



BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness
Affirming our essential unity with nature

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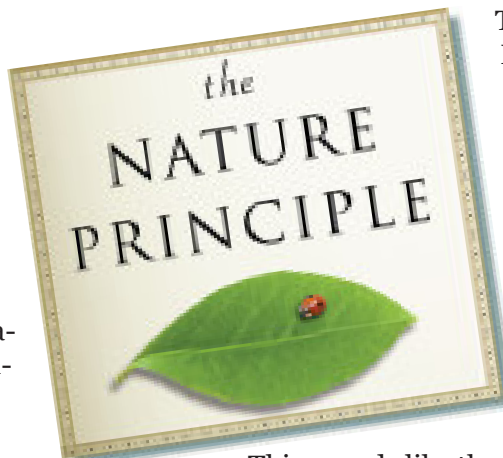
Unity with nature—a fact of life, not an ideal

Louis Cox

ATHRIVING engineering firm called NRG Systems in Hinesburg, Vt., is a leader in research & development of instrumentation for wind turbine energy systems all over the world. It is also known for its unique physical plant, built in 2004, one of only four industrial facilities in the world to receive gold LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. With such features as superinsulation, passive solar gain, on-grid photovoltaic power, and ground-source heating and cooling, the building uses about a *fourth* of the energy of a conventional building.

A less-celebrated achievement of NRG Systems is that *it has proven to be a very healthy, pleasant place to work*—as its very low personnel turnover attests. It has no dehumanizing cubicles. Its spacious work spaces are constructed almost entirely of green products and recycled materials that are pleasing to the senses. Climate controls bring in fresh air whenever outside temperatures are within a certain range. Because heating and cooling fluids are circulated through massive slab floors, there are no distracting background HVAC noises. Indoor plants provide a fresh, wholesome ambience. Large windows overlook a happy landscape of farm fields, woods, lakes, and mountains. Employees are given ample breaks to use indoor and outdoor exercise facilities.

This innovative concept in workplace design is celebrated in a DVD in the QEW video lending library titled, *The Next Industrial Revolution*, with architect William McDonough extolling new zero-waste industrial processes and productive people-friendly working environments. However, exploring the physical and psychological reasons for such amazing practical results did not fall within the scope of this video production. That's where Richard Louv's new book, *The Nature Principle—Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin Books 2011), takes up the cause.



The “Principle” that Louv identifies is the natural source of all that is healthy and constructive. It is not a speculative ideal or theory. It is a fundamental process that is built into the universe. Like Newton’s “Law” of Gravity, it can’t be repealed and we flout it at our peril.

This sounds like the same “principle” that 18th century Quaker John Woolman referred to as the moral force undergirding all Creation that, when honored in right living, leads to personal health, spiritual integrity, and peaceable communities. Conversely, when the principle is spurned or forgotten, the inevitable result is illness, strife, moral decline, and social conflict in all realms of life.

Louv’s *Nature Principle* was presaged as well by the founding of “Friends Committee on Unity with Nature,” now called Quaker Earthcare Witness. While the idea of living in “*unity with nature*” continues to be the cornerstone of the Earthcare movement, it has often been misunderstood as a romanticized escape to unspoiled wilderness, or even worship of nature itself. But it’s not just a *hope* or *aspiration*. It is the *fact* of our being dependent on the processes of nature, despite any notions we may have of being independent of and masters over the rest of the natural world.

The New Story is an inspiring account of our essential oneness with the creatively evolving universe, as revealed by modern life sciences and physics. But we are only beginning to imagine and explore its everyday practical applications. Louv, who also wrote the best-selling *Last Child in the Woods—Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin Books 2005), makes an important contribution here.

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He shows the reader that recovering from our epidemic of Nature Deficit Disorder does not require going back to a primitive pre-technological existence. We can retain much of the benefits and comforts of modern life while applying the Nature Principle to our homes, schools, workplaces, health-care systems, communities, farms, recreational programs, industries, and other facets of life, Louv maintains.

Although HD televisions, smart phones, and other technologies claim to be the epitome of sophistication, the long-term results have been desensitization of our bodies and diminishment of our spirits. *“Taken to extreme, a denatured life is a dehumanized life. Man (sic) becomes a kind of cosmic outlaw. Electronic immersion, without a force to balance it, creates the hole in the boat, draining our ability to pay attention, to think clearly, to be productive and creative.”*

BUT IT’S NEVER TOO LATE, Louv states. *“Reconnecting to nature, near and far, opens new doors to health, creativity, and wonder.”*

One serious side-effect of the distortion of sensory experience by electronic and other media is the way the different senses tend to lose the integration necessary for optimal learning that is common within pre-technological societies. Also lost is the subtle integration of conscious and subconscious aspects of perception and intelligence that evolved over millennia to aid those whose survival requires detailed attention to every aspect of their environment.

Louv also reflects on the heightened interplay of the physical and spiritual realms when one is fully immersed in nature. Faith might be thought of as a kind of *sixth sense* that is activated by full engagement of the other senses. This might explain the common use of religious terminology by those searching for words adequate to describe the transcendence of their experiences in nature, he says.

The euphoria often experienced by mountain climbers is but an enhanced form of the salubrious effects on the body and mind of what the author calls *“Vitamin N”*—exposure to and engagement with a healthy natural setting. The benefits are measurable: depression is eased by walks in the park; patients recover faster at hospitals with gardens on their grounds.

