



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

618.466.5004 • 4563 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 • lange@omiusa.org

Spring 2003
Volume 2, Issue 1

Ponderings From The Precipice*

By Maurice Lange, OMI

It's 5:20 on this January evening as I begin. Not that I set out to start writing at exactly the scheduled time for the ball to be kicked off on this Super Bowl Sunday..... that's just how the day has played out. I **am** making a conscious decision to write rather than watch the big game. Why? Maybe it's an act of cultural defiance. This particular act of defiance may come as a surprise to old friends who remember my rabid love for Sunday TV football.

I also write at this time when another kick-off is taking place. I believe however that this kickoff won't lead to a clearly identifiable "winner". War seems imminent.

I am against war. This could surprise my childhood friends when they recall the many battles we made believe: both with toy soldiers and our very own life-sized toy guns and hand grenades.

I'm also writing as the winter sun, just now, is setting majestically over an ice-clogged Mississippi River. I watch as the brilliant colors tease my sense of wonder and awe. I am **for** moments like the setting sun. That should not surprise most. A setting sun calls forth a transition in this sacred time 'twixt day and night. This time is traditionally revered by contemplatives and eagerly anticipated by lovers. As the rays fade over the river, I sit and gawk in solitude.

I ponder if the sun might not also be setting upon so much of our cultural cacophony. Even though the noise of the current polls blare out that a majority (albeit a slim one) of Americans back an invasion of Iraq (as if only Americans matter!). What about a poll of those still suffering from "Gulf War Syndrome"? What about one designed to hear from Iraqi mothers? And the children? Has any agency had the wisdom to poll them?!



The individual, cultural and global decisions we humans make in these 30 years will determine what species of animals and plants survive and thus, whether our own has a viable, sustainable future or one not at all. The responsibility called for by this deep realization, if taken to heart, melts away the extraneous noise.

Real life and its preciousness come into sharper focus.

What will it take for us to re-image ourselves and the choices we make? Can we listen to the Earth and to the voices of all those "others" who are "not like us"? Profound listening is in our human genes, and yet we are culturally conditioned not to hear with our hearts.

These days are precarious ones. Can we challenge the clamor resulting from an outdated cosmology? Can we hear and make heard the voices of the "little ones"? This Spring, wherever we are, let us sow seeds that can germinate into hope.

Letter from the Director

Welcome to the Spring Edition of "La Vista Visions". With this edition we mark our 5th issue and a full year since our first. This newsletter began in tenuous times and these have not changed. However, Spring is about birth, resurrection, newness. At this time may a new sense of relationship with this planet and all its inhabitants be birthed!

As you can see from our enclosed schedule of events, much is being planned here to help bring about this birthing. The quarterly equinox and solstice celebrations are a wonderful time for families to reconnect with Earth and celebrate the changing of the seasons. Our annual potato planting to help inaugurate Spring is always a hit with the little ones as well as the young at heart. Another occasion suitable for families will be the observance of Memorial Day through planting and ritual.



*Maurice Lange, OEI director,
visits with shareholder Gary Huelsmann*

Spring Equinox, 2003

Speaking of planting, that is exactly what our new head gardener, Amy Cloud, has been doing much of lately! The greenhouse of the Community Supported Garden has literally been a hotbed of activity as seedlings are now emerging.

These soon will be transplanted and provide for the first harvests to be divided by our 65 shareholder families beginning in May. Be sure to read the story of Amy's broadening perceptions in our highly acclaimed series "Emergence of an Ecological Vocation".

An outreach of the Ecological Initiative is also budding forth right next door (on former Oblate property). The *Children's Organic Community Garden* is being planted in Godfrey's newest public area: *La Vista Park*. Several local schools are benefiting from the generosity of the Illinois Master Gardeners and charitable organizations. These students come to the garden and learn through direct experience about the interaction of seed and soil, and thus, the source of their food.

As this newsletter heads into its second year, we are happy to hear how it helps folks appreciate the Integrity of Creation. We invite your participation in this endeavor. If you've not yet shared \$10 for a 4 issue subscription, won't you consider doing so? With your support, we can continue to assist the birthing of a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.

The flyer in the last *LaVista Visions* gave the wrong date for the "Revisioning the Vows for Religious". The correct date is May 23-25.

