

# ECOTHERAPY NEWS

HEALING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE ...  
ECOPSYCHOLOGY IN ACTION ...  
PSYCHOTHERAPY AS IF THE WHOLE WORLD MATTERED ...

Spring 2012



PHOTO BY KATRINA DREAMER

HEALING THE RIFTS and attending to wholeness inform both ecotherapy and Occupy.

## Occupy movement's concerns connect to ecotherapy's goals

By Kristi Kenney

Since the last issue of Ecotherapy News, the Occupy Wall Street movement has swept the country and even the world, further linking protest movements and people across borders and nationalities. I have been caught up in the excitement and, as an ecopsychologist interested in social change, I have looked at the Occupy movement with interest. What has caught so many people's minds and hearts in this mass movement?

Wealth inequality and an increasing gap between rich and poor may have been the original impetus for the Occupy Wall Street movement. Indeed, this is still at its heart, yet there is also so much more to it. The rumblings I see coalescing in the Occupy movement come from a growing awareness and dissatisfaction with our increasing disconnection from each other, from a lack of a sense of agency and involvement, and even an awareness of our estrangement from the land. People are tired of feeling like pawns and of having no sense of connection with the world as it is. There is an innate pull to heal the rifts we see and attend to our sense of community, connection, and purpose.

It is here that I see how intertwined the impetus for ecopsychology and ecotherapy are with the Occupy movement. They are born out of a similar inclination to wholeness.

See OCCUPY on following page

For a free e-subscription to this newsletter contact [lbuzzell@aol.com](mailto:lbuzzell@aol.com). Publisher and executive editor Linda Buzzell, M.A., M.F.T., founded The International Association for Ecotherapy in 2002 as a virtual organization of psychotherapy clinicians, counselors, healthcare professionals, coaches, guides, students and educators who are practicing or teaching in the emerging field of ecotherapy. (Also known as applied ecopsychology.)

Critiques? Contributions? Reach layout and managing editor Nicholas Boer at [nickboer@yahoo.com](mailto:nickboer@yahoo.com).

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At Occupy movements around the country we have seen much of this in action. For example, I see a few key broad themes that Occupy and ecotherapy share:

### Many voices

From its start ecotherapy –and the many things we might name or relate to ecotherapy – have had many voices, often quite diverse and divergent, but each pointing towards somehow healing our relationship with the natural world. The Occupy movement is similar in that it also brings together many different voices. One of the fascinating things has been watching all the different signs people bring to Occupy events; from “We are the 99%” to “You can’t arrest an idea” to “I am very upset” and “This is not a protest, it’s a process”. As with the multifaceted issues and interests of the Occupy movement, there is no one clear “ecotherapy”. Rather, both are a manifestation of many voices; this diversity adds depth, texture, and strength to both movements.

### Direct engagement & participation

Ecotherapy has never been “from the top down” as have other forms of psychology or psychiatry. Ecotherapist and their clients tend to have more collaborative relationships than other counseling relationship. Direct engagement and participation are key to the work of ecotherapy. This is also true for the amazing things happening in the Occupy movement; the General Assemblies are just one example of the way Occupy encourages decentralized, grass-roots, direct participation from all involved. Both the work of ecotherapy and Occupy seem to emerge from the bottom up rather than the top down.

### Addressing the connection between inner and outer work

Ecopsychology was born out of the recognition that we can no longer do therapy or inner work in isolation from what is happening out in the world. The environment

Ecotherapy and the Occupy movement grow out of the same source; they are related manifestations of the same impetus to heal our troubled world and our often troubled selves.

around us affects our psychological state; conversely, our mental states influence how we treat the world around us. We must heal our relationship with the natural world in order to heal both self and planet. The Occupy movement has been surprisingly adept at engagement and awareness around the inner work implicitly involved in the outer work of social change. This is visible in the way people are breaking down social barriers and engaging on deeper levels within the dialogues and collaborative group work at Occupy and in the work of the “emotional medics” attempting to make sure people are grounded and aware of the ‘inner’ psychological issues that may come up in this ‘outer’ activist work. The inner and outer—individual change and social change—are engaged in both of the work of ecotherapy and the mass movement work of Occupy. Ecotherapy and the Occupy movement grow out of the same source; they are related manifestations of the same impetus to heal our troubled world and our often troubled selves. I hope that ecotherapy can catch on like wild fire in the same way that the Occupy movement has. There is much work to be done.

