

# Streams

No. 51 Winter/Spring 2017 A Newsletter of Crystal Spring Center for Earth Literacy

## ***Through Fields of Grace***

On a warm August afternoon a car maneuvered up the driveway. A woman stepped out and said, "I went to school here; I had Sister Bernadine in the kindergarten. I live on the other side of town but I don't come by this way very often. May I take a picture of the academy plaque on the pillar?"

"Would you like to come in and see your kindergarten room?"

"Oh no" was her quick response. "Maybe someday I'll be back. For now it's just the picture."

Remnants and reminders endure. Forty wooden built-in boxes remain sturdy under the window ledge. A chalkboard stretches across the front of the room. The air of a 'classroom' era lingers. But small chairs and low tables have been replaced by five computer stations, each with an array of two or more screens listing seasonal produce, regional farmers, and the intricate movement of produce from farms to stores and beyond. The management, marketing and sales team of Red Tomato, Inc. has taken up residence. The story of how they arrived here weaves through our common histories.

Red Tomato is a designated USDA food hub. A 'hub' is an organization that manages the aggregation, the distribution, and the marketing of food products from local and regional farms to wholesale sites, stores, schools, hospitals, and all other institutions large or small which value and support a locally grown food system. In other words, Red Tomato's creative niche focuses on local food distribution to the traditional food chain.

Coordinating storage and the logistics of pick-up and transport requires a bit of genius. All farms have different infrastructures. Typically, only the larger farms have access to both coolers and transport. So, Red Tomato created and coordinates the set-up of clusters of two to five farms located in close proximity to one another. Networks of farmers within a region work together to consolidate shipments to the larger farms. The oft heard word is pallet! Two pallets of lettuces join five pallets of summer squash that head to the next small farm for eleven pallets of broccoli and on to the store shelf or school cafeteria. The entire effort evidences a relationship between a farmer, a family, a particular land base and local food with integrity.

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## *Through Fields of Grace, continued*

The story of Johnny Appleseed sways between fact and legend. It is good to add here the facts about one of the most visionary of Red Tomato's initiatives, the eco-apple program. The program began in 2005 with six orchards on 400 acres. Today fifteen orchards and over 1,400 acres were certified for the 2016 season. The Eco-Apple program is a partnership between farmers and science advisors working together to advance an environmentally responsible growing practice for tree fruit in the Northeast. You can hear the call ring out from early fall on ~ the Macintosh are here; the Honey Crisps, the Empires have arrived! And once in a while a box of heirlooms ~ Roxbury Russets or maybe Rhode Island Greenings, large and round with their slight russet and orange-red blush. This is one of America's oldest apples, planted as early as the mid-seventeenth century.

Actually, flourishing rows of garden beds, the hoop house, a cluster of hens, the magenta of swaying amaranth drew that woman up the driveway that August day. Though yet more promise than fulfillment, the resident farmer has begun permaculture practices. In the later 1960's when Sister Bernadine was a kindergarten teacher of great lore, the shift from rural to suburbia had just begun in this town. Now we join multiple synergies in collaborating with intuitive and creative efforts unfolding in every bioregion near and far. Together we are learning and offering opportunities to rethink our American experience from the perspective of Earth as the primary source of our human wellbeing.

Why this turn to agriculture? Through the past six decades and more we have all borne the intensity of rapid cultural

changes. Our present political reality signifies we have crossed a threshold. Things fall apart and the center does not hold. We must find new ways to respond to present dilemmas. Since agriculture is basic to just about every human culture, if we wish to alter our cultural ways of perceiving and doing, agriculture offers us a place to begin. Networks of farmers have begun to solidify new peer learnings with local social networks. Work is underway to replace our industrial mind with an ecological worldview.

Sometimes, but not very often, on a walk-about on this land one comes upon a snake shedding. To stoop down and gingerly gather up that 'skin', with its eye casting still intact, does fire the imagination. There is something about that shedding that speaks to all aspects of life. The time has come for Crystal Spring to bear the courage to release the energy required to substantiate our ways of thinking and doing. To transmute that energy will fire a change in consciousness leading to a change in form.

The story of this homestead, this land as it meets the eye today goes back into the very early 20th century. We who dwell here now can claim only about seventy years of the telling, but that certainly is sufficient to have come to serve this place, to love this place, to know this land in all its forms with an intimacy that recognizes it is the land that must be the guiding principle in the going forward.

Thirty five years ago a fresh field of energy swept in here in a moment longing for radical change. In the early 1980's, a Womancenter for the evolving of a woman's perspective of justice took root.

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In the telling of stories, women across the barriers of race and class, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, age and sexual preference shared a common suffering, the experience of 'other'. Yet, it appears that very suffering gave rise to a spiritual energy that through the ages held fast to deep cosmic Mystery.

In our more recent past we learned through the wonders of contemporary science that a particle can combine with other particles and reconstitute itself whole, losing none of its integrity. It's the implicit order of the Universe, the way change happens! This is not our time to despair or be afraid but to avail ourselves of networking, art, scientific knowledge, collaboration, and the wisdom of our own dreams and desires, even the depth of our dying.

All being came forth in a huge unfolding of Energy ever unfurling in the marvel and mystery of self-organizing connectedness. Our efforts are unique yet permeable and interchangeable. We must bend this consciousness to our self. As we endure the fires of transmuting energy, we wonder yet again through fields of grace. ■ CL

**Bread Baking Class**  
*From the sacredness of seeds,  
bread rises!*

**January 14, 9:00 - noon**

What is it about seeds that ignites the human imagination? They carry Earth's ever fomenting vitality, these small, daring, different one from another, so darn necessary, so sacred seeds.

Bread baking frees up seeds' hearty aromas, making designs on your heart and hearth. We knead regional flours into delicious loaves to honor the power of seeds: awakening our appetite for "home".

You'll make a loaf to bring home, plus one more to rise and bake in your own oven. Please bring your apron and a large bowl. Recipes provided.

To register: Please send your name, telephone number, and \$35 check to Crystal Spring, 76 Everett Skinner Rd, Plainville, MA 02762. Class limited to six participants. Registration due by Jan.7th (Snow date Jan 21st).

***Coming Home to Place***

People everywhere are inspired to join in the collective efforts that seek a new beginning. This requires a new way of thinking, a new participation. Respect for Nature's economy stirs in the work of local farmers, land conservation, food systems, community restoration, and human initiatives everywhere. Crystal Spring is one among the many seeking our way toward our next articulation. For your many years of support, participation and inspiration we are grateful.

Please accept this gift as my participation in the common work \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

*Our gracious thanks to you who are present in all that creates and is Crystal Spring*

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