



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 • info@lavistaec.org

Summer/Fall 2019
Vol 17 Issue 49

The Confluence Climate Collaborative, an Emerging Vision

by Betsy Slosar

Roughly ten years ago I had the good fortune to spend a week at La Vista Ecological Learning Center participating in the “Earth Literacy” program, and I fell in love. All my life I’ve cherished experiences in the natural world – the sense of Spring in the air that makes my heart beat faster, the peace of a walk in the woods, stargazing while lying on my front lawn – breathtaking before light pollution took over.

However, La Vista’s exploration of “our sacred universe” – a cosmology illustrating the flaring forth of the universe and our place in it as human beings – was truly transformative. During the experiential learning taking place each day, my love of nature took on a deeper love for Earth, in a much more spiritual and relational way. It brought a new understanding that we humans share with all living things – animals, plants, and minerals – the same life-giving elements that burst forth in the stars during the creation of the universe some 13 billion years ago. Science calls this DNA. Buddhists call it “interbeing.” Passionist priest Father Thomas Berry calls it, simply and profoundly, a “sacred community” of which all members, not just humans, deserve love and respect. Subsequently, I’ve spent much time, learning and growing at La Vista. Through discussions, study groups and exploring the grounds, I’ve been able to deepen my relationship with Earth.

Recently Sr. Maxine brought together a group from this area for a Northwest Earth Institute discussion course, “A World of Health: Connecting People, Place and Planet” leading us in examining the interconnections between the health of the planet and human health. As a group of 10-12 individuals with similar interests, we delved deeply into an exploration of modern medicine

and the need for including an ecological perspective in addressing all aspects of human health. The readings encompassed an analysis of problematic issues in modern medicine and emphasized the imperative that the systems in our natural world must inform medicine’s approach to preventing and curing illness.

The onset of climate change and effects of an ever more polluted environment bring an urgency to using medical practices that combine modern tech-

niques with complementary “ecological medicine,” and ancient practices that prevailed when the Hippocratic Oath to “first do no harm” was proclaimed. Many readings demonstrated the pervasiveness of chemicals – from plastics to pesticides and more – in our food sources, the water we depend on for life itself, and other aspects of our environment.

At the same time, two critical reports about climate change were published, one by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) and the other, the U.S. National Climate Assessment (NCA). Each report concluded, independently, that Climate Change is not “coming”; it’s “already here” and

is proceeding much faster than scientists originally estimated. Therefore, the timeline for action is narrowing drastically.

As the discussions ended, Sr. Maxine invited those who might be interested to work together in order to carry forward our learnings and their implications to the people of our region. Driven by the urgency of the call issued in the IPPC and NCA reports, five of us answered her invitation and met with her to determine how we could take action. Thus, the Confluence Climate Collaborative (CCC) was created. By joining



Some members of the Collaborative during a tree planting ritual

(Continued on page 6)

Sasi's Amazing Falafel with Yogurt Sauce

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cook Time: 30 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour

Yield: 10 to 12 servings

Serving Size: 1 to 2 falafel

Ingredients

Yogurt Sauce

- One-half cup plain Greek yogurt
- Juice of one lemon
- One to two tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- One tablespoon freshly chopped dill (or mint or whatever flavor you prefer)
- Kosher salt to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper

Falafel

- One-half pound dried chickpeas (soaked overnight and drained)
- One bunch parsley chopped
- One-half bunch cilantro
- One-half to one full tablespoon cumin powder
- One-half to one full tablespoon paprika
- One-half tablespoon black pepper powder
- Five peeled garlic cloves
- About one-half cup to three-quarters cup oil, any kind with a fairly high flash point
- Salt to taste

Instructions

Yogurt Sauce

In a bowl, whisk together yogurt, lemon juice, oil, and herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside to serve with the warm falafel.

Falafel

-In a food processor fitted with your metal blade, combine chickpeas, garlic, parsley, cumin and coriander. Season with salt and pepper. Process until the mixture resembles a thick paste. Add salt to taste and mix well. Note that if you have a smaller size processor, it might be best to make this in two batches rather than over load the processor bowl.

-Form the chickpea mixture into falafel balls about two inches in diameter.