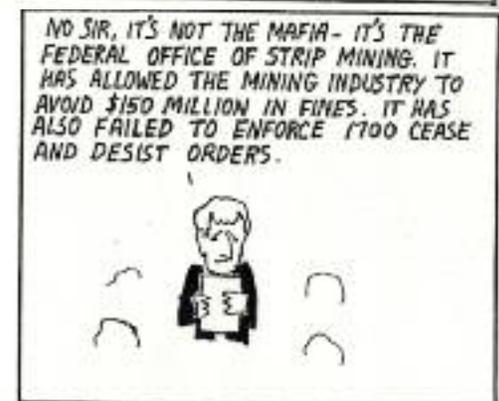
*Kristi Kenney is a certified ecotherapist with an MA in Integral Psychology focused on the intersection between psychology and activism. Please contact her via her website at [www.the-counterbalanceproject.wordpress.com](http://www.the-counterbalanceproject.wordpress.com).*

And now for something completely different:  
A comic strip-mining...

### SUBDIVERSION



by FREIS



*I had a dream*

# Sitting under a Ceiba tree with Dr. Martin Luther King

As an African American ecotherapist and experienced public health social worker I sometimes struggle with finding a way to describe ecotherapy to my community while also challenging my white colleagues to address the gaping blind spots in the ecotherapy conversation that rarely address or link the issues of social justice for people of color and poor people in the United States to the broader conversation.

I began thinking about this issue by remembering the lives and struggles of my ancestors. It is from this framework that I begin to see that the work of many African American ancestors was connected to repairing, healing and reconciling the complexities of our relationship to nature by focusing on healing relationships between human beings. It was with these thoughts on my mind that I fell asleep and began to dream.

In the dream I'm sitting under the canopy of a huge Ceiba tree when I see a man walking towards me. The Ceiba tree is sacred in African Traditional Religions, specifically the Lucumi and Orisa Diasporic traditions, as it is the place where Elders in the tradition hold special ceremonies for the ancestors.

As it is dream time my vision is slightly skewed but I see that he's sharply dressed in a crisp black suit. As he comes closer I see a huge red stain on the front of his chest. Then I recognize his face and it hits me: Dr. Martin Luther King is walking toward me. I introduce myself, asking him to join me on the Earth to feel the soil underneath our bodies and feet. Surprisingly, he sits. I notice there are lines on his face and he looks a bit weary. His suit is covered with what looks like ash, and the red stain is blood. But despite all this there is a sparkle in his eyes.

And then he begins to speak:



ECOSOUL  
J. Phoenix Smith

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*Phoenix Smith, MSW is an initiated Priest in an African Traditional Religion and founder of EcoSoul ([www.ecosoulwisdom.org](http://www.ecosoulwisdom.org)). She utilizes West African based ecospiritual practices, mindfulness based practices and nature to cultivate peace and well-being. She also has over 20 years experience working in community health programs in the United States.*

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USED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

*In 1968 I began to hear of the struggles of Black sanitation workers in Memphis, workers struggling for safe working conditions, for a fair wage, for respect and acknowledgement of their value as human beings. You see, some people have the erroneous belief that because these poor Black men handled trash and waste that they were also garbage. They were being told that their lives didn't have any value because like garbage they were disposable and as such should be satisfied with what they had and not stir the pot.*

*I went to the homes of these men and I noticed that they didn't live far from the trash dump, that they had beautiful houses and gardens but their homes*

*were surrounded by the waste of the entire city of Memphis. I began to think of the deep link between how trashing the Earth can easily to the ideology that people are trash as well.*

*What is the impact of this way of life and thinking on one's spirit? And then my heart feels heavy because I begin to think if I live in the community where the public dump is located not only will my physical health suffer but my mental health as well. I may begin to think of myself as*

*"garbage." I mean why not, when the leaders of my community dump their garbage in my backyard, my role as a sanitation worker is devalued. I receive the lowest wages and work in terribly unsafe working conditions. If you understand the link between what we are doing to poison the planet then you begin to awaken to the fact that in order to trash the planet you have to trash people.*

*I was committed to standing with the Memphis Sanitation Workers and their community. But little did I know that I would be assassinated in Memphis and that this would be my last civil rights campaign.*

*I took a deep breath taking in the weight of his words, and then I woke up.*

# Bridging earth and religion



**GREEN GULCH FARM ZEN CENTER** in Marin County features a thriving organic farm co-founded by Wendy Johnson in the 1970s. It is now cared for through an apprenticeship program.

— PHOTO BY LAUREL VOGEL

By Laurel Vogel

In October of 2011, I went to Green Gulch Farm and Garden for a two-month practice period.

A practice period is a rigorous form of scheduled Zen meditation and study, embedded in ritual and work. Green Gulch Farm is a monastery that upholds traditional Zen practice and is part of the mother-ship of Soto Zen in North America, the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC.org). It also features a famous model of small-scale organic farming co-founded by Wendy Johnson in the 1970s, which is now cared for through an apprenticeship program. One of the essential tenets of an ecopsychological perspective is to include the many contexts within which we live and heal. A multi-faceted approach that extends to relationships and surroundings is more comprehensive than 45 minutes of therapy in an office. Religious community and prac-

More than a few of those who identify as ecologically-minded are determined atheists ... Since my trip to Green Gulch, I am wondering if we are perhaps overlooking an untapped resource of strength and energy through this disassociation.

tice, however, are often left out of the ecopsychological dialogue.

