

Connie Barlow & Michael Dowd's Great Story Tour

# Turtle Log

ON THE ROAD TO THE ECOZOIC ERA



Number 4

September 7 - October 31, 2002

## Where We've Been Lately

**WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA, KANSAS, MISSOURI, COLORADO**

## Our Latest Adventures

**Presenting adult religious education programs at 4 UNITARIAN, 2 UCC, 2 METHODIST, 1 UNITY, and 1 MENNONITE church, plus 2 CATHOLIC retreat centers, a QUAKER meeting, and a BUDDHIST dharma group**

**Storytelling for children in chapel services and religious education at a UNITARIAN church and 2 MONTESSORI schools**

**Performing Sunday services at 2 UNITARIAN, 1 UCC, and 1 METHODIST church**

**Discussing the Great Story with teens at a UNITARIAN church and an ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL**

**Bringing the Great News of the Great Story to Christian students and staff at 3 CAMPUS MINISTRIES**

**Guest teaching religion, zoology, ecology, anthropology, interdisciplinary, and ethics courses at 6 COLLEGES**

**Presenting at a BOOKSTORE, CSA FARM, [ARBORETUM](#), PUBLIC RADIO STATION, BIOREGIONAL CONGRESS, [CREATION SPIRITUALITY CENTER](#), [EARTH CHARTER COMMUNITY SUMMIT](#), and ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY GROUP**

**Writing and posting on our website a "Coming Home to North America" [SCRIPT FOR CHILDREN](#)**

**Posting on our website two contributed [EVOLUTIONARY PARABLES](#), photos of Great Story [BEADS](#) made by others, and an article written about our itinerant ministry that appeared in Research News in Science and Theology**

**Adapting two evolutionary parables into scripts that are IMPROVISATIONALLY ACTED OUT by audience volunteers**

**VISITING WITH LEADERS in this movement (including our friend Ursula Goodenough, who just returned from teaching evolution to the [DALAI LAMA](#))**

**Making a pilgrimage to the [ALDO LEOPOLD SHACK](#) in Wisconsin and the [SALT MONUMENT](#) in Colorado**

**Experiencing in the wild [SPECIES OF TREES](#) that Connie has featured in her 2001 book, The Ghosts of Evolution**

## *Into the Fire*

**"Just how full do you want me to book your schedule?"** asked Dave Creswell last winter, when he volunteered to organize events for us in his hometown of Madison, Wisconsin. "Oh, you can't book us too heavily," we responded naively. Well! We rolled into Madison on September 7 with great anticipation, as we faced a schedule of 39 speaking engagements over the course of 17 days. Dave and Lori Creswell kept us housed, fed, and on time throughout the two and a half weeks. We not only survived, we thrived – though we admit to being a wee bit reluctant to schedule that intensively again!

We arrived in Madison on a Saturday, about an hour before Connie was scheduled to present a slide program at the **University of Wisconsin Arboretum**, titled "The North America Story: Becoming Native to Place." The 90 minute show was

well received, and followed by an hour-long guided walk that Connie co-led on the grounds in quest of "anachronistic" plants, while pondering the processes by which life forms time and again make the transition from immigrant status to resident. As one docent remarked afterwards, "I don't know what to say anymore on the native plant walks I lead!" Such is the mixed blessing of learning the Deep Time way of perceiving the world, of witnessing the 65 million year story of shifting ecologies on this continent. We are enthralled by the evolutionary pageant; we become confused about ours and others destinies.

Michael and Dave found Connie, at the end of her botanical tour, responding to questions beneath a honey locust tree. They plucked her away for the drive to the **MinGei Center for Creation Spirituality**, for a potluck and reception with local sustainability leaders. The MinGei Center rests atop a prominent drumlin – a steep, teardrop-shaped hill born of the last glacial retreat. The Center's founder and director, Penny Andrews, had chosen the ritual version of "Coming Home to North America" for a late afternoon program the following afternoon.

This drama and culminating ritual, written by Connie, is based on Tim Flannery's acclaimed book, *The Eternal Frontier*. Once the [scripts for the 8 characters](#) are distributed to those who volunteer for such roles, the event playfully unfolds without need for guidance. So we, too, become participants, just like everyone else – spontaneously acting out the movement and sound of American horses galloping across Greenland into Scandinavia 50 million years ago, or ancient elephants trumpeting their entry into America from Asia 17 million years ago.



**"Coming Home to North America" at the MinGei Center for Creation Spirituality**

Three hours later, we headed back down the drumlin and into the center of Madison, where Dave Creswell's Buddhist group was meeting at his church, the First Unitarian Society of Madison. Following a 45-minute silent meditation, Michael delivered a half-hour "**dharma talk**" on The Great Story. Interest was so high that he stayed on for another hour, responding to questions. So ended the first weekend of our Madison adventure!

