



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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Winter 2011
Volume 9, Issue 34

Allurement: What Draws You Most Deeply?

by Paulette Zimmerman, SSND

Last summer I spent several days at beautiful Lake of the Ozarks in central Missouri. Craving the soft music of creation, I complained about the frequent roar of jet skis and speedboats, which I said should be prohibited. A friend commented, “We can’t go back to using canoes.” But, whether it’s going backward or forward, we can consciously choose the values of quiet, clean air and water, and respect for the home of water creatures. As we make choices that affect the planet, Thomas Berry says “we need only listen to what the earth is telling us”; we can go “to our genetic coding to ask for guidance.”

In his DVD series, *The Powers of the Universe*, cosmologist Brian Swimme suggests that, because we live on a withering planet, a situation caused largely by humans, we need the image of Allurement – or attraction - to guide us. This cosmological power is evident in a huge cloud of hydrogen atoms in a field of gravitational attraction; as they come closer together, they implode in a point which is a star! Stars then become part of the gravitational field that holds the galaxy together. Earth’s attraction to the sun and the amazing moment when living beings created the chlorophyll molecule bring about the new relationship of photosynthesis. Finally, the allurements of sexuality in myriad life-forms leads to the deep intimacy through which life continues, for this power is not separate from what it means to be human.

Examples of Allurement that Brian Swimme gives from his own life are the absorption he once felt in dropping a rock and his absolute fascination with why it dropped; the realization that he chose his path in life because of the overwhelming beauty of the night sky; and the decision of a student to change his major to a study of the Universe because he had been captivated by Brian’s own enthusiasm. As beauty

captivates us, we become part of the whole field of attraction that draws others!

However, industrial society has worked to break the natural allurements humans have for the rest of the Universe and implanted the image of Earth as mere material and resource for our use. Our task then is to leave behind this industrial illusion

and enable Allurement to burst forth into our consciousness. Brian suggests that one who is occupied with this task is passionately absorbed in the world. Such a person has a wide spectrum of feelings, an amazing capacity to become overwhelmed in situations that seem trivial, an ability to be drawn in, and sensitivity to beauty in all its forms. Releasing ourselves into the field of our own Allurement, into that which draws us most deeply, we move into a pursuit of beauty

that will ignite beauty within us.

Poets, among others, can act as signposts or guides – reminders to live slowly and fully in the present, attentive to our natural love of other beings, to the *biophilia* that is genetically coded into us. Listening to the wisdom of his cells that knew their ancestral origins in the stars, Walt Whitman could say, “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” Emily Dickinson observes a humble rock: “How happy is the little Stone/ That rambles in the Road alone” wearing a “Coat of elemental Brown,” and says of another small fellow-creature, “The bat is dun with wrinkled wings/... His small umbrella, quaintly halved.”

That committed Earthling, Henry David Thoreau, asks with confidence, “Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?” Attentive to his neighbors at Walden Pond, Thoreau knows that every night “the fox and skunk and rabbit now roam the fields

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Letter from the Editor

Winter 2011



Sister Maxine and Mary Ann Pitchford practicing Tai Chi

Dear Friends of La Vista,

In a recent conversation with Mary Ann Pitchford, our Tai Chi instructor, she told me, "My grandfather taught me that success and wealth are judged, not by one's financial situation, but rather by how much one contributes to society." Her grandfather evidently had not bought in to the "collective wisdom" that money is the ultimate hallmark of success. Of all the topics we covered that day, this statement allured me the most.

It called to my mind the many other unexamined assumptions at the root of our current environmental crisis, such as:

- Earth's "resources" are here for us to use without considering the impact on the whole Earth community
- competition, not cooperation is the fundamental law of nature
- the price we pay for something reflects the full cost of making it
- there is some place called "away" where we can throw things

- it is okay to throw away "natural resources", species, some people
- human beings are separate from the natural world.

