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LifeWays North America NEWSLETTER Winter 2021

Theme: Sewing Seeds of HOPE

Greetings from Cynthia!



Dear Friend,

When our LifeWays Board decided a few years ago that it was time for our newsletter to be online rather than print, I actually left the room and cried! I know – a rather dramatic reaction! To this day, I still love to hold newsletters and books in my hands. HOWEVER, I will say that the interactive nature of this particular newsletter is so inspiring! Many thanks to our gracious contributors for lifting our hearts and minds. From numerous links and other attached articles to further enhance our caring, to Lynn's hope-filled practices and generous sharing of a number of songs and games (so engaging and delightful), this feels like an edition worthy of your favorite cozy chair and spaciousness of time to savor it over days. Each article evokes an inner calling in me to remember the things that matter most in life. They truly did lay seeds of hope in my soul. [THERE'S MORE!...READ CYNTHIA'S ENTIRE LETTER HERE](#)



May wisdom shine through me,
may love grow within me,
may strength penetrate me,
that in me may arise
a helper of humankind,
a servant of sacred things
selfless and true.

Rudolf Steiner

Contributions from the LifeWays Community

A Homeschool Family Finds Tools for Connection and Hope

by Erika Loker Vass



At first glance, it would seem that life for a homeschooling family wouldn't have changed a great deal during the pandemic. It is true that baking, gardening, caring for farm animals and engaging in handwork have always been a part of our daily life. The home-based academic work that engages my older children wasn't a new adjustment. As a mother and home teacher, I certainly felt very blessed that we had a strong set of family practices that would remain steady through the uncharted waters.

However, we were a very social family in days past. Friends, family and field trips - three pillars of our lifestyle - suddenly became off limits. The absence of these critical elements in my children's educations and healthy development has been palpable.

Before this strange time descended upon us, my children spent hours each week playing imaginative games with their friends. The younger children learned the new joy of feeling connection to peers, seeing themselves reflected in others. They developed skills of communication and caring for each other and as they parallel-played, each at their own pace in the supportive environments of each other's homes. The older children played richly and with intense focus, permanently taking over whole closets as entire secret worlds

emerged from their minds and hearts. Pre-covid, my children would also enjoy lengthy visits with their grandparents. Overnights, complete with snuggles and elaborate pancake breakfasts, were a regular occurrence. We also actively put heart into our relationships with community members. Volunteers at local museums, mentors at the nearby nature center, local farmers, small business owners and librarians, were people to whom my children felt a real connection. Although our visits with these individuals were relatively short, they always proved worthwhile in terms of not only learning skills, but also a complex value system. As homeschoolers, my children were able to see the many positive ways people invest their time in our greater community, making a difference in many lives.

I can't say that I took for granted the ability to make space and time for these relationships. I always knew we were very fortunate. I took comfort in the idea that we would enjoy this culture well into the future, with hopefully few interruptions. As I write this today, it is hard to believe that almost a year has passed since we enjoyed a sense of total freedom to play and socialize as we pleased. So, we have worked to develop **new ways** of feeling connected to our friends and loved-ones...[READ MORE](#)

Sowing Seeds of Hope by Bringing Attention

by, Mary O'Connell



**To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.**

~ William Blake

One of the silver linings of this global pandemic and the resulting changes in social life has been the opportunity to slow down and pay attention to things

we may have previously walked right past on our way to one of our many social or business engagements. Even the smallest thing can be a gateway to an experience of the extraordinary, if only we bring our attention to it. We really can see a whole World in a grain of sand. We can witness a hundred, thousand natural miracles every day, from the sun climbing in the sky to the mysterious tracks in the snow outside our window. Those miracles are there waiting for us to attend to them and, more importantly, to find our delight in theirs.

I have recently finished listening to a [series of interviews](#) between Orland Bishop, a profound mystic trained in South African, West African, and European Hermetic wisdom traditions, with American teacher, speaker and writer, Charles Eisenstein. Orland explained that African gnostic tradition doesn't hold science to fixed laws the way in which the more modern "hardened" view of science does. Among many astounding things he discussed during the interviews, he articulated that our attention is what makes something sacred. Our attention changes the thing upon which we are putting our attention.

