

Connie Barlow & Michael Dowd's Great Story Tour

Turtle Log

ON THE ROAD TO THE ECOZOIC ERA



Number 2

JUNE 1 — JULY 15, 2002

Where We've Been Lately

**Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York,
New Jersey, Ohio, Kentucky**

Our Latest Adventures

Unitarian Sunday Services

**Brothers of the Earth
Gathering**

**Sharing and Teaching
Rituals**

Our First Wedding Anniversary

Green Mountain Monastery

**Pilgrimage to Big Bone Lick
State Park**

Lots of Writing and Web Site Work

UNITARIAN SUNDAY SERVICES

Six wonderful weeks have passed since we wrote the first report of our travels ([CLICK HERE](#) to read Turtle Tour Log #1). In those six weeks we presented Sunday services at five Unitarian Universalist congregations in four states. Sermon topics included:

- **"Celebrants of the Universe Story"** (Connie and Michael)
- **"The Gospel of Evolution and Revival of the Human Spirit"** (Michael)
- **"The Great Story: A Bridge for UU Diversity"** (Connie and Michael)
- **"Can the Universe Be Trusted?"** (Michael).

Most services included a children's component, for which Connie performed either her own Great Story parable, "Earth Had a Challenging Childhood" (published in the summer 2002 issue of *EarthLight*), or read/performed part of Jennifer Morgan's 2002 children's book, *Born With a Bang: The Universe Tells Its Own Story*.

"But that *is* true! It's *not* a story!"

One six-year-old girl at the UU church in Woodstock VT taught Connie **an important lesson**: Partway through Connie's performance of *Born with a Bang*, the girl interjected, very seriously, "But that is true! It's not a story!" Ah, so we must always begin by assuring the kids that we ourselves know this to be a true story, a story drawn from science — not a fairy tale. It is sad to think that in our culture the distinction between imaginatively told fables and real science is so pronounced that kids (and adults, too) are unaccustomed to hearing science presented in playful ways, especially in story form. But then, as Brian Swimme has impressed upon so many of us, **the Universe can best be known as story**. Even the most sophisticated telescopes see the Universe as it was, not as it is. If the Hubble Space Telescope captures an image of a galaxy 10 billion light years away, then the image we see is how that particular galaxy looked 10 billion years ago. There is no other way to experience a Universe in which light travels at a mere 12 million miles a minute. The Universe unfolds as Story in each ever-more-distant ring or concentric shell of space-time. It is a Universe seen as nested time, understood as nested creativity.

Sermon Soon Available on Tape

Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church in Louisville **professionally recorded Michael's "Can the Universe Be Trusted?"** sermon and will be sending us a duplicate audiotape, which we hope to reproduce and offer for sale wherever we present. Michael was in top form, and the congregants responded with enthusiasm. Many wanted to obtain copies of the tape right away so that their spouses or children could hear the sermon, too. At times like these, we know without a doubt that we are on the right path. We thank **Amy Pendleton** and **Mark Steiner** in Louisville for helping us receive this invitation to speak.

Creation Spirituality Gathering

On that same Sunday, Mark Steiner invited us to participate in an evening gathering of the **Louisville Creation Spirituality community**, which was meeting at his home. We enjoyed sitting in the circle, informally presenting snippets of the kinds of talks we have been giving in a variety of places. It was especially satisfying to get a chance to tell the group about how we feel about this work, to talk personally about our tour, this itinerant lifestyle, and to share our newest ideas. In an unusual twist, Connie took the lead in talking about Michael's new ideas for a children's book or program on **knowing God as intimately as other animals do**. She even led the group in a few minutes of silently "thinking in tongues," which is a simple and remarkably effective meditation practice Michael developed to still the mind and

which grows out of his earlier Pentecostal experience.

