

ON BECOMING INHABITANTS

IF the modern world, in the persons of those who live "at the height of the times," is now in the process of recognizing that our civilization, of which we were recently so proud, is based on wrong assumptions and rapidly moving toward collapse, it is natural to ask what one can do to turn this process around. First, many will say, you must turn yourself around, but this is not saying enough, or further explanation of turning around is required. Not just oneself, but many fundamental facilities for life have to be turned around, too. If you live in a big city, and are poor, just to feed yourself and your family seems full of what we are told—and can see for ourselves—are offenses against life. Just reading the papers is enough to destroy most of one's faith in government and politicians. Moreover, we can see that revolutions of the sort we have had in the past are not the answer. Where, then, is the action, or where might it begin?

Not just city life, such as it is, but rural existence is also a shambles. Both the small farm and the family farmer are becoming sentimental relics. And even if the food grown by the big farmers is still good enough to eat—we are, most of us, still eating it—by the time it is delivered, through various intermediate hands, to the shelf in a supermarket, its freshness is likely to be gone and its price higher than ever. Industrialism and its economic necessities have left their mark on everything we need. How can anyone begin to change all that? Even well-meaning presidents fail when they attempt to introduce basic reforms, just as Jimmy Carter's inglorious attempt to discontinue eighteen ineffectual and wasteful dam and water projects that were in the federal works. It took years to prove to him that not even a President could put a stop to "politics as usual." "That," a sardonic Congressman remarked, "is the democratic process at work."

There are, however, a few individuals of vision who have decided to virtually ignore politics—especially at the national level—and to devote their efforts to direct action of a sort. One of these is a bioregionalist, Peter Berg, who presents his case for what he calls "A Life-Place Politics" in the Summer 1986 issue of *Raise the Stakes*, the triannual review of the Planet Drum Foundation (P.O. Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131). It is a long and well-developed article which should be read in its entirety, so here we'll simply quote from a concluding argument. He says:

There were no unsolvable physical mysteries during the industrial era, and Nature was thought to be merely physical. Physics, chemistry and engineering could unravel any puzzle for what was thought to be the inevitable betterment of humankind: produce anything imaginable, restructure any environment, remove any amount of a wanted resource, and exterminate or discard anything unwanted. If it came to the point that doing these things created new problems (considered a doubtful outcome for the greatest part of the period), there were still ways that were believed capable of restoring an upper human hand: (a) just be thankful for what progress has been made and accept living with whatever negative consequences come with it; (b) stop doing something that is known to be disastrous and start doing some new thing whose effects are completely unknown; and (c) apply more industrial techniques to solve problems brought through industrialism in the first place. The result of all this self-destruction? We live with poisons up to the waist in a junkyard of breaking machines.

More environmental agencies won't ultimately relieve our situation. They would only be further appendages of a political core that is welded to industrialism itself. We need a core based on the design of Nature instead, from watershed to bioregion and continent to planetary biosphere. Is it self-defeating to avoid established governments other than immediately local ones? Not if we want to anticipate a society whose direction already lies outside those

institutions. We need to uncover and follow a natural design that lies beneath industrial asphalt. . . .

On a farm in the country or in a city apartment, we're all completely enmeshed in the web of life. We can't know all of the details of all the connections. Bioregional politics doesn't try to overcome the mystery, it is aimed toward making a social transition so that we can live with that mystery. Can we stop tearing the web apart and consciously build a role as partners in all life? We better, and we can by beginning where we live.

We were going to stop quoting Peter Berg here, but there are some paragraphs in the body of his article that will give a fuller idea of what he and some others are working for. He says:

It goes without saying that creating a new political framework is difficult and that it will inevitably be seen at first as too radical (with some justification, considering the snaggy frustrates and boilingly ambitious types it may attract). The only reason to bother is to gain something that is absolutely necessary but can't be achieved through existing means. The question becomes: Is there any other way to preserve life places? Aside from immediately local ones, governments and dominant political parties aren't open to accepting sustainability as a serious goal. They seem barely able to hear outcries against obvious large-scale destruction of the planetary biosphere from merely reform-minded environmentalists now, and aren't likely to take bioregionalists seriously until the District of Columbia itself becomes totally uninhabitable. Government has forfeited the defense of life-places to the people who live in them. . . .