Of course, we know this to be true with human beings. And we have observed it with our pets. But are we open to considering the possibility that simply by giving our attention to the tree or the water or the soil, we can actually help those beings become what they are meant to become? Just as do people and animals, the rest of the natural world longs for our attention.

I had the pleasure of attending the Biodynamic Agriculture conference in November. I was unsure if I would enjoy a virtual conference, as so much of

the richness of assembling with a large group of gardeners, farmers and educators is, well, assembling! The Biodynamic Agriculture Association (BDA) did such a...[READ MORE](#)

'Miss Mouse' Stories Affirm Hope During Separation

by, Veronica Oliva-Clour



I am the owner/teacher of a preschool program called Little House Preschool, where I use Waldorf methods. I've been teaching for a long time, here in Central Minnesota. Naturally, I too was affected with the pandemic and had to close my preschool doors for two months. I worried about the children and their families and read the Lifeways Blog to get ideas, support and an outlook into the lives of others. One day in the spring of 2020, since I wasn't teaching, I decided to go through my teaching materials, toys and other items and clear things away that I no longer needed. There in a box, I found a handknitted mouse, whom I called Miss Mouse. Miss Mouse and I began to dialogue. She was wondering what had happened to the children, why there weren't pieces of rice left on

the floor for her to nibble on in the evenings, where had the singing and running of little feet gone too? This led me to write a one page story of Miss Mouse at Little House and her curiosity at this time of our lives, which I sent to all my current Little House families, in order to stay connected, and also to send out a feeling of hope and care. Little House was still there and I began to write stories about Miss Mouse and how she dealt with the loss of the children, or the quietness, a sad day, a rainy day, a day of spring or why she wanted to plant a garden. Those were the initial tales. We both had many stories to tell, and *my basic impulse was to affirm to the children that the world is good*, that a connection with nature is supportive to our well-being, and that the world at Little House and its rhythms and activities are taken up by Miss Mouse until the children return.

One sweet story begins with Miss Veronica searching for her little friend... *"I looked in the play kitchen, and there was Miss Mouse, sorting the pots and pans."* ...[READ THE STORY HERE](#)

In These Things, I Find Hope

by Lynn St. Pierre

Join me at the hearth on Star Dance Farm, in this year of tremendous challenges in the world and within ourselves, share in the warmth of the fire and the dancing light. As I strive to digest all that's coming toward me, all that's coming toward us in the Waldorf community, in my local community of Munith, Michigan, in our nation, and in our world, I find myself seeking solace and balance in many ways.

Here are a few practices that I have found enliven hope. My wish is that you will find at least one gem here that soothes your heart and soul.



So, sit with me if you will, and ponder... [READ MORE](#)

Maintaining Community and Connection During Isolation

by Kate Licciardello



Which exhausted 2020 cliché shall we start with, then? “Oh, what a time to be alive!” “Unprecedented.” “The new normal.”

I am an early childhood teacher in Rhode Island, where we’ve been living the mask life for 10 months. We are all muddling through these waters (hey—new cliché!) as best we can.

After being back to in-person learning for a few months, I held conferences with the parents in my class. Overwhelmingly, the biggest loss expressed by parents was not being able to walk into the classroom.

For me, this message rang true. This time of isolation has caused a deficit in connection. The feeling of seeing people’s smiles instead of watching them cross the street to avoid you. Gathering in groups. Being close. Carefree dinners at local restaurants. Anyone remember hugging?

