



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

618.466.5004 • 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 • oeatlavista@yahoo.com

Summer 2011  
Volume 10, Issue 35

## Exploring a Prairie, Expanding a Sense of Self

by Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Beginning last summer, the staff of *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* offered a yearlong journey exploring the Heartland Prairie in nearby Alton, Illinois. This 27-acre tall-grass prairie restoration shows what Illinois once looked like when 21 million acres of prairie covered the state. We offered a “visit” each season, hoping that participants would explore this vanishing part of our bioregion as it changed its face through the seasons. We also hoped that getting to know this amazing ecosystem would help us learn something about ourselves.

Our spring visit, called “Burned: A Terrible Beauty,” most deepened my appreciation for the prairie and expanded my sense of self. When we visited in late March, Friends of the Prairie had just completed the yearly “prescribed burn.” Regularly burning the prairie has many benefits, I am told. It gets rid of old growth so the sun can warm the soil allowing the amazing array of grasses and forbs to come forth. The ash nurtures the soil, providing nutrients for new growth. Even the smoke as it oxidizes the atmosphere contributes to plant health so beauty can arise in the spring and summer seasons. We arrived just a few days after the burn and could already see tiny green shoots pushing through the blackened soil.

As we wandered this primeval looking landscape, a saying from the sacred Jewish text, the Talmud, came to my mind. “Every blade of grass has its own angel whispering in its ear, ‘Grow, grow!’” In a sermon of Bruce Sanguin I recently read, he interprets this quote as a marvelous metaphor for the **evolutionary impulse**, an impulse that is fundamental to the universe. In fact, he reminds us that it is the **essential characteristic of life itself**.

It occurred to me that the prairie has no choice – burn or no burn, new growth will make its way through the old growth on cue as spring comes and temperatures warm. What has stopped prairies from responding to the evolutionary impulse is human choice. Our ancestors on this land plowed it, made homesteads, and planted crops. In the span of a single human lifetime, between 1830 and 1900, the prairie was steadily transformed into farmland. The tall-grass prairie is now one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. Before settlement in the 1820’s, the prairie was a major landscape feature of

our country with over 140 million acres – over 40% of the United States – covering the middle third of the continent! **Only one percent remains today.**

These facts make the commitment of Friends of the Prairie very precious to me. They not only care for the prairie, they also organize groups to walk the prairie week in and out from spring through fall. It is touching to watch them enter the prairie with reverence, naming

each plant as they pass by. What a great example of Thomas Berry’s insistence that until we learn reverence for the Earth there will be no possibility of bringing a healing or a new creative age to Earth. According to Berry, “*what we need now after distancing ourselves from creation is a new intimacy; after the mechanistic age, a greater biological sensitivity; and after damaging Earth, a healing...Now is the time to commit ourselves to the care and healing of these regions that have been devastated by agriculture, development, exploitation, and corporate greed.*”

And this calls to mind another quote from Thomas Berry also about a blade of grass, “*...the Earth will never again function in the future as it did in the past when it functioned independent of human beings. Now, almost nothing will happen on Earth that humans will not be involved in. We cannot make a blade of grass, but there is liable to not be a blade of grass if we do not accept it, protect it, and foster it.*”

Unlike the prairie, to grow or not to grow is our choice as human beings. We can hunker down, cling to the status quo and placate ourselves with the fruits of our industrial society, namely, consumerism (which gives a false sense of growth) and a static worldview (which reveals resistance to growth). OR we can embrace the evolutionary impulse that I have come to connect with the work of the Spirit. Pondering the prairie has helped me to realize that each of us is also the manifestation of a sacred evolutionary impulse. And, as that presence, it is our human role to make choices contributing to a vibrant, sustainable and resilient Earth community, which includes both human and other-than-human presences on this planet.

(continued on page 6)



## Letter from the Editor

Summer 2011

Dear Friends of La Vista,

“Resilience” is quickly becoming a very significant word as ecologically-minded people adapt their lives to be more sustainable. It’s just the characteristic we need to respond to the challenges offered by our culture. We need physical resilience as we deal with the nutritionally deficient diet served up by our industrial food system, and as we encounter the toxins in our air and water. We need mental resilience to manage the stressors prevalent in a culture that lauds individualism and the meaninglessness of consumerism. And we need spiritual resilience as we live in this time between stories – the story science offers us and the story provided by many faith traditions that all too frequently have discounted science.

Our summer and autumn calendar of events is an attempt to provide opportunities for participants to become more resilient human beings who then create more resilient communities. The fall “Do-It-Yourself” Series offers life skills for enhancing a diet that is healing for the planet as well as for people. It also includes the ancient creative craft of basket-making – a popular course that builds self-esteem as it weaves a useful and lovely container.