The benefits of nature-based methods of healing are becoming evident just in time. Modern medicine has become heavily dependent on fossil fuels, and the onset of Peak Oil is putting healthcare out of the average person’s reach. New appreciation of the healing powers of nature also will enhance the status of national parks, which will be treated as extensions of the

national health care system, with verified bottom-line implications.

Involvement in nature can enhance family and community life as well. It can reduce violence, fatigue, and aggression. *“Exposure to the natural environment leads people to nurture close relationships with fellow human beings, to value community, and to be more generous with money,”* Louv asserts. *“Nature strips away the artifices of society that alienate us from one another. In caring for nature, we end up healing ourselves.”*

Louv also reports positive economic impacts of experiences in nature on a wide range of important personal and social health indicators—from reducing adult and child obesity and depression to cutting health care costs and raising job productivity.

He offers new reasons to support the Transition Town movement, which is working to prepare communities for a new forms of local economic cooperation in a post-petroleum world. The movement is encouraging people to get out of their electronic bubbles (before Peak Oil forces them to) and get acquainted with their neighbors and local natural resources.

Shifting away from farm monocultures and suburban sprawl also will tend to enhance local biodiversity, as will increased reliance on more native plants. Other environmental gains may be seen as more people are forced to spend large parts of their waking hours out of doors and begin to regard industrial noises and nighttime light pollution as serious barriers to their need to reconnect to the natural world.

THE RE-NATURING of our environment must proceed on many fronts—from repairing dysfunctional suburban blight to creating bikeable-walkable cities. We also need to build new communities organized around ecological principles. An excellent DVD on this topic—*Designing a Great Neighborhood*—is available from the QEW video lending library.

There is a potential downside to re-naturing our communities, Louv warns—an unintended gentrifying effect of rising real estate values, displacing lower-income residents. It is important, therefore, to combine economic diversity and biodiversity to ensure affordable housing and equal access to common assets.

Just as important as economic and social justice is restoring our sense of *wonder* at the natural world and our sense of *kinship* with the community of life. As Thomas Berry said, we are living in a rare “moment of grace,” the last chance for humanity to reconnect with *the natural world as a source of meaning* and a foundation on which to envision a sustainable future. ❖

Talking to the ‘mainstream’ about peace, justice, and ecological sustainability

Shelley Tanenbaum

QEW Steering Committee Clerk

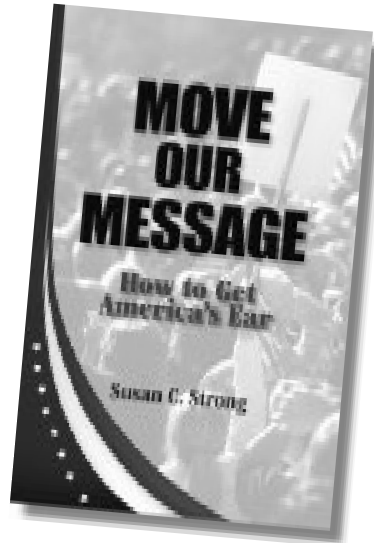
HAVE YOU EVER TRIED to have a serious political discussion with family members, friends, or co-workers who have world views or opinions different from your own, only to rapidly descend into name-calling and raised voices? Have you ever written an op-ed piece or given a talk, only to be wildly misinterpreted and find yourself under attack?

Susan Strong of Strawberry Creek (Calif.) Friends Meeting has written *Move Our Message: How to Get America’s Ear** as a guidebook for those of us who call ourselves liberals or progressives and who often feel that communication is impossible with people who don’t wear that label.

Susan has been helping progressives and liberals *mainstream* their messages since 1997, via her non-profit organization, The Metaphor Project. Susan has led workshops on “Friendly Persuasion” and has written two articles for *Quaker Eco-Bulletin*.**

By “mainstreaming” she means translating our messages into commonly understood language that evokes the best American values, the ones we share. She is not suggesting that we water down or change what we want to say. However, she shows us how to deliver a message that can be heard by someone other than those who already agree with us.

The best way to achieve that goal, Susan says, is to use language and succinct phrases that are commonly used, are easy to understand, and pack a lot of information in a small amount of words. Susan sees the use of metaphors and “speaking American” as a way to communicate complexity without requiring the listener to read multiple volumes or engage in lengthy study to get to the point. She emphasizes that we can do this and keep our integrity, because we are simply



telling the truth in a more accessible way. Further, such care with our words—empathizing with the listener so that we can understand how they are hearing our words before we use them—will allow us to communicate at a deep level. Only after we can make that heart-to-heart connection will there be an audience for our talking points and the nuances they may express.

Move Our Message: How to Get America’s Ear is full of practical guidance on how to connect with mainstream American audiences. The book includes a wealth of examples of how to talk about peace, justice, and ecological sustainability. It outlines how to run a workshop for creating messages that will get your point across successfully.

