# MLT NEWSLETTER
# FALL 2018

## Cultivating Resilient Communities




*We're starting out with my take on Maynard's new book. I think it is understandable if I display some bias, but the most objective part of me encourages you to read this book!*

## From James Joyce to Organic Farming, a Memoir

## A Book Review by Jon Towne

*From James Joyce to Organic Farming, a Memoir* is Maynard Kaufman's third book in the last ten years. *Adapting to the End of Oil, Toward an Earth-Centered Spirituality* of 2008 considers peak oil and the changes in spirituality needed to adjust. *The Organic Movement in Michigan* (ed.) of 2017 consists of articles by Maynard and other leaders of the organic movement in Michigan. Of course his PhD dissertation *James Joyce and the Temptation of Modern Gnosticism*: 1971 preceded these books by many decades. That work was never published.

*A Memoir* is a retrospective of his long life from growing up on a farm during the dust bowl and the great depression in South Dakota to academia as a graduate student at the University of Chicago subsequently receiving his PhD while teaching at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. During this later period he discovered that though he left the farm of his youth, the farm never really left him, and moreover, he discovered his environmental roots, which also included his Mennonite upbringing, his graduate studies in process theology and his university work which include planning and developing the Environmental Studies department. He became an organic farmer, taught small farming and self provisioning, a pioneer organizer of many green organizations, a green politics

promoter and a scholarly writer of a multitude of essays and the three books mentioned above.

First I have to disclose that I became his stepson at the age of six when he married my mother(Sally) so I am interwoven in the periphery of his story. Reading this memoir has greatly increased my understanding of his life and writings. There was even some information in the book I wasn't aware of concerning the circumstances of his divorce. In middle and high school I learned (not always happily) the ropes of farming, gardening, food preservation and all the skills inherent in those endeavors. After high school and during portions of the 1970's I lived (as if one of their students) for periods at their farm, the School of Homesteading in Bangor, between stints as a college student and other non-focused activities. In 1979, Maynard asked me to assist as an instructor at the Land Trust Homesteading Farm's WMU homesteading program which I did for a few years. I returned to the LTHF in the mid 1980's from a two year hiatus, and married Bobbi and had two kids, Shannon and Emma. I worked for most of the next four years at the Kaufman's dairy farm. Following the death of my mother in 1990, I then attended nursing school. I followed that career track in the decades since.

Structurally this autobiography presents Maynard's life in a non linear manner that seems to work. Each chapter focuses on some part of the Academia to Farm to Environmentalist gradient with enough overlap to make it all hold together well. His scholarship is prevalent throughout and his background in theology comes through in his essays such as in Chapter six when he distinguishes food systems as either "sacred" or "demonic". Throughout the book, he highlights his successes such as his well received academic papers in graduate school. His low point was his divorce in 1961 which along with the pain and ill-being he suffered, seems to have hindered or stopped any further advancement at the University of Chicago. Divorce was a large impediment that administrators couldn't overlook then. Since this is a "book review" I will summarize each of the seven chapters.

Chapter I: "A Time of Transition" outlines Maynard and Sally's "back to the land" phase from leaving the city of Kalamazoo (but not academia initially) to renovate a 30 acre piece of land in 1964, followed by moving to a "real" farm in Bangor while simultaneously starting the School of Homesteading in 1972/1973. Details of day to day life in the homesteading school with up to 8-10 live in students are provided. After a few years he worked with WMU to sponsor a related program at the nearby Land Trust Homesteading Farm which at its beginning provided academic credit with a paid Homesteading Instructor. After the mid 1980's and the decline of student interest, Maynard put more attention into farming especially with the time deficit left when he retired from teaching. A small Grade A dairy resulted, which later was converted to beef. During this time he was transitioning away from his teaching job in the department of Religion at WMU when he became half time in 1973 and retired in 1986.

Chapter II: "Back to the Farm" is about the Bangor farm that he and Sally bought in 1972, he still lives on a portion with his current wife Barbara Geisler. He describes in detail the land, the buildings, the house, the forests and vegetation present and the changes he's made over the years. He details building improvements and additions, utilities and equipment needed to work a progressing diversified farm. Aspects of growing crops such as rotations, animal husbandry, maple syruping and forest management are documented. In recent years he sold separate parts of the farm to three different and younger farmers leaving 27 acres that he presently resides upon in the "off the grid" renewable energy powered house he and former homesteading student, Thom Phillips built.