More than a few of those who identify as ecologically-minded are determined atheists, who, in an attempt to

disassociate themselves from hypocritical and abusive behaviors of many religious groups, eschew religious practice or describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Since my trip to Green Gulch, I am wondering if we are perhaps overlooking an untapped resource of strength and energy through this disassociation.

Conversely, it seems religious groups have much to benefit from when they include earth-saving practices within their community service work because of how this inclusion increases their relevance in the overall socio-political context. In either case, we too often hear the bad press about religion, and not much about the ways in which religious community can and does serve and restore the earth.

The young farmers and gardeners at Green Gulch were whole-hearted enough in their Zen practice, and showed up for all of the sitting periods. Most of the ones I queried were not interested in pursuing priesthood, but

See *GREEN GULCH* on following page



GREEN GULCH from previous page



Photos from Green Gulch Zen Center  
—Mary Ann Sacksteder



were glad to be there with community as a backdrop for their farm or garden apprenticeship. While quite sincere in their Zen studies, some of them worked full-time on the farm (for a stipend), and did not formally partake in the practice period, instead supervising our small work groups. Many of the apprentices belonged to a group called the Ecosattvas, who met with some frequency over issues such as GMOs and sustainability. They were, in general, robust, calm, hard-working and very connected to the land.

Surrounded by protected wild lands, the setting of the gulch was greatly healing. Often, when we were just too overwhelmed, myself and my companions found ourselves on the trails leading to the beach, or hiking up into the less populous hills during our breaks. More than a few times my emotional upsets disappeared in the soil of the farm or garden as I pulled weeds and trimmed bushes. Clipping thyme and removing lavender from stems settled my mind and brought about a remarkable forgetting of my troubles.

The farm, the watershed, and Muir Beach were as much our companions as we were one another's. Sometimes windy, cold, rainy, or hostile; other times, warm, inviting, and restorative, nature practiced with us.

What most impressed me about my

period at Green Gulch was how our emotional healing seldom occurred in a traditional therapeutic dyad. While practice discussion can often mimic therapy, it was not therapy, and it existed within the framework of community where practice leaders worked and cooked and ate alongside students. Real life situations emerged and had to be encountered in a way that no therapeutic dyad could mimic—and at its best, Zen practice can be quite a good container for working through such situations.

Of course, as in any human situation, things were also swept under the rug or handled badly. Just when I grew certain the place was irredeemably dysfunctional, I would witness a deep repair between two people, or a selfless act, and I'd have to rethink my position. This was gritty, in-the-trenches reparative work—maybe even a kind of emotional triage. Quite possibly this was as good as it was going to get in a lived application.

I was left with the impression that if not for a teacher/student/sangha relationship and its way of transmitting these practices over the centuries (through forms, chants and tradition), this opportunity would not have presented itself. The infrastructure of committed groups of religious practitioners has created hospices, recovery groups and other

charitable activities simply because of their mutual intention and practice.

And most of the teachers at Green Gulch seem to be deeply interested in psychological study and nonviolent communication. Admittedly, more than some other religions, Zen Buddhism easily lends itself to earth-healing practices. But one must also understand that, like other religions, Zen Buddhism emerged during a highly patriarchal and feudalistic time period, and still carries the aroma of hierarchical power structures and outdated Japanese cultural relics that have lost relevance in the current context.

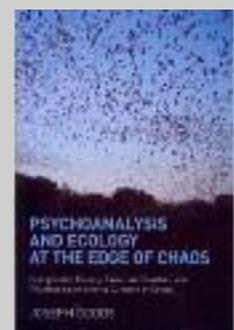
While SFZC has come a long way toward fostering an ecological consciousness, and developing checks against power abuses and sexual discrimination, it can still go farther with this; some entrenched blind spots remain. But, as consciousness rises among practitioners and as younger participants join in and insist on speaking up for themselves, I have faith that the necessary changes will manifest. And the world is, in fact, a better place because Green Gulch Farm and Garden is in it.

*Laurel Vogel, MA, received her masters in Ecopsychology and Contemplative Psychology at Antioch University in Seattle. She is currently director of Holding Earth Sangha near Seattle. [www.holdingearth.org](http://www.holdingearth.org).*

### Across the Atlantic

Here are three new “must-have” books in our field: “Vital Signs,” by Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totton; “Wild Therapy” by Nick Totton; and “Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos” by Joseph Dodds—all from the amazingly vibrant UK ecopsychology/ecotherapy community.