Of course, Susan has found that some people just do not want to alter the wording of their messages in any way, nor do they want to do anything that feels like actively trying to persuade others. Susan answers, “*If we progressives want our vision of a better world to come true, we need to pay more attention to what works for the general public. To get the best possible results, we would be wise to translate our message into colorful, story-evoking language or images. If we really care about our issues, we’ll make the effort to persuade others in the most effective way possible.*”

KNOWING SUSAN PERSONALLY, I can attest that she is promoting effective communication, not false or misleading communication. She wants us to empathize with our listeners and find common ground using stories and metaphors that are easily understood by all of us:

“To evoke shared values we need stories, and to convey stories quickly we need to use the familiar cultural language that reminds people of them,” Susan says. *“That’s what Occupy Wall Street did last fall, with ‘they’re the 1%’ and ‘we’re the 99%’ slogans. Those simple but meaningful phrases changed the political narrative in this country. They were short, punchy, and had the power to stick and transform. As 2012 and the years to come unfold, we will need to be able to say a lot more things like that to help the cause of peace, justice, and Earthcare.”* ❖

**The Metaphor Project*, 2012, 172 pp., trade paperback, \$10, is available from <www.metaphorproject.org>.

** “Eco-Friendly Persuasion” was published in the July-Aug 2004 edition of QEB and is available at www.quakerearthcare.org/Publications/QuakerEcoBulletin/QEBArchive/QEB-PDF/QEB4-4-ecopersuasion.pdf.

The Jan-Feb edition of QEB, including Susan’s article, “Challenging the Have More’s 2010 Con Job,” is available at <www.quakerearthcare.org/Publications/QuakerEcoBulletin/QEBArchive/QEB-PDF/QEB-11-1Right-Goldman-Sachs-web.pdf>.

Undefined 'Green Economy' is centerpiece of Rio+20 summit agenda

Mary Gilbert

QEW Representative to the UN

TWENTY YEARS AGO, in 1992, a major, two-week UN meeting that came to be called the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro. The nations of the world came to agreements that, had they been carried out as intended, would have kept our planet Earth, in much better health.

Ten years ago, in 2002, I attended a two-week UN Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, nicknamed Rio+10. Indicators showed Earth's health to be seriously worsened. The nations agreed to an international system represented by three pillars—Economic, Environmental and Social—holding up a platform called Sustainable Development. (Picture a three-legged milking stool.) It was apparent that collaboration between investors and government would render the social pillar much weaker than the other two, and without spelled-out goals and timelines for positive changes, the environmental pillar was also weak. The agreements cemented collaboration between multinationals and governments.

In June of this year there will be another Summit, again in Rio, called Rio+20. Although the health of Earth that supports life as we know it is now in a desperate condition, this Summit will be only three days long. The substance of the Rio+20 outcome agreement is being settled right now, at preparatory meetings in New York. The centerpiece of Rio+20 is a proposed "Green Economy," (See footnote * for critique by David Millar and me) to be nested in a framework of poverty reduction. The UN is stressing the context of poverty reduction because once again there is danger that the impacts of policies—designed by and for the benefit of corporations, which are ready to green-wash their ambitions in the name of protecting the environment—will disregard the well-being of the people of the planet.

It's really complex. If the corporate interests that actually run the world from their boardrooms in high places *can* see the benefit of keeping the goose that lays their golden eggs alive, they will think in terms of a longer future. It's a fast track to disaster if they can't. It could be good for Earth and all of us who participate in the planet's life, and there is reason to believe that "the Davos crowd"*** is catching on. How-

ever, even if they do catch on, it's hard to predict results, and nothing about where decisions are made is likely to change. The fat cats and top dogs will still be hefty and high up.

One major problem is that "Green Economy" has not been defined. Who determines the criteria for affirming that an economy is "green"?

What should be measured? How high a score on these measures should be required? What would constitute failure? Should there be one economy, or numerous economies? Should monitoring be by an outside agency or by corporate self-report? There is enormous resistance to answering these questions.

Another problem is economic growth. The Green Economy is being discussed as if this growth will always be possible, through technological innovation, retrofitting, and efficiency measures, without exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet. I have heard that there is a baffling inability to grasp the problem of "planetary limits" in parts of the corporate world.

I don't know how bad the outcome of Rio+20 will be, but I can feel my eyes go hopeless when I think about it. Then I remind myself that there are now voices at the UN speaking of

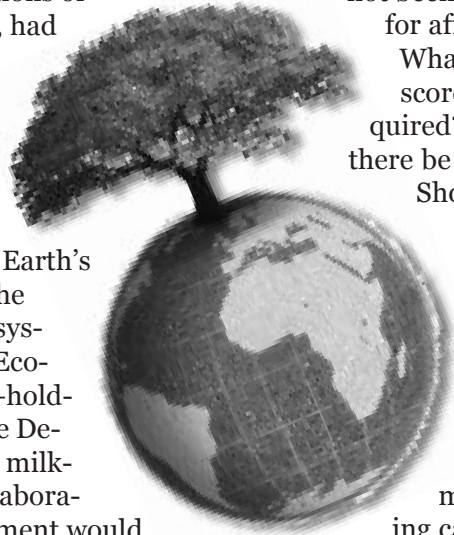
- The health of the planet rather than its carrying capacity.
- Local economic resilience rather than national Gross Domestic Product.
- Village-level cooperative decision-making rather than corporate rule from afar.

Projects around the world demonstrate the benefits of these ways of thinking and acting, and word of how to do these things does go viral.

Frances Moore Lappé writes that it is not possible to know what is possible. The important thing is to keep on with the best you can, sharing your best thinking and doing, creating community near and far. Here we go! ❖

* <www.quakerearthcare.org/>, click on Publications and Readings, then on *Quaker Eco-Bulletin*, then on issue 2011/4, July August)

** Davos, Switzerland, is where the World Economic Forum (WEF) gathers each January. The WEF is made up of corporate representatives, not governments.



