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News from the Farm

Perennial Roots Farm: An Interview with Stewart Lundy

In Memoriam—Michael Phillips

From the Editor

This year, tiny purposeful ants made their way through the corridors of my home where I hadn't seen them for two years. They marched up from cracks in the floor to the counters of my minimalist kitchen. Why, after two years, have they found their way back to me? An even bigger question relates to the spiders, which, with ritualistic regularity, moved their webs into the corners exactly two weeks before the ants always arrived. Without ants, the spiders have to nourish themselves with less plentiful bugs. This year, however, there have been ants but no spiders. Why?

Well, it has been an unusual year—hot some days and frigid during others. Weather in my part of the globe has been unreliable to say the least. What happens when patterns change? Do we change with them or do we hold fast to the behaviors we have become comfortable with?

More than ants and spiders know our civilization is changing. Predictions of food shortages, supply chain disruptions, and other diminishment to daily life have led people to scour the market for affordable land or to create space in their back yards to grow more than the usual summer tomatoes. They have taken classes to learn how to forage wild foods and reached out to support local farmers—and not just any local farmers, but those who have demonstrated integrity toward

the land and the multiple lives it nurtures. Biodynamic gardener and business owner Deb Soule recently observed in an e-letter that “with all the uncertainty in the world right now, we need to turn to the soil for healing.” What could be more sustaining than building an unshakeable relationship with the soil from which everything that supports our lives still comes?

In this issue of *Applied Biodynamics*, we feature some who have done just that. JPI's new media manager is a long time biodynamic farmer along with his wife and partner Natalie McGill. He offers insight into the process through which their Perennial Roots Farm evolved. He also notes that just down the road from him another young couple recently bought land. The new owner descends from eleven generations of farmers. The soil is calling to more and more of us too loudly to ignore.

Another lover of the soil was Michael Phillips, whose recent passing created a deep sadness for those who appreciated the wisdom he shared through his Lost Nation Orchard. Mike Biltonen honors him in these pages. Although Phillips planted seeds he may not have lived to harvest, he generously left clear guidance for those coming after him.

Certainly we all can choose to creatively change our behaviors or hold fast to what is comfortable. In my own home, I suspect Nature has mirrored this choice for me. Here, the ants are returning to what proved successful in the past. The spiders, on the other hand, have challenged themselves. They have picked up, moved on, and found their livelihood a little further from my built environment, out where the wild winds of change can bring them new food from the wider natural world.

Mary Maruca

Applied Biodynamics

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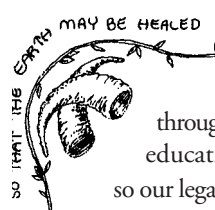
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Mission



The mission of the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics, Inc. is to heal the Earth through Biodynamic preparations, research and education, and to build a dynamic network so our legacy is accessible to all future generations.

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News From the Farm—It's Summer and Life is Happening!

Mike Biltonen

Summer is an amazing time to be outside. The natural world is wide awake. Birds are singing. Trees have leafed out. Life is happening. This year at JPI we are especially happy to be hosting workshops again.

In March, I conducted a Biodynamic Orchardring Workshop—the first live workshop at JPI in more than two years. With the magnificent assistance of Larry Mabe, Winter Hart, and James Wade, we had an amazing day of talking fruit trees and grafting.

Then on May 14, Larry (dedicated preparation maker) and Stewart Lundy (Media and Technical Manager) held an in-person workshop on ashing/peppering, as well as a recorded webinar. Ashing/peppering is a biodynamic practice that Steiner talked and wrote about and that JPI founder Hugh Courtney skillfully practiced. It is one of the more underused (and misunderstood) practices, but one that brings the full magic and energy of biodynamics to bear on any farm or garden. Stewart and Larry brought that magic alive!

In October we are planning a multi-day, biodynamic intensive at the farm from Friday, October 7, through Sunday, October 9, focusing in part on regenerative soil health and soil building. Join staff and attendees for hands-on biodynamic preparation work, food, learning opportunities from multiple speakers on a range of topics, and more! Lodging is available in nearby Floyd, as well as some camping sites at the farm. For more information, contact us at jpiadmin@jpibiodynamics.org, subscribe to our newsletter, or follow us on social media. More details to come.

During the past two years, despite the absence of the workshops and on-farm visitations from which we all learned and grew and improved our farming or gardening



Stewart Lundy (center) and Larry Mabe (near fire) with workshop participants

skills, we've been honing our collective vision for what is to come and starting to move things forward at JPI. As you are likely aware, the preparation storage room (root cellar) was fully renovated and rebuilt in 2021. Our water system has been reconfigured, and we are in the process of upgrading the Pfeiffer processing room to make it safer and more functional, which includes additional storage space. We are also completing our plan to bring our own cows onto the farm in 2023. A neighboring farmer let us use his cows last year, but we are excited to finally bring our own herd to the farm.