Active bioregionalists don't merely raise their hands to vote on issues but also find ways to interact positively with the life-web around them. They work with neighbors to carry out projects and build a bioregional culture together. Put another way, they are the working practitioners of what academics and others term "a paradigm shift." There is a very wide range of ways to express life-place consciousness and no need to exclude anyone's creativity in doing so, but bioregionalists do share a common interest in actually applying their convictions to local situations (in addition to having opinions about more distant ones). Their political activity is an extension of the work they do. They have a hands-on identity that is compatible with the goals of restoring natural systems, meeting basic human needs and creating support for individuals.

We turn now to an interview with Wes Jackson by the editor of *In Context*, Robert Gilman. *In Context* is published quarterly by the North Olympic Living Lightly Association (P.O. Box 215, Sequim, Washington 98382). Wes Jackson runs the Land Institute near Salina, Kansas, as most readers know. Gilman questioned Jackson about the progress of the idea of sustainable agriculture. At one point he asked Jackson when he would feel ready to be Secretary of Agriculture, and got this reply:

Marty Strange was asked that question once, and said [if he had that job] the first thing he would do is fire everybody in the Department of Agriculture and then resign, because that's not where the decisions are made. I don't know whether he believes that or whether he was just being funny, but the fact of the matter is that now, it is not where most of the decisions are made. It's in our export policy; it's in the whole system. It doesn't make sense to talk about changing agriculture or changing farming unless we're willing to talk about changing the society at large. What's happening to the farmer and the farm is simply a faint foreshadow of what's to come for the culture at large. The point is that I wouldn't be willing to even think about being a Secretary of Agriculture in the context of the present situation, because that isn't where the action is. I think there are any number of people that are effectively bringing about the necessary changes in agriculture, and not a single one of them is on a federal payroll. There are no federal people at this permacultural conference [where the interview took place], for gosh sakes. Why shouldn't the USDA have representatives at the permaculture conference if they're really serious? They're not. I'll bet you that the State of Washington doesn't have any State Agriculture people here. There may be a person or two from Pullman, but I'll bet they're here for other reasons.

Gilman asked Jackson about the individuals who are now making effective change, and in reply Jackson named several farmers, mentioned the New Alchemy Institute, and called attention to the Amish, pointing out that the manufacturers of pesticides and herbicides get no business from these people, and remarking that Ag Extension Agents "are nothing more than traveling salesmen for the chemical companies."

Once again Gilman raised the question of what Wes would do if he were Secretary of Agriculture. He replied that it isn't the family farm that needs help or money, but that the rural communities need restoration. Then he went on:

. . . every time I was invited to give an address as Secretary of Agriculture at a major academic institution, I would ask the faculty and the administration how many of them were prepared, or knew how to design a curriculum that would teach people to go home, to become "homecomers." In other words, what kind of an education do we need if we are homecomers? What I would hope to challenge them on is that what's needed is a lot of traditional subject matter in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in the sciences. To live and work in a community, it will have been useful to have had some time in a university where you studied, say, some of Shakespeare or Dante, and to gain some insights into the nature of the human. Or you study the Odyssey and you realize that there is a rich thing here for agriculture, Odysseus returning from the cave of Calypso to his wife Penelope to grow old and farm and die. When they then go back into those communities, they are carrying those images in their heads and can see that yes, here is a Lady Macbeth situation. To think about the Odyssey and what it means to be a farmer has as much importance as a course in soil science. I think that what we are talking about is using education for nothing less than the making of humanity, and there is no reason why humanity shouldn't be spread out on this landscape where we can have people operating more as naturalists than the modern-day dirt farmer, where we can have people looking at that landscape and thinking about what its needs are and then trying to meet its expectations.

That would be a real culture, but that may be the 1000-year journey that Gary Snyder is talking about. I think a Secretary of Agriculture that's worth his or her salt would be tuned into that.

What we hope has become evident, from these long quotations, is that both Peter Berg and Wes Jackson have one distinguishing characteristic: They both recognize the difference between causes and effects. The causes of the disasters which overtake human affairs lie in the attitudes of mind of large numbers of human beings. Those attitudes determine the radius of

the reflections of the people who hold them, limiting what they think about in making decisions. But the reverberations of what they do extend far beyond those limits, and the effects of their actions, in the long term, combine to produce dislocations—such as floods, such as dam failures, such as inflated prices for land, such as smog, such as jealousies and enmities between town and country, between states, between regions within states, that focus the attention of people on the effects rather than causes. It is only then that a few thoughtful men and women begin to see the hard sense, rather than dreamy-eyed sentimentality, in the way of life chosen by Thoreau, and recognize the social wisdom in the strange counsels of Lao-tse in the *Tao Te Ching*:

Were I ruler of a little State with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them, I would have the people look upon death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armour, they should have no need to use them. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be content with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the two peoples should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

This is a way of reading Peter Berg, who would have us withdraw attention from the doings of the pseudo-power of national states and focus our labors on the health and productivity of our bioregions. Lao-tse has a similar wisdom for the conduct of larger countries:

He who respects the State as his own person is fit to govern it. He who loves the State as his own body is fit to be entrusted with it.

