we opened our eyes and shared what we saw ourselves doing. Interestingly, each person, that day, had chosen a different aspect of the necessary chores. We agreed upon our tasks, then meditated for a few more moments to get ourselves focused and ready for the work. The attunement exercise leader, Hilf, invited us to think about the space we would be cleaning and the people who would then get to enjoy a freshly cleaned space. His brief words also reminded us to fill our labor with love. We ended and departed for our work. Surprisingly, I was excited to get going. Even cleaning the bathroom took on new significance as I offered my work with a mindful, caring attitude, aware of the holiness of the task and those I would serve with the work of my hands. Maybe I would do well to take this back to many of the tasks I do at home!

Each day's work began this way and became something I looked forward to. Both Peter and Ann spoke in their interviews about the significance of the attunement exercise at their work sites, as well, and felt it would be a useful tool to carry with them back to their work and home life. Peter very specifically raised the issue of how valuable the work experience was and queried as to the possibility of including work in other educational settings. "I think that it is important that work is built into education because of the ways it provides a different context for learning. It can be a place where

you learn specific skills, but you also have the wonderful feeling of already contributing to making things better, not just someday off in the distance, but now, even as a student. Why couldn't some form of mindful work be added even in school settings?" (Interview with Peter Blackledge.)

The role of work at Findhorn is to build community through shared tasks, increasing each person's investment and ownership in the physical place. It also serves as a means of deepening an embodied spirituality. Drawing upon Khalil Gibran's "work is love made visible," the Findhorn Community sees work entered into with caring attentiveness as an important aspect of spiritual development that helps provide insight, clarity and a deepening experience of the holy, even in the most mundane of tasks. This understanding has certainly been developed elsewhere, as well. In the book *Chop Wood, Carry Water: A Guide to Finding Spiritual Fulfillment in Everyday Life*, the editors devote an entire chapter to the role work can play in spiritual development. They draw on many sources from various religious traditions, as well as educators, poets and musicians in order to challenge the notion of work as "necessary evil," and in its place articulate the basis for a new work ethic in which work is viewed as something holy, a gift given, an offering made. Quoting the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Tarthang Tulku, the editors of the book use his works to express part of that new ethic.

Caring about our work, liking it, even loving it seems strange when we see work as only a way to make a living. But when we see work as the way to deepen and enrich all of our experience, each one of us can find this caring within our hearts and awaken it in those around us, using every aspect of work to learn and grow.”¹⁰

The Findhorn approach to education includes a similar commitment to work, and offers work as another opportunity to be fully present in the moment, offering what we can and remaining open to what is to be learned.

Discovery Games and Play

The Findhorn approach to education involves the use of a variety of tools and techniques. Many of these Peter, Ann and I experienced during our week long course. As noted earlier, the reactions to these activities varied, and bear out the truth that such techniques will work in some settings and with some learners more effectively than with others. As our week-long course got underway a variety of discovery games were used both to help the group build its trust and sense of connection, and to help individual participants learn more deeply about themselves. The following words, by one of Findhorn’s founders, Eileen Caddy, come from the Forward to the book *Playful Self-Discovery: A Findhorn Foundation Approach to Building Trust in Groups* and describes part of the philosophy and intended goal of these interactive activities:

I have seen how Playful Discovery sessions change people, how it opens their hearts and helps them to come together in a most amazing way. It is a miracle well worth experiencing to watch a group of people at the beginning of a session, and to wonder how these games are going to bring them together, and then, as time flies by, to see the joy, love and peace come alive in them.

Time and again I have witnessed how the session is a deeply moving and powerful experience for many people . . .

I had an experience I will never forget when I was taking part in one of these sessions. In one exercise, "Learning to See Each Other," we had to sit in front of partners and look into their eyes for several minutes. I was shy and embarrassed, and besides, the person who chose me was the last person I wanted to do it with. As the minutes ticked by, I began to see beyond the physical person to a very beautiful soul, and by the end of the exercise we were both in tears. It was a very good reminder never to judge anyone by outward appearances. . .

Have fun and enjoy yourself, either leading a session of exercises and games, or being part of a group participating in them. You won't be the same person when you have finished. You will find yourself more open, free and joyous.¹¹

Eileen Caddy voices the experience of many people I spoke with during my stay at Findhorn. For many of us had not played games or done interactive activities since we were young and there was a great deal of awkwardness as we moved beyond the familiar. Being in our bodies, moving, laughing, creating, problem-solving, suspending some of our judgment and tendency to be overly critical, engaging in an activity that was focused on process rather than outcome, these were not skills we developed as we moved through the educational system or our daily work lives. But as we did so at Findhorn, some unexpected things began to occur. My own journal entries reflect an experience similar to Eileen's, a certain discomfort, gradually giving way to an openness to myself and others and a deepening of connections.

The book *Playful Self Discovery*, describes a great number of games, meditations and creative activities that can be used to build trust and open communication within a new or existing group or class. The author, David Platts acknowledges that there can be risk involved, particularly if there are

participants who are “openly resistant, rebellious or disruptive. . . and their negativity can seriously affect the outcome.”¹² But Platts also goes on to describe ways to best engage the goodwill of all group members and to help foster “heart connections” that will break through some of these barriers and help open people to honest communication and respect. An educational setting grounded in these values, says the Findhorn philosophy, will make possible true life-learning by allowing people to bring their entire selves to the process. Even as the discovery games are in process, the observant viewer or participant will notice certain group dynamics already becoming visible. During my course, one woman was clearly resistant to the games, at various points acting frustrated and out of sorts with what was occurring. As the time progressed, I observed her increasing discomfort, as did many others in our group. Finally, while playing a game of “Pillow Tag,” she threw a pillow so hard she nearly knocked one of the players down. It was not until later in the week, in an altogether different setting, that this woman’s deep wounds surfaced a bit as she described how disconnected she felt from her own emotions throughout her life. She spoke of how, during the games, she was filled with simultaneous feelings of rage and low self-worth, and it was the first time she became aware of how angry she had been for years, while always keeping her feelings well hidden. The physical activity, playfulness, and disclosure that came as the games took her to new levels within herself, finally led her to a place where she could acknowledge emotional pain that had haunted her throughout her adult life.

It is tempting to minimize the educational value of these kinds of activities because the “learnings” that occur are not quantifiable, but often involve unmeasurable qualities such as self-awareness, glimpses into our own interior, and deeper levels of trust and understanding. At Findhorn, the learning process, no matter the topic, begins with and is always undergirded by a deep commitment to helping learners uncover their own inner knowing as well as to identify the places where there are blocks or barriers. For the woman in my group who had such difficulty acknowledging her own emotional center, the discovery games provided the space for her, albeit initially through great discomfort, to uncover the truth of her life and certain forces that were keeping her from the peace and wholeness she longed for. Parker Palmer is one of a growing number of American educators who similarly value creating learning environments, for the young and the old, that allow learners to come to know themselves more fully.

A learning space has three major characteristics, three essential dimensions: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality. When we understand what each of these means, we can find specific methods to create space for learning.

Openness is no more than the common sense meaning of space. To create space is to remove the impediments to learning that we find around and within us, to set aside the barriers behind which we hide so that truth cannot seek us out. We not only “find” these obstacles around and within us; we often create them ourselves to evade the challenge to truth and transformation. ¹³

For Palmer, the community members at Findhorn and many others, the “stuff” of learning necessarily needs to include opportunities to meet ourselves, again and again, coming to know ourselves more deeply, so that

learning is not mere abstraction, but is rooted firmly in existential experience, and the profound truth of being.

Let There Be Spaces in Your Togetherness

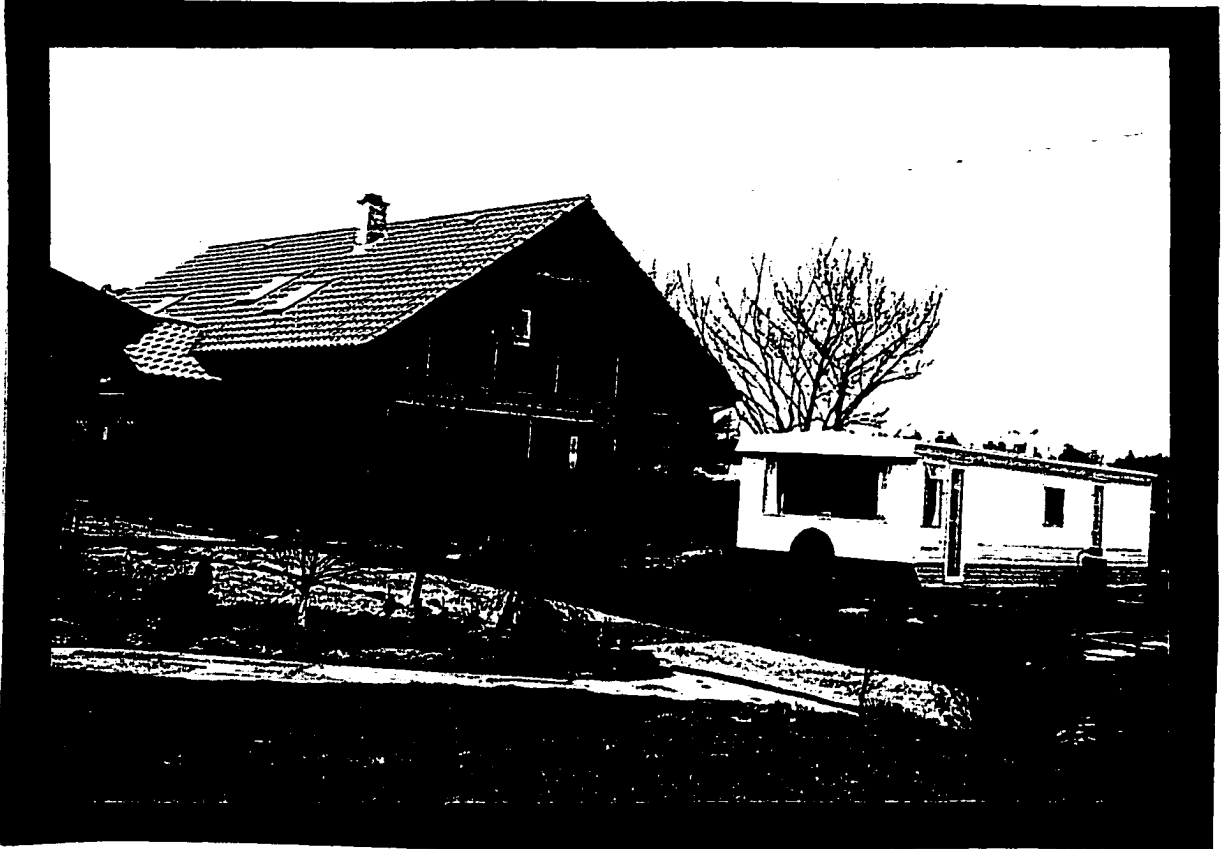
Along with attention to space, the value of work, and a commitment to self-discovery, the "Findhorn Way" also models the importance of silence, meditation and reflective time. Woven throughout a week of discussion, cleaning and gardening, presentations and interactive games, our course also had intentional spaces provided for individual reflection. Along with optional silent meditation each morning, at midweek the entire group was taken by bus to a place called Randall's Leap. The purpose was to spend time out-of-doors, breathing and being, letting the quiet of the place provide the space for our own inner work.

Sitting at Randall's leap, water rushing twenty feet below me through a rocky bed, huge boulders creating intricate pathways through which the water must find its course. The water flows swiftly with a loud splashing commotion as it rapidly charges past, bouncing against rocks, spilling and spraying into the afternoon air. Rich deposits of minerals found in the rocks and soils of this area have given even the water a dark molasses color, with even the frothy foam a golden brown. Here and there silent, dark pools hide amidst the rocks, a tiny place of shelter in the swirling fury. They say that in this place the veil between worlds is very thin, a place that offers many insights to those open to the message. Are there not, truly, many such places, if we but look and listen? Silently I gaze, transfixed by the hypnotic effects of the water, drawn into its music and rhythm. . .the trees about me bear silent witness to an unfolding drama. My heart is open, my mind awake, my body rests against a root with gentle ease. I am still learning how to be quiet. . . how to let go into a moment that demands nothing of me but my attentiveness to the silent, hidden mysteries in which I constantly reside.¹⁴



The classroom moves outdoors as learners participate in
a morning of gardening.

Photograph 3



Findhorn, place where old means new. A state-of-the-art environmentally friendly dwelling sits next to one of the original caravan homes.

Photograph 4

These images begin a journal entry I wrote while at Randall's Leap. It was there, in the quiet of that space that I recalled T. S. Elliot's words, "We had the experience, but missed the meaning." How often in my own life do I pause long enough to truly reflect upon those experiences, letting new images and connections emerge, cultivating a more reflective inner life. So often world's of meaning are missed because the learner never is provided the space, perhaps even the tools for creative reflection, the opportunity to integrate the experience into the entirety of her life. Dewey was highly critical of learning models that do not connect education and personal experience, warning that such disconnected learning can actually be "mis-educative" and can thwart further growth and development.¹⁵ He, in contrast, and as described earlier in this chapter, emphasized extracting the meaning from each moment or experience. And how can that occur if one experience flows into the next and the next and the next, with little space in between for reflecting upon what has occurred or its significance for our life or understanding.

The educational philosophy at Findhorn places a very high value on personal transformation, a process that occurs largely from "the inside out." Longtime Findhorn Community member Carol Riddell, in her book, *The Findhorn Community: Creating a Human Identity for the 21st Century*, writes that only education that is firmly rooted in and committed to personal transformation will allow us to meet the particular challenges our species, indeed our entire planet, faces. It is through "being still" and opening

ourselves to Love, that we are able to learn the lessons that lead to greater wholeness.¹⁶ Because of this value, time is spent each day, each week, each changing season, to be still, and to open one's self to the wisdom that comes from integrating our experiences and building upon them. It is not often that educators use the language of love, in speaking about their task, but we are now living in a time that invites, perhaps even demands a reintroduction of love as a pertinent educational theme. For in the words of Czech Republic leader, Vaclav Havel,

The experience I am talking about has given me one certainty: . . . the salvation of this world lives nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in . . . human consciousness nothing will change for the better, and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed . . . will be unavoidable.¹⁷

This "revolution of human consciousness" is rooted in reflection, in reclaiming the wisdom of the heart. This is no frivolous matter, no starry-eyed navel gazing. This is the task which a sustainable, livable future will require and one that can be modeled and promoted through educational vehicles. Findhorn is part of this revolution through their intentional commitment to personal growth and transformation, as witnessed in their educational programs and their daily living.

Much within Western culture decries this sense of "quieting" one's self, of pausing for reflection and renewal. Ours is a culture based on production and acquisition. We, in North America, tend to be somewhat suspicious of those who seem to have too much time on their hands. We are

busy people, with busy lives and busy minds. It is noteworthy and perhaps painfully telling, that the Chinese pictograph for “busy” is composed of two character: heart and killing.¹⁸ What a statement about our culture and perhaps even the state of our educational systems. Most of us are immersed in a heart-killing rhythm, moving faster and faster, with little time carved out for the necessary work of reflection, rest or renewal. Yet Havel, Palmer, Dewey and so many others offer a compelling vision of an alternative way of being in the world. At Findhorn, the cultivation of the inner life and a nourished and nurtured heart, are key educational elements that distinguish it from other settings. Their commitment is not mere lip service, but as just described, is modeled in tangible ways within the weekly flow of educational programs which clearly include this value and provide learners the opportunity to experience its benefits for themselves.

As our group returned from Randall’s Leap, each person spoke about the importance of that afternoon, for rest, replenishment, for listening, and integrating. My journal entry for that day ended with these simple words. . .“the talk has ended, the confusion abates. And my heart sings.”

Educators as Focalizers

One of the educational elements that further distinguishes Findhorn from many other educational settings is the understanding of the role of the educator/teacher. Even the language is intentional in trying to suggest a non-traditional understanding of that role. Those in educational leadership at Findhorn are called focalizers. The understanding of this role has evolved

over time as the community has sought to embody a philosophy of learning in which the students themselves are valued as a primary resource. Unlike the “banking method” so criticized by Paulo Freire, where the expert fills the learner with information, the Findhorn method stands in stark contrast. Terry Neal, a member of the Findhorn Community for over a decade, was a former teacher in his native Australia for many years. After coming to the Community he held many different positions, including serving for quite sometime as a Focalizer. During our interview he described his experience, which reveals with great clarity, much of the difference between more traditional understandings of the role of teacher and the Findhorn concept of the Focalizer.

I spent over 15 years as a primary teacher in New South Wales, Australia, and rose to the dizzying heights of Deputy Principal of a medium-sized school. For the first 10 years I really enjoyed teaching and after that time it began to dawn on me that the system I was working in, the system and the way it was dealing with children, I just did not agree with anymore. I became less enraptured by what was going on. And even though I loved relating with the children and being with them in a natural way on the playground or even in formal ways, I found the structures very challenging, both as a teacher, for me to maintain, and for me to sell to a bunch of streetwise children. One of whom even told me one time that his education really started at 3:30, when the school day was over. I swapped schools 3 times in 5 years and finally realized it was not the particular school system I was in, it was me and the kind of teacher I knew I wanted to be, but was finding it difficult to be. I left the classroom. . .

For me, the best teaching occurs by example. I realized that when I was teaching 7,8, and 9 year old. Mr. Neal could say to do one thing or another, but when things didn't work out in the classroom, it was often because Mr. Neal was not doing the very thing he was saying. Since coming to Findhorn I have reconnected with an understanding of the role of educator that

suits me better. The role of the focalizer is being aware of the group, something I learned to do in the classroom. Keep an overview of the group, what's happening with everyone, maintain eye contact, the logistics of teaching, not the act of teaching, of being aware that people are going to learn more by how I am than by what I say. So that implies, and this is the difficult part, being open to share, but not to lose it. Not to get so into the process that I lose the sense of the role I have taken on. Not to be controlling, not to experience so much that I no longer can hold the process, aware of each person, and what they are experiencing in the same process. It also means being aware of what is happening within me. This is one thing that is easy to lose, the camaraderie can get to feeling so good and the focalizer can join in so fully that the group becomes like a ship without a rudder. Just as the focalizer should not control the process, they should not get lost in it either. That is similar to the role of any teacher, I suppose, always being aware of the learners and one's relationship to them.

The role of education ideally can be found in the original Latin meaning of the word 'educare', meaning to draw forth from. Each one of us actually has a lot of knowledge and skills that await the right time, the right situation, the right job, the right group, to be drawn out of us. So I see the role of education in its purest sense, as each one of us encouraging each other to bring out, to talk out, to share the knowledge, gifts, and skills we have. And at the same time to learn from others, to build on that knowledge, gifts and skills. I think that is what frustrated me about the educational system I was previously part of, I was taught that my role was a 'filling up,' rather than an acknowledging of what was already there. Not all teachers did that, but I found that that was often what was required of us and it did not feel right to me.

As a focalizer I could bring all those best parts of my understanding of teaching and learning. I could listen in a new way and trust the process more. I began to have more fun again when I realized I did not have to have all the answers. That learning can be a reciprocal process. The teacher/focalizer needs to have certain information, but also needs to be open to other's perspectives. Really listening to the perspective of the 20 year old who just read the book we are discussing. There can be a variety of opinions that can be learned from, that can deepen our awareness of a particular topic. Teachers need not be afraid to facilitate those different opinions as an essential part of the learning process. There does not have to be only one way of

looking at things. Like the professor I had once who was still using the same notes from so long ago the paper was yellow and the ink was fading. The whole world had changed. . . .except for the material he thought necessary to present to his students. We have all had experiences of teachers like this who seem afraid to let go, afraid to ask learners what they think, afraid of not having the ultimate power. In that system with teachers who still use the old model, the students are so often bored out of their brains. It just doesn't have to be like that.

The real challenge, whether as a teacher, a parent, or living in community may be that difficulty in being real, and continually meeting ourselves. That continues to be one of my greatest learnings. I came to Findhorn, but I brought myself. This is no magic place to be, no magic system. . . there is just the honest, open willingness to meet ourselves, to learn and hopefully to grow. Maybe to be a good teacher is first and foremost to value that process. The content we need to convey to others will take on new life when we are being real people. When we really seek to know ourselves, sometimes we're surprised by what we discover.¹⁹

Terry's experience in the classroom may resonate with others who are educators or those who have been on the receiving end of such an education. Similarly, his words remind us that "it doesn't have to be that way." At Findhorn, the goal is to provide rich and meaningful educational experiences that lead to great self-awareness as well as helping equip people with more sustainable, life-giving tools for living. With such a goal in mind, those who are responsible for carrying out such a task have a unique role. Terry described that role as involving "holding the process" and spoke of the delicate balance that a focalizer must achieve between holding on too tightly or letting things spin out of control.

But the focalizers at Findhorn do not only work in specifically designed courses. Focalizers are used throughout the community to assist in

department work assignments, community meetings and other areas of community life. Alex Walker in *The Kingdom Within: A Guide to the Spiritual Work of the Findhorn Community*, writes: "The focalizer is not intended to be a leader in the sense of someone who gives orders, but is rather to be someone who, by virtue of their ability to attune to the needs of the whole, achieves respect. This does not mean that the focalizer has all the answers. Indeed the focalizer could well be someone who knows no more or even less about the work at hand than any of the others involved."²⁰ A primary task of the focalizer is their own attentiveness and spiritual centeredness. Their leadership role comes, not through the level of their technical skill, but through the respect they have gained within the community as one who is keenly attuned to the needs of the group and can assist the group in making decisions and completing group tasks.

Throughout the Experience Week course, Bruno and Ute served as focalizers for the group, holding the process and helping create a space where individuals and the group as a whole could work effectively, openly and honestly. Both have been members of the Findhorn community for a number of years and were well experienced and trained in working with groups. As Peter and Ann experienced their role this is what each had to say:

Peter: In many other settings they might be described as facilitators, doing something quite ordinary. They set the context, what we are doing and what we are not doing. And they keep things clear, the rules and whatever and they have done that in a straightforward way. Context setters, not the ones who were making things happen. Some of what they are communicating is just in the way they do their task, relaxed,

engaged, present. Not heavy handed, not running things or being too directive or even manipulative. They are helping us do what we need to do.

Ann: I get the impression (this style) works for them because it is the way they are, because of their own development and the way people relate with each other here at Findhorn, that we are all equals, that people deserve to be heard and also to be listeners. They seem to model the values they say are a part of this community. They have embodied them very well, I think, and that makes a really big difference.²¹

My own experience was quite similar. I have led many groups of students and adult learners over the years and have often reflected upon the delicate balance between holding a process, truly providing the space for learning to occur, but not letting the setting become "centerless," or using Terry Neal's image, letting the group become like a ship without a rudder. Bruno and Ute modeled a wonderful balance and embodied the very values they sought to bring to the group. Their skills were particularly put to the test as the week drew to a close. One of the group members spoke with great frustration and anger about some of what she had experienced during the week and in particular some sharp criticisms about the way the group was functioning. Our focalizers had spoken earlier in the week about creating a safe space for people to bring their entire self, and that the group was not there to "fix" things for anyone, or provide "group therapy." As this woman finished her emotional outburst, the group sat in silence. Inside me I felt a strong inclination to jump in and try to put a different "spin" on things, or try to help this woman through her anger. But I sat, as did the group, hearing her words, feeling her pain, and resisting the urge to try to make things "better."

My journal entry from the day reflects a powerful learning that occurred for me through that situation.

. . . the group did have a tense time today. Several people shared painful feelings. Then one member erupted - frustrated, angry, very emotional that we were all listening to their pain and 'not doing anything.' Oh, could I relate to that feeling. . . thinking pain was somehow some demon that we exorcise from others, rather than an inevitable part of being human. How many times have I rushed in, uncomfortable with the pain, unsettled by the "untidiness" and as a leader, wanting to make things right. And yet, it became clear to me again this evening that people's feelings are not something to "fix", but merely to "be with, " something to listen to, learn from. We can enter the painful space of another, but we cannot enter their pain. In our group, and perhaps this would be the case in many settings, we could respect and honor a person best when we were willing to be with them, without trying to change them or their circumstances. That means an incredible amount of letting go, of trusting that people can learn from their pain, and that a community of learners can provide the safe space for the person to claim his or her own story, as well as his or her own healing. The focalizers did not seem phased. They could be in this kind of emotional space without taking charge. As a leader and as a teacher I know I am most tempted to exert authority when I am fearful that things are getting out of control. Trust the process. Trust the people. Trust myself. Trust the learning that comes from the times we are most human, most vulnerable. Trust.²²

Within the Findhorn Community, this style of leadership seems to work well for the kinds of courses and settings in which it is used. In conversation, Ute, Bruno and Terry all expressed how much it requires that they themselves stay centered and focused. Their own spiritual practices, commitment to attunement, and a basic respect for the integrity of each person guided and sustained them in their role as focalizers. Terry added,

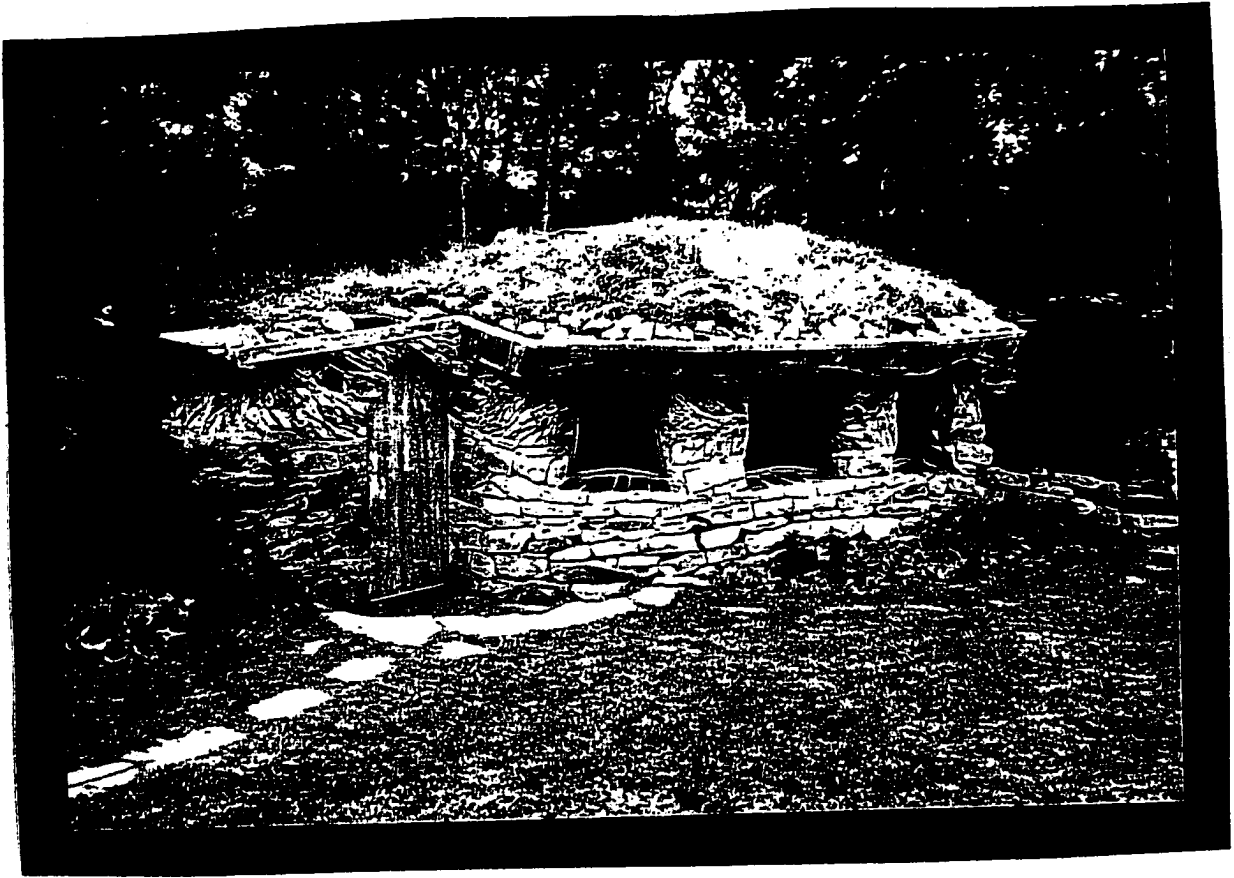
Sometimes as a teacher, I used to feel so weary and disconnected. I know now that I took that attitude and energy into the classroom. Little wonder some days were just a constant struggle. Gradually I am learning that what I bring to my teaching or focalizing is first and foremost, myself. I have more to offer when I have cared properly for myself. Then I don't spend so much time reacting or working out my own issues. Then I can relax and let the setting be whatever it needs to be. That's when we all learn the most.