Biodynamic Preparations Legend

BD 500—Horn Manure

BD 501—Horn Silica

COMPOST PREPARATIONS

BD 502—Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

BD 503—German Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)

BD 504—Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

BD 505—Oak Bark (*Quercus alba*)

BD 506—Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

BD 507—Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

BD 508—Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

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One of the more exciting aspects of our endeavors here is the resurgence of a focus on research and education. The last few months we have been developing plans to conduct rhizobox experiments *a la* Jochen Bockemühl. By tracking plant growth in rhizoboxes, we'll be able to test and compare "treatments" (e.g., preparations, composts, and seeds) from the perspective of root growth and development over time. In this way we will be able to verify the true effects of biodynamic practices on plant growth, production, and nutrient density. Increasing the amount of on-farm research will help substantiate the beauty and effectiveness of biodynamic practices.

All too often we in the biodynamic community rely on anecdotal accounts as proof that something works. By taking a

more scientific approach, we can test these anecdotal accounts under controlled conditions. The results will help substantiate (or not) what we already intuitively feel to be true through our daily interactions with the plants and animals.

We also plan to reestablish our chromatography efforts and establish a sensitive crystallization program. Both will allow us to investigate the qualities of various substances in qualitative and non-sensory ways. The results from all of these efforts and more will be reported regularly through our social media and online resources, as well as in the pages of *Applied Biodynamics*. We look forward to sharing all this and more throughout the remainder of the year.

Summer Practice for a Biodynamic Garden

Stewart Lundy

Summer is upon us. This is the time that the earth tends to die the most as its vitality is exhaled into plant expression above ground. Hopefully, we've managed weeds well in spring! As our crops shade their roots and the uppermost layer of the topsoil tends to dry, weed germination becomes somewhat inhibited. But if we want our crops to persist and stay tender into the summer, we are advised to consider offering those plants afternoon shade.

In addition to this, keeping plants succulent in summer means providing them with something more of the maternal nature of mother earth. Whether this offering comes in the form of milk from a cow or enzyme water from barley, we have various ways to encourage plants to avoid bolting and becoming bitter. As Goethe points out in his *Metamorphosis of Plants*, plants rush to flower when they lack enough "coarse juices" of the earth. If we wish to keep something tender and leafy, it needs more of the heavy elements of earth and water.

If you are weeding, consider fermenting all these weeds in a bucket of water and using that vitality to nourish your crops. Your weeds are not just a nuisance, they are a resource! Weeds thrive in summer and rarely look sad—embrace these plants and impart that summer vitality to your plants! I also use enzyme water (sometimes called "Rejuvelac") from sprouted barley, especially for my brassicas. All of the nourishment exuded by barley seeds is a gift from the mother plant and, as such, relates directly to nourishing plants in the leafy stage. Barley water (which I refer to as "moon water" on the farm) is like milk for tender plants. In Maria Thun's research, she found that Barrel Compound (BC) was especially useful for extending the life of brassicas.

If you happen to experience a cool or overcast summer, consider reaching for horn silica (#501) in order to enhance the ripening of fruits. If summer isn't summery enough, horn silica may be needed. One summer I had an especially cool July and it remained overcast. We had hundreds of tomatoes that were huge but entirely green. After a single application of #501g (501 potentized with gold) all of the tomatoes ripened overnight!

If you suffer from an especially wet summer and weeds are proliferating or fungus is plaguing your plants, consider weekly applications of *Equisetum arvense* as a tea until the weather clears sufficiently.

Best wishes in all your gardening efforts!



In summer an abundance of weeds can be added to water to ferment and used to nourish crops. (Photo courtesy of stock footage.)

Perennial Roots Farm: An Interview with Stewart Lundy

Mary Maruca

Stewart Lundy is a farmer, philosopher, and alchemist. He is also a recent member of JPI's *Applied Biodynamics* media team, serving as Media Manager. If you don't already know Stewart, we hope this interview gives you a sense of what's important to him and the topics he likes to explore. Expect to see more of his wisdom in these pages in the months ahead.

Q. How did you become interested in biodynamic farming?

A. I have to credit my wife, Natalie, for this. She has a preternatural intuition for what might suit me. We had traveled to Italy, where we visited farms and vineyards, eventually finding ourselves at one farm in the process of converting to biodynamics. Knowing nothing about biodynamics, I mostly listened and asked questions. Rudolf Steiner's name first came to my attention there.

We returned to the U.S. and started our own farm. Subscribing to the eco-agricultural publication *Acres, USA* opened a lot of conceptual doors. Natalie made me read an article by Hugh Lovel, and, for the first time, the dynamics of sap rising and falling clicked. I began to dive deeply into biodynamic books, unsatisfied until I got my hands on the works of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and Maria Thun, which convinced me of the potential efficacy of the preparations while offering data essential for converting people to biodynamic practice.

Ironically, after introducing me to biodynamics, Natalie became constantly skeptical of all of my claims! She reined in my imagination to what I could demonstrate, which helped prune it to more realistic standards. Her temperament embodies the sentiment of Goethe, "Only that which is fruitful is true." The most significant thing to transform in a biodynamic farm or garden is the imagination of the gardeners themselves.