In the highest antiquity, the people did not know that they had rulers. In the next age they loved and praised them. In the next, they feared them. In the next they despised them. . . .

As restrictions and prohibitions are multiplied in the Empire, the people grow poorer and poorer. When the people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion. When the people are skilled in many cunning crafts, strange are the objects of luxury that appear.

The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. Therefore the Sage says: "So long as I do nothing, the people will work out their own reformation. So long as I love calm, the people will right themselves. If only I keep from meddling, the people will grow rich. If only I am free from desire, the people will come naturally back to simplicity. . . .

He who knows others is clever, but he who knows himself is enlightened. He who overcomes others is strong, but he who overcomes himself is mightier still.

Our times, we say, are different and require immediate and more effective remedies. But are the times truly different, or is it that we have become so clever that we make them seem so? We are indeed skilled in many cunning crafts, yet it has become a cliché to proclaim that our crafts have not made us happy, but only stirred continuing desire for more and more.

We do not learn these things from our government—from elected officials and corporate spokesmen—but from the occasional "wandering Sannyasis" (wise men) who are published now and then. The authorities of our time—of very nearly any time—want the people to remain predictable, to be reliable consumers, not those in whom other tastes and goals are born. But the real spokesmen for humanity, for that in us which is capable of self-reliance and self-dependence—speak with the voices of men like Peter Berg and Wes Jackson; their art is in finding the language to do so.

Here in America there is still room for independence and innovation. If we are making large parts of it into a desert, it is still possible to learn how to live on a desert and to have the spirit of an Arab nomad if not his habits. And cities, in time, can be made over into places of greenery, as the Soviets have proved. Why not learn from

them, even as we hope to teach them some of our own ways of living?

Finally, as Wes Jackson has put it, why not slowly learn to become genuine inhabitants of our continent, instead of the mere colonists that we are now?

REVIEW

The Healing Journey

AN interesting manuscript-in-progress has come our way, with a request for help and information that some readers might be able to supply from their own experience or the experience of friends. The working title is *The Healing Journey*; and when completed it will be an extended meditation on the nature of cancer, speculations and testimony on its "cure," and hopefully guidance for those who find themselves "on the cancer journey."

The author is Marc Barasch, a writer, editor, and seeker from Colorado, who can speak on the subject of cancer from personal experience. During the early 1980s he was working as editor-in-chief of the *New Age Journal*, which was then trying to move out of the post-Sixties alternativist backwaters in to a more dynamic synthesis with the cultural mainstream. Barasch found himself living something of a double standard with the magazine: he believed in the "new age" goals and values of the magazine, but found himself working toward them in an old-fashioned way. He drove himself almost obsessively, and at some expense to his personal life and relationships, in the kind of all-out assault toward excellence and success that typifies "the American way." And a little over a year into that effort—which was paying off for the magazine—he developed a throat problem which was diagnosed as cancer of the thyroid.

That is a fairly common form of cancer which is "routinely" treated through surgical removal of the affected lobe of the thyroid, and the prescription of thyroxin pills thereafter to make up for the lost production of that all-important hormone. At the same time that problem was developing and being diagnosed, however, Barasch had been having increasingly vivid dreams which seemed to tie together his illness and the inconsistencies between the new-age philosophies he was preaching and the way of life he was practicing. But even if his own emerging system of beliefs had not led him to willingly accord importance to the dreams, they became so powerful as to be unignorable.

He felt he was being called upon to change or "grow up" in some important but undefined way—that rather than being just a random event victimizing him from some external source, the cancer was a kind of put-up-or-shut-up summons to him from deep within his own nature. Generalizing from that experience in the introduction to *The Healing Journey*, he says:

It is as if somewhere, sometime in our lives, we made a vow to ourselves to be whole, to experience joy, to seize the moment of our lives, and then, without noticing, betrayed that vow. Cancer comes us as a kind of reminder, as if to say, "There is no time but now; no you but your truest deepest self. Anything less than total embrace of life is no longer acceptable: you must grow or die."