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## *Awakenings and Conversion Experiences*

When we launched our itinerant ministry in April 2002, we felt an urgency to speak to people who had not yet experienced the epic of evolution as a sacred story, as a cosmic creation story we can all claim heritage in, whatever our religious differences. So it is an extra delight for us to serve as guest speakers at regular Sunday services of Unitarian fellowships, and for Michael to preach the Sunday sermon in Christian churches. Folks are going to be there anyway: we don't need to convince them in advance that the message is worth hearing – and that for more than a few it will be life-changing, as it has been for us.

Especially when a church pulpit offers Michael an opportunity to preach full-out, infused with spirit, we can count on a number of awakenings. A face will light up, then another. Some will seek us out afterwards to excitedly tell us how the message makes sense of their own experience. Others will quietly purchase a book or two from among the 15 titles we carry in our van: Thomas Berry's ***The Great Work***; all three of Brian Swimme's books; Jennifer Morgan's ***Born With a Bang***; or ***The Hand of God***, a gorgeous book of Hubble Telescope photographs published by the Templeton Foundation; along with Michael's own ***EarthSpirit*** book, two or three of Connie's science books, and inspiring works such as ***Promise Ahead*** by Duane Elgin and ***Nonzero*** by Robert Wright, who use their evolutionary understanding to articulate realistically hopeful paths for humanity's future.

We are vessels through which the Great News of The Great Story is transmitted. The ideas we offer are mostly drawn from a community of contributors, especially from the teachings of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and Miriam MacGillis. There are always "aha" experiences when we present Thomas's portrayal of our species as the celebrants of the Universe Story: through the human quest for deep-time understanding, Cosmos and Earth are awakening to the magnificence of their own immense journeys.

We love to quote Brian Swimme, too: "Four billion years ago Earth was molten rock, and now it sings opera!" The ensuing laughter signals growth toward an expansive and exceedingly ancient identity.

While one of Connie's personal contributions to the community of ideas is a ritualistic way of learning our continental story, Michael's personal contributions center on the psychological and spiritual benefits one can derive by coming to trust the Universe/Reality with the same gusto as customarily held for finding faith in God. Michael's talk/sermon, "Can the Universe Be Trusted?" is by far his most popular and appreciated presentation to both religious and secular audiences. This was the sermon he delivered at all three services at the **First Unitarian Society of Madison**, which is the second largest UU congregation in North America. He presented to almost as large a congregation on another Sunday morning in Madison, too. At the **Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ** his sermon topic was "Great News for a New Millennium," which was followed by a discussion on "The Marriage of Science and Religion" that Connie joined him in guiding.



**Michael Dowd preaching on The Great Story at the Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ (left) and The First Unitarian Society of Madison (right)**

Ever since his book *EarthSpirit* was published in 1991, Michael has been contributing to the movement by interpreting core Christian themes (sin and salvation; the Kingdom of God; Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life) cosmologically. Here is how a student at **Edgewood College** in Madison responded to Michael's Christian interpretations:

**"From your presentation I discovered for the first time what was right in front of my face, waiting for me to take hold of: the knowledge of how to incorporate my religious beliefs into everyday life in a meaningful way. I've always believed in God, but like many, I had an image of Him as an old guy floating in the sky, which didn't do much for my understanding of myself and the Story. Michael, I will never forget your heaven and hell explanations, and how when you feel love, that is heaven. That makes so much sense to me, and that helped me to relate to God as what lies within everything. Now I realize that signs of God are everywhere in everything, and it's a really cool feeling. Thank you!"**

**You've changed my life."**

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## Taking the Great Story to Colleges & Universities

**Soliciting invitations to speak to college students is a priority for us.**

In college courses or through programs offered by campus ministries, we know we will find individuals whose lives may be shifted by even a brief exposure to evolutionary ideas delivered in a personal and meaningful context – individuals who still have many years in which to make a contribution to the world and who may not otherwise hear this message unless we or others bring it to them now.

Ideal venues for us are small colleges, where instructors have teaching loads that stretch their energies to the limit and where guest speakers infrequently visit campus. We have found that if we take the time to explore college websites, we can usually find a professor in the religion department, and others in ecology, biology, or environmental studies, who are teaching courses in which our lectures and slide shows would be perceived as synergistic.

On occasion these instructors already know of our work. "I picked up your ***Ghosts of Evolution*** in an airport bookstore!" Calvin Cink (biology professor) told Connie when he received our email query. And, yes, Connie spoke on that theme in his General Ecology course at **Baker University**, south of Lawrence KS, while Michael was across campus, interpreting [biblical passages](#) from an evolutionary standpoint for students taking an Introduction to the New Testament course.