Transferable Features

The rhythm of life at Findhorn reflects the Community's deeply held philosophical and spiritual beliefs that have evolved over nearly three decades. Since its founding in 1962, this has been a place that has sought to embody love, "loving who you are, loving who you are with, and loving what you are doing."²³ Over the years much has changed as people have come and gone and new eras of community life came into being. Today, gardens, walking paths, solar homes and wind-generated power, an organic sewage treatment facility, daily meditation, an emphasis on the arts, community meals, decision-making by attunement, and a continuing commitment to a spirituality grounded in love, respect and cooperation, are just a few of the ways this community of people in Northern Scotland have chosen to live. It was only over time, as the community grew in international recognition that the educational programs come into being. Those programs, which are now viewed as a central aspect of the community now draw over 10,000 people a year. People come from Europe and Asia, North and South America, even Africa, to spend time in the community, to

learn from Findhorn's experience and take new skills, ideas and commitments back to their own communities.

In the weeks my family called Findhorn "home," we delighted in immersing ourselves in this very alternative community. The beauty, the values, the commitment to finding sustainable, gentle ways to live with each other and live with the earth, inspired and nourished us tremendously. But Findhorn is no utopia, nor does it espouse to be. Though founded on principles of love, caring, and a visible spiritual orientation, Findhorn is inhabited by real people. In more than one interview or conversation, community members spoke freely about some of the problems, difficulties, and conflicts that are also part of their day-to-day lives. My purpose in presenting various educational features of this community, is not to promote Findhorn as a community to be reproduced, or even that we should all flock to such a community. Instead, as a researcher and student, I went to this particular setting to see what it offered that might be of use in other settings where people are trying to embody similar values, but often within a culture or system still firmly entrenched in an alternative vision. As I moved about the community, took the Experience Week Course, talked with and interviewed various community members and guests, observed and reflected, the question before me was constantly, "what from this setting is transferable to other educational settings that might also contribute to enhancing our relationship with the environment?" I continually probed whether or not the Findhorn Way of going about education was necessarily unique to this



A sod-roofed stone building now serves as a meditation building

Photograph 5



The Living Machine, an organic sewage treatment system,
reflects Findhorn's commitment to new technologies.

Photograph 6

setting and the kinds of topics that were being addressed, or if a similar process could be used with different content, in very different surroundings. Certainly, Findhorn's educational commitment to self-discovery and the "drawing out" of learner's innate wisdom works for certain topics, but what of the myriad courses that are taught in schools throughout our country?

In our lengthy interview, Ike Isaksen, Co-Focalizer and Coordinator for Education at Findhorn, had much to offer on this question. He has served in a variety of capacities at Findhorn and at the time of our interview was focusing on the educational aspects of the community and how to better integrate the community-held values into the wide range of educational offerings. He began by describing the pedagogical model that undergirds Findhorn education, then broadened the discussion:

The Findhorn educational model goes in layers. There are the focalizers who hold the context for others. These educators need to be the context holders for the learner, to hold the structure. The key to it is avoid hierarchy. Do you as a learner feel that your experience has just as much validity as the person who may hold certain information or has had other experiences that put them in a place of teaching. The key is to be clear that the eager, inexperienced learner is on a level ground with the experienced. The teacher should not be the focus, but the focus should always be by the learner's own individual process. In this way relational pedagogy comes to the foreground. The teacher, the material, the learner, all in a triangle, each with equal access to the other. The relationship between the parts is really what matters. The learner does not "go through" the teacher to get to the material, but everyone has equal access. In relational pedagogy, the relationship is crucial, process, process, process. In the midst of it all the learner is exploring relationship with material, with self, with tutor/teacher. Similarly, the teacher is exploring the same. Each, then, is having an effect on the other. The teacher is not put on a pedestal, the focus shifts from the

teacher as expert. Everyone, teacher and students are relating with the material and with each other. All are engaged in a process.

Could this relational pedagogy be used in other fields of study that are not only about self-discovery or spiritual discovery? Oh, absolutely. We were working on a particular Community Studies Course recently, a situation came up that serves as a simple example of what I'm describing. There was an office worker who had been given a huge brochure project to take over. She was not too computer literate, but with the use of an interactive CD she was able to learn what she needed. Though initially intimidated by the technology before her, the interactive nature of the CD was more engaging, and she played with it. Her relationship was with the screen, then at times she could call on me and I would offer what I could. Still the relational model, but in the process she developed the skills she needed to do some advanced computer graphics. Always we need to be asking ourselves whether the learning process is bringing students in direct contact with the material or is the teacher always serving as the mediator, the go between. Somehow, we need to rework our learning models so that the learners themselves are empowered to relate directly with the material, even if the teacher is needed at times to help direct or interpret.

I think some teachers are already using this model and using it effectively in a wide variety of settings. The problem is the rigidity of educational systems that often do not foster shared learning but are still hierarchically based. It will take a certain amount of awareness to make the shift and a willingness to try a new integrated approach. Traditionally, education emphasized the rational approach, the analytic. Then during the 1970's there was a new emphasis on the emotional side of learning. Now the time has come to blend these two, bringing them into a new union. To do one or the other exclusively is to limit the educational possibilities that our humanity affords us. The key is about being present, learning that involves being present, physically, emotionally, rationally, being in the now, integrating all of those. What we do here could be done anywhere that people value the same sorts of processes, experiential yoked with the philosophical. Of course the way the relational model is embodied elsewhere will differ from day to day and place to place, as it should, but it can still emphasize the union of rational, emotional, experiential, and philosophical. This model is not the property of this place, or a community or a particular advocate. If we are willing to reinvent ourselves, reinvent the

learning process, we will find new and effective ways to make learning as engaging and challenging as possible, a place of self-discovery and discovery of the world beyond the self. And the learners will always shape the process, it will never be the same time after time, because the dynamics between teacher, learner, and material will always be in flux. It is a lively process, always interesting and full of surprises.²⁴

Isaaksen does well in describing what many guests and visitors experience through the different course offerings at Findhorn, an opportunity to be immersed in a relational model of learning that puts learners into direct contact with the world, with the information and experience they need in order to move through a transformative process into deeper levels of knowing and understanding. To begin with these direct experiences and relationships is a phenomenologically grounded educational model. Merleau-Ponty spoke of "relearning to look at the world by reawakening to the basic experience of the world."²⁵ Relational pedagogy, as described by Isaaksen, is a teaching/learning methodology grounded first and foremost in such a basic and direct experience. As such, it is possible to imagine the Findhorn Way being used in all sorts of topical areas. When asked whether this methodology could work in the sciences, Terry Neal had this to say:

I would say there can be a variety of methods used in teaching any course, and certainly in some fields there is a body of information to be learned, sometimes even memorized. But again, one must always begin with what the learner already knows, what the learner brings. Physics, for instance, could be taught with a willingness to follow the hunger of the student, acknowledging what the student knows and wants to know. By allowing the student's own passion and interest for the field of study to help guide the course, one can honor the individual while also moving into new places of knowing. Why couldn't the study of physics involve a dynamic, relational quality.

Indeed, if one ever speaks to a physicist, one catches a glimpse of what underlies their science and their passion for it. A connection. Is learning much more than providing the opportunity for such connections?

This certainly sounds familiar to Barbara McClintock's "feeling for the organism," which puts connection and relationship at the very center of all learning.

When asked about the possibilities of using other Findhorn "tools" in other settings he added:

I think the nuts and bolts of Findhorn's educational model could be exported, repackaged and used with other groups, communities, workplaces, where people would like to first learn more about themselves and how they operate in a group. And in learning about themselves I have seen in many settings that people are then able to identify places within themselves where they need to grow, change or learn. Sometimes this desire for growth can bring about positive change is small, not always in 'Ghandi-like' proportions, but something that may be a way to relate at work or at home, something they can actually do that makes a difference. The gift of this place is that many of the activities done during the trainings can be done anywhere. We have even done many of them in local schools with educators and school staffs. They loved it, even the games. . . . grounds people, teachers, lots of different people. They took to it. It really felt risky, at first, like plunging off the deep end, not knowing how others in more traditional settings would respond. They went through the whole gambit of group building games. All of them adults, people that were usually quite serious, even dour, but it all worked great. Most people respond well to creative engagement. When that's the basis of the group dynamic, lots of wonderful things happen and many unexpected learnings emerge.²⁶

Terry and Ike have both spent much of their work life outside an intentional community setting, but feel strongly that many of the educational elements they are now familiar with at Findhorn could be used elsewhere to help make education more engaging, and filled with discovery, more

relationally and less hierarchically based. They are part of a team of people who continue to develop the programs at Findhorn so that each program can fulfill the pedagogical and philosophical commitments of this very unique educational center.

Some of the participants in the Experience Week Course that February shared some of the same sentiments, acknowledging that some of the "spirit" of the experience was possible due particularly to the setting, but also agreeing that there were many elements that seemed transferable to a variety of settings. Ann saw some of the activities as potentially useful elsewhere, the games, sacred dance, meditation, attunement. "I think the format is what could be useful elsewhere, the variety of activities, the movement from interaction to reflection. What a great way to make other settings more engaging of the whole person." Peter agreed that many of the activities could be used elsewhere, but he was also clear that a feature he would like to see transferred to other educational settings was the commitment to spirituality. "I think it is now more important than ever to acknowledge the spiritual side of the learning process, spiritual while not being dogmatic or stifling. Spiritual in the sense that it is about opening one up to the self, to others, to the world, to the unseen. That is where real wisdom lies, the kind that will help us live lives that are rich and full of meaning."

Leave Taking

The Experience Week Course came and went. My family and I spent several additional weeks soaking up the spirit of the place. We took long

walks along the craggy Scottish coastline, shared leisurely meals with community members, attended worship and meditation times, and continued to learn about the ways in which this group of people is seeking, in so many ways, to find an alternative, more viable and sustainable way to live.

When it came time for us to continue our journey, it was with no small amount of sadness that we said our farewells, not only to a people and a place, but also to a way of living that had felt very nourishing and celebrative. That was a gift we will continue to carry with us.

CHAPTER 4

SVANHOLM, DENMARK

One cannot travel long in Denmark without discovering many unique and fascinating features about this country and its people. A place of great natural beauty, its people spend much time out doors, enjoying the beaches, green spaces and many bike and walking paths that crisscross the country and are readily accessible in cities as well. Steeped in agricultural tradition, Denmark is a small country with strong democratic ideals, a commitment to equality among its citizenry and a desire for all persons to reach their potential. The people of the country take pride in their appearance, both of body and the land. They have been pioneers in innovative education, housing alternatives, and other social commitments. Ecological concerns and sustainable living have been present within the political arena for decades, and currently The Danish Association of Sustainable Communities has nearly thirty member communities. These communities are found in cities and in the middle of vast farmlands. Some have a particular philosophical or spiritual foundation, while others represent a very eclectic membership. For some practical ecology has been the starting point, for others meeting pressing social problems, while for others creating spiritually-based communities is seen as an essential condition for pursuing personal and global harmony and peace.

During our extended stay in Denmark, my family and I visited six such communities, with a prolonged stay at Svanholm, an agricultural community on Sealand. At each of these locations we had the amazing opportunity of seeing the varied and inspiring ways in which humans can embody and give form to their values. Herta was one such community. A short distance from the bustling port city of Aarhus, on Jutland, Herta is a Rudolph Steiner community only about a decade old. The vision was to create a community for disabled and able-bodied people to live together, with land for growing food, small businesses for generating income, and places for members and guests to participate in drama, art, dance and music. Its buildings are just a few years old and all are exquisitely constructed in Steiner-style, with lots of wood and light and soft pastel colors. The place speaks of grace, beauty, harmony and respect. There, disabled persons live, supported by a community, participating in meaningful work, celebrating the daily rhythms of life.

Not too far to the south is Munach, a ten year old community built around a meditation center and committed to the healing of self and earth. Not unlike the mindfulness at Findhorn, the goal of these community members is to "be awake," to truly enjoy life and live with great consciousness, while also trying to make the world a better place for others. Their enormous herb garden, a series of concentric circles moving out from a small central pond, appears almost labyrinth-like, inviting one to walk with gentle steps through this colorful and fragrant place of beauty and tranquility.

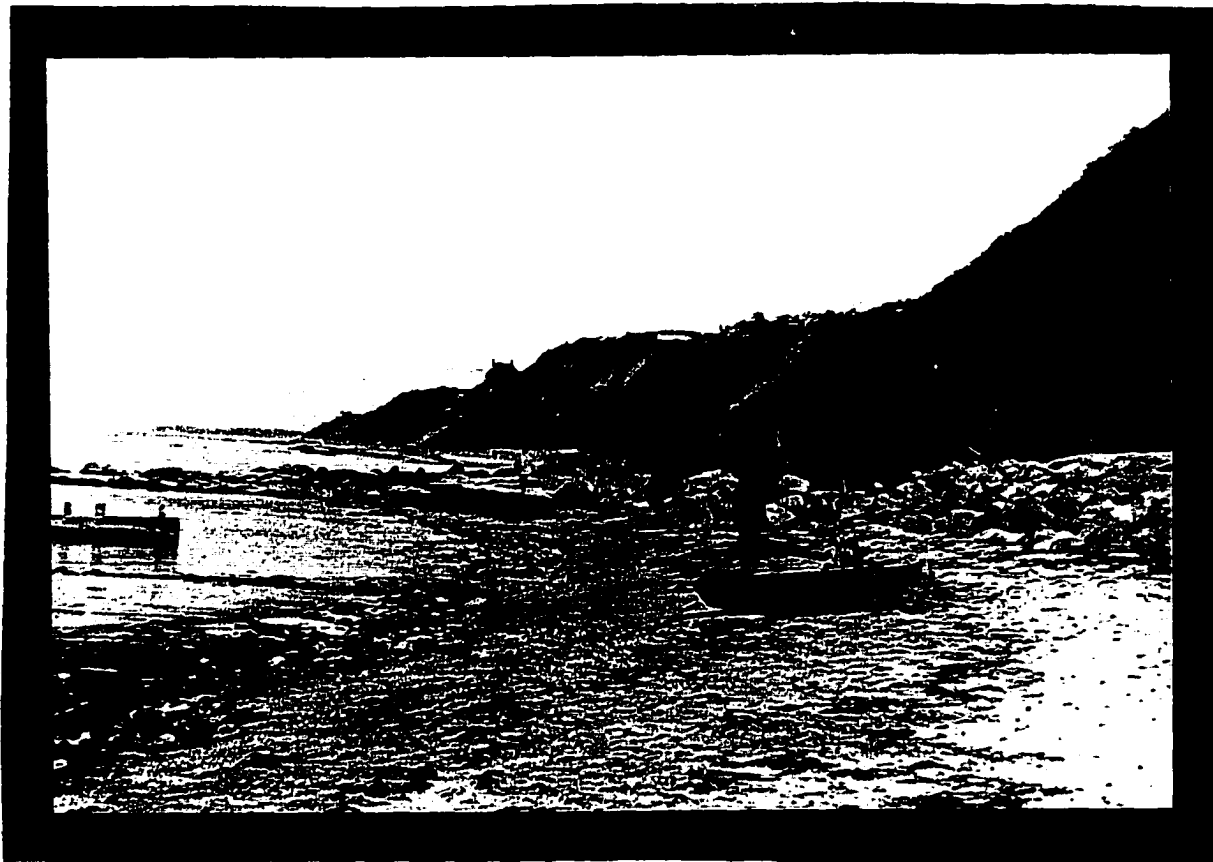
The eighty members here commit to daily and weekly meditation and seek to cultivate an active spiritual life.

Appearing almost futuristic, Torup on Sealand, is just two hours from Copenhagen. The geodesic dome homes, earth homes and solar structures bespeak a community committed to "caring for the land and each other."¹ Founded only a decade ago, this community of sixty adults and 25 children, is already offering many educational programs, in part because their unique construction draws hundreds of visitors each year. On the land, the homes are clustered fairly close together, interspersed with lovely gardens and all surrounded by fields where organic farming and gardening occurs. A community-building provides space for social events and common meals, where in comfortable surroundings the community members and guests can enjoy relaxed time together.

Vrads Sanya and Christiania are two additional experiments in community living that are as different from each other as could be. Vrads Sanya is nestled in the middle of the Danish countryside near Silkeborg, also on Jutland. The community purchased a summer camp with numerous apartments and several large meeting halls only a few years ago. They draw heavily on far-eastern meditation practices and follow a guru. They have a commitment to purity that has led them to refrain from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, while trying to develop a spiritual center where people can develop particular meditation practices to lead them to greater personal wholeness and internal harmony.

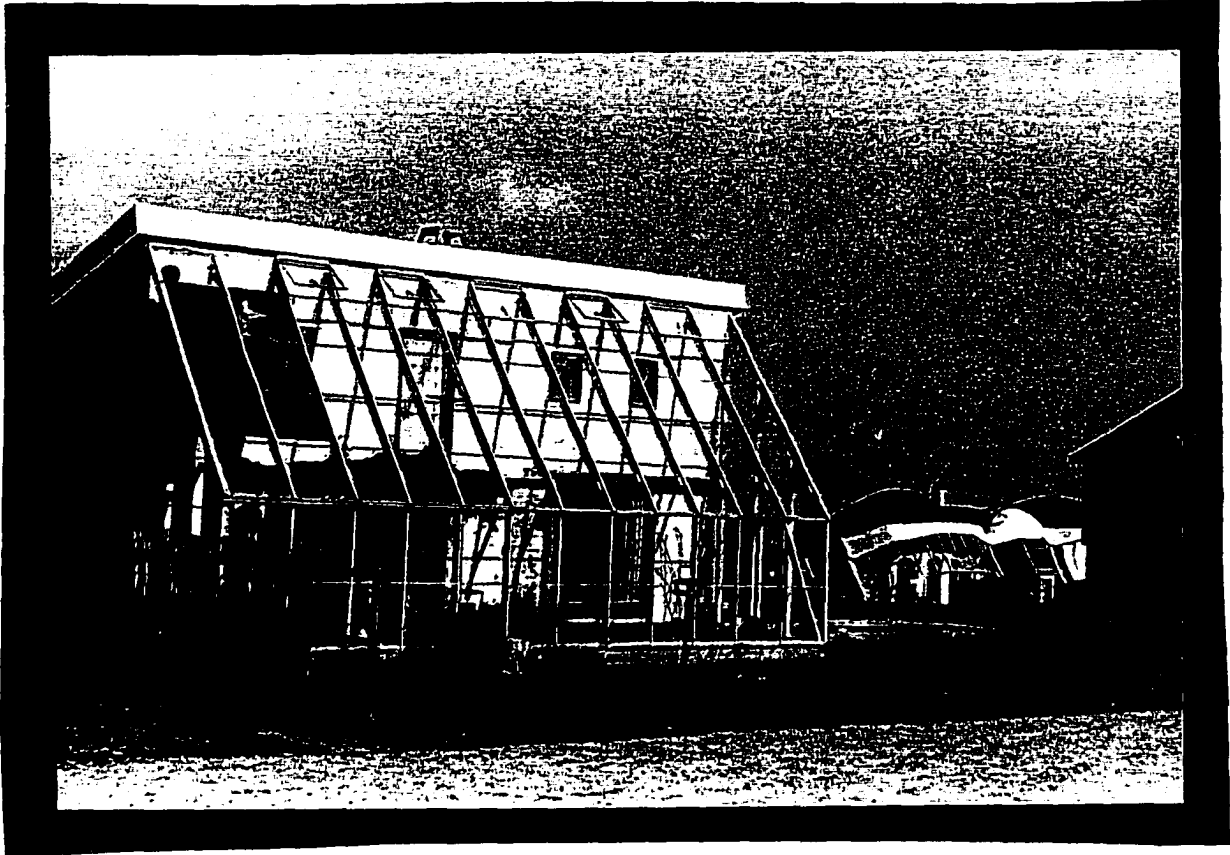
Christiania, in the heart of Copenhagen, has existed for decades, first as an anarchist squatters village and now with the full consent of the government. This community has hundreds of members, often very poor and indigent, who came seeking a safe place to live. At times the community has been under close scrutiny for alleged illegal drug use and other suspicious behaviors. Yet, Christiania is committed to being an urban home for those who might have no place else to go, and in the process to seek to model a cooperative and communal way of living that respects persons and environment.

These are just a few of the many communities that are evident in Denmark. The country itself continues to be a place that encourages such social experiments and invites its people to continue to create more humane, sustainable and economically viable ways to live. Within many of the communities, in educational settings and elsewhere, one will hear the name of Danish educator and Lutheran pastor, Gruntwig. Dead for over 100 years, this man may have had more influence on Danish education and current thinking than any other single individual. His theology and educational practice emphasized that life is a gift, that nature is filled with wisdom awaiting discovery, and that human beings find wholeness not in isolation but through sacred connection with earth and others. He was the inspiration for the Danish Fri Skoles (Free Schools), the sole focus of which was to help foster within students a love of learning. On our visit to such a school, near Thisted, Helle, one of the teachers provided us the opportunity to observe the



The Danish weather and landscape has helped produce a people who are hearty and environmentally aware.

Photograph 7



That awareness is reflected in a wide array of housing alternatives designed to be ecologically sensitive.

Photograph 8

classrooms of children engaged in drama, wood-working, and lively discussion. Older children often assisted younger children, and throughout the school there was an emphasis on working together, exploration, discovery, and creativity. Our guide spoke about the school's philosophy and more about Gruntwig and his educational vision. "Learning, believed Gruntwig, was a life-long process. The most important thing for students was self-discovery, an appreciation for creativity, a love of learning, which would for a life-time enable the student to seek out the specific learning, knowledge, information needed at a given time. Education is not the same as the acquisition of knowledge," she says, with amazingly good English and a strong sense of passion, "but about affirming the learner as a whole person who can use their whole self in the process of discovery. An ability to access the imagination will always provide a useful and necessary tool in gaining information throughout a lifetime. That's the kind of learning we strive for."²

A few days later on a visit to the world renowned Folkecenter for Renewable Energy, we saw visibly displayed what can come from the exercise of such human imagination. Here at the Center we saw technologies using wind and solar power, cars that run on bio-gas grown from a common variety of "weed," underground buildings, living plants that clean waste water, an amazing array of technological experimentation aimed at finding solutions to current ecological and resource-oriented problems. The Center's sole purpose is to come up with innovations that will enhance human quality of life while

reducing dependencies on limited resources and finding sustainable means of generating power, building homes, growing food, and cleaning waste water. One brochure from the Center had a rather philosophical statement about the value of educating people in such a way that creativity is fostered within the learner, for in doing so the seeds of a beautiful future could take root and grow. In Denmark, it appears, the cultivation of such creativity and love of learning runs deep, and is resulting in amazing innovations throughout the country that serve as models for more sustainable and just ways of living.

Through visits to various communities, the Fri Skole, and many conversations with Danes, I came to see that this educational commitment, first articulated by Gruntwig in the previous century, is now embodied in a variety of ways within Danish culture. The education of the whole person and a commitment to the cultivation of creativity was helping produce innovative thinkers who are addressing some of the seemingly intractable problems of our time. All of this seems significant to note as a precursor to a description of the sustainable community where my family and I spent the largest portion of our time in Denmark, Svanholm. For Svanholm is perhaps best understood within the context in which it was formed, took root, and continues to thrive.

Svanholm, A Farm for the Present and the Future

It was nearly 25 years ago that the idea began to be discussed. A couple of people were looking for a place to share land, grow food, and start a small community. When they put an initial advertisement in a local paper, 250

people showed up for the first meeting, recalls Bo Laessoe, one of those who attended. Clearly there was strong interest and for several years a group met and talked, dreamed and raised money, until finally in 1978 the group purchased land and began an intentional community.

The Svanholm Collective was founded by purchasing the Svanholm Estate in 1978. To the estate there was 988 acres of land, 588 acres of which are farmed organically, with the rest in forest, meadows, and wetlands. There are continually about 120 people living in the collective, including 40 children and about 15 guests. Formally the collective is owned by the company "Jarnvad", wherein all members have a share and in turn are all members of the Board. All decisions are made at the communal meetings.³

At Svanholm we have a common economy which means that all earnings go into a big pool. The economy is divided into two parts: the company accounts that deal with the production groups and the collective accounts that deal with the private areas. . . .To cover the rest, everyone gets a set amount of pocket money. ⁴

The basis of our community was formed by common ideals concerning ecology, income-sharing, communal living, and finally self-government (selvforvaltning). "Selvforvaltning" is a hard word to translate in English, and is used in Danish culture in regard to the development of educational and management ideas. It represents the idea of stimulating people, pupils, workers to be more involved in decision-making and feel more responsible for the outcome. Most importantly it is based on the importance of becoming conscious of ones own dignity and respecting the dignity of others.⁵

One could call Svanholm a kind of "experimental workshop on the future of humanity" even though it does not look much like science-fiction here. We're more like a bunch of stolid, frugal busybodies, who save everything from empty jam-jars and small scraps of paper to cardboard boxes, plastic bags and used cars. Because you never know what we might be able to use. To get us much as possible out of as little as possible, that's the name of the game.⁶

We also keep our eyes and ears open for what's happening out there in the big world. We like to use the new knowledge and

technology, if it's truly of any use, and if it fits into our system and frame of ideas. We don't have any intentions of handing out a recipe on a different way of living. Such a way of living can have many shapes and every person should find his/her own way. But just by being the way we are we prove that it is possible to organize a different way of life in our society and work together on things that are important for the future of humanity. Our society has need of new role models. Svanholm is one of them. And at the same time we simply live a life we enjoy.⁷

These selected passages from Svanholm's self-published guide to their community, provides a glimpse into an alternative community that is seeking tangible ways to move into the future more sustainably. In their twenty years of community life, like any community, Svanholm has gone through various stages of development and growth. Unlike Findhorn, which is comprised of people from many different countries, this community is almost entirely Danish. They came for many different reasons, but all share a commitment to organic farming, a pooled economy and decision-making by consensus. The Estate they purchased came with many buildings, barns and work facilities, which have now become home to this dedicated group of farmers.

Unlike the tidy, well-groomed garden spaces of Findhorn, or the new ecological buildings found there, Svanholm has an entirely different feel. As one enters the central grounds there is a feeling of having stepped back in time. The buildings are somewhat more rustic, though in their prime must have been rather grand, and one large central brick building still appears in stately manner. For most of the buildings, however, time and weather show



Svanholm, "the home of the swan," was once a majestic mansion and privately-owned farm.

Photograph 9



Today, traditional and contemporary practices exist side by side.

Photograph 10

on their aging facades. The grounds have a few gardens here and there, with several lovely sculptures, but one also finds the remains of old machinery and unusable parts, long discarded. Chickens roam freely, pecking at the grounds and occasionally stirring a cloud of dust. On one side there is a large barn filled with bawling calves, and a dairy barn where 80 tan and caramel-colored Holsteins are milked each day. The air is filled with a mixture of barn smells and decaying hay, mingling with the comforting smell of freshly baked bread made daily in the common kitchen. Many of the buildings are clustered closely together, with residential facilities interspersed with barns for animals and sheds for tools and tractors. A small store, Butikken, provides goods and supplies to community members and visitors, with shelves stocked with an array of organic products from the farm itself. There is a kind of tired familiarity to the place, well worn paths, clumps of unruly grass, buildings needing to be painted, yet clearly a place that is home, where working and living flow together in the gentle rhythms of the seasons.