—Linda Buzzell



# The Zen of pruning

By Linda Buzzell

Winter and early spring are the seasons when many gardeners, orchardists and farmers—fancying themselves surgeons—approach their trees, shrubs and roses with knives, pruning shears and saws in hand, seemingly unaware that these plants are, as the Buddhists would say, sentient beings.

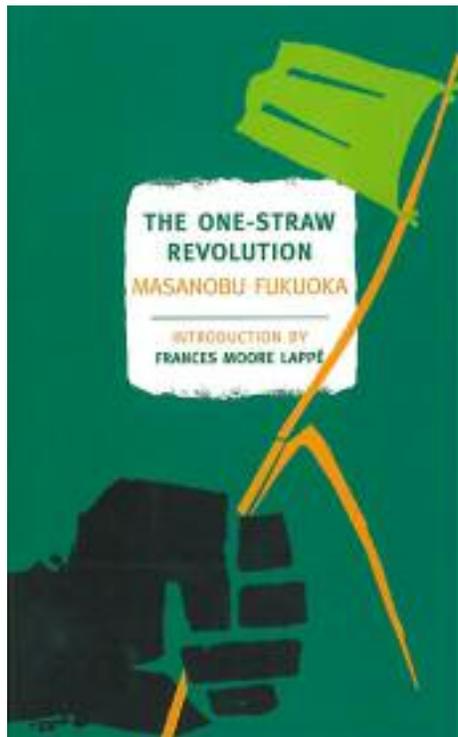
Most pruning is less a conversation between two of nature's creatures and more an act of ruthless domination under the guise of necessity. For some reason over the last few millennia we have come to believe that plants are unable to survive, bloom and fruit properly without human intervention. And while much of the painstaking breeding and hybridizing by our ancestors has provided us with an extraordinary variety of edible plants, it may be time to question some of the time-honored Western methods of plant care.

What's shocking to many people is that scientific research is beginning to reveal the utter lack of necessity for most of the one-sided surgery we call pruning. For example, a British study showed that rose bushes pruned with hedge clippers yielded as many flowers as those carefully manicured with hand pruners—and that roses left alone yielded still more!

Where did we get the arrogant idea that we know better than the plant itself how to maximize its productivity and health? Such a strange notion, when you think about it ... perhaps part of the larger delusion that nature is here merely for us to exploit without thought of the damage we may be doing to individual living beings or our biosphere.

So when might our pruning interventions actually be helpful rather than hurtful? And for whom?

The first principle of permaculture is "observe and interact"—admirable advice in the present instance. Taking time to respectfully see how the plant



This whole “do no harm” philosophy of pruning owes a great debt to Japanese philosopher-farmer Masanobu Fukuoka, author of a hugely influential book called “The One Straw Revolution”

itself intends to grow, bloom and fruit allows us greater insight into if, how, and when to intervene.

Vintage Gardens Nursery's Gregg Lowery, heritage rose expert extraordinaire, points out that mostly we prune for our own reasons that have nothing to do with the plant in question. It's a one way conversation. For instance, we may prune to make a plant look better to our eyes, our sense of what's beautiful or “tidy.” Or we may need to prune for space, when a tree or bush begins to outgrow its allotted place—probably because we made the mistake of not allowing for full, natural growth when we planted it—our error, not the plant's!

Rather than remove such a plant entirely, we may need to first apologize, and then gently shape it. Not just to suit our ideas of aesthetics (again, to please

us, not the plant), but hopefully to benefit both the plant and our space needs.

If so, we might want to observe that traditional pruning times and methods were usually designed for Northern conditions, to protect a tender plant from winter frosts. In a warm-winter climate this isn't necessary, and yet many of us who live in Mediterranean climate zones dutifully hack away at our roses in usually-wet winters, reducing them to stubs and weakening them with radical surgery. In fact, it's usually better to do any pruning for size in the summer if possible, when lack of rain may ensure more sanitary conditions.

This whole “do no harm” philosophy of pruning owes a great debt to Japanese philosopher-farmer Masanobu Fukuoka, author of a hugely influential book called “One Straw Revolution,” who advocated what he called “natural farming” or what some have dubbed “The Zen of Farming,” in which we refrain from digging, cutting or intervening unnecessarily in natural soil and plant systems which we truly don't understand. We also may need to refine our view of what's beautiful, to appreciate nature's own gardening style rather than the control-heavy European aesthetic.

If we do prune, perhaps we might initiate a respectful dialogue with our plants and trees, rather than a monologue. What might be helpful to the plant? Perhaps the removal of a dead or diseased limb? A limb that is rubbing against another in the wind? A sucker from below the graft (if we have a grafter plant) that is draining energy from the top growth?

Observation is the key. And listening. If we take the time to really get to know our plants, they will guide us in our care for them.