New Ritual: Coming Home to North America

Michael, in turn, told the group about a new ritual Connie developed and had led the day before for the very first time, as part of a two-day workshop on the Great Story we conducted for the [Catherine Spalding Retreat Center](#) on the grounds of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, a half hour south of Louisville. (We thank **Sheila Hutchins** for initiating the invitation.)

Coming Home to North America is a participatory telling and acting out of the 65-million-year story of this continent, which takes about 90 minutes to unfold. A long rope is laid out on the floor, in the shape of the continent. During the course of the ritual, participants reverentially and often playfully enact surprising and wondrous events that speak to the heart and that help us experience our continental story as a sacred story.

Raven flies in from Australia, tree frogs raft in from a then-isolated South America, and elephants (mastodons) venture into North America from Asia (across Beringia), while horses and camels and the dog family originate right here and then venture out around the world. Squirrels and nut trees coevolve. Grasses evolve and ginkgo trees go extinct on this continent. The Rocky Mountains rise and erode, and rise again. The Grand Canyon is cut, and climate warms and cools, warms and cools. There are crises and opportunities — and more crises and more opportunities.

Through it all, we are **powerfully learning what it means to become native to this continent**. At the end of the story, we set our characters aside — Landforms, Climate, Plants, The Little Ones, Big and Ferocious, Continental Connections, Crisis & Opportunity, Time — and become our human selves again. We then speak from the heart of where our ancestors, our own peoples, came from and where they and we have moved around on this great continent.

This is a free-standing ritual, but it would also work well in longer workshops in concert with The Cosmic Walk and/or The Council of All Beings, two well-known participatory rituals. (Click here for the script for the [North American ritual](#). We encourage others to freely use and adapt it to their needs.)

North American Continent Story

Telling the **Story of the North American Continent** has become a deep passion for us. The continental story, Thomas Berry has long advised, joins the Universe Story, the Earth Story, and our various bioregional and personal stories as a crucial component of The Great Story. Thanks to a 2001 book by Tim Flannery titled *The Eternal Frontier*, for the first time there is a source book to help any and all of us learn the story. Pieces of that story appear in the Cenozoic Era portion of the [timeline](#) we developed for [Great Story Beads](#), but we encourage you to take a look at the ritual [script](#).

Connie has also developed a **slide program** of this story. First presented in June at the **Brothers of Earth** gathering near Weston VT (we thank **Lou Niznik** for videotaping this presentation), The Story of the North American Continent was also shown the following weekend for the first meeting of **Companions of Green Mountain Monastery**.

Consistently, the response to this slide program is the same: "What an amazing story!" and, "Why haven't we been told this story before?"

Green Mountain Monastery, an Ecozoic Center

The Green Mountain Monastery currently exists in the minds and hearts of Sisters **Gail Worcelo** and **Bernadette Bostwick**, along with many, many supporters, among them the "Companions." It is an alluring dream just beginning to manifest on 190 acres of magnificent land in south-central Vermont. This will be an **Ecozoic Monastery**, dedicated to the vision of a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship, as articulated by Thomas Berry and others.



**Michael meditating on The Great One,
on the land of the Green Mountain Monastery.**

We visited the land, admired a truly magnificent multi-generational beaver impoundment on the property and an extraordinary boulder deposited by glaciers, helped dig post holes, and dined with Sisters Gail and Bernadette and their neighbors on June 17 — a great way to celebrate **our first wedding anniversary!**

Sister Gail presented a moving and inspiring slide talk of their **vision for a new monastery**. She told of how a concern for the suffering of Earth today is fully consistent with the core of her Passionist Catholic order: the suffering of Jesus on the Cross, which in modern times inspired good works in response to the suffering of the poor.

New Essays and Interviews at *TheGreatStory.org*

Our extended time with Gail and Bernadette was made possible by the generosity of **Betsy Ungvarski**, who owns the lodge where Brothers of Earth and Companions met, and where we were offered a home to settle into and work for the week in between the two events.

Thank you!