What a different planet it will be when more of us awaken to an emerging cultural story that says all humans, creation and the whole universe are profoundly interconnected. The awesome Universe Story, which is the foundation of all we teach at La Vista, shows how interrelated we are, and it challenges the above list of assumptions, ones that are at the root of our current dysfunctional worldview.

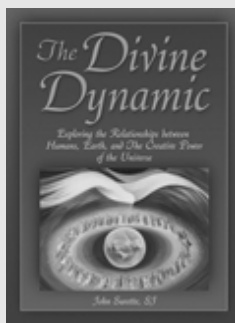
There are many signs today that a great movement is afoot to shift us out of our entrancement with consumerism and into lives of connection, cooperation, and care for the whole Earth Community. We see the movement in groups working to raise awareness of climate change, in businesses that believe in a triple bottom line: people, planet and profit; and in the many countries striving to become carbon neutral. It is also evident in the Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium that has been held across the globe and will be held in our area in March. (See our calendar of events for details).

We can also see the movement in our own back yard as the Community Supported Garden at La Vista enters its ninth season this spring, and as La Vista Ecological Learning Center enters its tenth anniversary year, offering programs responding to an increasing interest in environmental and personal health.

Our wonderful farmers at the Garden and our instructors here at the Learning Center are people who have also taken to heart the grandfatherly advice offered in the first paragraph. By their commitment to the health of both planet and people, they are making significant contributions to our society. We are grateful to all of them and to you, our readers for whatever you do to create a new dream for our rare and precious planet. ☺

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship



The Divine Dynamic:

Exploring the Relationships between Humans, Earth, and the Creative Power of the Universe
by John Surette, SJ

In this series of short reflections suitable for individual and group use, Jesuit author John Surette uses passages from the Scriptures to explore how humans are part of what he calls "The Divine Dynamic" of the Universe. This book challenges the way we think about God, the planet of which we are a part, and the ways we relate to one another.

Visit La Vista's Newly Designed Web Site

Go to www.lavistaec.org and explore our newly designed web site celebrating our tenth anniversary year! New features include a "Resource" section with materials for your personal use or to use in your ecological ministry. There are also more pictures on each page, giving you a look at the special people and places that have made up La Vista for ten years.

Events Calendar: Winter - Spring 2011



Tai Chi for Flexibility

*Thursdays, April 21, 28, May 5, 12
9:00 - 10:00 am*

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

A World of Health: Connecting People, Place and Planet

*Tuesdays, February 15, March 1, 15, 29, April 5, 19
7:00 – 8:30 pm*

A World of Health is a six-session discussion course that focuses on limitations of the current medical model and its approach to health, then addresses the places where our personal health intersects with the environment — from our food and homes, to our communities and society. Throughout the course you will find individual actions that promote good health and in turn, promote a healthier environment.

Each session includes readings, video clips, short assignments and accompanying group discussion questions.

Cost: \$25 for guidebook. (Additional donation to support La Vista's programming is appreciated.)

To register, call 618-466-5004 **by Monday, January 31 so that books can be ordered.**

Herb Workshop Series

*Each workshop includes presentation, hands-on experience,
take home materials, garden tour and herbal refreshments*



Nature's Remedies: Creating your Own Herbal Medicine

Saturday, March 12 1:00 – 5:00 pm

Join us and learn how to identify medicinal herbs in your own back yard, use herbs to make medicine in tincture form, make teas for certain ailments, and make your own first aid salve. We'll also discuss which herbs are appropriate for use as insect repellants, itch relief, bee stings, and sunburn. "Take homes" include three herbal creations in jars you bring, a recipe book and list of sources to find medicinal herbs.

Natural Household Cleaners

Saturday, April 9 1:00 – 5:00 pm

The benefits of making and using natural household cleaners are many: healthier for you and your family, positive impact on our environment, and less expensive than industrial cleaners. You will learn how to make your own laundry detergent, dish soap, all-purpose cleaning spray, toothpaste, window cleaner, as well as tips for using vinegar and baking soda. "Take homes" include three cleaners in containers you bring, a recipe book and list of local sources for supplies.

