

EarthMatters

Inspiring people to take responsibility for Earth.

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SUMMER 2009

NWEI News

We're All In: A weekend of inspiring community, workshops, and vision

By Kate Rinder

It's 1:30pm on Friday, June 19th, and my car is packed full of handouts, nametags, candles, cloth napkins, and art supplies (all the makings for a good conference). A light rain is falling, to offer our out-of-town attendees a true Portland welcome. I'm running through countless details in my head, hoping that I haven't forgotten anything. And then I realize, either way, it doesn't matter—at this point, I'm "all in".

What an inspiring weekend and a powerful reminder of what drew me to work in the field of sustainability education at NWEI. This year's North American Gathering, titled "We're All In", brought together 40 individuals from 21 cities, to learn and exchange ideas about using NWEI courses to create dialogue and action around sustainability in their communities. Highlights of the weekend included Tobey

continued on page 5

Earth's Innovators

By Dashka Slater

Erin Gately was working in the marketing department at Hewlett-Packard when she took a workplace class on voluntary simplicity designed by the Northwest Earth Institute. Over nine sessions in 1998, she and other HP employees discussed the materialism of our culture and its impact on the earth. Eventually, she decided to leave HP and find a job saving the planet. She took a leave of absence and asked Jeanne Roy, one of the institute's founders, for help finding environmental work.

To her surprise, Roy told Gately to stay put. "We need people who care about the environment to work in big companies," she explained.

Hewlett-Packard certainly qualifies as big. And computer products are some of the least sustainable goods on the market: Most have a life span of less than three years and contain so many toxic components that they are hard to recycle. Computers and other e-waste now make up almost as much of the municipal waste stream as disposable diapers; an estimated 70 percent of the toxic metals in U.S. landfills come from high-tech gadgets.

Even so, HP has a pretty good environmental track record. In 1992 the company launched an initiative called Design for the Environment, with the aim of creating products that use less energy and fewer materials and are easier to recycle. It makes computer monitors with recycled monitor glass, uses recycled plastic in five of its scanner models, and in 1997 began recycling its ink-jet printer cartridges. Gately became an environmental product steward, helping to further reduce the environmental impact of HP's ink-jet printers.

Gately's job was made easier by tough directives passed by the European Union that banned the use of heavy metals and other toxic substances in the production of electronic equipment, and set collection, recovery, and recycling targets for the equipment when discarded. The EU standards forced the electronics industry to rethink the way it makes its products, not just for the European market but worldwide. "What was considered interesting but not very marketable in 1992 is almost a necessity now," Gately says.

continued on page 5



MIKE'S MESSAGE

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For the Children

The rising hills, the slopes,
of statistics
lie before us.
the steep climb
of everything, going up,
up, as we all
go down.

In the next century
or the one beyond that,
they say,
are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests
one word to you, to
you and your children:

stay together
learn the flowers
go light

Gary Snyder, from Turtle Island

I love simple, big picture frameworks I can come back to when I start to feel a bit overwhelmed by all that must be done in continuing to change the course of humanity. Gary Snyder, in his poem entitled "For the Children", shares a framework that seems particularly relevant in these times.

"Stay together" – like the Canadian geese flying in formation, each making it easier for the others, yet critical for the skein (a gaggle is geese on the ground, a skein is geese in flight – I learned something new today!) to make it to their destination. Each goose takes a turn leading the way as it is able. This model speaks volumes about the importance of leadership and collaboration.

"Learn the flowers" – developing a sense of place and the understanding of relationships – flowers to seasons, elevation, soils, climate, insects, smells, etc. The more I know about the place I inhabit, the more I am likely to care for it. The more I understand about relationships amongst flora and fauna and the environment they inhabit, the more I become aware of the relationships existing amongst ecological, economic and social systems.

