

The 'Vermont of the mind'—a cure for what ails us?

by Louis Cox

“WHAT the ...?!” It was the middle of April in northwest Vermont. I was out in the yard one day doing some chores, when to my annoyance and astonishment a swarm of mosquitoes was hovering around me, maneuvering for sips of blood.

In ten years of living in the Champlain Valley (dubbed Vermont's “banana belt” by some) I had never encountered mosquitoes this early in the spring. The last mounds of winter snow along the driveway had just finished melting; there had been no standing water outdoors where mosquito larvae could have survived. Somehow these hungry adults had managed to winter over. While Vermont seemed to have had its typical deep snow and months of near-zero temperatures when home fires had to be kept burning around the clock, it wasn't quite as harsh a winter as we've often had in the past.

Then I remembered the flock of eastern bluebirds that we had spotted in the neighborhood several months back. Normally migratory, they too must have been encouraged by the milder winter to hang around instead of flying south.

There is always noticeable variation in the severity of winters from year to year, but precise records from government reporting stations confirm what my per-

sonal experience is portending, that the climate has been significantly warming over the past fifty years. For the tenth year in a row, Lake Champlain hadn't frozen solid—previously an almost annual event noted in the local



“Maybe there's something to this 'global warming' notion after all...”

weather records for over two hundred years. This echoes global statistics showing that eight of the hottest years on record have occurred in the last ten years.

RUAH and I were reflecting recently on her proposal for QEWS to hold its 2007 Annual Meeting & Gathering in Burlington, Vt., marking 20 years since its founding. How wonderful and appropriate, we thought, if we could just get Bill McKibben to be our keynote speaker. He's a gifted Ver-

mont writer who has gained an international following for his illuminating analyses of global climate change and other environmental issues. Bill's website suggests that he already may be booked that far ahead. So I have provided on the next page a summary of the kind of talk he might give to a gathering of QEWS supporters. He speaks movingly not only about the changes that are needed in public policy but also about the importance of inward, personal transformation. Although he's officially a Methodist, I have not encountered a popular writer who resonates more truly with my Quaker values and leadings.

Ruah and I are always urging people to come and visit us in Vermont, where we run the QEWS offices in our solar-powered house overlooking the beautiful Green Mountains, where we and our neighborhood community are working to develop ways of living that are sustainable and true to our calling to be responsible citizens of planet Earth.

We aren't trying, however, to get more people to move to Vermont, where the sparse population is one of its great qualities. But we are suggesting a journey to the “Vermont of the mind” that could give many people hope and constructive ideas as they work on social and ecological problems in

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their home communities. We need to be reminded that there are still places without ugly billboards, with thriving downtown centers, clean air, low unemployment; expanding community-supported agriculture, strong support for recycling and conservation, organic milk in glass bottles, great bread, great coffee, and even courteous drivers!

We also face many of the problems that the rest of the country is facing, such as urban sprawl, big box stores, questions about where our energy will come from in the future, toxic pollution of our lakes, and the lack of universal access to health care and effective public transportation. But we also serve as a model of how to approach these issues on a smaller, human scale and how to emphasize our most important assets—our community spirit and our relatively unspoiled natural environment.

My recent bout with the backyard mosquitoes (which can carry the West Nile Fever virus), along with reports that deer ticks (which can spread Lyme Disease) are migrating northward, has given another twist to that knot of fear and anguish I often feel in my gut. A host of social and environmental problems seem to be quickly spiraling out of control. But knowing that there are places like Vermont where many individuals, businesses, and government leaders are courageously lighting candles in the darkness makes it easier for me to keep going day after day.

Most of all, we need to learn from such “backward” cultures as Vermont that, as one bumper sticker says, “*The best things in life aren’t things.*” We need to find these places on a “new road map” that leads our country away from its infatuation with money and growth and other unsustainable practices. ❖

A Vermont writer’s words of hope

Here are my notes paraphrasing a talk that internationally-acclaimed writer Bill McKibben gave at Johnson State College, Johnson, Vt., which I heard on Vermont Public Radio on April 15, 2005. —ed.

GLOBAL climate change was considered just a hypothesis when I wrote *The End of Nature* in 1989; it is a scientific fact now. It is also increasingly viewed as something very, very dangerous, like a tsunami bearing down on us in slow motion, with similar power to radically alter life as we know it.

The average global temperature has risen about 1 degree F. in the last 35 years, due to the increased concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, much of it caused by human activities. An average of 1 degree may not feel like much, but it turns out that the planet can tell the difference. Glacial systems everywhere are in rapid retreat. Spring is arriving an average of seven days earlier than it did only 30 years ago. This is a very large difference to be taking place in so little time.

The “mid-course” scenario being offered today by the world’s professional climatologists adds another 5 degrees F. in the course of this century. That would make this a warmer planet than at the beginning of primate evolution some 400,000 years ago, with results we can only begin to guess at. Rising seas are expected to displace 100 to 200 million people.