From September through October, we also presented at the **University of Wisconsin** (a talk on evolutionary ethics for the **School of Business**, a vespers homily for Catholic students, and a longer talk sponsored by **Madison Campus Ministry**); at **Madison Area Technical College** ("The Great Story", presented for staff and teachers); at **Macalester College** in St. Paul MN ("Envisioning the Ecozoic Era" for an environmental studies program); at the **University of Kansas** ("Ghosts of the Ice Age Mammals" for a zoology class and "Christianity and the Great Story" for Ecumenical Campus Ministry).

The high point in our college interactions was our extended time at **Edgewood College** in Madison WI. Paula Hirschboeck, professor of philosophy at Edgewood, organized multiple events well in advance. Paula has become a leader in this movement, writing the first "[metareligious essay](#)" that we posted on our website. Her "[Buddha Bowl](#)" was the first in a series of evolutionary parables published in EarthLight magazine and also available on our website.

While at Edgewood, we presented to an honors course that Paula co-created with biology

colleague Jim Lorman. They titled their course "The Universe Story," and we followed up our talk later in the week by leading the students through a short version of the North American Continent ritual. Paula and Jim also scheduled us into the college auditorium one evening for a campus-wide presentation and slide show: "A Cosmic Creation Story." Connie enjoyed bicycling to campus on yet another day to present "The Mythic Potential of the Great Story" to an anthropology class, and Michael led a guided meditation at an ecumenical Autumn Equinox celebration that evening.



**"Coming Home to North America" ritual at Edgewood College. Amidst the students in this honors "Universe Story" class are professor Jim Lorman (second face from right, black shirt) and Dave Creswell (gray beard, center). Dave was our host and organizer in Madison.**

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## The Story for Teens

In Madison, thanks to Dave Creswell, we had invitations to speak to teens. What an opportunity – and what a challenge! Most challenging, and ultimately satisfying for us, were the five days we taught an American history class at **Malcolm Shabbaz High School**, an alternative school. We introduced students, through presentation and

discussion, to a truly deep time understanding of this continent, our world, and themselves. On the first day, the students clearly were testing us. But by day two, their postures shifted, and by day three most were attentive and a number had assumed leadership in the conversation. By the fifth and final day, we knew we had made a difference. Always, everywhere when speaking to youth, we talk about the Great Work, and how each person can find their bliss and a way to contribute to the world by searching for where "your own great joy intersects with Earth's great needs."

As is customary in schools, we asked for no honorarium for our work. Our payment, instead, was knowing we had made a difference. And the multitude of opportunities we had to sell books in Madison, following our presentations to adults, gave us the financial cushion to offer our services pro bono to Shabbaz.

Jordan Wilson, a senior at Shabbaz, followed up with a lengthy email in which he wrote, "**Wow, there are people out there in our culture who actually break away from the mindless and selfish consumerism completely and totally and live their life for a purpose and a greater meaning. I've always heard stories of people traveling and living with other people and being technically homeless, but I've never actually met anybody that does, until you two stopped by our school.**" He went on to talk about how our work and the ideas we presented reminded him of Daniel Quinn's *The Story of B*, and he thanked us for coming to his class and "teaching us something that we'll remember and keep with us for the rest of our lives."



**Alternative High School students in Madison WI, after a week with Connie and Michael. Senior Jordan Wilson is standing far right, teacher Gilbert Richardson seated far right, Michael Dowd seated front center.**

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## We Are Made of Stardust

**What a joy and privilege it is to bring the Great Story to younger children, too!** While Michael was conducting Sunday morning services at **First Unitarian Society of Madison**, Connie joined the senior minister, Rev. Michael Schuler, in conducting the children's chapel service. There Connie presented her favorite kids program: "We Are Made of Stardust." By the time it was over, the children knew that they were intimately connected to the stars – that every atom of calcium in their bones and iron in their blood came from simpler elements fused inside the belly of a giant star, which then exploded as a supernova, seeding the galaxy.

Many of the children left the chapel with a glimmer of stardust on their foreheads. Connie had taught the children to sing a chant-tune, over and over: "We are made of stardust, every single atom, of carbon and of oxygen, calcium and iron." While the children were singing, she rubbed a little glitter on her forehead, on the forehead of Rev. Schuler, and then she meandered among the children seated on the floor, anointing with stardust any who signified their desire to participate in this ritual by raising a hand.

## "My fuavurit puart wus evuluoshun"

While our main mission is to bring this sacred story of the universe to people who might otherwise not encounter it, we sure do enjoy occasionally preaching to those already enlightened. Such is the situation with Montessori elementary schools, as Maria Montessori grounded her whole philosophy of education in the Universe Story. (Click here [[ClassicQuotes.pdf](#)] to read what Maria Montessori wrote about the Universe Story in 1948.)