Barasch sought to answer that summons, taking leave from the magazine and beginning an exploration of alternatives to the surgery and subsequent dependence on medication as a way of dealing with the cancer. What he had not anticipated, however, was the pervasive power and momentum in his life of the mainstream belief in and commitment to allopathic and "invasive" medicine. His family and friends advised him, often with a surprising aggressiveness, to go ahead and have the "routine" surgery. Doctors were unsympathetic and impatient with his questions about the nature of the disease and possible alternative treatments. "When we receive the diagnosis of cancer," he realized, a number of things begin to happen:

Gears we didn't even know existed suddenly whirl into motion, oiled by decades of cultural habit, consensus, and accepted medical practice. . . . It is the nature of our society that when an issue becomes a matter of physical life and death, we are enjoined to relinquish all autonomy and independent thought to "the experts." It is fine to engage in whatever psychological, spiritual, and lifestyle exploration we want, but when we encounter disease (which is seen to be separate from the aforementioned categories) we must allow our fate to be decided by a loving collusion of relatives and medical technicians. We are, at that point, deemed somewhat incompetent, too emotionally involved.

Juxtaposed against this great juggernaut of cultural habit and belief was a bewildering array of alternate medicines, treatments, theories, and

therapies. Barasch made many—perhaps too many—exploratory forays into that world of alternatives, but found himself lacking in a sense of internal or external guidance; and finally the stress of being, as it were, between worlds, was too much for the circumstances:

I don't have a triumphant tale *a la* Norman Cousins to tell. I did not heal myself; after an agonizing and truly strange journey, I entered a hospital in a state of panic and despair and had most of my thyroid cut out of my throat. Though my own inner messages and dreams attempted to warn me of the severity and irrevocability of such a radical operation, I succumbed to a combination of fear, self-doubt, conventional logic, and unrelenting pressure.

The book he is working on, then, is not another success story, but the still open-ended account of a journey-in-progress, a kind of intuitive pilgrimage, like Tannhauser's:

I vowed to write this book when I woke up from surgery in horror at what I had allowed to be done to me. The book is, in some sense, a form of penance, and, I hope, compassion, an attempt to provide some methodology, some means of navigation, that I was unable to find.

While Barasch might wish that he had the success story to tell instead, the "triumphant tale," those of us who find ourselves on "the cancer journey" in the future might be glad that he doesn't, because he is able to make a valuable distinction between the "product" of a specific cancer "cure"—and the "process" of healing:

I am not interested in inserting myself in the imbroglios over various alternative methods of cancer treatment. Carrot juice or megavitamins? Raw liver juice or no meat? Miso soup or salt-free? There are real issues, and the so-called metabolic cancer therapies are gaining more and more adherents. However, I am not sure the verdict will ever be in, that we will ever find THE cure for cancer. Cancer is over a hundred diseases lumped under the same label (something Oriental medicine has long recognized), and each individual who has the disease as well as the diseases themselves are profoundly different.

I want to acknowledge these differences in each person's cancer journey, to acknowledge that one size doesn't fit all, no matter what conventional or for that matter alternative medicine would have us believe,

and that in this most monumental journey/battle of our lives, we must ultimately trust ourselves.

One of Barasch's more interesting findings to date, along those lines, is the fact that many of the people he has talked to who have cured themselves of cancer tend to be borderline sociopaths—ornery and iconoclastic individualists who do not as a rule take advice from anyone about anything. And cancer research long ago uncovered the extremely low incidence of cancerous disease in paranoid schizophrenics, not that this is a preventative that recommends itself.

But even though each individual soul brave enough to try must find his own to meet the challenge of the disease, and work his way through the battle/journey which is somehow encoded in his own past and unconscious—Shakespeare's "dark backward and abysm of time"—Barasch believes that "there are common elements in the journey that correspond to what writer Joseph Campbell called 'the hero's journey' (in his seminal *Hero With a Thousand Faces*), what shamanic cultures call 'the initiatory call' leading to the journey of power and vision, and Jung's process of individuation." It is those common elements of the healing/growing process that form the framework of Barasch's work in progress.

Campbell described the "hero's journey" in terms of three phases, separation, initiation, and return:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.