Vermont may well change very profoundly too. By mid- to

late century, Boston is expected to have a climate like what Atlanta has today. There will no longer be the snowy season that we know as winter, just a longer, chilly mud season. Our forests will evolve into a drab scrub oak-hickory landscape that is very different from the Vermont we know today—no more maple syrup, no more brilliant fall colors, no more skiing.

I’d do a lot to avoid these changes.

On the other hand, there is too much good news to justify despair at this point. In fact, many of the changes needed to avoid the scenario described above would produce a Vermont that’s even better!

A lot of the changes have to do with the way we eat.

Currently, the food in our supermarkets travels an average of 1,500 miles. This is possible only because of cheap oil. The economic advantage of shipping food long distances is only superficial, however. The current

low price of oil hides the environmental toll. It takes 90 calories of fossil fuel energy to deliver one calorie of iceberg lettuce from California to Vermont.

Meanwhile, another 81 Vermont dairy farms have gone out of business this year. This has left holes both in our landscape and in the fabric of our lives. The industrial food system also takes an enormous toll on taste for the sake of appearance, transportability, and storage life.

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Bill McKibben

“The solutions need to be hopeful and to offer some hope.”

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I recently wrote an article for *Gourmet* magazine on the question of whether I could survive one winter on the food resources of the Champlain Valley alone. (Luckily, Otter Creek Brewing Company of Middlebury had begun brewing beer with a local wheat!)

This experiment turned out to be the best winter eating of my life. I also found it amazing how many people in Vermont are out there doing interesting things with food production. Several farming families are growing wheat. I ate a lot of wonderful local apples. (The apple growers have developed a new method of storage that replaces the air with pure nitrogen, putting the apples into a kind of hibernation until they are ready to be delivered to stores.)

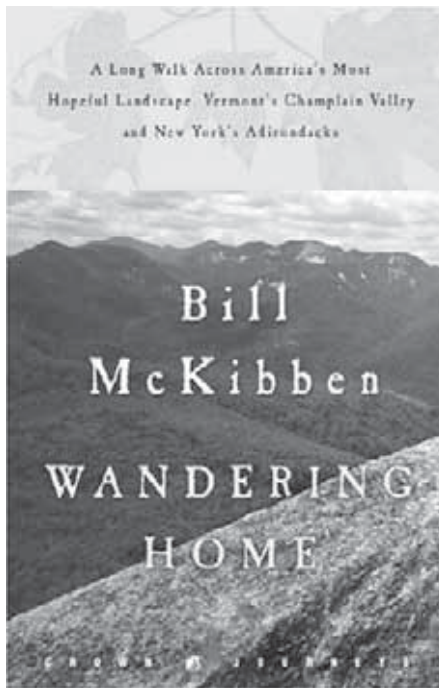
I also drank a lot of fresh cider from local community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations. In Essex Village, New York, I found a CSA that sells not only vegetables but milk, cheese, beef, pork, honey, and bread—practically a one-stop food source. These enterprises are working financially and in other ways as well. There were fascinating stories that came along with them.

The time that it took me to locate these locally produced foods was a plus. *I was forced to go out and find my neighbors and learn to rely on them.* All around Vermont in the last 20 to 30 years there have been exciting projects, like the experimentation in sustainable agriculture in Burlington's Intervale, the Vermont Fresh Network, and the Farmer's Diner in Barre.

WHILE preparing for my new book, *Wandering Home, A Long Walk Across America's Most Hopeful Landscape*, I set out to walk from my home near Ripton, Vt., in the Champlain Valley to Johnsbury, N.Y., in the Adirondacks, a

distance of some 75 miles to be covered in three weeks.

The going was tough at times, until I began to run into people doing all sorts of hopeful things, such as sustainable forestry that is



“What we need for happiness and well-being is connection through community and the security that provides.”

helping to stave off reckless development. These are things that governments should be engaged in, not trying to prop up the parts of the economy that are in decline.

In the field of energy, the benefit of the doubt should go to clean energy. We're not facing a choice of whether to have wind power or not. It's a choice between wind power and distant, often environmentally destructive sources, such as coal from Appalachia. Bridging the coming energy gap will take more creative thinking than we've been doing up to now.

And retail doesn't have to happen at the scale we've been doing it. Wal-Mart's annual cost savings to people who shop there average out to about \$58 a year, but that comes at a cost to neighbors, in the form of lower wages for everybody. We need places where we can go to buy underwear, of course, but there are more creative ways for those things to happen. We need to ask, "What is the scale that fits with the place we live?" Thinking more about the health of the local economy is neither a liberal nor a conservative idea.

In research for my book *The Age of Missing Information* I taped and watched thousands of hours of commercial TV broadcasting. The dominant, incessant message, I found, was that life is all about gratifying our personal whims in the so-called pursuit of happiness. But the truth is we're not built to find happiness through mindless consumption. Only 25 percent of Americans today say they are satisfied with their lives, despite the fact that their standard of living has doubled over the past 50 years.