Q. From the beginning of Perennial Roots, did you and Natalie agree to farm this way?

A. We wanted a smaller life, though it didn't always align with what we thought it would look like, or appear as economically viable as we'd imagined. Our idyllic view of nature was quickly revised. Nature is marvelous, but has little interest in producing what *we* want her to grow! Our early foray into sustainable agriculture centered around the permaculture ideas of Bill Mollison and the "Mahayana" farming of Masanobu Fukuoka. But within the first two years, we started using the biodynamic preparations. We applied the Pfeiffer Field Spray on a few acres around our house. It has been interesting to watch the contrast between the plot we first sprayed versus the rest of the farm. If ever in doubt about biodynamics, all we have to do is return to the area we first treated with the preparations.



Natalie and Stewart

(All photos accompanying interview are courtesy of Perennial Roots Farm)

The contrast shows us a plot that is always a few years ahead of the rest of the farm.

As Steiner urged, one should always start by applying the preparations to a *small* plot. If you apply them to the entire farm, where's your scientific control plot? Start small, prove results (assuming you attain them) beyond doubt to yourself, and *then* expand. We have since expanded to the entire 50-acre farm. We tend cows, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, geese, rabbits, and more. We have a small orchard and a market garden through which we rotate our animals to keep the entire farm organism integrated.

Q. What have the animals brought to your farm?

A. Animals have brought fertility. When we first arrived, the soil was so compacted and tired that even weeds wouldn't stay green over summer. Intensive rotation with our sheep and hogs began to transform the soil from a dead baked shell into a vibrant living skin. Our grazing system is still not perfect, but we're getting there. Each animal has its own quintessential temperament. It's impossible not to see why medieval sermons would reach for livestock as examples of moral turpitude. Pigs bring anxiety to the farm, and I



Pineywoods cows enjoy their home at Perennial Roots. Pineywoods cattle are landrace cattle introduced in the early sixteenth century by Spanish explorers.

say this advisedly. Pigs are bipolar, swinging from the pain of unending hunger to complacency in the sun. Pigs don't have a proper sense of time, so when they are suffering, they lack the concept that *the pain will end*. Animals live in the eternal Now, which is why industrial farming puts animals into perpetual suffering, creating trauma worse than much of what we do to our fellow human beings.

In contrast to the vacillating moods of the pig, cattle bring a nearly Vedantic contentment. They are always grazing, and their half-closed eyelids show you how their attention is withdrawn from their outward-oriented senses. A cow is constantly hypnotized by the kaleidoscopic display of its own inner astral world—by the colorful aura of its digestive process. The mere presence of happy cows is like covering the entire farm with a warm blanket and has brought a new contented quality to the farm, not to mention the value of their manure and sheaths for making most of our own preparations. The significance of ruminants, and cows in particular, is their ability to take plants lacking accumulated cosmic forces and

“ripen” them in their guts, which produces valuable protein and manure. Grass is predominantly “inner” planetary forces without the capacity to accumulate the caloric profile we would need for nourishment.

Q. How has your soil changed?

A. We had a soil scientist demonstrate what is called Horizon A (topsoil) and Horizon B (subsoil) in one of our garlic beds. He dug. And he kept digging. Eventually, he shrugged and said that the *line* was somewhere in there! That's exactly what you want to see in a biodynamic garden: the *line* between the dead world of parent material in the subsoil and the living topsoil should be *invisible*, with the transition between the two so gradual that it's impossible to pinpoint.

You can see this in chromatography when you look at a dead soil versus one with a healthy interaction between the living world and the dead world. Effects like this I can only credit to the biodynamic preparations. The preparations are magic in the fullest sense, with *magic* being a cognate of the Sanskrit word *maya* and the word *magi*. Though

maya is often translated as *illusion*, that's quite wrong. We don't call a puppet show an illusion unless we believe it's reality! Maya is the magical manifesting powers of divinity. The phenomenal world (*maya*) is only an illusion when we mistake the surfaces for the totality. The biodynamic preparations draw on the primordial formative powers of the manifest universe. I accomplish more with the biodynamic preparations than I do with most of my work during the year, which is humbling. No amount of driving a tractor or mixing compost into the soil can do what the biodynamic preparations do. The biodynamic preparations are like the fingerprints of God.

Q. Do you use interns?

A. For a while we weren't looking for interns, but they found us without us seeking them. Then we began to enjoy the extra hands and, unwisely, to put out notices for help. As soon as we did this, the barrier for entry was lowered and the array of help became a mixed bag. Our first interns and our last interns were completely unsought, and they are the best. For interns to look for farms and reach out to us when we don't advertise actively requires more initiative. Now we use interns less than we did, but we have three young men in their twenties who are in more of an apprenticeship role. One of them has been with us for more than two years and has allowed us to focus on the long view. We consider it part of our task to teach and grow a living community. This community may be small, but these are dark times, and anything we start now has karmic implications beyond our individual lifespans.

