



Chrysalis

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

Within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment – but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading. That's exactly the opposite of how it was when I was a child!

~ Richard Louv

Dear Reader,

In his groundbreaking book, *Last Child In The Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv explores the growing separation between children and the natural world that is an unforeseen consequence of our technological way of life. In the absence of natural play and direct experience, the natural world is becoming more of an abstraction than a reality for children.

What are the implications of this separation for both children and nature? On the side of the child, Louv sees a waning capacity to experience the world directly, a narrowing of focus, an atrophying of the senses, a “know-it-all state of mind,” attention disorders, and feelings of alienation and isolation from the world around them. On the side of nature, Louv writes, “as the care of nature increasingly becomes an intellectual concept severed from the joyful experience of the outdoors, you have to wonder: Where will future stewards of nature come from?”²

The causes of this divorce between children and the natural world are many - time spent with computers, television and video games, overly structured childhood activities, fears concerning safety, neighborhood design and covenants, and the demands of school, to name a few.

But Louv is no pessimist. He takes his reader through the growing body of research that suggests that experiences with nature are fundamental to the healthy development of the human child. His plan for an alternative future includes, among other innovations, a new kind of school reform based in “wildlife-and-child preserves”.

¹Richard Louv, *Last Child In The Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2005), p. 1.

²Louv, pp. 145-146



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From its inception, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm has sought to create "a wildlife-and-child preserve" in which both the child and nature find fulfillment - the child through discovering the wonder, beauty and intimacy of nature; nature through receiving the love and care of the growing child.

We are painfully aware of the limits, the shadow side, of the technological view of the future that pervades our culture. This issue of *Chrysalis* takes us beyond the familiar patterns of our post-modern way of life to various situations around the world where children still experience an intimacy with nature - situations where nature has not yet become an abstraction for children.

We begin with an interview with Neetu Singh, teacher and program coordinator at the Valley School in Bangalore, India. Based on the insights of Krishnamurti, The Valley School integrates nature into the design of the school so that children are embedded in the natural world as part of the rhythm of the day. At the Valley School, children become conversant with silence, with listening and looking, as they develop inner capacities for direct, unmediated experience.

Next, we see a Forest Kindergarten in Frankfurt, Germany through the eyes of Meike Shubert, a kindergarten teacher-in-training. The Forest Kindergartens of Germany, now 400 in number, are a glowing example of place-based education. Meike's kindergarten children spend their entire morning outdoors, playing and creating out of the richness of the natural world.

There follows an interview with Joy Hamlin, Curator of Education at the North Carolina Zoo, who was instrumental in creating UNITE, a program that links educators in North Carolina and Uganda. The children of Bigodi are born into a deep sense of belonging to the natural world. With Joy, we experience their sense of connectedness to nature and explore questions about the introduction of technology into their culture.

Jenne Sluder, a former intern at the Center, provides a living picture of the Kenyan village of Chepterwai where children are enculturated into a regard for the land and the human community. Jenne questions the hubris of Western culture and the way in which "our fast-paced, industrial, and individualistic culture is seen as something to aspire to."

Then, we travel with Center gardener Jessica Towle to the Patagonia region of Argentina where she worked with a group of international volunteers to design a Waldorf-inspired school based on permaculture principles. What better way to bring children into a relationship with the natural world than to build a school in relationship to the land, the water, and the sun?

Center Naturalist Megan Olivia Toben paints a loving portrait of Katia and Armenia, Peruvian cousins who live a childhood inseparable from the Amazon Jungle. Through the shaman's knowledge of their grandfather and the women's wisdom of their grandmother, they are wise to the earth's ways.

Finally, Gay Cheney shares a life-long connection to Native American culture that underlies her work with children at the Center. And Una Nakamura, Founder of Sisters of the Sound Continuum, recalls a day in the life of the Center when a group of first grade children were touched by nature and experienced the joy of music.

These portraits are reasons for hope. They remind us that nature-deficit disorder is a very new phenomenon – that we can still find our way into the future without losing the richness of life. Thomas Berry has said that the human being is “that being in whom this grand diversity of the universe celebrates itself in conscious self-awareness.”³ Without a bond of intimacy established in childhood, no celebration unfolds.

With warm regards,

Carolyn Toben

Carolyn Toben,
Co-Director

Peggy Whalen-Levitt

Peggy Whalen-Levitt
Co-Director



³ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p.198.

The Valley School in Bangalore, India: An Interview with Neetu Singh

Neetu Singh is a Teacher and Program Coordinator at the Study Centre of the Valley School, a school established in 1978 based on the teachings of the eminent philosopher and thinker, Jiddu Krishnamurti. The school is located in South India near Bangalore in a picturesque valley with undulating hills and farms with a reserve forest on the fringe. It has 110 acres of dense vegetation, with a lake on one side and a running stream. The school, Art Village and the Study Centre are located on the same campus. Peggy Whalen-Levitt interviewed Neetu on May 4, 2005

PWL: I understand that there was a year-long search for the land where the school now resides. Krishnamurti knew that the land should be about 100 acres. When he walked through the wilderness site that included streams, a lake, woodland and meadows, he knew the school had found its home. What is it about this site that supports the vision of the Valley School?

NS: One of the things that perhaps attracted Krishnamurti to this land was the giant Banyan tree and he had some special attraction towards that tree. In fact, the other schools in India have a huge banyan tree. And this one happens to have a fairly old banyan tree, perhaps a hundred years old. That's my guess. But I think it was more on the feeling level. From what I understand, he walked the land and when he came out he said "This is the right land, the right place to start the school."

PWL: As I learn more about The Valley School, I am struck by the ways in which the school nurtures a sensitivity to place. In creating a walk to the Art Village, for example, an attempt has been made to create a natural ambience of bamboo grove, stream, tall trees and pond. How did the school's founders go about creating this environment?

NS: When the original educators started the school, it was just a barren land. There were two or three trees like the banyan tree and the tamarind tree, and you could actually see the whole expanse. But now the whole area has been regenerated into a forest. So, they had to figure everything out from the beginning. What would we like the school to be? Twenty-seven years ago this place was very far away from the city. When they sat down to decide how to make a school, how to organize 110 acres of land, they put the structures at the borders. So that when the children walk from the school to the Art Village, or from the school to the Study Centre, they have to walk through the forest. They don't really have to make a deliberate effort or time to go into the forest. They have to do it, it's part of being there.



PWL: The school art director has said that "The (Art) Village offers a silent space for the creative minds to meet in the midst of trees, the rushing stream and the call of birds. All of these keep changing each moment to celebrate life in its silence and serenity. And in this silence may sprout a movement, which is the chant of Nature, within and around. Here, the child and the adult may free his mind from its limitation and awaken to the ageless mind that is beyond space, beyond time." This

is a very different view of art from the Western notion of self-expression. Would you say that art is experienced as a form of participation with the natural world?

NS: I would say, quite a bit of it, because when the children go to the Art Village, the structure is simple. There's a water pond, there's a huge banyan tree where the children have classes under the tree, and there's a bamboo grove, and the children spend a lot of time outdoors beside the pond, where they will do some drawing and painting. And the representation of the natural world in paintings or drawings is very beautiful. It's extremely touching. And also there's a music room, so you can listen to the music. The sound of music spreads everywhere. So when the children go there, it creates a very nice atmosphere.

PWL: I understand that it was a series of talks that Krishnamurti gave in Bangalore in 1971 that laid the foundation for the opening of The Valley School in 1978. During those talks, Krishnamurti gave a wonderful example of looking at a bougainvillea as follows: "There is not only the sensory perception with the eye: you see this bougainvillea. . . . Then as you observe that colour, you make an image, you have already an image; you have a name for it. You like it or dislike it, you have preferences. So through the images that you have about that flower, you see. You don't actually see, but your mind sees it more than the eye. . . . So you are looking, observing with the images, conclusions that you have formed. And, therefore, you are not actually looking at life. . . . So in order to look at your life

as it is, there must be freedom of observation.” Can you help us understand this “freedom of observation” that seems to be the impulse for the Valley School?

NS: Many years ago when I started reading the writings of J. Krishnamurti he posed the question – Have you ever looked at the tree? As I examined this question I realized that I had never really looked. I was not really paying attention to what was around me. Because in the kind of societies that we live in, everything is perceived to be for use. So I think in this quote, what is interesting to realize is that Krishnamurti uses the metaphor of looking at a tree to also pose that question, “Have you looked at your own images?” Whether it is the images between a boyfriend and a girlfriend or a husband and a wife, we take those images for granted. We assume that those images are helpful in knowing the other person. What Krishnamurti is asking is, “When you look at that image, what do you see? Is that image helpful or is it actually preventing you from having a direct relationship with the other person?” Then, he has a very famous quote where he says that if you don’t have a relationship with the Earth, with a tree, with the flowers, you don’t have a relationship with other human beings, because the same principle is involved. When we are looking at the natural world, when we are looking at a tree, are we looking only through our images that it gives us pleasure, it gives us a soothing effect, or can we just look at the way it is? Because if we look at the way it is, it tells a different story. When I look at a tree, for example today on a rainy day, it will change. In the morning, the same tree will seem to wake up, there will be hardly any light on it, and when the sunlight comes, the whole structure and the nature of the tree changes. In the evening, the tree has a somber look. So when I look at it, it is giving a different story. Am I in touch with something? Similarly, in relationship, am I really in touch with the other person? Or am I only approaching the person with the image I have of yesterday, which includes all the hurts and pleasures I’ve accumulated about the other person? Am I really in touch with that person, because every human being is changing, is evolving, is growing. They are not the same. And they don’t like to be treated the same as they were yesterday. Even I don’t like to be treated the way I was six months ago. So, that is the main question. Can we really examine the images?