What we need for our well-being and happiness is connection through community and the security that provides. It's learning to take care of each other, economically, with health care, and so forth. It's more possible to imagine this happening in Vermont than in other places. We don't need to become more like other places. We need to use our small scale as a source of real opportunity.

The environmental message of Rachel Carson has become mainstream, but we've not been as successful in formulating technical solutions as we have been in measuring the health of the biological community.

The solutions need to be hopeful and to offer some hope. Vermont has extraordinary gifts to share with the world. ❖

Shade-grown Fair Trade coffee yields many benefits

by Barbara Williamson
QEW Steering Committee Clerk

AMERICANS consume over 300 million cups of coffee a day, which makes coffee the second most traded commodity in the world next to oil. Approximately 20 million farmers and workers in more than 50 countries are involved in growing coffee on more than 11 million hectares of farmland.

During the last week of March American Depository Receipts went negative, and as a result Latin American commodity prices were lowered. The same week there was no participation by exporters in the weekly Indian Coffee Trade Association auction in Bangalore. And low coffee prices continue to hurt growers!

Until 1989, coffee prices were guaranteed under the International Coffee Agreement. From 1989 until the end of the century, coffee prices have varied wildly since. Coffee prices are in a five-year plus coffee slump—reflected in the income of coffee growers but not in the prices at your local coffee shop. Big crops, new countries entering the coffee market, free-trade agreements, and the world economy have slashed prices approximately in half since the late 1990s.

In the mid 1990s producer nations earned about \$11 billion from a world wide coffee market worth \$30 billion. Currently, according to the International Coffee Organization, they receive about \$5.5 billion from a coffee market worth about \$70 billion. The proceeds of coffee transactions usually break down as retailers receiving 25 percent, shippers and roasters 55 percent, exporters 10 percent, and farmers 10

percent. The amount the coffee farmer receives may be less than the cost of production forcing them into a cycle of poverty and debt; unable to support their families with adequate housing, education, or other much needed services. Many farmers have gone bankrupt and are abandoning their farms in



Coffee is produced under two different conditions:

Under the FIRST and ideal condition, coffee is produced in small parcels of land under shaded trees that not only yield valuable fruit and wood but also help replace the environments lost nutrients and prevent land erosion. Many of the traditional coffee farms in Latin America are forests and provide a refuge for many birds that have lost their habitat to the vast destruction of tropical forests.

Under the SECOND condition, coffee is produced on large farms under little or no shade because the forests have been stripped. This results in not only wildlife habitat destruction, accelerated deforestation of rainforests, and increased soil erosion but also the need for more costly biological controls such as herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and fertilizers, thus contaminating the soil and rivers and creating a health risk for the workers, the farmers and the community. This coffee-growing technique has been aggressively promoted by groups like the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

India, Africa, and Latin America. The human effects of increasing poverty are being felt now but in the future the agricultural effect of farmers leaving their farms and not caring for their coffee bushes and trees will be felt.

Shade-grown coffee plants can produce crops of beans for up to 50 years, approximately 35 years more than sun-grown coffee. Shade-grown coffee farms help to conserve watersheds, leading to higher water quality and quantity for local populations. Another benefit of shade-grown coffee is the habitat that it provides for wintering neo-tropical migratory birds in Latin America and the Caribbean (90 percent more birds than in sun-grown coffee areas). A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service survey has shown decreases of up to 3 percent in the number of birds migrating between North and Central/

South America over the past 20 years, the same time period during which shade-grown coffee production has been in decline. Shade trees protect the plants from rain and sun, help maintain soil quality, and aid in natural pest control, thanks to the birds.

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The Fair Trade option

FAIR TRADE™ companies foster long-term relationships with the people who grow or make coffee, tea, chocolate, fruits, crafts, and jewelry. They are committed to paying workers living wages, ensuring healthy working conditions, and working with producing communities to protect and restore the local environment. According to Oxfam International, more than 200 coffee co-operatives representing almost 700,000 farmers, more than 75 traders and almost 400 coffee companies work to the standards of Fair Trade™ Labeling Organizations, so that craft persons and farmers receive a decent return on products. Fair Trade™ organizations also prove much needed credit to farmers with low rates and technical assistance in environmentally sound farming methods. All Fair Trade™ coffee is grown organically, and 85 percent is shade-grown.

What can we do to support fair trade?

- ❖ Ask coffee cafes, local grocery stores and co-ops to carry and label Fair Trade™ coffees.
- ❖ Write letters to the editor and articles about fair trade—get conversations going about fair trade.
- ❖ Talk to local organizations to make sure they know about fair trade.
- ❖ Make sure your Meeting understands the benefits of fair trade and uses Fair Trade™ coffee.
- ❖ Use Fair Trade™ products.

