

DIONONDEHOWA

Wildlife Sanctuary & School

ISSUE 21

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2023

DWS&S

Incorporating Purposes

The Wildlife Sanctuary:

- * Provides a recharge area for wildlife on the Sanctuary and in the region
- * Contributes to the corridor that provides migration routes for large animals
- * Provides habitat for native plants and animals in an ever-dwindling natural landscape
- * Provides riparian and landscape beauty for recreational users of the Battenkill
- * Contributes land to existing forever-wild areas

Dionondehowa School:

- * Focuses on Nature Studies, the Healing Arts, and the Expressive Arts in a beautiful natural setting
- * Encourages the free exchange of ideas
- * Makes Expressive Arts, Healing Arts, and Nature programs available to individuals of diverse backgrounds and interests
- * Engenders a sense of social and environmental responsibility
- * Offers skills for implementing social and environmental responsibility

Board of Directors

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Our 2023 focus is The Land As Our Teacher. This article was originally published in the Summer 1999 issue of Healing Options.

In Love with The Land

I stand at the kitchen sink, doing the dishes. The dishes which prove infinity by virtue of their constancy. I look up from the comfort of my chore and out the window. My gaze drifts east into the Sanctuary's young sugarbush where, two nights ago, lights flickered throughout causing me to blink and stretch my aging eyes. The little distant lights remained, like December fireflies, like some Morse Code calling me out.

Fairy lights, I thought. As though this were a reasonable explanation. Sometimes the land calls me to come walk where coyotes sang last night, or to sit so still in a circle of young saplings that the deer will venture close, will hoof and snort, will look me in the eyes.

Sometimes it is the invisible that call. Fairies. Sprites. Spirits of the land, rising up to tell their stories. In just such a way the woods are calling me this morning. And I am resisting. It's no wonder I bargain with the land. It's no wonder I postpone and make my excuses when the invitation comes. It's scary to feel the tug, knowing that a little "vision quest" awaits me and the land itself will facilitate. So I resist, until I make my peace with the inevitable - surrendering to it a day or two later - walking off over the knoll, down to the creek, crossing it like a threshold on the land. Entering a kind of dreamtime.

The first occasion when I purposely took the land as my teacher was several years ago when I was afraid for my physical health. I headed out, allowing the place to choose me, stopping in a grassy clearing surrounded by young white pines and maples near a shale-y outcrop. The ritual defined itself as a wheel - with me at the hub turning slowly by degrees - pausing, breathing deep, eyes closed, gathering force, then opening them seeking wakefulness. Understanding. And release from fear.

I had asked the resident spirits to show themselves, to teach me about my fear, about being human. I was seeking so hard, blinded by expectation, that I looked right past the young white pine who stood before me. It was of no consequence to me. I was looking for something "important". A sign. Suddenly, by the grace of the land, my consciousness shifted and I looked *into* the young pine. In it I recognized a gentle teacher - and friend who had been waiting.

The land, then, can become a most trusted teacher - in a most non-ordinary way - when we pause on it, quiet ourselves, and open our senses. Within contextual agreement we open to a larger, unpre-scribed experience of what it means to be alive, to be human - individually wrapped quanta in an infinite, undulating, atomized reality. We're not *on* a magic carpet. We ARE the magic carpet.

It is a challenge for us to be still anywhere, but perhaps doubly so on the land. We sense innate possibilities which may feel dangerous. That's why we come to the land full of activity, ramrodding through with our chainsaws, our snowmobiles, bulldozers and all-terrain vehicles. Even our gentler busyness like hiking, cross-country skiing or wild-crafting will deny us full advantage if we don't pause, seek the stillness, and listen. We sublimate and sedate our emotions as we make our daily rounds, giving wide berth to our potential - staying clear of clarity.

So it's no wonder I resist the invitation and take great comfort in simple, orderly tasks like doing the dishes.

Parts II and III of this article are available upon request.