Not many words would have to be changed in that description to make it a precise summary of, say, a book like Norman Cousins' *Anatomy of an Illness*.

Barasch finds an even closer link between the mythic human adventure as described by Campbell, and the summons implicit in serious illness in a piece of Sufi wisdom which speaks of the "three elements necessary for spiritual transformation":

The first [as summarized in Barasch's introduction] was a crisis, or impasse. We must become clear that this is the end, that we can't go on in the same way any longer. The second is a sacrifice, that something has to die in order that something else might live. Facing it from the front, it is enormous, impossible: we are being asked to gnaw off our paw to escape from the trap. In retrospect it is always worth it. . . . The third element was guidance. We expect guidance nowadays from what has already been figured out, but guidance in a crisis of spirit, of mind/body, requires—and enables—us to plug into a truly different source of energy, a new guidance system, a mind somehow greater than all of us put together. Thus healing is not simply remedial, a fixing up, but a call for transformation that is inseparable from the spiritual.

Another benchmark work to which Barasch makes frequent reference is Richard Grossinger's *Planet Medicine*, a fascinating study of disease perception and healing from "Stone Age Shamanism" to post-industrial holism. Grossinger meditates at some length on the relationships between a society and the unique diseases that seem to most plague its members, observing that "when an individual becomes sick, he is tugged toward the reality of his biological and social existence":

[Today] we are surrounded by a flagrancy that is like disease: industrial waste; nuclear bombs; growth economy; left- and right-wing dictatorships; political use of torture; pornography; sadomasochism; crime waves, from the streets to the corporations and governments. All of these crises recur again in our individual bodies and their response and adjustment to them. We respond to their existence in the only way we can—by *our* existence. We and they (more deeply) are products of the same world order. As we evade responsibility for them consciously, we are still unconsciously and somatically implicated in their overall complexity. Disease truly arise from them, but they and those diseases share an origin in the rhythm of our civilization.

In this sense, the person with the courage to confront the disease and attempt the "healing journey" does so, like Sir Gawain going off to meet the Green Knight, for all who are part of the society besieged by the disease—but this also implies why the journey is usually so lonely, with powerful social and cultural forces not only withdrawing support

from the pilgrim but seeming to line up with the disease against him: most of us who are, manner of speaking, still well, have our lives heavily invested to some extent or another in that same "rhythm of civilization" that gives rise to the disease. . . .

Barasch is now in the process of collecting stories from those who have made or are making "the cancer odyssey"—people who have had the crisis thrust upon them, and who have chosen to sacrifice their comfortable cultural moorings rather than an organ or a gland or a pound of flesh. By its nature, as he knows, that life-and-death inner journey has to be an extremely personal undertaking; what he hopes to come up with is a "pilgrim's process" that will help make it a less lonely and alienating experience than it was for him.

Those wanting to talk with Marc Barasch about their own experience or to direct him to friends who have experiences to relate, can contact him at 2320 Balsam Drive, Boulder, CO 80302.

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COMMENTARY ABOUT FARMING

IN the editorial in MANAS for Dec. 31 (on page 4) we spoke of a new book to which Wes Jackson has written the introduction and we quoted some paragraphs from what he said. However, we got the title wrong, we later discovered, because we had a xerox of the title page of only Part I and mistook it for the title of the book. The correct title is *Soil and Survival*, the authors are Joe and Nancy Paddock and Carol Bly, the publisher is the Sierra Club, the price \$19.95. From what Wes Jackson says of this book in his introduction, it is a remarkably good book. It speaks of the indispensable necessities—the *moral* necessities—of the present and the future, stressing the interdependent relation between culture and agriculture.

Some good reading to go with this book is an article, "How We're Gonna Keep 'Em Off the Farm," by William Mueller, in the Winter 1987 *American Scholar*. Mueller teaches in the University of Iowa and writes on agricultural issues. He does not pull his punches. For example:

Today the remaining farmers realize that not only has the way farming gets done changed, but so has the institution of the family farmer. In freeing farmers from the powers of nature, those who would save the family farm have only insured that the farmer serves them. Each new effort to save the family farm really means a non-farm benefactor profits while farmers lose not only income, but their principles. Each step now takes farmers further away from their heritage, making them more like those they despise.