Fair Trade coffee produced by *Finca la Bella* is sold as “Café Monteverde” through Montana Coffee Traders. Five-pound bags can be purchased at a discount rate and sold in one-pound bags at full cost. The profits can then be sent to QEW for the *Finca la Bella* project. When contacting Montana Coffee

Traders, let them know that you are raising money for *Finca la Bella* in order to get the discount. You can also ask for copies of articles about Café Monteverde coffee.

Montana Coffee Traders
5810 Highway 93 South
Whitefish MT 59937
1-800/345-5282
<www.coffeetraders.com>

South Central YM's coffee sales benefit QEW

ONCE AGAIN shade-grown, Fair Trade coffee was sold at South Central YM, with the benefits going to Quaker Earthcare Witness. I am mailing the proceeds to you today.

Total amount taken in was \$347.05 (at \$1 per cup), less reimbursement for purchase of coffee \$49.11 = \$297.94 for QEW!

—Glenna Balch
Austin, Tex.

Ps: I did not get it together in time to purchase coffee from the Costa Rica farm. I bought the coffee again at Wheatsville Coop, here in Austin.

I started selling coffee at SCYM after having been the clerk and reviewing the evaluation forms of the Yearly Meeting annual session. We generally had good comments, but with frequent complaints about the quality of the camp coffee. So initially the “coffee table” was a service to provide good coffee. Then it occurred to me that it was a way to get the word out about environmental issues.

We have had literature about QEW at the table, along with a book about Texas Wildflowers. For the last four years, Jimmy Pryor of the Live Oak Friends Meeting in Houston has shared the responsibility for this.



Cambridge series focuses on food issues

FRIENDS MEETING at Cambridge (Mass.) has been exploring food issues in its 2004–2005 adult religious education program. The series is being co-sponsored by Youth Programs, Quaker Earthcare Witness, and Friends for Racial Justice, with the support of Ministry & Worship.

The series started October 17 with an overview: “Grace at the Table,” followed by “Our Food Footprint” on November 14.

On January 30 Friends talked about “Corporate Power and Food—the global trade in food and intellectual property: corporate control of trade, production, supply and traditional ecological knowledge; *Swa Raj* and Gandhi’s teaching of self-responsibility.”

On February 27 Friends focused on “Food and Justice—A religious and scientific response to endemic hunger among many mothers and their children in poor countries who are dying and many more who are barely surviving... the role of food and the matter of our responsibility.”

The program on March 20 was on “Food Insecurity and Hunger in the USA—What’s Spirituality Got To Do With It?”

On April 10, Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Hope’s Edge* and *Diet for a Small Planet*, led a program on “Hopeful Changes.”

On multiple Sundays in May Cambridge Friends will look at “Local to Global Food Connections—how we can act to enhance connections; new approaches to local production.” There will be tours of local projects, including a community-supported agriculture (CSA) project.

The program on June 12 will be about “Pulling it together—What do we know, where are we led?” ❖

NEYM Earthcare Ministries Committee plans Monthly Meeting 'listening project'

IN THE COMING YEAR, teams from New England Yearly Meeting's Earth Ministries Committee (formerly New England Friends in Unity with Nature) will listen to Meetings' concerns and ideas about the condition of the planet, rather than presuming to have all the answers.

At the committee's spring retreat, Clerk Molly Anderson of Friends Meeting at Cambridge, Mass., also led the 12 participants in planning for workshops for the August NEYM sessions and choosing themes and materials designed to give sharper focus to its activities and displays.

The committee retreat included potluck meals that used local foods such as maple syrup, dried apples, home-canned pumpkin, and even organic grass-fed beef.

The point of a "listening" rather than "telling" project, Molly explained, is to identify and reinforce the skills and knowledge that already exist within the different Monthly Meetings. This draws on lessons from human development organizations, who know the futility of simply arriving on the scene with material aid and technical expertise. As one member with many years of experience in Third World assistance programs, "You have to start by identifying and using the assets that already exist within the community you're trying to help."

The teams will try to find out what Friends in New England are concerned about, their level of awareness of different issues, and what they think the Yearly Meeting should be doing to help.

This renewed outreach effort reflects the committee's new mission statement, adopted at the NEYM annual sessions last August:

Minute on name change and restatement of mission

THE NEW ENGLAND Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends recognizes that threats to sustainability of the earth and its biosphere come from many aspects of our lives, and we commit to finding and living solutions. We realize that individual actions are not sufficient: Often we are constrained by social, financial, and infrastructure factors that prevent our making choices congruent with our values as Friends. Therefore, we commit to taking actions designed to dismantle those societal barriers to responsible earthcare, and to put in their place incentives and support for making socially just and environmentally responsible choices. The specific actions we take will be informed by a shared vision of how we can live in ways that respect and restore biodiversity, natural beauty, and the earth's ability to heal past abuses.