Voice of 'compassionate Presence' is key to sustainability

Sheryll Harris

Editor of *The Canadian Friend*

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MY FAMILY HAS SPENT quite a bit of time at Wildwood—a true forest north of Victoria, British Columbia. Merv Wilkinson, recently deceased at 97, took much of his livelihood from that forest, yet left it as vibrant and diverse as he found it. Pests? Merv said that his mixed-species, mixed-aged forest had all the pests and all their predators. It thrives in a state of equilibrium—a state of grace.

Many of us have come to accept the propaganda from pesticide companies that some bugs must be poisoned. Whereas perma-culture teaches that some plants strategically invite bugs, such as aphids, in order to attract ladybugs as pollinators. Smart plants. Blind to the symbiotic connection between plants and bugs, we ignorantly meddle with nature's innate wisdom. If a plant is sick or devoured by predators it indicates an imbalance in the soil. When bugs get the better of plants we think they need to be eradicated. But, build complete nutrient-rich soil and plants will resist damage. Bugs take the weak and the ailing.

Studies in homeopathic medicine teach that physical symptoms and chronic diseases flourish when our vital force is out of balance. Symptoms are useful messengers, alerting us to imbalance. Depleted and chemically processed substances do not nourish us or help us resist disease. We wouldn't dream of putting anything but gas and top-grade oil into our machines, yet we think nothing of ingesting degraded substances incapable of sustaining our physical and mental health.

While we are coming to understand that killing bugs with poison is the wrong approach, we are slower to recognize that zapping and suppressing physical and emotional symptoms does not sustain healing. Cycles of poverty and violence also have their roots in the unhealthy soil of imbalance and inequity.

Our conversations about sustainability barely scratch the surface. We miss the point when we box it up as an external environmental issue. *Imbalance* is chronic and wreaks havoc with every aspect of life: spiritual, emotional and physical. Imbalance affects

our inner lives, our interpersonal lives, our actions toward the environment, and toward each other. We need to apply principles of sustainability to all levels of our existence, including and particularly to nurturing Spirit.

IT APPEARS THAT we struggle with our unsustainable lifestyles, and worry over an ailing planet because we gave up honouring spiritual laws, and listening to spiritual guidance. Matthew 6:24 states: "No one can serve two masters....You cannot serve both God and money." Greed for money is dictating corporate and government strategies that are destroying the planet. Worldly power structures have no desire to celebrate Creation or learn the ways of spiritual harmony.

Hermit priest Cynthia Bourgeault says: "The great mystics and masters have pointed

We need to apply principles of sustainability to all levels, particularly to nurturing Spirit....



consistently to another way of doing business, another way of orienting our consciousness...from the dynamic and flowing stream of compassionate Presence itself." Equilibrium and sustainability will only be realized when we are willing to be instructed and listen to the *compassionate Presence*, when we act from a wise and humble heart, one willing to love and value the gifts of this earth. Let us see what we can do to turn things around. As the song says: "God's counting on me, God's counting on you" (Pete Seeger and Lorre Wyatt). ❖

The Canadian Friend focuses on sustainability in special issue

THE MARCH 2012 issue of *The Canadian Friend* has a number of articles on the theme, "Aspects of Sustainability." Some excerpts:

Keith Helmuth of Woodstock (New Brunswick) Monthly Mtg.:

"Integrity is perhaps the most easily understood of Friends' testimonies. Some folks see it as a kind of linchpin testimony, the presence of which vitalizes and validates all the other testimonies. At the first level it encompasses truthfulness and ethical consistency. In a widening perspective it includes devotion to right relationship, valuing direct experience in the formation of knowledge and judgment, and a commitment to accurate information.

"The corollary for integrity is Ecologically Sound Adaptation. This means ways of life and means of

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livelihood that are congruent with the resilience and functional integrity of the biotic environment. It means working in concert with ecosystem enhancement and resilience. It means recognizing the ecological worldview and the integrity of Creation as the essential operating platform for advancing the great work of justice and peace."

DAVID MILLAR, Montreal (Quebec) MM:

"We are the comfortable 20 percent of the world population, using 80 percent and more of world resources. Yet our comfort is insecure. Science tells us this cannot continue—we long ago exceeded the planet's carrying capacity and its ability to renew. Waste, excess, greed and inequality have robbed us of our spirit level...."

"Climate chaos has already shifted North American hardness zones north by hundreds of miles, while millions of people planet-wide suffer in fiercer floods, storms, fires, droughts and famines. Last year an estimated 300,000 died due to human-caused climate chaos. These are the true costs of our comfort."

"Resist illusions. No technofix will be enough to alleviate the impact of an industrialized, throw-away society. Nuclear power, when its waste is considered, is neither cheap, clean, nor renewable. The United Nation's Green Economy campaign for Rio+20—aimed at rescuing lost millennial goals. Although admirable, it betrays its end by its means: carbon marketing. If realized, such offsets would allow the worst polluters to buy cheap licenses to keep doing the same thing—effectively greenwashing business as usual—with the final bill to be paid by poor countries and future generations...."

LAUREEN VAN LIEROP, Halifax (Nova Scotia) MM:

"Several years ago, shortly after coming to Quakers, I had a leading to consider what we ate and where we bought it. ...Ultimately our choices depend upon our peace testimony and our commitment to community. Our peace testimony is at its richest when we consider a global awareness of issues around sustainability and our own actions in relationships and communities."