PWL: In the same talk, Krishnamurti spoke the following words. “Look at the sky, look at that tree, look at the beauty of the light, look at the clouds with their curves, with their delicacy. If you look at them without any image, you have understood your own life And so the question is: What is this observer, the observer who has separated himself from the observed? At the moment of experiencing anything, there is no observer. When you look at that sunset - and that sunset is something immense - when you look at it, at that moment

there is no observer who says, “I am seeing the sunset.” A second later comes the observer. So how does the observer come into being? When you look at this flower, at the moment you observe it closely, there is no observer, there is only a looking. Then you begin to name that flower. Then you say, “I wish I had it in my garden or in my house.” Then you have already begun to build an image about that flower. So the image-maker is the observer . . . So when you observe, the observer looks at that flower with the eyes of the past. And you don’t know how to look without the observer.” Would you say that the Valley School is a learning community where teachers and children alike are learning “to look without the observer?”

NS: That is a good question. There is a distinction between the program that is at the school and the Study Centre. We have a children’s program at the Study Centre and the school addresses mostly the academic issues. How the teachers address this really depends on the skill of the teachers and their understanding of what Krishnamurti is saying and their own work with nature.

Now, what we do at the Study Centre is somewhat different. When children come to us at the Study Centre, we are mainly interested in, “Can the child be silent?” Because we feel that in silence there is this possibility of observation. If the mind is constantly chattering and involved in some activity, then the capacity to look is somewhat diminished. When the children come to the Study Centre, our whole idea of creating an activity or a program is, “Has that activity led to an observation, or to a state of silence first and then to an observation?” So, there is an activity, the movement into silence, and then observation. For example, when the children come to the Study Centre, one of the first things that we do is ask them to sit quietly and just listen to the sounds of birds. We ask them to sit in a proper posture where they can breathe easily and observe their breath. And then we have various activities when they come for a three hour session. Sitting quietly is only one part of that session, perhaps for fifteen or twenty minutes. And then sometimes we have them listen to a piece of music, for example, music of the rivers, or music of the wind. So, when they listen to it, we ask them to construct a story which comes to their mind, or images which come to their mind. And each child is given some time to explore that and share with others what they felt when they were listening to the music. Sometimes we just sit quietly, we don’t listen to music. Later, when we ask them of all the activities they did at the Study Centre for three hours which includes sitting quietly, perhaps having a discussion and going for a nature walk, we ask them to write what they felt about the program at the Centre. One of the key things that they come to is that “I could sit in silence, I didn’t know that I could sit in silence for such a long time.” I think we assume, as adults, that children are not able to sit quietly, that they are quite mischievous and cannot sit quietly. And we try to downplay that activity. But

we find that when children leave, that is one of the key activities which they really enjoy. It's something that they go back with, "When I sat quietly, this is what happened to me: I could listen to the birds, I could just watch my thoughts." We tell them, "Just observe your thoughts and feelings." So, they have that capacity, as they have the capacity to do other things.

PWL: How often do they come to you?

NS: They come twice in a term. Four times a year.

PWL: And they would do that all the way through their schooling?

NS: Yes. They start when they are in class one and continue until class twelve. Right now we have children who have been coming for twelve years.

PWL: Can you tell me more about how you nurture the art of listening and looking at the Study Centre?

NS: When the children come to the Study Centre we sit in silence for a while. And then we spend some time in the natural world: going for a walk, drawing, sketching, writing, collecting, and so on. And then we do some activity to develop a relationship with the body. For example, learning very basic movements - yoga movements - to relax the body, to learn how to calm the mind and body together. So, we engage children in various activities to bring the children close to themselves, rather than just being in the intellect. So the first hour is spent relating the child to the senses in some way. And then we have a break where they can wander around the Study Centre and socialize with each other. During this time some children go around the tree and sing songs to the Peepal tree.

And then, the key program of the Study Centre is engaging the children in a dialogue, to be able to sit and have an intelligent discussion with others on various issues that relate to their daily life. Some issues are how they relate with their parents, their teachers, with other children, with the world. And we look at social phenomena, for example, environmental degradation. Before the children come to the Study Centre, I go to the different classes and I ask the children to write down their concerns, what they would like to discuss when they come to the Study Centre. And that allows them to open up and be part of the program, rather than the program coming from outside. And then we try to categorize the questions into society, the self, the environment, relationships and so on. When they come to the Study Centre, we may read some questions that they have written and we divide the class into small groups of seven to eight children. In those groups, we try to elicit responses from them to the questions. By engaging their mind by asking questions and encouraging them to express themselves in small groups, they open up and relate what is being discussed to what they are

going through. And quite often they come up with wonderful insights into the various issues.

PWL: The Valley School makes a distinction between the cultivation of intelligence and that of intellect, of memory and its skills. Can you help us better understand this distinction between intelligence and intellect?

NS: Intellect is the capacity of the brain to understand something verbally and express something and think logically and rationally. Intellect is independent of emotion and feeling. In schools and colleges, this cultivation of intellect is given the highest importance. And even the whole issue of creativity is looked at in the field of intellect, which is to be able to come up with new ideas and to find out new ways of doing things. All that is in the field of intellect. And intellect, as we know, is based on knowledge and memory. In fact, if we look at the advancement of modern civilization, it is all based on intellect. Usually, in our society, whether it is East or West, we often confuse intelligence with intellect. We assume that if a person is intellectually quite capable, then he must be intelligent, which is not always true if we really look at life. There are some highly capable people who would admit that they don't have complete intelligence, because intelligence is a much vaster area than intellect. Intelligence would demand that all the capacities of the human being would be paid attention to, which is our capacity to look, to listen, to question, and to learn. Intelligence is the capacity to feel as well as to reason. And I think, to a degree, these things are being recognized now. Even with the work of Howard Gardner, I think, there are listed ten or eleven areas of intelligence, and the list keeps growing.

PWL: At the Valley School, how do you create an environment where intelligence is nurtured?

NS: There are certain areas that can be addressed. One is that we approach learning as heuristic in nature, aimed at self learning and self discovery. So we try to create materials and the learning process in such a way that children are taking responsibility for their learning. They are learning at their own pace. They are learning through their own interests. The second area that we are interested in is to create an atmosphere that is free from authority. So that means that the teacher is not there to instruct the children in what they should think or how they should act, rather, the teacher is also learning, he is in the mode of learning, always learning along with the child. The third area which is addressed is without reward and punishment, because we understand that reward and punishment bring about fear, hurt, and self-protective reaction. The fourth area where we can address intelligence is through learning without comparison and competition, as they generate envy and antagonism between one human being and another human being. So, you have to see the connection between comparison and fear. And when we see that we are in

fear, then can we love? We also go into this question of what is freedom and what is responsibility? Giving freedom without discussing what freedom means, what order means, how they are connected, how responsibility is connected with freedom - just to give freedom is not enough. So, we have to constantly discuss these things among teachers, among children. And then, we are concerned with self-knowledge, which is to understand how we learn, what is our learning pattern, why do we get angry so easily, why do we get irritated, why are we snobbish? All these things are learning about oneself, a constant need for security, not only now but also in the future. So, when we look at all these six areas, those are the kinds of learning processes that are necessary to create an atmosphere where intelligence can come about.

PWL: Krishnamurti has said that “if you pass on through the meadows with their thousand flowers of every color imaginable, from bright red to yellow and purple, and their bright green grass washed clean by last night’s rain, rich and verdant - again without a single movement of the machinery of thought - then you will know what love is.” Would you say that, ultimately, education at the Valley School is an education in service of the possibility of love?

NS: Yes, if we understand the word love correctly. Krishnamurti did explore the word “love” quite often in his talks. His approach to love generally has been to discover what is not love. And actually, putting those factors or those conditions aside, then we discover what is love. For example, attachment is not love. One has to discover what is involved in attachment. What are the implications of attachment?

Krishnamurti summarized the aims of education as (1)

a concern for the whole over and above the part and a non-sectarian approach free from prejudice, (2) concern for man and the environment - ending of conflict between human beings and a nondestructive relationship with nature, as humanity and nature are one indivisible process, and (3) religious spirit and the scientific mind working together.

The purpose of education is the cultivation of the whole human being. Krishnamurti had a vision of looking at life without separation and without breaking things down because the human mind, which is based in thought mostly, breaks things down on the basis of nationalities and religion. Then there is a feeling of separation at a personal level that each human being experiences. So, he pointed out the factors that divide people at various levels and urged people to go beyond that. And then we have this fundamental concern for man and the environment and the relationship between the two. The state of the earth, as we see it, is deteriorating rapidly as the forests disappear and the planet is dying off. There’s a worldwide degradation and the tragedy is that most people are not aware of the consequences of their actions. The intention of education at the Valley School is to raise awareness of the child to what is happening and how their actions are connected to what is going on in the world and to have love with nature and natural phenomena. By religious spirit, Krishnamurti meant a quality of innocence and communion with all things, which means natural things, physical things, human beings. A religious mind seeks to go beyond the materialistic world, to discover something immeasurable, something sacred. And by scientific mind, he meant an uncompromising commitment to the observation and understanding of facts. For Krishnamurti, it was this religious quality of wholeness that alone could bring about a new culture in which the knowledge of science would find its right place.