Awareness of serious environmental problems and their spiritual connections is widespread in New England Yearly Meeting, as demonstrated by our enthusiastic endorsement of the Earth Charter in 2002. At present, our foremost task related to Earthcare is to act collectively on that awareness. In recognition of this new emphasis, the New England Friends in Unity with Nature Committee will be renamed the Earthcare Ministries Committee, with the following purposes and procedures:

Purposes: The Earthcare Ministry Committee encourages New England Yearly Meeting and its constituent monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, committees,

and staff to actions based on awareness that current rapid destruction of our planet and its fragile ecosystems is diametrically opposed to Quaker beliefs and values, and that the Religious Society of Friends must take an active stand against these trends and practices, inseparable from our other activities.

Procedures: The committee will help Friends to create a collective vision of how we can live peacefully and respectfully in the world, sharing finite goods with other inhabitants. It will work to identify specific actions that can turn this vision in to reality, and help monthly meetings and other units of the Yearly Meeting to carry them out. As part of this mission, it will connect the Yearly Meeting with the national Quaker Earthcare Witness committee (formerly Friends Committee on Unity with Nature) by sharing information and calls to action. The committee also will encourage a growing awareness of global interconnectedness among social injustice, war, environmental harm, and the emphasis our society places on materialism and consumption.

NEW ENGLAND Yearly Meeting charges every committee with integrating the need to transform our lives and society to care for the earth, supporting the activists among us, and including that witness in our new Faith and Practice. We call on every monthly meeting, worship group, and individual Friend to "let our lives speak" and to lead others, inside and outside the Religious Society of Friends to uphold ecological integrity by making radical changes in our lives.

—Approved August 2004



Last Child in the Woods: by Richard Louv *Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005, 344 pp., hard cover, \$24.95, ISBN 1-56512-391-3

Reviewed by Sandra Moon Farley
Redwood City (Calif.) Friends Mtg.

RICHARD LOUV in *Last Child in the Woods* has richly documented a cultural and life style shift occurring in the last twenty or thirty years across all levels of American life. Children are no longer spending idle time in the woods, fields, and gardens of our country. Children have much less idle time, and there are far fewer natural places to idle in.

Louv contrasts childhoods from a few decades ago with the experiences of contemporary American children and finds there is more stress, more electronic entertainment, more structured sports, more obesity, and more ADHD. At the same time there is much less unstructured time spent in a natural environment. He connects the dots.

Louv catalogues the benefits of time spent in nature. *BeFriending Creation* readers are already aware of how outdoor time eases tensions, develops spiritual awareness, and fosters creativity and self-reliance. He gives evidence from testimonies of individuals, as well as from documented studies.

Researchers have also observed that when children played in an environment dominated by play structures rather than natural elements, they established their social hierarchy through physical competence; after an open grassy area was planted with shrubs, the quality of play in what the study termed "vegetative rooms" was very different. Children used more fantasy play, and their social standing became based less on physical abilities and more on lan-

guage skills, creativity, and inventiveness.



"Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature." While we encourage team sports outside, we don't just let kids explore and interact with the natural world. The "islands of nature that are left . . . are to be seen, not touched." Traditional forms of outdoor play—catching tadpoles, building tree houses, rearranging the stones in a creek—these are now against the rules in most parks and open space areas.

Last Child in the Woods outlines some reasons why these changes have taken place: land development; structured and commercialized play; schools fixated on achievement test scores; parents afraid to let their children explore on their own; and lack of knowledge, leading to fearing or romanticizing nature

Louv brings the issues to the personal level. He does not want his child to be the last one in the woods. With this book he has issued a challenge to all of us to give

ourselves and our children the space and the freedom to come to personal terms with the natural world, to be restored in spirit by interaction with creation to a saner approach to life. In the final chapters he sketches a vision of a world where civilization and nature coexist and the arts flourish. He jokes that he may be "out on a limb" but "that's where the fruit is."

Louv makes a point of ending on a cautiously hopeful note, citing examples of projects and programs which are working in what he feels is the right direction. Environmentalists who work to preserve or restore wilderness areas may find this work disturbing, for he does not want to put nature on view as a museum exhibit. He wants us to interact.

How do we find an interactive role that is sustainable? Louv stands with the organic farmers and with those who would allow children to have the freedom to make mistakes or even be injured, trusting that, given the space, our Inner Guide will lead us aright.

Your reviewer sees unstructured time in nature as preparation for unprogrammed worship and thus sees a Quaker interest in promoting such opportunities. As a sequel to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *Last Child in the Woods* is a clear call to let our children and ourselves reconnect with the earth. We don't need a program for spending time in nature; we just need to let ourselves *be* in the world, so we can befriend the world. ❖

Sandra Moon Farley is a member of Palo Alto Monthly Meeting, Pacific YM. She is the primary author and illustrator of Earthcare for Children and one of the editors of Earthcare for Friends.

Quaker couple in Maine no longer compartmentalize their peace witness

by Ruah Swennerfelt

MARILYN and Harry Roper, a Quaker couple living in a solar-powered home in Houlton, Maine, long ago decided to stop “compartmentalizing” their concerns for peace, justice, and ecological integrity, as if these were separate and unrelated issues. They now work for peace on earth as well as peace *with* earth.