To arrive at Svanholm, my family and I traveled from Copenhagen, about an hour, to Fredrickssund where we were met by one of the community members with whom we would live during our stay. Hanne Wegge became our guide, hostess, and friend, as well as someone I interviewed extensively about the community, its educational programs and vision for the future. The first afternoon at Svanholm Hanne gave us a tour and told us the amazing history of the place. We gathered then in the large Common Hall for the community meal of rye bread soup, rice pudding and

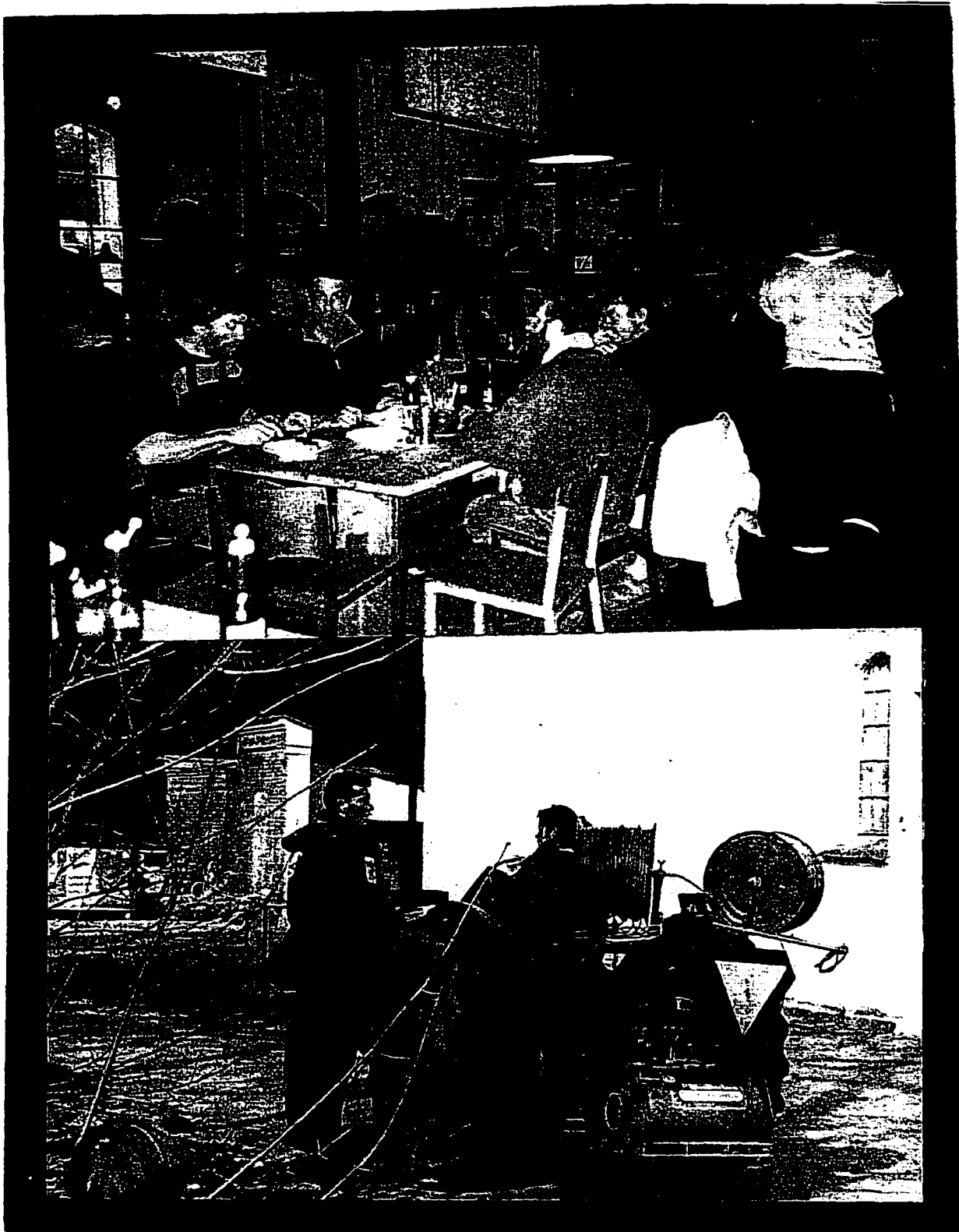
boiled vegetables. The room was filled with families and individuals, relaxing together over a meal, after the labors of the day were complete. The conversations were in Danish, so most of the content escaped me, but the “feel” of the evening did not. People laughed, conversed, some deep in what appeared to be thoughtful discussion about important matters, more than once something was spilled, and at one point one small group even broke into song. It was the family dinner table, albeit a big one, and anything could happen. Despite being outsiders, newcomers, who scarcely understood the language, even my children seemed relaxed in this gentle setting of conviviality and connection. Hanne took us back to her lovely, modest thatched roof dwelling and we were grateful for the hospitality at the end of the day.

Svanholm’s Educational Commitment

Since the inception of this community, education has been an important factor. Early on, the small, initial group of people interested in starting a community spent years educating themselves about ways to begin such an endeavor, and worked hard to learn about the intricacies of farming and of community life. One of those people was Bo Laessoe who became involved with the group in 1977. Here he tells some of his experience in the early years and describes some of the educational values that continue to be evident throughout the community:

I read an advertisement in the paper about two families who were looking for a piece of land they could share in common. They had a meeting and about 250 people showed up. I had a background in farm education, there were two of us with that background and we were in great demand for that is the only way you can buy land for farming in Denmark. So for about a year we all worked together to discuss the issues, learning together and working out the details. We had monthly meetings and also other small groups met. We finally found this place and started negotiating the deal. It was a big job just to get the land and we needed banks and lawyers and lots of organization. We wanted to do it the right way. Finally, we got through the process and after all the work that had been done, the different groups put together papers on different topics. One was about decision by consensus. One was about common economy. The third was about using alternative, organic farming methods. These papers became our first three documents that really described our philosophy and how we wanted the community to function. Those papers, really the whole process, only occurred because of the way we worked together, each sharing their knowledge, all of us learning together. There were no real leaders, we all had different pieces to bring. That was an important learning process that has shaped much of how we relate and how this community functions.

We also wanted everyone to share jobs so that each person had a chance to do each task on the farm. Everyone would know all the the aspects and no one would get cornered into doing just one part. We tried many different things in the beginning. We did not know how to do all this. We stated out with real financial burden because of the cost of the land and the buildings. We all had to work very hard to make it possible to stay on the land. That made some people leave, but it was not going to be easy living. It also made some people stay who then forged a deep connection to each other because we all needed each other so much. We had a common problem and we had to work together. In the early days we had lots of discussion, lots of discussion. Again some people left because they did not like this. It was very hard work, talking things out, making decisions together. It still is. We bought this place without every question being answered. We had to figure things out as we went along. Some people left, new ones came. And still the learning continued. We are still learning how to do all this.⁸



Good communication is a touchstone of this community and may occur at the common meals or as issues are addressed throughout the workday.

Photographs 11 and 12

Bo's description of the early years begins to give one a glimpse of a community that is grounded in a particular approach to experiential learning. Through their early years, and even into the present, this community has rejected notions of individual leaders, or even a leadership team. They believe that each person has something valuable to contribute and as they move along the process together, the knowledge, information or needed skills will emerge from among them.

The community has experimented with different kinds of educational programs over the years. As the community grew it drew more and more visitors, guests and potential new members who were curious about the place and how it functioned and came to experience the rhythm of daily life. Some stayed, others took away new skills and perspectives to use elsewhere. The first structured educational programs came about due to the development of a relationship with a nearby school. Again Bo provided the background:

We found that many people wanted to learn more about ecological farming. There was a nearby school that started and they were looking for places for students to get practical knowledge, so we began to work together. First with 2 or 3 students that would come for a year, to learn certain skills and help on the farm. It is a very structured program with an educational plan. They have been in school and come here for the practical work before returning to complete their courses. This model worked well for us because it was so similar to what we were most accustomed to, learning by doing. Serving as a place for students to get practical experience, working with their hands, alongside other farmers, that was good and still a program that exists today.

Despite the success of that program, Svanholm has not rushed to expand their educational programs over the years. They have continued offering

workshops, courses and seminars now and then, but unlike Findhorn, has not put energy into becoming a major educational center. Many of the community members shared their thoughts with me about this topic. Certainly there were those who thought it would be good, economically, for the community to offer more courses, but most agreed that the constant influx of new people would change the face of the community. Many enjoy the anonymity and pace of farm life. They are aware that the pace would be threatened if the community began to offer multiple, frequent courses. But it continues to be a theme discussed within the community.

We have discussed this quite a bit, as we do have much to offer, but have not taken the time to market ourselves in that way. Sometimes people from the outside see more of the possibilities here than we do. We have lots of groups that come through here already, touring the place because they want to see what it is like, what we do, or even specific questions about farming. We charge the groups and offer little "mini-courses" as they tour the farm and see how we seek to live more sustainably. It is always an issue as to how to balance private and public life. Boundaries are always an issue with these tours and the courses. Where can people go when they visit, and how can we respect the privacy of our own community members. Over the years we have offered courses on sustainable living, organic farming, community life, even decision-making. Having the groups here is important. We have a different way of living and when people come they see that there are other ways of living. I see the way it touches people differently. We don't tell people to go and live this way. We just model what we do, let them work alongside us for a time and encourage them to do what they can. Even though many here like the quiet of farm life, we also feel a commitment to making things better beyond this place. The courses are one way we can do that. We just don't want to get swallowed-up by that.

Many people come here wanting a fresh start, they want to do things differently in their life or their profession. Some university professors come here wanting to get trained.

Sometimes people want to expand the education they already got, because they see that it was too abstract or theoretical and they need the practical, hands on experience to really help them learn.⁹

As one moves about this expansive farm, it would be hard to distinguish who are the members and who might just be there for the day or week, learning by doing, working side by side to prepare the common meals, fix a broken tractor, work in the fields or orchards. Bo noted at several points in our interview that a core value at Svanholm is treating all people as equals and truly valuing what each brings to the community, to the work and learning. "There are no elected leaders, no bosses to tell other people what to do. Education here, whether for our members or visitors takes place as equals. We have to find ways to work together sharing our knowledge and skills. The basis I guess comes down to respect, treating each other with respect is the most important aspect of learning here. We are all different and have different things to offer. Respect, I guess, is most important."¹⁰

Running throughout Svanholm's educational vision is a deep commitment to sustainability. This commitment influences all aspects of community life and is interwoven into all educational experiences. Quoting from their handbook about the community, the members write:

The term 'sustainability' was introduced in connection with the Bruntland report, "Our Common Future", published in 1987. The report is basically some reflections on how to handle the global crisis we are in. For a system to be sustainable means that it is in balance and that it is constructed to maintain that balance.

The report emphasizes that we have to work towards greater sustainability in the way we handle ecosystems, man(sic) is a part of it all. It is stressed that in order to be sustainable, it also

demands that development of the economic, social and political structures also be in balance. This balance must also prevail in the long run--the Bruntland report says: 'A sustainable development is one that meets the existing needs without jeopardizing the possibilities for future generations to have their needs met.' A sustainable development demands a 'holistic attitude' and new values or a kind of global ethic where the goal 'in the broadest sense aims to bring forth a harmony between people and between humanity and nature.'

Though "sustainability" continues to be defined in many and varied ways, the Svanholm community takes seriously its role in promoting sustainability and a less consumptive future through its community life and educational programs. A commitment to sustainable development, drawing on the Bruntland report definitions, guides the community's decisions and choices.

Learning by Doing

With such a large farm, the various tasks needed to keep the farm functioning have been divided into two groups, *production* and *service*. The Production Groups are: Farming, Vegetable Packing and Sorting, Cattle, Sheep, Fruit and Berry, Forestry, Woodwork, General Store, Wine Import and the Mill. In each of these groups, a designated number of people tend and care for livestock and plants, make crates for shipping, and do the basic farming needed on a 588 acre farm. As noted, members rotate through the various groups so that each person's knowledge base is broad and when the community needs to make decisions all members have a better sense of what the effects of that decision might be on various aspects of the farm.

Similarly, the Service Groups provide important care for the community. The groups are: Kitchen, Accounting, Building Maintenance,

Childcare and the Car/Smithy group. Individuals in these groups are responsible for preparing and serving the two daily community meals (lunch and supper), tending the finances, keeping the buildings, cars and machinery in good working order, and assisting in caring for children. As with the Production Groups, community members rotate through these task areas, sometimes spending weeks, months, or even years providing a particular service.

When guests, visitors or students come to spend time at Svanholm, they will join one of these groups. Through their work with a particular group, they will learn the skills associated with that task by working alongside others. Sometimes the "learning" may involve a bit of instruction first, but often it is in the midst of the work itself that learning takes place. Even with all his years of training and experience in farming, Bo does not like to portray himself as the teacher:

I don't really consider myself a teacher, I don't really think like that. I want people to have an experience of working on a farm and learning what they need to learn. What we do is take people where they are and let them join us where we are. Even while they are here working, they are free to participate in the common meetings, giving their views, even getting the pocket money like the rest of us. We see the learners as equal. Though at times we have offered some lectures, I always prefer sharing my ideas and views in the midst of work. I don't think I want to sit down and write out these ideas and give them as a lecture. I do best when I am working alongside people and we learn and share together. We work together. Some days I may know what needs to be done. Another day the "student" may know. Some days we just figure it out together as we go. That's what I like.¹¹

Bo is a community member, farmer and teacher who definitely practices what he preaches. In my first few days at Svanholm several people

said I should interview Bo. He was a founder of the community, was clearly respected by all, and seemed to be something of a leader. As that first week passed, my husband Dale who was working in the orchard spoke about his work partner. For several days the two even had to dig a deep trench for irrigation. The work was hard and dirty and at days end resulted in exhaustion for both workers. As Dale spoke about his co-worker, Bo, it never dawned on me that this could be the same person described by everyone as a key community figure, "someone to talk to" who was very knowledgeable. It was not until the interview as I heard him speak about his views and values, that I realized the extent of my own hierarchical thinking. Hearing he was such a community leader caused me to project my own views of leadership onto this person I had not yet met. It created a certain amount of cognitive dissonance when I realized that just hours before our interview, he was waist-deep in muddy water working in the irrigation trench with Dale, a novice. What a learning for me!

Hanne Wegge, our host during our stay had a hearty laugh when I recounted this same story to her. Hanne has been in the community nearly twenty years herself and knows that such mistakes are frequently made by newcomers who have a difficult time fully comprehending the extent to which the community truly is committed to modeling a different way. During her years at Svanholm, Hanne, now 50, has worked in many different groups, but is currently putting her energies into the development of

Svanholm's educational programs. She came here seeking an alternative, more loving way to live:

Many of us who were finishing our studies in the 70's were looking for a way to live that was different than our parents. So with the spirit of the times, with the music, with such an ability to travel, because we were really the first airplane generation, we could go into the world like no others had before. We were educated people, having gone through university, and trying to think our own thoughts and build up communities not just oriented around work, but doing cultural things together. We were peace workers and peace in the stomach is a good place to start, so we got into ecology (she laughs heartily at this point, her bright blue eyes sparkling). So we came, some of us to this farm. We wanted to understand the culture of farming, how the ancients lived on the land. What rituals or ways of being helped them celebrate the seasons, the good food, and the joy of being together as a community. That is really what brought me here. That was 1980. That is still part of what keeps me here, but most of all it is the people, the closeness you develop after you work so closely together through good times and hard times. That's the love part. It's hard and it's wonderful. It is the basis of life. The basis of all real learning.¹²

Hanne spoke much about the development of relationships here at Svanholm and the ways in which those ties have been strengthened and tested over the years. But for her, the commitment to the community and to the varied people here has given her life a dimension she would not care to do without. I was struck by her experience and the depth of community she and others described, which seemed to stand in such contrast to how many Americans experience their own communities, not as places of such rich and satisfying connection, but places of anonymity and even estrangement. For Hanne, many of her deepest learnings have come about as she has worked alongside other community members. "Learning through doing" continued to be echoed in her experience:

Education is really a swap of theory and practice. You need to think and research at a profound level, and then you need to have a try-out with it, to see how it works in practice. You learn and think. Real education can take time because it is an organic process. That is sort of an old fashioned idea, I guess, because now we want everything to happen to quickly. But education is learning by doing. The best teacher is often your mistakes. As you do and make mistakes, then you learn. You don't fail, you have to adjust, rethink, reflect, build on things and make changes. It is a circular way of thinking, an organic way of thinking. . . you have to prepare, you have to do, you have to repair and you have to clean-up. This is sort of a circular way of doing things. That way you do your part, but then another could come along and take over for the next round and build upon it. This circular way of attending to the world, that is the model of education I want to help promote here at Svanholm and pass on to others. ¹³

Though neither Bo, nor Hannah, or any other community members I spoke with at Svanholm was familiar with Environmental Educator, David Orr, it was clear that many of their commitments to learning through doing, and learning in the context of problem-solving is a pedagogical model shared by Orr. In, *Greening the College Curriculum: A Guide to Environmental Teaching in the Liberal Arts*, Orr and nearly a dozen other educators describe methods of reshaping course curriculum and pedagogy so that it is much more hands on, a bridging of theory and practice aimed at helping equip learners for the particular challenges of these times. In this collection of resources, Orr Writes:

Education that builds on solving real problems requires broadening what we take to be our constituency to include communities in which educational institutions are located. It requires institutional flexibility and creativity which in turn presupposes a commitment to make knowledge count for the long-term health of local communities and people. It requires that we overcome the outmoded idea that learning occurs exclusively in the classrooms, laboratories and libraries. It

requires acknowledgement of the possibility that learning sometimes occurs most thoroughly and vividly when diverse people possessing different kinds of knowledge pool what they know and join in a common effort to accomplish something that needs to be done. . . The students and faculty alike discover that they are able to change things that otherwise appear to be unchangeable.¹⁴

Orr and a growing number of educators with a commitment to sustainability are articulating the need for a pedagogy that includes experiential learning as fundamental. Moving away from abstraction alone, to a model that embraces both theory and practice, they say, will make possible more creative problem-solving and perhaps create the kind of educated citizenry that will find livable solutions to many of our environmental and social crises. Indeed, what may appear to be intractable and unchangeable, can be addressed by those who have been “schooled” in practical problem-solving and hands-on learning. This is similarly the commitment of the Svanholm community, that education at its best provides new solutions and patterns for living that make possible a more livable and sustainable future. Learning through doing. Learning through the active exercise of the mind and body seems a simple pedagogy, yet one rooted in a profound respect for human integrity and the value of wisdom derived phenomenologically.

Living In Community: The Meaning Beneath the Text

During our time at Svanholm we learned of this community’s particular way of understanding education. They have students, off and on, most of the time, but in small numbers to keep from overwhelming the community. Bo, Hannah and others in the community were always willing to speak about the



Dairy cattle are a part of the farming community providing milk and other dairy products for use by community members and to sell for income.

Photograph 13



While laboring throughout the day, workers take time
for breaks that nourish the body and soul.

Photograph 14

history and philosophy of Svanholm, what brought them there and what sustains them most in this close-knit, but diverse community. The courses and mini-seminars that continue to be offered seem to reflect these core values and are a notable part of the community. But in addition to the particular courses and work experiences guests and visitors can participate in, there is, yet another dimension to life at Svanholm that speaks volumes, the learnings that take place in the living of life, the sharing of meals, the consensus form of decision-making.

My family had not been at the farm 24 hours when we received our first work assignments. Unlike Findhorn with its attunement process of determining work sites, Svanholm works on a much more pragmatic model. Where is the work to be done? What is most needed at this time? So, after only a brief period of transition and learning to find our way around, Dale and I were given our work for the week . . . the "course" we would take in order to learn more about this community. Dale was with the Farming Group and I, the Kitchen Group. For the week, we would rise early, eat our breakfast, walk the mile or two to our work sites, then spend the day working alongside others. Mid-day, a break for lunch, then ending with dinner around 6:00 p.m. The children were welcome to move about the farm, playing in designated areas and checking in with me in the kitchen when necessary.

From beginning to end, the week was full of awarenesses and learnings aroused by this unique setting and the people with whom we shared the

journey. Even setting off for my first day of work, as my journal entry reflects, was a gentle experience of awakening to things too often missed:

Waking before sunrise, streaks of pink-yellow light blushing just above the dark line of horizon, the ground silver-white from an over-night frost, I breathe deeply, nestled in warmth, feeling at peace, the deep oneness of the universe enveloping my very being. Another day in Denmark.

Walking from Hanne's house, across the fields and through the forest, to my first day of work at Svanholm. The beauty of this day awakens all my senses. I feel a deep gratitude at simply having this time to walk, not drive, to move among the trees and shadows, mud and moisture, rather than along paved streets, the rumbling of a car droning in my ears. The blue of the sky on this glorious morning, the fertile smell of spring soil, the cool breeze, the morning's bird song, all offer a blessing to my soul. I am enthralled to be part of it all. How often does it merely move past my window, providing mere backdrop for my living? Yet, this morning in the cool refreshment of another day, I feel the earth beneath me, the air upon my cheeks, the engaging pulse of everything that lives. In this moment I know that I belong.¹⁵

For me those first days were spent chopping onions, washing and preparing vegetables with new names but familiar appearance, and picking up more Danish language. We gathered at the start of each day, around a big table, coffee cups in hand, discussing what needed to be done, who wanted to bake, or mix, prepare some favorite dish, or recall some nearly forgotten recipe. And then we worked. We worked and told stories. We worked and told jokes. We worked in silence. We worked while singing. Each person offering their part. Each teaching and learning from another. Many conversations were in Danish and I silently listened, trying to decipher words and meanings, while others were in English, a clearly conscious effort to bring me into the circle. No boss, no instructors, no one saying how things should

be done. Some group members had lots of experience and were glad to share their ideas, while other newcomers, like me, observed and tried our best, always with the encouragement of others. And after a morning of work, the food was laid out upon the long serving counter, the doors opened and hungry workers filled the space, partaking of this food, resting for a time, sharing news of how the morning had gone. No fast food, no quick lunch gobbled down while sitting at a desk or driving off to, yet, another meeting. The rhythm of the work day included this hour to an hour and a half for rest and rejuvenation. I took note of this and vowed to never work through lunch again.

Emma and Zachary came each noontime, as well. After a morning on the farm, with stories of the newborn calves they watched and an old tire swing on which they played for hours, they would arrive, brimming with energy and enthusiasm. Their faces were bright, their eyes clear. Already community members had learned their names and would greet them as they entered for their meal. How many places could I feel so relaxed to have my children roaming about, confident that many kindly eyes were watching. Both children were ecstatic with the freedom, coupled with the sense of safety. "Can we stay on this farm forever?" they frequently asked, and I knew that beneath their childlike question, was their own deep resonance with such a place of belonging, their deep joy at the simple pleasures that welcomed them each day. No television, no computer, no rushing off to groups, or camps or sports events. Just the gentle rhythm of a day in the

barns and fields, learning the silent mysteries of wild things. In her book *Children at Play: Using Waldorf Principles to Foster Childhood Development*, Heidi Britz-Crecelius, emphasizes the need for such a vast and open "classroom" in order for children to thrive:

Our environment is becoming increasingly sterile and more and more deprived of possibilities for play. Even our cities used to offer fine opportunities for play. What adventures were to be had in back yards and lofts! Anyone who was a city child in Germany after the last war will remember the ruins with pleasure. That was a world full of adventure, surprise, danger. There were green, secret hide-outs where the ferns grew on the walls, towering remains of walls and sheltered meetings places. It was possible to build, climb, make a fire. Only children were at home in the labyrinth of paths which ran through this wilderness. Today, such eyesores have been removed. The eye is regaled by properly looked after house-fronts, well cared for parks and clean, boring playgrounds. Whilst parents live in unprecedented comfort, the children have more toys than their fathers, mothers and grandparents put together. But they have to pay for that by experiencing restrictions unknown to their ancestors.¹⁶

Britz-Crecelius, believing that imaginative play is more vital for a child's future than almost any other single factor, has worked on education within Germany for many years and has written extensively about the value of creative, unstructured play for children. Watching my own children as they immersed themselves in the wonder of this new place, observing their look of eager contentment, I thought how seldom they have such opportunity to wonder and explore, to delve into the world of fantasy that forests and hidden pathways evoke. What opportunities for learning about the natural world are missed because the pace of American life precludes such luxurious

immersion into the elements? And at what cost to children and to the earth itself?

At the same time, many elementary schools in the United States are eliminating the one place where many children have any semblance of such creative play, recess. Due to supposed shortages of time within the school day, recess, a time of unstructured play, becomes the “unnecessary” time block that is forfeited in order to provide more time to “better educate” the young. Britz-Crecelius asserts that when children are allowed more time for unstructured, spontaneous play, they gradually learn how to join the extended game of human society. And when they have been provided ample opportunity to be absorbed in their play, the more fully and effectively they will be able to later take their place in the community of adults.

Though the children of Svanholm spend their days in school, they also grow and develop in a setting in which they are regularly invited into the natural flow of farm life, watching plants and animals grow, creating little hideaways in the nearby forest, learning of the seasons and the elements as they engage day by day with the natural world. I saw, with Emma and Zachary, a gentle joy that seemed to overtake them in that setting and though that had not been part of my “course,” it was profoundly instructive.

Another element of life at Svanholm that seems replete with educational value is a kind of “grounded spirituality.” Though the community does not purport to be spiritual, and some members even disdain the word, there is however a commitment to a quality of life and relationship

that is non-materialistic. From the common meals shared daily, to the common economy and consensus decision-making, this community lives an alternative vision. Hanne described it this way:

Spirituality is a way of living, a way of working in the garden, a way of being. You cannot find it by talking of it, but by looking at your life and the way you live. Living in community is a spiritual practice. Not just when there is some ritual taking place, but just the day to day living. Music, dancing, the 'joy' part of life, that all seems too much missing in religion. What I find nourishing is asking questions, discovering what inspires others, what inspires me, what moves us to want to help others. Many people at Svanholm are suspicious of the word 'spirituality,' because it makes them think of church images about some other realm, when they are just working so hard to make life good in **this** realm. But dancing, singing, those are powerful things that put people in touch with their bodies, their feelings, it is those things shake up the orderliness of things and make room for true connections. When we do our harvest celebrations and dance together, that , I think is a truly holy moment. All of us celebrating together, as a community, hands touching, hearts connected. That to me is spirituality, a kind of spirituality that the world needs, that communities need, that education needs. Education and spirituality, aren't they both really about learning to feel and understand those feelings, feelings of being human (Hanne's voice was very intense at this point, quite full of emotion) Engaging with the world, with each other, what else is there?¹⁷

This type of embodied spirituality was evident at Svanholm in the way people relate with one another and in the values that are lived daily. At Svanholm, people don't own cars. There is a car pool--a relatively small collection of cars owned by the community for use by members as they are available. Similarly, homes are modest and other material possessions are at a minimum. But the community does not seem like a place of deprivation and paucity. The community life feels rich and full. One particular evening we had the joy of being part of one of Svanholm's traditions. When any

community member has a decade birthday (10, 20, 30 . . .) that person gets to choose the evening meal for the entire community. One evening we joined in celebrating ten-year old Lana's birthday. She had selected all the various dishes for the meal, and one member had even labored for two days to make her favorite kind of ice cream, a rare treat. We gathered for the sumptuous meal, then near its completion, the parents of the young girl rose and spoke about her life and the joy she has brought them. Everyone raised glasses in celebration of this child with hopes that her year ahead would be filled with much growth, joy and love. A simple celebration, but so moving, to have a child celebrated in this way by an entire community. How must she have felt to be surrounded by such love, such attention, such a message that she mattered. What a powerful ritual for any community. And Bo's words echoed in my ears, "I guess it all comes down to respect, treating each other with respect is the most important thing."

Bo also has his own views of spirituality and how it is lived out at Svanholm. For him the common economy is truly the glue that holds the community together, that makes them a family, not just a village. He described the process by which decisions are made about particular expenditures, even for members who may want to visit a sick relative a long distance away. The process of discerning how to spend their limited resources has made possible the deepening of relationships. Bo notes:

With such a model, there is no hiding. You can have lots of good ideas and philosophies, but that is not enough. At Findhorn they are a spiritual community and were founded on certain philosophies, working with chakras and things. But

when they come to visit us, we are so different. 'Oh it is so wonderful,' they say, 'you are so grounded here.' (he laughs aloud) And they want the spirit we have here. We don't even talk about it, it is not something we write about. We just live in a certain way and other people see and experience the difference.

I have come to see that spirituality, or whatever you might want to call it, is just a way of looking at things. For me, and I think for many here, equality, participation, sharing information, that is what we can be about here in this place. For me it is about priorities, how we choose to live.¹⁸

Indeed, how we choose to live becomes the larger context for learning.

The values that are present in the home, the classroom, the community, those create the fabric out of which educational experiences are woven. At Svanholm the student is not only invited into a classroom, a living laboratory, but is also welcomed to the family table, included in discussion and decision-making, surrounded by the subtle signs and messages of what is important to that group of people, what will be expected and what is most desirable. The learning context is always present providing learners with an implicit set of values. Does the setting, whether it is a farm, a playground or the family living room cultivate creativity, compassion, a celebration of the interconnections of life? What kinds of relationships and rituals does it help produce?

After ten years of research and extensive interviews with hundreds of people, James and Cheryl Keen, Laurent Parks Daloz and Sharon Daloz Parks produced a book that looks at what factors and educational moments lead to a life of commitment to the common good and sustains such commitments in a changing and turbulent world. In *Common Fire* their research leads them

to conclude that in order to help cultivate individuals that are compassionate, courageous and committed to using their energies for the betterment of the world, it is important that good mentors are available throughout crucial years of development and that someone believe in the learner and their capabilities. Additionally, they speak about the educational setting and the need for it to reflect values that promote such qualities and life attitudes. In looking specifically at schools they write:

Evidence suggests that the whole school environment contributes to what students learn. Small schools that exemplify positive community are particularly effective in promoting commitment to the common good. Ways of being, disciplines and dialogue that promote democratic values of inclusion, respect, accountability, fairness and compassion can play a significant role in enabling children and young people to learn that "this is how we do things." Learning multiple habits of attention and interpretation, cultivating an active imagination of a positive future, and discovering the rewards of becoming comfortable with what was initially unfamiliar in both natural and social worlds can provide deep and lasting lessons about how we can dwell together well.¹⁹

The authors of this study go on to make numerous additional suggestions about the ways in which our learning settings could better foster these community values and assist in developing learners that are not only mastering content, but are also rehearsing the art of living meaningful lives.

Svanholm appears to be such a setting, where the philosophical commitments are evidenced in the day to day lives of the community and learners are provided living texts that encourage the integration of these commitments. Learning does not stop when the workday is through, but is present in the quality of relationships, the allure of undeveloped forests, a

gentle spirituality, a deep joy in simple pleasures that is woven into the very fabric of daily life. Truly a place dripping with teaching moments.

