

## Morning Earth: E-Mailing the Wild

Every weekday morning I begin the day by stepping outside and observing for a few minutes, then sit down at the computer and write a poem celebrating earth. After the poem I append a prose comment that provides ecological and human context to the poem.

This small poem is my daily Earth Journal entry, which I e-mail to over 1,000 subscribers on five continents: Teachers from Ventura County, CA, Beijing, China, Cornwall, England, Zimbabwe, Africa, the Bronx, NY, Chicago, IL, Wisconsin and Minnesota share the poems with their students, often as a prelude to student writing.

Above I said something foolish that I try to avoid: "ecological and human context." The *and* implies a separation that is deceptive. The perceived split between what is human and what is nature is the root of great environmental problems. That division is a fantasy, for it allows us to define everything not human as *resources* to be used however we please, without environmental considerations. We must no longer pretend we are above nature, nor that we can manage life on Earth.

The movement known as deep ecology reminds us that when we love, we *identify* with what we love. We connect our personal well-being with the well-being of what we love.

When we love the earth, we recognize that we *belong* to earth. Our bodies are made of earth. We are earth, but we are earth made conscious. That is our gift and our dilemma.

When you love the earth, to injure earth is to injure the self. In the seventeenth century, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza taught us this: *We are as large as our loves*. When we love we are

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enlarged by the inclusion in our selves of what we love. If we know we are part of earth, protecting the environment will be as automatic as protecting our toes.

Our task is to love other lives, not nature in general, but in its particulars. We can connect to this tree, that chipmunk, this green iridescent beetle a lot more easily than we can love a huge abstraction called Nature. The problem is, most of us these days have little experience with other lives. A daily poem about wild doings is my way of trying to increase that experience. I try to engage the power of art and art-making. In my forty years of teaching children and adults to write poetry, I have been amazed at how powerful their writing becomes when it is about lives other than human, and environments other than urban. There is an inherent biophilia in us; we are fundamentally attracted to the rest of living nature.

The EarthJournal is about context. The broadest natural context is the biosphere, the skin of life that envelops earth. The study of how the biosphere works is ecology. Ecologists teach us that everything is connected and interdependent. We commonly repeat this, but often don't grasp it. We can't grasp it without placing our persons in it. We don't just inhabit the biosphere, we belong to it; human life is one of its processes. Earth Journal writing requires close observation of process, not just events, to learn how lives intertwine.

Nature is everywhere. As the poet Gary Snyder has said, "Nature is not a place to visit; it is our home." Don't require 'Nature' to be Wilderness. Distinguish between "wildness" and "wilderness." Children are hungry for the wild. The wild is everywhere; it cannot be extinguished. The wild centers every seed, enters every garden. Wilderness is memory and myth, the wild is everywhere. Wilderness is distant, wildness is local. Wildness is the urge of life to be, the grass blade in the blacktop crack, the peregrine in the office tower, weeds pioneering an empty lot, the

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patch of brush where kids make forts.

The EarthJournal is about celebration, the most ancient motive for poetry. I ask people to celebrate moments when the earth gives us gifts—of beauty, of laughter, of surprise, of connection. I also ask them to celebrate the painful gifts earth offers, for these experiences teach us much that we need to know. We learn death early on from dead butterflies, earthworms, roadkill. We learn the terror and necessity of predation

Consciousness gives us a great gift. We can take into ourselves whatever hard things life throws at us, pain and confusion and loss, and perform the artist's miracle of transformation. We can transform pain into power, loss into beauty, by turning poison into a poem, a song, a painting, a dance, a story. When we're done, we have not forgotten, but we have learned and begun to heal. Here's the bonus: when we witness pain and transform it into art, we can share our learning and healing. Making art is a survival skill for both maker and sharer.

The EarthJournal is about sharing. Sharing EarthJournal entries is a communal act. After a period of glorifying "I", we are slowly re-inventing "We." When I read what another has written that wakes that joy of Yes! in me, I know I am not alone. Is that not the root of community?

The EarthJournal is about writing. When we write, we discover how much we know that we didn't know we knew. Writers continually surprise themselves. That's the joy of it, you don't know what's going to come, but you can be sure you'll say more than you thought you would. This is why poets don't outline.

The EarthJournal is daily writing. Writing every day is how we best learn to write, for we teach ourselves to write. I coach writing by providing examples more than directions.

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Sharing work that is raw and far from polished or 'worked' often feels risky, but I have found readers to be generous. My intent in writing and sharing without pause is partly to de-mystify poetry; the mystique around creating poems is a barrier to many who would like to write. My daily e-mails are presented "warts and all."

One of my goals with Morning Earth is to practice a transparent poetry that is simple and accessible. People respond to it, I suspect, because we all hunger for news of the earth and reassurance that the wild exists. My hope is that the Journal helps readers and students to feel part of the community of life, from which our culture too often divorces us.

I am at the age where one "gives back." It is odd how slowly we recognize that virtually all we have done in life has been collaborative. Here is a little March collaboration with finches:

This dawn, redpoll finches feed  
as the east burns gold--  
The great living globe of fire ignites  
the red caps and ripe beaks  
of these little fires  
as they fuel the travel north again  
to the place of birth  
to pass the fire on.

One gives back to the community by passing on the fire. The fire, even after all these eons, is still communal.

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## The Earth Journal

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