According to a recent report from Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) 42 cents out of every U.S. tax dollar paid in 2004 went for “war, preparing for war, and obligations from past wars, including veterans programs and the military portion of interest on the national debt.”

In contrast, only 2 percent was used for “environmental protection, energy resources, natural resource conservation and development and public land management.” Only one percent was spent on “diplomacy, international cooperation, and humanitarian and development aid and addressing the root causes of war.” (For the full report, go to www.fcnl.org.)

However, the Ropers’ 2004 tax return showed they had no federally taxable income, partly because they have chosen to live modestly and frugally and partly because they keep their limited financial assets in tax-exempt municipal bonds. Not only has this greatly reduced the amount they are forced to pay for war. It has enabled them to devote more of their resources to supporting good works in their community and state and around the world.

The Ropers make it clear that they are not judging others who choose not to engage in various forms of tax resistance and seek to



Marilyn and Harry Roper practice ecological stewardship in their on-grid solar-powered home in Houlton,

make an impact in other ways.

Although this strategy for avoiding federal income taxes wouldn’t work as well for people in other life situations (for example those still paying mortgages and college tuition) it is an interesting example of how, with planning and determination, Friends in the modern world can witness effectively for a more just and livable society.

The Ropers’ determined strategies for reducing their ecological footprints are equally creative and impressive. After retirement (Harry was associate professor at West Chester University; Marilyn worked as a museum archaeologist for the University of Pennsylvania) they sold their home and looked for a less hectic environment closer to their children. For \$16,000 they were able to buy a small “fixer-upper” house in north-east Maine, where they saw good prospects for living more simply and more lightly on the earth.

Rehabilitation work on the house included extensive retrofitting of insulation in the 100-year-old structure and engineering a hot-water heating system fueled by sustainably harvested local firewood. In 1991 they installed an on-grid photovoltaic electrical system.

Although their town still offers relatively affordable electrical power, the Ropers decided that they wanted to be part of the solution to the problem of providing clean energy for their community while addressing the broader issue of global climate change. They recently added a solar collector that pre-heats the water for their tankless, on-demand water heater, and they grow some of their own vegetables on their small town lot.

By living in town, within walking distance of stores, the Ropers greatly reduce their need for private transportation. (They also live close to the small Houlton-Woodstock Friends Worship Group, under the care of New Brunswick Monthly Meeting, Canadian Yearly Meeting.) For occasional trips they have a three-cylinder Geo Metro car, which gets 53 miles to the gallon—and it isn’t even a hybrid! They could have afforded to buy a larger car when they moved to Houlton, but the cost savings made it much easier for them to pay for their rooftop photovoltaic system.

Another “dividend” of their frugal and conscientious lifestyle is the ability to give away a lot of money to good causes. Despite their tax reduction methods, they do not see themselves as shirking their patriotic duties. On the contrary, through the “Roper Foreign and Domestic Giving Program,” they have been able to support many organizations that they deem to be life-enhancing for both people and the natural world, such as health programs and higher education.

THEY are also actively involved in the affairs of aboriginal peoples in the U.S. and Canada, whose spirituality often expresses the kind of relationship with the natural world and concern for the

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well-being of others, even to the "seventh generation," that our industrialized culture needs to learn.

As Quakers, the Ropers often speak of the spiritual basis of their lifestyle decisions. Like most people who were brought up in traditional American culture, it took many years for them to realize how complicit they were in the forces of destruction that their government has unleashed around the world. Harry's tour of duty with U.S. Air Force during the Korean War took him to Hiroshima, Japan, where he was very moved by the memorial to the innocent victims of the first atomic bomb. He remembers this experience as one of the things that led to his becoming

a Quaker.

While living and working in the Philadelphia area, the Ropers were drawn to the message of the Mennonites' New Call to Peacemaking. As they approached retirement in the late 1980s, Friends they had met in the Mennonite Central Committee shared some helpful advice on how to resist the industrial world's war machine by the thoughtful stewardship of their material wealth. They became involved in draft counseling as well.

The spiritual basis of their peace-making and Earthkeeping choices also has helped the Ropers in walking this path. "We really love the kind of life we're living; we didn't make this commitment in order to be miserable." ❖

Dominion can mean compassion

AS THE PLANE takes off, the flight attendant gives us safety instructions. In an unlikely event, our cabin loosing pressure, little cups will drop from above providing us with life-sustaining oxygen. Contrary to my normal impulse to care for others, I am instructed to put an oxygen mask over my face before helping others with their masks. I should help myself before helping others under my care.

Why should I be instructed to be selfish when my human reaction is to be unselfish?

Then I think, maybe this is like my relation to the environment of the Earth which God has created for us to live in. In Genesis, God instructs men and women to care for all living things. Since humans are among God's creations, some taking by humans from the environment is justified—that is, we should take enough to survive and carry out our duty—exercising dominion over all living things. This is like caring for a child on an airplane after I have cared for myself.