Of Farming and More

As described, Svanholm is not a typical learning environment. It is a community striving to offer an alternative vision of sustainable living. Yet, at the same time, they do not act as if everyone should live as they do. They invite people into their rhythm of life for a time, providing them the opportunity to experience another way of being, a different set of life choices, and then encourage the learners to see what it all means for them. While at Findhorn I sometimes felt a subtle undertone of superiority, a sense that the Findhorn community “knew how to do it,” at Svanholm there was a kind of genuine humility, a sense of always striving to live with more integrity and a continual desire to learn how best to live together.

Sanna Makalhof was from the nearby Ecological College in Northern Jutland and was spending a second year at Svanholm for the practical side of her education. In her early 20's, bright and energetic, Sanna first came to Svanholm to do a year-long practical internship, but had such a positive experience and realized how much more there was to learn about farming that she decided to spend an additional year before returning for her final courses and exams at the college. Though she was initially drawn to this farm community in order to develop her skills, she realizes that what she is learning there has, also, to do with who she is and where she wants to go with her life.

I came here last year and am in my second year. I am in the group working out in the fields driving a tractor. We are three groups, one that works with corn, one with vegetables that are sold at market, one with vegetables that are used here in the Svanholm kitchen for meals for the community. We meet as one group in the morning. We talk over what needs to be done that day and what each of us will do. The group is about 10 people. In the summer we get people from all over the world who are coming to study organic farming and so there are many more people. We need more at harvest, but that's when many people return to their regular lives. For my school studies we do practical work and one guy in my class had come here. So I came for a visit to see what it was like and said 'wow this is very nice and this is (a) good place for me.' My last practicum was a very small farm, just working with cows. I worked all by myself and hardly saw anyone all day. It was very hard work. But coming here, I liked all the people around and the activity, lots of things going on.

There are different ways of learning here. Sometimes they have me work alongside someone who explains what to do and how to do it, especially if it is something new I don't understand. But I am here to learn so sometimes I just need to go off and figure it out for myself. They are very good here about working with you side by side, but also sending you off to do things that you will have to learn as you do them. I had never worked in the fields like this and was not certain what it would be like or even what I needed to know. Now after the first year, I am coming to know what questions to ask, what I want to know and what I need to know. I could not do that when I came. The work has helped me a lot and now I have an idea of what I want to learn next and how to find out how to learn it and from who. This has been a good place for me. The practicums make such a difference because you get to really use what you learn and then build upon it.

Sanna had known for much of her life that she wanted to engage in organic farming. Now that she is in a place like Svanholm, she is realizing that along with farming in a particular manner, she also wants to **live** in a particular manner. Even for Denmark, which is quite open to all sorts of social experiments, Svanholm is viewed as quite different. Sanna spoke of how her

friends from school don't even really understand what this community is like. She acknowledges that one really needs to live there to come to an understanding and appreciation of the place, its practices and philosophy. Learning more about farming, however, has only been a part of Sanna's learning and she feels that she has gotten a "double education," with much of the learning being about herself and what she wants for her life.

This place has affected me a lot. I think most of all it has shown me that I want to live in a community. I have been talking with friends at school about this too. At the Ecological School, it's the only one in Denmark, more people are coming and it is growing. We all talk about what we want to do after school and many of us want to make a difference, help each other, work together. I think there is so much to learn. I like being in a place where it is not just me and the farm, but there are lots of other people around helping each other. There are also conflicts, but that is good as you work things out. Many of my learnings here have not just been about farming but about life. When you live with people you have to face things together, that's what makes it work. Sometimes here it has been hard and I have to learn to know where to get involved, when to say "no", and how to deal with conflicts. That's not something they teach much at school, but here there is so much to learn.

Maybe the biggest learnings have been personally, about my own development. I have reached, grown a lot, and learned a lot about myself. There is space for it here, time for it. People can accept that you are not always happy and smiling. Living in this place with so many people, and it's working, that is really positive. And all the beauty around, it is such a wonderful place. It is good there are not too many students and make the community feel more like a school than a group of people really living together. Everyday I learn, not just about the fields, but about me, too. And it keeps me asking more questions. I guess I thought learning was about coming to know the answers. Being here I am finding that asking the questions is as important.

I think people need to come here to really understand this place and how different it is. My friends don't even really understand. They have imaginations about what it is like, but when I tell them in positive words, they see it is something

about change, something that sounds good to them. Someday I hope to be farming here, or in a place like this. It is the kind of place I know I could be happy and do the kind of work in my life I want and need to do.²⁰

It is impossible to know where Sanna's learnings will take her, but through our conversations and a delightful afternoon spent horseback riding, I came to see that this place had made a tremendous impact on her life. At a crucial point in her own personal development her attitudes toward farming, friendship and the future had been dramatically shaped by this community of people and would always influence the direction of her future choices and commitments. Though my family's stay was nowhere near the length or intensity of Sanna's, we too had a powerful sense that our being there, for even a short time, would have long lasting effects in our lives. To experience a place that is so committed to an alternative vision and lives-out that vision with such integrity is quite compelling. As we prepared to leave Svanholm, 4-year old Zachary declared that if he couldn't stay at Svanholm, it would have to stay with him. And indeed it would, for a very long time.

Leave Taking

The time at Svanholm took my family and me somewhat by surprise. A community we had heard little about became for us a place of great learning and deep connection. Emma and Zachary delighted in observing the daily activities of the farm, watching cows being milked, the tractors at work hauling hay for feed, the slowed pace and time spent outdoors. For Dale and me, working alongside individuals who were committed to living gently on the earth and with each other, people who believed deeply that there were

other, more sustainable, ways to construct and organize human activity, was inspiring and transforming. The night before we left Svanholm I wrote these thoughts:

For years I have studied environmental ethics, took seriously the need to move toward more sustainable ways of living, even taught that we can change our habits and find more meaningful ways of living together. But here it is. . . not in theory, not some book or impassioned treatise. Here are real people, toiling in the soil, planting more than food, they cultivate hope. They are the tenders of a future that is not despair. Would that I could bring some of my more cynical students to this place, to be immersed in possibility, if only for a time. What transformations might occur? What ruptures in their jaded outlooks might take them to a deeper place of knowing, and in so doing make way for hope. Making way for hope, what a task for education as we move into the 21st century. What a task for us all.

Eating healthy, organic food grown in fields nearby, taking walks in a grove of 2000 year old oaks, being part of the glorious chaos of 100 people sitting down to a meal together, taking part in a spring planting ritual, experiencing the gracious hospitality of strangers, who soon became friends, all these experiences reminded us again and again what is important in our own lives and rekindled our own commitments to live more gently and more intentionally as we seek to make way for hope. With gratitude for this unique place and its people, we said our farewells and prepared to depart Denmark for our next destination, Lebensgarten Germany.

CHAPTER 5

LEBENSGARTEN, GERMANY

A train's ride from Hamburg, nestled halfway between Bremen and Hanover, is the tiny town of Steyerberg, Germany. It is a small farming community with tidy brick homes and well-kept yards. The center square has a dozen or so small shops of various kinds and one large supermarket. There is nothing particularly remarkable about this small village. A few buses rumble along the wide streets. Older women carry their bundles from the market. Children laugh and play in the yards and parks. Old men sit silently with eyes that almost hide the unspeakable things they have seen in a lifetime. It is, perhaps, like many other German villages. With one exception. Just a mile out of town exists the thriving intentional community, Lebensgarten. Here, a small group of Germans and others from around the world have sought to create a place that offers an alternative example of living in community, modeling values of peace, tolerance and creativity, within a culture that still bears deep scars from other ways of living.

The following brief description comes from a small guide to eco-villages, published by GAIA Trust:

Lebensgarten in Steyerberg is notable as an example of an intentional community developed in the mid-80's before the current wave of interest in ecological communities began. It is in many ways a social microcosm because of its diversity.

The project, sited on an unused former military housing complex, has developed as a spiritual and ecological community with 130 people. Lebensgarten is operated on the basis of individual economy and social responsibility. There is not a communal economy, and the general aims are to live with each other and with nature in compassion, creativity and balance.

In addition to housing, there is a 13 acre permaculture project, started in 1986. The community also includes several members who practice and teach alternative healing methods, a group that produces arts and crafts, including musical instruments, and a seminar group that organizes courses with subjects ranging from encounter groups to practical environmental protection. Among other service facilities, Lebensgarten members now reach out to help the foundation of smaller and middle-sized ecological settlements in Germany, France and the Netherlands.¹

This brief description does little to portray the richness of Lebensgarten or its history, but does provide an entry point into learning about this unique community. This was the description we had available to us before arriving at the train platform to be picked up by community member Declan Kennedy. We were therefore amazed at the story of this place that began to unfold during our initial day's tour and introduction.

During World War II, Steyerberg was an important, though highly secretive location, due to a huge munitions factory located in the nearby forest. Hidden among the dense, dark forest, the factory produced large amounts of weaponry used during the war. Prisoners were brought from labor camps in Poland and Russia, to work in the factory under harsh, brutal and often lethal conditions. Thousands died while performing this forced labor. At the perimeter of the forest, where the terrain levels off into rich farmland, officers' quarters were constructed out of the red brick that is so abundant in Lower Saxony. The housing was clustered about a small

hospital, dining hall and an army room, where military personnel met to make decisions about the factory and coordinate weapon's production. After Germany's surrender, British troops occupied the space for several years. A place of brick and mortar, death and horror, the munitions factory and the housing facilities were then closed and left uninhabited for many years.

In the late 1970's a small group of German people began to discuss ways they might help their country continue to heal from the brutality and psychic scars left by the horrors of WWII. In particular they sought out a place that epitomized that brutality and violence, with hopes of transforming it from a place of death, into a place of life. By 1984 they began their community in the very same buildings that had once housed military personnel. The buildings were in disrepair and many years were spent rebuilding the site and making it habitable. Throughout the rebuilding process, that early group of community members worked with great intention to alter the energy of the place, striving to make it a place of peace instead of war. By reclaiming and transforming this space, they hoped, healing could occur that might spread outward to touch other people and communities. The name "Lebensgarten," or "living garden", was chosen to symbolize the intended transformation and the commitment of the community to make the place one of life and hope.

In the fifteen years since then, the community has grown to nearly 130 people, 85 adults and 40 children. The once stark brick barracks, are now lovely homes, with brightly painted doors, clean, white shutters, each home with gentle personal touches that reflect the pride of the residents. Lovely

pocket gardens are found alongside the homes, which in early spring are bursting with crocus, tulips, and flowering bushes. The former army hospital is now the guest house, named Heille Haus, 'healing house", the army room has become a chapel, and the large mess hall is now home to theater productions, basketball, skate boarding, and morning dancing, when weather forces the dancers off the outside central square. A small shop, art studios, meditation rooms, a common greenhouse and a dining area all face out onto the central square, a bricked area that serves as a social and aesthetic hub of the community. Here, each morning community members gather to dance together, greeting the morning and easing themselves into a gentle daily rhythm. More gardens and a small playground also ensure that this central area is also filled daily with the voices and energy of the young. Well-placed benches provide space for community members and guests to sit and enjoy the view or engage in conversation or silent reflection. The chapel and various meditation rooms all bear a variety of religious symbols and images in an attempt to keep the community interfaith and open to the wisdom of different traditions. As my family and I took our first tour of the place, hearing about its history from long-time member Declan Kennedy, we could immediately feel that this was a place that valued art and creativity. Everywhere were lovely garden spots, window boxes, colors, shapes, areas for sitting, all so inviting and peace-filled. Out of the death-dealing archways of the past emerged a source of life-giving beauty and hope. Through love,

hard work and vision, the members of the community transformed this place into a truly living garden that bespeaks respect, creativity, peace and joy.

During our stay at Lebensgarten, my family and I had the joy of spending our first week living with a gracious community member, Brunhilda, in order to help orient us to the community, and our remaining weeks living in Heille Haus, with a bit more space and privacy. Both living situations enhanced our experience of the place by giving us opportunity to view the community and its daily life from several different vantage points. Our days were filled with walks and long conversations, working on the permaculture plot, hiking through the nearby forest, and for me, additionally, interviewing members and taking a week-long course entitled "Living in Community." The following is from the program booklet and describes the course:

Global Eco-Village Network, Eco-Village Training Center has set up a cycle of courses under the general heading, 'How to start an eco-village.' The training program consists of 6 courses, each of them focusing on a different subject of eco-village life. The courses can be attended separately. They are directed primarily at European participants and will be taught in English.

Living in Community: What are the joys and pitfalls? How does a community become sustainable over time? How to create a good core group in the beginning; conflict resolution as a learning process and decision-making processes.
Led by Declan Kennedy.

Additional courses in the cycle included other aspects of eco-village design, fruit-tree planting, earth-homes and fund-raising. While these course were being offered, a wide-array of additional courses were being offered at the community, including ones on topics such as massage, peace-making, and

working with healing herbs. Just looking through the program booklet one gets a sense of how diverse this community is and the wide variety of educational opportunities available to guests, visitors and community members themselves. Education is clearly important for this community as it seeks to be a life-giving garden of hope and healing.

Education at Lebensgarten

As this community grew and more of the physical space was transformed, there became an increasing interest in providing educational opportunities for the broader community. The rationale for beginning such programs was two-fold: the courses could be income generators for the community, and they could also provide the venue for sharing some of the values, skills and practical knowledge the community members had accrued over the years that might be beneficial to others who similarly wanted to work toward greater peace, tolerance and understanding. Today, there are dozens of courses offered, with people coming from around the world, as well as throughout Germany, to learn, gain information, and return to their own towns or workplaces with new ideas and abilities.

The courses run differently but are all organized around the concept of 'holism,' seeking to promote more holistic ways of living whether through the foods one eats, the exercises with which one engages, or on a larger social scale, the way conflict is resolved, or sustainable practices are integrated into daily living.

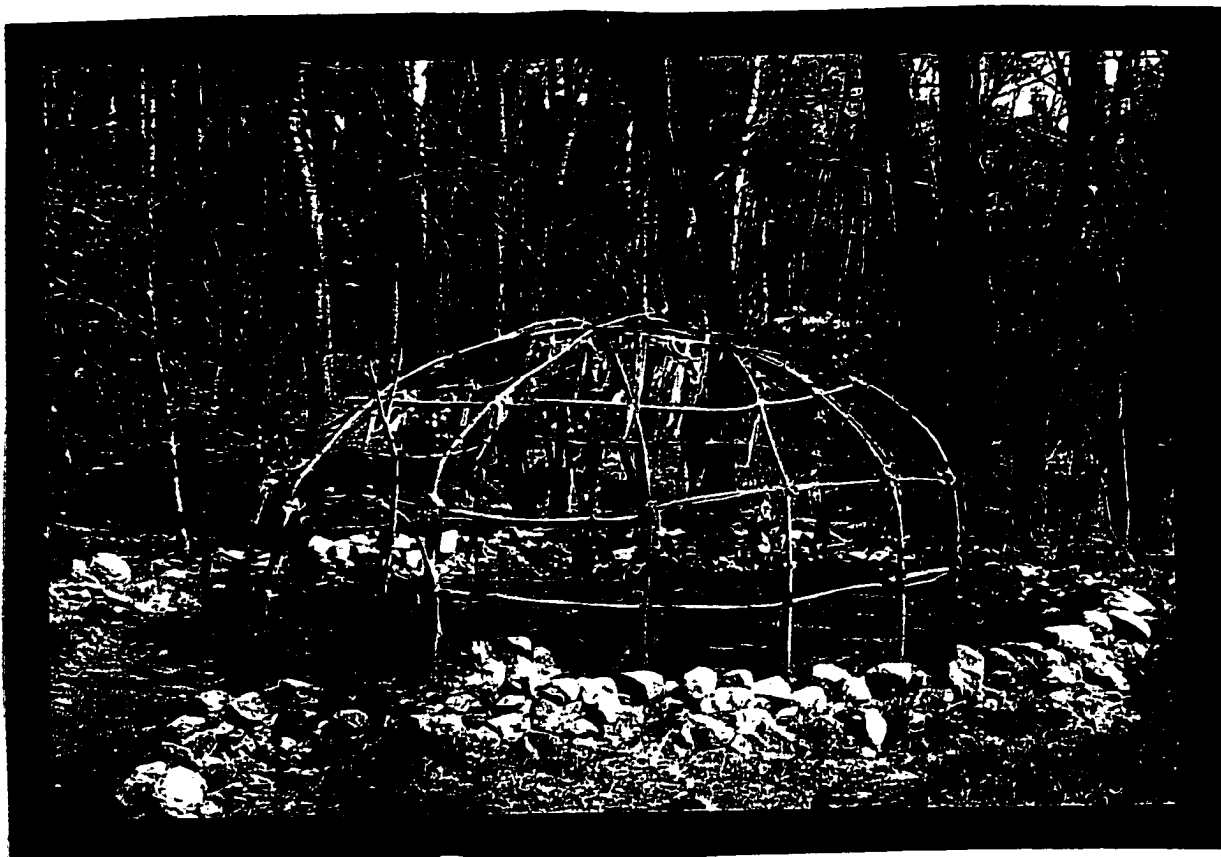
One of the coordinators for the educational courses is Declan Kennedy. He and his wife Margrit have been living at Lebensgarten since 1986. Declan, an architect by training, spent several decades teaching environmental health and public affairs, urban design and urban planning, both in the U.S. and Germany. By the early 1980's he felt that many of his teaching commitments were compromised due to the rigidity of the settings in which he taught, and desiring a setting that would allow for more holistic ways of teaching and working with students, he came to use his skills at Lebensgarten. Margrit and he had long been interested in living in community, and coupled with Declan's desire to spend the next phase of his teaching career in a more innovative setting, the decision to join this community seemed a timely one. I spent numerous afternoons and meals with both Declan and Margrit, finding them to be extremely helpful in my learning more about the community and the way it operates, while also hearing more about the educational philosophy and pedagogy that undergirds the courses at Lebensgarten. Declan was also the teacher for the course I took on "Living in Community."

Declan Kennedy's commitment to innovative teaching has had a strong influence on the approach to education in the community. Those commitments were present, even in his former teaching positions, despite institutional limitations. Said Declan in one of our conversations in the sunny solarium in their home:



Electric cars are one of the ways Lebensgarten practices ecological alternatives.

Photograph 15



The frame of a sweat lodge stands empty here, but is used for community ceremonies.

Photograph 16

The techniques and different modes of learning we use here at Lebensgarten, I have been using and experimenting with for years. I used them first at the University of Pittsburgh where I worked on a joint program between Environmental Health and Public Affairs. I used a lot of experiential learning with computers, as well as using problem-solving scenarios and a variety of interactive games. All these different modes I used with undergraduate, as well as graduate students, and it was a great thing. From there I went to the Technical University of Berlin, in 1972, still behind the Wall. There I was teaching students urban design and urban planning to architectural students, again through computers and gaming. It gave them a wonderful experience of using their own creativity, of trying to work together, of having fun with the material and coming up with things they might not have otherwise. Even now still when I meet these students elsewhere, they often talk about the experience. Many of them got opened to self-learning through those experiences. The most important thing they needed at that time was really getting beyond being 'learn fed,' but really digging in and playing with the material, pushing themselves and each others, engaging with the material at a new level. Not me just spoon-feeding it all to them, but them finding their way. As much as it was wonderful with the students, after 14 years of that I got very weary of being 'odd man out', with the rest of the faculty, and found I was very weary and low on energy. Having little support for what I was doing, it was hard to keep going that way. I needed more support and that is what led me to want to use these ideas here at Lebensgarten to develop trainings and courses that could allow me to use the holistic stuff in a supportive environment.²

During that same conversation Declan spoke further about the philosophy of education that he and others at Lebensgarten seek to embody:

In part, it has to do with making the teacher redundant. In other words, to empower the learner, rather than just giving him (sic) the knowledge. The teacher has certain knowledge and information, of course, but the emphasis should be on putting the student in a position of life-long learning. So that means you have to get other methods going. You will still have times of lecture-style teaching, but not always be focused on the frontal situation.

The "frontal situation?" I asked, unclear what he was referring to:

The frontal situation is where the teacher is up in front. It is one-directional, with the focus on the teacher in the front. Instead there needs to be more of a situation of conviviality or co-laboration. 'Labore,' in latin, means working together. A hackneyed word is the 'workshop' and because so many workshops have become little more than little lectures themselves, they really miss the point of laboring together. There is even a certain amount of manual work where you can learn by doing. You can work at planting trees, connecting with the energy of the tree, the energy of the earth, and the communal energy, the communal doing, and you have all the things for learning right there. So that's the sort of way we try to get different modes going in the courses. I call them 'modes,' a way of doing the thing. Using different modes that all work together, move together, one building upon another.

There is so much you can do then, combining lecture, getting people up to move around, and of course a certain amount of humor and playfulness engages people at a deeper level, helps them connect with the material and also with the process, the group, the community of learners that is being formed in that few hours, days or weeks. For example, once I took about a half moment of silence before I began to speak. Then I broke into song, a beautiful one from Three Penny Opera. I don't know it in English, but it roughly translates that you make a big plan, and then you become enlightened and then you make another plan and then you don't do either of them because in this life the person is not clever enough to carry out a workable plan. So the song ends saying that because of such failings you bang the person on the head. It is a lively song. (At which point Declan breaks into song to regale me with the full force of his illustration, then resumes his reflections) And the song in German, because of a play on words is quite funny and gets everyone laughing. Then I often use a mixture of slides and some overheads. I learned a lot from my math teacher when I was quite young. He taught that when you need to remember a formula or some way of solving a problem, you create a rhyme or a joke. There are many creative ways to commit things to memory and so I sometimes do a few of those. I learned a lot from him. And if you can get humor into it, you get people thinking differently. Engaging people using a variety of forms is important. Too much of one thing, whether its slides, lectures, or even the humor and song, too much of one thing and the mind loses interest. As you vary things, but have them connected and each part building upon the previous, you stimulate the learners and get them engaged.³

This type of creative engagement was evident in the “Living in Community” course in its entirety. Each day was a mixture of presentation/lecture, discussion, meditation, perhaps some artwork, or making something with our hands. We used our bodies through movement, hiking, even biking one day. We used our minds through the receiving, processing and analyzing of new information and ideas, including dynamic discussions that took place throughout the week. Declan modeled his rejection of the “frontal situation,” both in the way he physically structured the classroom in a circle, and through his involvement of the participants, who were never mere spectators of the “sage on the stage” but collaborators with the “guide by the side.”⁴

Another community member I spoke with, Anne, has been at Lebensgarten for nearly a decade. She herself came to the community out of a tumultuous personal situation, seeking peace and healing. Now for the past five years she has been using some of her own learnings in the courses she works with. Our conversation took place in her lovely home, adorned with beautiful artwork, candles and several bouquets of flowers. She had prepared a lovely table with tea and a variety of biscuits and fruit. As we relaxed in this quiet setting, she spoke about her background and what she strives for in her courses at Lebensgarten. Her training had been in education, so finally getting to use those skills again and continue to develop them here within the community was especially meaningful for her. Said Anne:

For the past five years I have helped develop workshops around peace and peace-making and most recently on mediation and conflict-resolution. I spent time working in war-torn areas, trying to help people rebuild their lives, trying to help them rebuild peace. Those experiences brought me to want to work with others who are trying to live more peacefully. That has led me to work on peacemaking between men and women, on citizen diplomacy--peacemaking between people of different nations, and also peacemaking with the earth - The Children's Peace Tree Project. All these are courses that may differ some, but they all focus on finding ways to live with more peace, to focus on and heal your own wounds - a real self-discovery process that allows you to come to know yourself better. There, at your own center, that is probably the only way where peace can really take root and be lasting. So, to learn peacemaking is necessarily to spend energy on self-discovery and inner healing.

This can take many forms and during our courses we vary the format, doing meditation, role-playing and lots of diad work. Education, you see, is also about healing. You can see it here in this place (Lebensgarten), but it is true elsewhere.⁵

A theme that seemed to be consistent with Declan, Anne and others I spoke with was the commitment to a varied educational format that provided learners opportunity to engage their whole self in a process of discovery, and move them along a path toward life-long learning. Another underlying theme was the commitment to helping model for learners ways to be actively engaged in promoting peace, cultivating creativity and valuing diversity. These, said many in the community, are educational values that need to be present in any learning setting, formal or informal, for only then can education truly lead to a whole, healed and balanced future.

Whole Learners and Holistic Learning

As described in the early pages of this paper, much has contributed, over the centuries, to the kinds of fragmented and reductionist thinking so rampant in contemporary culture. The Greek bifurcation of body and soul,

the material and non-material realms, the later scientific revolution's elevation of objectivism, and the gradual, yet continual distancing of moderns from the physical world and the forces of nature, all have contributed to a particular world view that continues to receive greater scrutiny and increasing criticism. Physicist Fritjov Capra has written extensively of the tensions that exist between such fragmented thinking and more holistic ways of describing and understanding reality. In *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, Capra draws upon his vast knowledge of physics and systems thinking to provide an alternative to classical Cartesian, mechanistic understandings of the world. He writes compellingly of the need to expand beyond dualisms that necessarily limit our vision of ourselves and the world in which we live, toward a world view that makes room for a holism that is radically relational and interconnected. Through such a shift, believes Capra, will come the ideas and energy to move toward patterns of living that are truly sustainable for generations to come.

The power of abstract thinking has led us to treat the natural environment--the web of life--as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. Moreover, we have extended this fragmented view of our human society, dividing into different nations, races, religions and political groups. The belief that all these fragments--in ourselves, in our environment, in our society--are really separate has alienated us from nature and from our fellow human beings and thus has diminished us. To regain our full humanity, we have to regain our experience of connectedness with the entire web of life.⁶

Capra encourages the development of holistic ways of thinking that will promote a sustainable and ecologically-grounded future. Such thinking, he argues, may arise out of modern science, but is truly an ancient and

somewhat intuitive way of looking at the world, wherein the emphasis is placed on the whole, rather than the parts.

Placing an emphasis on the whole, rather than only the parts is an important feature of the educational and social life of Lebensgarten. Here, as in the other communities I visited, there is the deep recognition of and respect for the integrity and worth of each person. The wholeness of each individual connects with and contributes to the wholeness and well-being of the larger community and beyond. Most people I spoke with at Lebensgarten shared a belief in the need for learners to be able to bring their entire selves into the learning process and similarly, community members needed to be able to bring their entire selves into the life of the community. There was a deep recognition that holistic learning will best be fostered in settings which model such holism through particular topical content, as well as through specific methodologies or processes that demonstrate such commitments.

Within the educational courses this commitment to holism is visible in a variety of ways. Declan is quick to note that some people grow suspicious when one speaks of holism, and may conjure up all sorts of “new age” images. But he and others have a firm commitment to creating learning environments that model holistic thinking and that help learners make connections for themselves, coming to see the world in relational terms, rather than as isolated, discreet entities. In responding to critics who may claim that such approaches are less analytical or scientifically-based, Declan offers this perspective:

Things are not as reducible as we sometimes like to believe. We have to begin even looking at science differently. And of course we have examples to look at, of places where even science is already working holistically. Like the space program. That involves a lot of hard science, but if you are going to put a man on the moon, you better well think holistically, because there are so many things to consider, to plan for, to anticipate. You can't just think of one aspect when putting a man in space. You have to think of the machine, but also the human, the social aspects, the emotional, the physical, the whole organism with a multitude of many different systems working together. . . Our own bodies are an example of where divinity/the mysterious, and the technical and mechanical, the systems approach all come together. As complex as our body is, it is a series of connected systems that not only each do their part, but interact with the others and are influenced and affected by the others. We can quite simply look even at our own bodies as an accessible example of the need to draw on this kind of wisdom in other areas of life.