"Go light" – voluntary simplicity is a freeing practice and an effective mechanism for thriving, especially in tough economic times. Research continues to demonstrate that happiness does not grow in proportion to the size or scope of our possessions and "to do" lists. (Having "enough", however, is critical. Voluntary simplicity does

not advocate a life of social and material deprivation.)

There is little doubt that changing the direction of the planet's consumptive cultures presents the greatest challenge in the history of humanity. With that in mind, thinking of this poem as indicative of the complex solutions required might seem a bit Pollyannish. If the solutions you are thinking of start with new technologies and revised public policy, you're right, a poem won't get us very far. My solutions also include new energy systems and shifting farm subsidies to regenerative forms of agriculture. It's important to remember that all the necessary solutions begin with a need for inspiration and the ability to step back and see the big picture.

For me, this poem provides a framework for taking action, and the inspiration to take the first step. Inspiration is a cornerstone of our work...helping people (at home and in their public lives) overcome the resistance to action that we all face in changing the status quo. I wish you the best in finding your inspiration to lead the change!

For us and the planet,
Mike Mercer

Thank you to all our new and renewing members!

Our Spring Membership Drive was a resounding success--thanks to you! Your support makes it possible for us to continue delivering first-rate discussion course programs! 100% of membership dues and donations go directly toward our programs.

If you did not have a chance to join during the Spring Membership Drive, it's not too late to join the NWEI community! Please use the membership form on the back page of this newsletter (or join online at www.nwei.org/join) to show your support for NWEI and our Earth today. You can also join or renew by calling us at (503) 227-2807. Check out our new member benefits at www.nwei.org; every quarter we hold NWEI Member Raffles. Join or renew today to be eligible for our fall raffle!■

This Fall, Become an EcoChallenger!

The 2009 EcoChallenge is quickly approaching and we are still putting together our team of EcoChallengers—we want **you** to join us!

The EcoChallenge is an opportunity for new and veteran NWEI volunteers and supporters to take action toward a sustainable future. We will collectively demonstrate the power of making one small change on behalf of the planet—and raise money to continue developing the programs you know and love!

The idea is simple— you pick your EcoChallenge, let your friends and family know you are participating, and work toward your goals from October 1st through 15th.

What are the EcoChallenge Categories?

For your EcoChallenge, you can choose to: conserve water, increase your alternative transportation use, save electricity, eat more sustainably, reduce your trash output, or “choose your own eco-adventure”.

Why take the EcoChallenge?

Our pledges to participate in the EcoChallenge means we will actively be working toward a world where our lives are in balance with the ecosystems

upon which we all depend. You will also be supporting NWEI’s work by collecting pledges of support for your EcoChallenge. The money raised during the EcoChallenge will go directly toward NWEI’s programs— you will be supporting the development and outreach for our discussion courses.

Who can participate?

The EcoChallenge is open to anyone who would like to participate! You can live anywhere, be connected to NWEI through an affiliate, or just interested in working toward a sustainable future (along with many other EcoChallengers, and the entire staff and board of NWEI!).

If you would like to create an EcoChallenge Team, with friends, family or colleagues, that option is available too—and the team that raises the most money during the EcoChallenge will win a free discussion course (all materials will be free for up to 12 people)!

What Do I Need to Do?

After you register to be an EcoChallenger, we’ll send you a participant packet with all the info you’ll need to be successful in the EcoChallenge. If you want, you can customize your personal page on the

EcoChallenge website (we can help you with this, too), and use that to communicate about the EcoChallenge to your supporters.

To collect pledges of support, we suggest starting with your network of friends and family. Supporters can make a flat rate pledge or pledge per day that you accomplish your EcoChallenge goals.

All pledges can be processed through the EcoChallenge website, so it will be easy for you and your supporters.

How Do I Register?

Register today at www.nwei.dojiggy.com. You can also call Kerry to register over the phone at (503) 227-2807. We look forward to the camaraderie of taking on the EcoChallenge with the NWEI community this October!