Next I think of the corner of God's Earth where I am, Friends House, a Quaker-sponsored retirement home. As a part of God's creation joined together in Friends House, should we exercise dominion? Should Friends House take enough from the environment for its own survival before it helps others? And does our exercise of dominion require us reach out to care for others beyond Friends House?

Yes, Yes, and Yes.

—Will Alexander
Redwood Forest (Calif.)
Friends Mtg.

Available from QEW!

Arrowhead to Hand Axe In Search of Ecological Guidance

by Keith Helmuth

Argenta Friends Press, 2004, pp. 44

THIS THOUGHTFUL and personal journey, originally presented by Keith Helmuth as the Sunderland P. Gardner Lecture at Canadian Yearly Meeting in 2004, tries to reconcile the earth's ecological principles with the economic behavior and settlement patterns of contemporary human society.

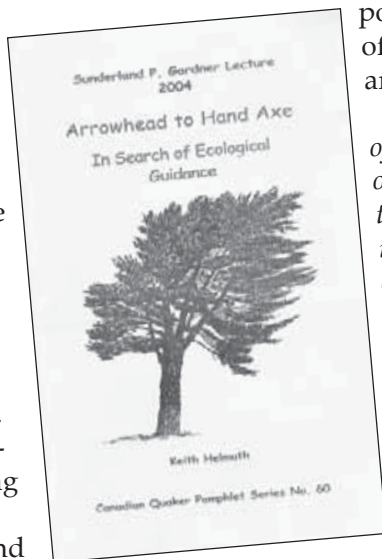
Tracing the evolution of his thinking through his experiences as a farmer and educator, Keith raises the hope that our civilization can change course in time to avert disaster—not by conscious changes in our lifestyles and habits alone but by revamping an

economic system that is actually rewarding what amounts to a policy of liquidation of the earth's natural and social capital.

"Our modern way of life has been based on the assumption that the environment is part of the economy. We are now realizing this assumption is an error, and that the human economy is actually part of the environment—a wholly-owned subsidiary of Earth's

biosphere. This recognition is a profound upheaval of our culture's understanding of the human-earth relationship."

Copies can be ordered from the QEW office for \$4.00US, plus S & H.



EarthSpirit Rising 2005

A Conference on Ecology, Spirituality, and Community
July 8–10, 2005, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

WE LIVE in a time of crisis—crisis of Earth, crisis of Spirit, and crisis of Community. Many of us have come to recognize that these crises are not separate, but interpenetrating dimensions that must be addressed as a whole. It is only through understanding the deep interconnections between Earth, Spirit and Community that we will be able to transform this time of crisis into a time of hope.

EarthSpirit Rising 2005 explores the connections between ecology and spirituality through the lens of community. We recognize that without community and collective action our hope for a more ecologically sustainable and spiritually rich world will never be realized.

Come explore the roles of education, politics, religion, food, ritual, and cosmology within our varied communities. Participate in a wide variety of breakout sessions and workshops facilitated by dynamic authors, educators, and leaders. Participate in community dialogue sessions led by local and regional innovators.

Throughout this powerful weekend we will seek to nurture connections, pursue solutions for today's problems and plant seeds for a better future. We have the ingredients for a thoughtful, magical weekend but we need *you*—your wisdom, your spirit, your energy to make it a weekend that will transform us all so that we can return to our communities with renewed vision and hope.



Keynote Speakers

Matthew Fox—From Tribalism to Interfaith and Interbeing: the Basis for Sustainable Community.

Winona LaDuke—Redefining Relationship: Indigenous Thinking and Work for the New Millennium
Frances Moore Lappé—Using Your Power to Create Healthy Communities.

Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP—Gathering the Community in Deep Time.

John Seed—Our Larger Community: All Species of the Cenozoic Era.

Malidoma Somé—Reflections on the Global Community.

For details go to:

<www.earthspiritrising.org>

For a conference brochure, registration, or more information:

EarthSpirit Rising, 700 Enright Ave., Cincinnati OH 45205; 513/921-5124; earthspiritrising@imagoearth.org.

Spirit Listening to Creation

AN INTERGENERATIONAL Earthcare program for Friends. "Spirit Listening to Creation," will be held at the Rochester (N.Y.) Meeting House on Saturday May 7th, 4:00 to 8:30 p.m.

We will explore our feelings about the degradation of the earth community, and then view our concerns through the lens of Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, equality, and justice. Our process will include experiential exercises, discussion, and worship sharing.

This important meeting will offer Friends a space and a process to examine together our faith and practice as it relates to the critical needs of our ailing planet. We hope to begin to look at changes we can make, individually and as a Meeting.

All ages will gather at 4:00 p.m. for group activities and a potluck dinner at 5:00 p.m. Children under 12 will participate in a special Earthcare program led by environmental educator Annie O'Reilly.