Q. What food and medicine plants grow especially well for you?

A. Because of our sandy loam, root vegetables do particularly well. Yarrow is a plant that has *followed* me, in spite of me largely trying to ignore its message. It appeared in my field of consciousness after a Zen meditation retreat, where I stopped the car, got out, and dug up some of it to take to the farm. After that, yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) appeared around the house and began encroaching. I wasn't listening to it, but I needed yarrow and it basically had to scream at me. An herb that we've been growing almost from the beginning is tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), which is a wonderful herb on every level. Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is probably a favorite medicinal food. I particularly appreciate the late Michael Phillips's work in his book written by him and his wife, Nancy—I recommend *The Herbalist's Way* as an introduction to growing and processing your own medicinal herbs.

Q. What stages of development have you gone through with the farm?

A. In its first stage, the farm is merely a seed. The farm seed

looks a lot like an idea in someone's mind. But the idea doesn't belong to you any more than a squash belongs to the soil in which it germinates. Outwardly, the farm began as an empty house and an overgrown field. We didn't know what we were doing, and all we could do was take from the field and let some of it return to the wild. Bill Mollison liked to recommend that for the first year the farmer should *do nothing* but observe the natural cycles and what already wants to grow in a place. The incarnational process of a farm organism is not that far from the development of the human organism. At first, the farm tries to come into existence. A lot of what is performed, in retrospect, will seem futile, but this is a necessary struggle. In reality, the farm is entirely a *sense organ* when it begins. Only when enough of the infrastructure is built can *thought* become unmoored from the *formative process*. This process of maturation is like the development of the intellect in adolescence when much of the growth process has been completed.

A child, like a young farm, is *thinking* itself into being—but all the thinking is preoccupied with getting the infrastructure built. Only when most of the infrastructure is established will the farm's thought-life become liberated from the demands of necessity. Thought begins to become



Farm produce prepared for CSA distribution.



All babies like a ride on a tall human's shoulder.

free when it is no longer preoccupied with the growth process. Initially, the farm is inexperienced but nonetheless strives to bring itself into being. Embrace mistakes and don't take them too seriously. Learning only occurs by making mistakes. As William Blake said, "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise." I've been foolish long enough that I can at least tell people what to avoid in developing a garden or farm, which is the majority of what my consulting services offer our clients.

Q. Would you say your farm is self-sufficient?

A. A farm never becomes totally self-sufficient. Even when it gets close, it depends entirely upon the new influx of energy from the Sun for its continued existence. The ideal isn't total autonomy, but *relative* autonomy, where the farm primarily relies on that new influx of sunlight for its fertility. We are closer to that, but we still import feed for animals, hay, and organic compost. These are examples of exceptions to the biodynamic ideal, mostly because of our hogs, who require more grain than we can grow ourselves. I recommend that people have as few hogs as possible: limit their numbers to what the *surplus* products on the farm can feed for free: whey, sour milk, culled fruit, old vegetables from the garden, etc. Pigs are the largest farm animal that does not pro-

duce any particularly useful or marketable product until it is dead, making the hog a minor feature within the farm organism.

Q. Knowing what you know now, what would you recommend a beginning farmer do first?

A. Start with good perimeter fencing and living hedgerows to subdivide the property. Every living organism has an inside and an outside, and a semipermeable membrane to mediate between the inner and outer worlds. And start with the animals that are the cheapest to feed—primarily ruminants, but particularly sheep and cows. Goats are amusing, but can be especially devastating to young trees, so, in general, hold off on goats. Geese primarily eat grass, so they can work well too. Some chickens are fine for your own purposes but don't get involved too eagerly with animals that require perpetual feeding. Stick to what can grow from within your own resources. Yes, you'll buy hay for cows, and that's expensive enough. But even more fundamentally, start with the animals that are the cheapest: earthworms. Anyone can tend a worm bin with great benefit, and Pfeiffer remarked that the microbial populations of earthworm castings resembled those he found in horn manure. If you eat, you have food waste, and if you can keep a houseplant alive, you can keep worms alive. The farm organism is characterized, like the etheric body, by its *dynamism* and its *flow*. A copy of *The Lean Farm* by Ben Hartman will be of immense value. While Hartman isn't biodynamic, there is nothing preventing using the *lean* approach to realize biodynamic goals.

Q. What are your current book interests and what new thoughts are they generating?

A. The following list may sound pretentious, but this is simply what I read. I am currently exploring the Traditionalist titan, Frithjof Schuon. He affirms the unity of all religions, not as a nebulous *one* religion but within their own distinct initiatic frameworks. Exemplifying this, he was an initiated Sufi (which grows out of Manichaeism), as well as an initiated member of both the Lakota and the Crow. Alongside this, I am rereading Swami Chinmayananda's Advaita commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Separately, I am working through the complete works of William Law, who is the chief exponent of Jacob Boehme's theosophy in English. I'm considering doing a workshop on Steiner's *Theosophy* if I find enough interest. Whenever I study something, I attempt to plumb its depths and glean all of the value I can find. I try to suspend criticism and immerse myself within the worldview of the author. Only when the *inner contradictions* become too much for the worldview to be sustained do I step outside of it and criticize it externally.