Creating A Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

Spring Green Cleaning

A lot of over the counter cleaning products are harsh, abrasive and even potentially dangerous to your home and family. Since you are concerned about risks to your health and the environment, you may want to consider using homemade, all-natural cleaning products. Here are some effective cleaning products you can easily make at home.

aStain Remover

1 tsp. vegetable-oil based soap
1/4 cup vinegar
1/2 cup water

aDrain Opener

1/2 cup baking soda
1/2 cup vinegar
warm water to rinse

aDusting Spray

1 tsp. olive oil
1/2 cup white vinegar

aFabric Softener

add 1/4 cup white vinegar
to last rinse cycle

aGlass Cleaner

1/2 cup white vinegar
gallon of water

aWood Polish

1/8 cup food-grade
linseed oil
1/8 cup vinegar 1/4 cup
lemon juice

aAll Purpose Cleaner

1/2 cup pure soap
gallon hot water
1/4 cup lemon juice

Earth Literacy Program: “Exploring the Sacred Universe”

August 2-9, 2003

During this Summer’s week-long Earth Literacy Program, the Universe Story provides the framework for exploring the meaningful questions of our origin and for reconnecting with Creation and the Creator. As we re-imagine ourselves by way of this new understanding of our origin, radical changes in our human activities and attitudes will be called for. The Universe Story will supply the creative energy needed to accomplish this Great Work. During the final days of the program, as we shift our attention to bioregionalism, we will consider how our cultural activities enhance or degrade local ecosystems.

The Earth Literacy Program is limited to a small number of participants who will live, reflect, and work together in an experiential learning process. In addition to the guided activities and instruction, there is a strong emphasis on immersion into the natural world and on developing practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life-style. All of the activities are designed to awaken the participants’ creativity and to provide the support of a group of peers who hold the same pursuits.

An important part of the program is developing a deep connection to the land. To this end we strongly encourage the participants to: 1) Share in a simple group ritual of greeting the new day; 2) Choose a sacred site on the land and visit it daily; 3) Spend time in the Community Supported Garden at LaVista and 4) Keep a personal journal. While most of the activities of this week are experientially oriented, there are a few short readings assigned from *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, in addition to other articles and videos.

To participate in the Earth Literacy Program, please contact Fr. Maurice Lange.
Our program has been inspired by the Earth Literacy Program at Genesis Farm, Blairstown, New Jersey.
Call to inquire about their offerings at (908) 362-6735

Don’t forget to visit the Oblate Ecological Initiative on the web at www.lavistacsa.org

As we are together, praying for peace, let us be truly with each other.

Let us pay attention to our breathing.

Let us be relaxed in our bodies and our minds.

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds.

Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves. Let us maintain a half-smile on our faces.

Let us be aware of the source of being common to us all and to all living things. Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion-towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Let us pray that all living beings realize that they are all brothers and sisters, all nourished from the same source of life.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

Let us plead with ourselves to live in a way which will not deprive other beings of air, food, water, shelter, or the chance to live.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going around us, let us pray for the establishment of peace in our hearts and on Earth. Amen

-Thich Nhat Hanh

Emergence of an Ecological Vocation (third in the series)

By Amy Cloud

I am a woman born to farming – a slight modification of a title of a poem written by Wendell Berry, his called “The Man Born to Farming.” His poem is about a man, maybe even Wendell, whose vocation was a seed inside him from the start, like his own lung, or ankle bone, or layer of skin. Every spring with the touch of the soil he would sprout. And with the coming of fall he would enter a yearly death. And his love of farming “flows out of his mouth/ like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water/ descending in the dark.” It has been a long road that has brought me to an understanding of the man in this poem. But now I feel justified in slipping in the word “woman” and “she” and saying this poem is as much about me.

Whatever idyllic, romantic picture you have of rural farm life, put it on the back burner for right now. We’ll eat it later. My childhood farm experience was not about horseback riding or fields of butterflies. My father was born to farming, but I think he would have rather been a weatherman. As a young man he worked on my Grandpa’s farm until he had a down payment saved for his own farm, then he married my mom newborn out of

high school and they started their life together in a trailer on two hundred acres. Fifteen years later they had me, a house, eighty dairy cows, and one thousand acres. Seven years later there was me, my three sisters, a woman named Mary and a divorce.

My mom, my three sisters, and I moved fifteen minutes away into town. My dad and Mary had three other daughters and then divorced over the span of the ten worst years of my life. As I grew older my responsibilities on the farm increased. The antique red tractor that I first drove helping my Dad bale hay turned into a giant, green, eight-wheeled John Deere with a chisel hooked to the back. My sisters and I took turns spending a week at a time with my dad, plus the court appointed every other weekend. By my sophomore year in high school I was milking sixty cows solo in the evenings, taking care of calves and feeding the livestock. That’s not even beginning to detail the busy seasons of spring and fall. My father was probably the only father in the world who hated when the school year kept creeping later and later into the summer because it ate into the hay making season.

I grew up hating farming because it was nothing but work and all struggle.

When I went on to college I wanted never to look back. I started pre-med, then after a semester of organic chemistry switched to a literature major. My senior year in college I spent a semester in Chicago working at a publishing company, being horrified by consumerism, materialism, and seeing first hand that the world of publishing was more about money than about good writing. I also began reading Wendell Berry, oddly enough, deep in the heart of the city, on the corner of State and Division. Through Berry and that semester my eyes were opened to a hurting social, spiritual, and ecological world.