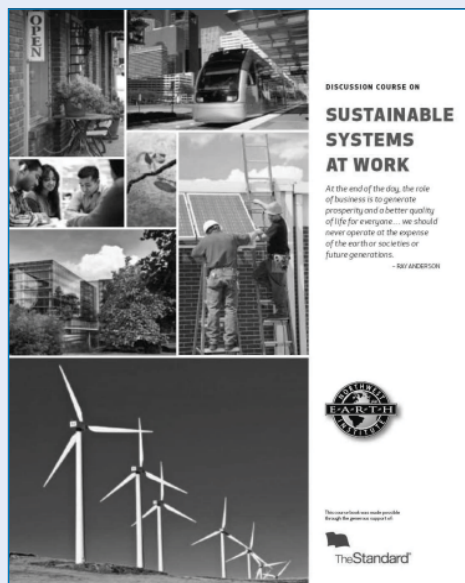
How Else Can I Help?

Pledge an NWEI Staffer! The entire staff of NWEI is taking on the EcoChallenge this fall— visit our website at www.nwei.org to find out what our staff members’ EcoChallenges are and pledge your support today! ■

Sustainable Systems At Work

Our brand new discussion course, *Sustainable Systems at Work*, is now available! This new course will help move businesses large and small toward sustainable practices.

We are currently working hard to spread the word about this valuable (and cost-effective) tool. If you have connections with businesses, organizations, or other large employers, let us know. ■



For more information about our latest program, *Sustainable Systems at Work*, please call our Outreach Team at (503) 227-2807, email contact@nwei.org, or visit www.nwei.org.

Building a Community

By Melissa Austin

Over the course of eight weeks last spring, I witnessed the development of a group which met weekly for the NWEI discussion course *Menu for the Future*, and ended up creating a small food-conscious community.

The development of our food community started simply. During one of our discussions, a participant mentioned she had previously offered canning courses, but didn't get much response from the community. Many in our group chimed in that we wanted to learn these food preservation skills and participate in one of her workshops. She agreed to organize a time for our group to gather and learn this skill together. A few moments later, after we all started thinking of skills we could teach each other, another participant offered solar cooking lessons. We found that our group included gardeners, some versed in the permaculture way, herbalists, and surely many more talents that haven't been uncovered yet! Our group was eager to share their talents and solidify our bonds in the process. The level of energy and anticipation in the room was astounding, and we realized that the discussion course we had signed up for was becoming much more than just an eight-week learning experience. As our course came to an end, we agreed to continue developing and strengthening our connections by meeting regularly to share our skills and continue creating a community. Each month we plan to have a potluck with the option of reading a selected book (continuing on the food theme, we started with Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*).

As we created the beginnings of a local food-conscious network, all the participants felt ownership of the group and helped to mold it into what it is – and will become. To continue

our trajectory of learning about and acting on sustainable food options, one participant scheduled to have a local boy operating a farm fresh eggs business come talk to us about his operation (door-to-door delivery, eggs pulled along in a cooler). He discussed why buying local eggs from local chickens, and not battery farms, was better for the consumer, farmer, chickens, and environment. Another participant organized a public showing of Food Matters. Many of us are eager to take additional NWEI courses in simplicity and sustainability, and we are currently discussing *Choices for Sustainable Living*.

As the organizer of this particular *Menu for the Future* group, witnessing the blossoming participation and networking was an amazing experience! I believe the discussion course participants benefited as much from the community and support of the group as they did from the growing awareness of food systems. A pre-course survey showed that most participants knew how and where to access locally grown foods, and weren't particularly anxious about food choices. However, after navigating through NWEI's readings, our eyes were opened to topics and issues we hadn't considered before. Our newfound knowledge of our food web might be making our food choices a bit more complex, but we feel equipped with the knowledge and understanding to make the best decisions for our lives. We are also supported by those in our group as we navigate the sustainable food world. The value of our community cannot be underestimated- there will be additional NWEI courses, book discussions, skills trainings, and gatherings to keep the group growing and thriving. I'm pleased to have had the

opportunity to organize a course that gathered a diverse group together and over time created a community! ■

Melissa Austin is a NWSA AmeriCorps Volunteer in Salem, Oregon. Born and raised in the area, she thrives on supporting sustainability and permaculture locally. She is eager to support the growing interest in these topics, and looks forward to organizing additional NWEI courses in Salem. To contact Melissa, email community.dreamer@yahoo.com.