The question one needs to address is not so much whether we have a moral obligation to preserve the family farm way of life. As economic units, family farms can be large corporate entities. Family farms can also include very small farmsteads, where one or both adults hold off-farm jobs. The economics of farming today encourages both of these possibilities for the farmer. What I am suggesting is that, with increasing regularity, it is difficult to act in ways that encourage the family farm environment. Both for small farms that have significant off-farm incomes and for very large farms that are diversified, there is tremendous advantage in exploiting the farm economically. The large operation can install single-purpose farm buildings, such as hog confinements, that are eligible for rapid depreciation allowances. The farmer raises hogs, in other words, not

because the world needs pork or because he has a better way to raise pigs, but because he can use the tax credit against profits in another area. . . .

The temptations to "federal crop" in unethical ways are tremendous, particularly for the large and medium-sized farmer. Price-support systems have been exploited by unethical farmers who plant poorly germinating field corn (not expensive hybrid seed) and receive compensation on the amount their yield is below the county average. That scheme drives down the total county average and penalizes their honest neighbors for overproducing, in which case they lose guaranteed payment. Other large farms buy up neighboring wood lots that have been nurtured for decades, contract them out to loggers, reaping an investment credit, and declare that the razed ground was intended for cash crops, but they will hold them out of production—for which the government pays them. That is blackmail. The latest scheme began when the 1985 Farm Bill introduced the whole-herd dairy buy-out. By a stroke of luck, the program takes eighteen months to complete—just enough time for unscrupulous dairymen to bring to maturity thousands of heifers they will claim were going to be their dairy stock, which everyone knows would have been culled from the herd otherwise. What would have been veal or hamburger then earns the farmer an annual income for five years, as he is paid not to milk a cow he never planned to milk.

Of course not every farmer wants to exploit the system. Yet today the majority of family farmers struggle to stay free from compromise. It is becoming increasingly difficult to farm honestly and make a living at it. Those family farmers who follow their ethical principles are the ones now being forced off their farms.

There is much more of this informing material, which both bewilders and shocks readers who, perhaps, in their youth had experienced something like the old farm life. Who is to blame? Hardly the farmers, since they are only taking advantage of ways to outwit the government's methods which were meant after all to be helpful, but turned out not to work as planned. As Prof. Mueller says:

It is difficult to say which case is more tragic: the family farmer who recognizes the corruptions of the system and learns how to exploit food and land to his advantage; or the farmer who persists in being the kind of farmer he admires, who is systematically ground to dust.

CHILDREN ...and Ourselves

THE booklet, *Teaching the Teachers*, is a report by the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture on a two-year summer school program for English teachers in high schools, in which the following classics were intensively studied: Epics, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*; Tragedies, *Prometheus Bound*, *The Oresteia*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, *The Bacchae*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*; Comedy, *Acharnians*, *Frogs*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*. Among the novels studied were *Moby Dick*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Light in August*, and *As I Lay Dying*.

An essay descriptive of the program explains:

Most of these works are not to be found in the present secondary school curricula in which participants actually teach; their inclusion in this project was on a different basis. As paradigms that embody the archetypes lying behind literary works of art and invisibly governing their meaning, these fundamental texts are irreplaceable as instruments of pedagogy. . . .

Although the program of study made no direct attempt to change the English curriculum in the secondary schools its effects through the participants has been to introduce into the body of the educational process a self-generating source of cohesion and learning that will gradually pervade all its parts. This modification from within is the essential way in which any reform by the humanities may be effected, perhaps the only means by which the "rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools, spoken of in the report *A Nation at Risk*, can be stemmed. . . .

For English-speaking countries, the classics are the Greek and Roman works of antiquity which, along with the Bible, entered into the Anglo-Saxon and European consciousness and through translation became an integral part of the English language. These ancient masterpieces inspired the creation of other classics such as the *Divine Comedy*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Paradise Lost*, in a long line of succession that extends on up to our own day. . . .

When a society is deprived of a conscious knowledge of the basic texts that have shaped its culture and provided its heritage, it loses its connection between the material and spiritual orders of being. Feeling and thought are turned loose in infinity: anything seems possible: yet, since increasingly fewer standards exist, action becomes dependent upon the changing whims of the public. Honor, nobility, excellence, and courage are thus not transmitted as achieved moments of human greatness into a permanent realm where memory will not allow them to die, but are subject to the fickle moment of general acclaim.