Q. How do you weave your alchemical interests into your biodynamic practices?

A. Alchemy is like magic or love—it finds you whether or not you are looking for it. You won't know that you're accidentally already apprenticing to be a magician, or a romantic fool, or an

alchemist. As Goethe said, ‘Beware of wishing for anything in youth, because you will get it in middle age.’ Long after we’ve forgotten our wishes, they bear fruit, often when we least expect them or want them. Alchemy is a dialectical process. We see Jacob Boehme’s concepts lifted directly by Hegel, whose work was then appropriated by Marx. But it is fundamentally this: something exists, its environment contradicts it, and the two become a new synthesis. This dialectic is the entire dynamic of evolution and the manifestation of the Trinity through the phenomenal world.

To me, alchemy is about reuniting with God; its ultimate goal is spiritual immortality, which is really enlightenment. In its degenerate forms, alchemy becomes obsessed with physical longevity or generating physical gold, instead of transforming the leaden soul into spiritualized gold. Through the lens of alchemy, biodynamics is an active way of helping preserve the conditions necessary for life on earth. If you know that turning lead into gold is as ordinary as turning lemons into lemonades, you’ll realize you are already an apprentice. When we make the world better than it was given to us, that is alchemy, and that is biodynamics.

Q. Who are some of the BD farmers/teachers who have most influenced you?

A. I recall that my first in-person experience learning about biodynamics was an all-day workshop with Gunther Hauk at the Virginia Biological Farmers conference. I practiced under Hugh Courtney during the final seven years of his time on this plane. I value what I have gleaned from every book and teacher in biodynamics, but these two names stand out in my mind like two sides of a tree. Biodynamics is still in its infancy. Though by all accounts we are headed into a climate catastrophe, under which the power of alchemical agriculture will prove itself. Unsustainable methods will continue to prove themselves by their sour fruits until we are forced to turn our attention back to the source of all fruit: the spiritual world.

Q. Often we grow from careful observation of natural processes. How have your own discoveries evolved?

A. One of the most significant things I’ve learned is a single principle, which is deceptively simple. Find the conditions you wish to remedy in your garden out in nature; look for plants that thrive in nature in the very way you wish your plants to thrive. Find a plant that thrives in undesired conditions and yet performs with the qualities you wish your garden plants to possess. One example I can give is pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), a plant that stands tall and proud even in the blistering summer heat. If you see squash wilting in the summer heat, find a plant that rarely wilts like pokeweed, chop it into small pieces, and make a decoction by simmering the plant material in a covered pot

for 45 minutes. Strain the plant material out. Let the decoction cool. Water your suffering plants and they will usually begin to recover quickly. If you let this decoction first ferment, it will work better, but usually, if you’re making a remedy it is often time-sensitive. If you plan for the next year and make a large batch, the weeds that thrive in your garden are often candidates for this gaze. If you wish to make a long-term ferment, you can submerge entire plants in crocks and use a 3.5 percent sea salt solution, as if you were making sauerkraut. You can age this almost indefinitely, but all plant material should be kept submerged under the water. Even without clairvoyance, a gardener with clear eyes can easily find candidates for such remedies amongst everyday weeds. Remember, we are not what we eat; we are the *qualities* of what we eat. This goes for plants too.

On another topic, the biodynamic pest *peppers* are of particular interest to me. I have begun nourishing the roots of plants with the ash of their own pests. In small experiments, I have noticed anecdotal evidence that specific pests are disinclined to bother the plants whose roots are nourished with pest peppers. At one point, Steiner talks about villagers who drank from a stream that ran through a graveyard; this practice made the entire town sickly and tired because they were absorbing byproducts of human decay in their drinking water. This is what happens when we nourish the roots of plants with pest peppers: the plant becomes distasteful to the pest in question. If pests begin to nibble on the plant, they quickly become tired. This phenomenon is *species-specific*, however, and so it only applies to the specific pest. Even if you do nothing but collect pests (e.g., tomato hornworms) and let them rot in a jar of water and then nourish your tomatoes by watering them with the rotted hornworms, you can obtain similar results. Steiner himself indicates that if you let pests rot you might obtain even more effective results than burning. In my experience, Steiner seems to have been right about this. This does not make plants immune, nor does it overcome fundamental weaknesses of ethericity or soil balance, but if all else is in order, it seems to make the plants less palatable to specific pests.

Q. What are your thoughts on whether biodynamic farming can be practiced separately from anthroposophy?

A. In a letter Steiner wrote, he says that “Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge, which intends to lead what is spiritual in the human being to what is spiritual in the universe. It arises in man as a need of the heart, of the life of feeling; and it can be justified only inasmuch as it can satisfy this inner need.” There are not only a number of possible paths that approach this summit; even every anthroposophist has a unique path, which must be driven by their own individual life of feeling. In addition, Steiner reminds us in his



Some high summer CSA fare from the farm.

medical lectures that there are as many *healths* (plural), as there are *individuals*. All individuals are their own species.

