

The Wonder of It All!
The Depth of Our Belonging to the Evolving World

Workshop III: Living the Emerging New Story

My New Story Journey – The Work of Transitioning to Live it.

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I was born on an organic farm, one of 5 kids. My father had a prescient passion to raise unadulterated food, an idea that germinated the modern organic farming movement about 75 years ago.

On our farm, we grew a mountain of compost, an enormous vegetable garden, a herd of high-butterfat, gorgeous Brown Swiss cows, pigs, chickens, horses, and we installed a huge stone grinding mill for our organic wheat flour. However this noble vision that my father had was a losing a struggle as an ongoing enterprise. In reality, our organic farm was way ahead of its time, a dis-organized money sink, and my parents were not able to keep either the farm's operation or their marriage together. At 12, I felt like an irredeemable, country bumpkin, social miss-fit.

But, even though there was much familial heartache and distress involved in our farming endeavor, the innate wisdom and beauty of an organic farm had an intractable truth that has stuck with me in mysterious and durable ways ever since. This truth has been a strange yet constant guide for me. Despite our family's failed farm, the unfathomable beauty and mystery of its warm summer alfalfa field, and its starry, cosmic expanse above endure..... these things indelibly 'zapped' me. The universe I was looking at was clearly an emanation of God for me. Without knowing the term, **'panentheism'** became my religion. The mysterious, all-encompassing beauty of an alfalfa field resonates to this day. I experience sacred presence in both natural and manmade creativity.

Nevertheless, the bright lights of civilized urban life and designing buildings became a more powerful attraction.

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So, following my childhood penchant to become an architect, I fortuitously entered a graduate school uniquely steeped in the study of ecological planning, U Penn. I found myself working intuitively with the dynamic of natural, social and manmade systems. Designing multifamily housing that sustainably fits into a land use or urban plan – contributing *in an organic and marketable way* to the larger environment - became my driving impulse. But becoming a multifamily developer in a culture that glorifies suburban castles with acreage is a hard slog. So, despite the fact that development- like organic farming- has sometimes turned out to be an emotionally punishing and a once-bankrupting path, it has also permitted my husband and me to be pro-active builders embedding our values in buildings more than architects normally can.

Along the way, as an adult, I found that Quaker spirituality responded to my search for a spare spiritual practice that included the search for right living.

I had come to see the built environment – primarily multifamily structures- as agents for evolving social and natural relationships. Building agglomerations – towns and cities - are a human encrustation of Earth. Well-designed and located urban buildings can become the equivalent of both ‘societal artistry, and its compost’ – mysteriously nurturing life patterns in a building structure that uses energy resourcefully and enables an enriched and generative interaction among its inhabitants. Organic building. Without a scientific defense of this proposition, I believe that any building can somehow be measured by how well it integrates its location with mechanical/material/structural and **social systems** and can thereby somehow bubble up societal creativity and contribute to healthy human evolution. *I believe this habitation-system-‘truth’ expands to all creation.*

Thankfully, the New Story group formed and has become an intellectual and spiritual touch stone: I now see that all creation is connected in to a great, infinitely complex, exquisitely beautiful, organically inter-related system. Love is integral, to the whole at an atomic level. And, for me, the joy and sense of purpose in life is found when I’m feeling that what I’m doing is more aligned with it all. I desire to participate in a healthy, generative fashion. Impossibly idealistic, I yearn to participate in making peaceful, resource-efficient environments with clean air and water, and good work for healthy communities.

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How can I align myself with the natural systems that have nurtured a healthy balance in Earth's evolution over millions of years? It's just a 'blink' of human development that's now driving Earth's climate amuck. As we humans are a conscious part of Earth's great systems, I've come to believe that it is my absolute obligation to **bend the trajectory** our species is now on with what small might I haveto visibly, audibly, live and act in the most cosmically aligned way I know how.

So, knowing my CO2 footprint is still painfully too large, I struggle with my hypocrisy: how to live, work, play, eat, grandparent, and drive as resource-consciously as I can? How to make the switch is a first world dilemma. (Our car, a VW has turned out to be a polluter, so we've now leased an Electric Chevy Volt) We eat organically, live in a small house in a co-housing community we were the development consultants for, (but we also have a vacation house), we build energy efficient (but not passive energy) buildings. I work with Quaker Earthcare Witness to support a carbon pricing bill in Massachusetts (that takes years to pass!), I write and call legislators whenever possible, but the political process is painfully slow. I participate in climate demonstrations as often as possible, bring my grandchildren, a feel-good but insufficient catalyst for change. I have committed non-violent civil disobedience against the Spectre pipeline, and was arrested in a gentle, non-newsworthy fashion. I feel acute guilt about flying, but do so, nevertheless. So I assuage my guilt by supporting an African reforestation project as generously as I can. **We know that of this is enough. (Bernie?)**

So I've come to see that there's no piece of my life that is not part of a system that is either helping or hindering Earth's health. I can try to live in the Light, to live the New Story; it's an ongoing **alignment** effort to act it, write it, speak it, sing it, build it, and take it to the streets. And I keep the faith that somehow, in the greater scheme of things, the effort will make a difference. It feels **just OK** to know that I'm groping along with you and others through a thick fog, toward the Light of right alignment with the age-old principles of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness/Love.