Recognizing an NWEI

VIP: Rick Reber

As you probably know, volunteers are a critical piece of the NWEI foundation, and make it possible for us to accomplish as much as we do. We are grateful for the countless hours that our volunteers put in to help us with everything we do, from course book development to office tasks.

One long-time volunteer has made such a great impact on NWEI, and in the community, that we would be remiss not to recognize his efforts. Rick Reber has been an NWEI volunteer since 1993. Rick also introduced The Standard Insurance Company to NWEI's courses, and was instrumental in The Standard forming a Green Team and implementing many sustainable business policies and practices.

Recently, Rick was awarded the first ever Leo Award by The Standard for his volunteer efforts. Rick was selected "based on the long-term impact of his activities and the sustainability of his work." A big thanks from NWEI to Rick for his commitment, passion and hard work creating sustainable communities!

Earth's Innovators cont. from page 1

Gately's focus for the past few years has been the DeskJet 6540 printer. It was designed to snap together so that it could be easily disassembled for recycling. When the product-design team wanted to use plastic with a painted metallic finish, Gately persuaded them to use real metal instead because painted plastic isn't recyclable. The DeskJet 6540 has won awards for its eco-friendly design and for its printing performance.

What's encouraging to Gately is that HP has found that sustainability is good business. For example, eliminating an adhesive that made it hard to recycle ink-jet cartridges ended up saving the company \$2.4 million over two years, while eliminating unnecessary packaging on printer cartridges reduced the production cost of each one by 17 cents. Last year HP received more than \$6 billion in bid requests that required information about its commitment to social and environmental responsibility — far more than it received the year before.

To Gately, the lesson is obvious: "The world is waking up." ■

Dashka Slater writes about the environment for a variety of magazines. This article first appeared in the July/August 2005 issue of *Sierra*. Learn more at www.dashkaslater.com. Reprinted with permission from *Sierra Magazine* and Dashka Slater.

Partnership with Earth Protect

We are excited to announce that NWEI is now partnering with Earth Protect, a leading social networking environmental website for uploading user videos and films on environmental issues and solutions. Check out their site at www.earthprotect.com. ■

NWEI News cont. from page 1

Fitch's "Converting Interest into Commitment" workshop, several gardening sessions, a presentation on Simplicity Matters Earth Institute's "Secrets to Success", and our Labyrinth celebration of the Summer Solstice.

For someone new to NWEI's bi-annual Gatherings, I was awed and rejuvenated by the passion, dedication, and creativity that were shared amongst friends, new and old. To those unable to attend this year, your presence was missed, but as our theme of "We're All



NWEI staff and volunteers enjoying the sunset at the 2009 North American Gathering in June

In" recognizes, we can and must all be a part of the solution to realize a truly sustainable planet.

Online Ordering Now Available for NWEI Course Books

We are pleased to announce that you can now order NWEI course books online. This should simplify the ordering process and it ensures that you can order your course books at any time, on any day. We still enjoy talking to people though, and welcome your phone orders as well! To order course books online, visit our website at www.nwei.org. ■

Protect the Earth Through Public Speaking

So many issues, so little time. It is not always easy to find the best way to have our message heard and we're grateful that you have answered the call. For a number of years, The Northwest Earth Institute has been able to reach a broader audience through our membership in EarthShare of Oregon, Oregon's only environmental federation—and we could use your help this year.