What I am trying to do is get the whole, the holy, in each day, in each week, in each workshop or course. So that you can see all the different components, the marrying of the technical and the intuitive/creative, the doing and the thinking. In one moment you will certainly be doing one thing, but then in the next, you will build upon that by doing something different that reinforces the idea or allows you to work on the issue through a different venue. Like in our course when we would sit and talk, or ride the bikes to the cemetery, or be silent in meditation or reflection. A movement connecting the thoughts and the doing of something, moves us toward a kind of holism that leads us to new possibilities.⁷

This commitment to learning experiences that blend thought and action was embodied throughout the "Living in Community" course in a number of ways. Each day began with dance and throughout the day the course might include a lecture and discussion, silent meditation around a candle or outdoors in the sunshine. Singing, artwork, cognitive and collaborative games, videos and overheads, were incorporated throughout the week, engaging the learners through a variety of approaches and allowing

a setting which recognized that learning was a full-body experience. The use of the arts was something new for several of the learners in the course and they initially expressed some discomfort with trying their hand at artwork, clay or drawing. But by the end of the week many expressed that using their creativity, though uncomfortable at first, was truly a gift, reminding them of their own creativity. "Creativity, you know," noted Declan, his Irish eyes sparkling, "anything that helps people experience their own creativity, that changes how they feel and how they learn. That's dynamic! That's the 'holy' part of 'holism'."⁸

For teachers to recognize the "whole learner" is not always an easy task, and sometimes means that the flow of a course gets interrupted and adjustments need to be made in the moment, something some teachers are more comfortable with than others. Our course had been going for about 5 days. The day began with a time of quiet reflection and "centering" while we gathered our thoughts for the day and prepared ourselves for the morning's activities. We had a full schedule, so after the time of silence, we began our work. Just moments into a discussion of mediation and conflict resolution, Vally Palsdottier, who had often been fairly quiet, suddenly spoke up. Something that had been said in regard to the complexity of human relationships had sparked a memory within her. As she began to speak her voice trembled. She spoke of a dream she had the night before in which her godchild came to her. The godchild, Vally told us, had died tragically about a year ago and the dream had left her feeling overwhelmed with sadness. In

some settings, little might have been said or done, and the group, with noticeable awkwardness might have just returned to the topic and moved on. But that morning, I saw a teacher skillfully and lovingly make space in the agenda for the expression of real, raw human emotion, and invited the expression of those feelings to be interwoven into a setting often reserved for the cognitive-rational alone. Declan invited Vally to tell us about her godchild, times they spent together, how she had died. For nearly twenty minutes Vally's words and images poured forth, along with more tears and even a bit of laughter. She told the story of this young one who had meant so much to her and of her own profound sense of grief in her passing, how throughout the week as she spent more time being attentive to her own feelings, sitting in meditation, letting the week's learnings move into her own spiritual/intellectual/emotional center, she became aware of fresh places of pain that had, as yet, been untouched. The group sat attentively listening. At times Declan would ask a question, but mostly, he too was silent. When Vally seemed to have spoken all she needed, we sat in silence around the candle, with Declan leading us through a brief remembrance of the young girl and offering prayers of healing to all who loved her.

It could have happened anywhere, but it probably would not have. I have been in classrooms where a student makes mention of a personal loss or trauma, that is often barely acknowledged before the energies of the class are refocused for "the task at hand." But here in a simple act of humanity, Declan had modeled what educator and Process Theologian Mary Elizabeth

Moore terms “teaching from the heart.” In her book by the same title, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*, Moore describes the art of such teaching as “an act of reverence,⁹ willingness and commitment on the part of the teacher to hold learners and the learning process with a great deal of respect and appreciation. Quoting from Thomas Groome, she further describes the art of teaching from the heart as a passion for people: “a deep passion and caring for the well-being of those we would presume to educate.¹⁰ Such passion and care allow one to recognize the sacred story that each learner brings and to trust that the unfolding of that story is not merely peripheral to the learning process, but essential to it. Putting the emphasis on the primacy and value of relationship, Moore, like Nel Noddings in her ethics of care,¹¹ believes that effective educational methodology emanates from a profound respect for the integrity of persons and a commitment to the inherent wholeness of each learner. The educational process then becomes one in which the very process itself assists learners in discovering that wholeness in themselves and in the world.

Capra and many contemporary scientists are helping make possible the development of holistic world views, grounded in contemporary understandings of quantum physics, biology, chemistry and math. These world views are already finding their way into the course content at Lebensgarten, as learners engage in discussion about the new physics and its implications for our time, discover some of the cutting-edge work being done in permaculture or explore dimensions of sustainability. But in addition to

exposure to such holistic paradigms, the courses also reflect a deep commitment to modeling that very holism through process and relationship. That was certainly evidenced in my course, time and again, helping provide a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment for discovery and learning.

Expanding the Classroom

Another particular feature of educational programs at Lebensgarten seemed consistently to be an "expanding of the classroom," enabling students, both figuratively and literally, to take the classroom discussions and information out into the world and into other varied settings. It was not unusual to see a group walking together in the gardens, working on the permaculture plot, or going off on a field trip in order to connect their learning with other aspects of life. One such experience during my course was a bike trip from the community, twining through the forest on dirt paths, to the cemetery where an estimated 2,000 people were buried. The graves stand as testimony to those who died while working under horrific conditions at the munitions factory. The themes of tolerance, trust, and living in community that we had been discussing in the classroom took on particular significance as we gathered in that solemn site. My journal entry from that day cannot capture the depth of my emotions, but provides an entry point into some of the learnings this expanded classroom provided:

Riding a bicycle along the narrow dirt road, tall pines towering like silent sentries on either side. Peddling, I move in and out of shadows that crisscross the pathway beneath my tires. The late afternoon sun is warm and it feels good to have the breeze blow past me as I cycle along. The sky, so blue, the fields to my left a verdant green, the cool dark forest to my right, a place of mystery

and silence. I find myself breathing with the rhythm of my peddling, in and out, up and down, stretching out my legs, drawing in a long slow breath. There is an abundant stillness--the air is quiet, yet there is a fullness, an overflowing quality I find difficult to describe. The air is full - full of life, full of springtime's promises, full of the silent memories of ages past when others moved along these pathways. My heart, too, feels full.

But the juxtaposition is jarring. My bike eases to a stop along a high fence, maybe twenty feet high, with rows of barbed wire stretching above that. What is this place? Then only a little further ahead the fence makes a dog leg making room for the cemetery, just alongside the path. The Cemetery is a grave site for over 2000 "casualties of war," mostly Russians who were put in forced labor camps only to die from malnutrition, disease, torture, and despair. Their labor camp was here, just on the other side of that high fence, hidden in the forest, that only moments ago seemed filled with peace and quiet. The munitions factory where these very souls were forced to work, creating weapons of death to be used on their own people. The graves are marked with simple red flagstone, common to the area, but in many places the stones bear lists, not of a single name or family, but a column of 20-30 names, or even worse, the only marking reading "30 Dead Russians." Deep sorrow flows through me as I stand and look and feel and let the knowledge of this place, the horror of this place flood my senses. And this is just one little cemetery in a country riddled with such grotesque scars--tangible reminders of the human capacity to live completely detached from others, from compassion, from tolerance. My small group of fellow students, equally stunned, gather in a circle around a particular gravestone, for quite some time, feeling the place, paying silent tribute to those whose last days were spent in unimaginable oppression, violence, pain. My heart aches. My mind races with questions that have no answers, no words to make sense of all this. In silence I stand, I listen, I breathe a prayer.

Peddling back, riding fast, now, down the hills, bumping on old roots, nearly getting tossed in a hidden patch of loose sand. In and out of shadows. Is that not truly where we dwell? Moving through light and darkness, suffering and joy, the horror and the beauty of it all, along a bumpy, unfamiliar path toward home.¹²

Later, in another entry I reflected further about the significance of that afternoon trip. The opportunity to blend the theory of community-building, cooperation, trust-building, sustainable practices, with its visible antithesis so stark and emotionally devastating, was a powerful and incredibly educational experience. To physically move into another space had been crucial for many of us who later discussed the experience. And to enter another emotional and psychic space had also led us to many learnings, insights and awarenesses. A fellow student I later interviewed at length shared similar feelings about the trip. Vally Palsdottir lives and works in an intentional community in Iceland especially designed for the mentally challenged. For her the experience at the cemetery served as a powerful learning in human choice:

Maybe one of the most useful or educational elements of the week, for me, was the trip we took on the bicycles. To go to that cemetery and it is so close to this lovely place (Lebensgarten). And the radioactive waste dump was on the way. Here is this beautiful example of community at Lebensgarten. Here we are talking about and learning about helping create thriving, healthy communities, and so near are these examples, so sad, of no community. The violence done during the war, the violence against a people, also the violence against the earth itself. We could sit at Lebensgarten and talk about those things, what happens when there is a break down in community, but to go there, to ride on a bicycle, like I was a schoolgirl, (she laughs briefly at the feeling of youthfulness the bike ride temporarily provided, then her face grows serious again) to ride through that beautiful countryside on that beautiful day, then go to such a place. Here there is a permaculture plot and it is so lovely, so creative, and then you ride to the graveyard and it is, oh. . . (Vally's voice trails off, she shrugs her shoulder and shakes her head as if in disbelief that such horror can take place) it said more to me about the importance of our daily choices than anything I ever could have read or studied. Those people in the cemetery, were like us. The people forcing them to work and to

die, they too were like us. The people off in villages, acting as if they didn't know, they are like us too. And so are the ones who were making the decisions and choosing who would live or die. It came upon me, there in that quiet, awful place. . . .we are all connected, we all suffer, we all inflict the suffering, we all die. I rode back from that place with a new awareness of how important each moment is, each action, each choice. It all matters like never before.¹³

None of us came back from that bike ride unchanged. For there in the quiet of the German countryside our learning did not simply grow out of the sacred and peaceful, but also out of the horror and brokenness that is also part of the human experience. To honor human experience and to see it as educative it is important to note that it will not only be from the beautiful that we learn, but also from the ugly, the evil, the dark and terrible. A simple three hour excursion had taken a group of learners to new places in their knowledge of the world and of themselves. The expanded classroom had expanded our own capacity to think and feel and integrate even through the sadness of it all. Ours was not just the rational journey, reading and absorbing the facts and figures about those who died in a long ago war. It was also the emotional and visceral journey that comes when faced with experiences that defy reason. Through the experience I became increasingly aware that such encounters with evil, with the extent of human brokenness and cruelty, may also be crucial elements of education in that they allow learners access to parts of their own psyche and emotional landscape that may provide deepening insights and understanding.



A place where life and death confront each other on a daily basis, Lebensgarten seeks to truly be "a living garden" even on a site which was a place of suffering and many deaths during World War II.

Photographs 17 and 18

Other such experiences of the expanded classroom were much less dramatic, but no less educational. During the week we had heard about permaculture and spent time learning about the ways it differs from monoculture. In the strictly agricultural or natural sense, it has to do with the growing of a variety of plants that are mutually enhancing, creating a stable ecosystem. This is most evident in natural settings, meadows, woodlands, where a variety of plants, trees, shrubs, even insects and small creatures all live and thrive in a balanced relationship. Modern culture has opted primarily for the cultivation of monoculture, the growing of a single crop or plant in a given area. This makes the plants more vulnerable to disease, requiring more fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides and is ultimately more labor intensive, leading to the use of large machines which may be hard on the land and that use non-renewable energy for fuel. In contrast, permaculture relies on nature's wisdom, wherein a variety of plants interact with each other creating a healthy environment for plants and wildlife. Bugs are usually kept in check and are rarely a problem. Other key features include soil preservation, chemical balances, use of renewable resources, and long-term sustainability. Permaculture is gaining widespread attention, throughout the world, as farmers, educators, policy-makers and futurists look for sustainable methods for food production.

During our course we read articles on this topic, heard lectures, and discussed various issues connected to permaculture's strengths and limitations. Midway through the course we had another experience of the

expanded classroom as we journeyed the short walk to the permaculture plot at the far northern edge of the community's property, and spent the day experiencing permaculture first hand. We toured the plot, learning about its organization, what plants work best together and the special attention given to creating "sun traps" for most efficient use of solar rays. We observed and studied plant combinations that reduce insect infestation and got ideas for planting with an eye for aesthetics, as well. We got our hands dirty in the rich soil, compost-feeding a number of fruit trees, pulling out grass around young plants, to be used elsewhere as mulch, transplanting a number of birch trees in a better, sunnier location. My family even was able to join us that day as we dug and laughed, planted and watered, reflecting all the while on themes of interconnection and sustainability. This exercise provided the opportunity to ground our learnings, quite literally, in a practical, hands-on experience, which took the themes from being merely abstract, to being quite tangible and engaging. As a learner and one unfamiliar with permaculture, this foray into the farm plot, provided me a deeper understanding and working knowledge of permaculture than might have been possible from merely reading a book or hearing the process described. Working with the plants, my hands covered with moist soil, perspiration trickling down my back, learning the names of plants as I handled them and talking with other students, I found myself fully engaged with the learning process, using all my senses to integrate the cognitive information received in the classroom, made

more meaningful by this immersion into the practical application of my knowledge.

Such experiences of the expanded classroom are quite common at Lebensgarten, tangibly reflecting some of the core educational values of the community. Declan and Anne spoke of how these rich experiences empower learners, by giving them firsthand knowledge, rather than always having the information processed, mediated, and delivered by the teacher or instructor. At the end of the week, Vally reflected upon the importance of this kind of concrete learning and the value of connecting learners with the subject matter:

The starting place for most learning, I think, is in connecting, getting people connected to the subject, to each other, working together. That way, in the connecting, the people have the place for learning. You don't just hold the learnings in your head, but as you work and use your hands, your body, your ideas, all of it comes together in a new way inside of you. The important thing is providing the meeting place for these kinds of real-life encounters, like we had this week (in the course). Getting people to work on a project, share a meal, creatively try to solve a problem together, something happens between the people and within them, and that is where the education starts.¹⁴

Margrit Kennedy, herself an architect, teaches in nearby Hanover at a large college. She occasionally helps with courses at Lebensgarten, and her experience and understanding of the learning process have made her a highly valued community resource. For her, the learnings that this setting provide are not limited to the courses being offered, but are part of the daily living of life within a community where there is nowhere to hide, and everywhere you go you continue to meet yourself! One afternoon during my stay, Margrit

and I spent several hours enjoying tea and a sumptuous bowl of strawberries as we spoke about the personal self-discovery side of learning and of the transformations that take place as we come to know ourselves more deeply. She recounted an experience of a particular member of the community, "Olaf," who did not really fit in. He seemed odd to Margrit and others, always going around singing songs about God and seeming "out of touch." Margrit had harsh feelings toward him and was even part of a group from the community that went and confronted Olaf, asking him to change or leave. She recounts how he refused to change, saying, "I am who I am. I cannot change. What are you so afraid of?" Several days later, recounts Margrit, while driving home from teaching in Hanover, she suddenly realized "Olaf" had as much right to be in the community as she. Perhaps he was equally appalled by the way she chose to live, by her values and way of being. Suddenly, overwhelmed by a sense of acceptance for him, she began singing loudly, songs of praise and joy. Maybe she needed to sing more praises to God, herself. In accepting "Olaf", she tells, she could accept a part of herself long denied. She came home singing that day, went to his house and told him of her awareness and apologized for the way she had acted so unlovingly toward him. As she accepted him as a neighbor and a community member, she changed. And, she adds, he changed right before her eyes, or at least her perception of him changed. So many times in the community, claims Margrit, it is the one you think you like least who you end up learning the

most from. That, claims Margrit, is because they hold up a mirror of yourself, your own dark side, exposing to the light things you are reluctant to see.

Acceptance, in this situation, brought about transformation, from the inside out. As I embraced "Olaf," I could embrace within myself things I had pushed away long ago, my spirituality, a kind of spontaneous exuberance that I knew as a girl, but that I abandoned when I joined the professional world. I had come to take myself so seriously that I was made uncomfortable by one who embodied the simple, gentle, awe-filled faith of a child. The mirror was before me, and it was not "Olaf" that I disdained, it was part of my own story that I did not want to look at, address, alter.

Einstein said it was more difficult to change a person than to split an atom. Indeed, to change ourselves is the difficult work of this time, yet how can we change ourselves if somehow we are not given opportunities to meet ourselves along the way.

The true gold of this place are the day to day learnings that come from really living together, as a community, as family, unable to run from conflict or avoid what or who is distasteful. Here we must look without and within. That, for me, has been the gift, the grace, the gold of this place.

The buildings here at Lebensgarten only look and feel differently than the barracks used to, because those who inhabit them are seeking to live with peace, tolerance, creativity, trying to transform ourselves first, and that makes all the difference. It's most visible in the buildings and the beauty here, but that really just reflects the inner transformations that are at the core of it all.¹⁵

The "gold" of this place, the commitment to self-discovery and transformation are present in the courses, in the interpersonal relationships, in the daily living with others. The basis of such transformations is love, an intentional desire to have ones prejudices and judgments softened and gradually reshaped by a deeper sense of acceptance, compassion and peace. This kind of love is not the romantic fluff of a Hallmark greeting card, but is

that deep and genuine experience of coming to see ourselves as connected to another; and in that connection allowing a sense of compassion to arise. In Margrit's experience of transformation, she learned to accept not only "Olaf" but also herself, in a renewed bond of love and caring. Such transformations are not trivial matters, not mere waves of superficial platitudes, the stuff of greeting cards. No, in this community there is a deep and willing desire to be changed, to go through the sometimes startling, sometimes painful, often exhilarating experience of coming to know oneself and the world in a new light, one that makes room for the soothing, uplifting and ultimately transforming power of love. "Love" is not an academic term, and an educational setting that seeks to promote loving transformations seems far from mainstream. Yet Parker Palmer, Nel Noddings, Lisa Delpit, Maria Montessori and a host of educators, past and present share a similar commitment to a relationally-based educational methodology that not only makes room for, but believes education can most authentically occur where such transformations are present, acknowledged and celebrated. For Palmer, this is "knowing as we are known."

Education of this sort means more than teaching the facts and learning the reasons so we can manipulate life toward our ends. It means being drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world of which we are a part. . . this is a knowledge that does not distance us from the world, but brings us into community, face to face. A knowledge that heals and makes whole. . . the 'objects' of our knowledge will no longer be objects, but beings with personal faces, related to us in a community of being, calling us into mutuality and accountability. It will be as the poet Rilke says, . . . 'There is no place at all that isn't looking at you—you must change your life.'¹⁷

Such an education makes way for transformations that move learners into deeper awareness of them self and others, deeper contact with them self and others, deeper reverence for them self and others. That is the “gold” of this place.

At Lebensgarten there is a commitment to this kind of transformation. The learnings may come while community members gather over a meal, engage in consensus decision-making, take a particular course, or move through daily life. One thing that makes this community unique is that it is willing to speak unapologetically about the power of love to transform and heal. They have immersed themselves in a commitment to transformation. The means of promoting such transformation changes from day to day and situation to situation. In the “Living in Community” course, we had many opportunities to “meet ourselves,” to explore both the outer and inner qualities of building and sustaining a community. And we spoke about love. We talked about how love is present in our own lives and when we have felt its absence. We meditated on what keeps us from loving self and others and what encourages and enhances such loving. We worked in the soil, with loving intention. We picked wild greens to share with each other over mealtime. We bicycled to a place that epitomized the lack of love, and toured a local cathedral which has as its sole mission, “to make love visible in the world, in our communities, in our lives.” We cried and laughed and learned together, acknowledging that such real encounters change us, transform us, bring us to new levels of knowing and being known. As the course came to

an end I wrote about the impact of the place and the commitment to transformation:

For me this place, this Living Garden, is made ever so much more powerful and inspiring because it is transforming the evil, pain and death that haunts this place, indeed haunts this planet. If healing and wholeness can come out of this place, then truly anything is possible. There is no place so broken, no soul so broken that loving transformation and wholeness are not attainable. It is the resurrection story told all over again, a timeless message of the power of love to overcome lovelessness.¹⁸

There were many learnings that arose for me out of the week long course and out of our extended stay within the community. Perhaps most compelling were the constant, visible reminders of the power of love and the possibility of educational and community settings to be grounded in that power. Not a trivial matter, it is as Teilhard de Chardin suggests, this "love", so central to our humanity is by far the greatest force on earth, if we could but learn to harness its best energies.

Celebration and the Cultivation of Joy

Matthew Fox is best known for his theological writings that invite those who draw upon western Christianity as a spiritual source to revision and reclaim the much silenced side of that tradition. For Fox, sin and brokenness are not the original state of being for humans, but instead, it is blessing and wholeness that constitute our origins. His work has done much to articulate and promote a creation-centered spirituality that emphasizes connection, interdependence, love, beauty and justice. His only children's book, *In the beginning there was Joy: A celebration of CREATION for children of all ages*, portrays the process of creation as an outpouring of joy.

All that came to be, writes Fox, came about through cosmic exhilaration flowing forth and bringing to birth planets and plankton, ozone and oranges. He concludes with these instructions being offered to humanity by the Source of all things, Joy:

Now heed this advice if you want to find happiness and share what is nice:
 When there is trouble
 rise up from the rubble
 and remember your origin and source of our name:

Joy is your heritage-
 the family that made you-
 give it and receive it
 and don't ever leave it.
 To Joy be true.
 And never forget
 to play every day.

Now and forever.
 A holy endeavor.
 Worlds without end.
Amen. ¹⁹

Though written in verse with luscious, colorful illustrations to delight the senses of children, his book also speaks volumes to adult readers about a way of approaching life that is somewhat counterculture. Most of us, throughout our lives and formal education, learned that becoming an adult, becoming an educated person meant "putting away childish things," which included spontaneity, joy, play, celebration. Within most educational settings, allowances are made for the very young to engage in play, but gradually those opportunities become less and less until they are nearly nonexistent, promoting the view that education is a serious matter and that joy, laughter, play and celebration are of lesser value.

In contrast to these prevailing attitudes, the community members at Lebensgarten seem to have taken Matthew Fox's admonitions to heart. "There can be no real learning without joy, can there?," asked Declan Kennedy, his eyes twinkling. And indeed, it seems that many in the community have a deep appreciation for celebration and the cultivation of joy-filled habits. Their understanding of transformation and the building of sustainable communities includes the need for times of connection that allow one to laugh, dance, sing, and play. Noted Margrit Kennedy:

We already know all we need to know about how to live sustainably. We need now only the power and the will, the inner tools to make different choices.

Enjoyment is essential. You can't build a new paradigm that is sustainable, ecologically and spiritually, if it is built without enjoyment, pleasure, fun. These are not trivial or frivolous things, they are part of the essential foundation of anything lasting. At Lebensgarten this is embodied through daily dance, singing and chanting, and frequent and spontaneous celebrations. ²⁰

During our first week within the community, my family and I began attending the daily dancing. Members and visitors gathered on the beautiful brick plaza of the central square and for thirty minutes each morning, used our bodies to greet the day. The group ranged in age from 4 to 78, all sorts of backgrounds and body types, some who had danced for years and others who were just beginners. Breathing in the morning air, feeling the warmth of the hands of those on either side, moving in a circle to the sounds of music from various places in the world, near and far, the group celebrated the gift of a new day. It became a daily highlight for my children who delighted in the

movement as well as the intergenerational quality. A simple, yet powerful ritual that grounded one in his or her own body and connected one to the natural environment, a joyful embodied celebration, an opportunity for growth and learning.

Along with daily celebrations there were also the frequent “special” celebrations. One such celebration came just days before our departure from the community. It was April 23, 1998, a day that had been set aside by an international peace organization as a day to pray for peace in our world. About sixty members of the Lebensgarten community gathered in the large, sunny meditation room to spend time in silence, song and chanting. At the conclusion of this time the entire group moved out onto the terrace overlooking the central square to “plant” the peace pole. The pole, tall and white, had black writing on all four sides, different languages calling people to lives of peace. The following are my reflections written just after the ritual:

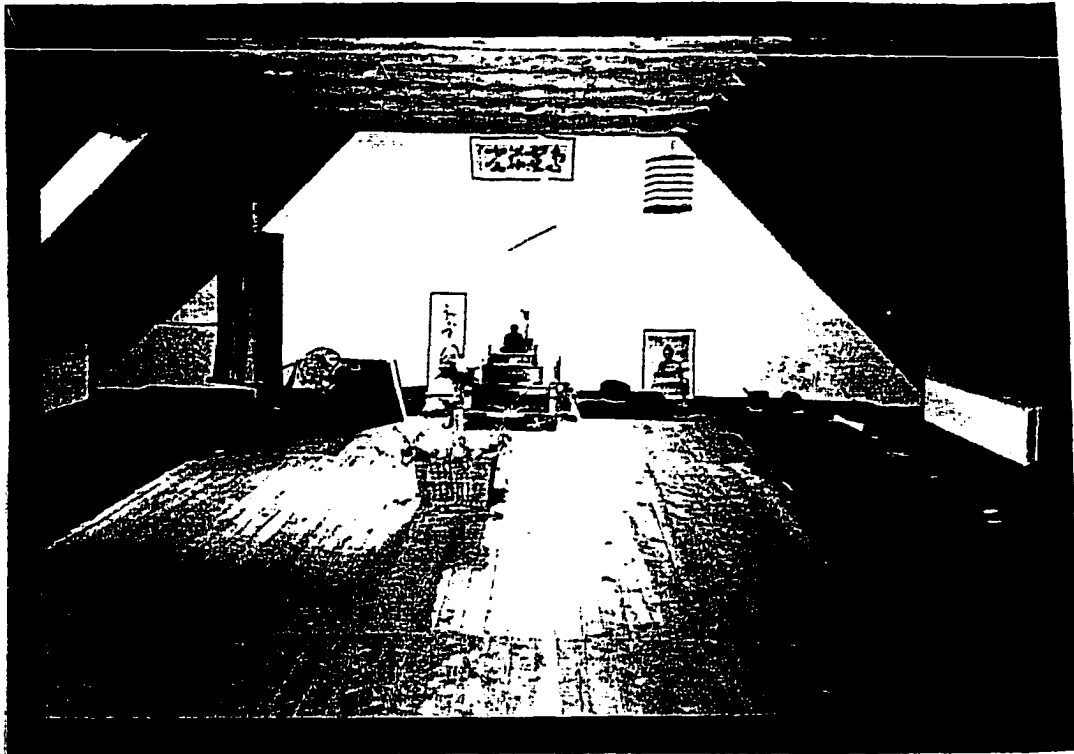
Standing in the bright morning sunshine
 Gathered on the garden terrace
 Where once soldiers stood in line for meals
 Surrounded by the same brick buildings
 That once helped promote a war -
 We stood.
 German and American, Dutch and Irish,
 Icelandic and Polish, Swedish and French.
 We meditated in silence for a world
 free from war and violence and intolerance.
 Placing the pole into the rich earth,
 Handful by handful we placed soil around the base
 to hold it firm.
 A solemn joy, a reverent hope.
 And then we sang.
 We sang of peace and love and joy
 Growing in our own hearts then
 Spreading out to all the world.

Standing in the bright morning sunshine
Gathered on the garden terrace
Eyes and hearts open to possibility
We changed the world
For peace.²¹

When Emma and Zachary speak about Lebensgarten, the planting of the peace pole is an event they both recall with detail and enthusiasm. They, like many of the adults present, felt the power and comfort that comes from such meaning-filled rituals, that provide the seed bed for hope, and that offer space to exercise a blessed part of our humanity.

Declan, ever the teacher, believes that such celebrations and expressions of joy and hope can be included within curricula in a way that is not manipulative, but allows for a type of interaction and fun that promotes learning. He has used games throughout his long teaching career and finds that the emotions, creativity and energy that are generated are amazing. But, he is also quick to note that “there is nothing magical about games or interactive play if it reinforces ideas and feelings of competition and fragmentation.”²² Instead, urges Declan, whether using games in a classroom or creating rituals for a family or gathering of friends, it is important to be clear about the underlying values and assumptions. Creating places for people to experience joy and pleasure is at the heart of learning, claims Declan, at the heart of transformation, at the heart of being alive.

Whether gathering for an evening bonfire on Easter-eve to “burn off the old and make way for the new,” celebrating a birthday, or greeting the dawn with a dance, this community takes seriously the importance of the



Finding a balance between stillness and action, the community values meditation, as well as the dancing that begins each day.

Photographs 19 and 20

cultivation of joy as an essential ingredient to human wholeness and the creation of healthy, sustainable communities.

Leave Taking

The month of April spent among the generous people of Lebensgarten left us with much to ponder and digest. As a student I experienced a learning environment that embodied values and reflected techniques that could be used in other settings. The commitment to self-discovery, the use of the expanded classroom, the respect of learners and a desire to promote a life-long love of learning, these were compelling qualities I could envision incorporating into classrooms and other learning settings elsewhere. Similarly, for my family, the immersion in a community so dedicated to transformation was life-giving. To witness a people who are actively engaged in creating a place of healing, hope, love and acceptance, will be something we will carry with us for a lifetime and will influence the way we choose to move through the world. Many learnings and awarenesses were made possible by this unique place and its genuine, human attempts to create a "living garden," out of a place of death and despair. We said our farewells and headed off by train to distant places and peoples, carrying with us the people and experiences of Lebensgarten.

PART III

NEW DIRECTIONS:
MEETING THE CHALLENGE

It cannot be surprising to anyone that we are facing serious environmental challenges. The toxicity of our planet is evident in places like Sweet Valley but also in the melting of the polar ice caps, subtle and dramatic changes taking place within the human body, the extinction of species, contaminants in water, air and food. The news of our plight can be devastating when we allow our senses to fully take it in. And because this Earth is home no matter how bad it gets there is no where else to run. There is no place we can hide from these painful realities. The environmental degradation that has been wrought upon this planet is yet to be fully understood, but what we do know is that we cannot delay. Scientists, politicians, activists, and religious leaders may argue about how we will alter our course, but most agree the time is now. In order to preserve the integrity of living things and to ensure a future for those yet to come we must find creative, effective, timely ways of addressing these issues and heading in a new direction in our relationship with nature, the cosmos and each other.

