

Chrysalis

Volume 3 Spring 2006

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

Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner – what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Dear Reader,

What every young child has for centuries experienced – that feeling of inner relation with the outer world – is now threatened with extinction. How removed, how cut off, our children have become from the stars, from the sound of birds and the caress of the wind.

Recently, parents gathered at the Center for a parent study group centered on Richard Louv's book *Last Child In The Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder*. They lamented that their children don't spend time outside anymore. They spoke of the allurements of television, video games, and the computer. With some alarm, they spoke of how their children are "plugged in," "glued to the screen," and "sucked into" technological worlds.

Nature has increasingly become an abstraction for children. Their knowledge about the natural world may be vast and global, but their firsthand experience is paltry. The partitions are formidable between the children and the stars.

Writing about this polarity between technology and the natural world, ecophilosopher David Abram suggests that "direct sensuous reality, in all its more-than-human mystery, remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us."¹

¹ David Abram, *The Spell of The Sensuous: Language and Perception in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996) p. x.



The Center for Education, Imagination
and the Natural World

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Our way out of the situation we find ourselves in cannot, it seems to us, be rooted in the same tendencies toward abstraction that have given rise to it. In other words, no textbook, no checklist, no curriculum, no study guide, no standardized test, will extricate us from our estrangement.

New forms of social renewal are called for. When we began the work of the Center, we knew this instinctively. We would need to create new social forms.

The image that came to mind was that of a seedbed. We would create a vessel within which seeds of the child-nature reunion could be sown and nurtured.

Central to our way of working with teachers is the belief that the sensibility of the teacher is the single most important factor in bringing children into a deeper connection to nature. Consequently, our programs for teachers begin with their own reconnection to the natural world.

Another thread has to do with the children themselves. New forms are needed to honor and support the inner lives of children. We would need to become good listeners and greet the children's deep inner reflections with interest and respect.

Finally, our program is based on a belief in the essential autonomy and creativity of the teacher. We do not offer a fixed curriculum, but rather work with teachers to co-create approaches to the child-nature reunion that are tailored to their individual situations, drawing upon the innovative ideas and creativity of the teachers at every turn.

When we sit down with teachers to create a Special Design program, we engage in a dialogue about where a possible collaboration might take us. What are the values of the learning community? How might the child-nature reunion be nurtured there? How can we provide continuity of experience for the children so that their connection to the natural world deepens over time? These are some of the questions that open up possibilities.

The forms that have evolved at the Center are relational, generative, interdependent and organic. They are always new, always in the creative process of unfolding – like the universe itself.

In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we take you inside the world of our programs. We begin with a reprint of an article by Cindy Spring, "Ten Caterpillars Yawning" (pp. 4-6), that appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of *Earthlight Magazine*. Cindy interviewed Carolyn Toben about the work of the Center and we thought our readers would enjoy seeing us from Cindy's vantage point.

In "Shomrei Adamah: Keepers of the Earth" (pp. 7-11), we introduce you to a partnership with B'Nai Shalom Day School in Greensboro, North Carolina, in which we collaborate to bring adam (earthling) and adamah (earth) back together again.

"Behold! Nature Photography from Jackson Middle School" (pp. 12-13) depicts a Special Design program in which the inner landscapes of the students from Jackson Middle School and the outer landscape of the earth sanctuary met in joyful collaboration.

In "Nurturing Cosmic Education: A Partnership with the Greensboro Montessori School (pp. 14-17), we describe the ways in which the Center has engaged in a creative process with Montessori educators to support them in their work of nurturing the child's "cosmic task," or sense of purpose within the larger whole of the universe.

And, in "The Poetry of Nature" (pp. 18-19), you encounter a day retreat for teachers with Diane Pendola and Theresa Hahn from the Skyline Eco-contemplative Center in California. This was a day of reconnection for teachers as they listened to Diane's poetry and took time to walk earth sanctuary trails. It was also a day of sharing their own ways of working with their students. Asked to begin the sharing in the afternoon, Andrew Levitt offered the following poem:

Mastering the Crows

While you were sleeping I
was mastering the crows
getting their darkness underneath my skin
making the blue-black sheen of midnight part
of all I know so I could greet
the morning and astonished by the light
awaken you so you could know it too.

As he spoke these words into the circle, we realized that Andrew had given us a new metaphor for our work with teachers. Could it be that what we are offering is an apprenticeship in "mastering the crows?" The day left us with a deep feeling of gratitude for the inner development of these teachers and the ways in which they are awakening the children in their care to the phenomenal world.

We end this issue with a full description of our Summer Nature Camps for children, as well as our ongoing programs for teachers and schools (pp. 20-22). Finally, we wish to express a heartfelt thank you to all the donors (p.24) who continue to make this emergent work possible.