EarthShare of Oregon is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with businesses and public agencies to enable their employees to support 70 environmental groups through workplace giving campaigns. Last year, more than 3,000 people supported EarthShare through giving campaigns in 100 workplaces.

The Northwest Earth Institute was able to use the funds raised

through EarthShare to launch our latest program, *Sustainable Systems at Work*.

In order to get the word out to their employees about the giving options available, many workplaces invite EarthShare members to give brief presentations about their projects. If you have a passion for NWEI's work, a small amount of time to volunteer to make a 5-10 minute presentation, and a willingness to overcome stage fright about public speaking, let us know! We'd love to have you represent us as only you can do, as a generous and committed supporter.

If you'd like to learn more about EarthShare and about their business partners in your area, you can visit the EarthShare website at www.earthshare-oregon.org. To join the team of speakers for the 2009 Fall Charitable Giving Campaign, please contact Meghan at (503) 223-9015 or meghan@earthshare-oregon.org. ■

Knowing Your Place: Becoming Native to a Place

By Coleen O'Connell

*From the banks of Thompson Creek
in the St. George's River, Maine*

For those of you who awaken each morning to another day of sunshine it may not be known to you that there are those who feel responsible for the return of the sun each day. Twenty years ago, upon adopting a new homeland in Maine, I began to explore the native history of the land. I had never read of the Wabanaki Confederacy in my history books nor heard of the northeast tribes who call themselves the Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy and Abenaki. This confederacy knows themselves as the "People of the Dawn" and they hold a responsibility on Turtle Island (North America) to call up the sun each morning.

On the eastern most point of the United States in a place in Maine where the waters were once filled with cod and whales, I am awakened in the dark to the sound of a rattle shaking near my head. My native friend, gkiesotonomook, is rousing us to action. I rise, dress and silently walk the path to the ocean's edge. First light is announcing itself. With sweet grass lit, a smudging ceremony purifies each of us. As my friend faces the eastern ocean and raises his arms, a school of harbor porpoise passes quickly off shore, synchronized fins cutting through the dark water. A seal pops its curious head up in front of us. The ocean is calm this morning.

Though not understanding the language of the prayer, I resonate with the earnestness in which my friend calls forth. The intentions of his every movement and each word spoken brings with it increasing lightness. Pink and indigo streaks are beginning to lace the eastern sky. The spruce and fir trees are turning green as the blanket of night

is lifted. The prayers continue with an increased tempo. As the sun peeks over the horizon my friend shouts a greeting of welcome. Tears roll down my cheek in a rush of primordial recognition.

Another day has begun on Turtle Island. He turns with a big grin and announces, "Let's make some coffee and have some grub."

How do I become native to this place? The local ancestors of the first white settlers to Maine claim that your family must live here 3 or 4 generations before you can say you are native. The hippies that came in the 70s and had children, who are now having children, cannot yet say they are natives. "Just because a cat has her kittens in the oven doesn't make them biscuits," the old timers proclaim.

I recently read somewhere that if you are native to a place, you must be able to tell its stories. Whether or not I can ever become native to this place, I am surely making it my home. I drink its waters, eat its wild berries, warm myself with its wood, and bask in the beauties of each season, including mud and black fly season. I eat lobster and blue mussels, grow potatoes and squash, nurture an apple orchard, and wonder how to get the wood chuck to stop living under my house and eating my flowers. I am collecting stories each day I live here. This spring when an adolescent turkey was practicing his mating warble in my front yard, I chided him for sounding more like a dog than a turkey. I wished him luck as he headed into the woods seemingly in search of a willing partner. Next year I hope he is back in full regalia and accomplished sex talk. I can only wait and wonder.