These new challenges facing us require that we tap into under-utilized capacities within the human heart and mind. We have the ability to analyze the effects of our present environmental choices and habits but we also need to further cultivate a deeper understanding of what these choices and habits

will inevitably lead to, and to reclaim the human passions that may allow us to alter our course. It is time that we reclaim the human capacity to love, feel, care and commit. Certainly we will need all our brilliant rational and cognitive skills as we undertake new directions in our relationship with this planet. I do not want to diminish the role that science and technology can and will play in leading to more sustainable ways of living and being. But we are in desperate need of reclaiming the long devalued human capacities to care, to be swept-up in wonder, to dream, to commit, to open oneself to grace and possibility.

In this section I will explore the ways in which education and spirituality can play vital and essential roles in helping cultivate more sustainable patterns of living. Drawing extensively on my experience at Findhorn, Lebensgarten and Svanholm, as well as the current literature and my own experience as a pastor and educator, I propose that it is in the recovery of some of these very qualities that we will find the additional tools and capabilities we need in order to create alternative ways of living in healthy, life-affirming ways. I suggest that educational and spiritual practices that are grounded in authentic relationships and that reveal the underlying interconnection of all things will help foster the human capacity to love and care for this planet and all its myriad creatures and lead to practices that honor and celebrate those fundamental relationships.

The challenge is before us. Again we are faced with diverging roads. For nearly 350 years we have taken the road of science and rational thought

almost exclusively. We did not take the road of intuition, faith or feeling. That has made all the difference. But these paths do not need to remain so divergent, for it is at their intersections that we are able to draw upon all that it means to be human - the cognitive and intuitive, rational and emotional, analytic and relational. It is time that we experience ourselves as whole beings in hopes that out of our lives and dreams might grow a world of health and well-being for us, our children and for the entire planet.

I do not wish to eliminate the tools that come from science, reason or rationality. On the contrary. They are gifts to be used wisely, thoughtfully and with great care and gratitude. But it is now time to awaken to the untapped resources that still lie within our reach, our own capacities to connect and relate, to love, care and create. It is time we commit our energies to a new path which values all the rich and varied dimensions of being human and that is open to the mystery that is beyond our grasp.

May our work and worship, our science and ritual, our knowledge and intuition help us meet the challenge with courage, vision and hope. May we be the ones who help make this world, once again, a garden.

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was and never will be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?

We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all of the world there is no other child exactly like you. In the millions of years that have passed, there has never been a child like you. And look at your body - what a wonder it is! Your legs, your arms, your cunning finger. You may become a Shakespeare, a

Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must cherish one another. You must work - we must all work - to make this world worthy of its children.

- Pablo Casals

CHAPTER 6

RELATIONAL LEARNING: GREAT AWAKENINGS AND AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

Introduction

My experiences within the intentional communities I visited were varied. Each providing me with incredible amounts of information and ideas as I sought to describe an educational approach that might promote more engaged and holistic learning. As described in the three preceding chapters the class discussions, outdoor activities, interactive games, as well as the commitment to affective learning and personal transformation made lasting impressions upon me. Despite many apparent differences between these communities with further reflection, I came to see that there were several themes that arose with great consistency. Each community places a high value on relationships and in their own particular ways seeks to cultivate a deepening sense of connection within the life of the learner. Though the methods varied from place to place each took seriously the goal of awakening learners to their place within the universe. At each location the people of these communities embodied a commitment to learning that is about engaging the whole learner--body, mind, spirit. Such models seek to draw learners into deeper and deeper levels of awareness about their connection to others, to Earth and the material world, to ideas, creativity,

emotions and other aspects of the non-material world. This holistic approach I am calling “relational learning” because at its core it is about discovering the fundamental reality of our deep connectedness to all things (a paradigm described in Chapter 1) and seeks to honor, cultivate and celebrate that reality. As an educational model relational learning is about **awakening** and **engagement** thereby distinguishing it from models which rely heavily upon detachment and pure objectivism. In the following pages I will articulate a pedagogy for life-long learning that has grown from my research and experience as a teacher and pastor. Three areas where I have chosen to focus are: relationship with self and others, relationship with place, and relationship with mystery and awe. I believe these three areas, in particular, seem to offer an essential starting point for those committed to cultivating learners’ capacity to actualize a just and livable future.

Relationship with Self and Others

The Student

Having spent nearly thirty years within academia as a learner, teacher or chaplain I have witnessed countless ways in which we treat students as empty vessels to be filled and teachers as the ones to fulfill that task. Paulo Freire refers to this approach as the “banking system of education.” In such a model the purpose of education is to “mould the minds and character”¹ of the young learners so that in due time they will find their rightful place in society. Such an approach calls for detached observation, wherein education

becomes a process of gaining bits and pieces of factual information provided by the teacher.² It typically is a process whereby

. . . the teacher (narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content . . . it turns the students into 'containers', into 'receptacles' to be filled by the teacher . . . Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. This is the 'banking' concept of education . . . knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.³

Such educational approaches often fail to recognize the basic humanity of both learner and teacher. Students within such a setting do not tend to be empowered to be life-long learners and often are not recognized as having much to offer the educational process. Similarly, this approach puts unreasonable expectations upon teachers who must hold all the information and dole it out in appropriate sequence and quantity.

By contrast my research points to the possibility of alternative ways of understanding the student and teacher that allows for authenticity, engagement, shared learning and a higher regard for persons and what they bring to the learning process by way of life experience. Within the communities I studied the educational approaches were consistently grounded in a kind of reverence for the human being. Individuals were invited, indeed, expected to bring their whole self to their life as community members and as learners. This commitment is reflected in the very way people regard each other as members of a community connected to each other through a complex web of relationships. The integrity of individuals and the dynamism of the community are taken seriously. Whether peeling onions in

Denmark, working to resolve a group conflict in Scotland, or engaged in discussion about the advantages of permaculture in Germany, I experienced myself as a valued part of the process, a participant in a community of learners. Each community values honesty, deep caring, integrity, cooperation, empathy, intelligence and humor. These qualities are not viewed as something outside the learning process but are viewed as an integral part of learning. Engaging the whole person, not only the mind, is a clear and well-articulated goal. Each person is viewed as having something to add to the whole and the relationships between students becomes something of great value, an important component of relational learning. A journal entry written while at Lebensgarten touches on the power and vitality that come from the cultivation of such relationships.

The sun is radiant today. After the rain and gray gloominess of the past few days it was exhilarating to be outdoors today. Fortunately our classroom discussions about permaculture led us out of doors today to work in the permaculture plot at the edge of the community. We gathered as a small group of eager learners, no longer feeling like strangers after only 5 days together - but already with a strong bond of trust and caring. Such a bond feels oddly intense given the short duration of our work together, but the dancing and meditating, cooking meals, the sharing of laughter and even occasional tears have carried me to a more open and vulnerable place inside myself that feels wonderful. It is powerful to look at Declan and experience him as genuinely human, one who has incredible insight and wisdom, my teacher, but also one who can act the fool, can laugh at himself, can let others shine, has a tender kind of humility. The others with whom I am sharing the week are such a mix - and yet I find each one so unique, fascinating. How accustomed I am in my academic and professional life to play things "close to the vest." Here I have been thrust into a joyful, messy, cooperative, musical, silly, amazing, heart and mind-opening educational process. The bonds between us feel so genuine, so safe, a true community, if even only briefly . . .

The kind of bond, so described, is quite different than most educational settings I have experienced. At Lebensgarten this particular teacher intentionally created opportunities to engage students in deeper contact with each other. He modeled this through his own willingness to be honest and open and by using a variety of tools (including dance, art, discussion and hands-on projects) to help learners connect with each other in new and life-giving ways. Those connections were not peripheral to our learning, but a key component. Vally, one of the other students, shared a similar response to these community building activities and spoke of the kind of joy it evoked within her.

Teachers who value these kinds of interaction among students will find that there are many simple activities that connect learners and allow them to shed some of the intellectual aloofness that is often found in higher education. Some of these will be further described in the following pages.

In addition to fostering dynamic relationships among learners, relational learning can cultivate a deeper sense of connection between the learner and the subject matter. Engaging the students with each other is crucial, but it is also necessary to find meaningful ways to put the learner in deeper contact with the educational content. Though much learning can take place in classrooms, there is also a profound level of learning made possible through direct access to the material through actual lived experience. We may speak of helping learners connect body, mind, spirit, but it is the actual practice of that value that can open new avenues for understanding. The

following lines continue the journal entry from above and reflect a level of learning that emanates from close encounters with the physical world.

. . . we dug in the soil and felt sweat drip down our cheeks. Composting around fruit trees, using cardboard around the base of each. The sun shone down through the branches as we pulled out dry grass and leaves, feeling the rich soil, smelling earth and decay and the promise of life. After layers of cardboard, pig manure, water liberally added on top, more dry grass to that. We then gathered in a circle around the fruit trees, newly revitalized by our efforts and we offered our blessings in word and song. The sun, the rich smells of compost, soil, human sweat, the deep feeling of connection to the earth, to the process of life, to the circle of those gathered with me . . . it was glorious. And in that moment it all came together for me. The permaculture plot - a varied and integrated system of plants and trees that each add to the other, creating a balanced, stable, yet dynamic and vital living community. The definitions given in our class discussion became real here under the bright sun on a plot of land in northern Germany. And isn't that also the very kind of community that brings about life within the human experience, as well. A safe, nurturing garden of ideas, creativity, compassion and cooperation, each lending nutrients or shade to another, as needed. Each benefiting from the health and vitality of the whole. A permaculture plot, a classroom, a family, a village - isn't it all the same - creating a community where we grow into wholeness, together.

The learnings I experienced so profoundly at Lebensgarten and over and over again at Svanholm and Findhorn were first and foremost about the recognition of the learners' humanity. We were no empty vessels waiting to be filled. Rather these communities modeled a respect for the integrity of each person and sought to provide the space where learners were encouraged to bring a whole self, body, mind, spirit, to the learning process. There seemed also to be the recognition that learning need not only take place in isolation from other learners, but that within a community of learners something powerful and life-giving emerges.

Parker Palmer is one of many educators who is highly critical of the educational focus on individual learners, promoting competition and creating settings which work against a sense of connection or community.

The root fallacy in the pedagogy of most of our institutions is that the individual is the agent of knowing and therefore the focus for teaching and learning. We all know that if we draw the lines of instruction in most classrooms, they run singularly from the teacher to each individual student. These lines are there for the convenience of the instructor, not for their corporate reality. They do not reveal a complex web of relationships between teacher and students and subject that would look like true community.⁴

Palmer challenges educators to restructure educational settings so that the myth of the individual agent of knowing can give way to a model which promotes respect, cooperation and interconnection.

In a college course I frequently teach I have been working to move away from what Palmer describes as the competitive classroom and instead integrate greater opportunities for students to bring their whole selves and to engage with others. Through group presentations and small group work I intentionally try to step aside in order to let my students learn from each other. By fostering such interpersonal relationships I have witnessed new levels of accountability and resource sharing. Though the class often has only 35-40 students, throughout the course of the semester there is a great deal of open honest sharing, discussion, struggle and resolution. As I have provided greater opportunity for them to share their ideas, fears, hopes and understanding, a palpable bond has been established. Such a setting acknowledges that my students are more than just isolated individuals

utilizing one aspect of their cognitive skills, but they each bring an entire history and have the capacity to imagine, create, feel and relate. Their humanity is affirmed while also helping them establish for themselves a deeper sense of connection to their fellow learners.

Taking my cue from my research settings I now include in almost every class session some opportunity for each student to speak about some theme we are addressing. In order to avoid mere abstraction, for example, when the students in my Ecology and Values class are talking about signs of environmental degradation, each is asked to bring in something that represents that degradation. At the start of class we take time to go around and each person offers the example drawn from their own lifeworld: a photo from a magazine, a newspaper article, a seashell with petroleum residue, stories of wetlands near their homes that no longer exist or forests they once hiked that now are dying from acid rain. The stories not only connect these learners to the topic, but connect them to each other as they hear and speak the truth of their lives. This process can take time and more than one colleague has suggested how impractical such a process would be in their own courses. Impractical? Yes, if the goal of the class time is to pack into an hour all the information the professor deems essential. Impractical? No, if part of the classroom commitment includes rich, dynamic relationships between individuals and a classroom that engenders respect, shared learning, and an affirmation of the value of knowledge gained from lived experience.

For learners to feel free to cultivate a deeper connection with their fellow learners it is imperative to find meaningful ways to counter the effects of competition. Montessori-trained educator, Aline Wolf notes that:

. . .an education that is merely a blind struggle between strong and weak can produce only inefficient adults. To avoid this we must substitute more nourishing conditions in our schools. . . Sadly children now receive reward for triumphing over their schoolmates in competitions and excelling in examinations . . . Adults who have been brought up this way are not prepared to love others and to join them in striving for a better world⁵

The environmental challenges facing us require new ways of working together as we strive toward a more inclusive vision of the common good. Educational methods that cultivate a strong sense of community and foster in learners a sense of cooperation will be essential as we seek out intelligent, creative ways to move toward sustainable patterns of living. By promoting cooperation and shared learning that de-emphasizes competition and “rugged individualism” learners may come to see themselves as truly part of the dynamic whole. Such a realization may be one of our most needed tools as we seek holistic, sustainable and just practices. Bertrand Russell offered this stinging critique of many past educational models . . . “in each generation the best brains and best imaginations are immolated upon the altar of the Great God Competition.”⁶ Many of us have seen that reality and are now ready to strive for cooperation rather than only competition in order to engage those brains and imaginations in the pursuit of the common good. This is not only about education, claims Russell, but about ethics, as well.

Competition is not only bad as an educational fact, but also as an ideal to be held before the young. What the world now needs is not competition but organization and cooperation; all belief in the utility of competition has become anachronism. And even if competition were useful, it is not in itself admirable, since the emotions with which it is connected are the emotions of hostility and ruthlessness. The conception of society as an organic whole is very difficult for those whose minds have been steeped in competitive ideas. Ethically, therefore . . . it is undesirable to teach the young to be competitive.⁷

Many of those I spoke with at Findhorn, Lebensgarten and Svanholm also share Russell's belief that learning at its best is a cooperative endeavor in which connection and a sense of respect for each other is fostered with great intentionality. Not only did these communities have an intellectual commitment to that idea, they also found tangible and practical ways to weave it throughout the life of the community and most certainly throughout the educational programs. I do not doubt that many teachers already know that it is advantageous to cultivate such connections within the classroom, but often do not go the next step in shaping a learning experience that elicits such connections. Attentiveness and an openness to promoting strong bonds within the community of learners will make a difference, but it needs to be put into action, as well. Whether at work peeling onions or digging in the permaculture plot, discussing topics or trying to determine work assignments, in each of these settings I experienced a profound commitment to creating relationships between learners. By seeking to cultivate dynamic interconnections within the educational setting learners experience themselves as part of the whole, a community of learners. Such relationships are not frivolous matters for they offer something potentially

transformative to learners and to the systems and attitudes that now threaten the future.

Within such a community the values of honesty, caring, integrity empathy humor and imagination can be practiced and cultivated. Because academia places such an emphasis on reason and rationality as the basis of knowledge, other forms of rationality are often over-looked, devaluing or underestimated. We can fill the minds of learners with more and more information, but by "leaving their hearts empty"⁸ we fail to acknowledge the affective side of being human. As we begin to engage the heart, the emotions, the human capacity to feel and to care, learners make that relational shift from "I-It" to "I-Thou" with an increased sense of connection and affiliation. While the cultivation of critical thinking continues to be an important element of learning, my research has led me to observe that in order to work toward the wholeness and well-being of the planet, its people and creatures, it is essential for humans to move away from detachment and objectification and make our way toward a recognition of our embeddedness in the larger whole.

A recognition of such connection was visible in the morning dancing that took place at Lebensgarten and the morning gathering before work at Svanholm. In both settings there was an intentional effort to bring the self into contact with others in order to fully engage. Whether through classroom sharing of thoughts, experiences or feelings, or a group discussion, project or activity, students can come to look at themselves and each other in new ways.

Such simple rituals allow the class to gather as individuals with insights, questions, and experience, no longer isolated and disconnected through competition and objectivism. Teachers who integrate these values into their classroom model for learners that the educational process can take us more deeply into the lifeworld and not merely distance us from it through abstraction.

These activities can develop a sense of connection among learners and invites and awakens their capacity to care. It is what Matthew Fox calls the “praxis of interconnectedness.”⁹ Such moments provide the opportunity to ground our theories in action. If we truly believe the quantum paradigm that all things are related, interconnected, bound up with and within each other, then we must begin demonstrating and claiming this reality in the very way we bring learners together.

The Teacher

In addition to the relationship of the learners with each other, another relationship that needs exploration and redefinition is that between student and teacher. In most educational settings the relationship between teacher and student is not typically one characterized by closeness or sense of connection and compassion. My research and my classroom experience seem to point to another possibility in regard to that important relationship.

Nel Noddings in her book *Caring* argues for an educational ethic based on caring that is characterized by receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. She sees caring as the starting point of the teacher-student relationship,

without which little true learning can take place. She writes, "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's . . . To care is to act not by fixed rules, but by affection and regard."¹⁰ Though Noddings expresses her philosophy in terms of "caring," her basic regard for the student-teacher relationship is shared by Declan Kennedy at Lebensgarten.

If I don't have basic care and concern for the student, if I am not somehow engaged in helping him or her discover something joyful in the learning process, I really don't deserve the title of teacher. 'Technician' maybe. But not 'teacher.' A teacher is not a guru but a collaborator, a co-laborer. To labor together in order to learn requires much patience, tenderness, playfulness and a willingness to go deep. It's all about connection, creating true bonds together.¹¹

Terry Neal describes something similar about the role of teacher at Findhorn.

Because we begin with a recognition of each other as spiritual beings as well as physical, there is a deep respect for each persons integrity and spirit. I don't need to fill anyone up. As a teacher I need to listen and be present in order to help the learner reclaim what is true and learn what is true for them. To be such a teacher is to act with great caring and trust. I didn't get to exercise that in the public schools the way I needed to, but here I am able to be that kind of presence with others, caring and trusting. Maybe it all comes down to basic respect.¹²

Caring, creating true bonds, basic respect. It is out of this place of attentiveness and respect that the teacher ceases to function as the sage on the stage, but more as mid-wife, the guide by the side. Through such a relationship of caring the teacher provides the safe space for the learners own birthing process of discovery and growth. This makes room for true collaboration, learning as a "co-operative enterprise"¹³ as described more formally by John Dewey.

Such a relationship is by no means an easy one to describe or create. With most of us having been steeped within the Western understanding of scholarship, to speak of caring, trust, compassion and respect for learners may sound rather foreign. Tarthang Talku, coming from the Eastern perspective, notes that a relationship based on caring and trust may seem “unscholarly” to the Western mind. Yet he argues that this kind of relationship “can be the most stimulating experience of our lives, catalyzing and enriching a growth process in more ways than we thought possible.”¹⁴ Most of us can recall such a teacher, one whose caring and concern created an environment out of which learning could grow and thrive. Though distance and objectivity has been the hallmark of good teaching in the past, the future requires that we seek a new way of understanding the dynamic and vital relationship between teacher and student.

As noted earlier, one intended purpose of my travels was to collect resources that might help educators in their task. But I became more and more aware that it is not mere tools and techniques that create truly engaging and potentially transformative learning settings, but a quality of relationship.

Writes educator Parker Palmer:

Good teaching cannot be reduced to techniques; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves and their students so that students learn to weave a world for themselves. . . . The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts--meaning **heart** in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect, emotion and spirit converge in the human self.¹⁵

A poignant experience of this kind of teaching from the heart occurred in my final days at Lebensgarten when teacher Declan Kennedy took time in the midst of our learning to listen to Vally's tearful memories of a young friend who had recently died. Though in the midst of a lesson, Declan did not stifle her expression of emotion or even rush in with a solution. Instead he extended himself and with gentle caring helped provide a safe place for Vally to tell her story and share her grief. He showed great respect for Vally and for her feelings and modeled for the entire class, yet another dimension of community.

Teaching from the heart, being concerned about the well-being of the learner, may require that those who are teachers and in positions of leadership also tend to their own inner landscape. During my time at Svanholm Bo reflected on this very issue during one interview.

Real education always involves equal participation and a good amount of respect. But when I get busy or tired, I am more likely to forget to care for others, to show that kind of respect and confidence. When I start getting distant from those around me I am likely to think I have all the answers. I know I have to take time or I lose that practical commitment of working together as equals.¹⁶

To teach from the heart means also to live from the heart. But in the frenetic pace of 21st century lifestyles many people experience a kind of business that precludes respectful, caring relationships. Brother David Steindl-Rast illuminates this problem in describing the Chinese pictograph for "busy" as the two characters: **heart** and **killing**.¹⁷ The heart-killing rhythms of our daily existence threaten our capacity to truly be with each

other in relationships of care and compassion. Care takes time. Compassion takes attentiveness. This was vividly illustrated for me one rainy day as I hurried to class some years ago. My week had been filled with endless meetings and demands on my time and energy. I dashed off to teach, forgetting my boots and umbrella. I arrived cold, wet and tired. As I began to teach I noticed a student in the back of the room wearing a ball cap, appearing only vaguely interested in the day's topic. In that moment of my own hurriedness I did not feel a sense of connection or respect. I felt critical and angry toward him and before giving it much thought I had a rather curt statement about the "ungentlemanly" way he was wearing a cap in class. Clearly embarrassed, the young man did remove the cap. It was not one of my better moments and upon later reflection I was so struck by the effects of my own heart killing pace.

To cultivate care and bonds of trust in the classroom, teachers need first to practice that in their own lives, taking time for silence, meditation, rest, and rejuvenation. Caring for oneself is not something typically viewed as an essential skill for an educator. Not through any of my professional training did anyone underscore the need for me as a teacher/pastor to cultivate a healthy relationship with my self in order to be more effective in my profession. Oh, occasionally there would be passing reference made as to the need for Sabbath or sabbatical times, but the message of self-care was often approached with a certain amount of embarrassment. As if somehow the humanity of the teacher and his or her need for rest and care made them less

professional, less capable. But during my months of research I heard educator after educator reflect upon the necessity of caring for oneself. Hannah Wegge, from Svanholm, summed up the essence of many of their commitments when she said,

Oh, it's great to want to teach, to save the world and make some monumental difference. But first you better feel and you better learn to love. It's there in your own passion that you'll find the real teacher. It's there in the quiet dark of your own soul. Go there and listen. Then you'll be the kind of teacher the student needs.¹⁸

Relational learning always seeks to help awaken students and teachers to new dimensions of life and to engage each in deepening, life-giving connections. Such fundamental relationships help create the context for holistic learning, the very basis for education that will make a difference in the lives of those involved and beyond.

Relationship with Place

Along with establishing a new sense of connection to the other people with whom we share the learning endeavor, relational learning also puts a great deal of emphasis on one's relationship to place. This is not a particularly new concept. As far back as 1897 John Dewey noted the importance of place. Along the way Lewis Mumford and most recently David Orr have continued to build upon this concept as an essential element in education that seeks to promote sustainability and holistic attitudes. Writes Orr,

Other than a collection of buildings where learning is supposed to occur, place has no particular standing in contemporary education. The typical college or university is organized around bodies of knowledge coalesced into disciplines. Sorting through a college catalog you are not likely to find courses dealing with the ecology, hydrology, geology, history, economics, politics, energy use, food policy, waste disposal, and architecture of the campus or its community. Nor are you likely to find many courses offering enlightenment to modern scholars in the art of living well in a place. The typical curriculum is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's comment after reading the vast, weighty corpus of Hegel's philosophy, that Hegel had 'taken care of everything, except perhaps for the question of how one was to live one's life.'¹⁹

How to live one's life might be far too large a curricular goal for education, but Orr reminds us of something far too overlooked in education, the relationship to place and its centrality in human experience. In Leslie Marmon Silko's book *Ceremony*, the main character of the book, Tao, a young native American, struggles with depression and alcoholism until he returns to his ancestral land. Through connecting to that place Tao experiences healing as he regains a sense of belonging to the land, its people and history. That sense of connection brings healing to his life as it recreates within Tao a deeper awareness of who he is. It allows him to understand his pain and estrangement in a new way and provides for a sense of identity that is ultimately transformative and life-giving. Silko powerfully portrays the devastating effects that occur when peoples or cultures lose a sense of connection to place and lose the deep sense of belonging that provides meaning and grounding to life.

Tao's story may very well be our own. For in our own culture there are many visible signs of disconnection from place. Our unwillingness to alter

our consumption of non-renewable resources, our addictions to alcohol, tobacco, consumerism, our obsession with malls, all seem to reflect the detachment with which we move through life cut off from a vital relationship to the very places we live and learn.

Many decades ago Albert Einstein spoke about the need to connect to place in order to create deepening connections to the world of which we are a part.

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the 'universe,' a part limited in time and space. He (sic) experiences himself (sic), his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his (sic) consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.²⁰

Einstein, Silko, and Orr all seem to have their own particular language for talking about a common theme, the need to deepen one's connection to the whole and to widen our circle of compassion to include the very settings in which we find ourselves. Connecting to the ecological place as well as giving greater attention to the learning spaces we help shape are both critical aspects of a relational pedagogy.

A sense of place involves an awareness and engagement with the cosmic, global, regional, and personal spaces we inhabit. Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme and a host of others remind us that we must reconnect with our deep sense of affiliation with the larger cosmos. To learn again to feel at

home among the stars and to connect with the holy origins of the universe are essential aspects of being more integrated, holistic people.

What we have lost then, is the ability to see our lives as part of a wider order and reality beyond our daily and passing self-centered desires and dreams. By seeing nature and the entire universe as a 'stuff' put here for our endless productionist transformation and use, we have reduced reality to a mere extrinsic value for us; it is no longer encountered as intrinsically valuable *in itself*. As a consequence, we have lost any sense of belonging to a larger and more significant drama and reality.²¹

Philosopher Paul Brockelman describes the experience of "disconnect" that may be at the heart of so many of our social, political and personal woes. He recounts that it was through a very real experience within the natural world at the age of fourteen he awakened to his own sense of belonging to the world, to the universe, to mystery and a larger life-drama. That personal experience and sense of coming home to his place in the universe was transformative for him and seems to reveal a truth that is too often overlooked. Writes David Orr in a discussion about pedagogy and place,

Place is nebulous to educators because to a great extent we are a displaced people for whom our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration. . . Our lives are lived amidst the architectural expressions of displacement: the shopping mall, apartment, neon strip, freeway, glass office tower, and homogenized development--none of which encourages much sense of rootedness, responsibility, and belonging.²²

Expressions of displacement are all about us. And whether it is the disconnection of which Brockelman writes at a more cosmic level, the disconnection from Earth and nature described by Orr or countless other examples there seems to be ample evidence to support the claim that many

people within American culture live with such a sense of disassociation from place. Educational settings have the wonderful opportunity to turn that reality on its head and through a commitment to awakening and engaging learners to a sense of place provide a powerful sense of belonging to the whole which will surely lead to the fostering of new levels of responsibility, affiliation and connection. A goal of relational learning is to foster and encourage such growth and understanding,

More and more educators, environmentalists, spiritual leaders, parents and community members are reflecting upon this sense of place and its role in our lives and in creating a more livable future. Seattle-based environmentalist, Sheila Kelly, has written about the need to connect people to the land, to the source of their food and water, with the beauty, poignancy and brokenness of home, in order to create together a sustainable future.

My experience is that this sense of place feeds a deep human need and at the same time it offers hope for an emerging sense of global responsibility. As with so many other phenomena, we are giving a new name - sense of place - to an old reality. Earlier societies had no choice but to pay attention to where they were - survival of the species depended on knowing the topography, geography, the seasons, the weather, the plants and animals. But somewhere along the way, the Western religion separated humanity from the Earth and matter from spirit, while science separated truth into parts. Now we are on a great quest to rediscover connections and wholeness. . . . Experiencing the sense of place can bring together humanity and Earth, spirit and matter, in a new and powerful way.²³

She writes of ways in which immersing ourselves in our own surroundings, listening to whale song, walking through forests and deserts, connecting to the changing seasons, learning about where our daily food and water come from

and where our waste goes, all these are crucial elements of reconnecting with the whole. Such reconnecting, Kelly and others believe, will shape the future and make way for greater love of Earth, greater shared responsibility, and greater sense of personal and global wholeness.

A task of education as we move into this millennium will be to rediscover the ways in which our pedagogy can be rewoven with a sense of place, providing learners with tangible experiences of being part of the whole. Such an awareness guards against treating Earth as resource or object. In his now classic work, *Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry speaks of the power of coming home to our sense of place, the healing, energy and vision that comes from a real and vital relationship with Earth. Berry underscores that it is not through analysis and objective research that our deepest knowing will come, but that through direct relationship that something transformative, educative and life-affirming is born.

We are returning to our native place after a long absence, meeting once again with our kin in the earth community. For too long we have been away somewhere, entranced with our industrial world of wires and wheels, concrete and steel, and our unending highways, where we race back and forth in continual frenzy.