The Community Supported Garden at La Vista, in the middle of its ninth season, also models resilience as our farmers, Eric and Crystal, deal with weather variables. The Garden continues to offer highly nutritious, delicious and beautiful vegetables. All of us at La Vista are grateful that we can rely on this safe and sustainable food source.

I am also grateful for you, our readers, who support us with your donations, your participation in our programs, and by sharing the good news we hope to provide in our newsletter. May your own resilient life be a blessing for our rare and precious planet! ☺

For La Vista,  
Maxine Pohlman, SSND

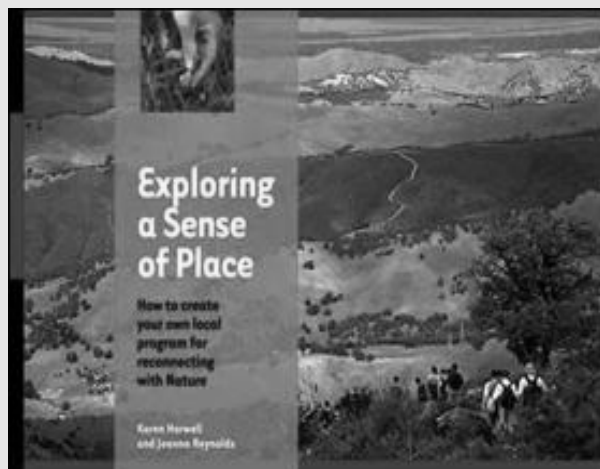
*Sister Maxine with the discussion group that has been meeting for two years. Currently, the group is working through A World of Health from the Northwest Earth Institute.*



## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

### ELEMENTS OF EXPLORATION

*Whether you are exploring a prairie restoration  
or some aspect unique to your own bioregion,  
try these elements of discovery to deepen your experience:*



- Approach with an attitude of respect and humility – a “not knowing.”
- Establish a pattern of spending time in and observing nature.
- Explore with all of your senses: experiment with sound, touch, smell, taste and sight.
- Follow your feelings: curiosity, awe, gratitude.
- Explore your wonder: ask questions, engage.
- Notice the language you use to describe place. Try to move away from the language of things and objects and into the language of reverence.
- Learn in community. Find the people who are familiar with the place to guide you. Explore with a group of people, sharing your insights with them.
- Respond. Express yourself in poetry, music, art, dance or however you feel moved.
- Find ways to design your life and community life with nature in mind.
- Celebrate belonging!

Excerpt is taken from Exploring a Sense of Place: How to create your own local program for reconnecting with Nature by Karen Harwell and Joanna Reynolds, 2006. Visit them online at <http://www.exploringsenseofplace.org/>

## Events Calendar: Summer - Fall 2011

For those who have a deep concern for our world and want to make a difference ....

### *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium*

Saturday, November 12 9:00 – noon  
(Registration begins at 8:30)

*Are you ready to give up the dream of the modern world – a dream of consumerism and competition?*

*Do you want to wake up to a new dream for your future and that of your children and our planet?*

This Symposium brings to you inspiring voices inviting us to change our dream to one of justice, peace, and ecological sustainability. The process includes viewing inspiring DVD presentations along with engaging group interaction.

This workshop simply presents facts about what the situation is in today's world and how it came to be. It then helps participants explore their own experiences to imagine different options for the future. Cost: \$15

Registration Options:

Send your check made out to "OEI" to La Vista Ecological Learning Center, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL, or register through PayPal: [www.lavistaelc.org](http://www.lavistaelc.org).

**New Film Showing  
at the Autumn Equinox Celebration**

### *Journey of the Universe*

Saturday, September 24 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Celebrating the change of season is a great time to ponder our place in the universe. Join us and find yourself carried away by marvelous images that deepen your connection with the entire universe.

This amazing film begins on the Greek island of Samos, birthplace of mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras. Disembarking on the island at dawn, Brian Swimme guides viewers on a trek through time and space, sharing a view of cosmic evolution as a process based on immense creativity, connection and interdependence. After the toll of midnight, he sets sail into the star-lit waters of the North Aegean Sea to inspire us with a sense of wonder at the mystery, complexity and connectivity of the Earth and universe.

Our viewing will be interactive, providing time for sharing reactions and insights. Please call 618-466-5004 to register.

No Cost: Donations appreciated

## Coming Home to the Sacred Universe:

A Retreat Time  
to Deepen Spirituality

Wed., Aug. 3, 6:00 pm –  
Wed., Aug. 10, 1:00 pm

Many of us who are inspired by the Universe Story and the new cosmology find ourselves embracing the journey to "re-inhabit" our lives out of this broadened context. We ask ourselves questions like:

- How can the dynamics of the Universe in my spiritual practice in a deeper way?
- How can I prayerfully tend the emerging worldview in culture embedded in the former worldview?
- How can I re-interpret the deep wisdom of the Christian tradition out of an evolutionary perspective?