-In a large skillet or wok, heat the oil until a drop of water added to the oil sizzles and pops.

-Fry falafels in medium heat until golden, then transfer to a paper towel.

-Serve warm with the Yogurt Sauce

Notes: Falafel is quite rich, so serving size really depends on how hungry you are. Prep time does not include soaking the chickpeas overnight, but does include the time it takes to make both the yogurt sauce and the falafel mixture.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

THE DIGNITY OF ANIMALS by Novice Democracy Mudenda

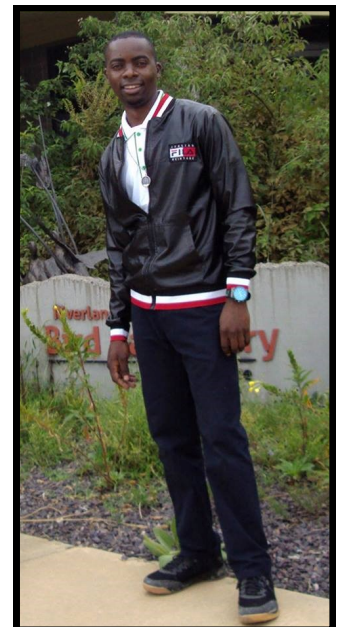
Each of us has been made by God for a purpose. One of my challenges this year as a novice at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois, is to learn to dignify the creatures, especially wild animals. I find myself asking, *Who am I in the eyes of God, and what are animals in God's eyes?* It seems to involve mutual trust, understanding and recognition of their being and how we humans are being helped in one way or the other by animals. I am Zambian, and in Zambia there is a general lack of care, of not valuing or upholding that animals are part and parcel of our community. If we see a deer, we feel free to shoot it for food. At the Oblate Novitiate deer wander the land freely, protected from being harmed. I also see birds being provided with seed from feeders rather than being captured for a meal. This is a new awareness for me.

I felt impelled to write this article after participating in La Vista Ecological Learning Center's Winter Solstice Celebration in December. I was very much moved and touched by learning how to honor and respect the animals regardless of size. I learned they all deserve dignity and love. In my past, I knew wild animals only for meat consumption but not as deserving of care as part of our common home. In my home country, Zambia, wild animals are viewed as only for consumption, not as preserving them as part of nature.

Since I have learned this I am aware of not abusing animals or taking advantage of those that don't move or run fast. I see that it is not good to run over them with a car. It has also become clear to me that it is from the very small and big animals that we get some of our shoes, waist belt, coats, handbags, door handle and many other items. As human beings, we need to be rational about animals and have a sober heart and love towards animals. They all give, play, and add value to our lives especially when it comes to observing them.

I feel called to stand up with a loud message of upholding values that promote the dignity of each animal and of being committed to regarding animals as friends. Environmentally speaking, we are responsible to embrace the dignity of God's creation. And, as we love to view or watch them, we should consider them as the mysterious beauty of God's very good creation. We are all called to cultivate and care for all the good of creation by God.

Novice Democracy Mudenda is currently living and learning at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois. He came to the Novitiate already in tune with nature, and this awareness has grown during his months here.



Cultural Cooking Class at La Vista: A Recipe for Courage

by Toni Oplt

The cooking class held at La Vista Ecological Learning Center on March 16th was not about perfecting a specific dish or technique; it was a lesson in courage, taught by Sasikumar Balasundaram, or to friends: Sasi. Sasi is a professor of anthropology at SIUE, and he accepts his role of leadership with great seriousness, joy and creativity. His students learn about their past by living in the present, practicing sustainable ways to eat, cook and live. For cooking class, our assignment was simple: Be courageous in the kitchen.

But like all simple assignments, there was much wisdom below its surface and proved not as easy to execute as it seemed...at least

not in the beginning. But we all tried to believe in our own bravery, as Sasi began throwing rice into pots of bubbling water, setting up prep stations where folks shredded peppers and beans and cabbage and coconut, heating oil in big, well-used woks, and talking and smiling all the while. There was not one mention of a measuring cup or spoon.

Occasionally someone would look up from his or her piece of the projects and ask: "How much did you want in that?" And Sasi would answer: "Well how much would you like? What are the flavors you want?" You see, Sasi is a talented teacher, encouraging his students to learn rather than directing them to replicate.