Chapter III: "The Deep Roots of my Environmentalism" explains his self proclaimed environmental credentials despite having no academic preparation in that subject or even of any science in general and it is convincing. He narrates how he saw first hand the results of the destructive application of farming with the drought and dust bowl of the 1930's. Incidentally this demonstrated how difficult it was to make a living by farming and helped propel Maynard to leave the family farm to pursue an academic life. His Mennonite background provides good pedigree since they were innovators in conservation practices. He developed intimacy with nature by hunting and trapping in his youth. In

graduate school at Divinity School at the University of Chicago, he was immersed in process theology which can form the basis for an environmental ethic. God, besides being the creator, encompasses the world (the world is god's body) and is affected when humans disrupt ecological integrity. He spends a couple of pages clearly explaining process theology through the works of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Later when he moved to the country, he became instrumental in the planning for the first Earth Day in 1970. He also became involved in the nascent planning for university environmental programs, and taught a class "Religion and Environmental Awareness". He began to consider himself and be considered by others as an environmentalist, something confirmed by his later involvement in green politics in leadership at a local and state level - something that gave a political context to his environmentalism. His 2008 book put his environmentalism and his role as Religion professor together in a book about peak oil which delved into climate change. Finally, his green, off-the-grid house cements his environmentalism in practice. This chapter explains much of the ethical underpinning of his life.

Chapter IV: "A Doctoral Dissertation on James Joyce" was of course a culmination of his academic life. This chapter describes a challenging period which includes his difficult divorce and remarriage as mentioned earlier, while attending the Divinity school at the University of Chicago. His success was apparent with several fellowships, from making his mark socially and, and with well thought out and well written papers such as "A Christian Theory of Literature with Reference to Joyce's Portrait" which later became the basis for his dissertation. Professor Preston Roberts was impressed by this paper and others and became a mentor and dissertation adviser, although later tragically left that role. After receiving his MA and finishing his PhD exams, because of his divorce, remarriage and the associated circumstances, his success had its limits and he found little possibility of advancement at the Divinity School. In 1963, he and his wife Sally, their son and her three children moved to Kalamazoo, MI to take a position in the newly formed religion department at Western Michigan University. Despite the distraction of his diversion into farming, he finished *James Joyce and the Temptation of Modern Gnosticism* and received his PhD in 1971. After that he was freed to pursue his deeper interests as laid out in this book.

Chapter V: "My role in the Organic Movement" covers his involvement from the move to Bangor to the present day. He was one among several founding members of Organic Growers of Michigan (OGM) in 1973. This was the year of the first growing season on the new farm and the first class of ten students at the School of Homesteading. There was a rapid increase in interest in organic growing in the following years and this grower-focused organization grew to many Michigan chapters and a statewide organization. Later Maynard helped form MOFFA, Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, a still thriving organization focusing on healthy local food systems. Also in the mid-1970's Maynard became a founding member of Michigan Land Trustees (MLT), with a focus on making land more accessible. However, much of this chapter is about OGM and its core issue, certification. The federal government instituted is own costly certification standards and OGM couldn't ultimately coexist with them and went defunct in 2006.

Chapter VI: "Food Systems, Sacred, Profane and Demonic". This chapter was formerly a paper written and presented in 2003. Although in Christianity, God alone is sacred, in most of human existence until the industrial revolution, nature is sacred and in order to grow food, attention had to be made to the appropriate rituals to assure good crops. Farmers intervene in the regenerative powers of nature. Food systems were simple, focused on growing, preserving, processing and preparation, which were done at home. With the industrial revolution, and complex food systems, food is produced to make money and much of the actual work is done behind the scenes such as when you buy food in a supermarket without knowledge of where it came from. Enter pesticides, huge farms, equipment and genetically modified plants which are patented. Maynard describes these technologies as demonic as their purpose is to make money by controlling nature with corruption implied, not to feed people

healthy food. Maynard has always advocated home gardening and food production over agribusiness and this chapter very effectively gives some religion based arguments for it.

Chapter VII: "Resisting Climate Change" is an effective bookend. Maynard examines himself, his motives, and his inquiring mind and finds that they have evolved. Formerly he was content with scholarly work alternating with work outside. Not that ethics didn't intervene. Maynard was always suspicious of industrial modes of production, the demonic, but more recently because it exacerbates climate change. The greediness of industrial production has caused a further enclosure of the commons where the indiscriminate emission of CO2 to the atmosphere and resulting climate change is now the number one problem that can cause mass extinctions including our own. As he explains, our monetary system insulates people from their actions. Two attempts at local exchange systems have been his ethical response. A solution to climate change is carbon sequestration in the soil, where originally most of the atmospheric carbon formerly resided until bad agricultural practices liberated it over the last hundreds of years. Organic gardening and farming without tillage, homesteading, biochar, permaculture, and tree crops can all be used to increase carbon sequestration in the soil and reduce or eliminate fossil fuel inputs. As much energy goes into the food a family of four buys, as in the car they drive. Much of this is aligned to what Maynard has always done and with his very low input, low carbon footprint lifestyle.

I do have a big problem with the last two paragraphs of this chapter and book in the section on environmental ethics. He muses maybe we shouldn't be concerned about saving lives such as those of the hungry, because of overpopulation and the imperative to get our CO2 emissions down. Aside from this obvious questioning of the sanctity of human life, it doesn't make sense since it is us, the middle class mostly white American who is responsible for the lion share of CO2 emissions, not hungry, poor third-worlders.