With warm regards,


Carolyn Toben
Co-Director

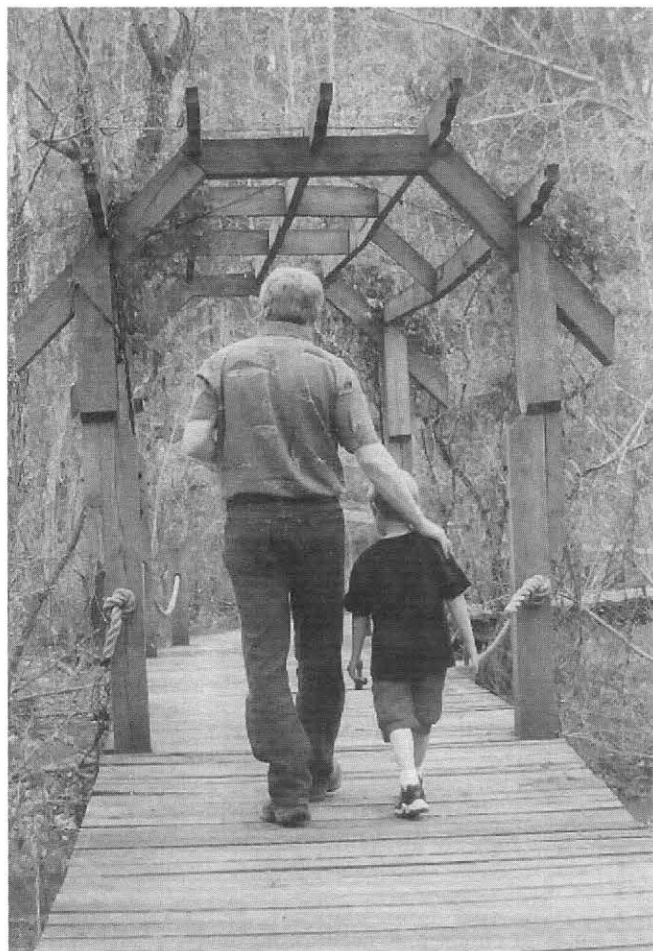

Peggy Whalen-Levitt
Co-Director

Ten Caterpillars Yawning

Interview with Carolyn Toben

by
Cindy Spring

Cindy Spring is Co-Founder of Close to Home, a program that explores nature's treasures in the East Bay of San Francisco. The following interview appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of *Earthlight Magazine*, published in Oakland California. It is reprinted below with the kind permission of *Earthlight*.



Earth Light: What prompted you and co-director Peggy Whalen-Levitt to begin the Center?

Carolyn Toben: We feel that a great deal is being lost for children today: a sense of wonder and a bond of intimacy with the natural world. We see a trend in the culture where nature is seen as an abstraction. Children know about global warming and ozone depletion. But they don't know the smell of the spring rain or the sound of a bullfrog. Most children today lack a sense of celebration of the dawn, the sunset, the moonrise, a reverence for life and growth and the cycles and seasons. We hope that we are offering what is missing.

(Ecophilosopher) Thomas Berry plays a major role in our thinking; he's been a mentor, advisor, and friend for 28 years.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is located at Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary in Whitsett, North Carolina. Timberlake is a unique place of beauty with wildflower meadows, four miles of gentle trails, small streams and tall hardwoods and pines. Fourteen resident deer find refuge there. Fish, ducks, frogs, and turtles thrive on two lakes. Wooden footbridges and benches blend into the natural landscape and invite exploration and contemplation. It is a place dedicated to communion with the natural world. In 2001, the 165 acres of Timberlake were placed in an easement with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina.

Since Carolyn Toben co-founded the Center in 2000, it has been a "wildlife and child preserve" for not only children, but also teachers, parents and many visitors. Its programs were completely filled this past school year. The Center offers nature camps, teacher retreats, and provides special design programs for nearby schools and universities. In addition to organic gardening, recycling, and composting, they have a lunch program that encourages children to live lightly on the Earth.

His wonderful poem, "It Takes A Universe," (see sidebar, opposite page) has inspired the direction of our work.

EL: How do you link imagination and the natural world?

CT: What Peggy and I know is that children are born with these deep inner faculties of imagination and intuition. Those faculties have to be brought forth through the life cycle. The neglect of this development in education leads to a deficit in the child and in the natural world and in the culture at large. Children have to be given an opportunity to develop, to respond with intimacy in the natural world, and to experience it through their senses and imagination.

For example, in one of our nature camps, we did a session of listening in the woods. We had thirteen children ranging in

age from 5 to 7. We asked them to listen outwardly to hear what sounds they heard and we wrote it down. Then we asked them to listen inwardly and not outwardly at all. And we wrote those down. In the second part, one little boy named Alex said: "I heard ancient fires crackling." A little girl named Sharon said: "I heard ten caterpillars yawning." We went back to our tree house which is the epicenter of the land. They quietly took their watercolors and created pictures of what they heard. So we had these extraordinary phrases along with their watercolor drawings. This is an important part of the process of nurturing the human being, to help them create their own images out of their own experience. We acknowledge the potential of their inner life and seek to allow it to unfold.

EL: I wonder if the average adult could distinguish between listening outwardly and listening inwardly? Do you give them any guidance in listening inwardly?

CT: No. I don't give them any help in tuning inward. They'll tell us what they hear inside themselves or what pictures they see.

EL: How do you approach spirituality as a topic? Do you use the word "God?"

CT: Spirituality isn't approached as a topic separate from our daily lives here but it's central and implicit in all we do. Thomas Berry has given us a new language to speak. He talks about the trees and the flowers and the sun being modes of divine presence. There's no need to use the word God. What we need now is to recover the foundations that lead to a sense of beauty, wonder, and intimacy. All religions are founded on these attributes.

Our intention is to create a bond of intimacy between children and nature. For example, through the seasons, we talk about the cycles of growth and the seed within the plant. Then we look at the plant and talk about the children's growth. We make those correspondences as often as possible. We talk about how you plant something and how you nurture it. We ask how they've been nurtured and cared for. In our special design programs, children come out through the seasons. They adopt a tree and then they come back and see how it's changed and grown and how they see things differently by the end of the year.

One of the exercises I do on our earthwalks is to have them stop and pay attention to what is moving. And this is all in silence. So they notice the ripples on the pond, then the way the wind moves and stops; the way the leaves dance. One little girl said she noticed the beating of her own heart.

Then I say to them: "If we came back here tomorrow and stood exactly in the same place, would it be exactly as it is now?" Even the littlest children say, "No." And I say, "Why not?" And they say, "Because everything's always changing." Then I say: "Are you always changing?" And they say, "Yes." It's a cosmological way of knowing. Nobody is taught that directly. They know it within themselves.

It Takes A Universe

The child awakens to
a universe. The mind
of the child to
a world of wonder.
Imagination to a world
of beauty. Emotions
to a world of intimacy.

It takes a universe
to make a child both
in outer form and inner
spirit. It takes
a universe to educate
a child. A universe
to fulfill a child.

Each generation presides
over the meeting of these two
in the succeeding
generation.

So that the universe
is fulfilled in the child
and the child is fulfilled
in the universe.

While the stars ring out in the heavens!

~Thomas Berry

EL: How has the landscape shaped you?

CT: As my family shaped this land, it was actually shaping us. The presence of the hardwoods, the cedars, the lakes, the creatures – they all live within us in what Thomas terms "fulfillment." It's a relationship of giving and receiving. This is not a center in which the natural world is a backdrop for our human endeavors. It is the central focus. It's a very rich, abundant environment. Everything right now (August) is blooming. It's quite generative and verdant. If I go to a desert, I have an appreciation for the amazing variety there, but I long for the green of North Carolina. The Earth is constantly burgeoning forth and releasing new life. My imagination and generativity have flourished here because of all the wonderful organic forms.



