

These Forty Acres By Christine Loughlin, OP

Our neighbor, Meta Unterweger, telephoned the other day. Her inquiry was easily answered, but what lingers long after our conversation is the list of changes she has observed at Crystal Spring in a few short years: the community supported garden with its greenhouse and distribution center, the recovery of the stone building into a simple oratory, the bread-baking ovens for a small 'home industry,' the booknook, the fixing up of the little cottage, and the retrofitted shed. Her listing became a litany to my ears and my heart leaped with an old, familiar refrain ~ *ora pro nobis*. Each new venture is the outer expression of the inner process of an evolving dream...the dream one wise elder has called "re-inhabiting the Earth." As the images of recovery raced through my mind, the circle chanting *pray for us* suddenly included the fragile web of the feathered and the furry, the leaved and the winged.

On this unseasonably warm November day lush in the burned orange and sienna brown of fading oaks, Alex Lyon and his crew are reconstructing the stream bed and shelving the pond. Kevin Langetange is retrofitting the shed that Tom Metcalfe and the Wheaton College students laboriously recovered from total collapse three years ago. Joe Perry and Adele Rustino, a true comrade and faithful Board member, are in the woodland surveying plots for the forestry management plan.

The old well that was central symbol and daily sustenance of Crystal Spring Farm in the early decades of this departing century still stands in the southeast corner where the spring waters seep to the surface even during the dry seasons. Mr. Cassells, our neighbor, remembers his childhood trips from North Attleboro to the farm to pick apples and pump water in the spring house. Over the years the farm land and open space along School Street has been converted to house lots with septic systems.

The spring waters are once again necessary for the farm. With hot, dry summers we must develop an irrigation system for the community gardens. Alex has observed the soil structure and water levels. He and his crew are reconstructing a shallow well at the site of the old well. The waters will flow down a meandering stream over rocks and through a variety of plants into a pond and then out to the garden. The stream with its rocks and water flow system and the waterfall into the pond aerate the water. Adele and her class from Cambridge School in Weston have visited several times and planted rushes, sedges, aquatic mints, and yellow flag irises.

We are learning again the meaning of "living water" not solely as symbol but as the basic sustenance for all life here.

Joe Perry from the Division of forestry is observing and advising a woodland management plan. It is not that we will 'manage' the woods. We are increasing our understanding for holistic planning of the emerging agricultural project on these forty acres. Farming is the active engagement of harvesting sunlight in such a way that we will either enhance or diminish the biological capital that sustains the whole web of life on these forty acres.

To reflect a true 'profit,' a farm must enhance the soil and water and the life within it. If the soil is destroyed, or water polluted, or plant life depleted, the profits gained will not be genuine because the biological capital, the Web of Life, has been consumed.

In this holy season when our hearts surge with grateful thanks and our human soul enters the darkness where the inner light of collective human awakening dawns a New Day, we thank the

many who participate and take up the cause of these forty acres. You make real the dream of “re-inhabiting the earth.”

There is much chatter about the new millennium. On the one hand there is nothing significant about this day as an arbitrary calendar date slides us over into the next thousand years. On the other hand it is a moment of intense collective awareness and presence never before possible. We hear with new ears an ancient litany and our hearts dissolve amid the terror and anguish—*ora pro nobis* utter all the creatures in the Sacred Web of Life.

The International Association of Biologists gathered at the American Museum of Natural History in New York confirm that we are in the sixth great extinction in Earth’s history. The loss of species is staggering, the altering of the very elemental forces that give life and sustenance—the earth, the air, the water—suffer irreversible abuse. Into the darkness of this terror and demise our human soul awakens. We dare our common way toward a radical transformation that births a beginning of hope. We rediscover our place in the natural order. Coming home to these forty acres is the daily spiritual practice to “enter through the narrow gate” into that order. The Winter Solstice celebrates that home coming and belonging once again to the Sacred Web.

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