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Forest Kindergarten: A German Perspective

by

Meike Schubert

Meike Schubert is completing the five-year training to be certified as a kindergarten teacher in Germany. We asked Meike to describe a typical day in the life of the Forest Kindergarten outside of Frankfurt where she has just completed her practicum year.

Here in Germany, every child has the legal right to have a place in a kindergarten and the majority of children attend a kindergarten before they go to school. In recent years, the public discussion about the educational system in Germany has gotten louder. The kindergarten teacher training, as well as the kindergarten concept, is in transition. Education and learning in general, as well as experiencing nature, have become a much more important value in the work with children.

The kindergarten teacher training here in Germany takes five years. Teachers need two years of work experience before they can start two years of school and another year of practical internship. For example, I studied two years at a training college for social pedagogics. Periods of practical training work placements covered six weeks during both years of study. I did my first in a forest kindergarten and the second in a kindergarten that had outdoor projects every day. At the end of the two years in school, I had my theoretical exam. In September of last year, I started my practical year and will take another exam this September to get my state certification.

At the moment, I work at the protestant church kindergarten of the St. Thomas community in Frankfurt, Germany. We are one of four groups, but we are the only group that goes to the forest every day. All the other groups stay in the kindergarten house. My group has 20 children and two teachers, plus me



doing my practicum year. The children in our group are between 3 and 6 years old at the moment. In Germany, children start school at six years old.

Each morning, we meet with the children in the kindergarten at 8:00 am to take a 30-minute train ride to the Taunus Mountains. From there, we walk to one of the different places we have in the woods. Every child has his own rucksack with breakfast and a little insulation mat to sit on.

When we get to the place we have chosen for the day, each child takes out his mat and puts it where he wants to have breakfast. We sit all together in a circle. Before that, we have a welcoming circle. We sing a song or play a game and then we wash

hands. We bring a bottle of warm water and we use Leavenworth as a soap. At the beginning of every week, we choose new children for that job. After washing hands, we sit down for breakfast and after breakfast, the children pack their rucksacks.

Then, they have free time to play. We don't carry any toys because, as you can imagine, they don't need toys at all. They always find something to do or explore. They do a lot of role playing, build hideouts, and collect things. Being in the woods every day, the children can directly experience the rhythm of the seasons with all their different qualities: the change of weather, the smell of rain, animal tracks in the snow, the changing colors of leaves



In our work, it is an important value to give the children the possibility of taking their time to see and experience the natural world and not to feel pressured by time. In the Spring, for example, there is so much change and renewal in nature every day. The path we walk every day to get to one of our places would take a grown-up about fifteen minutes to walk, but we need up to an hour because there are just so many things to find, see and watch! The plants and trees look so different every day. There is so much activity in nature. All the birds come back and we can watch so many insects, snails and wildflowers that it never gets boring. The children not only learn about the different plants, but they learn also not to pull them out and to respect all the little things we meet every day. There is also a small stream that always invites the children to build dams and a small lake a little further away where we can watch polliwogs.



We also carry tools with us, such as small saws, files, hand drills and pocketknives that the children use under our supervision. All the children are very involved in working with the tools and this highly promotes their fine motor skills. In the absence of toys, children have the freedom to use their own amazing imagination to build everything possible out of the materials that are around them. They also discover many solutions on their own. One amazing experience I observed a little while ago had no pedagogical intention. I bought small nails and just put them in our toolbox, but we don't have a hammer. Looking in the box, a small 3-year-old simply went away and I thought that he had lost interest. After a little while, he came back with a perfect stone and, without saying anything, used the stone to hammer in the nails.

We sometimes do little guided handcraft projects with the children and, once in a while, we do longer projects on special



subjects. One, for example, had to do with water and the children built water wheels. But for the most part, we let them be creative and just give them an impulse or, if needed, support.

Around noon, we head back to the kindergarten and have a warm lunch. The children are picked up for the day at 2:00 pm.

This is just one possibility for how to create a forest kindergarten. There are around 400 forest kindergartens or groups in Germany, but there is a lot of variety in how they work. Some are a part of a regular kindergarten as we are. Some are "just" a forest kindergarten and they have something like a boxcar as a home base. Other kindergartens have forest days where regular groups go to the woods once a week. These are just a few of the differences.

The main premise is that children more and more need to have the experience of being outside in nature. Nowadays, you encounter more and more children with deficits in motor activity, children who are overweight, who are alienated from natural processes, and who have difficulties with social, cognitive and physical competencies. Being outside helps the children develop better sensory perception, sensitization and appreciation for the contexts of nature and the habitat. They have the opportunity for practical experiences in nature and, of course, holistic learning using all the senses. Most of all, the forest kindergarten affords the children freedom and free space to move around in.

If you would like to learn more about Forest Kindergartens in Germany, you can contact Meike Shubert at melepi@gmx.net or visit the forest kindergarten webpage at www.budesverband-waldkinder.de.



Childhood and Nature in Bigodi, Uganda

An Interview with Joy Hamlin

Joy Hamlin is Curator of Education at the North Carolina Zoological Park. She has been instrumental in creating a unique international partnership between North Carolina and Ugandan schools called UNITE (Uganda and North Carolina International Teaching for the Environment). Peggy Whalen-Levitt interviewed Joy on June 3, 2005 to learn more about childhood and nature in Uganda.

PWL: Joy, I know that when you travel to Uganda, you keep a daily journal of your experiences there. Can you tell us something about the village where the project is based?

JH: UNITE has built unique partnerships with 8 rural schools near the biologically rich region of Kibale Forest National Park in western Uganda. This magnificent rainforest is home to 13 species of primates, including endangered chimpanzees. It hosts over 70 species of mammals, at least 370 bird species and sometimes swarms with 144 species of butterflies, moths and other insects. Illusive forest elephants, buffaloes, giant forest hogs and about half a dozen antelope species inhabit the area as well. An incredible variety of plants with medicinal values, along with 350 species of trees, grow there too.



JH: The children are born into a deep belonging. Their lush surroundings and simple lifestyles, so directly dependent on the Earth, connect them in obvious ways. They know that foods come straight from their gardens to their mouths. Their water comes from the source, to be boiled for drinking or cooking. Their homes are hand-built from the mud and sticks on location. In most homes, there is no floor other than the Earth – so they may sit on it, sleep on it and walk barefoot on it every day. Each toy, each tool, each craft comes from the Earth and has most likely been made by the children, their parents, or someone they know.

There is an obvious awareness of how the rains, winds and other weather conditions are directly related to how the gardens grow. And the success or failure of the garden is directly related to the health of

the family. Most letters I receive from Ugandan friends begin with a reference to the current condition of the garden, including the severity of the dry season or the ‘mercy’ of the rains. This personal experience invariably sets the tone for the rest of the letter, but with great appreciation for the Earth’s gifts always being recognized and expressed.

Within walking distance of the park is the small village of Bigodi and the school – Bigodi Primary - that inspired UNITE. Without electricity, running water or other modern conveniences, our Bigodi friends focus much energy on digging in their gardens, collecting firewood and carrying water. Children may walk several miles to school. One dirt road runs through the center of the village and a network of footpaths lead back through the fields and trees to individual homes. Some homes are huts built of mud and sticks while others are constructed of handmade bricks. Next to every home is the all important ‘garden of life.’

One especially enthusiastic Bigodi teacher, Alex, takes great pride in inviting us to his home for a feast during our visits. He thrills at showing us his garden and the outdoor kitchen where his wife prepares our delicious meal. As we enter the kitchen, we are greeted by the family’s chickens. Could it be more obvious where the breakfast eggs come from? Just behind the house, Alex points out the graves of his sister and brother. Ugandan children must have a much closer connection to death with larger families and more situations where illness and death are part of their lives at an early age. This all fits into the question of being part of the natural world.

Near the edge of the village is a beautiful wetlands sanctuary where visitors can experience an abundance of birds - including the Great Blue Turaco – aquatic insects, plants and the papyrus used by local women to make their intricately woven baskets. Because the sounds of cars and other manmade noises are infrequent, the music of birds, frogs, insects and primates often fill the air and surround the senses. The smells of smoke from wood fires, the rich earth and the humid wetlands are unmistakable. I close my eyes and know I’m in Bigodi!

PWL: How are the children of Bigodi brought into a sense of belonging to the natural world outside of school?

Expressions of the human connection to nature are among the most joyous experiences in Bigodi. Dancing, singing, drumming, storytelling, poetry and dramatic performances all tell stories of human culture, wildlife and conservation. These activities are not only used for celebration, but for teaching and learning as well. Students enjoy relating conservation messages

Students enjoy relating conservation messages

Students enjoy relating conservation messages

through performing at community events. The dedication for the new classrooms and library funded through UNITE included a celebration of speeches, music and dance that last for six hours!

PWL: One of the goals of UNITE is to promote ecological understanding across cultures. In what ways are American children introduced to Ugandan ways of knowing?