The path of unitive gnosis, which is not mere intellectual knowledge, is known in Sanskrit as *jnana*, which is itself a cognate of the term *gnosis* in Greek. But the impulse towards *gnosis/jñāna* begins in the heart, with devotional feeling, which is called *bhakti* in Sanskrit. James writes that “Faith without works is dead” but this can be extended to wisdom without devotional feeling is dead. As Frithjof Schuon once said, there can be *bhakti* without *jñāna*, but there cannot be *jñāna* without *bhakti*. The marriage of head and heart is the goal of the spiritual path, with outward will flowing from that sacred marriage. If the individual is driven by a desire for unitive knowledge of the world, themselves, and God, and pursues it based on their own devotional feeling, as an inner need, then such a person belongs to the renewal of the path of human wisdom. Someone full of resentment and bitter feelings—regardless of what spiritual sect they identify as—will bring that negativity to their plants and to the preparations.

If everyone had to be an anthroposophist, then how did Alex Podolinsky attain all his results in Australia? By his own

account, he was not really an anthroposophist, though he was clearly influenced strongly by Steiner's ideas. If we allow our gaze to soften and realize that the essence of anthroposophy at its best is not a club or a sectarian group but an articulation of a universal impulse already at work in the world (even outside its own walls), we can come to a more egalitarian approach to biodynamics. I would rather have a compassionate atheist than a proud Christian stirring my preparations.

The most important aspect to me is that the individual is sincere and on their own disciplined path of self-development. What Buddhists call the no-self (*anatta*) is little more than emphasizing the indescribable quality of the Absolute, which is recognized at the heart of every single religion. Sometimes people call themselves an atheist in a similar way, simply because they do not believe in a dictator God and lack the proper vocabulary to articulate their spiritual experiences. I, too, do not believe in a dictator God, and neither did Steiner: "Monism knows no such world-dictator who sets our aims and directs actions from outside."¹ But if we accept with Goethe that "God is the world of ideas," then everyone is *always already* participating in the divine world.

Q. Has your online teaching influenced your analysis of Steiner's Agriculture Course?

A. My study group offerings based on the *Agriculture Course* (GA327) began with me quoting a lot of Steiner. The translation I've made of the *Agriculture Course* is overweighted with references to Steiner's work, Boehme's theosophy, Paracelsus's alchemy, and more. But as I've struggled through it time and again, I find myself referring less to the text as an authority. The *ideas* are the authority, not a group of thinkers, and certainly not a single thinker. This last year, teaching the course blossomed for me into an unabashedly spiritual approach to life. I sense some friction from my audience at times, but some of them need that. It is important in our era to speak of the spiritual world.

Q. What would you like people to learn from biodynamics and apply to their own lives and farms?

A. I would like people to find Jacob Boehme's key in the *Aurora*, which is really an extended seed meditation. It is a difficult read, but that is the point. It is repetitive and sprawling, but if you consider that there are review lessons included within the text itself, you'll understand the repetition better: it is designed to redesign your soul.

If ideas are gleaned from the spiritual world by an initiate and then merely handed to uninitiated people who have not discovered them for themselves, they simply do not work the same way. Yes, people can benefit from such ideas, but in a narrow way. Ideas, if imparted, are ghosts if they are not discovered as a birth within the soul. This is true

of all Steiner's work—and anyone's work, for that matter. If the idea is not born in you, it does not matter if you can repeat it all in perfect pedantic detail.

The transformation of the earth is analogous to the transformation of the soul. The most significant thing you can transform is yourself. The rest follows. Start with the farmer.

Q. As JPI's new media manager, would you speak about what you hope to bring to JPI, as well as what your feelings might be for the biodynamic legacy represented in the physical presence of JPI?

A. On the one hand, I see JPI reconnecting to the spiritual-scientific roots of biodynamics and, on the other hand, I see JPI extending into more empirical research guided by the renewal of spiritual-scientific insights. This was Pfeiffer's own legacy, and it is long overdue for a new body of research that can continue to confirm to the external scientific world *by its own standards* the efficacy of the biodynamic preparations. This doesn't mean we need to dumb down anything. Quite the contrary! We need to spell out the benefits of the biodynamic preparations in terms that materialistic minds attached to statistics can understand. While *we* may not need statistics to provide proof to ourselves, we *do* need statistics to communicate to the outer world. If we wish to preach to the choir, we need a rector. If we wish to reach the unconvinced, we need an evangelist who can meet them where they are without dumbing down the message. I want to reach back to the spiritual-scientific roots of biodynamics in order to nourish the material fruits of biodynamics. This is where JPI's research plays in: by demonstrating what is effective and what is not, a kind of delicate empiricism can help light the way.

Q. Finally, I've always been moved by your tag line "Until the last blade of grass is redeemed." Perhaps you might address this line as it defines your work.

A. This comes from a lovely essay by the inimitable polymath, Amanda K. Coomaraswamy (*Hinduism and Buddhism*), in which he says, "There are [...] Bodhisattvas, notably Avalokitesvara, who are virtually Buddhas but are vowed never actually to enter into their Buddhahood until the last blade of grass has been first redeemed." This is the embodiment of the bodhisattva ideal, an aspiration to return to whatever plane has laggard human souls and to suffer alongside them until the last spark of divinity is redeemed. I do not claim this status myself, but it, nonetheless, has been an ideal towards which I aspire. We are likely familiar with the biblical assertion that all flesh is grass. For me, this belongs to Steiner's impulse to create a new "priesthood of the earth." This is the heart of biodynamics. Steiner also said that the laboratory must become an altar once more. This is the heart of alchemy. As Mahayana Buddhism has less respect for the Arhat who merely saves himself, the bodhisattva ideal of returning to

strive alongside others with universal compassion aligns rather nicely with Steiner's impulse to remain wedded to the future of human evolution.