Photo by David Hawgood used under a Creative Commons License  
**A WEEPING** weeping willow after aggressive pruning

# Heal by healing: Animal care=animal therapy

By Karen Diane Knowles

**E**cotherapy was established in recognition that human health declines when deprived of meaningful relationship with other than human nature and that the range of psychological malaises affecting so many people today derives from living as if apart from the planet. Ecotherapy, then, asserts that reconnection with other than human nature provides a profound healing to the human psyche.

Ecotherapy is about being with nature without exploiting nature for our human benefit. When ecotherapy is not grounded in ecocentric philosophy, the understanding that humans are only a part of the vast universe of nature, not the center of it, it merely becomes yet another tool of anthropocentric thinking. We end up just using nature, helping ourselves at the expense of others.

Rather than cutting down a tree so we can make a fire to get warm, we sit among and with the trees with the intent of being in service to the values and needs of other species and let this communion generate warmth from within. In animal-involved therapy, human healing comes of the caring for and service to another being. By working compassionately with animals, ecotherapists can relieve the angst, helplessness, and despair of compassion overload—in both their clients and themselves.

Animal-assisted activity (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) are ecotherapy modalities that rely on our natural (biological, evolutionary) bond with nonhuman animals and the healthful and healing effects of relating with them. The practice of AAA/T spreads as more people and institutions recognize these healthful effects: physical



Photo courtesy of Karen Diane Knowles

health (in movement therapy and good ol' healthful exercise), and psychological/emotional health (through nonjudgmental support and loyal companionship—with the biological effects of oxytocin

sweetening the pot).

The burgeoning of AAT brings with it some disturbing attitudes revealed in the characterization of animals as therapeutic tools. Clearly, when an animal is considered a tool, his or her individual subjectivity and agency are not being respected. This is unethical, especially from the point of view of ecopsychology. Further, when the wellness of an

animal co-therapist is neglected, the purported therapeutic value to the human client is turned on its head. Owing to a recently discovered neuronal mechanism (mirror neurons), we really do experience another's reality—painful or pleasurable, physical or emotional. From this we realize that the well-being of animals has a direct effect on ecotherapy clients—and vice versa. We also need to consider that since nonhuman animals have these

mirror neurons too, when animal therapists are regularly exposed to people in pain, it takes a toll on them.

We can work with animals not to manipulate but to nurture; when we give them what they need and value, we reap reciprocal benefits. Consider horticultural therapy. We speak of cultivating and nurturing a garden, giving it what it needs and when it needs it, facilitating natural processes—rather than using chemical manipulation; rather than going against nature, we respect the agency of plant life and soil.

When we nurture the soil, we are rewarded with harvest and nutritional bounty.

Some programs do have at their core rescued animals paired with

troubled humans who come to know healing through identifying with and caring for these animals. Animal care as an ecotherapeutic practice changes the kind of focus put on animals in animal-involved therapy, from an object for healing humans to the subject of healing by humans—with the result of *mutual* healing! Billions of animals suffer and die as part and parcel of our society's disconnect from nature. Being with animals is a way of being with nature and healing animals is a way of healing nature; this brings healing to us. We can help ourselves (therapeutically) in the process of helping them.

In "Ecotherapy: Healing With Nature in Mind," Gay Bradshaw's essay *Transformation through Service: Trans-species Psychology and its Implications on Ecotherapy* emphasizes the importance of service to other species. This is essential for them, for us, and for the planet. As more comes to light about who we *all* are as animal kin, our practices need reflect a higher and deeper consciousness. "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together."

Karen Diane Knowles, MA is an interpreter at UC Berkeley and a faculty member of JFKU's ecotherapy program; she authored "Tuning In to Terra through Our Animal Kin" in "Rebearths: Conversations with a World Ensouled" (2010).

**Animal care as an ecotherapeutic practice changes the kind of focus put on animals in animal-involved therapy, from an object for healing humans to the subject of healing by humans—with the result of mutual healing.**

# Cultivating an intimate relationship with place

By Katrina Martin Davenport

Establishing regular, sustained relationship with natural places can help us cultivate shifts in consciousness. I witnessed this firsthand as the director of the TerraPlaces project, a nine-month exploration supported by the Powers of Place Initiative that looked at our relationship with nature.

From July 2010 and April 2011, participants chose a place in nature to sit with as often as possible for at least five minutes at a time.

Karen Jaenke, PhD, director of the Ecotherapy Certificate at JFKU, had a profound experience with this exploration. She chose a spot next to a creek downhill from her home. One evening, not long after she spent time at her spot, a storm blew through and knocked down several trees.

"When I went back the next day at lunchtime, an oak tree had literally fallen across my path on the way to my sitting place," Jaenke said.