*Amy Cloud, head gardener of the Community
Supported Garden at LaVista*

I returned for a fifth year of college and took one environmental science class that connected me to organic farming and the idea of **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**. From there I moved to Massachusetts for two years, working on two different organic CSA farms, Caretaker Farm (one of the oldest CSA's in the country) and Brookfield Farm. Those two years have been the two best in my life, I can honestly say. It is where I first learned what a broccoli plant looked like, and the importance of healthy soil. I climbed back on a tractor for the first time, a much smaller and more to my liking, Massey Ferguson 35, and learned how to manage a weekly harvest of vegetables for over five hundred families. It is where I held soil and it didn't blow away in my hand like my father's. It was where I could survey the whole farm from one point and not have to drive miles to see the end. And where I finally concluded in my heart that there was a viable alternative to conventional farming that was so good: good for the farmer financially, good for the consumer healthwise and tastewise, good for the land and the local community.

After another year of internships, one CSA in Michigan and then another in Rockford, Illinois, the wind has blown me here to the **Community Supported Garden at LaVista**. Ninety-nine percent of my days I am beyond excited, incredibly enthusiastic, determined and grateful to the Oblates and our shareholders for the opportunity to be here and to be a part of this new project. The other one percent is when I wake up at four in the morning realizing completely what I have got myself into. What if I forget to do the one thing out of the thousands I must remember to do? Will that mean there are no fall carrots? Or the greenhouse runs out of propane because I forgot to check? Or I forget to return a shareholder's phone call and I miss out on hearing that one new piece of information that could save me time, save a crop, meet a life changing person, or how to cook the best butternut squash soup I will ever have in my life? Those are the moments I realize the awesomeness of this garden and I tremble in a good way.

There are days, maybe even all winter months where I forget that I am a farmer. All the dirt from under my fingernails disappears. The cracked skin of my hands from handling a season's worth of dry soil and rough outer rinds of vegetables finally heals. And when I tell new folks that I am a farmer they look at me skeptically and I have no concrete evidence. So I drag out the pictures and am myself reminded that, yup, I've been doing this farming gig for quite some time.



Amy discussing the harvest with shareholder Jim Sullivan

The earliest childhood memory I have is about farming. I remember climbing down the grated steps into the pit of my father's milking parlor. I remember how cool it was down there and the large glass bulbs with white milk streaming down the side, filling halfway or more. I also remember water fights in the parlor, days that were so hot and laden with flies, late evenings so cold and the propane heater leaving that thick, fiery taste in my mouth.

My new memories are less about machines and more about vegetables. Two years ago on a perfect fall day, I was pulling up forked carrots, resting on my knees in the soil, yanking a carrot up, snapping off the top, putting it in a bucket, yanking, snapping, putting, for countless feet, oblivious to time and my surroundings, this work, and myself. Just present and approaching peace. Those moments are so few, but they are the moments when I don't have to say anything, think anything; it is when I feel my own seed is firmly planted, is growing and is producing what I most internally feed off of, something like water and sunlight and soil.

On this road I have discovered that I have been in my father's fields all this while. All his children are there in some way or another, I'm sure.

**We encourage you to read the book that inspired the cover title "Ponderings From the Precipice: Soulwork for the New Millennium" by James Conlon. Forest of Peace Publishing, 1998*



“I find myself in a strange niche, reviled by some compatriots because I can’t praise war as the best answer, and reviled everywhere else because my nation does.”

-Barbara Kingsolver

How Can I Participate? \$

All people seeking a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth are welcome to participate in the scheduled programs and the Community Supported Garden of the Oblate Ecological Initiative. Just call or write for more information and/or to register. Due to the wonderful response, we will probably need to put newly interested possible shareholders on a waiting list. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in the office as well as the garden.

Fr. Maurice is also available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact him with your requests.

We do ask that guests and shareholders respect this site and its primary function as a novitiate. Visits to the office and garden are made by appointment. Please call Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI for directions.

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

OEI CALENDAR

March 22 Saturday	Spring Equinox Celebration, 4 PM followed by a potluck feast.
April 26-27 Sat- Sun	<i>“New Life! New Life!”</i> Spring Ecospirituality Retreat
May 5-16 Weekdays	<i>“Kids Exploring the Sacred Universe”</i> Students immersed in the natural world
May 23-25 Fri - Sun	<i>“Revisioning the Vowed Life”</i> Retreats for those in Religious vows
May 26 Monday	<i>“Memorial Day Planting and Ritual”</i> Come plant in the memory of loved ones
Aug 2-9 Sat - Sat	<i>“Exploring the Sacred Universe”</i> Earth Literacy Program

First Sunday of every month - Community Supported Garden
shareholder meetings

For more information, please call 618-466-5004