1.) Steiner, Rudolf. *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception*. United Kingdom: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013, pg 213

See how, like lightest waves at play, the airy dancers
fleet;
And scarcely feels the floor the wings of those
harmonious feet.
Ob, are they flying shadows from their native forms
set free?
Or phantoms in the fairy ring that summer
moonbeams see?
As, by the gentle zephyr blown, some light mist flees
in air,
As skiffs that skim adown the tide, when silver
waves are fair,
So sports the docile footstep to the heave of that
sweet measure,
As music wafts the form aloft at its melodious
pleasure,
Now breaking through the woven chain of the
entangled dance,
From where the ranks the thickest press, a bolder
pair advance,
The path they leave behind them lost—wide open
the path beyond,
The way unfolds or closes up as by a magic wand.

From Schiller's *The Dance*

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Moving On— Bill McCranie Steps Down from JPI Board

Teresa O'Shaughnessy

When you first meet Bill McCranie, there is an openness and warmth that draws you in. He is quick to jest, a consummate storyteller, and a gentleman. Never one to miss out on a little mischief, he has the innate ability to turn an ordinary day into an adventure. Bill has visited fifty-seven different nations in his travels and has a treasure trove of stories to prove it. He embraces life with gusto, loves deeply, admits when he is wrong, and is steadfastly loyal and passionate about three things: family, friends, and biodynamics.

Bill has been married to his bride, Nancy, for thirty-five years. Together, they live on Chickamaw Farm and Ranch in McDade, Texas, where he grows Demeter-certified blueberries and raises Irish Dexter cattle. They are soulmates in every sense of the word, sharing both the joys and challenges of marriage, parenthood, and life. Bill cherishes his family time, and has two sons he is immensely proud of. He also maintains many friendships, some spanning more than forty years of adventures and others that are brand new. All of the people he comes to know are treated with care—he loves us in spite of our human failings and because of them. He sees beyond the day-to-day to the larger picture of why we are here, and believes that our purpose is to love one another and to love and tend this earth. His farm's name comes from a Choctaw word for sacred ground. It is no wonder that Bill found his way to biodynamics.

His journey with biodynamics began in 2005, as Bill tells

it, when some “Waldorf moms” came out to his farm to buy organic blueberries. During their visit, they told him about Rudolf Steiner and biodynamics. Bill started doing research, which led him to BDA, JPI, and Hugh Courtney. A few months later, he attended a fall workshop led by Hugh at Woolwine, where he stayed for ten days, learning about spiritually caring for the earth and each other and about producing quality crops. In his own words, “It felt like coming home.” From that moment on, Bill was hooked.

Bill has attended many workshops and conferences throughout the years. Hugh encouraged him to get involved with the Fellowship of Preparation Makers and, in 2010, asked Bill to join the Board of Directors at the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics (JPI). Bill went on to serve on JPI's Board for eleven years, eventually stepping back in December 2021.

As one of the longest standing members of the Board of Directors, Bill has weathered many changes and challenges, both in biodynamics and at JPI. Through it all, he has remained a steadfast presence, grounded by his life experiences, guiding our energies, celebrating our victories, and reminding us that JPI's primary mission is to educate and share the story of biodynamics and the preparations with as many people as possible.

We wish Bill only the best on his next adventure, and we can't wait to hear the stories he will have to share.



Bill McCranie. Photo courtesy of Dean Houghton, previously used in an article about Chickamaw for the John Deere publication The Furrow in 2018.

In Memoriam: Michael Phillips

Mike Biltonen

I didn't know Michael well, but I knew him well enough. Though we met several times over the past twenty years—a few times at conferences, mostly at the Berkshire Roundtable each March—I never made it to one of his intensives or visited him at Lost Nation Orchard, and I hadn't seen him at the Roundtable since March 2020 because of Covid. We were mere days away from another vigorous gathering, talking apples, cider, and other true gems of the natural world. We were even emailing regularly, as he did with many folks, and feeling energized for the year ahead. But, alas, it wasn't to be.

I heard about Michael's passing from Alan Surprenant, his longtime friend, confidant, and biodynamic orchardist. He notified attendees of the upcoming Roundtable that Michael had died of a heart attack in his orchard while chasing down a rogue deer. I haven't had many people close to me die so young. The news hit me like a gunshot. I was stunned and saddened, as many of us were—I am still in shock. Nevertheless, the Berkshire group endeavored to forge forward with the meeting since Michael would have wanted us to do that. More than a tinge of somberness and sadness seasoned the gathering, however. We shared sentiments like “where do we go from here” wrapped in love, passion, and honor.