Silently, and without fanfare, the Native Americans of North America continue the ceremonies that entwine their lives with the web of life. The Hopis gather ceremonially in their plazas

and the Lakota dance and fast during four-day Sun Dances. In our fast-paced culture these ceremonies go unnoticed, relegated to another time, another worldview. I used to be confused by all the different Native cultures around the world proclaiming that their mountain, or their ritual site was the center of the Universe. How could there be so many different "centers of the universe?" In my westernized thinking, there could only be one center. Who is correct? I have lived my life into the answer – when I truly reside in a place, come to know my more-than-human neighbors, and am mindful each day of my place in the web of life, my home becomes a sacred place. My community has become the center of my universe, my life revolves around the order of things that sustain me in this place. As the circle shifts, so does the center... an ongoing dynamic as invisible circles are imagined into life everywhere on our planet.

It no longer matters to me whether or not I will ever be considered a native Mainer. I am of North America, I am of this land that gave birth to my parents, my grandparents, and beyond. I too will become an ancestor in just a generation.

What does matter to me is that those that come after me will have fresh water to drink, clean air to breathe, and have soil and a climate that will support the growing of food. If I can leave this physical existence knowing that I have done my best to insure that legacy for future generations then I will have the due reward that I desire. I will have found my place in "the family of things" as poet Mary Oliver announces. ■

[Coleen's home is in a small ecovillage on 176 acres near Penobscot Bay in Maine's midcoastal area.](#)

Network News

Welcome to the Western North Carolina Alliance

One of the most effective means of expanding our presence and furthering our mission is forming partnerships with nonprofits, businesses, universities, and places of faith. You may ask "What is a partnership?" NWEI envisions a partnership as a mutually beneficial relationship.

This spring, we accepted our most recent affiliate partner, the Western North Carolina Alliance based out of Asheville, NC. WNCA has been around over 27 years and prides itself on empowering "citizens to be advocates for livable communities and the natural environment." They focus on: leading citizen advocacy on growth management issues; involving citizens in

public lands protection; and protecting the region's water supply. They will be bringing NWEI courses into all seven of their chapters.

Canadian Earth Institute Update

Recently, CEI hired two part-time assistants (in addition to their Executive Director) to help with grant writing, web site, enabling web donations, events and a proposal to pilot discussion courses through provincial government Green Teams and the local Chamber of Commerce. As a complement to the discussion courses, CEI offers hands-on day workshops on cob building and permaculture design. They also attend public events to promote Earth Institute courses and have attended twice as many this year as last. They are now selling close to 200 books per year—impressive when one takes into account Canada's population is only 9% of the U.S.!

To learn more about CEI, check out www.CanadianEarthInstitute.org.

Utah Society for Environmental Education (USEE) News

The Northwest Earth Institute discussion groups have received much attention lately in Utah, most notably, the Menu for the Future and Voluntary Simplicity Courses. With the farmers market season beginning and a continued desire by many people to eat local, Utahans want more information on food choices, especially pertaining to where the food is coming from and organic choices. USEE was lucky to have two of their participants interviewed by Fox News for a TV news story on simple living this past May! ■

Check out the USEE website at www.usee.org

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Many thanks to all of our donors and members who contributed to NWEI this spring and summer!

The following donors contributed at the Earth Steward (\$100) level or higher:

Judith Alexander
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I'd like to support the Northwest Earth Institute!

Membership includes a one-year subscription to EarthMatters. See www.nwei.org for a full list of member benefits.

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Membership: Regular, \$35 Household/Contributor, \$50 EarthSteward, \$100
(all levels are tax deductible) Sustainer, \$250 Patron, \$500 Founder's Circle, \$1,000

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I would like information on how to offer a course on:

- Global Warming: Changing CO₂ course Healthy Children – Healthy Planet Exploring Deep Ecology
- Voluntary Simplicity Discovering a Sense of Place Menu for the Future
- Choices for Sustainable Living Sustainable Systems at Work

The Northwest Earth Institute is a 501 (c) (3) organization dedicated to *inspiring people to take responsibility for Earth.*

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