At **Children's Center Montessori School** in St. Paul MN, Nancy Dunlavy arranged for Connie to spend three hours with a Montessori class of 29 students, ranging in age from 7 to 11. Connie showed the class her [Great Story beads](#) and led the students through a re-enactment of animal evolution on and immigration to the North American Continent over the course of 65 million years.

The students had been asked the prior day to bring in their favorite stuffed animals, so Connie told the story in a way that would give each child a chance to carry his or her animal – whether elephant, frog, wolf, bear, or cat – into the continent, to add to the growing pile of North American critters.

The following day, the children wrote and drew thank you letters to Connie, which their teacher, Joan Swanson, bound into book format. What a gift to receive those heartfelt

letters! Here is a sampling:

- **"Thank you for spending so much time with us you were so energetic. You taught us a lot about prehistoric life. The story of the turtle island was fantastic. It was unbelievable that we are 13 billion years old! and that we are made out of stardust it makes me feel like a Goddess. I don't like it. I love it." Love, Eileen**
- **"I liked the part about the golden age of turtles because turtles are one of my favorite reptiles. I think that I would have liked to live in the golden age of turtles. I really liked your necklace too. We liked your necklace so much that the whole school is going to make one. I hope you can come again." Love, Lucas**
- **"You are unusual and energetic. You're like Albert Einstein and you're wise and I never thought you would be so smart." Sincerely, Tommy**
- **"Thank you very much for coming to visit us. You were fantastic. I don't think anyone could get smarter than you. I loved the way you used every stuffed animal. Also the whole school is going to make a necklace like yours. I loved it when you talked about the tiny horses and how the camels evolved in North America. And it was very fascinating to find out that we were made of star dust and 13 billion years old. Please come again." Sincerely, Storrie**
- **"I am glad you came. what I like the most are crocodiles I hope you come again. you are wise and I like your necklace I want to make one too. mine will have the Big Bang. the Big Bang bead will be red." Love, Andrew**
- **"I really liked the part when the meteor hit the Earth and wiped out everything to Japan wow what a meteor. I really think that was nice that you use stuffed animals for your story. I hope you come again." love, Reid**
- **"It was very fun, my favorite part was evolution." love, Iain**
- **"Thank you for telling us that we all are 13 billion years old. When you said I am made of star dust, I was very happy because I liked space and I want to be part of it. I feel like an alien. Please please please come again." Love, Liza**

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## ***Crisis Into Opportunity: Writing a New Script for Kids***

We planned to spend just two nights in Colorado on our drive west to the Cosmological Imagination Conference in Berkeley CA. We had evening programs booked in Denver and Boulder churches, but at the last moment (literally), we arranged to teach one morning at **Dennison Montessori**, a public Montessori school in Denver, where John Fowler, originator of the Timeline of Light ritual and long-time Epic of Evolution contributor, teaches 5th grade.

There was no time to ask the kids to bring in their favorite stuffed animals, and perhaps some 5th graders are past that stage anyway. What to do? How to involve the kids while telling the story?

One of the characters in the adult version of the North American story is named "Crisis and Opportunity." What might be the opportunity here? Well, the opportunity turned out to be the seed for writing a whole new [script](#) for teachers and parents to use, and that can be printed right from our website. Names of animals (rhinos, horses, camels, frogs, turtles, bears) are put into a basket for children to randomly pick. It is then their job to listen carefully for when their creature enters the story (sometimes on more than one occasion) – perhaps originating right on this continent, or walking across Beringia from Asia, or floating up from South America, or even going extinct.

This way of telling the deep time story of our continent worked amazingly well – and even for a combined 5th and 6th grade class of 60 students, all sitting on the floor in a semicircle around a model of our continent outlined by a rope.

We have found that kids, for some reason, aren't as willing as adults to act out the animal stories. But they are nevertheless transfixed as they watch the story unfold, waiting for a chance to simply stand in the continent, representing their totem creature, while their peers greet them with a hearty "Welcome to North America!"

With 60 children, there is no chance at the end of the storytelling for each to enter North America one by one, describing which continent(s) their own ancestors came from. So Connie called for them to enter in groups. At the Denver Montessori school, about 8 children stood in the continent to honor their Native America ancestors: mostly Cherokee and Navajo. A lot of kids then stood in the continent to honor their European ancestors, calling out "Ireland, Germany, Scotland" and the like. So, too, with Africa: "Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt." None from Australia, none (of course!) from Antarctica, none from Polynesia (though one from Hawaii). Quite a few entered from South or Central America, and a number from Asia.

Connie learned from this first experience with a continent-by-continent approach that kids with Russian ancestry choose Asia rather than Europe as their ancestral continent. She was reminded by others to call out the Middle East as a distinct

place, as these children had not responded to any of the continental names. Very important, too: children with recent Mexican ancestry do not regard their heritage as North American. "North Americans" to them are folks who live in the U.S. or Canada, even though Mexico, geographically, is part of this continent.