**These questions are a call to "come home" to both the sacred universe and the deep wisdom of our Christian tradition, and this retreat provides an opportunity to explore these questions with others who share them.**

**Coming Home in order to go forward....**this is the trajectory of the retreat time. Our process will include

- rituals on the land
- inspiring input from several presenters
- time for individual and group contemplation and meditation
- optional discussion circles
- immersion in La Vista's 255 acres of woods, bluffs, meadows and gardens
- vegetarian meals prepared and eaten in a mindful atmosphere

The cost is \$550.00

Registration Options:

1. Call us at 618-466-5004 and request that a form be mailed or e-mailed to you.
2. Visit us online at [www.lavistaelc.org](http://www.lavistaelc.org) and click on Upcoming Programs. Scroll down to the "Coming Home" retreat and download a registration form.

# Becoming Resilient

## “Do It Yourself” Series

### Canning and Dehydrating: Preserving Food without Refrigeration

Saturday, October 1

1:00 – 5:00 pm

Learn these time-tested skills and enjoy safe, fresh, local and tasty foods throughout the winter. You'll be guided step-by-step in the canning process using both a water bath and a pressure canner. While the food is processing, you'll receive instruction on dehydrating vegetables. These are great to toss with a salad or add to homemade soups and other dishes.

Materials: Please bring a quart Mason jar and enough green beans to tightly fill the jar. You'll take home the quart of the green beans you canned along with a booklet of instructions, recipes and tips – **everything you need to know to “do-it-yourself”!**



**Annie Kelley**, our presenter, has been gardening and canning since 1971. Last year she canned, dried, and froze 85% of the food she and her husband ate all year! Annie's 25 years in the restaurant business has given her lots of practical experience regarding food preparation and safety. Cost: \$25

### Basketweaving: Making a Bread Basket

Saturday, October 8

1:00 - 4:30 pm

Basketweaving is a skill well worth pursuing. The product is both functional and decorative while the process is both rewarding and therapeutic. During the workshop, participants will learn basic vocabulary and basketweaving techniques as they make a basic bread basket.

All supplies will be provided. Each participant will leave with a completed basket and a cloth basket liner.

**Mary Jo Jacobs** will lead participants in this workshop.

Cost: \$25.00



### The Skill of Bread Baking: A Lifelong Treasure

Saturday, October 15

1:00 - 5:00 pm

From our earliest days, humans have been sustained by one form of bread or another. Join us as we learn about the many very different kinds of bread and then experience the joy of preparing and baking yeast bread “from scratch.”

Please bring a two quart container with cover, a dish towel, and a wooden spoon. We will provide the ingredients, samples of breads to taste, and recipes to take home.

**Mary Jo Jacobs and Maxine Pohlman** will lead us. Cost \$25.00



### Healthy Vegetarian Harvest Soups

Saturday, November 5

1:00 – 5:00 pm

You can learn to make soups that are good for your family and the planet! Commercially prepared soups commonly contain wheat, gluten, corn, soy, MSG, and way too much sodium. They travel across the country in trucks, polluting the air and using petroleum. In this hands-on class, you'll learn simple techniques and specific procedures to develop flavors for a satisfying soup. After helping to prepare Vegetable Minestrone and Cream of Carrot and Rice soup, you'll enjoy tasting the results of your work.

Ingredients will be provided. You'll take home a booklet with recipes and special tips from our presenter, Annie Kelley, who has been making delicious soups for many years.

**Annie Kelley**, the presenter for the canning and dehydrating workshop, will lead us again as we learn more about healthy soup and its preparation. Cost: \$25.00



To register for one or more of the “Do It Yourself” Series call 618-466-5004.

## Tai Chi for Flexibility

Thursdays, Sept. 15, 22, 29, Oct. 6 6:30 - 7:30 PM

Practice the ancient art of Tai Chi and experience gentle meditative movements that increase range of motion in joints, aid in circulation, soothe anxiety and depression and help lower blood pressure and hypertension. Our instructor also incorporates Qi Gong breathing movements that help with memory and alertness, as well as TaeBo for strength in the arms and shoulders. Classes will be held outdoors on the beautiful bluffs at La Vista.

**Mary Ann Pitchford** is a certified Tai Chi instructor who is the director of HEALTHQUEST with seminars and workshops on natural healing for physical, nutritional and emotional problems. She is also a certified lecturer/instructor of Senior Programs for the National Arthritis Foundation.

Registration is required; space is limited.

Call 618-466-5004

Cost: \$7.00 per session



## Thank you for renewing your subscription!

We recognize that a *transformation of vision* is the foundation for sustainable living and a healthy planet. Our semiannual newsletter, **La Vista Visions**, seeks to enrich your understanding and provoke your creativity in this endeavor. Your donation will be used to support this newsletter as well as our programs, retreats and activities that are designed to facilitate this shift in consciousness. Thank you to those generous subscribers who renewed last issue. And thanks to many who added a donation. We are so grateful!