Guardian Spirit

Please Enjoy the Concise Essays Throughout this Newsletter in Response to *The Land as Our Teacher*

✿ I walked the Portuguese Camino last summer. One hundred miles from Porto, Portugal to Santiago, Spain. Walking 10 miles a day, you get in a rhythm. You feel the earth. You hear her teaching. She taught me about myself, how strong and resilient I can be. It was amazing, carrying everything I needed on my back: a change of clothes, a toothbrush, pair of shoes, water bottle. She showed me how she provides: signs and paths, fruit, and water, music through the trees along the way. Most extraordinarily, she taught me how connected I am, not only to her and those around me, but to all who have come before.

Walking is such a simple way to see the earth. With no separation, climbing hills, resting on her ground, drinking from her springs, as millions have done for millennia.

I heard an American, Buddhist monk propose a theory that she had once been human, giving of herself to feed her children, constantly consumed. Tired of the cycle of life and death that flowed through her, she made herself into a planet, still willing to open and share of herself. We are given the choice to learn from her, and to either consume her or partner with her.

May we awaken to her great teaching and learn to live in a way that honors our connection to her and with that connection, ourselves. ~ DAA

✿ I had some dying trees removed from the yard last year in the late winter. Some trees were left, and after raking the area I decided that it offered a setting for ferns which I hoped to transplant from the woods.

Come spring I was busy in the other garden beds tending the more "important" plants, and seemingly overnight a large drift of 2 foot tall white flowers were showing themselves in the fern bed. What were they, friend or foe? Weeds! How dare they ruin my plan for a bed of ferns!

As I started pulling the weeds, I noticed how delicate the white petals were, like a small ring of fringe with a yellow center. The stalks were sturdy, and easy to pull out. But, there were a lot of them so I decided to continue my task over the next several days.

As I worked my way to the middle of the imposter garden I noticed other plants; small pink and purple ones, and insects finding a new place to visit.

I was surrounded by gentleness, and it was so peaceful just sitting there admiring the instant wildflower garden that had appeared.

Throughout the summer and into the fall, I was treated to patches of yellow and purple among the white to appreciate and be with instead of destroy.

I look forward to the blooms returning for many years. ~ CCL

Gratitude is Abundance

Special Thanks to:

Lewis Steele for his pro bono donation of time to the benefit of Dionondehowa

Patti & Jim Evans for refreshing the Blue Bird boxes for a new season nesters

Arnie Friedman & Cecily Fortescue for their bequest in Geoffrey's name

Mike Conklin for his gifted problem-solving, his generosity of spirit and for joining us as an Advisor

CJ Davidsen for continuing to patrol for the Sanctuary during deer season and now joining us as an Advisor

David Hunt for his ongoing care of our beautiful Creek, his knowledge of plant communities and for joining us as an Advisor

Skosh Snyder for tuning us up for the TM Young Artists concert

Rey Wells for guiding our 2022 Bird Walk and our 2023 on May 13

Everyone who stepped-up for Dionondehowa: Paula Krieg, Nancy Krauss, Rebecca Brown, Mark Bascom, Mike Conklin, Robbie McIntosh, Siri Allison and Lindsay Fisk

Ideas to Consider

What happens if we don't go immediately to our phones for an answer? Is it sometimes luxurious to dwell in not-knowing? Where we can wonder and imagine. And anyway, why do we trust that our phones have the right answer?

How does our experience on the Sanctuary change when we leave our phone back at the barn?

How does our experience of nature deepen when we interrupt the impulse to **name** what we see or hear and instead let ourselves look, listen, and feel as though we do not know? To notice first.

Why do we not seem to question our relationship with the trash we "throw away" - that there is *no* "away". Planet Earth is a "closed system".

