



# 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 • [oeiatlavista@yahoo.com](mailto:oeiatlavista@yahoo.com)

Summer 2010  
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## Living In Between Stories

by Norman Comtois, O.M.I.

### Where are we?

In her January newsletter Judy Cannato mentioned, “It has been a few years now since Thomas Berry pointed out that our generation is ‘in between stories.’ Ours has been the one caught in the gap between the story science tells and the one religion tells. We have been wedged between the old and the new – old traditions and new revelations. We have been the ones to encounter the poverty of stories that no longer work because they are based on long-dead metaphors and inadequate accounts of the cosmos.”

With those comments in mind, a group of eleven “in betweeners” gathered at La Vista to discuss the implications of living in between stories.

We asked ourselves “where are we?” This question prompted us all to share our own stories of being in between. We then fashioned the questions that would guide us through the weekend: What is it like? What do we do? Who are our companions?

### What is it like?

Having discovered that we were in a major paradigm shift requiring a radical change of perception, we asked ourselves what it was like to be in this place.

Stepping out into the land of “in between” initially takes us to a space of **loneliness and uncertainty**. We were all brought up knowing exactly where things were or where we thought they should be. Now there is no longer that certainty. It is as though we have been thrust into a paradigm shift that is totally unfamiliar to us. Consequently, we **cannot predetermine** the appropriate path. Our destiny will be revealed while we are on the journey. We need to simply be where we are, in the **present**.

Often we begin to experience a **loss of identity** much like the caterpillar that is dying, dissolving, and disintegrating. We know through experience the butterfly is forming, reforming, and trans-

forming as it prepares to experience new birth and fly into totally uncharted territory. Like the caterpillar we are inherently unable to believe that any good can come out of this agony unto death. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for a caterpillar to imagine being a butterfly. Consequently, the caterpillar part of us fears the changes and prefers a strategy of retreat.



At the same time we become aware that our **attentiveness**, our sense of observation actually creates the path ahead. We actively participate in creating what we see — no longer disengaged spectators who look at the world from the sidelines.

As we walk together, we learn to **see** one another into life, into a community of love and acceptance. Many of us realize our potential because someone has seen us through the eyes of love. Again and again the power of love makes something or someone real.

Finally, the land of “in between” becomes a place of **imagination** and of **dreams**. Both science and spirituality in their search for truth value the imagination. Einstein said: “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you anywhere.” Imagination is what one turns to in order to fill the void and in the process, bring to birth new visions and new vistas. As Thomas Berry tells us, it is the dream that drives the action.

### What do we do?

First, we **pay attention** and awaken to nature around us and discover creation as the primary revelation. We learn to be in communion with all that surrounds us. We learn to consider the lilies of the field. We discover how to love nature for itself, for its intrinsic worth, in all its differences and detail — just because it is. Most of the time we do not see. We pass a tree, an early spring crocus, the face of another human person, and we do not marvel at these wonders, because we do not see each one’s uniqueness.

(continued on page 6)

## Letter from the Editor

Summer 2010



Learning Center Staff and Our Farm Family

Dear Friends of La Vista,

They arrived in late February ready, willing, and able to facilitate the growth of vegetables, herbs and an abundance of good will at La Vista! Our new head farmer, Eric Stevens, and his wife Crystal Moore-Stevens, didn't waste a minute as they planted early spring greens, germinated seeds for transplanting, built a demonstration composting system near the barn, and revealed their multi-talented selves. The eighth season at the Community Supported Garden at La Vista promised to fulfill and exceed shareholders' expectations!

And now it is June, mid-year, and, as the Garden "transitions" into this growing season, Norm Comtois' message to us in "Living In Between Stories" carries a depth of meaning. During this time between the end of the industrial era and the emergence of a new, sustainable future on our planet, what could be more important than how and

what we eat? As Wendell Berry reminds us, "How we eat determines, to a large extent, how the world is used."

When Farmer Eric arrived, he toured the winter gardens, noting evidence of last season's marvelous abundance. He expressed his delight in being able to farm on soil that has been tended with great care and respect. This kind of treatment of the land is one hallmark of the emerging era: humans and Earth co-existing in a mutually enhancing, sustainable manner. Exploitation, domination, treating Earth as a resource – all need to end.