\_\_\_\_\_ Please renew my subscription to *La Vista Visions* (\$10.00 for 2 years.)

Please check one option.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Regular Mail** - If you would like to continue to receive *La Vista Visions* by mail, don't do anything. We will continue to mail you our semiannual newsletter.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Electronically** - If you would like to receive an email notice when *La Vista Visions* has been posted on our web site so you can read it online, please email us at [oeiatlavista@yahoo.com](mailto:oeiatlavista@yahoo.com). In the subject line type "NEWSLETTER" and your full name. You will no longer receive a paper copy of the newsletter.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Remove from mailing list** - If you would like us to remove your name from our mailing list, please email us at [oeiatlavista@yahoo.com](mailto:oeiatlavista@yahoo.com) and type "REMOVE" and your full name in the subject line; or, send us this form by standard mail and request removal.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please use this additional donation for your programs.

Thank you for sending this form to: Oblate Ecological Initiative 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035

Who do you know  
that might be interested  
in this good work?  
Tell us and we'll send  
them a free copy of  
*La Vista Visions*.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Birthing a New Consciousness, Living with Compassion

### An Advent Day of Prayer

Saturday, December 10 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

At this tenuous time on our planet, we invite you to come apart for awhile and share a vision of compassion built on cooperation that can transform our despair into HOPE!

Recognizing that we are the spirit of evolution birthing new life, we'll explore how hope can be the foundation for new life with the whole Earth Community.

Our process will include guided meditation, input, contemplative time, group work and reflection time on the land.

Lunch is included. Call 618-466-5004 to register. Cost: \$40

**Judy Best, SSND**, received her M.A. in Theology from the University of Notre Dame, South Bend. Her ministries have included: secondary education, diocesan administration, provincial administration, and more than 35 years in spiritual direction. In her desire to become a "co-creator" of evolutionary consciousness, Judy is learning from mentors who include her congregational founders and contemporary poets, scientists, and musicians. Mother Earth is her primary teacher.

## Seasonal Celebrations

Summer Solstice – Saturday, June 18, 2:00 – 4:00 pm  
Autumn Equinox – Saturday, September 24, 2:00 – 4:00 pm  
Winter Solstice – Saturday, December 17, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

*"The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do." - Galileo*

Our one wonderful sun not only holds the planets in place and ripens grapes, but also gives us four distinctly beautiful seasons as it shines on a planet that is tilted on its axis.

Join us each quarter as we celebrate the power of our one Sun and our one lovely planet. We'll spend time giving thanks, immersing ourselves in the special gifts of each season, and enjoying the camaraderie created by human beings who share delight in the natural world. Please bring a seasonal dessert or drink to share.

Optional donations are welcomed and appreciated.

\*



La Vista Ecological Learning Center  
4300 Levis Lane  
Godfrey, IL 62035

\*

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 225  
ALTON, IL 62002

**Offering  
programs  
and resources  
for living  
consciously  
within the  
integrity of Creation.**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

\*



**The Oblate Ecological Initiative  
is a ministry of the  
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.**

Visit us at [www.lavistaELC.org](http://www.lavistaELC.org) & [www.lavistaCSA.org](http://www.lavistaCSA.org)  
or on **Facebook**: [www.facebook.com/EcologicalLearningCenter](http://www.facebook.com/EcologicalLearningCenter)

(continued from page 1)



To honor this impulse as a sacred one, I have asked myself: How can I embrace the evolutionary impulse as a spiritual discipline? Here are some of the actions I feel called to include in my spiritual practice:

- As I begin each day, my morning prayer includes the promise to intentionally align myself with the call to grow, to evolve.
- My time of meditation has become an opportunity to silence my small self and open up to the call of the future, comfortable with “not-knowing”.
- When I choose a book for spiritual reading, I ask myself: Will this book challenge my thinking – or simply affirm what I have thought for a lifetime?
- When I watch the world news, I ask: What is Earth asking of me, of us as a human community?
- As I review my day, I examine: Is my sense of compassion expanding to include both the human as well as the other-than-human community? Have I allowed time in my day to enjoy the natural world?

- And as I interpret a nighttime dream, I explore: How is this dream calling for what is unconscious in me to become conscious?

Paying regular visits to the Heartland Prairie for a year has taught me that to choose life, to consciously cooperate with this intrinsic, evolutionary impulse, is one of the best things I can do for my relationship with the Ground of all Being, as well as with the whole Earth community flowing from it. If I accept the evolutionary impulse as an essential characteristic of my life and of the entire planet and all beings on it, then I feel I will be moving toward a future worth living. ☸



**All events are held at La Vista Ecological Learning Center  
4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL unless otherwise indicated.**