Three more **Metareligious Essays:**

Patricia Gordon ([Unitarian](#))

Glenys Livingstone ([Goddess/Pagan](#))

Mary Coelho ([Quaker](#)).

Magazine interviews with **Brian Swimme:**

[U.S. Catholic](#)

[What Is Enlightenment?](#)

Scheduling for the West Coast

Also during that week, Michael sent out email queries to **200 possible venues on the West Coast** — retreat centers and Unitarian, Unity, and UCC churches — to begin filling out our itinerary for 2003. Response thus far has been gratifying. Practicing what he preaches, Michael (and even Connie!) is "trusting the Universe." We trust that as we commit to speaking invitations, offers of home hospitality will come our way.

We still need housing for much of our time in California: from November 2002 through March 2003. If you are able to support our ministry by offering us a place to lay our heads for several days to a week, or longer, or know of another, or others, who might, please let us know by emailing Michael@TheGreatStory.org. We are especially grateful for accommodations where we can plug into a phone line once or twice a day to check email.

Serendipity

"Trusting the Universe" takes no effort, of course, when invitations to speak and offers of places to stay come in the same package — and without our having to make the initial contact. Our first scheduled foray beyond North America (in late May 2003) came to us this way, through the generosity of **Yoko Kmetz**. She and her husband will be flying us to Japan, lodging us with her mother and at a bayside retreat, and organizing venues for us to preach and teach the Great News of the Great Story in Japan.

The occasional **serendipitous encounter** also compels us to trust this path in life. Here is such a story: While hiking a mountain trail with our Unitarian hosts in New Hampshire (**Madelyn and Frank Baker**), we encountered a group of young people doing trail work as their volunteer service in the Student Conservation Association. When Michael introduced himself as an itinerant preacher and teacher, this prompted, "Hey! You spoke to our class last month!" Sure enough. That class was nearly a thousand miles away: Warren Wilson College in Asheville NC. "See you around the continent, **Maggie Holobauch!**" we called out in high spirits as we bid Maggie and her group farewell.

Visits with Friends

The drive between New England and New Jersey easily accommodated a side venture to Granville, Massachusetts, where **Michael had pastored his first church**, and where Connie just recently learned that an ancestor is buried: James Barlow, who founded Granville in the mid 1700s. Both of us therefore had people — the dead and the living — whom we visited in Granville. (Special thanks to **Michael and Rocio Patterson** and to **Cindy Tavernise** for feeding us and for good conversation during that time.)

Other serendipitous events: we arrived in Princeton, MA, just in time to celebrate the 72nd birthday of our host, **Philemon Sturges**. The Universe Story has become a big part of Philemon's life and creative work, and we enjoyed talking "shop" with him during our stay.

We arrived in Woodsfield, Ohio, home of **the second church that Michael pastored**, in time for Michael to pay a final visit to an 89-year-old former parishioner and dear friend whose days are numbered. Death is as much a part of the Universe Story as is life, and it is an honor to be present for such a sacred transition.

The Ark of Hope

We were fortunate to cross paths with the **Ark of Hope** — an awesome creation of Vermont artists, children, and residents from all walks of life.



The Ark of Hope is a huge treasure box of inlaid wood, extraordinary painted scenes, the text of the **Earth Charter** written by hand on papyrus harvested from one of John Todd's living systems that process sewage, and drawings and collages made by people of all ages that have been gathered into hand-crafted "books" that fill the chest, the ark.

Sisters Gail Worcelo and Bernadette Bostwick with The Ark of Hope.

In August the Ark will be moved to South Africa in support of the Earth Charter, a people's initiative which will be considered for adoption by the United Nations.

The Ark was our altar for the morning. What a gift!