As Sasi continued to add dishes and have us chop up more vegetables or stir fry lentils, many of us began to wonder if the meal would come off in the end. After all, most people follow some sort of directions when they cook, rely on measurements and amounts of some kind. But everyone seemed to be carried away by the magical energy Sasi created. He just kept saying, "Trust what you like; don't worry about the way other people cook—cook for yourself—be courageous." And we did and we were.

Woven into the actual cooking class were threads of larger conversations—using what you have and not wasting food, for instance: There was talk of clean food and food scarcity related to climate change. Gratitude, for the bounty we were enjoying. So, here is the final menu:

Roasted Beet Hummus, Cabbage Avial, Falafel, Simple Red Lentil Soup, Peanut Eggplant Vadhakal, Batsumi Rice, Mango Lassi, Coconut Spinach, Potato Piratal, Parippu Usili (green beans and lentils) , Appalam (fried lentil chips)

What an amazing meal. We were all blessed as we sat down to eat this communal repast. Wish you'd been there? Well, take heart. Sasi's recipe for Falafel is included on page 2. Served with a simple Yogurt sauce it's delicious. YUM!

Toni Oplt is the author of a marvelous food blog "Green Gal of the Midwest" where you can find inspiration for great cooking, helpful kitchen hints, connections to resources that change lives for the better, local and healthy food wherever you're from and however you choose to be well, and more!



Program Calendar June—December, 2019

Summer Solstice Celebration: Make your Garden Toad and Frog-Friendly Sat., June 22, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Frogs and toads might call your backyard home if you make it welcome to them. Why bother? Amphibians are the most endangered group of vertebrate wildlife on the planet, with nearly one-third of species at risk of extinction. You will learn how to maintain frog habitats in your backyard, so you'll not only help them by providing a pocket of habitat, but you will also be rewarded with a frog symphony in the spring, summer and autumn months. And you will be caring for creation!



Presenter: Vernon DePauw, nationally known wood carver who previously presented at La Vista on native bees

Cost: This is a donation-based event. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Registration: Email us: info@lavistaelc.org

Sketching and Nature Journaling Flowers Sat., June 29 10:00 am—Noon

Do you enjoy exploring the world of flowers and wish you could creatively record your discoveries on paper? Please join us as we begin our investigation of flowers by covering a variety of techniques to creatively capture your observations on paper. The indoor part of our study includes taking a flower apart and observing all of the components of its make-up, as well as their functions. We will then go outside to observe wildflowers in nature and record our discoveries from the techniques presented inside. Both beginners and those that want to broaden their sketching and recording skills are welcome. Artistic skills are not required.

Presenter: Angie Jungbluth, pictured standing at right with journaling student, is a signature member of the St. Louis Watercolor Society, an avid journaler and seasoned teacher.



Supplies: unlined drawing paper (in a binder or journal with space to sketch and write), pencil, eraser, coloring tools (colored pencils or watercolors), camp chair
Cost: \$20

Registration: Use the form on p. 5 to send payment.

Evening Adventure at La Vista: Meeting Moths Up-close; Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the First Moon Walk

Saturday, July 20, 7:30 - 9:30 pm

National Moth Week celebrates the beauty, life cycles, and habitats of moths which are among the most diverse and successful organisms on Earth. We'll get informed via video, then move outside to the patio to enjoy refreshments and observe moths attracted by a special light and a unique "moth brew". Learn several ways you can help our nighttime wildlife affected by our changing environment!

We'll also remember the first walk on the moon which affected our lives forever. Please bring your binoculars and hope for clear skies.



Cost: This is a donation-based program.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 or email us at info@lavistaelc.org.

Fourth Friday Night Film Festival Aug. 23, Sept. 27, Oct.25, Nov. 22 7:00—8:30 pm

Each evening we will view a documentary described as "deeply subversive, challenging the status quo". We'll cover topics such as economics, education, ecology, and eco-consciousness. In-depth conversation will follow the film.

If you enjoy ideas that turn our current worldview on its head, you will appreciate the perspectives offered in these videos.

Cost: Donation based event

Registration: info@lavistaelc.org.