The Treehouse at Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary

EL: Can you give me more examples of how you create that bond of intimacy between children and the natural world?

CT: In our nature camps, we use the Council of All Beings (created by Johanna Macy and John Seed) where the children make masks of animals they love. On the last day they come into the fire circle and they speak from the perspective of that animal, about how they feel as a member of that species and what they want to say to people. One day, the eagle said he couldn't fly as high anymore because the air was polluted. The grasshopper was sad because he wasn't paid attention to. It gave the children a chance for symbolic expression of their feelings. I've discovered that children are very concerned about what's going on. They can tell you stories about trees that they love that are being torn down or about housing developments coming in. They need ways to express these things.

We also have Magical Moments. It's a matter of stopping and taking in a moment as deeply as you can. You take

in the movement, color, internal feelings, smells, listen deeply to the sounds. When I do this, I always give children the date, for example: "This is June 30, 2005, and we're here with one another and this is a very special moment." I invite them to close their eyes and remember what they have seen inwardly. At the end of the day together, we re-invoke those moments in a sharing circle.

At the Earth sanctuary, we have a Wishing Rock. It's large and fairly flat and under a maple tree that hangs over the lake. Children go individually out on the rock and make a wish and while they're wishing, all the other children wish that that child's wish comes true. So they get a lot of help with their wishes. I think the success of the Council of All Beings, Magical Moments and the Wishing Rock speaks to the need of children to ritualize their own experiences in a culture that isn't paying attention to that need. Children have a deep need for ritual and connection.

Shomrei Adamah: Keepers of the Earth

One of the serious side effects of urban living and technological growth is a loss of connection with nature. We've forgotten the essential link between *adam* (earthling) and *adamah* (earth). The environmental crisis is not only a technological problem with technical and legal solutions. It is a spiritual and moral crisis. An environmental crisis occurs when an entire civilization overlooks the inherent value of air, land, soil, water and species, and approaches the natural world as a toolbox of resources to use for its own gain. If our obliviousness to the gifts of nature is the root of the environmental crisis, then the task at hand is to learn to see and appreciate nature and God's presence in all of life.¹

~Ellen Bernstein & Dan Fink, *Let the Earth Teach You Torah*

On February 25, 2005, faculty from the B'nai Shalom Day School met at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World for a day retreat in which we pondered how we might collaborate to bring *adam* (earthling) and *adamah* (earth) back together again for the children of B'nai Shalom. Thanks to a grant from the Toleo Foundation, this would be the first of many meetings in which we co-created a Special Design Program in Judaism and the Natural World.

We began by creating a circle of eco-stories from the teachers' own lives. Memories took us to saying prayers at dusk on the piers of the Neuse River, feeling the coolness of a big rock by the creek, hiking every weekend, hearing grandmother's stories on woodland strolls, restoring a courtyard garden, climbing rocks made of salt from the Dead Sea, climbing the sand dunes in Sinai, taking Thanksgiving walks in the North Carolina mountains, watching the trees grandmother planted grow in an apartment courtyard, lying down in the meadow and watching the clouds overhead, and feeling the open spaces of the American West.

Through an envisioning process, we began the work of imagining how to weave these kinds of experiences into the cycle of the Jewish year. After several planning sessions, we imagined a school year in which the second and fifth grade classes would experience the natural world in summer, fall, winter and spring and bring these experiences with nature into connection with the Jewish holidays of Sukkot, Tu B'Shevat and Passover.

At the opening of the school year in August, the second and fifth grade classes each visited the Center for a day of nature awareness and experience of the earth sanctuary in late summer. We gathered around the fire circle for welcomes, introductions

and conversations about the seasons, how things change and where we were now in the cycle of seasons. The children were encouraged to look about them to discover the uniqueness of this moment, this particular season, and to share with the group. They responded by pointing out drying leaves in the trees, the smell of fall's approach, the position of the sun in the sky

Morning earth walks deepened the conversation. Children were invited to "behold" the natural world in partner pairs in which one child's eyes were closed until the sighted partner spoke the word "behold." At that moment, the partner opened his/her eyes and blinked to "take a picture" of a small single flower, plant, rock or leaf. Each child took a turn to discover a significant image to hold in mind.

Moving on to the "Magical Garden," attention was given to the growth cycles of plants and creatures and to the activities of fall preparation that the children observed around them. We spoke of the later rising of the sun and the earlier setting. And we spoke of their growth cycles and what this time of year meant for them. We invited them to memorize what the garden looked like now, so that they would be able to discern the differences when they returned for Sukkot in the fall.

We had lunch on the deck of the Treehouse, followed by preparation for a silent walk to the sacred circle with Gay Cheney for a Native American program. They told Gay about their morning with great excitement – the sighting of a blue heron overhead, a tiny snake, an intricate spider's web Gay shared the four directions with them, a Native American story, her musical instruments, and ended the day with song and movement. In our closing moments, each child shared what had been special for him/her that day.

¹ Ellen Bernstein and Dan Fink, *Let the Earth Teach You Torah: A Guide to Teaching Jewish Ecological Wisdom* (Wyncote, PA: *Shomrei Adamah*, 1992), p. 8.