"For us, issues around fair trade, justice, environmental degradation by things we consume, and regional economic practices, all factor into our definition of sustainable living. There are three recurring

There are three recurring road blocks to sustainable living: time, self-awareness, and life-style. All three are driven by fear...

road blocks to sustainable living: time, self-awareness, and life-style. All three are driven by fear: that time is too short to invest in making change; that if one examines one's personal practices then something difficult might have to be changed; that one's personal lifestyle sacrifices may be insignificant in light of the unsustainable lifestyles of others...."

"What is sustainable changes with each circumstance. Once we tried to reduce the impact of a certain committee meeting that required much driving but the efforts to have meetings by e-mail and conference calls failed. Ultimately the committee had to agree that it was unsustainable not to drive. A sus-

tainable practice in one aspect of life conflicted with sustainability in another."

"Now, dear reader, to the final ingredient of living sustainably: resting. There are times when it is needful to say, 'That's enough for now, I'm doing the best I can.' There are times when we feel ill, so we use a prepackaged soup mix. There are times when there is a houseful of guests, so we use the dryer. There are times when we need the dentist and thank God she uses electricity to drive the drill and not a foot treadle."

"There are times when we need medicine. It may not be natural or it may be prepared with a toxic process, or it supports a greedy industry. Sometimes we can't make a good choice and we have to learn to live peacefully with what cannot be changed...."

ISABELLE YINGLING, Ottawa (Ontario) MM:

"Permaculture is about living in harmony with the land and animals and all of nature; practicing the conservation of finite resources; applying wisdom to the means of distribution while we think globally and act locally."

"Permaculture is a process, not an object or goal. If I want to apply the concept of sustainability to my life then I will need to shift from focusing solely on goals to being process oriented. Instead of striving to find the right career or my true calling, I will consider that I am called to acknowledge the seed of God in every person that I meet and in whatever I am doing. Whether it be teaching, caring for children or the elderly, mothering my adult children and all the while being a helpmate to my husband, the what I do is not as important as the how I do it. In addition to being applicable to how we relate to our surroundings, sustainability should also be applied to how we relate to

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our family, friends, work and play. Living sustainably might mean committing to and doing only that amount of activity that we can continue on into the future while avoiding burnout.



“Does life need always to be about the unending striving for more, yearning for, and seeking contentment, satisfaction and joy? Are joy and sorrow flip sides of the same coin? Is life about balancing the yin and the yang? Is learning how to receive as important as learning how to give?”

Can we only pause when we are balanced half way between full or empty? Can this place where we pause be called ‘reaching sustainability’? In our ever-changing universe where nothing is constant, is it possible for this pause or state of balance to remain for more than a moment? These questions lead me to conclude that living sustainably requires constant adjustment to our inner selves and outer surroundings....”

ROBERT KIRCHNER, Edmonton (Alberta) MM:

...Obviously the economy won't survive if humans don't survive, and humans can't survive for long if we continue to degrade the ecosystems that we depend upon.... the emerging crisis of the global financial system, and the light shed on this system by the Occupy Movement, have made it increasingly clear that our economic system cannot and should not be saved.

Naomi Klein (author of The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism) argues that the solutions to our environmental and economic problems are one and the same. We just have to move beyond the framework of this current economic system, designed as it is to allow the wealthiest one percent to make a killing, and focus instead on how 100 percent of us might make a living ... So, I return to the premise that there must be some way for humans to live without harming the rest of creation. How then?

“I believe I have found some answers to this question in my exploration of Permaculture.... the movement founded by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s.... Mollison characterizes permaculture as ‘a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and

thoughtless labour; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single project system.’

“It's not immediately obvious how to get from small-scale gardening projects to the kind of massive social transformation we so urgently require. ... Klein explicitly acknowledges the role of Permaculturists and the allied local food movement in this hoped-for transformation. Ten years ago, she observes, anti-globalization activists faced the objection that there is no alternative to the corporate-controlled industrial production and distribution system for meeting people's needs and providing gainful employment. In the past decade though, the permaculture and local food movements have been developing the nucleus of a just and sustainable local food system. And permaculturists are already working on extending these ideas to home construction, transportation, and other basic needs.

“What does this have to do with Quakers?... I hope it is obvious from my description that permaculture principles are deeply consonant with our Testimonies.

“The anti-consumerist, anti-waste theme of permaculture accords with Simplicity. Permaculture's insistence on living within our environmental limits speaks to Integrity. The concern for economic justice accords with Equality. The principles of integration, of valuing diversity, and of putting elements of a sys-

tem in right relation to one another, suggests the building of healthy human communities as well as gardens, in ac-

cord with our Testimony of Community.

“As for the Peace Testimony, I submit that the corporate-controlled-industrial production and distribution system of modern capitalism, with its demand for ever-increasing inputs, is in a state of constant war against the people of the developing world for control of those resources and against the other species of this planet as it devastates the ecosystems they are part of.

“We can choose, actively or passively, to remain reliant on this system and thus complicit in its violence, or we can begin to move towards sustainable non-violent alternatives. I suggest that the permaculture movement can furnish us with a wealth of practical solutions to do this. ...”

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“What does this have to do with Quakers?... I hope it is obvious from my description that permaculture principles are deeply consonant with our Testimonies.”