DONATION and REGISTRATION FORM

Program Name _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

E-mail address _____

Payment Enclosed: _____ Donation Enclosed: _____

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



Hungry for Change: Food, Ethics, and Sustainability Discussion Course
Mondays, Sept. 16, 30; Oct. 7, 21; Nov. 4
7:00—8:30 pm

What we eat matters—the food choices we make every day have an impact on our planet. ***Hungry for Change*** is a discussion course that will help you explore the true meaning of the phrase “you are what you eat.” Discuss how food choices have an impact on a range of issues, including ecosystem health, factory and farm worker treatment, and our global economy.

Registration: Use the form on p. 5 to send your payment. Please register before Sept. 6 so books can be ordered; or you can order your own online: www.nwei.org

Cost: Book of readings is \$30 plus optional donation to La Vista for hosting this course.

Autumn Equinox Celebration:
Nature Share and Show
Saturday, September 21 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Have you ever seen a fossilized camel hoof? How about a petrified pumpkin? Alley Ringhuasen, Director of the Great Rivers Land Trust, has these marvels and more in his collection of treasures found during his 25 years walking the land. You will be amazed as you hear his stories and view his rare collection.

You, too, are invited to bring your own best nature stories and found treasures, like rocks, insect specimens, fossils, arrowheads, etc. to share with the group. Don't miss this homespun kind of fun. Please bring a snack to share.

Cost: Donation-based event

Registration: E-mail info@lavistaclc.org

Cultural Cooking II: Healthy Food + Healthy People = Healthy Planet
Saturday, October 5
2:30—5:00 pm

Dr. Sasi returns to delight us with a second cultural cooking class! Join us and have your traditional ideas of how to cook turned on their heads. Everyone will be engaged in the prep work as together we create a meal sure to delight your senses in every way—taste, smell, texture! You will learn to make authentic Sri Lankan dishes you can repeat at home. Join us and wake up to an alternative way to cook.

Dr. Sasi Balasundaram is an anthropologist, farmer, food and environmental justice advocate.

Cost: \$15

Registration: Use the form on this page to send your payment to La Vista.



This program is a La Vista and SIUE Anthropology Collaboration.

Save the Date

Winter Solstice:
Saturday, December 21, 7:00 – 9:00 pm



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

***Never doubt
that a small group
of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world; indeed it's the
only thing that ever has.***

- Margaret Mead

***All it takes
is one good person
to restore
hope.***

- Laudato Si'

Visit us at www.lavistaelc.org

and on Facebook: Ecological Learning Center

forces, we agreed that as a group we could affirm the quote famously attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The original group included four individuals already working with environmental organizations --La Vista ELC, the Piassa Pal Group of Sierra Club, Studio Gaia in Edwardsville, The Center for Spirituality & Sustainability at SIUE – also an environmental blogger known as *Green Gal of the Midwest* and an SIUE anthropology professor who incorporates sustainability into his coursework. Two others have since joined, a free-lance writer from Godfrey and an SIUE sociology professor who leads the university's Sustainability Action Group.

At our first meeting in January 2019, we "took off running" with a mission to "*Educate as many people in our area as possible about the challenges of climate change and provide the tools to empower a change of course in our local communities toward a greener and more sustainable future.*" To get started, it was decided to hold at least one event in each quarter of 2019. In the first quarter, we hosted two film screenings: the first, *Normal Is Over*, a documentary looking at climate threats globally; the second, *Paris to Pittsburgh*, a hopeful examination of local efforts across the U.S. to meet

the goals of the Paris Climate Accords regardless of our government's withdrawal from the agreement. In April, the CCC welcomed participants to La Vista for *A Retreat Day Among the Trees* in celebration of Earth Month. Looking ahead, a listening session is planned to hear community members' perspectives about the climate crisis and what they can do. To close out the year, stay tuned for a program on biodiversity.

I'm truly thankful to be part of the CCC, in the company of these amazing people who so passionately love our planet.

Betsy Slosar is a retired social worker who spends her days finding more and more ways to love and protect her Mother Earth. She is also Board President of the Center for Spirituality and Sustainability on the campus of SIUE.



Betsy Slosar viewing the transit
Of Venus during her Earth Literacy Program

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