The world of life, of spontaneity, the world of dawn and sunset and glittering stars in the dark night heavens, the world of wind and rain, of meadow flowers and flowing streams, of hickory and oak and maple and spruce and pineland forests, the world of desert sand and prairie grasses, and within all this the eagle and the hawk, the mockingbird and the chickadee, the deer and the wolf and the bear, the coyote, the raccoon, the whale and the seal, and the salmon returning upstream to spawn--all this, the wilderness world recently rediscovered with heightened emotional sensitivity . . . a moment of reconciliation with the divine after the long period of alienation and human wandering away from the true center.

Something of this feeling of intimacy we now experience as we recover our presence within the earth community. This is something more than working out a viable economy, something more than ecology, more even than Deep Ecology, is able to express. This is a sense of presence, a realization that the earth community is a wilderness community that will not be bargained with; nor will it simply be studied or examined or made an object of any kind; nor will it be domesticated or trivialized as a setting for vacation indulgence . . . we are now in a period when we become capable once again of experiencing the immediacy of life, the entrancing presence to the natural phenomena about us.²⁴

A sense of presence, the possibility of experiencing again the immediacy of life, what a role for education as it strives for understanding.

There are many ways to help learners and educators alike regain that sense of connection and immediacy of which Berry so powerfully writes. An educator may feel overwhelmed at the thought of trying to provide students with a renewed sense of connection to the Earth, let alone the cosmos (that is indeed an immense undertaking!), but through my research I came across many do-able starting points for educators who value cultivating such awareness and relationship. Through my travels and research I saw three communities embodying a commitment to place in very particular ways.

From the moment we arrived at Findhorn I was struck by the attention to detail and numerous expressions of beauty. The following journal entry comes from early in my time at Findhorn, but speaks to relational values that are visibly embedded within that community that help foster an awareness of place.

Early observation--already at Findhorn, in just these first hours, I have seen 4-5 sites designated for meditation - some indoors, some outdoors - but all giving a clear message, all with such natural settings, so inviting, beautiful, peaceful. Also everywhere there are gardens, beautiful artwork, stones stacked in intricate design. The rooms where learning takes place have such a rich feel to them. . . candles, flowers, objects from nature, windows accentuated, pictures and posters of stars, sunsets, people, Buddhas, beauty. Moving about the space I find myself drawn in by all the beauty, reminded everywhere I look of what an amazing place we call "home."

Findhorn's commitment to sustainable living begins with the most basic aspects of connecting people to their surroundings. As there are no cars allowed on the Park itself, community members walk or bicycle everywhere, no matter the season or the weather. The grounds and buildings are intentionally designed to be in harmony with the space they inhabit and are decorated in such a way as to highlight local plants, colors, history and culture. As described briefly in my first day's observations the Findhorn community seeks to reflect a sense of connection to earth and an appreciation for the natural world. The classroom where I took my course on community living was in an old building, but the space reflected deep caring and intentionality on the part of the caretakers and community members. Each day fresh flowers and plants adorned the room. Some days, depending on the topic we were discussing, there might be a special collection of rocks, leaves or other items as part of a focal point in the room.

Just those simple expressions of our connection to the natural world were deeply enriching as a learner and I have since experimented with some of this in my own classrooms, bringing in flowers, using pictures or posters

hung about the room, drawing attention to seasonal changes. Attention to space does not seem a radical notion, but just peer into any classroom at the university level, and except for the science labs with their wonderful array of instruments, most classrooms are devoid of color and texture, often even windowless. How can we foster a sense of connection in students when they experience even in the classroom a reaffirmation of disconnection and alienation from the beauty, wonder, spontaneity, chaos and change which characterizes the natural world? At Findhorn all learning, discussing, meditating, dining, working, was done in such a way as to honor the relationship with the physical world. I experienced the contrast to be quite stark.

At each of the communities I had a similar experience. Though each setting differed in many ways each reflected an attentiveness to creating a deepening sense of connection. At Svanholm that sense of connection to place occurred most profoundly for me around the shared meal and the family table experienced daily. The learnings of community life were lived out time and again as we rubbed elbows and broke bread, taking into our bodies the very produce of this place and taking into our spirits the laughter and warmth of the fellow community members. These potatoes were grown by Hans Siner. Those apples came from the trees Emma and Zachary were playing under just this morning. Living on a farm, engaging in the daily rituals of caring for livestock and crops, reengaging with the growing cycles and the seasonal rhythms of northern Denmark in March, provide that

community with daily contact with place that is not taken for granted. "As you work in the mud, you dance in the stars," Hannah Wegge shared with me one afternoon. She spoke of how her deep sense of connection with nature and the land at Svanholm are really part of connecting her to something much larger. Hannah reflects the experience I too had as I "played in the mud," a deepening sense of belonging to all of this, to the processes and the turnings, the mystery and the beauty. I too "danced in the stars," with a sense of awe and reverence as I partook in basic daily rituals that powerfully reconnected me and my family to the land and to the reality of that particular place, its history, people, needs and changes.

Not every classroom comes equipped with its own apple orchards and dairy barn, but the possibilities are limitless. Sending students out on projects that get them outside the four walls of the university, hikes and exploration, integrating an awareness of the seasons and cycles. The classroom discussions and intellectual stimulation at Lebensgarten took on fuller dimension with the bicycle ride to the mass burial site. My experience of community was molded at Findhorn, not only through lectures and group process, but also as I sat at Randall's Leap and listened to the wisdom of the rushing waters or dug in the community garden on that chilly Wednesday morning, removing bricks and rubble, creating something beautiful with sweat and dreams. The learning was real and tangible as I walked to work at Svanholm and as I gathered around an ancient tree to reenact a Viking ritual of spring's return. Such experiences provided me opportunity after

opportunity to connect the work of my mind with the movement of my body, a true synthesis of the physical, intellectual and spiritual qualities we humans possess. That quality of experience, claims David Orr, is crucial.

The integration of place into education is important . . . First, it requires the combination of intellect with experience. The typical classroom is an arena for lecture and discussion, both of which are important to intellectual growth. The study of place involves complementary dimensions of intellect: direct observation, investigation, experimentation, and skill of application of knowledge. . . For Mumford and Dewey, practical and manual skills were an essential part of experience, good thinking, and the development of the whole person. ²⁵

Such practical experiences might appear less compatible with certain disciplines or fields of study, but one can only wonder as to how the business student or the math major might experience himself or herself after such vital encounters with the physical world.

At Lebensgarten there is a visible commitment to being a “living garden” reflected through beauty, color, creativity, and tenderness. The yards and homes, once merely living quarters for army officials have taken on new life as individuals seek to redefine that space. Shutters and doors are brightly painted. Well-tended flower beds and sitting areas abound. Probably one of the most powerful experiences of my time at Lebensgarten was the morning dancing, of which I have written in Chapter 5. Such a ritual is the actual practice of grounding oneself in a sense of place. With rain on my face or the warmth of the sun on my back, with tired body or refreshed, with smells of early morning soil and cow manure, I began my day knowing I was alive within a community of plants, people and creatures of which I was a part.

There was nothing abstract about my sense of connection to Earth. I felt it in my body with each step, with each breath. In my daily class I was studying permaculture--thinking, reading, analyzing, talking with fellow students. Those experiences were full of meaning and insight. But standing in the cold morning air, warm palm pressed against warm palm, clumsily stepping left then right, awkwardly, joyfully, a deep sense of connection rolled through my body. I did not approach the day or the people around me in the same way having had such a grounded experience of being in my body within the body of Earth. Though the image might seem absurd I do wonder what might happen if a little more dancing took place in Board Rooms and teachers' lounges across the country. What powerful sense of connection might take place if we began each day, each class, each gathering with a raucous or introspective dance or intentional movement surrounded and supported by breezes and rains, stars and bird song. Even a meditative walk can produce similar responses and on more than one occasion I have taken my students on silent treks across our campus and into the adjacent woods. No matter the topic, those experiences provided an enriching sense of place that served as a basis for further interactions, ruminations and learning.

Providing settings in which students are encouraged and supported to develop a deeper awareness of place will come in many forms. The aesthetics and attention to detail with which we shape the classroom experience, the kinds of buildings, gardens and greenspaces that are part of daily life, the intention with which we seek to connect with the cycles of the moon and the

growing season around us, our awareness of where our food comes from and where our waste is taken, these are parts of a relationally-based education that practices connection and in tangible ways rejects the prevailing myth of separation and objectification. And all of it geared toward helping educate whole people who will have both the depth of resources and range of vision to promote holistic patterns of living within this place, Earth.

Relationship with Mystery, Creativity and Possibility

If the forthcoming initial reports from the Human Genome Project are accurate, we humans are not as different from other species in regard to our genetic make-up as was previously believed. Our 30,000 or so genes are only double the 15,000 of the common earthworm, or the 13,000 of the fruitfly (NPR report, February 12, 2001). We, the great masters of the planet, the great thinkers, creators, dreamers, doers, seem to have more in common with our fellow creatures than ever imagined. Our experience of being quite unique, if not extremely "superior," seems grounded more in perception than reality. Clearly a few thousand genes makes a world of difference but the news may give us occasion to reflect upon what it is that truly makes us unique. One scientist interviewed on National Public Radio the day before the public report was issued spoke almost poetically about what it is that makes us human, seemingly so different from other species, yet fundamentally not much more complex. Perhaps, we are more than our DNA assignments might suggest!

The implications of this upon our understanding of ourselves is quite dramatic. At one level this emerging picture of the human being reflects a very deep and underlying affiliation with nearly all other species, including some long extinct bacteria, the code for which is still housed in our own genetic make-up. Just as physicists are offering new cosmological understandings that describes a deeply interconnected universe, so are geneticists stumbling across another equally stunning discovery in regard to our close familial ties with creatures we typically see ourselves as quite separate from.

This news underscores a major theme of this thesis, that far from being separate, discreet entities on our individual and isolated journeys, we humans are relational creatures bound up in a stupefying narrative of interconnection and embeddedness. We are in nature, nature is in us. We are in the universe, the universe is in us. We are not merely a brain with the capacity for cognition, abstraction or rationality. We are an amazing integration of 15 billion years of evolutionary expressiveness and radical creativity. Our bodies house the memories of ancient creatures, long extinct, perhaps not only in some mystical, metaphorical sense, but in scientific actuality. With only a few thousand more genes than a worm, human beings represent a genetic configuration that can create beauty and art, nuclear power and weaponry, literature and poetry, music and suspension bridges! Descartes knew there was something truly unique about the human mind and its ability to think and reason. Indeed, these are awesome capabilities

that express themselves in nearly infinite combinations. But as continues to be revealed human beings are also more than our cognitive capabilities. Housed somewhere in the brain and body lie human capacities that appear more and more miraculous the more they are described. Perhaps Henry Miller's words resonate with our growing experience:

We may know a little or much, but the farther we push the more the horizon recedes. We are enveloped in a sea of forces which seem to defy our puny intelligence. Until we accept the fact that life itself is founded in mystery we shall learn nothing. ²⁶

Throughout my several decades in formal educational settings I experienced the cultivation of my mind with great emphasis on my intellectual and rational capabilities. But at many points I might as well have left my body behind! The emphasis on only this one aspect of human potential has led to the devaluing of other qualities that constitute our humanity. My research revealed that there can indeed be different starting points in education that begin with different assumptions and perceptions. A respect for mystery, imagination and creativity were all deeply embedded in the educational practices of all three communities I studied within and each offers insight into how to educate whole people.

At Findhorn I experienced a powerful example of synthesizing the world of knowing with the world of mystery. One evening during the course a local geologist gave us a brief lecture about the land on which we were staying, its history and origins. He spoke of eras and slow change, of forces and pressure, heat and wind, upheaval and sedimentation. Then we left the comfort of the well-lit, warm building and walked up a small hill. We were

invited to find a quiet place to sit or lie and to spend the next hour with our body pressed against the earth, learning its story without words. A simple exercise but this journal reflection from later that same night reflects its impact:

I am not really afraid of the dark, but having to traverse unfamiliar terrain at night was not something I had anticipated and did not fully appreciate. I tried to be dutiful and follow instructions. Moving deeper into the shadows I placed my body along the curve of a large boulder, the color of which I could not at first see in the dimness. My mind was busy at first. When would we go in? What would we do next? Was everyone feeling chilly, as I was? It took time, more time than I would like to admit, but finally my mind quieted and I began to experience this place in a new way. The slope upon which I lay must have been formed by major upheaval many eons ago. What mighty force had shifted and moved in order to create this particular knoll. How small I felt.

Then the boulder. . . The boulder that had seemed cold and rough when I first positioned myself against it, seemed slowly to take on new dimensions. With just moonlight to guide my eyes I saw lines and ridges, layers of differing kinds of rock that had been fused with heat and pressure. Everywhere around me was silent, so silent. But inside I began to feel an intense excitement. My mind poured over the bits I could recall of the earlier lecture and my own scant knowledge of geology. Here was a story right before me. A story of endurance and change. Power and yielding. All of it unfolding without a human witness. How small I felt, yet at the same time, my flesh pressed against the stone, I knew at a deep almost unspeakable level that we were one. It's power and possibility lay within me, as well. After all were we not in some distant time star dust together.

Throughout the remainder of our travels I did not look at rocks or geography quite the same way and was filled with awe and a sense of mystery about the very forces that had shaped the terrain. By combining information about the rocks and geological formations of the area and an experience of them, I gained a new passion and sense of connection. The ground was no longer

something I merely walked upon, but it too became a sort of kindred spirit that had a story. Even this brief seemingly inconsequential exercise heightened my awareness of place and my sense of wonder at its origins.

Howard Gardner has written extensively about the theory of multiple intelligences. As an educator, Gardner has explored the ways in which individuals access information and engage in the learning process in a variety of ways. Along with the more traditional cognitive entry points for learning, Gardner also describes the *existential, aesthetic, hands-on* and **interpersonal** entry points through which learners engage with the world and gain knowledge and understanding. These four entry points were so integrated into the educational practices at Findhorn, Svanholm and Lebensgarten, but have often been devalued in other settings. Yet, my experience on a Scottish hillside reflects the learning value of hands-on and existential entry points. Because we are not merely a mind, utilizing numerical and logical entry points, it is of vital importance that educators take seriously the task of utilizing these additional entry points. Gardner expresses part of his educational vision in these lines from *The Disciplined Mind*:

Educators' understandable focus on cognition has sometimes had the unfortunate consequence of minimizing awareness of other equally important factors.

The role of emotions in learning has also undergone renewed scrutiny. Emotions serve as an early warning system, signaling topics and experiences that students find pleasurable to engage in, as well as those that may be troubling, mystifying, or off-putting. Creating an educational environment in which pleasure, stimulation and challenge flourish is an important

mission. Also, students are more likely to learn, remember, and make subsequent use of those experiences with respect to which they had strong--and, one hopes, positive--emotional reactions.

The integration of the emotional realm into cognitivist perspective remains an ongoing challenge. Initially, in part to simplify their work, cognitive scientists exhibited a distaste for dealing with affect--it was soft, wet, messy and more suited for the psychoanalyst's couch than for the experimentalists's laboratory. It has become evident, however, that any portrait of human nature that ignores motivation and emotions proves of limited use in facilitating human learning and pedagogy. At the end of the day, people are not computers. . . if one wants something to be attended to, mastered and subsequently used, one must be sure to wrap it in a context that engages the emotions. Conversely, experiences devoid of emotional impact are likely to be weakly engaging and soon forgotten, leaving nary a mental representation behind.²⁷

Gardner's descriptions runs parallel to my experience on the hilltop. My mental representations were reinforced and more fully engaged as I physically experienced the landscape. This blending of cognitive and affective experiences was practiced in a variety of ways within all three communities I researched. In so doing each setting affirmed the belief that humans are more than our cognitive enterprises and that knowledge is derived through many and varied experiences. Such experiences also make way for wonder for they offer us new lenses through which to see, not only reflect upon, but actually to see, feel and experience the world.

Paul Brockelman in connecting the work of a number of scientists, ethicists and theologians affirms the value of wonder. He writes of wonder as "the radical and inexplicable mystery of being encountered at the boundaries of understanding."²⁸ Such wonder arises in me when I read about the human Genome Project and its preliminary findings. Such wonder arises

in me when I open myself to a real, unmediated experience of nature, my lover, a good book. This kind of wonder, claimed Albert Einstein, is at the heart of all science, that startling awareness of the incomprehensible that has led us to explore and investigate. This kind of wonder is probably also at the heart of all art and creativity igniting the desire to give voice to something awe-inspiring. Yet, where, within the academy do we ever read about a course that seeks to provide an experience of wonder or to cultivate a sense of mystery or awe in the learner?

Relational learning seeks to engage learners with this dimension of human experience. This was done at Findhorn as described in the previous pages and also through gardening, cleaning, star-gazing and interpersonal interactions. Underlying these activities was a worldview that made room for spontaneity, surprise and newness. The learning environment was not structured to control the learners experience of the material, but to open the learner to their own experience. At Lebensgarten it was while visiting that terrible mass burial site that wonder hit me in a very different way. In that moment I was not uplifted by my experience, but taken into the deep shadow land where the human capacity for cruelty and violence dwell. The horrors of WWII, the stuff of history books, took on a stark new power for me as my knees grew weak and my heart felt sick standing next to the chiseled stone that bore name after name of those who died in the labor camp just through the trees. The experience took me to the boundary of understanding and forced me to confront a reality that was no longer abstract, but very real. Such

moments can provide an opportunity for engaging in worlds of knowing that might otherwise elude us in the tidy, safe confines of the academy.

For the Svanholm community living close to nature provides a rich environment for engagement with mystery and possibility. “We are a very down to earth group. We don’t believe in the fairies and such,” says Bo, referring to some of his discomfort with Findhorn’s explicit spirituality, “but we know that if you have a problem and you let yourself be open to a solution, you are always surprised to find that it leaps out at you when you didn’t even expect an answer. I can’t know enough or be smart enough to know how to handle every situation that arises, here in the fields or even an issue in the community. But you learn that the answers come when you are driving the tractor or arguing with someone over dinner or just waking up in the morning. It surprises you to discover what was there. Such a simple thing really.” Bo has spent over twenty years as part of the Svanholm community and he has come to understand the ways in which mystery is woven into everyday life when we are open to the experience and what it can teach. As a primary educator at Svanholm, Bo also integrates this understanding into his work with students, always seeking to provide the space for them to stumble across the answers in that wonderful, awkward way that makes learning so rewarding and teaching so satisfying.

When we allow our learning settings to be open to mystery we may also find that we provide new opportunities to stimulate, cultivate and affirm creativity. If the answer is not placed directly in front of the student,

but requires their engagement with the material, be that a mathematical problem or a permaculture plot, new possibilities emerge. I was struck again and again by the expressions of creativity that flowed through the educational life of these three settings. That creativity was visible in the aesthetics of each setting, but was also cultivated in learners as we did problem-solving activities or other group interactions that did not have clear solutions or predictable outcomes. As a teacher I have tried to recreate some of these activities in my own college classroom. Students often reflect that those experiences were a highlight for them because it was a place where they really got engaged and discovered they had something useful to offer the process.

In the packed schedule most of us keep it is a challenge to be intentional about carving out times that are not highly structured. Academia has incorporated the same kind of frenetic pace as most of the rest of our culture thereby leaving little room for these kinds of body-mind-spirit engagements. However, the learning at Findhorn, Lebensgarten and Svanholm was so engaging and transformative not really because of any particular tool, technique or exercise, but because within all three communities there was a deep and fully embodied recognition that we humans are more than our rational thought processes. What was so powerfully modeled within each community was a profound understanding of the human being that encompassed the realms of thought and feeling, passion and creativity, character and will, dream and memory and sought to connect all these varied and marvelous qualities in an attempt to discover

more fully what it means to be human and to live more whole and holy lives.

Along with rich and varied activities learners had the opportunity to touch upon mystery, creativity and possibility because there was also time to do so. Interspersed in all the time spent **doing** activities was also time spent simply **being**. All too often we have potentially educative experiences but because we have moved so rapidly from one to another we never glean the fullness of the meaning or touch upon the wonder they elicit. Perhaps it is in the intentional moment of silent reflection, a deep breath, that we come face to face with our own exhilarating capacity to experience wonder. Unlike the child who is merely surprised to see the jack-in-the-box pop into view, "Wonder, then is stepping back from our immediate experience to notice aspects of it which until then were unnoticed because, as we said, we were too busy living through them to reflectively notice them."²⁹ The starry night sky, wind playing over a field of flowers, a geometric formula, the combination of notes and rhythm that produce a particular piece of music, these are the moment to moment experiences that provide depth, dimension, joy and learning to our lives when we are attentive, awake, aware.

At Findhorn each morning began with a quiet time of attunement to center ourselves and prepare for the days work. At Svanholm the long distances between lodgings, work places and the dining hall provided walkers a time for silent pondering. At Lebensgarten each gathering began with

silence. How powerful it was the day we all gathered to silently meditate and pray for peace in the world.

What a simple thing. Learning settings that take seriously the need for silence, space, quiet, reflection, a deep breath. Wayne Muller is an educator and social activist who has written about the need to reclaim a concept of sabbath rest in contemporary culture. He draws on an ancient understanding that may have great significance for our time. In the book of Genesis we read the human account of the awesome event of creation. Each verse offers a poetic rendering of how water became separated from sky and land, how birds and plants and even people emerged out of the creative winds that hovered over all. And after all that stunning work, so the text tells us, God, the Creating One, rested. According to Muller, the Hebrew word used here is more accurately translated "exhaled."³⁰ The holy of holies, the moving force of the universe gave a heavy sigh. Whether out of exhaustion or pure delight, God exhaled. In some mystical or even practical way the act of creating and perhaps even the act of teaching/learning involves the rhythm of inhaling and exhaling, drawing in and letting go. For both our students and ourselves there is a need for such "spaces in our togetherness," in order to fully appreciate, enjoy, understand and comprehend the process in which we are engaged.

Since returning from my research in Europe I have been starting all my classes with a time of silence and occasionally add other times of quiet reflection throughout the semester. Always at the start of the semester some

students are skeptical. Others think it is downright out of place. But I am always amazed at how differently the classroom feels after a group of 35 people sit for 5 minutes in total silence. I am amazed at the change in the energy of the students, the easing of the furrowed brow, the more relaxed posture, greater willingness to share thoughts and ideas. I have no way to quantify the benefits or effects of such times, but I know it models something important about the value I place on the whole learner and I have observed the way it opens people to learning that is dynamic, authentic and engaging.

When we openly acknowledge an appreciation for creativity, wonder, and mystery, we also can find meaningful ways to include such affective qualities as love, compassion, hope and caring in our academic vocabulary. When these are yoked with the ability to think, reason and analyze, we may just find that we can become the kind of the people the future needs.

Closing Thoughts

Relational learning is about connecting heart, mind, body and rediscovering our embeddedness in nature. It is not a blueprint, but a lens, a new way of looking at ourselves and the learning process. It does not offer a step-by-step “how to” manual on producing better people or more effective citizens. It does however offer an alternative understanding of the dynamic relationship that underlies our experience of reality. It affirms human qualities and capacities that have for too long been devalued and seeks to reaffirm a view of humanity that is holistic and hope-filled. Perhaps most of all relational learning is about waking up to who we are and what we can be

about during our time on this planet. May we use this critical point in our history to rediscover such capacities and in so doing make possible a just and sustainable future.

CHAPTER 7

FINDING OUR WAY HOME: SPIRITUALITY AND RELATIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

In the opening pages of this thesis I recounted the experience of the people who once inhabited a place called Sweet Valley. The loss of their home was not merely the loss of a place, but truly was the loss of a way of life, the loss of a series of meaningful relationships and a peoples' sense of identity and connectedness. Their experience dramatically portrays the kind of brokenness that results from a series of human choices. Their story is bound up in our own and we must not let their loss go ignored. Sweet Valley is a haunting symbol of our time and serves as an example of the reality facing us all as our home planet is slowly poisoned and we experience the loss of clean water, safe oxygen, beautiful places of refuge and rejuvenation. Such losses are not only about losing a place, but also involve a loss of identity, a loss of relationship, a loss of connection and hope. We know we are living through the midst of an environmental crisis. But the threat of the loss of our home, our very place of belonging, has resulted in a profound spiritual crisis, as well.

As I relate with college students, parents, professionals, I have come to see that this spiritual crisis, this crisis of meaning, is manifested in countless forms of fear, denial and despair. Among the college population where I

spend much of my time I often detect a sad sort of fatalism, a lack of hope that the future can be a bright and shining one or even that they can make a difference in how that future looks. The materialistic world of their parents has left them empty. They hunger for connection, for real, life-giving relationships with others, with nature, with mystery and meaning. They long for experiences so real and vital it shakes them to their core. So they take drugs, drink to excess, engage in high risk sexual behavior, just to feel alive. But it is not only the young ones that suffer. My work as a pastor puts me in daily contact with people who are experiencing a profound kind of despair, a "sickness unto death," in which there is no deeply satisfying sense of connection to something larger, something whole and holy. They, too, reflect the deep hunger of our time, a hunger that has led us to devour our planet and consume the very source of our lives in a mindless attempt to fill up the empty spaces in our hearts and spirits.

We have lost a sense of home and through our choices to live as if the planet were some inert machine, a mere resource for our consumption, we have become like restless drifters, alienated and estranged. This deep sense of alienation from Earth, each other, and indeed from all that is holy, eternal, mysterious, will not be mended by the Internet and its capacity to connect us with people world's away from our own. Our deep longing for true communion will not be satiated at the altar of consumerism. Our fearful, stressed out, harried lives will not be soothed and calmed by any more "labor-saving devices" or even the latest time-management scheme. It is time to go

back to the source of our pain, the place where we began to get lost, cut-off from all that is truly sustaining and life-giving. These times call for reclaiming our deep capacity to feel, to love, to care, to be open to wonder, awe and mystery. Now is the time to return home, to reacquaint ourselves with the source and substance of our lives. For what is "ecology," *eco-logy*, *oikos-logios*, but a love of home, that deep bond of filial connection with one's place of belonging. We have lost touch with "home," we are adrift without a true sense of belonging, we have devalued love, compassion, cooperation. In so doing we have diminished our own capacity to relate and connect with this awe-inspiring, mysterious, richly complex and simply beautiful place that is truly our home.

My work within ecology, religion and education has brought me to a place of deep conviction that we are desperately in need of recreating dynamic relationships with nature and each other in order to reconnect with the profound wonder and possibility that undergirds life itself. And at the very heart of it all reclaiming the spiritual values of hope, forgiveness, love, compassion that have been devalued and excluded in our culture and certainly within academia. My research within sustainable communities provided wonderful examples of places and people trying to reclaim these values and offers insights and hope as we undertake our own arduous, joyful journey to wholeness. Such a journey is truly a spiritual one as we reaffirm life and reconnect with wonder and mystery. The map that will guide us is one that faith deciphers and will be discernible to those whose hearts have

been awakened to their place in the vast web of life, who long to reconnect with the whole and holy, who are willing to engage their lives in the sacred work of love, creativity, passion and hope. This journey invites us to rediscover our embeddedness in nature and reclaim our vast spiritual resources as we seek to find our way back home.

O World

O world, thou chooseth not the better part!
 It is not wisdom to be only wise,
 And on the inward vision close the eyes,
 But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
 Columbus found a world, and had no chart,
 Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
 To trust the soul's invincible surmise
 Was all his science and his only art.
 Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
 That lights the pathway but one step ahead
 Across a void of mystery and dread.
 Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
 By which alone the mortal heart is led
 Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

- George Santayana

And a Child Shall Lead Them

My husband, children and I were returning home one summer evening when an enormous orange-gold ball appeared on the horizon. The sky was still a pale shade of blue with Venus the only other visible light. The trees stood in quiet reverence, their dark silhouettes looking like lace filigree against the sky. The night air was so clear one could see the contours of the moon with unusual clarity. For almost an hour the four of us watched in quiet amazement as the glowing moon rose slowly and impressively into the sky.

Later that same evening as we tucked our children into bed six year old Emma, her eyes still shining with joy from the experience, said, "I don't think I've ever seen such a beautiful moon, so big and full. It made my heart feel full just to see it." Indeed, I too had felt a "full heart" at the exquisite beauty of that moonrise and felt grateful that my young child could feel such joy. As we turned off the light to leave the room, our ever-questioning four year old, Zachary, asked, "Do you think the moon was as happy to see us?" Then he smiled and said, more to himself than to us, "I think so," and closed his eyes for slumber. The moon was full and so were we.

It is a scene repeated many times. . . an experience of beauty, a response of joy, a deeply felt sense of connection. As we shared that peaceful evening, it was my children's response that reminded me how truly satisfying it is to experience the awesomeness of nature, to have that indescribable feeling of joy well up from within. How, indeed, it makes full one's empty, open spaces. And did the moon feel it too? Well, practically speaking, it is highly doubtful, but oh what a delightful thought, what alluring reciprocity, a true communion of subjects, the holiest of unions. The fullness of the moon may have something profound to offer the emptiness of our time, if we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart like a child's.