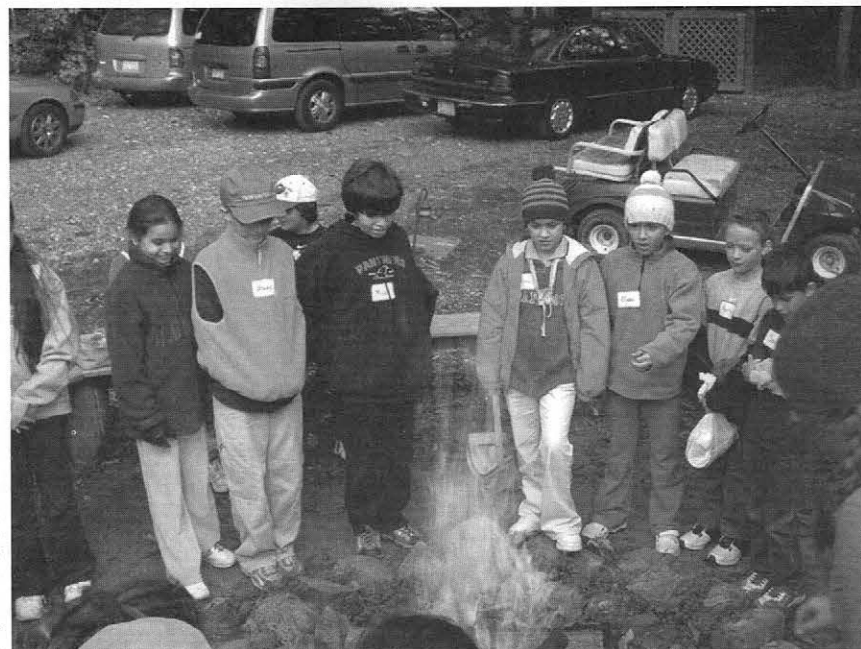
From this point forward, the second and fifth grades would come out to the Center together, each fifth grader paired with a second grade buddy. On Monday, October 24, 2005, they arrived to celebrate the last day of Sukkot. Many hours of advance planning had taken place between our staff and the faculty at B’Nai Shalom. Hebrew teacher Edna Sharoni had the lulav and etrog ready, fifth and second grade teachers Sue Zaleon and Lynn DeWeese had rehearsed the ancient story with the children, and Center staff adorned the sukkah in our “Magical Garden” with cornhusks, pumpkins and flowers for the occasion. All was in order for the day.

The children were most excited about the day and met us that cool, sunny autumn morning with their usual intense interest and curiosity. Parents had dropped them off at our fire circle, where we had lit a fire in honor of the occasion. When we asked them to retell the story of Sukkot, they did so in great detail and with much enthusiasm. Edna then led us in a song and dance before we headed into the woods. On this occasion, our earth walks were journeys on and off the trails where we made periodic stops along the way to discover brachot (blessings), which we translated into word and image on small cardboard circles in preparation for decorating the sukkah in the garden.



circles in a gesture of gratitude for the earth’s bounty.

On February 13, 2006, the children returned to celebrate Tu B’Shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees. Tu B’Shevat is a time to honor trees and the wellspring of creation: the Tree of Life. On this day, we brought the children into a deep connection to trees at the earth sanctuary, inspired by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who thought it possible to establish an “I and Thou” relationship with the natural world. Reflecting



trees as a foundation for being keepers of the earth.

At the sukkah, Edna asked two of the children to take symbols of the earth’s bounty, lulav (palm branch) and etrog (citron), and shake them in the four directions, bestowing kindness on the earth. When asked what guests they would like to welcome into the sukkah, the children overwhelmingly brought their grandparents into the circle. They went on to share, one at a time, their blessing

upon the human relationship to the tree, he mused that “the tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it – only in a different way. Let no attempt be made to sap the strength from the meaning of the relation: relation is mutual.”² By the end of our day together, the children experienced a deep bond of intimacy with the

² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 8.

Our year will end with a fourth visit to celebrate hope and renewal in spring. By then, the children will have experienced a deepened sense of community with each other and the earth, and they will have strengthened the connection between their Jewish holidays and the natural world that gave rise to them.

The Special Design program with B'nai Shalom would not be complete without an offering for parents. On March 8, 2006, the Center will offer a program for parents called "Why Abby and Ari Don't Play Outside Anymore: a Conversation with Stephen Jurovics, Carolyn Toben, Anthony Weston and Peggy Whalen-Levitt," intended as a lively conversation about the place of nature and technology in the healthy development of the Jewish child. Dr. Jurovics has served as the president of LimiTV, Inc., since its founding in 1996. LimiTV is a non-profit organization that informs parents, students, and the community at large about the negative effects of excessive TV and video game use on a child's education and health. He presently works as an engineer for an environ-

mental consulting firm in Chapel Hill. Prior to that position, he worked for the IBM Corporation for over 25 years. He belongs to Temple Beth Or in Raleigh, NC. Anthony Weston is Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Elon University and is the author of a wide variety of articles and books in both areas, including *Back to Earth* (Temple, 1994) and *An Invitation to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford, 1999). He is a member of Beth El Synagogue in Durham. Carolyn Toben and Peggy Whalen-Levitt are Co-Directors of the Center.

In *The Book of Miracles*, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner says that "to be a Jew means to wake up and keep your eyes open to the many beautiful, mysterious, and holy things that happen all around us every day."³ We are deeply grateful to the Toleo Foundation for making it possible for the children of B'nai Shalom to engage in a year dedicated to "keeping their eyes open."



³ Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Miracles* (New York: UAHC Press, 1987), p. 6.

I see a garden
I hear a bird and a splash.
I smell two leaves.
I touch a plant.
I taste a grape.

~ Shiri Koren

I see a blue-tailed skink.
I hear crickets and birds.
I smell rosemary.
I touch a deer horn rattle.
I taste my lunch.

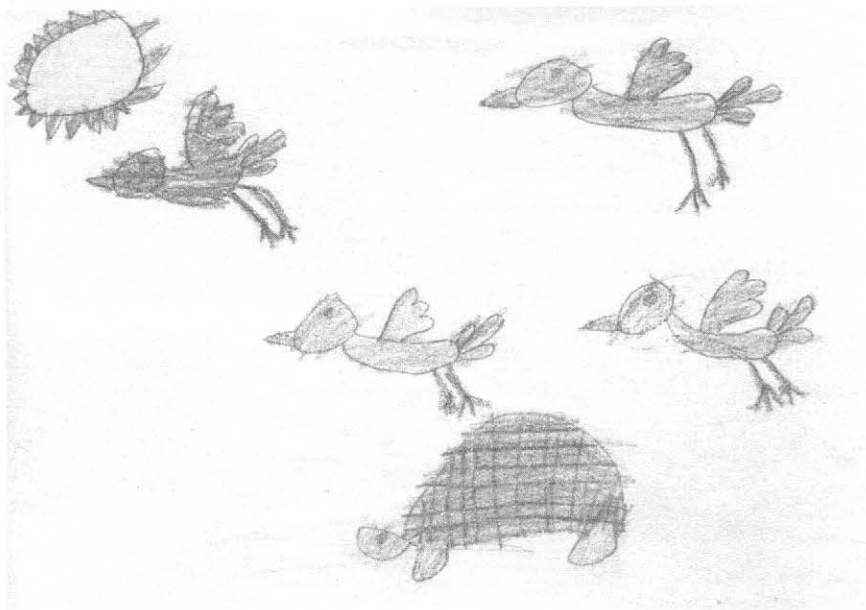
~ Eitan Strauss-Coen

I see a lizard.
I hear a cuckoo bird.
I smell a red rose.
I touch a turtle.
I taste scuppernongs.