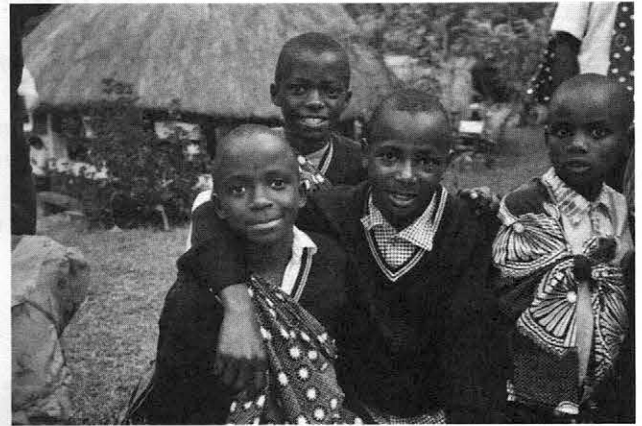
JH: NC teachers have been inspired to use creative ways to get their students in touch with what Ugandan students' life is like. One NC teacher was very struck by the fact that some schools had no buildings at all and that students gathered under a tree for their lessons. To make this idea come alive for her students, the class decided to spend a day learning under a tree. To add to that experience, they were each given only half a piece of paper and a pencil as their only resource. Another teacher was especially awed by the amount of music and singing she heard at every Ugandan school. She felt the experience evoked a marvelous spirit throughout the school that was missing back home, so she vowed that her students would spend time each day singing, dancing and making rhythms with drums and other surfaces. Several NC classrooms are now growing gardens in parallel with their Ugandan sister schools.

PWL: Through UNITE, some basic word processors and two laptop computers have been donated from NC schools to participating schools in Uganda. How do the children take to this new experience of technology?

JH: Teachers and students alike are very intrigued with the technology as a tool for learning, but have also experienced early frustration with the need for technological support. Since they don't have electricity, solar energy is going to be important for having a reliable means of being able to use a computer on a regular basis.

PWL: Richard Louv, in his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, feels that children in America are beginning to lose the capacity to experience the world directly. It seems that in Uganda, you have an opportunity to introduce technology while at the same time protecting and nurturing the capacity for direct experience. Is this something that has come up as an issue for UNITE teachers?

JH: This has been an important and sometimes emotionally charged discussion, especially among North Carolina UNITE teachers who feel very strongly that balance between technology and direct experience is vital. We understand that the Ugandan students and teachers have a great hunger to learn more about the world beyond their village and realize access to technology is an avenue for them to learn about other parts of the world. At the same time, we see such a value in their close connection to the Earth. In some ways, our cultures are two extremes –



America has the advanced technology and Uganda has the close connection to the Earth. By sharing with each other our perceptions, our emotions, our dreams and our knowledge, we may help each other understand how to better reach that balance.

PWL: What does the American relationship to the natural world look like through the eyes of Ugandan teachers?

JH: Our Ugandan friends are very curious about the American way of life with all our conveniences and obsessions. They readily express their insights and provide me with much food for thought. My favorite example comes from a conversation I overheard between the first group of Ugandan teachers that visited NC. The group of three had been in America for only a short time and were obviously quite overwhelmed with the pervasive electricity. I chuckled one night as we were riding through town in my car - street lights and store lights lining our way - when I overheard one teacher say to another, "I don't know why these people have a moon anyway, they don't even use it." Now, I look at the moon every night, hear that voice and smile. Fortunately, we experienced a lunar eclipse during their visit and made a point of celebrating it!



“Life is Simple and Full in Chepterwai”: A Kenyan Perspective

by
Jenne Sluder

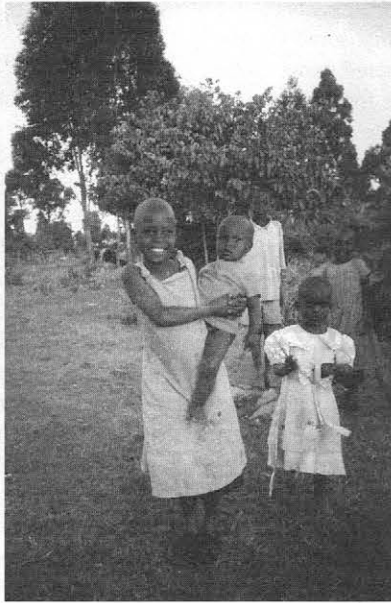
Jenne Sluder is a writer, musician, and activist. She graduated from Guilford College in 2002 with a BA in Comparative Religious Studies and has since worked as a volunteer towards environmental and social change. She returned from Kenya this past February and is now living in her hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, planning her graduate studies in Peace Education. Jenne volunteered at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World during her senior year at Guilford and sent the following letter to Center staff on January 19, 2005.

If you want to completely sever all ties with everything you have ever known and get the chance to rebirth into a second life filled entirely with new smells, sounds, sights, tastes, emotions, and ways of relating to other Beings - human, animal, plant, rock, water, sky, spirit - immerse yourself in rural Africa. Our bodies, ourselves, are ever-changing, ever-forming, but I have never felt quite so amazingly altered.

I sleep on a firm mat (I don't think they have this 'sleep number' in America) under a zebra-print blanket, under a mosquito net, under a tin roof filled with over one-hundred chattering bats, under a deep dark African sky, peppered with stars and vivid constellations I had no idea called out to us so brightly above America's street-lit skies. While drifting off to sleep, I sometimes hear wild dogs singing and howling; I sometimes hear voices singing and howling at a ceremonial circumcision; and I sometimes lift my head to try to discern if it is human or animal I hear off in the distance.

I wake right before sunrise to doves scampering on the roof. They let out these surprised “ooohs” and “aaaaahhs”, as if they are more impressed every day by the sunrise over Mount Elgon. When daily activities center around the outdoors, pre-dawn doesn't feel quite so early. In Chepterwai, the first thing you do when you wake is go outside - to carry water from the river, to bathe, to cook, to tend to livestock, all the while attuned to the stillness, with the comforting awareness that the stars are fading into the growing light of a new day.

Sister Jane and I live on what is known as the Nandi escarpment in western Kenya, an escarpment being a long cliff that results from erosion or faulting and separates two relatively level areas of differing elevations. Our community, Chepterwai, is situated at it's highest point - over 7,000 feet above sea level - with huge, dynamic views stretching out in all directions. There are a few significant stretches of tropical rain forest, but



primarily green, rolling hills peppered with acacia trees due to the pastoral nature of the inhabiting tribe.

The people are striking. Their deep dark, glowing skin, chiseled faces, and strong bodies give them a dignified beauty and a powerful presence, tempered with soft eyes and a ready smile. The Nandi folks have their own tribal language, so we struggle to learn both Nandi and Swahili, the nation's official language spoken in more urban areas. The youth are somewhat fluent in English. The adults are more limited, as such rural communities are only recently beginning to feel the pressures of westernization. Children will respond to any question with “Yesss”, or shout “Howahyoo?” when we “mzungos” (white people) walk by. But more so, the

children bridge the language gap with wide grins and playful giggles.

Sr. Jane and I were ceremoniously welcomed into the Nandi tribe. We were given a “sotet”, a gourd exquisitely decorated with beads and shells that is used to hold milk, to represent our dependence on livestock for nourishment. We were also gifted a traditional blanket, or “lesso”, used to tie a baby or small child to your back (usually while carrying something even heavier on your head). Both items are definitive of the woman's role in the tribe. All the women danced and sang, encircling us with their appreciation, and we wandered about, greeting each one in the traditional manner. We then cut individual cakes and Sr. Jane and I were to feed our cake to the elder men and small children to symbolize our dependence upon each other for nourishment.

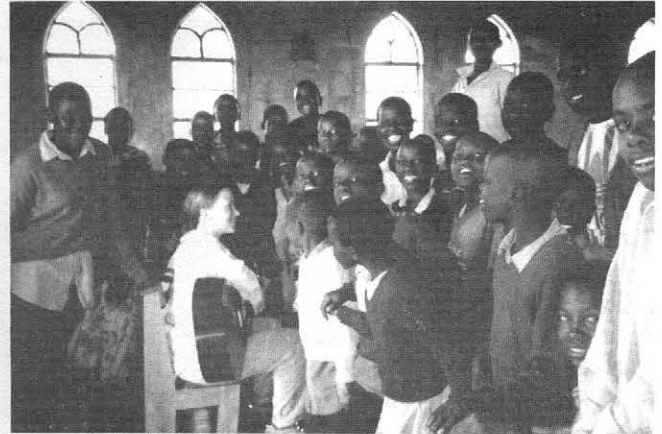
Time in rural Africa INCHES by, so you find several openings throughout the day to play, rest, converse or find shade, even if you are working diligently! I think this is because the bulk of the work is limited to meeting everyday needs - work that keeps your belly full and your spirit fulfilled. Days do not

revolve around extraneous work to try to 'develop' what is already there. Work is embodied – physical - rather than a string of mental hurdles. No paperwork, no phone correspondence, no television, radio, or computer - no driving back and forth! Life is met at an easy pace, even with troubles on your plate. So I find plenty of time to strum and sing. And, often just by walking outside with my guitar in hand, I will attract an enormous crowd of children in minutes. They most enjoy songs with vocables (nonsense words) or that tell a story (even if they don't understand English, they know a story is being told if I am expressive enough). Then I have them teach me some of their songs, which always come attached with movement, and OH! how they get to giggling when I try to join in - especially dance.

Song is a daily part of their life (and so full of life!), and exuberantly expresses their dedication to the Creator, the strong sense of joy that characterizes the collective vibrance of the African peoples or, may oftentimes serve as prayer, lifting the needs of the community, by voice, to the greater Powers. Rituals and rites of passage are also a centerpiece of the culture, made almost entirely of song, and serve to honor the sacredness of life and the continuance of tribal wisdom and tradition, handed down from elder to youth.