The ensuing weeks have shown that Michael's legacy is solid and that his mission moves forward. At the meeting, I recalled how I initially came to know Michael through his book, *The Apple Grower*, which deeply informed my own holistic orcharding journey that had started several decades before when I embarked on my apple growing career. Though the first few years of my farming career were without context (what did I know about growing things?), as a lover of wild nature, I'd long had a bone to pick with conventional AG. Sustainable agricultural wasn't even really a term until the late '80s, and I barely knew what growing apples was all about then. Organic farming was a still a hippie, back-to-the-land *thing* that had no place for *real* farmers. But by the early '90s things had started to change. The USDA (for better or worse) had established an organic certification. Alar had hit the news, and consumers had become more aware of how their food was grown; many also focused on how our industrialized food system was killing the planet (and us) in subtle and not-always-dramatic fashion. But Michael—almost single-handedly, yet with an intense focus on growing apples—cast a new light on what it meant to be an enlightened farmer and fellow human. He expanded on the work of Rodale, Nearing, Steiner, and too many others to recount.

When I first stumbled across Michael's book, I knew



Michael Phillips. Photo courtesy of Frank Siteman

plenty about growing apples but I knew little about growing apples organically. Though I thought I had started to crack open the door of organic apple growing, Michael's insights and wisdom kicked the whole damn door in for me. He evoked a new trajectory, philosophy, and passion for my pomology career. He did this also for an ever-growing tribe of avid apple growers asking, “What's next?” He did that every day of his life, leading up to that fateful night when the inevitability of death caught up with him. He'll continue to do that in spirit for years to come. Others have picked up the torch of his Holistic Orchard Network and are moving forward with it; indeed, holistic *anything* is the only way forward if we hope to save ourselves, apples, and Earth.

I feel a somber sadness that Michael passed when he did. He had just finished his cidery, almost finished a book, had renewed energy injected into the Holistic Orchard Network forum, and had all of us just about ready to gather again at Stump Sprouts. He was passionate about getting us all together again, giddy after almost two years of not seeing many of us. But I mostly feel for Nancy and Gracie who lost a husband and a father without warning—I can't even imagine the grief of that.

When I first heard of Michael's passing it reminded me of an Ed Abbey story, “Deadman at Grandview Point.” It's

the story of a man lost in the red rock canyons of the desert southwest—a man so lost that he sits down in the shade of the blistering heat to die, knowing that the end is nigh. But in his last moments he takes in the grandeur of everything around him and is content. I can only imagine Michael doing the same, albeit in the snowy wilderness of Lost Nation Orchard, becoming one with everything around him and taking a deep breath while looking up at the night sky. And not for the last time, but for the first and for eternity.

Michael in many ways was larger than life, yet so down to Earth. As Alan put it, “some angels are dressed like bears.” So true. I reflected recently about how, for someone with so much knowledge inside him, he was such a good listener. He will be with us for a long time to come. He is with us here today. It is up to us to honor and carry on his legacy—the earth, the people and the apples demand it. He is listening, floating in the stars and taking notes.

Christopher Bamford (1943–2022)

Writer, Editor-in-Chief for Steiner Books, Founder of Lindisfarne Press

“Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire.

I will not cease from mental fight.
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.”

From *Jerusalem*, William Blake

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Ongoing Activities

Biodynamic Association Courses and Webinar Series

For a small fee, the Biodynamic Association offers ongoing webinars on pertinent topics. <https://www.biodynamics.com/webinars>

Chesapeake Biodynamic Network (CBDN), College Park, MD

Meetings, networking, Agriculture Course study and biodynamic workshops held monthly in College Park, MD. Contact Michael Judge for the schedule at mjudge2000@gmail.com.

The Pfeiffer Center, Chestnut Ridge, New York

Workshops and trainings. www.pfeiffercenter.org

Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary, Floyd, VA

Classes in sustainable beekeeping and biodynamics. Apprenticeship/internship opportunities. www.spikenardfarm.org

Online Resources

Rudolf Steiner Archive

Lectures and books; donation requested. www.rsarchive.org/

Rudolf Steiner Audio

Audio version of lectures and books. Donation requested. www.rudolfsteineraudio.com

Bio-Dynamics Journal (1941–2007): Soil & Health Library

Articles by E.E. Pfeiffer, Sir Albert Howard, Albrecht papers and others. One time donation of 10 Euros. www.soilandhealth.org
<https://earthhavenlearning.ca/seed-regeneration.php>.

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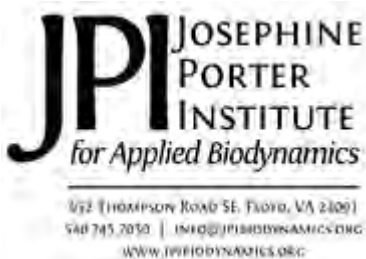
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“...all that works inward from the far spaces of the Cosmos to influence the growth of plants, works not directly—not by direct radiation—but in this way: It is first received by the Earth and the Earth then rays it upward again. Thus, the influences that rise upward from the earthly soil... are in reality cosmic influences rayed back again and working directly in the air and water over the Earth.

Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture Course*, (Adams trans.), pg. 31



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