Growing and Harvesting Herbs

Saturday, May 14 1:00 – 5:00 pm

In this class you will learn the basics: what type of soil mix to use, proper drainage, light exposure, plant maintenance, harvesting and storing. Learn how to save money and the environment by using recycled containers for starting herbs. "Take homes" include herb starts, a simple grower's manual, and a list of local sources for supplies.

Creating an Outdoor Wood-Fire Grill and Cooking with Culinary Herbs

Saturday, June 25 1:00 – 5:00 pm

Learn how to make your own outdoor wood fire grill from "found" materials such as river stones and a cob mixture – an energy efficient, low cost cooking practice! You will also learn how to cook using herbs, make rosemary flatbreads, make a meal in a Dutch oven using fresh herbs, and make herb-infused oils and vinegars. "Take homes" include a guide for creating an outdoor grill and simple recipes. Finally – you'll enjoy a shared meal of the food prepared together.

Each class costs \$35 – or you can sign up for all four for \$120. Upon registration you will receive a brief list of materials to bring to the class.

Crystal Moore-Stevens and Eric Stevens are our farmers at the Community Supported Garden at La Vista. They have taught herb classes at the Ozark Natural & Cultural Resource Center and children's classes at the Bonebrake Center of Nature and History in Salem, MO.

New this summer

Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium

Saturday, March 5th, 8:30 am – 1:00 pm

This symposium is an interactive transformational workshop that inspires participants to play a role in creating a new future: an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on this planet.

Through excellent video and group interaction you will:

- become deeply aware of the scope, complexity and urgency of the issues facing our planet today
- examine the worldview that has brought us to where we are today, and begin to free yourself from the constraints of unexamined assumptions you may have internalized
- experience yourself as able to make a difference in how the future of the planet unfolds
- come away with a deeper level of readiness for effective action and with a profound sense of hope and purpose

Place: St. Ambrose Parish Center

820 West Homer Adams Parkway, Godfrey, IL

Cost: \$15

Registration Options:

1. Send your check made out to "OEF" to La Vista Ecological Learning Center, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL
2. Register through PayPal: <http://www.lavistaelc.org>

For more information, call Mary Jo at 618-466-5004

Co-sponsored with the United Congregations of Metro East - Alton Area Cluster, and the Illinois Sierra Club - Piasa Palisades

Coming Home to the Sacred Universe: A Retreat Time to Deepen Spirituality

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

When participants leave our transformative Earth Literacy program each summer, they find themselves embracing the journey to "re-inhabit" their lives out of the broadened context they have experienced. Along with others who are exploring the "new story", they ask questions like: *How can I connect my prayer life with the Universe Story? How can I prayerfully tend the emerging worldview in a culture embedded in the old worldview? How can I bring my deepened awareness into my work and community life?*

On this tenth anniversary of our Earth Literacy program, we decided to put it on hold for a year and offer a retreat in response to the above queries. It is our intention to provide an opportunity that will help to deepen your spirituality in light of the riches given us in the sacred Universe Story and in the thinking of Thomas Berry and other wisdom figures like Brian Swimme, Judy Cannato, and Miriam MacGillis.

Each day will include morning ritual and input, contemplative prayer experiences, immersion in La Vista's 255 acres of woods, bluffs and meadows and organic, vegetarian meals prepared and eaten in a mindful atmosphere.

To benefit from this retreat, it is suggested that you have some familiarity with the Universe Story and the new cosmology. **This retreat is designed to accommodate past Earth Literacy participants as well as other interested seekers.**

Cost: \$550.

Please call us at 618-466-5004, and we'll send you a registration form.



Photo by Novice Rusty Gardiner

Becoming Conscious: Tuning in to God's Universe In and Around All People, Earth and Ourselves

Friday, April 29, 6:30 pm – Saturday, April 30, 3:00 pm

Experience God's energy and love as it is present in each of us and in our universe! In the evening and morning we will be led through teachings and practice of energization exercises, simple yoga and meditation. We'll then take this newly awakened energy into the great outdoors where we will engage nature in a system called Flow Learning as developed by Joseph Cornell of The Ananda Community of Nevada, California. We will awaken Enthusiasm, focus Attention, direct Experience and share Inspiration.