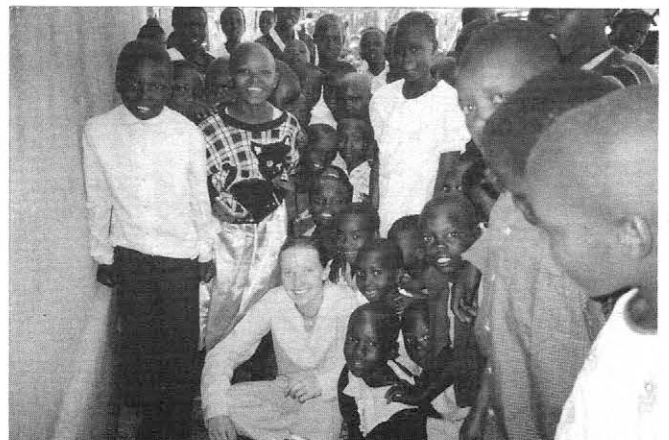
We are very likely the first foreigners to pass through their remote village since the British were forced out 40 years ago! And in Kenya, most especially in the rural, a white person's presence is considered a blessing. Because of a concept we Americans have created of "developed" and "developing" countries, many Kenyans internalize their culture as inferior to the "outside world." Westerners are placed on a pedestal. Our fast-paced, industrial, and individualistic culture is seen as something to aspire to. So I find myself repeatedly expressing to them, at every opportunity, what specifically I am learning from their way of being in the world, and how I feel bettered by their presence in my life, forever blessed by their inexhaustible warmth and hospitality, and most especially, their regard for the land and the primacy of community. I have been engaging in many conversations with Nandi folks about the possibilities of learning from each other.

Life is simple and full in Chepterwai. It is about sharing meals together. It is about lying on the grass and "soaking sun" together. It is about working hard WITH each other. It is about celebrating the marvel and mystery of existence, and providing support and generosity in times of hardship. The community is deeply touched that we have traveled such an unfathomable distance to volunteer our time and skills to help them develop a source of income that might pay for their children's education.



Oh yes. I should tell you the animals I have seen too, right? Colobus monkey, baboons, zebra, antelope, impala, rhinoceros, eagles, water buffalo, elephants - and I had a near-death experience with a ticked-off giraffe. Imagine hooves the size of your head, swinging about your peripheral vision as legs taller than your body chase you through open field (and a couple good kicks in the back).....quite the story. More on that when I get back to the land of squirrels and deer!!!!

Kwaheri (Towards happiness),
Jenne



La Escuelita (Little School) in El Bolson, Argentina

by
Jessica Towle

El Bolson (the big bag) Argentina is a valley in the Patagonia region of South America. This valley, which is mothered by the powerful, intense presence of the Andes Mountains in every direction, is the home of "La Escuelita," the little school. La Escuelita is a Waldorf-inspired kindergarten made of mud, earth, sand and straw. The school was built by a group of international people in a natural building course organized by Kleiwerks in the Winter of 2003. At the request of parents and teachers in El Bolson, Kleiwerks returned in the Winter of 2005 to design eight more classrooms and to build a panaderia (bread oven) for the school. Jessica Towle, gardener at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, gives the following firsthand account of her participation in this remarkable vision for a school that nurtures a deep relationship between children and the Earth.

January 10, 2005

Hola !!!!

I have made it to my destination. Ahh, what an amazing place!!! This town is dominated by the Andes, and so much water. There are so many backpackers here from all over the world. In my class, there are Germans, Argentineans, Mexicans, Peruvians, a Canadian, a couple from los Estados Unidos, Chile, etc. It has been so amazing. In one day, I feel at home. All of these folks are committed to taking care of this Planet and that desire has brought us together. I don't think I could have picked a kinder place to go on my first time leaving the country. I am on a siesta break right now – good organic food, simple life, enough spirit, fire and drumming last night, handstands this morning, and 'oh lots of maté. I am not sure I can see any room for improvement - amazing instantaneous connections surpassing language...everyone is a teacher, everyone a student, and everyone knows it...enthusiasm is present and creates the spirit of community...we have healers, mud workers, musicians... It took me 45 minutes to walk to this computer. Ahh the good life...

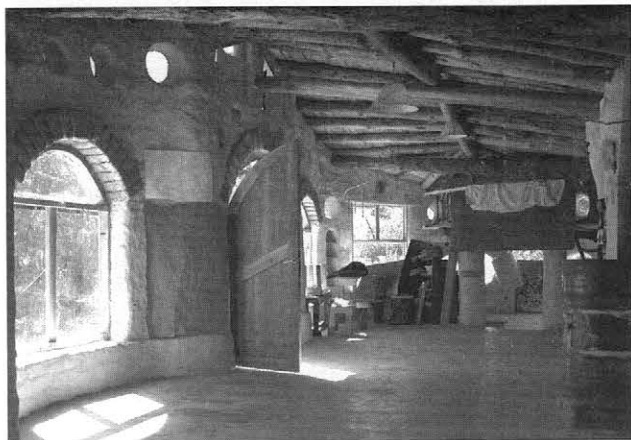


January 29, 2005

This past week, my small group and I designed a model of a school that is based on permaculture principles, which we presented to the school board. It was an amazing and difficult process. We had to really learn the land in order to understand how to position everything to enhance the natural energy of the sun and moon. We had to listen to each other, to lead and follow. It was a success and I am glad I took geometry.

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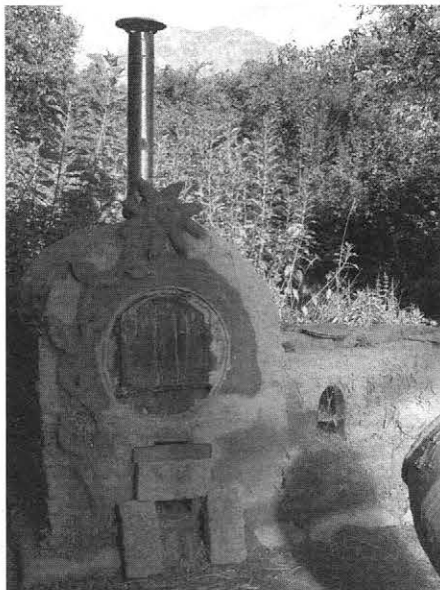
I have met a very special, special friend. Her name is Ankara and she is two years old. She calls me "mi amiga." Her mother is a seed saver from Australia, now living in Italy. She has an amazing way of parenting. Ankara is exceptional. She speaks three languages. Her mother taught her none of them - she just picked them up. She has taught me more than anyone. For the five days she was here before heading to Venezuela, she was my best friend. It is amazing to meet a best friend when she is still young. I realize, through children, how important it is to be clear in ourselves and treat the earth with respect



for their sake. It sounds redundant, but it is true - we create our future everyday. If you have a protractor and are creating a design and, for some reason, your circle is ever so slightly crooked, when you go to create the next circle, it becomes a little more crooked, and so on. If we don't give children a strong circle, then their life will not be built upon what it should be, what it could be

I am now a certified permaculturist, which I think means that I have given myself the responsibility to keep attending to the planet and all beings with respect to the design that is already implicit. I feel as though I am inside of a great love, so big. Inside of this love there is so much possibility. I *real eyes* more and more the profundity of the ways in which we are all connected and I know that there is no way that I could have imagined these precious souls coming into my life. There is no way I could have planned something so great. It is a mystery.

With that said, I encourage everyone to think about all that has happened in our personal histories, as well as our cultural history and planetary history, and to realize the energy it took to arrive at this moment. With this in my mind, I am committing to extend what I have learned in order to do what I can in this life to make sure that the integrity of this planet is really respected. This happens through permaculture, through building in ways that enhance the environment, enhance the quality of water. I didn't realize that you simply have to take the time to see... to see what other beings live on the land with you, where the water is, where the sun rises and sets, what your soil has and needs, on and on it goes. Through this process, we can become aware that every being is in us and we are in every being. I have been thinking about



how Thomas Berry put it that every being in the universe is governed by three principles: differentiation, interiority, and communion. This is true in the dynamics of the natural world, as well as in human communities. It takes so little to see ourselves in someone else.

March 14, 2005

We are now moving into the fall season in Patagonia. The weather is still pretty warm, however the cold is allowing its presence to be felt every couple of days. School has started for the children and most of the backpackers have left to resume their other lives. I have finished the natural construction course, which I found to be very practical and important for the future of humans inhabiting this delicately strong planet. One thing that struck me the most about this art of natural building is that it is almost like creating a space to live in that is alive itself. We literally shaped a whole building out of the very earth all around us. Not only is there a feeling of intimately knowing this new building, every inch of it, but there is also a layer of newly formed friendships stored in every brick we placed. I believe this building will always carry that energy of being born out of love by the hands of many people from all over the world who came together to build a panaderia (bread bakery) for children in Argentina. The fathers of these children will sell bread in order to raise money for "La Escuelita," the little school. Children are always the future, eh? Building this panaderia reminded me of what ancient people must have felt like building a temple or a pyramid together. Many times I looked around and was astonished by how it felt as though we were building something sacred, a new future.



Voices from Peru: Katia and Armenia

by

Megan Olivia Toben

Megan Olivia Toben graduated with a degree in Biology from Elon University. She has worked with the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World for almost 4 years, tying her love of the Earth with her love of children. Her two-week visit to Peru was led by Botanist friend and plant lover Frank Cook- with the hope of understanding more deeply the spiritual connection between humans and plants in ancient traditions of South America. The group was blessed to be a part of a traditional Ayuhuasca Ceremony and a trek to the most sacred Incan city of Machu Pichu.