We Dedicate Our Efforts This Year to All Beings Kept in Cages

Dionondehowa's 2023 Calendar of Events

Thursday April 27	<i>Poetry at Greenwich Free Library</i> 7 - 9pm
Thursdays May 4, 11, 18, 25	<i>Writers Workshop Series with Bonnie Hoag</i> 6:30 - 9pm
Saturday May 13	<i>Bird Walk with Rey Wells</i> 9am - 12pm
Saturday May 20	<i>Creek Restoration with David Hunt</i> 9am - 4pm
Saturday May 27	<i>Conversation & Ceremony with The Foreboding</i> 1 - 4pm
Thursday June 1	<i>Writers Reading at the Greenwich Free Library</i> 7 - 9pm
Saturday June 10	<i>Geoengineering & The Water Cycle</i> 1 - 4pm
Sunday June 25	<i>Taconic Music - Young Artists Concert</i> 4pm
Thursdays July 13 - Aug 17	<i>Thresholds Series: Paths to Shamanic Perception</i> 6 - 9pm
Saturday August 12	<i>Writers Retreat</i> 10am - 5pm
Saturday August 26	<i>Introduction to The Abenaki Language with Jesse Bruchac</i> 1 - 4pm
Saturday September 9	<i>Being in Nature & The Nature of Being</i> 1 - 4pm
Saturday September 23	<i>Equinox Celebration & annual singing of The Rift</i> 1 - 4pm
October (TBD)	<i>Workday with Union College</i>
Every Wednesday	<i>Guided Visualization with Bonnie Hoag</i> 7 - 9pm

Visits to the Sanctuary by appointment are welcomed; please contact us at 518.320.0502 or dionondehowa@yahoo.com
And if you are curious about Echology, Howling or The Stone Mounds please give us a call.

☼ *Dionondehowa: Where Science and Spirit Communicate.* ☼

☼ Graceful curves captivate my attention. Spirograph-making machines were my first introduction to looping curls, which likely warmed me up for seeing the swirls I come across in nature. I stare at waterfalls and study tendrils of steam rising into the air, trying to make out the patterns of flows. Going on walks in the late fall, I collect tall grasses whose long dried-blades settle into meandering coils which stay still long enough for me to draw them.

During the years that I helped my children make sense of their math homework I discovered that the beloved curves that I find on the land can be described with equations, which inspired me to want to know more. Eventually, through the descriptive language of math, I now have developed a common way to think about the cycles of seasons, planets, and spiraling blades of grass. Having internalized this elegant understanding of curves, I better sense cyclical trends of my own life, leaving me feeling that, rather than life being a series of random moments, that each moment is part of a fathomable trend: a realization which gives me great comfort. ~ PBK

☼ I'd been waiting for many years for the opportunity to walk on the Sanctuary.

It came serendipitously on the Winter Solstice of 2022: a rare winter day with clear blue sky and bright white snow covering the ground.

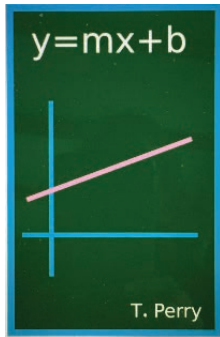
Our tracks across the snow followed the tracks of a Bobcat that followed the tracks of a Rabbit.

In the spirit of learning from the land, this reminded me of how all creatures - great and small - follow a similar path.

Not long after this observation we were greeted by the song of a nearby Owl, seemingly out of place on such a bright and sunny afternoon.

It felt like a welcoming hello, enhancing the brightness of the day.

A little later, as we followed our own tracks home, we wondered outloud had there been a message for us, beyond hello. ~ LTF



This excerpt from T. Perry's work-in-progress is included here not to endorse animal experiments but rather as a concisely brutal illustration of what we DO NOT mean by *Taking The Land As Our Teacher*.

Dragonflies are simple. They're about as simple as you can get, short gestation period, small number of neurons, big eyes, tiny brains. They have four wings and can catch small insects mid flight, but nobody understands how they do it. That's the mystery of dragonflies. Part of their control has to do with the structure of their wing joints, but how they go from seeing a fly in its randomized flightpath to figuring out how to catch it is still almost a complete unknown.

At the end of the day, you can probably think of neurons like a chemical version of a computer. Since dragonflies are so simple, scientists think that the algorithms running on their neuron computers are probably simple too. Simple in the context of neurons that is, which are incredibly complex even before you consider what happens once they start interacting with each other.