~ Aaron Sistare

I see a box turtle.
I hear a loud wind.
I smell lemon balm.
I touch rattlesnake weed.
I taste bagel and butter.

~ Molly Warner



Artwork by Aliza Owen

There we were on the Keyhole Trail, observing
silently.
There it was – the Keyhole – so big and beautiful,
Easy to sight but easier to miss.
Then the Chapel and lake, so green and peaceful.
Silently up the steps to the garden
Wonderful and delicious fruits and vegetables,
So ripe and colorful.
Then to Wishing Rock,
A small rock but a big feeling inside.
Across the bridge silently
Observing fish, frogs and plants.
Then off to the secret place;
Seems so secret, yet not.
Back to the Treehouse –
So much fun now over,
Sadness of leaving but excitement for coming back.

~ Allison Lindenberg, 5th grade

So peaceful, graceful and quiet outside on a
trail of nature –
What can I say about this day?
No animals at all but spiders
Cicada skins on trees, plants all over the trail.
Scott gives me binoculars out in the chapel –
I look in them – wow! What a beautiful view!
The lake is like a slow flowing river.
One lizard, on a tree,
Butterflies all over.
Standing on the Wishing Rock deep into my
thought, wishing and wishing.
Suddenly, a fish jumps out.
The wind is making the leaves sing,
Birds, a nature orchestra.
The plants have music –
The cicadas like a drum.
A great, great nature day.

~ Eliana Fishbeyn, 5th grade

Timberlake has changed a lot
since last time we were there.
More red and yellow and brown,
since last time we were there.
No insect orchestras today,
but frogs and crickets were there.
We also saw spiders with yellow and orange
working on their webs.
We got to be with someone new.
We had our buddies too.
We went to other different trails
and saw new different things.
I found a leaf so very big
from a big, red oak.
My experience is big.
I love, love, love, love Timberlake.

~ Alina Gabitov

Timberlake Farm
ice cold
miraculous perfection
bulb plants
exploring
reverse trails
lake pier
astounding fruits
kind people
emerging things

~ Alison Mckane

Time to relax
Insects
Memories
Best time
Excellent time each time we go
Ridiculous never before seen things.
Lick, hear, look, touch, smell
Anything can happen there
Keep your faith there
Earth

~ Noa Havivi

Go to Timberlake.
Go for nature's sake.
Go to slow, slow, slow down.
Go to Timberlake.

~ Jake Semon

The fifth grade and the second grade went to
Timberlake Farm on Monday, October 24. At Timberlake
you have a chance to be with nature. When we got there we
sat around the fire and taught the owner and the other people
about Sukkot, and about the traditions of the holiday.

Then we split into groups and went on nature walks.
My group went to the field of cosmos, which were beauti-
ful. We were partnered up with a second grader and in
pairs walked through the cosmos and looked and listened to
different noises and saw different things. We were given a
sheet of paper and drew and wrote what we saw and heard.
After the cosmos we had a lot of magical moments by the
two lakes.

My group took a trail to the magical garden where there
was a sukkah and we shared our pictures. We showed the
staff how we shake the lulav and etrog. Then we went back
to the treehouse and had lunch. My class and I had a lot of
fun and we are looking forward to coming back in February
and April.

~ Shira Chandler



Artwork by Molly Warner

Behold!

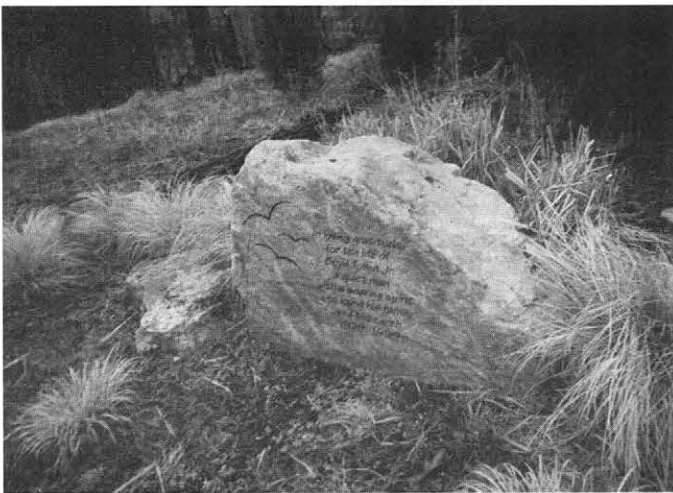
Nature Photography from Jackson Middle School

Nancy Fletcher, a Guilford School Health Alliance Nurse, and April Forsbrey, a Guilford School Health Alliance Guidance Counselor, approached the Center in the Winter of 2005 to create a Special Design Program for a group of Jackson Middle School students. They had been working with the students to create a book of poetry and photography through a Teacher Art Grant they received from the United Arts Council and wanted the photography section of their project to take place at the earth sanctuary.

Together, we envisioned a full day of nature awareness and nature photography. On March 23, 2005, the students stepped off the bus into the world of our nature preserve: Tiffany Holmes, Jawahir Awo, Keya Donnell, Bruce Davis, Latoya Branch, Latasha Little, Darrius Wooding, Sharelle Cooper, Shanelle Williams, Rodnesia Woods, Larriel Teague, Keith Baptiste, Ashya Lindsay and Carolina Do.

In the morning, we took earthwalks on woodland trails, around lakes, and in the garden. The mood of the day was attentive and peaceful as we opened all our senses to the natural world. The photographs that follow capture many moments where the inner landscapes of these students and the outer landscape of the earth sanctuary met in joyful collaboration.