—Janet Laird

Subscribe to **EARTHLight** The Magazine of Spiritual Ecology

"EARTHLight is the magazine to read if you are concerned about the fate of our planet, and have a sense that, at its root, this is a profoundly spiritual issue. With lively articles from a wide spectrum of thinkers in touch with the cutting edges of ecological consciousness, EARTHLight is an efficient way to keep one's thinking co-evolving with the best ideas of our time."

—Brian Swimme

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TOTAL \$

Canadians may contribute through Canadian Yearly Meeting for a tax receipt, starting at \$45/Can. Please send check to Canadian Yearly Meeting, 91-A Fourth Ave., Ottawa, ON K1S 2L1. CYM needs to know that the money is for QEW support. Forward this form to QEW to let us know that you have chosen to contribute through CYM.

Nature connection stories wanted

IN AN EFFORT to raise awareness that simple contact with nature profoundly affects the human heart, mind, and body, *Hooked on Nature* is asking for your stories. We are seeking stories that will allow others to feel our relationship with the natural world, perhaps in ways that inspired awe, wonder, curiosity or a sense of connection.

Stories should be approximately 1,500 to 2,000 words and appeal to all ages. We hope that the mere act of thinking about those times in your life, when you have been affected by nature in subtle or more dramatic ways, will be enjoyable and may serve to remind you of its impact. Writing it down may help you to remember details and subtleties perhaps forgotten, safeguarding the memory.

At present, our intention is to create a collection of stories with an eye toward publishing. Your story will not be shared in any



form without your written permission. If a book is published, permission for use of a story will go through the editor, who will pass in on to authors for their individual approval. You will be notified by September 2005 as to the status of this project.

Any proceeds from the publication of these stories will go to *Hooked On Nature*, a non-profit national network to foster love and respect for each other, the Earth and all that is. Your sharing will help people everywhere understand what it is to be "hooked on nature."

To find out more about *Hooked On Nature*, visit us at www.hookedonnature.org. Send your stories to Karen MacDowell, karenmacd@aol.com. Please enter HON Story Project in the subject line of your e-mail. We look forward to reading about your experiences. ♦

BeFriending Creation

BeFriending Creation, Vol. 18, No. 3, May-June 2005. Newsletter of **Quaker Earthcare Witness** (formerly Friends Committee on Unity with Nature). ISSN 1050-0332. Published bi-monthly.

We publish **BeFriending Creation** to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Submission deadlines are February 7, April 7, June 7, August 7, October 7, and December 7.

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Membership in Quaker Earthcare is open to all who demonstrate commitment to support the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness and who support its work at the Monthly or Yearly Meeting levels, or through other Friends organizations. Quaker Earthcare Witness is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation; contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity. WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

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Website: www.QuakerEarthcare.org

May–June 2005

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- ✓ Fair Trade, shade-grown coffee yields many benefits. 4
- ✓ NEYM Earth Ministries Committee plans “listening project.” 6
- ✓ Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. 7
- ✓ Quaker couple no longer compartmentalize their witness. 8
- ✓ EarthSpirit Rising conference coming to Ohio in July. 10

Do Friends’ summer camps heighten Earth awareness?

SIERRA FRIENDS CENTER near Nevada City, Calif., each year provides an opportunity to live, work, and play in community for a week. Come to the mountains for carpentry, building, gardening, painting, and other work in the beautiful sunny Sierra Foothills. We’ll start out in the cool dewy morning and stop in the afternoon making sure there is also plenty of time for play, fellowship, worship, hiking, biking, singing, dance,... plus hearty meals to fuel all the fun!

There are two week-long camps. One is June 12 through June 19 and focuses more on adult-oriented work. The second camp, from June 19 through June 26, is especially family- and kid-oriented, with age appropriate work. (Though, don’t put off coming the first week with your kids if that is the only time you are free!) Each camp begins on Sunday afternoon, and we gather at 6 p.m. for dinner (after some time to settle into cabins or tents).

Camping or lodging for a week, plus meals is only \$45 for adults, \$35 for youth 11–14, and \$25 for ages 10 and under.

—Kristina Perry
<stina@igc.org>

THERE ARE a number of Quaker-run summer camps where youth and adults reportedly are encouraged to reconnect with nature in the context of Quaker values and principles.

- ❖ **Farm & Wilderness Camps**, Plymouth, Vt., teaches “skills for outdoor living and appreciation for our connection with the natural world.”
- ❖ **Camp Woodbrooke**, Richland Center, Wis., associated with Olney Friends School, focuses on “environmental issues and intimate acquaintance with the natural world.”
- ❖ **Opequon Quaker Camp**, Winchester, Va., run by Baltimore YM, says, “Rooted in nature and celebrating human connections to the earth and to each other, we discover the divine within and around us.”

Other Quaker camps, such as Camp Neekaunis, Waubashene, Ont. (under care of Canadian YM), and China Friends Camp, South China, Me. (under care of New England YM), do not discuss Earthcare in their brochures. But the actual extent of ecological education in Quaker camps would make an interesting article for BeFriending Creation. Is anyone interested in researching this and writing it up? —ed.