This loss of touch with the classical past has been going on for some time:

In recent years these crucially important texts have been omitted from the general curriculum even at the best colleges and relegated to the few students who choose to specialize in Classics or Comparative Literature. For the most part, the burden of teaching literary works of art has been transferred to English departments, which have felt obliged to confine their offerings to British and American writings. . . . And the situation has become even more limiting for students preparing to become secondary school teachers. These have usually been forced, because of degree requirements, to take only a few courses in their teaching fields. Under the elective system, they have often, unfortunately, missed those works that provide the basis for literary interpretation. It has been the hope of this institute to restore to teachers (and ultimately to the common consciousness) those indispensable texts—and an understanding of the poetic imagination that shaped them.

Fifty high school teachers—probably all of them working in Texas schools—took part in this two-year program. Of particular interest are their comments on what they studied together and on what they had learned. The booklet says:

Without a doubt, the project achieved its aim: to transform a group of secondary school teachers of English into spokesmen for a tradition that transcends boundaries of space and time. Admittedly, the participants were special in that they volunteered for what they knew would be a rigorous course of study. Too, some were exceedingly gifted in their craft—so much so as to make it apparent that there is a reservoir of talent within the school system well beyond any indication given in the public press. Even so, according to the testimony of the teachers

themselves, a change has been wrought in their attitude toward themselves and toward their pupils that affects their teaching. In quite fundamental ways, educational reform has been established in these teachers.

Such projects as this one must continue until a sufficient body of like-minded teachers exists to alter the general attitude toward learning. Literature has always been central to education. What happens in its pursuit affects the entire curriculum. Other disciplines look to it and will in emulation set up equivalent projects. Educational reform lies within the power of teachers, not in how they are outwardly directed. That recognition of inner resources must become paramount to academic administrators and school boards, and then managerial reform will become meaningful.

Teaching the Teachers is well worth reading, especially for what the participating teachers say about the value of the program. Although no price is listed, copies can probably be obtained by writing to the Dallas Institute, 2719 Routh Street, Dallas, Texas 75201.

Another way in which the young may become interested in ancient classics is described by a home-schooling mother, Kathleen Hatley, who writes to *Growing Without Schooling* No. 53:

In February, my husband had a difficult surgery and was out of commission for a couple of months. . . . I had to take a very active role in our business, while Steve (13) and Shaman (9) took over much of the household work and younger child care. "School" was very unstructured as real life took over. . . .

. . . this seems a good example of how a small spark can set off a real flame. We borrowed a wonderful mythology board game called *By Jove* from our educational enrichment co-opt. It had a 64-page booklet of Greek myths with it. We played the game and Shaman read the myths. Since he seemed to enjoy the myths, I gave him three different volumes of myths that I had, which he read cover to cover, and enjoyed comparing the different versions. He then checked out every book on mythology at the public library. I gave him a hardcover edition of *Bullfinch's Mythology*, which he devoured. At a college bookstore, he picked out classic versions of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, all of which he has read at least twice. And very unexpectedly, he picked the collected plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and

Sophocles to read. The interest branched into a study of Charlemagne, Welsh mythology, King Arthur myths, and some of the Roman emperors. Best of all were the many detailed historical drawings of warriors and battles (especially the Trojan War). . . . The younger children, Ram (7) and Chris (4), were happily drawn into this passion as Shaman spent hours making them tunics, helmets, and capes from the scrap box: shields out of cardboards, foil, and duct tape; swords and lances whittled out of cedar branches. The art work, as well as the fantasy play, of my younger boys took on an exciting dimension as they made drawings about the myths that Shaman and I read them—Medusa, Hercules and the Hydra, Theseus and the Minotaur, Cupid and Psyche.

This wonderful story goes on and on, and in other directions.

FRONTIERS Birth of a Culture?

READING through the *Land Report* for last summer, one becomes aware of a far-reaching change of interest among farmers, especially small ones, who are becoming as concerned about the health of the farm as about the economic well-being of the farmer. Hundreds of groups around the country have been formed by farmers who are working to conserve the land as well as their incomes. In the summer 1986 *Land Report* Patrick Bohlen tells about a tour of Nebraska farmlands by Land students and staff, climaxed by a day's conference in Hartington, Nebraska, on the Revitalization of Rural America. His report begins:

The corn-covered landscape through which we drove gave the impression there was an abundance of water in the region. Northeast Nebraska receives about 27 inches of rainfall, but many farmers depend upon the profuse center pivot irrigation systems, which draw their water from the abundant underground store of the Ogallala aquifer, to water their corn. Puddles we saw at the ends of many fields were signs of a prodigal use of this underground store. The immense irrigation frameworks not only threaten the aquifer—which is being depleted in some areas faster than it is being recharged—but also disrupt ecological stability and further intensify an already over-capitalized agriculture in the region.