Nurturing Cosmic Education: A Partnership with the Greensboro Montessori School

Montessori's Vision

The Center's relationship with the Greensboro Montessori School began with Earth Guide visits and deepened in the Fall of 2003 when twenty-two teachers from the school enrolled in our yearlong Seventh Generation Teachers' Program. In many ways, it was a natural fit. During the course of the year together, there was mutual recognition that the Center and the School shared a deep commitment to nurturing the child's sense of belonging to the universe in all its wonder, beauty and intimacy.

As the year unfolded, we understood more about the plan of cosmic education that is at the core of the Montessori elementary school curriculum. We learned that Maria Montessori developed her thoughts on cosmic education while interned in Kodaikanal, India during World War II. It was there, in the context of the natural world, that she had time to reflect and make conscious her philosophy about the essential unities of humanity, life and universe.¹

Montessori's insights bear a striking resemblance to the contemporary insights of Thomas Berry, particularly to his book *The Universe Story*, written in collaboration with Brian Swimme. In her book, *To Educate the Human Potential*, she writes:

If the idea of the universe be presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying . . . The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole relation with each other, and so close is this relation that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun! No matter what we touch, an atom, or a cell, we cannot explain it without knowledge of the wide universe It becomes doubtful whether even the universe will suffice. How did it come into being, and how will it end? A greater curiosity arises, which can never be satiated; so will last through a lifetime The child begins to ask: What am I? What is the task of man in this wonderful universe?"²

Montessori, like Berry and Swimme, presented a picture of a universe unfolding in time. She expanded the teaching of history to include the history of the universe and set human history within this great cosmic story. She understood that the question "Who am I?" can only be meaningfully answered in terms of the child's "cosmic task," or sense of purpose within the larger whole.

"Human consciousness," she said, "comes into the world as a flaming ball of imagination. . . . In the study of history and geography we are helpless without imagination, and when we propose to introduce the universe to the child, what but imagination can be of use to us?"³ The elements were clear for a partnership between the Greensboro Montessori School and the Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World. Rooted in the child's imagination and in a sense of the universe story, we co-created a series of continuous offerings for children throughout the year.

¹ Michael and D'Neil Duffy, *Children of the Universe: Cosmic Education in the Montessori Elementary Classroom* (Hollidaysburg, PA: Parent Child Press, 2002), p.3

² Maria Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential* (Adyar, Madras, India: Kalakshetra Publications, 1961), pp. 9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, p.15.

Beginnings

Although the cosmic education curriculum is designed for elementary age children, the foundation for it is laid in pre-school where the children experience their environment with “an absorbent mind.”⁴ Therefore, Greensboro Montessori teacher Annamarie Edwards brings her kindergarten children to the earth sanctuary every fall and spring for an immersion experience in the natural world.

The following account captures the rapture of these children on an autumn visit in 2004:

You can see a lot while lying on the forest floor. Red, orange and yellow leaves drift to the ground. There's a blue sky above. Beyond that, kindergartner Jacob Shores says, is black where the stars are, and then, white, where heaven sits. Jacob's vision, his teacher says, is perfect. The students from Greensboro Montessori School are here to learn with the imagination. During their visit this week the children giggled and squealed as white puffs of fluff floated from cattails and across their noses. They piled onto each other, football huddle style, to catch a closer glimpse of wet, green moss that covered the ground below their feet. “This whole thing is very experiential and full of possibilities,” Edwards said. “I couldn't teach them what they're learning today, and they're learning on their own. It's fabulous.” Throughout the day the children ran, skipped, picked up spiders and lizards, and most importantly, Edwards said, were left to move freely without anyone telling them to stop or not touch. Even before the end of the field trip, the children were in love with what they had discovered. “I like all the place,” exclaimed Mayu Uchida, 5, after crossing a bridge over a small marsh. Edwards was just as impressed. “This provides children with a place to experience their sense of wonder,” she said. “Nature is the perfect teacher.”⁵



Even in 1948, Maria Montessori lamented the child's separation from the natural world: “In the civilized environment of our society, children live far from nature, and have few opportunities of entering into intimate contact with it . . . Does anyone let them run out when it is raining, take off their shoes when they find pools of water, and let them run about with bare feet when the grass of the meadow is damp with dew?”⁶ The Center provides just this opportunity for the children of the Greensboro Montessori School on a regular basis. Each visit to the Center brings new possibilities for exploration. In the autumn of 2005, the kindergarten visit coincided with the blossoming of the cosmos field in all its glory. What a day of frolicking in a sea of gold!

⁴ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967) p. 51.

⁵ Allison Perkins, “Natural Connections,” *Greensboro News & Record*, November 12, 2004, pp. B1-2.

⁶ Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child* (Adyar, Madras, India: Kalakshetra Publications, 1948), p. 100.

From Six to Nine

Through an in-school grant, Greensboro Montessori teachers Debbie Slazyk and Kristy Biss have co-created a three-year Special Design Program with the Center for the lower elementary grades. Since the fall of 2004, the six to nine-year-old children have visited the earth sanctuary every fall, winter and spring.

The theme of the first year was "Seasons," integrated with the writing process as a continuous thread. This year, we have been exploring "The Language of the Forest," integrated with the history of writing. And, in our third year together, we will explore the "Shapes of Nature," integrated with geometry.

In the fall of 2005, the children arrived with much excitement, as most had been to the Center many times from previous years. They told us, at our invitation, about their memories of being here at other times, and wanted to know if they could return to familiar spots . . . the wishing rock, marsh bridge and garden. We began with Sandy Bisbee telling a story of "The Girl Who Listens," and the girl's journey to discover the language of the forest. We talked about the way early people had to listen to that language and how they might have shared that world with each other. We then broke into groups for our earth walks, each earth guide equipped with our small cardboard circles and crayons. Each group took the opportunity to go off the trails to new places the children had never visited before, much to their delight! At each spot, the children would try to be deeply quiet, listening for the language of the forest through all their senses and then depicting what they experienced on their small circles in images only. We went down the creeping cedar trail to the creek, up the hills alongside the moss walk, over to the cosmos meadow, and with each step, the children were asked to walk "without making a sound." Each child also had an opportunity to revisit a special "treefriend" he/she had made on a former visit.