*La Vista Ecological Learning Center's* mission is to align itself with this emerging worldview and facilitate its birth - hospice to the old story and midwife of the new. So, we are pleased to offer you courses, programs, workshops and retreats that nudge forward human consciousness, a couple of them centering on the topic of food.

Crystal and Eric Stevens are teaming up to offer "Herbal Remedies" in October, teaching participants everything they need to now about planting, harvesting, and preparing and using herbs at home. What a great way to change our lives!

In December we'll welcome Jack Lau, OMI, for a retreat in which he will wear two hats: a chef's and that of a spiritual guide. He'll direct "Retreat for a Conscious Gourmet" at King's House in Belleville as well as an evening workshop at La Vista.

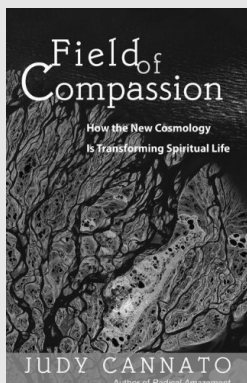
Please join us for any of these opportunities and deepen your commitment to living sustainably during these "in between" times! ☯

For La Vista,  
Maxine Pohlman, SSND

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

For your summertime reading:

### Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life



"The best-selling author of *Radical Amazement* articulates a transforming vision of spirituality that examines the intricate connectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds, a phenomenon she calls the 'field of compassion.'

In the tradition of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, Judy Cannato invites spiritual seekers to embrace the way in which an understanding of religion and the spiritual path is informed and illumined by cutting-edge science. Cannato's newest book is a must-read for those interested in how the new cosmology and the Christian story can be understood in harmony with one another. She shows how modern scientific discoveries demonstrate that at the most fundamental of levels all life is connected and that humankind participates in the unfolding of the universe. This book's compelling and radical call to transformation will inspire readers to choose collaboration and peace over competition and conflict." [www.judycannato.com](http://www.judycannato.com)



## **Events Calendar: Summer - Winter 2010**

To register for our programs, contact us at 618-466-5004.  
Programs can also be viewed on our web site: [www.lavistaclc.org](http://www.lavistaclc.org).

Programs are held at *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* unless otherwise indicated.

### **Registration still open for Exploring the Sacred Universe Earth Literacy Program**

**6:00 pm Tues., Aug. 3 through 1:00 pm Tues., Aug. 10**

All around us evidence is mounting that the current industrial perspective is harmful both to Earth and to humans. The corrective that is needed includes not only practical lifestyle changes, but also a shift in our basic understanding of what it means to be human on this rare and lovely planet.



Join us this summer and explore Creation's integrity for a week along the bluffs with a community of learners. Together we'll explore the profound shift in understanding evoked by the story of an evolutionary universe. As we sit with the wonder, awe and newness of the Universe Story, we'll also critically examine the perceptions that currently fashion our cultural worldview.

This week-long program includes

- \* guided activities and instruction
- \* immersion in direct experience of the natural world
- \* practicing skills for a more ecologically-conscious life
- \* contemplating the story of an evolving Universe
- \* examining the perceptions that fashion the current cultural worldview
- \* deepening our appreciation for the inherent spiritual dimension of our sacred universe

Registration information will be sent to you upon request  
by calling 618-466-5004.

Cost: \$550 (lodging, meals and program included).

### **AWAKENING to the POWERS of the UNIVERSE:**

**Eleven Evening Sessions from July – December  
Mondays from 7:00 – 9:00 pm**

**July 19 & 26, Aug. 16 & 23, Sept. 13 & 27,**

**Oct. 11 & 25, Nov. 15 & 29, Dec. 13**

These sessions involve an interactive viewing of Brian Swimme's DVD series, "Powers of the Universe." In these 11 presentations, participants will journey from the vast reaches of the ancient cosmos down to the most infinitesimal elementary particles and discover that no matter where we look, even into the human heart, the Powers of the Universe are present.