Time Out for Exploring Nature's Beauty

An unexpected treat in our journey, too, was the two-hour **canoe trip** with **Jim Thaxton** on the Licking River of northern Kentucky. Jim and Ann Thaxton own a canoe and cabin rental business about a half hour south of Covington ([Paddler's Inn](#)). Jim knew of us, thanks to his having been one of the thousand people who attended the EarthSpirit Rising Conference in Louisville a year ago. Because Paddler's Inn is situated only a slight jog east from our travel route between Ohio and Louisville, it wasn't a difficult choice for us to say "Yes!" to Jim's generous invitation to take a brief retreat here during a downtime in our schedule. Fog, great blue heron, drumfish streaming in the shallows, shells of clams and mussels (the southeastern United States holds the world's richest assortment of freshwater mussels), and fossil bryozoan colonies eroding from limestone banks were among the memories we have taken from our river journey.

We overnighted at Paddler's Inn, too, on our way to Louisville, and the next morning Jim and his wife, Ann, accompanied us to a place we knew we needed to experience: **Big Bone Lick State Park**, less than an hour southwest of Cincinnati. It is truly a sacred site of the Epic of Evolution. This is where many of the fossil mastodons and mammoths and ground sloths on display in eastern museums were collected. Salty spring water emerges here, not far from the Ohio River, and many a mammal traveled to this spot to lick the salts. Some never left. The springs became graves whenever big beasts got stuck in the muck.

Some big bones are displayed in the visitor center, but the real excitement is to walk the grounds and conjure up the ghosts of these **great animals of Ice Age America**. A herd of bison onsite (an extinct species of bison were among the Ice Age beasts who left their bones here) is a big help for envisioning how the licks teemed with life in the past. So is an outdoor exhibit of life-size models of a mired mammoth, a foraging ground sloth, a trumpeting mastodon, and bison and muskox carcasses being picked over by a model turkey vulture.

Connie enjoyed showing our group how to **conjure the ghosts of the Ice Age** in another way, too: by focusing on the pods and thorns of the abundant honey locust trees that thrive where forest becomes field. The pods coevolved with the big beasts of the Cenozoic Era in America, offering sweet pulp to attract mastodons and mammoths to pluck and swallow the pods, later defecating the seeds in rich mounds of dung. By providing Jim Thaxton with this new scientific information (Connie wrote a whole book on this topic, *The Ghosts of Evolution*, along with short articles in *Natural History* and *Arnoldia* magazines), we hope that when we visit again in some future year there will be a new exhibit on the site that puts Honey Locust front and center!

Thanks to our many hosts, supporters, and fellow travelers!

The "loft" bed built into our van by our friend **Paul Newman** (above our 23 boxes — mostly books and files) is very comfortable, and we camped in it for five or six days these past six weeks.

But our full-time itinerancy is made possible only through the generosity of those who invite us into their homes, lodges, and campuses.

Home hospitality was graciously provided during these past six weeks by **Jan and John Nickerson** (Boston MA), **Philemon Sturges and Judy Sue Goodwin** (Princeton MA), **Madelyn and Frank Baker** (Franklin NH), **Betsy Ungvarski** (Weston VT), **Janet Newman** (New City NY), **Dick and Marie Yoss** (Woodsfield OH), **Jim and Ann Thaxton** (Butler KY), **Sisters of Charity** (Nazareth KY), and **Brian Buford** (Louisville KY).

Other people in the Great Story / New Cosmology movement not mentioned above, but whom we met and shared stories with during our travels include:

Jim Conlon, Lou Niznik, Conrad Federspiel, Maurice Lange, Bill Rickard, John Herrington, Kym Farmer, Doug Van Houten, Rosie Bishop, and Leslie Pilder.

Special thanks to **Patricia Gordon** for donating the camera that took the Earth Ark picture shown here, to **Leslie Pilder** for sewing pouches to hold our Great Story Beads, and to **Robert Wright** for his encouragement and for donating copies of his book *Nonzero* for us to sell along the way.

**Till next time, we are ALL together in the Great Work,
Connie and Michael**

NOTE: To read our first travel report, Log #1, click [HERE](#).

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