Upon returning to the Treehouse, one group became involved with bursting cattails at the lake and had great joy in helping seeds disperse in the air and all over their clothes! Final sharings were held at the Tribal Council Circle where the children shared their experiences of the language of the forest, which included the discovery of deer tracks in muddy places, a preying mantis laying eggs, the finding of oyster mushrooms behind Perrin's special treefriend, and the amazing photo of Grandmother Spider which only came out as a ball of light! Many spoke of their joy at reuniting with their treefriends and the day ended with Sandy's lovely flute music.

It was a bright, wintry day when the children came back to the Center in January 2006. We began with a fire in the fire circle, asking the children to observe the changes around them. What was the forest saying to us now? Sandy told another "Girl Who Listens" story, this time one in which the girl draws a pictogram of a special place she has discovered. As we broke for earthwalks, two of the boys ran ahead to find their special tree and one little girl said to her earth guide, "Please let them go ahead – they need special time alone with their treefriends." Then, she said more thoughtfully, "They need to have a reunion with them."

One group cleared a circle of brush and went into silence to listen, observe, and experience the language of the forest and then attempted to capture the essence of the moment through their pictographs. One child spoke of a deep place in her mind that the clearing brought up for her. She said, "I know it's my imagination; I discovered it when I was six. All my ideas come from there!"

Lunch at the Treehouse was followed by a re-grouping at the fire circle to learn the Native American song Wo-E Lo-for Aye, which we sang in the woods on the way to the Tribal Council Circle. Down the Creeping Cedar Trail we went singing and, once at the Tribal Council Circle, listening to the music of Sandy's flute and Scott's drums playing softly. Each child shared a pictograph of his/her special place and we ended in silence before returning to the Treehouse.

In her book *To Educate the Human Potential*, Montessori quoted Dante, saying "La somma sapienza e il primor amore," or "The greatest wisdom is first to love."⁷ Through these continuing experiences of loving the natural world, the lower elementary children are well on their way to becoming wise.

⁷ Montessori, *To Educate the Human Potential*, p. 26.

A Gathering of Educators

In the spring of 2005, the Center invited Montessori educators from throughout the state of North Carolina to an all-day retreat to share the fruits of the Greensboro Montessori partnership and to explore ways in which we might nurture cosmic education in North Carolina Montessori schools. Nancy Hofer, Associate Head of the Greensboro Montessori School, was kind enough to write a letter of introduction for the Center. Addressing her Montessori colleagues, she said:

I am writing to tell you about our school's connection to a very special place, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, in the hope that you, your faculty and your students may have the same wonderful experiences there that we have had. The work of the Center meshes so very well with the work our children do in Montessori by supporting their sense of connections among all the facets of the universe.

Several years ago, our Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary classes began traveling to the Center for the Earth Guides Program. Earth Guides is an all day program focusing on Earth awareness. The children are surrounded by forests, lakes, creeks, wild vegetation, animals and the quietness of a woodland. Each time they go, children return telling stories of magical happenings, such as the time they were so quiet a fox came within 10 feet of them, stopped and stared at them for awhile.

We love to give our children these times to be in and with nature. It facilitates a deep appreciation of the natural world which carries over to their cosmic studies in the classroom

Many of our teachers and myself have participated in the 7th Generation Teachers' Program offered at the Center. Just as our children have had the opportunity to be quiet in nature, our teachers were able to have their time of solitude and quiet as well. We found that by deepening our connection with the natural world, we were able to transfer this inspiration to our students. We discovered this connection is something that is felt, it goes into every fiber of one's being. It is truly immersion with the earth. It left us renewed, peaceful, and with our senses more open to our natural surroundings.

The Center has now worked with twelve Montessori schools in North Carolina, nurturing cosmic education. Montessori wrote that "we shall all walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. This idea helps the mind of the child to become fixed, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for knowledge. He is satisfied, having found the universal center of himself with all things."⁸ It gives us great joy to feel that we have played a part in enabling the children served by these schools to "find the universal center of (themselves) with all things."



⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

The Poetry of Nature



Photographs by Jessica Towle

On January 28, 2006, a group of twenty educators gathered at the Center for a day retreat on “The Poetry of Nature” with Diane Pendola and Theresa Hahn, Co-Founders of Skyline Eco-Contemplative Center. Diane and Theresa live close to the earth in the foothills of the Sierra-Nevada mountains where they nurture a sense of place through contemplative presence to the natural world. They live amidst goats and horses, cut their own firewood and build their own buildings, and lovingly restore the forest that was damaged by a devastating wildfire in 1999.

In the morning, Diane offered a reading of her poems: profound poems of connection, of relationship, of death and rebirth. Afterward, we took time for silent walks on the earth sanctuary trails and then met at the Treehouse for a delicious lunch and time to enjoy the company of each other.

In the afternoon, participants shared the many ways in which they bring children and young adults into an experience of the poetry of nature. Andrew Levitt spoke of his work with “the poetry of nature” at the Emerson Waldorf High School; Emily Chamberlain shared her collaboration with Annie Dwyer in “imaginative understanding” at the Carolina Friends School; Jessica Towle gave an account of how she and Liz Levitt have worked with a living/moving poem experience based on the poems of Mary Oliver and Rumi during Center Nature Camps; Gay Cheney brought us into the circle of her Native American program for children; April Forsbrey spoke of the “poetry of photography” with students at Jackson Middle School; Kat Bodrie recalled her experience of receptivity and nature journaling as an intern at the Center when she was a student at Elon University; Randy Senzig shared the ways in which the aesthetic experience of mask-making can bring a science unit to life for his students at Fuquay Varina High School; Mel De Jesus described the richness of nature imagery in the poetry of Lorca that he speaks in Spanish to middle school students; and Sandy Bisdee, of the Community Montessori School, told a striking story about how she created a setting for the children in her after-school care to watch the sunset as they sat in a row of chairs eating popcorn!

When Diane Pendola closed the day with a reading of her poem, “May We Know Who We Are,” we could feel the resonance of the poem with the day itself – a day of coming closer to who we are.