As a teacher, it’s important to me that I show up fully and joyfully for my students and their families, especially now. That means taking relentless care of myself so that I can do this. While I won’t claim to be perfect at navigating a pandemic, I’ve recognized some ways to help foster deep connection...[READ MORE](#)

My Monarch Mama Journey

by Simone Demarzi

Butterflies have always held their magic for me. In the spring I planted many butterfly and hummingbird flowers and dreamed of raising butterflies, but never really had time to organize it. My Butterfly story began unintentionally when one of the neighbors put an old fish tank out on the curb for the taking. I was excited



to get the tank because I had been looking for one. The neighbors were moving and said I could transplant any plants I wanted to my yard! I made a new garden in the front yard with many of the plants from my neighbor, but after a few days, some of the plants were not happy, (mid-summer transplanting is not recommended) so I went to clip some of the leaves and stems that were turning brown, and low and behold, there was a Monarch caterpillar on the butterfly weed (*Asclepia incarnata*) plant...just a tiny one! I clipped the stem and leaves it was on and brought out the fish tank and hung an old gauze curtain over the top. My journey with Butterflies had begun. I got in touch with a friend who lives in

Brooklyn (yes, city) because I had been admiring her online posts about her Monarch Mama experiences and she gave me some good tips on what to do next. With my new information, I went...[READ MORE](#)

Candles for Candlemas

by Michaelleen Hınca



In the Christian tradition the candles which will be used in the church throughout the year are blessed on February 2. This day is also known as the Feast of the Presentation, a day which celebrates the Christ child, who came into the world to bring light and dispel darkness. One of our beloved family traditions is to make beeswax candles on Candlemas. The small, smooth (and a bit misshapen!) bearers of light are then included throughout the year on our birthday

cakes. We discovered this beautiful expression of the Living Arts when my first child was a student at the nearby Waldorf School. As the years went on, each of her siblings delighted as one-by-one they grew ready to enter into this Creative process and transform the wax from the bees into delicate candles to be enjoyed throughout the year.

The [Little House on the Prairie website](#) offers a lovely tutorial for dipping your own candles at home.

From Cynthia: When we opened our first LifeWays Early Childhood Center in Wisconsin we had a lovely relationship to a local Waldorf homeschool group. They would visit us whenever they had a new play to present or perhaps to sing to us or play some games. They also joined us for our first Candlemas where we all dipped candles with each other. It was so endearing to see our little ones mixed in with the bigger homeschoolers as they circled the table dipping their candles as we sang together. Community is such a beautiful thing!



Are you enjoying this newsletter? If so, please share it with a colleague, friend or your school community!

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Featured LifeWays Representative

Little Farm School

***LEARNING THROUGH LIFE, HONORING
CHILDHOOD***
Limerick, Maine





I remember, as a child of three or four, walking on the land our family made home, where my mother was born. To me the land was vast and went on forever. There was a path through the field, beaten down by the many footsteps of my siblings, cousins, and neighbors. Venturing off the path wild strawberries grew at your feet. My father had many woodlots on this land and I can still smell the scent of his chainsaw and the sawdust it created. In the winters we rode in sleds down the hill, aiming for the opening in the stonewall that led to the next field. The meadow where my great-grandfather grew corn that he would sell at the city market is where my husband and I chose to make home and raise our family. And today I walk daily with the children of my home-based program, Little Farm School, on this land, carrying our seeds of hope to build a new home for us to continue growing in.

Little Farm School, LLC is a LifeWays Representative program located in Limerick, Maine. Opening in 2011 at the homestead of the Graham family, Little Farm School is a farm-based program offering full time care to children ages 2-6 as well as Farm Camps for school age children in the summers.

Little Farm School began when director, Mary Graham, looked to bring quality childcare to her community while raising and homeschooling her own children at their family's farm. Sharing seasonal life on the farm naturally became our curriculum as we sank deeper and deeper into the land we were embodying. In Spring we welcomed baby chicks and goats to the barn and chose where to plant each seed in the garden. In Summer we frolicked in the tall grasses of the meadow gathering wildflowers and herbs to feed the growing chicks and goats, enjoyed the milk the mama goats shared, and pulled weeds in the garden to allow space for our harvest to grow. In Autumn we gathered the harvest from the garden, collected seeds for the next year's planting, tucked bulbs into the earth before it froze and created warm spaces inside the barn for the animals there. And in Winter we sank into the deep rest the season provided and dreamt of the next cycle of seasons. The rhythms of the farm and the seasons of the natural world held us all throughout ...[READ MORE](#)

Want to know more? Visit [LITTLE FARM SCHOOL](#) online!