Each session will be interactive and include viewing one episode of the series, reflective questioning, dialog and a closing ritual. It is suggested that participants have some familiarity with the new cosmology and the Universe story.

Cost: \$5.00 per session

### **Seasonal Celebrations: Weaving Ourselves Back into the Web of Life!**

**Summer Solstice – Saturday, June 19, 7:00 pm**

**Autumn Equinox – Saturday, September 25, 4:00 pm**

**Winter Solstice – Saturday, December 18, 7:00 pm**

Human beings are an intimate part of the whole web of life, a fact we often ignore or forget. Seasonal celebrations at La Vista are a delightful and powerful way to celebrate and experience that special kind of Earth intimacy. Join us for this family friendly event and welcome each season as it presents itself to us in the movement of the sun across the sky!

Please meet near the white barn, and bring a dish to share as we conclude each celebration with the bounty of the season.

*Optional donations are welcomed.*

## Exploring the Heartland Prairie, Expanding Your Sense of Self:

**A yearlong journey into the seasons of the prairie and your own heart.**

This series follows the changing faces of the prairie and allows you an opportunity to examine your own journey through the phases of your life.

### Summer Sunrise at the Heartland Prairie in its Full Flowering Saturday, July 24, 6:00 – 9:30 am

At sunrise we'll meet with local experts who will deepen your appreciation of the prairie as an ecosystem, explain its ancient presence in the middle of this continent, and enchant you with its flowering beauty in the early morning hours. Discover what it means to "become native to your place"! This session includes preparatory readings, local experts, time for exploration, and a return to La Vista for personal reflection, integration, and seasonal refreshment.

Cost: Commute - \$15

Overnight - \$40 (Optional overnight stay at La Vista on Friday, July 23 for those traveling from a distance. Includes breakfast.)

### Faces of the Heartland Prairie...

Continuing the series, you'll walk through phases of the prairie while exploring its changes through science, meditation, literature, art and music. Following each visit, we'll travel to La Vista for seasonal refreshment and discussion/activity. Between sessions, readings will be suggested to deepen your understanding and to maintain the continuity of this journey.



### Autumnal Beauty

Saturday, October 30, 9am - Noon

### Depths of Winter

Saturday, January 29, 9am - Noon

### Burned: A Terrible Beauty

Saturday, March 26

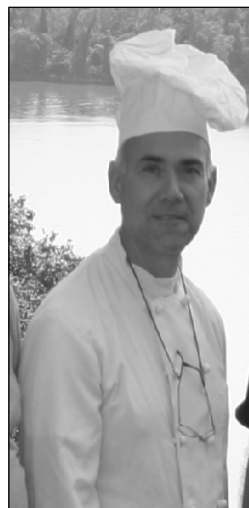
### Renewal in Springtime

Saturday, May 7

## Food as Gift of the Season A GOURMET Weekend Retreat

Friday, December 3 – Sunday, December 5

Held at and co-sponsored with  
King's House Retreat and Renewal Center, Belleville, IL



During this weekend retreat we'll explore together the Advent and Christmas Seasons through the holiday foods we eat. Jack will lead us in becoming aware of the gift of food: Where does it come from? How is it grown? How does it nourish our bodies and balance with other foods?

This hands-on retreat will bring about a conscious awareness of God's living presence in the balanced human being: body, mind and soul. That is the mystery of the Incarnation, the ongoing gift of Christmas.

Weekend retreat includes:

- Presentations by "Chef Jacques"
- Specially prepared holiday meals, snacks and recipes
- Group involvement in meal preparation
- Prayer services and celebration of Eucharist
- Chocolate!

**Jack Lau, OMI**, is currently the Director of Spiritual Services at Galilee Centre in Arncliffe, Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate of both the Culinary Institute of America and the Oblate School of Theology, and a registered yoga teacher RYT200. Jack is the principal chef at the Oblate Ecological Initiative's Earth Literacy Program each August.

Registration opens at 4:00 pm. An optional light buffet supper is available from 5:00 -6:30PM for early arrivals. The program begins at 7:00 PM and concludes on Sunday with noon lunch.