There's a positive side to witnessing for Earthcare at the UN

Mary Gilbert

QEW Representative to the UN

AT THE END OF MARCH, Friend Roy Taylor sent out these provocative questions:

In the context of Friends,

- What does it mean to you to “witness”?
- When you witness for peace, what are you doing?
- When I tell you that I “witness for Earthcare,” what do you think that I am doing?

What do I think I am doing when I witness for Earthcare at the UN? My primary job is to “*learn, discern, and tell.*” Like a reporter, I witness what happens, go through my notes for a theme that stands out in my mind, and then tell you about it.

Civil Society at the UN—There are limitations to what one can do at the UN. At last fall’s Quaker UN Group meeting in Geneva, someone pointed out that countries are looking for *political* solutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are looking for *humanitarian* and *ecological* solutions. These are usually incompatible.

Only national delegates have access to “the floor,” and for an NGO representative, access is very limited. At some meetings we may be allowed to speak for one or three minutes. A dedicated NGO group, working late into the night, writes these “interventions” and chooses who is to read it. I have been part of such groups, and was once the reader. (I read well!)

But essentially, NGOs can only influence outcomes by identifying and working through countries that espouse similar values. Some countries welcome civil society input, while others strongly resist any such input. Many just ignore it. I’ve had the chance to work on identifying countries who use “rights-based” language in their statements, so NGOs can approach them help in their work toward fair language in outcome documents.

QEW representatives have an additional consideration that constrains what we do at the UN. Although a few dozen people I’ve known for years now know that QEW is not connected with the Quaker United Nations Offices (QUNO-New York and QUNO-Geneva), it’s a fact that there are thousands who will forever assume that we are the same organization. The QUNOs’ work is delicate, based on decades of work with individuals in the UN and from different nations. It focuses on fostering amicable, productive discussion in informal settings, skillfully working to-

ward what can be done. To achieve this end the QUNOs do not take sides on issues. We have to take great care not to compromise their work.

Constructive dialogue—The UN is a hot spot for the exchange of ideas. Some of these come from countries or institutes, and some come from fairly ordinary thinkers within Civil Society. The important thing is to get these ideas into the general conversation, where they can be clarified, weighed, and spread around. Here are a few positives from this season:

“**Social protection floor**” refers to a basic set of social rights, services, and facilities that every person should enjoy. It’s theoretically preferable to a “safety net” because you can fall through a net, but (maybe) not a floor. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_floor>.

Indices of happiness or well-being are getting serious discussion at highest UN levels as a supplement to GDP. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happiness_economics>.

Measuring subsidiarity—That strange word refers to a system where community decisions are made at the “lowest” possible level, giving people direct control over their circumstances. I would like to see an indicator developed to measure subsidiarity, so we could see how it affects other measured outcomes, such as ecological health, various projects, and happiness/well-being.

Earth as a living entity—The following ideas go together because they all consider Earth as a living entity and address how we should act on that understanding. With any luck they can replace habits of thinking about Earth as an assortment of “things” for us to use and manage, i.e. “resource allocation.”

- **Rights of Nature / Rights of Mother Earth** is a scientific and spiritual attempt to speak for the planet, which without us has no voice in human discussion.
- “**Bien vivir**”/“**Sumak kawsay**” (living well) is a concept of living in harmony with nature around you, taking only what you need and caring for the whole environment.
- Speaking of **the health of Earth** is an idea I have brought up several times in meetings. It necessarily implies interrelated systems working together for the good of a living entity, rather than a collection of inanimate resources for our use.

Witnessing, next page >>



New FCNL staff member to focus on sustainable energy and environment

AS THE NEW Legislative Secretary on Sustainable Energy and Environment, **José Aguto** will direct lobbying efforts that reflect and advance the policies of the FCNL community to seek an Earth restored. Major facets will include advocacy on the development of clean energy resources and meaningful actions to help peoples here and abroad prepare for and withstand the profound impacts of climate change.

Prior to joining FCNL in February 2012, José was privileged to work for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest and most representative intertribal organization in the nation. At NCAI he helped lead efforts that resulted in the inclusion of tribal nations and peoples in several climate initiatives from Congress and the administration; develop and advance legislation tapping the vast energy potential on Indian lands; and create and advance the work of Our Natural Resources, an alliance of intertribal organizations promoting the sustainability of Indian Country's natural resources, cultural lifeways, and ecological practices.

He is a graduate of Brown University and Villanova University School of Law, and a member of the Maryland Bar. ❖



José Aguto

>>**Witnessing**, from page 8

It's important for Civil Society to be in as much agreement as possible, so we can speak for the people and the planet in one voice. People are now working out language to overcome a perceived conflict between bio-centric and people-centric orientations. We want to talk about the human right to a healthy environment, and about the right of nature to its own health, without ruffling each others' feathers

Our society here at home will also profit from learning that people and nature are not opposed. Clarifying this issue is a job you can take on without a trip to New York City. May you be blessed in your own witnessing for Earthcare.

Being part of Civil Society conversation at the UN holds me together in the face of the great disappointments that afflict the world as the UN fails in keeping its founding promises to protect peace, equality and justice. ❖

Exciting programs planned for the Earthcare Center at FGC's 2012 Gathering

CUTTING-EDGE ecological concerns, such as the Transition Town movement will be explored in programs you will find at the QEW-hosted Earthcare Center at the 2012 FGC Gathering, July 1-7 in Kingston, Rhode Island.