Meet Mary Graham

Little Farm School

Working with the LifeWays philosophy was a sort of coming home for me. So many of the practices resonated with me at such a deep level, mimicking the beautiful childhood I was blessed to have, and connecting me to the rich ancestry that I come from. LifeWays inspired me as an individual, which inspired my parenting, my relationships and how I wanted to show up in my community. I feel a deep connection to this approach to fostering human development and feel blessed to be a steward of this. I feel deeply that this work is what will inspire humanity for generations to come and I am honored to use our family land to bring this gesture forward.

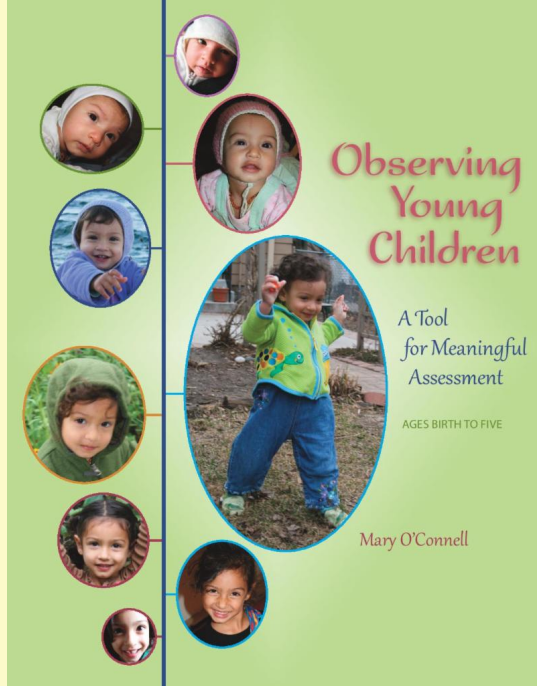
News from the LifeWays Community

***Are you attending the [WECAN conference](#)?
Look for LifeWays there!***

State of Minnesota joins Wisconsin and APPROVES Observing Young Children for Accreditation!

LifeWays owes a big THANK YOU to Veronica Oliva-Clour who helped get **Observing Young Children** by Mary O'Connell approved by the state of Minnesota.

Veronica wrote to us to share the



good news, and said, 'I am so very pleased and excited that Waldorf methods can be part our MN state Parent Aware accreditation system. Having the choices we need, as educators, to follow our philosophy and curricula based on genuine child directed play and open ended activities filled with heart, patience and wisdom is so necessary in this ever increasing hardened world for little ones.'

Do you work in an early childhood program in Minnesota? Using *Observing Young Children* as a tool for observation and assessment meets the criteria for Parent Aware Accreditation!

Do you work in an early childhood program in Wisconsin? *Observing Young Children* has been approved by YoungStar accreditation for use at LifeWays Milwaukee, and you can petition for your program to use it as well!

Do you work in an early childhood program elsewhere in the U.S.? **Submit *Observing Young Children* to your state's rating system for approval!** Be sure to let them know it has already been approved in two states. Let us know how we can support you in getting it approved in your state.

Do you want to know more about how to use this tool effectively? Watch for "**Learning to Observe Children**" online course -- returning soon!



Your support of LifeWays North America keeps Certification Training, Continuing Education Hours and Parenting Enrichment available for students worldwide. Your past generosity helps us keep resources like our [Living Arts Weekly](#) blog posts and our [newsletters](#) free for thousands of people. You help us continue to develop new avenues of support, and you help us provide a living wage for our staff.

Your generosity is deeply appreciated!

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CALL IT IN - make your donation over the phone by simply calling Michael at (405) 343-7211 ~Thank you!

Welcome: NEW LifeWays Representative Programs

Would you like to see your program in this WELCOME section of our next newsletter? Learn more [HERE](#)



Looking for details on upcoming LifeWays trainings, workshops and courses?

Now you can plan your education and enrichment opportunities with the new **LIFEWAYS PLANNER**, published every two months. Catch up on the latest issue, **JANUARY/FEBRUARY**. By signing up on our website

[HERE](#) you'll get the bi-monthly Planner, our weekly Blog and more!

Questions? Ideas? Comments?

Share them with your editor:

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LifeWays graduate, Class of 2000



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