January 31, 2005

After a hard, four hour hike, we stumbled, drenched and exhausted, into the clearing that was the much-anticipated jungle "campo" where we would spend the next three nights. The first chickens we had seen since we left the city pecked the ground beneath a bamboo hut, occasionally gobbling a beetle or dropped grain of brown Peruvian rice. They were scrawny in the midst of the lush jungle, and sometimes pecked the fleas off the back of a sleeping mutt.

We were led across a footbridge like royal visitors. Most of the previous crossings had been fallen logs over Amazon tributaries, rushing with waters from the drenching rains that had graced/cursed our long, hot trek. This water was more like mosquito-infested mud, serving as a bathing and drinking place for the livestock.

A short way through the laden mango, lime, and papaya grove stood our huge open-air bungalow. In it was all we needed: posts from which to hang our hammocks and soaking wet clothes. We graciously exchanged the clothes on our bodies for the few dry things that had been protected by plastic, and blindly hung hammocks to hold our exhausted bodies.

It wasn't long before little footsteps found their curious way to our shelter. I glimpsed two beautiful sets of deep



chocolate brown eyes, set in the most gorgeous coffee colored faces I have ever seen. Their almost black shiny hair was wet with the rain, but somehow their clothes were dry. I beckoned to them, and they hesitantly climbed our stairs. Shy little grins emerged as exclamations erupted from the group- there was a tiny monkey on one of their strong little shoulders! Reaching back for my textbook Spanish, I inquired about the "monito," to learn that it had been found clinging to its dead mother. "Un huerfanito," an orphan.

Though we never learned the rest of that story, young Katia and her cousin Armenia proved to be wonderful surrogate mommies- much to the dismay of their strict grandfather. The girls knew which of the several banana-like fruits their little one liked most, and patiently fed him one tiny monkey-bite at a time. He received a little bottle of milk, which must have been a scarce provision this far from a dairy, most likely by the grace of grandmother.

Tiny "Martin" the monkey made sure he always had a shoulder to cling to by emitting a loud squeaky cry when he was separated more than a few feet from the members of his family group. Once, he crawled over as I was reading on the floor. After studying my eyes for a moment, he turned to study the words on the page as I was- moving his eyes back and forth across the lines. Katia and Armenia watched and grinned with the amazement of proud new mommies.

The Amazon Jungle offers unimaginable new sights, sounds, smells and tastes - all of which we and the little monkey were just learning to understand. Tropical birds send loud mating calls out into the night and before the earliest light of day. Intoxicating sweetness seeped from huge jungle flowers and rotting fruits. We gratefully consumed fried plantains, fresh avocados, yucca roots, and papaya so sweet my mouth began to water as soon as I woke and thought of it in the morning. Katia and Armenia were intimately connected with this world- the sounds and smells were a part of them. It wasn't long before they learned what we liked, and would trot down the trail, grinning, arms laden with offerings



of ripe fruits on their way to gather water. The watering hole was also the drinking hole, the washing hole, and the laundry hole - a relatively deep place in a neighboring Amazon tributary, where the water ran slowly and the local humans approached cautiously, never assuming they were the only ones utilizing the precious "agua."

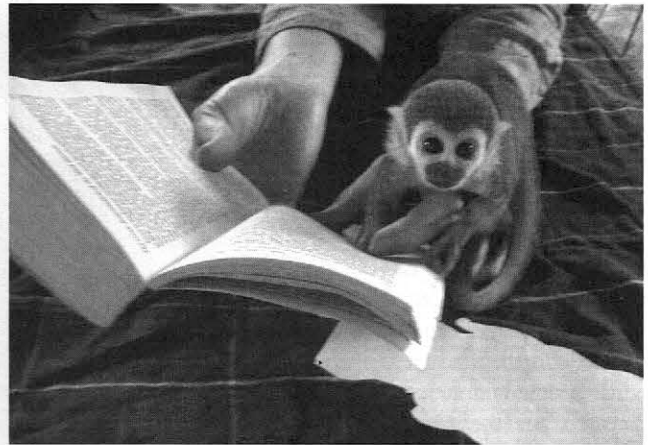
Katia and Armenia carried at least ten gallons of water each morning to their family's hut, often returning for more throughout the day. They were incredibly capable with life in the jungle. Their sandaled feet gripped the ground better than our unaccustomed hiking boots, and with at least five gallons of water on each of their heads, they walked as proudly and regally as Incan goddesses.



They giggled when I would jump in surprise as a fish nibbled my toes during precious bath time. They shyly showed me how to stand where I wouldn't sink in the mud, and how to dip bucketfuls of water over my body instead of floundering in the barely 3 feet and wondering what unseen creature was swimming amidst my limbs.

Katia and Armenia patiently taught me to scrub clothes in the river (a much needed skill) and dump my soapy water downstream. They rescued my failed attempts at cooking fires. They showed me, with the grace of older sisters, which fruits to eat straight off the tree and how to cook the others. They quickly scampered up trees like their monkey friends when the fruit we desired was out of reach.

Katia and Armenia lived in a little wooden shack with their beautiful old "abuelita" (grandmother) whose round cheeks and smile lines surrounded the most wise chocolate brown eyes... and whose toothless grin came easily and often. These two sweet and wonderful little women had, in their 12 and 13 years of age, gathered the shaman's knowledge of their



Grandfather, and the women's wisdom of their Grandmother. If you caught the old woman staring dreamily into the tops of the trees, she would grin and explain that she loved the birds, and in exchange, they sang beautiful songs for her every day. Her hands were gnarled and experienced in life, yet so gentle when teaching her granddaughters. The old man was strong and tapped into the powerful healing wisdom of the plant kingdom. He shared stories of the jungle healing cancer and AIDS- and the ceremonial plants opening people's minds to the vastness of universal truth.

Within these two powerful perspectives came a love and respect for the natural world that was deeply a part of their souls. The love that they held for the earth sprouted and grew stronger in their granddaughters every day- as naturally as the papayas cradled their precious seeds- with a hope that they would create and sustain the next generation of life.



“The Earth is Our Mother”: Native American Perspectives

by
Gay Cheney

Gay Cheney is Professor Emeritus of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She offers programs based in Native American cultures to children at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. We asked Gay to share the story of her life-long connection to Native Peoples that underlies her work with the children.

I love being with the children at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World to do Native American ceremony and talk with them about how the original people honored, celebrated and cared for the Mother. We smudge with sage, invite in the energies of the Four Directions, Father Sky and Mother Earth, and talk about how all things are part of the family, all related for Native Peoples. We identify the power animals of each direction and the colors associated with each - Red, Black, White and Yellow, each representing one of the races of people on the planet who the Native Americans knew would all eventually sit together in a circle and work together for peace and harmony. We sing songs, do dances, and I delight in telling stories, some authentic, some created for the occasion, like the coming of age stories, going vision questing, Guatemalan stories for those who are studying South and Central America, stories about the lower and upper worlds, where human beings came from onto this earth. There is a wonderful story about Nannaboju who was the friend of Spirit who came down to be on a raft with the animals, two of each, floating in the midst of a huge sea, and how they created the Earth, which floats today on the back of Grandfather Turtle. I ask the children what it reminds them of, and most of them know about Noah and are



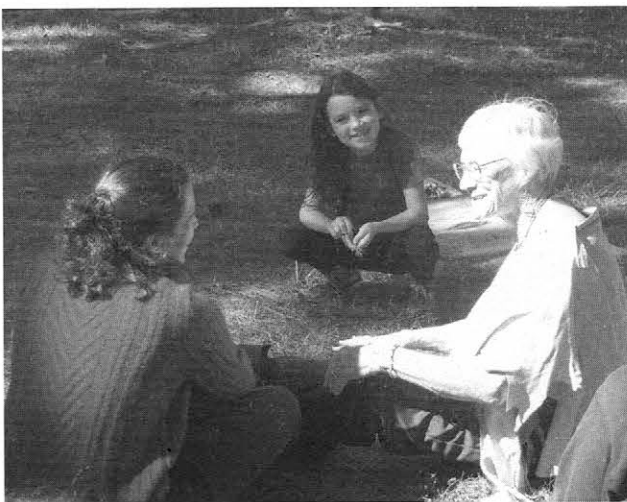
surprised how close the stories are between people who are so far apart.