To register call Colette at 800-779-7909 or 618-397-0584, Ext. 10 or email [ctaylor@kingsretreatcenter.org](mailto:ctaylor@kingsretreatcenter.org).  
Overnight: \$175.00 Commuter: \$135.00

### Evening Presentation at La Vista with Chef Jacques

Monday, December 6, 7:00 - 8:30 pm

*"What do I do with kohlrabi?" "Do you have good recipes for kale and collards?" "What are some whole grains I can fix besides rice and barley?"*

If any of these questions have been on your mind, then join us and hear Chef Jacques address them and others. Jack will bring his good humor, bottomless creativity and gentle spirit to the evening's sharing. A healthful and delicious dessert will be included.

Cost: \$10.00

## 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.)  
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them a free copy of  
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Herbal Possibilities: Growing and Using Medicinal Herbs at Home

Saturday, October 2, 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Join us and learn everything you need to know to enhance your well-being with herbs! We will get tips on soil preparation, planting and harvesting as well as on how to make tinctures, salves and teas with the herbs you grow. Hands-on demonstrations will follow the presentation.

Handcrafted medicinal herb blends (tinctures, salves, balms and teas) will be available for purchase as well.

**Crystal Moore-Stevens** is an herbalist who teams up with her husband, **Eric Stevens**, head farmer at La Vista, to present this informational workshop.

Cost: \$15

## Basketry: Weaving Beauty and Utility

Saturday, October 23, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Come, enjoy the contemplative art of basket-making. Woven into the schedule will be time for personal reflection and communal ritual. No experience necessary. Materials furnished. Participants will take home a bread basket, cloth basket liner, and a loaf of homemade bread.

**Mary Jo Jacobs** is a crafter, an educator, former school principal and administrative assistant at La Vista Ecological Learning Center. She has been making baskets of all kinds for many years.  
Cost: \$25



**All overnight programs must be pre-registered.** Overnight retreats must be paid in full with registration due 14 days prior to the retreat. If you must cancel, 75% of the cost is refundable up to two weeks prior to the beginning of the retreat.

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

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Our mission is to:

**CONTEMPLATE**

the ongoing sacred story of the Universe,

**EDUCATE**

for deeper ecological awareness,

**CELEBRATE**

Earth's seasonal cycles.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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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)

*(continued from page 1)*

Secondly, we **take action** on behalf of the planet. We discover the primary ethical issue of our time is the destruction of the environment. Listening to the wisdom of Mary Evelyn Tucker, we realize that the world's religions are being called to contribute to a new understanding of the universe story. The challenge for religions is both to rediscover and reinvent our role as citizens of the universe.

If humans destroy this awesome matrix of mystery, where will we find sources of inspiration pointing us toward the vastness of the sacred? We, as a people of faith, cannot assume a disengaged pose while species become extinct, forests exterminated, soil, air and water polluted beyond restoration, and human health deteriorates. Earth's survival is at stake requiring community action on our part.

Thirdly, we **celebrate** in ritual. We honor, as Diarmuid O'Murchu would say, our Ancestral Grace as we celebrate the seven million years of our human evolution, from swinging from tree branches to discovering fire for the first time to discovering it for the second. We break bread together and share the cup and in so doing we realize that we are taking our place in the long line of ancestors who have lived in between stories and beyond.

**Who are our companions?**

As the weekend came to a close we gazed into the fire observing the spiral of our ancestors. Now companions on the journey, we listened to Judy's concluding words: "There comes a time when we can say that we are no longer between stories. We cannot afford to label ourselves as 'in betweeners' any longer. We may be beginners, at the merest cusp of the new era, but we are there, and we have to live it – tentatively, fearfully, uncertainly – and filled with radical amazement."

Yes! May we be filled  
with radical amazement. ☯

*Norman Comtois, OMI, is on the staff at Berakah, a renewal program for women religious and a center for summer retreats. He serves as a priest, teacher of the new Cosmology, and retreat director. He also serves as a team member of the Earth Literacy Program at La Vista Ecological Learning Center.*