Overall, it was moving to see how proud the children were to enter the continent in this way. Ancestry is so mixed in Denver that some kids came into the continent 3 or 4 times! Finally, we honored all those ancestors whom we didn't know, whose contribution to our lives was a mystery. But this was not, in fact, the end. One girl called out, "How about if we all try to fit into North America together?" Great idea! We did that; we all fit; and Connie led the children in singing a simple song to celebrate our bonds (which she had learned from Michael):

**"We are one: round, round, round. We are one walking holy ground, round round."**

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## ***From Quaker Silence to Methodist Movin' an a-Shakin***

In addition to organizing events for us, home hospitality for our two weeks in Minneapolis was provided by Jack and Mary Phillips, and then by (newlyweds) Jack Heckelman and Linda Bergh. Jack and Mary Phillips are long-time Quakers, and they arranged two weekday evenings for Michael to address their Quaker group, the **Twin Cities Friends Meeting**. After Michael's first presentation on The Great Story, Jack stepped in with a suggestion: "Let's now take five minutes of silence, and then have the responses and questions emerge from the silence." What a wonderful way to transit from lecture to discussion! Any group might benefit from this entry into silence, as the heart is given a chance to join the mind in what ensues.

In Minneapolis, we had our first opportunities to present in Methodist churches. Michael gave a special program on "The Great Story" to 65 congregants, following the regular Sunday services at **Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church**. The semicircular seating arrangement, around a central altar, brought out the best in Michael. The audience response was enthusiastic – and there were numerous awakenings.

We did more than speak at Hennepin Methodist: we listened and learned! This is a stately old church, with a very large congregation – so large that members and guests have a choice of services: a traditional Methodist service in the spectacular sanctuary, or an alternative service in a large meeting room / art gallery that explicitly brings a reverence for Earth into Christian celebration. Two beautiful practices we learned in the latter we'd like to pass on:

**Here is how "Amen" is said at Hennepin: "Ah-men, ah-women, ah-children, ah-animals, ah-creation, ahhhhh!"**

And, when congregants are offered an opportunity to speak to the group their "Joy or Concern" (a practice we frequently experience in Unitarian services, too), the congregants use a simple gesture to acknowledge each contribution: one hand "sweeps" the concern into one's heart, holds it there for a moment, and then, with an outward gesture, releases the joy or concern or prayer back into the world.

Michael also delivered a Sunday sermon on the Great Story, followed by a forum, at **Walker United Methodist Church** in Minneapolis. What an amazing blend of Christian and Earth-honoring ritual, preceded by a rousing half hour of sing-along gospel and Americana music, led by a band of aging boomers! Connie was so energized by the sing-along that when it came time for her to perform passages from Jennifer Morgan's book, ***Born with a Bang!***, she asked the congregants to stamp their feet to help her shift into the persona of the Universe telling its own story.



**The altar and a banner in the sanctuary of Walker United Methodist Church, St. Paul MN.**



We met the pastor of Walker United Methodist the evening before, as Reverend Seth Garwood played the role of Crisis and Opportunity at the "Coming Home to North America Ritual" we conducted for a group of 30 adults at Hennepin Ave United Methodist Church. That was a particularly lively and meaningful enactment of deep time history. All roles were chosen at random – volunteers simply picked up one of 7 scripts lying face down on the floor. I marveled at how the man who happened to choose the role of Plants was wearing a forest green sweater with a conifer tree design. The man who played Climate told me afterwards that at the Earth Charter Community Summit, held a few days earlier, he had chosen to attend the Climate Change workshop!

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## *The Great Story and September 11*

**"Finding Hope in Challenging Times"** was Michael's theme for an evening presentation on September 11 at **St. Benedict's Center** north of Madison. The turnout, 75-80 people, was greater than our sponsors had planned for, and extra chairs were brought into the chapel. The memories of one year prior were very close to the surface for all of us. And there was a synergy between audience and speaker that allowed Michael to shine.



**Michael showing his Great Story Beads to the audience at St. Benedict's Center (WI), which had gathered to hear "Finding Hope in Challenging Times" on September 11.**

Oh, had we been able to arrange for a video recording of that presentation! That

experience led us resolve to purchase a good video camera and tripod at the first opportunity. The book-buying response at St. Benedict's, First Unitarian, Orchard Ridge, and elsewhere in Madison provided enough of a financial cushion for us to make the investment: a Sony DCR VX2000. We now look forward to producing professional quality videos and making them widely available.

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## Connecting

Jack Heckelman, a long-time community activist and [Earth Charter](#) advocate, initiated an "**Earth Charter Community Summit**" in Minneapolis for September 28, concurrent with similar events happening in Seattle, Washington D.C., Louisville, and other cities. Thanks to Jack, and to Nancy Dunlavy, we were keynote speakers for the Minneapolis gathering of more than 230 people. We learned later that Mark Steiner, a cherished colleague in this movement and one of the co-organizers of the 2001 EarthSpirit Rising Conference, was the keynote for the Earth Charter Summit held in Louisville that same day, and Vicki Robin, a dear friend in Seattle, was keynote for the community event there.