No, I am not Native American, at least not in this life, although I swear I have been before, kidded as a “wannabe”, and none-the-less listened to perhaps because I have the credentials of a UNCG Professor Emeritus. I always say that my Dad was my first teacher about the Earth and its blessings. We’d go to the beach in the summers and he’d look up at the sky and say, “Oh, my, look

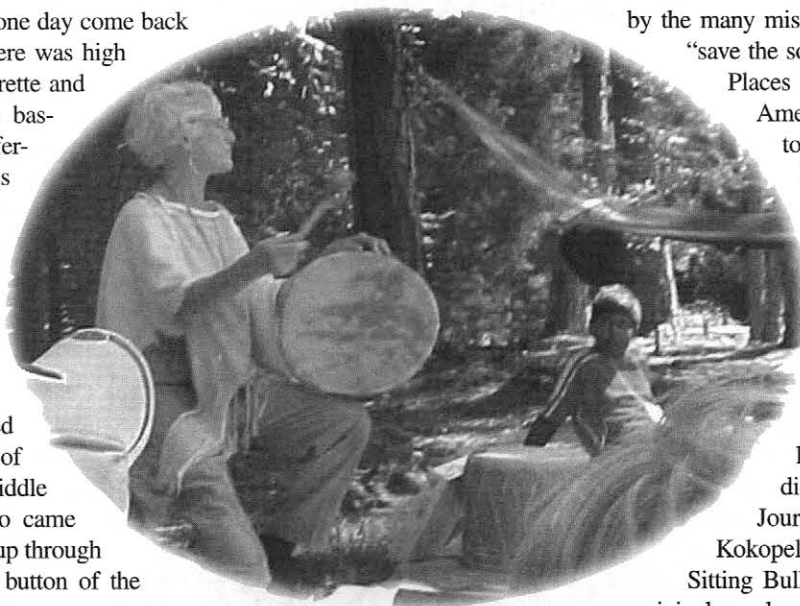
at that sky. Isn’t it huge and clear and beautiful?” Or “Smell that ocean. Let’s hurry in to get healed, to float and get carried along.” When he was 82, he met the California redwoods for the first time and cried, tears rolling down his cheeks, with reverence for the huge and ancient tree beings, those who Native Americans call the “Tall People of Light.” When I first heard Native People talk about the Earth - actually in my first sweat lodge with Grandfather David, 101 year old chief of the Hopi Nation who had spoken to the UN about including Redskins in its union - I first learned how to pray. I heard how Native People addressed and honored the nature family, and it was so like my own Father, I felt right at home.

In more concrete terms, I’d had some experiences as a young person that let me know I was part of the Native American family. When I was four, my Mother used to take me grocery shopping with her. One summer, on the way to the Big Bear, I refused to go past a Native American elder sitting outside his teepee near the store. After watching my mother make several tries to get me to go along with her to no avail, the elder suggested that she leave me with him and he’d play his flute, sing me songs and tell me stories. She agreed, although today I feel sure that would never happen. I just got lucky early on and knew that this elder was my grandfather. After the summer, when he was gone from The Big Bear, I was heartbroken and have looked for him ever since.

Then, when I was eleven years old, a Native American troupe came to my elementary school and looked for a dancer to do the wedding dance with a young brave. I was it. We hopped around the stage under a shared blanket and friends kid-



ded me that he would one day come back to claim me. Then there was high school. I was a majorette and going steady with the basketball captain – a different awareness and focus until graduate school at the University of Wisconsin when I met Ferial Deer, a dance student and daughter of a Navaho chief. She choreographed a dance based on the Navajo myth of habitation of the “middle world” by people who came from the lower world, up through the “sepapu” or belly button of the Earth, which is in Arizona.



My interest rekindled and when I got to California and my new job and life, I started following the pow wows. That was about the time when Adam Nordwall flew to Rome to claim it for the Indians, planting their flag there. Wonder of wonders, Adam lived in Hayward, California where I was teaching, and when he returned with great notoriety, I asked him if he would come teach a class at Cal State, Hayward. He gave it serious thought on the phone, and responded that if we would build a longhouse, make moccasins and pass the peace pipe, he would consider it. I was stunned at how total and connected his form of dance was, not just the art and entertainment forms that I had been involved with. We didn't build a longhouse, but we did make moccasins and pass the pipe, and many of our students danced with Adam in area pow wows. The men, even the football players, could do this kind of dance, while they might not have been able to do ballet.

When I came to North Carolina, I met Lumbee and Cherokee people, few of whom knew much about their original spirituality, having been converted to Christianity early on

by the many missionaries who were out to “save the souls of this heathen flock.”

Places like the Guilford Native American Association worked to keep the traditions alive.

In my experience, never a more “spiritual” people existed than these Natives. I made a point to study with teachers (Joan Halifax, Alberto Villoldo, Buck Ghosthorse, Hank Wesselman),

learned about ceremonies, did Vision Quests, went

Journeying, read about Kokopeli, Wallace Black Elk,

Sitting Bull, the tragic history of the

original people of this country and our treatment of them. And I determined to do something

about it, and about the tragic treatment of the Earth.

I taught Dance at UNCG, which gave me some latitude to teach interrelated arts in Residential College and other open-hearted and minded places, then to offer a course called “Art and Ceremony for the Earth” in which much of what I knew across the board could be passed on and experienced. Then, after my retirement, I was invited to offer a program for children at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm. Through my program, children are invited to experience the Native American understanding that the Earth is Our Mother, that the River, she is flowing, down to the sea, that we feel Mother Earth's heartbeat under our feet, and promise to walk gently on her belly, to love her and do no damage, to live in peace and harmony with all her children. Blessed be.

What a privilege and a joy to be able to work with these young ones, still so close to Great Spirit, and to be part of the sacred circle at the beautiful and bountiful Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary. I am in love with it, and feel so full of Spirit in doing it.

Ear to the Earth: “Sisters of the Sound Continuum” at the Center

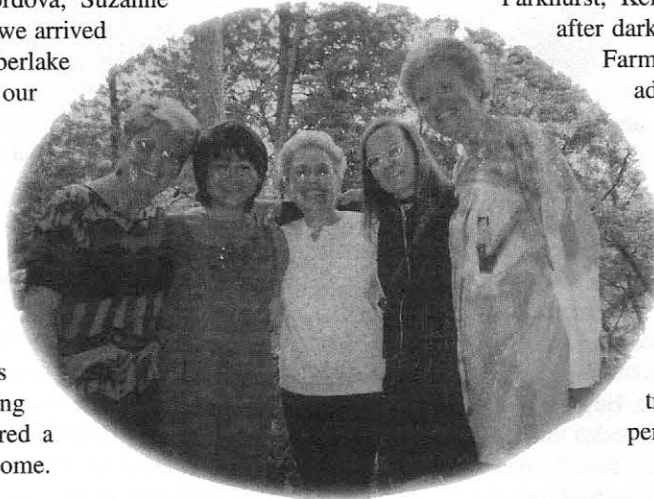
by
Una Nakamura

Una Nakamura is the founder of Sisters of the Sound Continuum, a remarkable group of women from the San Francisco Bay area that redefines improvisation by use of extended techniques with voice and a variety of African, Native American, Asian and Western instruments. Invited to come to the Center to give a benefit concert, the Sisters in Sound also participated in an Earth Guides program with students from Betsy's Hodges first grade class from Thomasville Primary School. We asked Una to share her reflections of that day.

I.

Sisters of the Sound Continuum (SIS) was invited to offer a benefit concert at the Center at Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary. There was an immediate response that made it clear it was something we would do. Five of our group of eight, Nancy Beckman, Norma Cordova, Suzanne Parkhurst, Kellen Perry, and myself arrived full of anticipation. Because we arrived after dark, awakening to the early morning beauty and sounds of Timberlake Farm overwhelmed our senses: an inspiring way to begin our adventure in transformation.

We spent Friday morning and Megan Olivia Lane a half miles of trails with a children who had come their teachers was a participant-Generation Teachers' the Treehouse, a meeting-tree. Its three graduated stories Its deck, nestled in and among one of the Twin Lakes, offered a children took their bus back home.



ing following Carolyn Toben around some of the five and group of elementary school from a nearby town. One of pant in the Center's Seventh Program. The group met at house that was built around a resemble the shape of a tree. tree branches with its view of perfect spot for lunch before the

The children gathered at the fire circle next to the Treehouse waiting for an introduction to the day. We came out of the Treehouse with drums, rattles, flutes, bells and voices offering a welcome to the Center at Timberlake Farm. They were astounded to see a group of real live musicians singing and playing for them. Soon their delight overtook any shyness and they reached out to us, clapping, smiling, touching, cheering. Their welcome to the Center had been confirmed.

We followed them around in small groups enchanted, along with the children, at the natural beauty along the lakes and trails. The opportunity to slow down and simply be with nature was irresistible for all of us.

II.

Highlights of the Nature Walk:

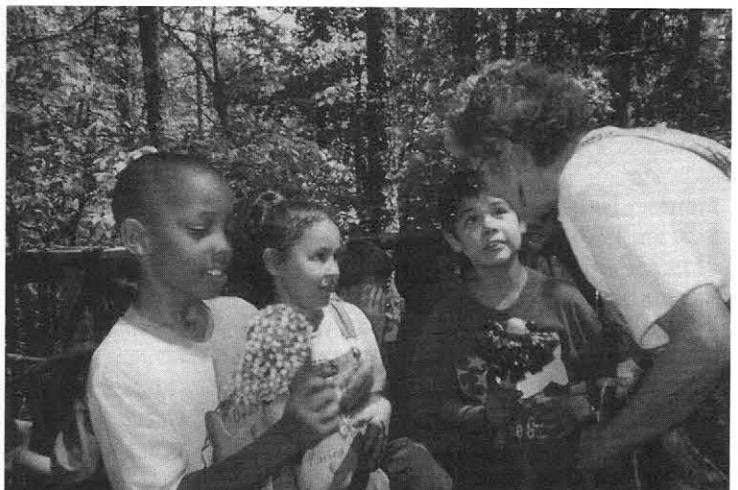
- ~ Being invited to walk slowly and softly, so as to hear the sounds of the forest
- ~ Speaking and talking softly, so others can also hear the sounds of the forest
- ~ Looking for the moss covered entrances to fairy houses along the trail
- ~ Using a circle of yarn to find a tiny forest floor kingdom to explore with the aid of a magnifying glass