But if we could understand what those algorithms looked like, then that would mean all kinds of things. Even if we could only understand parts, it could revolutionize our understanding of neurons and brains, not to mention robotics and also dragonflies. It was interesting research, and important, too, but Lesley found it slightly offputting that the grant she worked under came from the Department of Defense. Don't worry though, her advisor had told her, the truth is that any real understanding, that the government might try to weaponize, is still a long, long way off. Very comforting. "Sounds like I'll have a great thesis then," she had responded. She knew she would though. And it was interesting research.

It was a good hunt. In total, she caught four stream cruisers, didymops transversa, three males and one female. Four dragonflies in a day. The didymops climb trees as larvae, and they're hard to find. They like lakes with sandy bottoms and just a little bit of current. When she was catching pondhawks, she only needed an hour or two, but catching the didymops could take a week. She'd go back out again tomorrow since she had such good luck today, but her next job was to put tiny electrodes into their heads and take super slow-motion videos of the specimen as it tried to catch flies. Out in the wild they were dragonflies. Once you caught them and brought them back to the lab, they were specimens. This was how they got their data. Everyone needs data.

✿ Whenever I see a classroom in television or movies the teacher is always at the front doing all the talking. The students are always sitting in rows silently, doing all the listening. This image however gets it all wrong. A great teacher is quiet. A great teacher wants their students to think, question, reflect, or investigate. The greatest teachers create an environment for students to learn in and then step back.

This is why the land has such an exciting potential to teach us. If you go out on the land and leave your phone or any other distraction behind you have a limitless opportunity to learn. The land doesn't speak at you. The land doesn't demand silence from you. The land will always provide an environment that allows you to think, question, reflect, or investigate. The land is the perfect place to learn if you want it to be.

One day at the Sanctuary I went off to the stone mounds. I left my distractions behind. It was just me on the land. I listened to my thoughts, my feelings, my impulses. I had an urge to be hidden and crawled underneath a pine tree. The fallen needles provided a soft bed for me to lie on. I drifted and became lost in my mind. When I opened my eyes I saw a shed snake skin next to me. It got me thinking about my life. About some of the changes I know are coming and that I will have to navigate. A sense of comfort came over me looking at the dried and twisted skin. I felt that like the snake the process of change will probably be painful and scary but ultimately I will make it and move on. Underneath the pine tree lying on the dried needles the land taught me a lot that day. ~ EJS

✿ About fifteen years ago, often overwhelmed with mid-life anxieties, I began walking a daily path through nearby woods. Each time, I would find a sense of peace while leaning back against one very large tree. Gradually, feeling a connection, I started reading about communing with plants and began approaching this tree with more awareness. Holding my hands a few inches from its trunk, I felt the push and pull of energy...-like breathing in and out, together. Asking and listening, offering and receiving, it is joyful to be opening to possibilities as our relationship unfolds. Curiosity, wonder, gratitude. ~ CBG



Finding Faces in Nature

If, like me, you easily see faces in nature you may have wondered why. Who is that, looking back at me?

I have a working theory... that Reality presents to us with the familiarity of a face to let us know that everything is sentient, that everything has consciousness, that - quite possibly - everything *is* consciousness.

~ BEH



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✧ Come to your senses at Dionondehowa! ✧



Geoengineering & The Water Cycle Workshop June 10 1 - 4pm

Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary & School, Inc. is a non-profit land trust located on 217 acres bordering the Battenkill (Dionondehowa before the Dutch came) in southern Washington County, New York State. While the Sanctuary serves as a refuge and recharge area, the School is dedicated to Nature Studies and to the Healing and Expressive Arts, using them to engender social and environmental responsibility, in an atmosphere both contemplative and joyful. The name Dionondehowa, pronounced dye-on-on-duh-how-uh, was first recorded in 1709 and is listed in Beauchamp's *Aboriginal Place Names of New York State*. It means "She Opens the Door for Them" and may have referred to the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee (hoe-dee-no-SHOW-nee) Confederacy.

In 2021, Vermont Public began to compile a list of Abenaki place names in the state. Since the Battenkill's source is near Dorset, VT, we inquired of Abenaki teacher Jesse Bruchac what the word Dionondehowa might be and with what meaning. TAWN TA ho WA - "someone opens something for someone". So the mystery remains. Who is this someone? What is opened? And for whom?