Besides new displays, informal discussions, and videos, there will be guest speakers and facilitators on a variety of current issues:

- ◆ **Carol Barta**, QEW Steering Committee member and **Ruah Swennerfelt**, QEW's former General Secretary, will facilitate an interest group on the principles of Permaculture that have informed their work in the Transition Town movement.
 - ◆ **Steve Chase** will lead a short version of the "Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream" symposium.
 - ◆ **An energy staffer** from Friends Committee on National Legislation will talk about the economic and ecological implications of pending energy legislation.
 - ◆ **Eric Joy** will lead a discussion on the Occupy Movement and his travels across the country visiting several Occupy sites.
 - ◆ **Judy Goldberger, Mary Hopkins, Lisa Greber, and Viv Hawkins** will lead a program that links ecological and human migration issues.
 - ◆ **Shelley Tanenbaum**, QEW Steering Committee Clerk, and **Louis Cox**, QEW Publications Coordinator, will serve as hosts at the Earthcare Center each afternoon during the Gathering.
- In addition, at least four Gathering workshops have strong connections to the natural world:
- ◆ "Bicycling in the Light," led by **Russell Nelson**.
 - ◆ "A Great Turning: Healing for the Planet and Self," led by **Lynn Fitz-Hugh**.
 - ◆ "The Ground Where You Stand is Holy," led by **Christine Greenland** and **Cathy Draine**.
 - ◆ "Permaculture and Transition: Changing Lives," led by **Ruah Swennerfelt** and **Carol Barta**.

More at <www.fgcquaker.org/workshops>.

I AM SENDING THIS to a broad range of Friends who might be interested.

In April 2012, Hartford (Conn.) Monthly Meeting approved the following as one of our five suggested legislative priorities for Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL):

“Change/modify our monetary, banking, tax, and economic systems which are not sustainable for the future to systems which are not dependent on exponential growth and which do not concentrate wealth in the hands of few. Reform election funding to reduce the influence of money on politics and elections.”

A group of us in the Meeting have been meeting monthly for about a year to study our economic and monetary systems. We have come to the conclusion that our present systems are unsustainable and that their lack of appropriate functioning contributes to war and the threat of war; results in inequities between individuals within countries and between nations; does not promote communities where every person’s potential may be fulfilled; and leads directly to lack of care of Earth’s resources rather than to “an earth restored.”

We also support the efforts of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Growth Dilemma Project (GDP) <www.pym.org/committee/growth-dilemma-project-gdp-pym> to foster “a national dialogue to reform our economic system so it serves justice and the commonwealth of life.”

—Bill Upholt
Friendly Economics Discussion Group
Hartford Monthly Meeting, New England YM

GREENFIRE FARM and Earth Regeneration Center of New Marshfield, Ohio, co-hosted a screening of *The Economics of Happiness*, a new documentary film by the International Society for Ecology & Culture (ISEC) about the worldwide movement for economic localization.

The film features a chorus of voices calling for systemic economic change, including Vandana Shiva, David Korten, Michael Shuman, Richard Heinberg, Rob Hopkins, Juliet Schor, Zac Goldsmith, Bill McKibben, and Samdhong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister of Tibet’s government in exile.

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Founder and Director of ISEC, and co-filmmaker, joined follow-up conversation live from Australia, along with a seasoned local panel.

—Dick Hogan
Athens (Ohio) Friends Meeting

The obligation of intelligence

THE CREATION STORIES of most societies, if interpreted allegorically rather than taken literally, reveal the deepest longings and fears of human beings. The Bible relates the creation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion by God from the Garden of Eden for their “original sin” of disobedience, thus the fall of man from the state of grace. Is it not the allegorical emergence of humans and animals? Aboriginal creation stories tell similar tales; Australian aborigines, for instance, speak of the “Dreamtime,” when humans and animals were one. Aboriginal cultures differ from Western cultures in that they seek and even sanctify connections between humans and animals, while Western societies have invested in intellectual and moral superiority over the rest of creation.

I was listening to an interview of an author who had written a series of books on vampires and now is concentrating on werewolves. As she was explaining the attributes of these supernatural beings that condemn them to eviltry, I began to realize that these were simply the characteristics of animals—there are animals that can climb sheer walls, see through solid objects, hear whispers beyond our aural range, and sense the stars through the clouds. A case of a physician who documented her own stroke after her recovery recalled a blissful state of living only in the present when she experienced vast augmentation of her senses and awareness of her surroundings, during which language and reasoning were useless.

Is this not the state of animal reality? However, those humans who purposely seek these primal ties are viewed with grave suspicion and even fear in the west. So great is the dread of reverting to a pre-civilized state that scores of innocent women have been burned at the stake for witchcraft. Precious artifacts of the most advanced city-states in the Americas were lost to fanatical Conquistadors horrified at the religious practices they found. Some fundamentalist followers of the Bible equate environmentalism with pagan Earth worship.

The history of Western civilization has been one of deliberate and intensified alienation from nature. It has brought us great benefits, but at the painful price of separateness—even from one another—that is endemic to Western society. What is the obligation of intelligence—dominance or compassion, observation or participation? These are not simple problems to be solved through technology. These are profound spiritual and moral questions to be dealt with squarely in our own souls.