- ~ Thanking the earthworms at the garden with a song for all the important work they do
- ~ Farmer Joel's hayride to the barn
- ~ The way the children hungered to be touched
- ~ They ways they were touched by Nature
- ~ The wonderful taste discoveries made in the organic Magical Garden
- ~ Finding a special place of beauty, using my hands to frame a picture and really noticing every detail within my frame, then stepping back and widening my frame, noticing again, then widening my frame once again and noticing what I can see that wasn't in my first picture. Then, taking a memory snapshot of this moment that records not only what I see, but how I feel in the midst of such beauty. Then, being reminded that I can bring that picture forward any time I want, especially if I'm feeling sad, and want to recapture all the good feelings of this moment.
- ~ Stopping at the Marsh Bridge to honor the statue of Quan Yin sitting by the entrance. She's there to protect and bless crossings. The bridge goes over a boggy area in a zigzag pattern, so you cannot see where the bridge ends. Carolyn explains that there are physical crossings, emotional crossings, and spiritual crossings. Quan Yin helps us with all three. So we find a small gift of nature from the forest floor and place it on or near her before we begin our crossing . . . one at a time with slow, thoughtful steps as we watch each other disappear into the marsh willows leading to the other side.
- ~ Making a wish at the Wishing Rock was a special moment. The rock lay at the shore of one of the Twin Lakes, next to a tree that reaches out over the water. Halfway up the trunk is the carved wooden face of a tree spirit . . . strong jaw, deep eyes, long flowing hair blending into the trunk of the tree. If you look imaginatively at the lower half of the tree trunk, there is another tree spirit image naturally etched into the bark markings. Each child is invited to stand on the Wishing Rock and make a wish. Each child on the trail is invited to wish that their friend's wish comes true. What precious and magical silence moves with the breeze and easy movement of the water lapping the base of the Wishing Rock, blessing each child's wish.

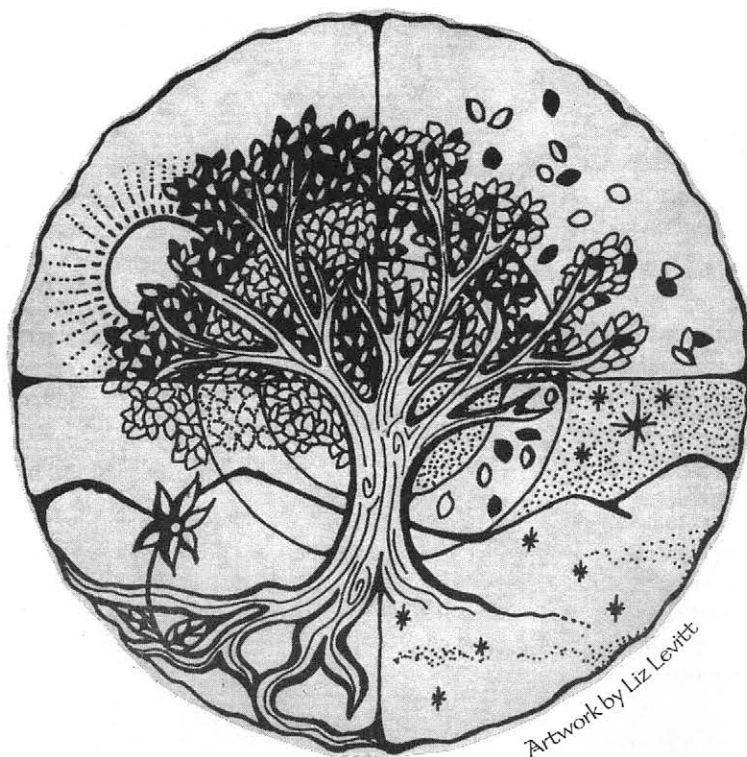
III.

It's lunchtime back at the Treehouse and the children spread their food out on the deck's picnic tables as we chat about our discoveries and delights. By special request, SIS offers another musical improvisation. Some of the children join us with rhythm instruments we provide for them. Suzanne conducts the children with their own instrumental solos before playing her Native American flute. Nancy plays her Japanese shakuhachi as she moves to give the children a closer look at her instrument. Kellen, singing, keeps the beat going with her hand held drum as Norma also sings, passing out instruments and weaving amongst the children with her rattle. I move from child to child to child with my Tibetan ting sha vocalizing a sound blessing for each one. The children are in wonder of the variety of ethnic instruments. Some tell us that they have never seen a "real musician" before.

So, this is the Center at Timberlake Farm where interns and teachers are guided to lead children into meaningful connections with nature as they experience it themselves through leading small groups of children on a discovery walk into nature. The invitation to feel the spirit of the land, to notice how quietly the trees whisper to us, naturally leads us into an experience of connection with life . . . all life.



Center Programs 2005-2006



Programs for Children

Earth Guides Program for Schoolchildren

9:30 am - 1:30 pm

Ages K-12, \$10 per child

September-November, March-May

The Earth Guides program is an all-day program for schoolchildren focusing on nature awareness through sensory experiences, art, story, and a visit to our organic Magical Garden.

Tiny Kingdoms for Tiny Folks

9:30 am - 12:00 noon

Ages 3-5, \$10 per child

September-November, March-May

A magical morning at the Center will begin at the Treehouse and then await the children on the trails and footbridges where they will observe the enchantment of forest and stream. A hayride and stop at the organic garden are part of the morning's pleasures. Pre-schools welcome!

Summer Nature Camps

9:30 am - 3:00 pm

\$175 per child

Session I: June 12-16, 2006 (5-7 year-olds)

Session II: June 19-23, 2006 (8-10 year-olds)

Session III: June 26-30, 2006 (11-12 year-olds)

A week-long nature awareness program for twelve children that encourages a mutually enhancing relationship between children and the natural world. Children directly experience lush forest, lakes, creeks, and meadows and experience their own sense of belonging to these places. Look for more details in our Spring newsletter.

Programs for College Students

Earth Guide Apprenticeship

September 10, 2005 & March 4, 2006

9:30 am - 4:00 pm

free (organic lunch included)

The Earth Guide apprenticeship is an opportunity for college students to prepare to lead Earth Guides programs for school-children at the Center. Earth Guides attend a full day apprenticeship and make a commitment to a weekly schedule of service during the Fall and/or Spring Semester.

Voice of the Earth: A Day Retreat for College Students

October 1, 2005

9:30 am - 3:30 pm

\$65 (organic lunch included)

In this day retreat, we will consider what Richard Louv refers to as "the third frontier" - the social context for a de-natured childhood. We will take solo time on earth sanctuary trails and explore together a new imagination for the future.

Programs for Parents

Last Child In The Woods: A Study Group For Parents

February 2, 9, 16, & 23, 2006

9:30 am - 11:30 am

free

In this four-week study group for parents, we will read Richard Louv's book *Last Child In The Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* and create a welcoming space for parents to share their concerns and insights about their children's relationship to nature.

Programs for Educators

Seventh Generation Teachers' Program

November 5, 2005, February 25 and April 1, 2006

9:30 am - 3:30 pm

\$195 (organic lunch included)

The Seventh Generation Teachers' Program provides a context for teachers to deepen their own personal connection to the natural world and to be co-creators of ways to bring nature awareness to all paths of teaching. In Part One, teachers reconnect to the natural world through solo time and nature journaling. In Part Two, we make a study of Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. In Part III, we introduce educators to practical ways of re-introducing children and young adults to the natural world and co-create initiatives for bringing education "back to earth." CEU credits available.

The Poetry of Nature

January 28, 2006

9:30 am - 3:30 pm

\$65 (organic lunch included)

Join Diane Pendola, co-founder of Skyline Eco-Contemplative Center in Camptonville, CA, for a morning reading of her original poems. After lunch, we will gather around the fire to share ways of bringing the poetry of nature into the lives of children and young adults. CEU credits available.

Special Design Programs

We invite schools to consider entering into a partnership with the Center in order to bring the rhythms of the natural world more fully into the school year. The Center welcomes inquiries from teachers and schools, pre-school through college, who wish to tailor a program to their particular situation.

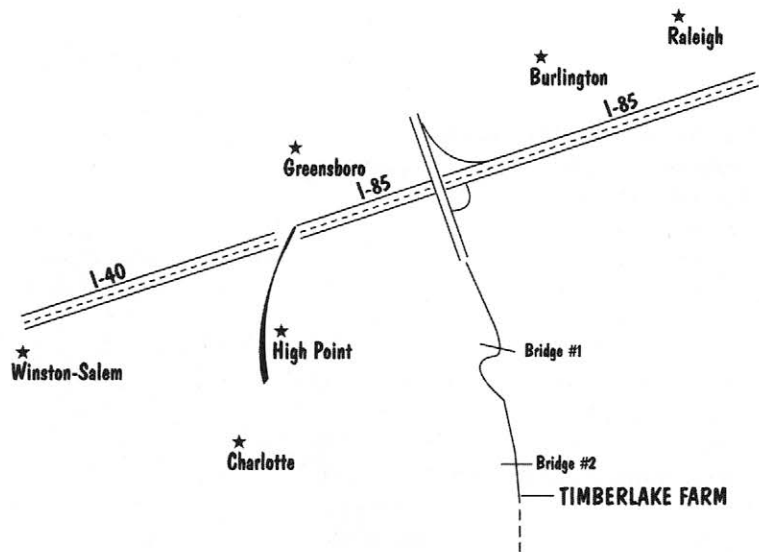
Applications can be downloaded at www.beholdnature.org or requested by contacting the Center at (336) 449-0612.

FROM WINSTON-SALEM/
GREENSBORO

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

FROM RALEIGH/DURHAM/
CHAPEL HILL

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



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

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

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