Her landlady removed the fallen trees, creating a dramatically new space; it went from being shady and wooded to sunny and open. Jaenke noticed how the area had been deeply affected by sudden oak death. "This experience was quite dramatic for me. I had to work with what death in this spot, and by extension death on the planet, means," she said. "I felt depressed spending time in the spot after it first happened.

"After a couple of weeks, I realized that nature was already beginning her rejuvenation process; that other species were already and would continue taking advantage of the void left by the oak trees. The relative proportion of various species in the area would change over time, with less oak trees, perhaps more bay and pine, more low growth shrubs, etc. Yet nature's green presence would continue. This was an amazingly liberating realization for me."

Overall, participants' experiences in the project surpassed expectations. People experienced expanded states, increased intimacy with nature, deep



Photos by Katrina Dreamer

community building, and profound internal shifts. They began to spend more time outside and gained an increased awareness of their surroundings. These changes happened within a few weeks for many, and the longer individuals participated, the more they shifted.

Craig Chalquist, PhD, creator of JFKU's Ecotherapy Certificate, and I created the project to train people in terrapsychological inquiry and make the practice accessible to everyone, not just psychologists and therapists. What is terrapsychological inquiry? Terrapsychology "studies how the patterns and shapes and features of the human and nonhuman world sculpt our ideas, our habits, our relationships, and even culture and sense of self" (Chalquist, 2009). Through terrapsychological inquiry, one examines

the relationship between themselves and a chosen landscape, taking into account the internal and external shifts that happen as a result of entering into that relationship.

Terrapsychological inquiry can fit quite easily into your ecotherapy practice. You can ask clients to choose a spot in nature special to them, even a corner of their backyard or a bench in a local park. It's key to choose an easily accessible spot so people will be more likely to continue the practice. Ask them to choose a specific amount of time they'll spend there, from five minutes to an hour or longer. Then have them decide how often they'll visit.

Once the framework is set, your client can begin visiting their place. There are several things they can do there:

Ask clients to choose a spot in nature special to them, even a corner of their backyard or a bench in a local park. It's key to choose an easily accessible spot so people will be more likely to continue the practice.

See *PLACE* on following page



PLACE from previous page

Observe with all their senses: what do they see, smell, taste, feel, and hear?

Take inventory of all the plants and animals present. Close their eyes and witness how their body feels being there. Look at a different spot each time they visit. Entering into an imaginal dialogue with the spirit of the place.

After they've done this for several days, they can add in other aspects, like watching their dreams for themes related to their place, researching the history, biology, ecology, and geology of the place, looking for synchronicities, and tracking how their internal states shift.

Encourage your clients to see their place as an animate being, one that has agency and a voice. Ask them to let their preconceptions about the place fall away so the spirit of the place can emerge. And remind them to give questions higher priority than answers.

Another important piece to this practice is keeping a journal. Writing down observations and recording the information gathered is vital because it helps people see how this practice affects them. In addition, having one place where all the research about the place is collected will help your client see the greater picture emerging from their practice.

*Katrina Martin Davenport, MA, has a degree in Consciousness and Transformative Studies. She is a published author, photographer, speaker, and teacher, and she writes about the connections between earth, dreams, and the ancestors at [katrinadreamer.com](http://katrinadreamer.com).*

# Starting ecotherapy program transforms coordinator's life

By Lynnea Brinkerhoff

I am about to head for the United Nations to forward plans for the first *Biodiversity Summit* in Indonesia. The intention is to identify the best practices across the globe to balance environmental needs with the interests of global business. Right now I am on the way to complete my next phase of training as an Epona-based Equine Coach. And next month I will attend a retreat and training where I will explore my own troubled adolescence as part of the process of creating healthy rites of passage that support teenage girls in their coming of age. All of this and more is the result of my commitment last year to create a first-class Ecotherapy program on the East coast. That devotion has utterly changed my life in ways I could never have imagined.

Not quite two years ago I realized that I felt trapped in a perfect life that left me feeling over-civilized and embarrassingly dependent on the comforts of the 'indoor life.' The golden handcuffs that Dr. Michael Cohen talks about in his '*no child left inside*' crusade had me by the wrists. I was soul sick, plagued by a sense that I had 'bought in' to a system that caused me to lose my bearings and to strive for a success that had no real meaning for me. As I sat with the discomfort in my body, I committed to re-imagine my life from a blank screen, to catch a glimpse of the natural cycle of life, the myriad hues



**THE AUTHOR** and pioneer of an East Coast ecotherapy program sets off on one of her many adventures.

and the tidal shifts, that might help me reconnect with the deep yearning in my soul.