Diane Pendola



Theresa Hahn

May We Know Who We Are

by
Diane Pendola

Keep it simple, I tell myself.
What is our work if not simplicity itself.
Simplicity. Beginners Mind. Second Innocence.
Becoming again like a little child.
Cultivating relationship.
Enhancing relationship with each person, each creature, each being.
Taking time to listen.
Having enough quiet within, enough space,
To actually hear and receive the gift, the presence of another.
Inviting awareness of our communion,
Our relationship with each and every other being.
I am because you are.
I am because the trees grow and speak
In the language of the heavens
Like the wings of angels beating in the wind.
I am because of the wind, blowing
Across the seas and the continents,
Carrying the atoms of everything that has lived,
Expanding in my lungs and sending breath back into theirs.
I am because the sun rises in unspeakable glory,
Rests its light in the sparkle of dew,
The green of grass, the yellow of daffodil
And sets in my soul, and names me there.
I am because I've grown up out of this world,
Its song in my song, its rhythm in my heart,
Its beauty woven into the fabric of my bone and sinew.
I am because the world is.
We exist together or not at all.
We go into the future together
Or wither as the root of our soul life is severed at its core.
As though we can go forward without
The polar bear, the elephant, the gorilla;
Without wilderness and reverence
For the interior depths of the non-human other;
As if we can be fed by machines and nurtured by consumption.
I am because everything else is.
May we nurture all other beings.
May we discover ourselves.
May we know who we are.

Summer Nature Camps



Make New Friends

A Nature Camp for 5-7 year olds

June 12 – 16, 2006

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

\$175

“Make new friends,
New worlds unfold,
They know secrets
That have ne’r been told.”

In this magical week together, we will make new friends deep in the forest, bubbling in the brook, blossoming in the garden and living in the open meadows. Our days will begin with music, natural play and sharing time, and continue with nature walks, where we will experience “magical moments” on woodland trails. We’ll enjoy healthy snacks and an organic lunch, freshly prepared daily. In the afternoons, we’ll gather in the story circle, make festival costumes and props, and go creek walking off the Creeping Cedar Trail. The week will close with a joyful “Children of the Forest Festival” on Friday.

Staff: Sandy Bisdee, Liz Levitt, & Jessica Towle



Exploring Secret Places

A Nature Camp for 8-10 year olds

June 19 – 23, 2006

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

\$175



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

Staff: Sandy Bisdee, Liz Levitt, and Jessica Towle



Earth, Air, Fire, Water

A Nature Camp for 11-12 Year Olds

June 26-30, 2006

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

\$175

Join us in exploring the elements of earth, air, fire and water, both in the outer world and the inner world of ourselves. Each day of the week will be devoted to one element. We'll play imaginatively with the elements, experiencing the healing of water, the sound and movement of air, the firmness and fertility of rock, stone and clay, and the warmth of sun and fire. And we'll look for these qualities in ourselves through sharing circles and journaling. On our final day together, we'll "sing the elements" in celebration! Healthy snacks and organic lunch prepared daily with your help.

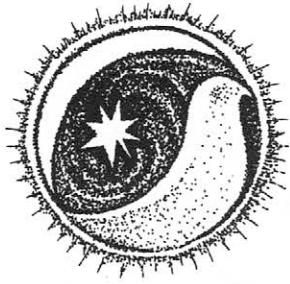
Staff: Sandy Bisdee, Carolyn Toben, & Jessica Towle

Sandy Bisdee brings over twenty years' experience as a Montessori teacher, as well as a deep love of the Earth and Native American culture, to her work at the Center. **Liz Levitt**, who graduates from Wesleyan University this year, brings light, love and deep imagination to her work with children and nature. **Carolyn Toben**, Co-Director of the Center, is a lover of forest, skies, and all creatures – great and small. **Jessica Towle**, who will graduate from Prescott College this year, is a master at nurturing a mutually enhancing relationship between human beings and the Natural World.

Please contact the Center at beholdnature@aol.com or (336) 449-0612 for an application.

Deadline: May 1, 2006

Artwork by Liz Levitt



Center Programs 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 of stream. A hayride and stop at the organic Garden are part of the morning's pleasures. Pre-schools welcome!

Programs for College Students

Earth Guide Apprenticeship

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 schoolchildren 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.

Programs for Educators

Seventh Generation Teachers' Program

Dates TBA

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. Details of the 2006-2007 program will appear in the Fall 2006 issue of Chrysalis.

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 beholdnature.org or requested by contacting the Center at beholdnature@aol.com or (336) 449-0612.

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*We wish to express a heartfelt **thank you** to the following individuals, foundations and organizations for their generous support of our work in 2005 .*

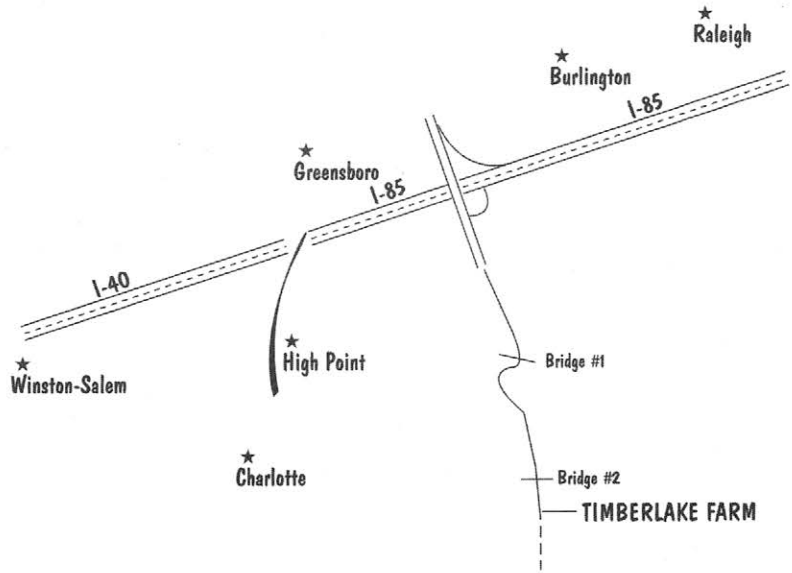
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Take I-40 East to I-85; continue about 13 miles beyond Greensboro towards Burlington. Exit at Rock Creek Dairy Road (Exit #135). You will go under the overpass and loop around. Turn left at the top of the exit and go just over two miles. The Timberlake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

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CHAPEL HILL

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



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

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