—Nancy Halliday
Evanston (Ill.) Friends Meeting

Steering Committee to meet at Cambridge in June

QEW's Steering Committee will hold its summer meeting June 28–June 30, 2012, at Friends Meeting at Cambridge, 51 Longfellow Park, Cambridge, Mass.

The summer Steering Committee meeting is an opportunity for QEW Friends to gather, reconnect, share stories, conduct business, and get to know local Friends.

Friends Meeting at Cambridge has generously donated use of its Meetinghouse and will be arranging hospitality with local Friends or low-cost accommodations.

Full per-person costs will range from \$115–\$220-US. All meals are being prepared and served by QEW, and participants will be asked to sign up to help with meal preparation and clean-up.

We have timed this meeting to end the day before FGC's Gathering begins in close-by Kingston, R. I. (We will provide travel information and informal car-pooling between Cambridge and Kingston.)

Friends should plan to arrive in Cambridge by noon on Thursday June 28th for lunch. Hospitality is

available for those arriving Wednesday night. Friends have the option of staying through dinner Saturday June 30th or staying one more night and worshipping with Friends Meeting at Cambridge at 10:30 a.m. on First Day, July 1st.

To register go to QEW's website <www.quakerearthcare.org> and click on the Summer Meeting button at the bottom. You will have the option of registering and paying online or downloading a registration form in PDF format to mail in with your payment, by **June 1st**.

If you have any questions about on-line or mail-in registration, please contact Anne Mitchell <anne@quakerearthcare.org>, phone: 802/658-0308.

The QEW Annual Meeting

(this year October 4–October 7, 2012 in Chicago) includes programs and public talks, along with making connections and business. *QEW will be celebrating its 25th anniversary.* If you have stories or memories to share, please send them to the QEW office. ♦

BeFriending Creation

BeFriending Creation, Vol. 25, No. 3, May-June 2012. Newsletter of **Quaker Earthcare Witness**. 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 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.

Steering Committee Clerk Shelley Tanenbaum, <sbeltan@pacbell.net>.

Gen. Secretary Anne Mitchell, 173-b N. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401. 802/658-0308; e-mail: <Anne@QuakerEarthcare.org>.

BFC Editor Louis Cox, 360 Toad Rd., Charlotte, VT 05445. 802/425-3377; e-mail: <Louis@QuakerEarthcare.org>.

Website: <www.QuakerEarthcare.org>

Earthcare Calendar

June 1, 2012. Deadline for registration for the summer Steering Committee meeting.

June 7, 2012. Deadline for article submissions for July-August 2012 *BeFriending Creation*.

October 4–7, 2012. QEW Annual Meeting (and 25th anniversary celebration) in Chicago.

Quaker Earthcare Witness Order Form

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Home Mtg _____

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Please check the appropriate boxes

- 1-year support for Quaker Earthcare Witness (includes subscription to *BeFriending Creation*)
 \$500/US \$100/US \$50/US (avg) \$35/US Other \$ _____/US

Make checks payable to **Quaker Earthcare Witness**. Send with this form to **Quaker Earthcare Witness**, 173-B N. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401-1607.

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 Canadian Yearly Meeting.

BeFriending Creation May-June 2012

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Greening your finance\$—Put your money where your mouth is!

MOST OFTEN WE HEAR of ways to become more energy efficient in our homes and transportation. However, there are other ways to be more “green” in our culture. How we spend our money is a kind of *voting* for how we want goods and services produced.

§ Therefore I try to purchase only *second-hand goods*, so that I’m not “voting” for more and more to be manufactured. And, in fact, I end up with very good quality clothing that I might otherwise not be able to afford. Plus it becomes fun to find the bargains.

§ Another way to be more careful about our “votes” is to look carefully at our *investments*. Sometimes even “green” funds can have criteria that let them purchase stocks in companies such as Wal-Mart because the company touts some green innovations and doesn’t manufacture guns. But you’ve probably read about some of Wal-Mart’s questionable personnel practices and can see by their labels that much of the clothing and goods are not from fairly traded sources. So look carefully at those “*green*” *mutual funds* and find one that fits your criteria. An interesting fact is that, in general, funds that incorporated environmental criteria have been outperforming traditional funds.



§ These days it’s almost impossible not to have a *credit card* if you need to rent a car, purchase travel tickets (planes, trains, and buses), or purchase goods on-line. Some large environmental organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy or the Sierra Club, offer affiliate cards that allocate a certain amount from each purchase to the organizations. I use my Amtrak card, which gives me points for free travel and helps me support national rail in the U.S.

§ Of course, *contributing* to non-profit organizations puts “your money where your mouth is.” The organizations depend on your support and you get a tax deduction, if you itemize your deductions. (*And may I put in a plug for QEW right here?*)

§ Consider joining a local *time bank*. It’s like bartering, only more flexible. The time you spend working for another member gives you credit that you can draw on, like cash, on when you need services.

§ And last, but not least, consider asking for *e-statements* from banks, credit card institutions, investment firms, utility companies, and any other firm that sends you a monthly bill. Think of the amount of paper, and ultimately trees, that can be saved by taking this small step. And get rid of those catalogs that clog your mailbox just by calling the companies’ toll-free numbers and asking them to take you off their list. (You may need to be persistent.)

THERE ARE MANY WAYS we can make a difference financially. It just takes a little time to consider our impact and then search for ways to reduce it!

—Ruah Swennerfelt, Burlington (Vt.) Friends Mtg.