There will also be slowed down time for contemplative walks, journaling in prose, poetry or art, eating and enjoying vegetarian meals, and sharing of the richness among us.

Call 618-466-5004 to register.

Cost: \$85.00

Sandra Spencer is a Catholic laywoman, recently retired staff chaplain and Director of Pastoral Care at Saint Louis University Hospital. A trained Spiritual Director in the Ignatian tradition, she has more than 25 years of experience with retreat work and spiritual direction.

Kathleen Spencer, SSND has a ministerial background as elementary teacher and administrator, director of social concerns, founder of a Multicultural School for Empowerment and teacher of Sadhana meditation. She considers herself "a seeker of greater consciousness".

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.

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_____ **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. In the subject line type "NEWSLETTER" and your full name. You will no longer receive a paper copy of the newsletter.

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

Name: _____

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Basketry: Weaving a Handy Tote Bag *Saturday, February 19, 1:00 – 5:00 pm*

Weaving your own tote bag out of reeds is a wonderful way to exercise your creativity while making a functional carry-all. This tote features decorative cloth over-the-shoulder handles.

Program includes detailed instruction, materials, refreshments and camaraderie!

Call 466-5004 to register.

Cost: \$30

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

Exploring the Heartland Prairie, Expanding Your Sense of Self: *A yearlong journey into the seasons of the prairie and your own heart.*

Burned: A Terrible Beauty

Saturday, March 26, 9:00 am - Noon

Renewal in Springtime

Saturday, May 7, 9:00 am - Noon

Continuing the program begun last July, we'll walk through the prairie in March after it has been burned and before the spring flowering. Less than two months later, we'll explore the lovely new life appearing from the ashes of last season's bounty.

Following each visit, we'll travel to La Vista for seasonal refreshment and reflection on your experience. Please meet at the Heartland Prairie, located in Alton, IL, at 9:00 am.

To register and for detailed directions call us at 618-466-5004.

Cost: \$15 per session.

Note: The January session has been dropped.



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

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Visit us at www.lavistaELC.org & www.lavistaCSA.org

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and woods without fear.” Also a cosmic citizen, he wonders, “Why should I feel lonely? Is not our planet in the Milky Way?”

A contemporary poet of Allurement, Mary Oliver delights in eight ravens, “coal-black birds with/ dark-brown eyes” with their “squallings and cracklings and whistles,” who “clack and spill their delicious glottals, of no consequence but friendly and without the least judgment, down and over” her when she greets them. She also admires, surely with eyes sharpened by attraction, the owl with “such pomp/ in the gown of feathers/ and the lit silk of the eyes” and the beak that opens “clean and wonderful/ like a cup of gold.”

Letting Allurement claim us requires slowing down: looking and listening, walking and eating mindfully, attentive to our senses and the divine revelation unfiltered by the limitations of culture or faulty translation. Allurement invites direct experience. Simply knowing what makes us happy is a great start; it’s how the Universe speaks to us and acts within us. Allurement draws us to wild energy, and, as Terry Tempest Williams observes, “Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”

This connectedness then leads to creativity, be it atoms to stars, sun and chlorophyll molecule to photosynthesis, or human love to poetry and dance, for it delights in diversity, honors interiority, and recognizes Earth as a communion of subjects. Allurement returns us to awe at what is, whether the Grand Canyon and Rocky Mountains, cheetahs and flamingos, or tulips and bees, carrots and cardinals in our own backyard.

If we are allured by the guiding vision of a vibrant Earth community, a return to canoes might not be a bad idea. ©

Paulette Zimmerman, SSND, served in formal education as an English teacher for many years until she was drawn to the New Cosmology and a spirituality embedded in the sacred Earth community. She now serves as the Justice, Peace, & Integrity of Creation coordinator for the St. Louis Province of School Sisters of Notre Dame.