Raised in a home where business was the only viable career path, I had created a successful life that left me hungry for something more. I wondered if it was really acceptable, at the tender age of 45, to turn my gaze to what had always held my heart. Could I follow that call to something that would help me feel at home again,

See *TRANSFORM* on following page

something that reminded me of when I felt most alive, most connected and most engaged? What came to mind were the times on the farm tending animals and weeding the vegetables, the horseback riding, the north woods camping, the mountain climbing and the kayaking, all nestled among a loving community. The day I answered that question for myself, was the day I naively thought I coined the term "Ecotherapy." Only later did I learn that Father Howard Clinebell had coined the term many years before. But I had touched the same yearning as he. Those yearnings lead me to Craig Chalquist, PhD, who helped me understand the current state of Ecotherapy in America, the West coast of the United States that is. It wasn't long before I ran the idea of a certificate program past some colleagues at The

Graduate Institute in Bethany, CT who embraced it whole-heartedly. The Chancellor, Dr. A. Harris Stone, started the first environmental science program in the US in the 1960s at Southern Connecticut State University. Our proposal was accepted by the state in record time and we were off and running. In my enthusiasm I believed we could move from concept to initial cohort (I think of them as *co-hearts*) in just 90 days. Now nine months later the job is clear: we must help engender a movement that will carry this wave of energy forward.

*Ecotherapy and Cultural Sustainability*, as the program is called, is not yet a recognizable term in New England. Yet when the concept is presented it stimulates genuine interest and real excitement. Our visibility is growing as we are mentioned in nature-dedicated magazines, host introductory evenings, reach-out to Community Healthcare facilities, Eldercare associations, the Visiting Nurses Association, and others. In this process we are gaining 'internal champions' who are excited by these non-invasive, restorative techniques aimed at individual and community well-being.

The program is gaining traction. We have 13 distinguished faculty members, growing enlistment and numerous interested professionals looking for a line of sight to a new career in an



**THE AUTHOR** Lynnea Brinkerhoff, with her PhD advisor last summer as she was doing research of sustainable farms and "social permaculture" in Massachusetts

emerging, sustainable economy. We also have a series of special venues and extraordinary farms where we can host monthly sessions, and a well developed curriculum with both breadth and depth.

Seeing the light go on in the faces of those touched by this work buoys my spirits. Like water weaving a beautiful and well-worn pattern through the rocky shore, I expect that one day others will see the idea of Ecotherapy as a pattern that was present from the start. As we weave this timeless and simultaneously new pattern together, in spite of all its twists and turns, the support of all of those who love our planet and recognize its beauty and fragility provide me with what I have named 'Radical Nourishment.' It is a

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nourishment that reaches all the way down to the depths of our souls, that reminds us of nature's great bounty, that mirrors the workings of our inner life and that points to a magnificent future that is truly worthy of our efforts.

**DAY 1 SOLO**

*Pieces strewn about...right where God left them*

*We are invited now to circle around  
Like a great hawk and swoop in to repair  
The failing nest*

*It must be sturdy if we are to fly free from it...with a good push for take off  
The nest hosts pieces of our lives, sometimes clumsily woven in  
Sometimes elegant in the story they weave  
Nonetheless, this is my nest*

*I shall work with God to repair it as a partner and steward of my own gift of life  
And then when it is time, together we will fly  
Each a wing on either side of the mystery*

— Lynnea Brinkerhoff, written during a visionquest facilitated by ecopsychologist John Davis through Lost Borders School

# Reintroduction of wolves dramatically improves Yellowstone Park's ecosystem

By Justin Hanlon

In 1995 the re-introduction of the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) to the Yellowstone biome met with much resistance from the cattle industry. There were threats by local cattle ranchers to seek out and systematically eliminate the wolves because they were a perceived threat to the surrounding cattle ranch. (The majority of nearby ranches do not have so called "free range" cattle, which itself is unnatural, creating pretty much a buffet for predators.) The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made all sorts of promises of compensation if the cattle industry would wait and see what the results were, assuring the cattle industry that there was sufficient Elk (*Cervus canadensis*) in Yellowstone and the wolves would not need to wander outside of the biome. Today Yellowstone is a model of success that other groups worldwide are examining as a model in predator reintroduction programs.

The wolves were re-introduced in 1995 after being extirpated (extinction on a localized scale) from the park around 1926. In her 1996 book "The Yellowstone Story—A History of Our First National Park," Aubrey Haines suggests the decline in wolves was due to pressure from cattle and livestock industries that forced the U.S. Biological Survey (predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to eliminate the wolves in the park. The U.S. Biological Survey utilized the U.S. Army in hunting down and killing the wolves in Yellowstone. From 1926 to the 1990s the elk population had exploded, having catastrophic effects on Yellowstone's flora: The elk's diet is Cottonwood (*Populus monilifera*) and Aspen Spruce tree (*Populus tremuloides*). This led to insufficient growth which led to decreased productivity among beavers and many avian species forcing them to leave the park. In addition, over the generations of the wolves' absence, the elk lost their instinctive fear of the wolves.