A Crisis within a Crisis

The critical state of the environment has been before the public for the last thirty to forty years. Rachel Carson wrote of it in 1962, and throughout that decade and the next many efforts were mounted to stop pollution and

the deterioration of the environment. From the beginning there have been those who were quick to make the connection between the environment and religious/spiritual values. Now, in the present it is not only religious leaders but many politicians and scientists alike that are calling for a kind of transformation in ourselves that is holistic and spiritually-based.

In their 1990 "Open Letter to the Religious Community," a world renowned group of over thirty scientists called upon faith groups to respond to the ecological threats facing the planet. "Problems of this magnitude and solutions demanding so broad a perspective must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension."¹ Similarly, Vaclav Havel took the opportunity in his 1994 Philadelphia "Fourth of July" speech to raise similar themes, calling for a reaffirmation of spiritual values and the link between the soul and the cosmos. Without a heightened regard for the sacred dimension and "the miracle of Being" even the best politics and regulations will not bring about the necessary changes. Havel's call spoke of a spirituality not steeped in the abstract diest religious views of the 18th century, but a new cosmic spirituality that includes all in the great mystery of life. A major theme of former Vice-President Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance*, was similarly a call for a rethinking of the dualistic world view that is now all-pervasive and to find in its stead new ways of living faithfully in order to act differently in our relationship with nature.

What all these voices and many others have in common is the growing recognition that the ecological crisis is not merely a problem of "good

science gone bad” that can be tinkered with in a lab in order to readjust or correct it. Instead, they recognize that at the core of our environmental problems are attitudes and beliefs that are in desperate need of transformation if we are to adequately face the coming challenges. What they seem to be saying is that the “crisis within the crisis” is a spiritual one, and that what is needed is a “basic transformation of human hearts and minds . . . a profound reshaping of how we think and live so that we may deepen our kinship, our connectedness, with all life.”²

Fritz Hull, founder and director of the Institute for Earth and Spirit, has been working on the intersection of ecology and spiritual values for several decades. His work points to the ways in which our current planetary problems are ones so deeply rooted in our basic beliefs and value structure that until we address that spiritual dimension of life, we will fail to address the suffering of Earth. He writes, “The spiritual dimension offers the depth needed to understand this crisis, the courage to confront the destructive patterns, the commitment and staying power to engage this crisis over the long haul, and a hopeful spirit from which a new and sustainable culture may be born.”³ His words echo the commitments of the Findhorn Foundation and its desire to be a place for the intentional cultivation of a spiritual outlook. As far back as 1975 they expressed their vision in the following statement shared with the United Nations:

The crises of our time are challenging the world religions to release a new spiritual force transcending religious, cultural and national boundaries into a new consciousness of the oneness of human community and so putting into effect a spiritual dynamic toward the solutions of the world's problems . . . we affirm a new spirituality directed toward planetary consciousness.⁴

The Findhorn Foundation, twenty-five years later still embodies that commitment to spiritual values and practices. Whether through daily meditation, the attunement process used throughout the community, or the creative attention given to cultivating lovely gardens and eco-friendly buildings, my family's experiences at Findhorn stood in contrast to the patterns of living found in the United States and the community in which we live. For at Findhorn they have translated their desire for a new spirituality of oneness and harmony into very tangible actions, interactions and ways of being. Theirs is not an abstract commitment to some utopian dream or religious dogma, but is rather a living witness to the power of spirituality to shape the life, values and rhythm of an entire community. And the results are stunning!

Irish-born ecologist and priest Daniel Martin also speaks of the "crisis within a crisis" but does so using some different language. He claims that at the core of the crisis is a lost sense of belonging which can only be recaptured through real experience with Earth, our home.

The crisis we experience today needs to be understood at its most fundamental level: the alienation of human from the Earth, that is born of fear, so that we do not feel that we belong, and that results in the creation of a world of illusory control to protect ourselves. The solution to our crisis, then, has to be the personal experience of the world as it truly is--a web of life--and

our place in it. Only from such an experience can a new understanding be reached that will allow us to take steps beyond our present tendency to patch things up and postpone changes that we must inevitably make . . . When we experience the fire of the universe in the present moment, when our senses have been revitalized and our deep memory stirred, when we have been grasped by the mysterious purpose of the universe, then we will begin to know what to do and more importantly, have the power to do it.⁵

These rich experiences of which Martin writes, this awakening of our senses (not unlike my children's viewing of the rising moon), takes us to new places in our sense of belonging and our capacity to experience ourselves as part of the miraculous and numinous. This is also the place where educators and parents alike can provide rich, meaningful contact with the world beyond the self. Our classrooms, boardrooms and churches are largely designed to keep out the "distractions" of light and motion, color and change that make up the natural world and often in the place of real authentic encounters, substitute mere abstraction. But to awaken the senses, to stir the memory, to provide opportunity for learners to be "grasped by the mysterious purpose of the universe," these are moments and experiences that are replete with spiritual meaning, that reassert our underlying connections to Earth and Mystery. These are the things which Pablo Casals speaks of as the true teachings we must offer the young, grounding them in the miraculous reality of their own being within a universe of possibility and promise. It is this sense of connection and home, believes Martin, that will provide us the capacity to make the changes that will lead us beyond crisis into deeper experiences of community. Such experiences may also offer the possibility of healing that

moves one beyond fear and despair and into radiant hope. Time and again as I interviewed community members at Svanholm, Lebensgarten or Findhorn, it was this kind of healing that was recounted. As individuals reconnected with nature, with mystery, with other people, something profound and life-giving began to take shape within them. Transformation of the self made way for the possibility of transformed relationships with nature and others as isolation gave way to connection and rootlessness was changed into belonging.

A major voice in ecological theology, Dr. Sallie McFague, shares Martin's belief that much of our current crisis stems from our very sense of rootlessness.

Most simply and profoundly, we have lost the sense of belonging and the sense of life. We have lost the sense of belonging to the world and to the God who creates, nurtures, and redeems this world and all its creatures and we have lost the sense that we are part of a living, dynamic, changing cosmos that has its being in and through God. We have lost this sense of belonging to life. . . ."⁶

That lack of belonging pervades all we do and shapes not only our sense of self but also the way we relate, or fail to relate, to nature and the cosmos. Without a sense of belonging to this planet or to a community of beings, there is the tendency to seek after alternative means to satisfy our longing for connection. We go to the mall until our arms are laden with things and our homes filled to capacity, or we reach for a bottle of whatever substance we think will provide the euphoria and peace that eludes us. Our lives are filled

with more and more stuff, but we are no happier, no more rooted, no more satisfied than before.

Many religious leaders and theologians are among those who are now awakening to the need for a major shift in thinking. Biblical scholar and seminary professor David Rhodes is working to make environmental issues , not just one among many, but central to the understanding of faith. "It is very important that we bring this concern for the environment into the orbit of faith, because no technological fix will heal what we have done to creation. Healing will require a major shift in lifestyle, a profound human transformation.⁷ Similarly, Middlebury College's Steven Rockefeller, has been a leader in making connections between the spiritual and the environmental and sees religious attitudes as having the power to help move humanity toward more respect and care for nature.

Even though the spiritual life is not confined to the institutional religions, the latter are in a position to play a vitally important role in the process of personal transformation and social reconstruction that is required to address the environmental crisis. If a religion is in harmony with the creative spiritual energies of the times, its myths, symbols, and rituals have the power to teach the heart and awaken faith. Ideas of God and teachings about the relationship between God and the world shape human attitudes toward nature. A theology can obstruct development of a respect for nature or foster it.⁸

There is a growing recognition that science alone cannot provide the way out of our current environmental miasma because it is not within the purview of science to bring about human transformation. It is the religious and spiritual traditions of the world that have always provided the means for talking about the larger categories of existence, why we are here, how to live

knowing we will die, what is the purpose of this journey, how can we face suffering, what does it mean to love? It is a uniquely spiritual endeavor to speak of the sacred dimension of life and to seek after an encounter with that numinous reality in which we live and more and have our being. As human choices continue to result in Earth's deterioration and desacralization, it will be the spiritual task of re-imagining our central purpose and reclaiming an awareness of "the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of our own existence," (Havel) that may provide as the vision, courage and strength to take a different course.

By What Means Transformed?

The desacralization of nature brought about by the emerging mechanistic world of the Renaissance received further momentum through the Copernican Revolution and the rise of modern science. Author David Kinsely describes the evolution of this thinking as the "disenchantment of nature" which provided the capacity to justify the control, manipulation and abuse of the natural world.⁹ This model, he and others claim, is a major reason for the level of environmental degradation experienced in the present, as it promoted hierarchical and anthropocentric beliefs that gradually became reinforced by religious language, theology and ritual, and that resulted in greater disconnection from nature.

Sallie McFague is among those who acknowledge the negative consequences of blending theological language with the scientific understandings of the past. She seeks a replacement for the hierarchical and

mechanistic constructs and distances herself from those who would use Christian tradition to bolster and support an out-dated and unhealthy paradigm of domination. Instead, she believes that by drawing upon the new cosmic creation story that science is imparting to us we have a common story that provides the basis for a new way of understanding and hence new patterns for living. This story of a universe fifteen billion years in the making opens up new possibilities for understanding our place in the universe and our deep embeddedness in a wild, dynamic and relational drama.

The organic model that emerges from the common creation story is not the orderly, limited, clearly defined classic one . . . Rather it is wild, strange and unconventional. . . from the slimy bodies of primitive worms to supernovas and black holes, from the elegant bodies of tigers and seals to coral reefs, viruses and birch trees. . . what characterizes it above all else is diversity. . . interconnected in the most radical, profound way. . .¹⁰

She argues that the traditional paradigm with its metaphors rooted in hierarchy and rank ordering must be dismantled in favor of a model that celebrates diversity and interconnection. By toppling the notion of the “great Chain of Being” and replacing it with a community of holy creatures there is no longer justification for the abuse and exploitation of those things considered to be “lesser.” New relational possibilities emerge as we rethink our place among earth’s creatures.

McFague is joined by Father Thomas Berry in pursuit of an ecological theology for our time that is grounded in contemporary cosmology, but also brings qualities of spiritual reflection that science alone does not offer. Berry

reminds us that the scientific story of the origins of the universe, while giving people a shared story, a common history, is an incomplete one, describing only the physical aspects of cosmic emergence. There remains the need to include the numinous, conscious dimension for a functional cosmology.¹¹ Berry sees the universe itself as a primary mode of divine presence. Nature provides us with a functional spirituality by awakening us to “the unique and irreplaceable qualities of the individual and the inseparable bonding with every other being in the universe.”¹² Our relationship to and with nature takes on new dimensions. Just as we are embedded in nature, nature is embedded in us. We are unique, as are all aspects of nature, yet we are also not just separate, but truly one with nature. Such a vision of connectedness offers a compelling alternative to the disconnection and alienation that has characterized Western attitudes toward the natural world for hundreds of years. It is this emerging understanding of our deep bonds with the natural world, Barry contends, that can provide the spiritual basis for all we do and provide us the awareness necessary to move beyond the more limiting older paradigm.

Elizabeth Dodson Gray has said it seems to be high time to finish the Copernican Revolution. Even as we had to learn the astronomical reality of the universe now it is time to adjust our thinking about ourselves and the mental pyramid of values still in place in our heads. We have accepted that the earth is not the center of the universe, but we continue to act as if we humans still were.¹³

There is great need for reordering our thinking so that we avoid the kind of hierarchical traps that always lead to bias, prejudice and ultimately abuse and mistreatment. We, as humans, are not the center of the universe, but are a dazzling, diverse part of it. Those who would seek to articulate or teach religious or spiritual values must be aware enough to avoid unknowingly reinforcing the mechanistic paradigm. They must draw anew upon ancient and contemporary wisdom in order to describe a relational world view that helps connect individuals to that larger sense of self that reaches outward to include an unfolding cosmic mystery.

Within the communities I studied there are many examples of how one can move toward this deeper awareness of our place in the universe. At times our best tool may simply be to slow down and let ourselves be attentive to what nature has yet to teach us about who we are and how we belong. Gazing at the night sky, taking a long walk through the forests or meadows, listening to a lecture about human evolution, each of these experiences and countless others will take us to that very real place of knowing where all our categories and classifications give way to a larger mysterious and wholly relational reality. The following journal entry from my time in Denmark reflects what can occur when we take the time to be present with nature, with ourselves and with mystery. Late one afternoon I left my work of transcribing interviews and walked along the fjord. My mind had been so full of words and images that what I longed for most was a quiet moment to breathe and renew myself.

There, in the waning hours of the day
my entire body present
the boundaries dissolve into quietude
and I am fully there.
It is as if the gentle lapping of the water
is the very sound of my own blood
flowing through my veins.
The breeze, my breath.
The ground I stand upon
nothing more, nor less
than my own flesh.
There is no "other"
Only this -
the one amazingly interconnected universe
that is my heart.

This experience I can only call "mystical" for it filled me with a deep sense of the mystery and wonder of oneness that cannot be fully grasped by the intellect. By taking time to fully be present, quiet, open, I transcended the normal categories of my daily perception and entered a place of spiritual awareness that offered an experience of oneness and connection that was life-giving, renewing and inspiring. Such experience can emerge in daily life through many means, but require an openness and a receptivity which often resides only in the domain of stillness and quiet. That may be, yet, another reason why each of the communities I studied placed a great deal of emphasis on the inner life that includes meditation, quiet time in nature, periods of reflection, for it is often out of such inward moments that we capture a glimpse of that larger numinous reality in which we live.

The emerging paradigm of our time, as described in Chapter One, is not only about new understandings of our origins. It also has profound implications for the way we understand ourselves and how we are to live on

a finite, ever-changing planet. In light of such a paradigm Berry, McFague and many others acknowledge the need to draw upon such understandings in order to shape an authentic spirituality that takes its learnings from the natural world, celebrates diversity, seeks encounters with the numinous, is open to mystery, and awake to the radical interconnectedness of all things. Such a paradigm will effect the way we build our cities and relate within our homes. It will be reflected in our consumer practices and our work for justice and peace. It will be made visible in our worship life, meditation practices and the songs we sing. This was the case at Findhorn, Svanholm, and Lebensgarten, where we found people living a kind of spirituality that was not "otherworldly" but instead revolved around the sacred, mystical, beautiful connections that constitute life. Such a spirituality is grounded in the most powerful force of all, love.

Rediscovering the Capacity to Love and the Power of Awe

It has been said that there are only two things that bring about real change in humans, fear and love. Fear has been a predominant theme within the environmental movement over the past decades. Scientific data tells us how bad things have gotten, news reports speak of global warming and rampant toxins and we feel powerless, worried, fearful of the future. I see this often among my students, even the brightest most talented ones seem to shrink in the face of such overwhelming obstacles. We have more and more information about the state of our world, and yet, as one of the great fathers of environmentalism suggested long ago, all the education in

the world, indeed all the scientific information in the world, cannot change people, is not sufficient for crafting a new day. Indeed, such information seems to merely reinforce for many the idea that there truly is no hope.

By contrast, the spiritual traditions offer the language and practice of love, rooted and grounded in an awareness and experience of awe. When Chardin spoke of harnessing the energies of love this was not some shallow metaphor, but a deep and profound spiritual statement about the power of love, passion and compassion to bring about the miraculous and seemingly impossible. As we move away from relationships characterized by domination and disconnection toward ones imbued with reverence and a deep sense of shared connection we create within ourselves the capacity to care and to be moved by all that is sacred around and within us. George Washington Carver seems to have understood that reality when he said, "If you love it enough anything will talk with you." As one seeks intimate connection with the other, a true relationship emerges that makes possible Berry's vision of a "communion of subjects," an opening up of new lines of communication and feelings of kinship.

Such loving communion is made possible by deeper knowledge of the beloved. One does not love in the abstract. Love is brought about by encounter and by deepening knowledge and understanding of the other. As the old cliché says, "love takes time." And this could be sage advice for those of us who want to cultivate deeper capacities for love and caring within ourselves and others. In the business of our lives as we drive quickly

through a grove of trees to some particular destination, we will probably not experience the uniqueness or beauty of each tree. It is when we take the time to walk among them that we begin to relate in a new way. No longer merely the backdrop for the drama of our lives even the trees and flowers, sky and birds become entities with which we develop a filial bond. Similarly, as we take time to be with other people, hearing their stories, learning of their needs and likes, hopes and fears they cease to be mere objects and we relate with them as subjects. This shift makes possible true bonds of intimacy, love, compassion and caring. The cultivation of love takes time, attentiveness, being awake to the wonders of those persons, creatures and places that constitute the lifeworld. The major world religions all speak of the importance of love and for most it is love born out of relationship, not purely some highly spiritual form. It is real, embodied, authentic experiences of love that elicit praise, good works, and hope.

Along with deepening capacities to love, central to the spiritual life is the gift of awe, the awakening of the heart to miraculous immanence, or in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, the experience of "radical amazement." "Awe is the beginning of wisdom," declares Heschel, drawing upon a rich biblical concept. "Awe precedes faith."¹⁴ It is in the presence of mystery that we are left with the jaw-dropping wonder, the kind that filled my six year old as she gazed at a glowing moon, and ignites the human imagination and capacity to feel. This sense of awe is shared by mystic and

poet, scientist and child, young and old and is grounded in the sheer mystery of life. It is out of this sense, claims Heschel, that all true faith emerges.

For those attuned to the transformative power of a deep, authentic spirituality there is an awareness that when the human heart is ignited by a passion for the universe and a compassion for all that is, then true change can take place. Wendell Berry, essayist and farmer, reiterates that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. What is needed is love. "Love your neighbors—not just the ones you pick but the ones you have. Love this miraculous world that we did not make, that is gift to us."¹⁵ It is only love which will take us to the place where we reconstitute ourselves and make way for a transformed life.

There is a quality to the spiritual task that is purely about experiencing the ineffable. No longer numb to what is around us, we find our deepest meaning merely in the experience of being. We find something that truly satiates our inner longing. Joseph Campbell spent much of his life exploring the religious and spiritual values that shape culture and provide meaning in human experience. He notes:

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experience on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.¹⁶

"The rapture of being alive" is to participate in the mystical. This type of engagement with life and living occurs most often in those times when we are attentive to the world around us, awake and aware of the ebb and flow,

the leaf and breeze, the colors, textures, movement and change that exist within our seeing. In the word of Sallie McFague, "Looking at the world with full attention- any bit of it- should stun us, leaving us amazed and wanting to know more."¹⁷ She describes the spiritual task to be one of learning to truly look at the world with such attention, allowing oneself to avoid the objectification of the "arrogant eye" and instead to cultivate the "loving eye." Here she builds on the work of feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye who uses these terms to separate the type of seeing so apparent in Western scientific values of objectification and control (arrogant eye) from the kind of seeing that is grounded in respect for the subject.¹⁹ It is the "loving eye," claim both Frye and McFague, that takes us from a place of detachment to the place of true engagement. Such engagement, such subjective attentiveness opens one to her/his own capacity to care. One cannot truly love what one does not know. And one cannot come to know that with which one is not truly engaged. To open ourselves to such engagement fills the heart and mind with wonder, awe, and the stunning power of being swept up in the miraculous. Just as my experience along a Danish fjord opened me to a deeper sense of connection and affiliation it will be in practicing such attentiveness that we will be plunged into mystery and offered deeper abilities to love and connect.

The capacity to love and the power of awe are first and foremost grounded in experience, not merely abstraction. It is in those moments when we are truly present, letting ourselves be awash in the vital immediacy of the

experience that we begin to reorder ourselves, our lives, our priorities. For this reason I have rebelled against having a car phone, despite many meetings that take me several hours from home and office. I know myself and if I had such access I would want to "make the most of every moment," by phoning this person or that in order to be more "productive." But then I would miss the slant of sun coming through the trees in the late afternoon, the brilliant blue of an autumn sky, the purple-blue-pink beauty of lupine just beyond the roadway. To love is to make a choice to be fully present in one's own living. To love is to open the heart, mind and body to a relationship that promises no less than to transform one's very way of seeing and understanding and no more than to satiate one's deepest longings. Such a relationship brings healing and renewal, as so eloquently expressed in this poem by Wendell Berry:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their lights. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.¹⁹

Far from being an overly romanticized vision of nature, Berry recounts an experience that resonates with many of us. Nature is not merely the utopian "Peaceful Kingdom," but home, the place where we can take our weary souls and aching hearts and be refreshed through deep and trusting bonds of love

and intimacy. Nature, whether it be a gorgeous spring morning or a raging winter storm is not only the context for our living, but also the living text from which we learn life's deepest lessons. But if the world is mere resource, if we have only the arrogant eye through which to gaze, if we are only attuned to the material reality of work and success, acquisition and achievement, then the hollow place within us grows and so does our despair.

One cannot love in the abstract. Love is an embodied experience of taking into oneself the needs of the other, the concerns of the other, not in an attempt to control but out of a deep desire to understand, support and care for. Academia does not speak much of love. It is almost as if the human capacity to feel and to connect were somehow an embarrassment, a failure of sorts, and those who can rise to loftier heights of objective, rational thinking rule the day. But more and more we see the price of such fallacious thinking. We see it in the eyes of the student staring blankly while one hand takes notes on a topic soon to be forgotten. We see it in the divorces, illnesses and addictions that touch our lives and those we love. We feel it in the way we move through our days, never enough time, never enough peace, never enough. We appear to be fools if we take off our shoes to feel the grass beneath our toes, or unplug the phone to enjoy an afternoon of napping or love-making. We seem suspicious if we care too much about our students or if we are too passionate in articulating hope for the future.

Albert Einstein was most precise: ‘Three great powers rule the world’, he said, ‘stupidity, fear and greed.’

How to interrupt this vicious circle? What tool shall we use and where shall we insert it?

For me the Dalai Lama has marked the way: ‘My religion’, he said once, ‘is very simple. My religion is kindness.’

Kindness trumps greed: it asks for sharing. Kindness trumps fear; it calls forth gratefulness and love. Kindness trumps even stupidity, for with sharing and love, one learns.

Kindness is not on political agendas. Kindness is not on financial agendas. Kindness is not on scientific agendas. Kindness is not on technological agendas. Why not? It’s inexpensive, simply understood, and universally approved.

The twenty-first century must feature kindness - to the earth and all its species--or there will be little hope for a twenty-second.²⁰

Where do we go and learn such capacities to care, to love, to act with kindness? Is this not the role of spirituality? Is this not also the role of education, to also help learners become members of their communities? What might a religion called “kindness” look like as it is embodied in the lives of teachers and administrators, parents and shopkeepers, students and the elderly? What might it mean in our own daily lives to treat our own bodies and the body of Earth with such kindness and reverence? This would truly be a revolution that would cause more than a mere blip on the screen and could open the human capacity for creativity and innovation in ways we can scarce imagine.

Making the Transition: Heading toward Home

In the introductory pages of this work, I described the experience of a little community called Sweet Valley and suggested that their story is also our

story. That the non-sustainable practices of Western culture will ultimately drive all of us from our home. But there is still time for another story to be written. There is the possibility of making change, meaningful change that will move us toward sustainable patterns of living and will draw us home to the center of what is whole and holy. Just as we have crafted the world we now know, a world of banks and bombers, the World Trade Organization and the World Wrestling Federation, a world of fast food, fast sex, fast tracks, game boy, AIDs, air travel, pesticides, planned obsolescence, objectification, Playboy, addictions to fossil fuels, antiques, beanie babies, we can also craft an alternative way of living, being and loving. Through human choice there is another way. But it will require that we draw upon qualities and values that we have relegated to the back pages of our list of human priorities.

In my research I intended to gather information that might illuminate the environmental struggles and challenges many of us face, while also using these sites as sources of information as to how we might move toward more sustainable patterns of living. What I gained from these communities was a profound sense of hope. These communities became the basis for my articulations about relational learning and they also modeled alternative ways of being in the world. Fundamentally, each of the communities I studied is about reclaiming the most basic aspect of being human—to relate. “I relate, therefore I am,” might well be the credo of the new millennium. For we are fully and completely relational beings connected to the cosmos through our amazing origins in space, connected to this planet out of which

we emerged and from which we draw daily sustenance, connected to each other through intricate bonds of necessity and choice. Relational learning, therefore, is not only an educational approach, it is about a way of being in the world. Even now as I reread the chapters in this thesis that describe the communities and my experiences within them, I am again struck by the ways in which these communities reflect a compelling vision of how we choose to honor or disregard those most fundamental relationships. This defines the spiritual task of our time--to awaken to the relational reality of our lives and to learn to honor and tend those very relationships. The implications of this kind of transformed way of living and relating will be far-reaching and will begin to move us into more sustainable and joyful ways of living and being.

In their stunning book *Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future*, Meadows, Meadows and Randers present devastating data on the impending collapse of many of our major ecosystems. But as they look at the possibility of a shift to more sustainable patterns of living, even these three scientific minds acknowledge that the shift is also a spiritual one that requires reclaiming some essential aspects of what it means to be human and to relate with the rest of life.

People don't need enormous cars; they need respect. They don't need closets full of clothes; they need to feel attractive and they need excitement and variety and beauty. People don't need electronic entertainment; they need something meaningful to do with their lives . . . People need identity, community, challenge, acknowledgement, love and joy. To try to fill these needs with material things is to set up an unquenchable appetite for false solutions to real and never-satisfied problems. The resulting psychological emptiness is one of the major forces behind the desire for material growth. A society that can admit

and articulate its nonmaterial needs and find nonmaterial ways to satisfy them would require much lower material and energy throughputs and would provide much higher levels of human fulfillment.²¹

“People need identity, community, challenge, acknowledgment, love and joy.” Are these within the purview of science and technology, the mall or Home Shopping Network? How deeply their words resonate with many of us, yet how deeply they contradict the prevailing attitudes and values of our time. Still, deep within we know the joy that comes through the cultivation of healthy, dynamic relationships. We experience the satisfaction of having used our energies toward something meaningful. We know the deep peace that can fill our senses as we watch a golden-yellow moon emerge above a distant horizon. Once again Vaclav Havel offers a similar vision.

What could change the direction of today’s civilization? It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit. . . it is not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behavior and a new set of values for the planet.²²

The transition toward sustainable patterns of living will start within the individual human being as she/he becomes increasingly aware of her/his own relational reality. Before we can tap into our own creative reservoirs to discover the solutions to global warming and toxic waters, we must dive deep into our greatest natural resource, the human spirit, the capacity to love, feel and connect. To find our way home is truly the spiritual task of reclaiming our own humanity, in its deepest, noblest sense. To learn anew what it

means to live in joyful reciprocity, to engage in harmonious acts of celebration and creativity, to bear witness with our lives that there is something here worth living for. Such learning will necessarily take place in classrooms and cornfields, homes and community centers, offices and places of worship. Through such eco-spiritual educational practices we will find new ways of living into a future that is not predetermined, but is even now coming into being. Such practices acknowledge we have the capacity to change and that there is reason for hope. Like Fritz Hull and others who share his vision I too believe that

. . .we will discover the needed wisdom and learn the ways to become resourceful and visionary members of the Earth community. As we learn a new love for this world, for nature in all its dimensions, we will meet our challenge and know what do to. For that which we love, we will protect, defend and heal. This is not a time to hold back. This new time requires imagination, love, boldness . . .the pouring forth of our creativity into the life of the Earth, its peoples and its future. Nothing less is required and nothing less is in our best interest.²³

As my family spent months living among people who were committed to sustainable practices, several things became clear. First, we learned that there is no certain and sure path before us that points to what sustainability will look like, no blueprint to follow. There are great resources that teach about sustainable practices in building, investing, parenting, energy use, educational pedagogy. We need all that and more. But secondly, we also learned that the first step on the path toward sustainable living is truly a breath, a moment, a particular attentiveness to the now. The human ingenuity and skill that brought us DDT, the internet and propelled us to the

moon, is the same energy that can be harnessed for another purpose if we have the will and are open to grace. The universe has blessed the human creature with amazing capacities to dream and dare and do. The task we are invited to undertake is the daily, moment by moment work of reclaiming our own spirits, embracing our full humanity, uniting with others to make this day and all future days lived with an awareness of our deep, sacred connections, here and now. This work will not be done in the abstract, but will be embodied in the lives of those who are willing to touch and be touched, love and be loved, change the world and be changed by the world.

With our spirits untethered may we relearn to dance with the stars, sing with all manner of creatures, dream with the ancients and find the deep peace that comes upon arriving home after a long and perilous journey.

May a good vision catch me
 May a benevolent vision take hold of me, and move me
 May a deep and full vision come over me,
 and burst open around me
 May a luminous vision inform me, enfold me.
 May I awaken into the story that surrounds ,
 May I awaken into the beautiful story.
 May the wondrous story find me;
 May the wildness that makes beauty arise
 between two lovers
 arise beautifully between my body
 and the body of this land,
 between my flesh and the flesh of this earth,
 here and now,
 on this day,
 May I taste something sacred.²⁴

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