And thanks to our participation in the Earth Charter Community Summit, we met and connected deeply with musician/singer and peace ambassador Joe Carter as well as key leaders in the Twin Cities sustainability movement.

After two weeks in Minneapolis, we hit the road again, heading south, just ahead of the first tendrils of winter. We caught up with the migrating monarch butterflies we had last encountered in Wisconsin. After one night in a truck stop, we rolled into **Camp Woods in the Flint Hills of Kansas**. There Michael greeted old friends from the bioregional and permaculture movements: Peter Bane, Patricia Allison, Gene and Joyce Marshall, Jeanne-Marie Manning, Deborah Giannini, Pam McCann, David Haenke, Bea Briggs, and Stan Slaughter. It



was also great to reconnect with mutual friends: John Herrington, David Abram, Rael Basson, and Jim Schenk, and to make new friends. This was Michael's third experience of a North America bioregional congress, and Connie's first.

### **Connie and Michael at the 2002 Bioregional Congress in the Flint Hills of Kansas.**

While Michael was taking in events, presenting on The Great Story, and connecting with friends, **Connie was mostly connecting with friends of another sort: trees who remember the mammoths.** She had written about honey locust, Kentucky coffee tree, and osage orange in her 2001, ***The Ghosts of Evolution.*** But here was a chance to experience all these elders in the wild!

Connie gathered osage orange fruits. These fruits had coevolved with American horses, their preferred seed dispersers, for million of years. But horses went extinct on this continent 13,000 years ago. What a thrill to unite plant with animal partner, by tossing the softball size spheres into a corral, and then watching the horses eat them.

Way up a dry creek into the prairie hills, Connie encountered a stand of all-female Kentucky coffee trees. Might this clone of gnarly trees be growing from a far older rootstock that had its start as a single seed sprouting from the turd of a mastodon?



**Kentucky Coffee trees growing in the wild of the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas. Did this clone of trees perhaps germinate from the turd of a mastodon 13,000 years ago?**

After the bioregional congress, **Lawrence, KS** was our destination, where we connected with John Brewer, whom Connie has known for a long time through his contributions on the Cosmogogenesis listserve. John organized a number of events for us in Lawrence, and he and Elaine welcomed us into their home, as did Doug and Shirley Hitt.

The **University of Kansas** campus was only a short walk from the Brewer residence. Connie took the opportunity to meet with Professor Donald Worster, Hall Distinguished Professor of American History, to talk about prospects for reintroducing the cheetah to its continent of origin and other aspects of "rewilding for evolution" in North America. The previous month, in Madison, she had delivered a talk on the Wildlands Project to an enthusiastic audience at the UW Arboretum. Wherever we travel, Connie enjoys furthering her commitment to wildlands advocacy.

Also at the University of Kansas, Professor Larry Martin, Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology, attended Connie's "Ghosts of Ice Age Mammals" slide talk for Prof. Robert Timm's zoology class. Connie was thrilled that Professor Martin, an expert on sabertooth cats, offered to show her his collection of skulls and then take her on a personal tour of the Cenozoic mammal skeletons that grace the KU museum. Also on campus, Michael offered two presentations sponsored by the KU Ecumenical Campus Ministry. Both were very well received.

In St. Louis, we visited Ursula Goodenough at her office in the Biology Department of **Washington University**. We delighted in her tale of having recently spent a few days in India teaching evolution to the Dalai Lama! Jim and Mary Jo Brauner had set up two speaking opportunities for us in St. Louis, as well as providing home hospitality, expert computer advice, an introduction to Heartmath and Healing Touch, and gentle companionship that, though we had just met, made us feel like old friends.



**Ursula Goodenough with the Dalai Lama.**

Speaking of old friends, what a delight for Connie to catch up with Mary Ellen Garrett in Colorado, a friend and kayaking companion from more than twenty years ago, when they were both living in Juneau, Alaska.

**Old friends, new friends, the distinction becomes a blur. It is a privilege to enter into the lives of so many who share our commitment to a healthy, celebratory relationship of humankind with the whole Earth Community.**

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## Website Improvements

Little did we know that when Denny O'Neil contributed an evolutionary parable about the ancestors of the first vertebrates to venture out of the sea onto land that it would become a playful way to learn and celebrate the story wherever we go. Connie adapted the story into a script, "[Ozzie and the Snortlefish](#)," for three readers and two actors, which can now be printed off this website. What an exuberant fish hero Linda Bergh became when she acted out the Ozzie character in Minneapolis!