Photos of wolves in Yellowstone Park provided by the National Park Service.

It appears that now, some sixteen years after their reintroduction, the wolves are having a dramatic, yet positive effect on the Yellowstone biome; the elk population has gone from 15 thousand to six thousand. Decreased elk populations have given rise to an increase in the health of the cottonwood and spruce. Due to the tree growth, various species of birds have returned to Yellowstone as well as an increased number of beaver colonies, which in turn bring about a healthier riparian hydrology that is bountiful with fish and waterfowl.

In addition the coyote population has decreased as a result of the returning wolves, which led to an increase in smaller mammals to populate the park and serve as prey to larger mammal and avian predators.

We know that reintroduction of predators does have its risks, however we also know that it has therapeutic value (notice I say "we know" as opposed to "we think" or the dubious Fox News



mantra "some may say"). We know because Yellowstone is proof of how symbiotic nature is. A walk, hike, run or bike through a biome abundant in flora and fauna creates an ecosystem that is far more emotionally satisfying than doing any one of these activities in an urban setting.

Justin Hanlon is a Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biologist who lives in Seattle with his wife Lejla, son Tahir and dog Maury.

## The Woodpecker

*You have come into my life.  
You peck on the wooden eaves every day  
calling for attention.  
I know you want to nest above my bedroom.  
It's all right.  
We can share this space.*

*The Woodpecker has relocated to my place.  
You work hard to prepare the ground for your staying.  
You do not want to nest in the tree trunk,  
but to live closer to this fellow human.  
I hope we would not subsume.  
before weaving our inter-dependence...*

*I heard you peck the wooden eaves above my altar.  
You were not very far...  
Rolling up my window blinds, I invited sights into my life.  
You worked outside, I inside.  
You flew to the Redwood tree in front of me,  
holding vertically to the tree trunk, wanting to be seen  
by this fellow human.  
I am captivated by your presence.*

*Splendor red crest Woodpecker,  
Your crimson crown denotes your power,  
an honorable distinction of your legendary devotion.  
You draw my attention...  
Your eyes are sharp and brilliant  
I guess you are keen and diligent.  
I am ready to listen...*

*"The foundation is here," says the Thunderbird.  
It is safe to let go of your protective layers.  
Be open to your secret wonders.  
Follow through to your success.  
Before being crowned by your new wreath,  
Find your own rhythms to cultivate your endowments.  
Other birds claim their territory by singing.  
I claim mine by drumming.  
I am destined to bring the human heart  
and the earth rhythms back to your life.  
The beats have always been alive.  
We sometimes forget to realize.  
Stop for a moment as you read.  
And listen into the rhythms of life, indeed.  
Car tires slap the concrete.  
The driver hitting the brake makes the car breathe.  
Birds tweet.  
There's the humming buzzing  
wing clapping sound of insects.  
Trees rattle the leaves on their branches.  
Whispering thieves...are the voices of your critics...  
who take your presence away...  
Stop for a moment to listen to your deepest needs...*

—Lily Truong

*I will repeat the message every time we meet,  
when you hear me loudly peck wood.  
I am strong-minded, and rarely changing course.  
When a task is accepted, I'll complete.*

*Please be reminded  
Don't be wrapped up in mental and spiritual activities  
Wake up to your new mental faculties  
What is here in your physical reality?  
Listen to your body.  
What is it telling you?  
What are its sounds?  
What does it need you to do?*

*I will talk to the Thunder God  
Not to strike too hard when he wants you to wake up;  
especially when rainy season comes.*

*I know you are alone.  
It wouldn't be good to startle and fall.  
I would want you to feel safe from within.*

*As the oracle of Mars (Ares)  
I would want to remind you that  
What drives War is Love.  
Mars can't be separated from Venus.  
Your warrior spirit is married  
to the Love for the humanness  
You can find yourself in that sacred union.  
Reach within...they are not dormant.  
Neither are they asleep, nor are they hidden.  
Ride the drumbeats  
of your throbbing heart and that of the earth.  
Dive deeply into your search.*

*Excavate your psyche  
with sincere nonjudgmental curiosity.  
Peck away at deceptive realities...  
until the truth is revealed...  
but not to attach to what is real.  
Continue to peel  
hidden layers of illusions.  
Travel willingly into various dimensions,  
space opening and time bending.  
Until you meet yourself from within.*

*Discernment it seems  
to be what you would need to learn.  
Commitment and hardworking are of concerns,  
Embrace your goals...  
With wide-open arms...  
It is because life cannot be planned.  
So there is no use to be clingy.  
What valuable is your commitment to be..."*

*It's believed that Thunderbirds come  
at the same time as carpenter ants.  
Can we all be friends?  
We are different, yet the same...*

*We can work together to pursue our goals...which will be obtained...*