

Streams

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To Pass A Living Flame

In 2010, Wendell Berry, farmer and teacher, writer of prose and poetry, honored citizen of Henry County, received our country's prestigious National Humanities Medal. Over long decades rooted in the farming community of rural Kentucky, he relates the stories of its peoples through the history, language, landscape, and the philosophy whereby they thrive as good neighbors and caretakers of the land in the knob hills and bluegrass fields of central Kentucky.

His works fill a bookshelf and beyond. One rather recent story could seem out of place with its delicate blue-gray cover adorned with a lovely sketch of a white-footed mouse nestled in a bed of grass inside a canning jar. Listed as children's fiction, the story is more a spiritual fable for our times. Whitefoot lives at the edge of the woods and knows for sure that she exists at the center of the world. What she can't perceive in her wildest imagining is a whole world and a river just beyond her safe sanctuary. One day the rains fall and the flood waters rise carrying Whitefoot in its currents far from her home. Throughout the tumultuous terror, the voice in her mind repeats – Stay Alive!

Such is the 'voice' kindled long ago in a fiery birth when clouds of gases rose up from hissing seas. Long was the wait before dry land appeared. That churning intimacy of rock and sea and air awakened life and brought

forth a living planet. Every differentiated being contributed to its environmental niche. Feedback loops within the communion assured that each living species contributed more than it took out. As a consequence, the air and water became more pure, the topsoil deeper, and the living system grew more and more diverse. Every origination presented a promise of Earth's readiness for the next breakthrough. Eventually, the community became diverse enough, the life forms complex enough for a quantum breakthrough. A species emerged with the potential for self-reflective consciousness!

The human could ponder the beauty in the multitude of forms all around, forms in the air and on the land. We could perceive the power of destruction and gape at the awesome pattern of cycling light and darkness. We had the ability to think and to consider our own being the very center of the world. But, our ultimate endowment is the capacity to love.

A fable is a story written to illustrate a moral lesson. Most often the genre is expressed as a children's story with animals or some other force of nature speaking in human language to reveal a human folly and to encourage a change in our behavior.

In these times the flood waters are rising, the atmosphere is warming, and many living forms that cannot adapt quickly to rapid changes succumb.

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To Pass A Living Flame *continued*

The ‘tumultuous terror’ we face is climate change. The forces of nature do speak through an intimacy forged long ago in the primary functioning of our home planet. The sustaining community of atmosphere and hydrosphere, of land-sphere and ever originating biosphere is unraveling. One species strains the feedback loops and takes out more than it gives back. We humans have become the primary agents of planetary change.

A few decades before Wendell Berry wrote his fable for these times, another writer of the same name, though no relation, captured broad attention. Thomas Berry was a cultural historian. He focused his study not only on the sacred stories and texts that shaped a peoples worldview and behavior, he coupled his work with emerging scientific insights. From a scientific perspective, Thomas understood that Earth had come to a turning point in its planetary process. From a spiritual perspective he recognized that Life itself had reached a point of immense breakthrough. Humankind would make the choice, a moral agent guiding Earth’s unfolding story.

Survive(stay alive), Reinvent, Flourish... the disciplines, he said, for our going forth..

How then to reinvent ourselves at the center of the world with cosmic awareness and a planetary presence. It is time for a great homecoming...coming home to place. Creative ingenuity along the Hudson River has coined the word ‘culture shed’, perhaps because the culture of a region flows together like the river and streams of a watershed. They define a culture shed as a geographic region irrigated by streams of local talent and deep pools of human and natural history. It’s an area nourished by what is cultivated locally and by the efforts of writers, farmers, artists, musicians, chefs, and scholars who contribute to a vital and diverse local culture. The term culture shed

conveys both the breath of a local vision and the belief that an authentic, compelling culture arises from a particular place – extending the notion of sustainability to include not just nourishment to live, but a vibrant creative community to flourish! For some years the stone pillars at the end of our driveway defined this place. Recently a startling perspective offered a cutting edge truth! The pillars identify a residence more than a Learning Center.

The Story guides us. Every form, when its work was completed, surrendered itself back to the Whole. The present form must now surrender lest soul energy flicker and fade. Rebirth invites new relationships, a deeper communion for creative possibilities. Not to relinquish responsibility but to become strong moral agents to choose life for the future. Reinvent! Flourish!

Winter Solstice eve families will gather on the long night to experience the dark and quiet of winter. Children will light their lanterns and go forth to seek the light. In the seeking they will become deeply aware of the indestructible light within. The beginning and end of all our human endeavors rest in the cosmological order pouring forth from that Light. Blessed be our moment of grace.

Oh Ardent One, O living flame, be with us as we dare ~ to make of love a greater love and pass a living flame.

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