The Center for Rural Affairs, which sponsored the conference in Hartington, has focused on preserving and sustaining water supply.

In their Small Farm Resources Project (SFRP) they work with 23 local farmers to promote dryland farming practices appropriate to the region. Rather than provide a panacean prescription for the farmers' woes, the SFRP works with resourceful farmers who are pursuing or willing to pursue diverse paths toward ecologically sound agriculture. These paths necessarily emphasize reduction of expensive inputs and an augmentation of internal farm cycles. They include, among other things, an emphasis on mixed crop/livestock operations; soil building through composting, green manures, and crop rotation; and

the use of nitrogen-fixing legumes to build soil fertility.

The tours were to nearby farms whose operators had not neglected the biological health of their farms in order to gain quick profits.

Although these farmers were not rich, their farms comprised a wealth of conserving practices for which all of them had won conservation awards. The Small Farm Resources Project encourages each farmer to develop systems based on the special characterization of his farm. Each farm we visited reflected the resourcefulness of the person or persons running it. The farmers emphasized the importance of being able to do their own welding and machine shop work, and they talked about doing their own meat cutting and growing vegetables and fruits in gardens. Coupled with their quest for increased self-sufficiency was each farmer's readiness to employ innovations that would reduce inputs and enhance the farm environment.

Students at the Land Institute (2440 E. Water Well Road, Salina, Kansas 67401) are called interns in sustainable agriculture and take part in the program from the middle of February to the middle of December. They do not pay but receive stipends of \$93 a week. They supply their own housing and meals, working from 9 to 5 daily. All races are welcome. The interns study, work on the Land's experiments, and write reports. The Institute was established more than ten years ago by Wes Jackson, the long-term objective being the development of a perennial plant, rich in protein, as a source of food to replace annual grains. The following gives an account of the activities:

A focus on agriculture does not mean that we are uninterested in environmental problems or peace and social justice concerns. The ideal of a sustainable society is central to agriculture and all of these issues. The everyday work of planting, hoeing, harvesting and collecting data takes place amidst wide-ranging discussions stimulated by classroom work or individual reading. Publications and newsletters in our library provide students and visitors information on issues such as population and third world development, acid rain, the perils of the nuclear arms race, the loss of genetic seed stock, and the farm debt crisis. Conservation interests and social concerns of students and staff are often explored in articles they

write for the *Land Report*. This year we have changed our statement of purpose to read: "devoted to sustainable agriculture and stewardship of the earth." This about covers it all!

Each year the Land holds a Prairie Festival complete with special speakers and music by friendly performers. In 1986 the Festival's theme was "Soils and Seeds: Success of Culture." Gary Nabhan and Karen Reichhardt told about their work with Native Seeds Search in Arizona, beginning with "the prehistoric and early historic works of native American farmers who have passed from hand to hand, generation to generation, the seeds that compose our native crop heritage."

American crop heritage includes beans and corn and at least twenty other species of squashes, sunflowers, amaranths, chenopods, devil's claw, jack beans, and panic grass. Some of these crops have a variety of types which may be especially suited to the particular environments in which they evolved. . . . Unfortunately, the official policy in this country has been to neglect native seed sources, discourage native practices, and display a lack of respect for the contributions native folk sciences and traditional knowledge have made to the botanical concepts and agricultural technology. Gary and Karen bemoan this neglect. They estimate that from one half to two thirds of the native landraces grown by American farmers at the time of Columbus have been lost and that eighty of the five hundred wild relatives of native crops are now endangered.

Land Report related:

Native Seed Search got its start when Gary Nabhan was helping Papago Indians with vegetable gardening in southern Arizona. Some of these native farmers began to wonder where they could get seeds of the plant varieties their grandparents had grown. The awakening interest of these farmers prompted Gary, with the diligent aid of Karen Reichhardt, to begin search for these native seeds.

Now there is an organization, Native Seeds SEARCH, 3950 West New York, Tucson, Arizona 85745.

At the beginning we spoke of a "change of interest," but it is more than that. It is the slow

formation of a new kind of culture of humans joined to the life of the earth.