Also new to our website is a link to [Paula Hendrick's webpage](#) that explains in detail how she makes Universe Story beads and that shows photographs of examples. Known variously as Cosmic Rosaries or Great Story Beads, the idea is catching on in school classrooms as well as among adults. We thank Jim Lorman for sharing a

digital image of a loop of Great Story Beads created by one of his students at Edgewood College.



**These Great Story Beads were created by Edgewood College student Tina Rataj, from materials available in crafts stores. We thank Jim Lorman for sharing the digital images.**



Earlier in this Turtlelog, we mentioned the addition to our website of a children's version of the North American ritual. And for the December holidays, we wish to draw your attention to two possibilities for group or family rituals: "A Feast of Elements" and "The Tiamat Ritual."

We'll be testing out "[A Feast of Elements](#)" for the first time this year (at the EarthLight offices in Oakland on December 19), and we invite you to do so, too, by printing it off our website and embellishing it for your own use. "A Feast of Elements" is a way to honor the ancestral stars who gave birth to all the complex elements on Earth and in our bodies. Key is that the science story of stardust is told in a sacred way and is explicitly linked to the experience of Winter Solstice, to Hannukah candle-lighting, to star-topped Christmas trees, to Kwanzaa, and to the Buddhist way of enlightenment.

Also newly up on our website is the "[Tiamat Ritual](#)" which Connie wrote eight years ago and has enjoyed sharing with family on Christmas eves. This is a mini-version of the Universe Story and also celebrates the stardust theme. Volunteers take on the roles of narrators, The Great Star Tiamat, The Prophet of Planetary Futures, The Spark of Life, and The Magic of Mind. Especially great for mixed groups of children

and adults.

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## The Salt Monument

Mary Romano, Karen Kudebeh, Jackie Ziegler, and Neal McBurnett did a superb job of keeping us busy for three days in Colorado. Early on, we were told that "**The Salt Monument**" ([saltmonument@hotmail.com](mailto:saltmonument@hotmail.com)) was on the agenda, just for a visit. Clueless until we got there, the Salt Monument became a high point of our visit. As we walked into the made-over garage, a spectacular clear prism half-full of – well, salt – towered above us. And there to greet us was its designer and visionary: Margot Weiss.



**The Salt Monument in Boulder, Colorado, and its creator, Margot Weiss. Right: Neal McBurnett with Connie and Michael after a presentation at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder.**



Over the next half hour we explored the other objects of art that had been gathered or painted by Margot and that all support the theme of the monument: helping visitors to get in touch – visceral touch – with the daily births and deaths of humans throughout the world. Each single grain of salt represents a human being alive today – all six billion and more of us. The ritual (performed by the artist or a designee each day, without fail) entails pouring new grains of salt into the top of the vessel to represent all the human births that day, and then draining from the bottom of the vessel grains of salt that represent all the deaths that day.

And then the ritual began. How to describe it? Impossible, except to say that it was unspeakably powerful and brought us both to tears.

**Everywhere we go, we witness individuals and groups of people becoming founts of creativity, inspired by the cries of Earth, life, and humanity: great news for challenging times!**

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## Communing with Aldo Leopold

**Our travels afford opportunities for us to experience not only works of spiritual art but also what we regard as sacred sites of the Epic of Evolution.** The Flint Hills of Kansas are venerated by many as among the last vestiges of unplowed, original tallgrass prairie in North America. So Connie was thrilled to discover that they are also a sacred site for experiencing the ghosts of mammoths and mastodons who shaped the sweet pods of Kentucky coffee tree.

While in Wisconsin, Connie took a day off with Dave and Lori Creswell to experience the grounds (and the "shack") where Aldo Leopold retreated to write and to practice ecological restoration. Rob Nelson, director of educational outreach for the **Aldo Leopold Foundation**, personally guided us into the shack and through the grounds. It was a profound experience for Connie, as Aldo Leopold was a major presence for her during the seasons she lived alongside the Gila Wilderness of southwestern New Mexico (our nation's first wilderness area, established in 1924, thanks to Aldo Leopold's vision and persistence). And Connie concluded her Ghosts of Evolution by quoting from Aldo's Passenger Pigeon essay in his ***Sand County Almanac*** (1949):

**"Men still live who in their youth, remember pigeons. Trees still live who, in their youth were shaken by a living wind [when millions of pigeons would descend upon a woodland]. But a decade hence, only the oldest oaks will remember, and at long last only the hills will know."**

Oh how Aldo would have rejoiced to learn that even a young honey locust still remembers the mammoths!

At one point in the tour of the Leopold grounds, Rob Nelson halted and pointed to a bare spot on a slope. A plaque was visible below, but the text was unreadable from our position. "There used to be a stump here," he told us. "What do you think it commemorates?"

"The oak!" Connie responded. "The Good Oak," Rob corrected. In an essay so titled, Leopold included in his ***Sand County Almanac*** the story he discerned from the rings of an old oak tree on the property, blown down by a storm. Just as a "good oak" inspired Aldo Leopold in the 1930s and 40s, a "great oak" would inspire Thomas Berry in the 1970s and 80s to write his ***Riverdale Papers*** and the essays later collected in his ***Dream of the Earth***.

Oak trees, genus *Quercus*. As we travel the continent, Connie finds herself especially drawn to commune with oaks native to each place – and there is always a native oak or two or six! In the prairie states, it was the burr oak who called out to her. The burr oak stands alone in a sea of grasses and flowers – its thick, low branches find sunlight by reaching out and out, horizontal to the ground. The acorn is enormous, with a thick furry cap.

We are writing this turtlelog at the beginning of our California sojourn. Here there are oaks galore, including live oaks who retain their leaves through the winter and whose large acorns are lengthened into almond-shapes, rather than the bulbous nuts native to eastern forests. But that is a story for our next turtlelog. Till then, know that we are all together in the Great Work!

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**Know we are ALL together in the Great Work!**

**Earthly blessings,**

**Connie and Michael**

*~ Gratitude ~*

*Our traveling ministry would be impossible without the hospitality and generosity of friends and colleagues who house us, feed us, heal us, organize events for us, teach us, sometimes fund us, conspire and play with us, pray with us, and teach us wherever we go. Thank you all!*

**We are still looking for housing offers in southern California for January and February 2003. Housesitting (cat- or dog-sitting) for longer stretches of time would be ideal. Please let us know of any leads you might provide in this: [Michael@TheGreatStory.org](mailto:Michael@TheGreatStory.org)**

**WISCONSIN:** Dave and Lori Creswell, Steve Paulson, Muriel Gunderson, Thomas Eggert, Molley Murray, Ken Wood, Ted Odell, Sylvia Marek, Leah Creswell, Penny Andrews, Gene Delcourt, Gilbert Richardson, Kathryn Martin, Jordan Wilson, Pat Hitchcock, Barb and Dave Perkins, Deb Josephs, Ed Clarke, Marian Timmerman, Paula Hirschboeck, Jim Lorman, Anne Forbes, Tina Rataj, Cindy Rolling, Cal DeWitt, Sr. Mary David, Travis Tennessen, Winton Boyd & family, Nancy Vedder-Shults and Mark Shults, Teri Balsler, Michael Schuler, Kelley Krockner, Sr. Marie Louise Seckar, John Parente, Johanna Seubert, Roberta Hodges, Sr. Joan Foley, Sr. Margaret Wagner, Doug Pierce, Karla Schmidt, Rob Nelson, Brian Joiner, William and Aszani Kunkler

**MINNESOTA:** Jack and Mary Phillips, Jack Heckelman and Linda Bergh, Joan Swanson, Betsy Barnum, Kate Tucker, Kelton Barr, Cris Anderson, Joe Carter, Betty Dyson, Nancy Dunlavy, John Hynes, Rick Magyar, Sally Johnson, Bob Gubrud, Al Romero, Barbara McAfee, David and Hend Penchansky, Seth Garwood, Jennifer Gahnstrom, Sean Gosiewski, Cris Anderson

**KANSAS:** John, Elaine, Robert, and Chris Brewer, Adrian Melott, Larry Martin, Robert Timm, Jean Hershey, Donald Worster, Calvin Cink, George Wiley, Rev. Thad Holcolmb, Doug and Shirley Hitt, Peter Luckey, Graham Kreicker, Bea Briggs, Jim Scott, Acasia Berry

**MISSOURI:** Jim and Mary Jo Brauner, Sr. Corlita Bonnarens, Sr. Nancy Wittwer, Keith Hanlon, Don Kemner, Rev. R. Carlton Stock, Rev. Elinor Jane H. Stock, Bob Aaron, Maurice Strauss, Ursula Goodenough

**COLORADO:** Karen and Steve Kudebeh, Mary Romano, John Fowler, John and Susan Maus, Jackie Ziegler, Neal McBurnett, Margot Weiss, Mary Ellen Garrett

**WE WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE OUR EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE with a plea in behalf of our colleagues at [EarthLight](#) magazine.** Right now, EarthLight is hosting a series of evening presentations and rituals by us here in California. EarthLight has also published evolutionary parables from our website and reported on Great Story beads. Truly, EarthLight, the magazine of spiritual ecology, is a partner in the Great Work. But also right now, this advertising-free magazine is facing potential insolvency. Six thousand loyal subscribers would be well served if any of you might be able to help the editor, Lauren de Boer, connect with potential benefactors. You may contact Lauren directly at [klauren@earthlight.org](mailto:klauren@earthlight.org)

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