This book presents a purposeful well-thought-out life based on theory and practice consistent with his environmental ethic, where theory comes before practice. Back in the late 70's he developed and taught a course "Homesteading theory" for three credit hours. "Homesteading Practice" was the "clinical" (in nursing student jargon) hands on that I was involved in, also for three credit hours. This synergism enables deliberate purposeful practice. Human lifestyles and government policies need to have a factual basis so to speak, so that they will solve the real environmental problems that face us. Too often, people justify their actions after the fact, we see it continuously in our politics where there is no factual basis for most recent government policy except to make certain people a lot of money. There should always be more than one reason to do something, not just to make money. Organic gardening reduces fossil fuel inputs, eliminates pesticides, reduces air and water pollution, and provides healthy food and exercise. Now Maynard adds sequestering CO2. It goes to show organic gardening really is doing the right thing and we should all be doing it as he has been advocating for and doing for 45 years. There is no compartmentalization here! We should also contemplate that instead of striving to throw off the shackles of the material world as in Christian salvation, the world (as god's body) and nature are meaningful objects of reverence. How could we not feel this way after 4 billion years of life?

*From James Joyce to Organic Farming, a Memoir is available by contacting Maynard Kaufman at 269.650.1758. It is also available on Amazon.*

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*What follows are two articles by Rita. The first reiterates the potential and importance of gardening to reduce CO2 emissions and actually sequester carbon. The second article distinguishes "preppers" from homesteading, both of whom stockpile food. Motives in the former are based on fear, which disrupts clear thinking, while that of the later, are based on seasonal adaptation and logical thinking.*

## *Plant a Garden: Cool the Climate*

By Rita Bober

During the big world wars, Europe's farmlands were no longer capable of producing large amounts of food, which led to a famine that affected Allied soldiers. In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson asked United States citizens to grow their own food so that more food exports could be sent overseas. These were called Victory Gardens.

Today, there is a campaign to promote the same sense of urgency and collective action by encouraging people to plant "Climate Victory Gardens." Rather than assisting in a war effort, these local gardens can help combat an impending threat that jeopardizes everyone: climate change.

The key to transforming traditional community gardens and urban farms into climate gardens, or gardens capable of sequestering carbon, is in embracing gardening principles that protect soil health and biodiversity.

These principles promote regenerative agriculture, a type of farming that turns dead or degraded dirt into rich, bio-diverse soil that acts as a carbon sink. A worldwide switch to regenerative farming could reverse climate change. Drawdown, a nonprofit founded by bestselling author Paul Hawken, conservatively estimates that regenerative agriculture will increase by 1 billion acres by 2050, which would draw 2312 gigatons of CO2 –equivalent from the atmosphere.

Gardeners are asked to commit to ten regenerative gardening principles that serve both the environment and the soil. Each climate victory gardener makes a pledge to: grow edible plants, keep soil covered, encourage biodiversity, plant perennials, don't use synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides, compost, integrate crops and animals (integrating animal manure can make soil richer), use people power and not mechanization, rotate plants and crops, and get to know their garden and understand its efficiency and what works best for it.

Following these principles leads to food production that supports the local economy and soil health, while curbing erosion, pollution, and pests, increasing water retention, and decreasing runoff. Healthy soil sequesters much more carbon than dead dirt.

The soil has an incredible ability to store a lot of carbon but only if it's rich in living organisms. As those organisms die off, carbon is released into the air. Scientists at Ohio State University have estimated that cultivated land around the world has lost up to 70 percent of the carbon it once held.

Did you know that since the 1970s, just one regenerative farming technique – not tilling the land – has reduced carbon dioxide in our air as much as a year's emissions from 50 million cars?

Though most likely small in size, Climate Victory Gardens have the potential to enrich entire communities. The increase of local food production spurred by gardens also cuts down on the transportation needed to export foods into various cities, thereby reducing CO2 gas emissions. And as people learn about the importance of climate gardening at home, they will start demanding food grown with regenerative techniques. Parts of this article were excerpted with permission from Green America: www.greenamerica.org.

## *Homesteader or "Prepper"*

By Rita Bober

Recently the New Yorker magazine had an article about rich "Preppers and how they were getting ready for serious disruptions in our society. They were building underground, silo-type living shelters, buying property in New Zealand (where they feel it is the safest place to be in the world), having food supplies for long-term, and of course, having guns to protect this property.

Because we raise our own organic food, have animals, and solar power, we are often asked if we are "Preppers". Many times this comes from people who never experienced coming from a large family where sometimes food and money were scarce. Or that you came from a farm family that practiced canning and preserving food to last through the winter.

The term "Prepper" is often used in a derogatory way to imply people are fanatics and think the world will end soon. Yet, every entity in the natural world preps. Humans, however, have recently been conditioned not to prepare and to rely on the government and societal systems to sustain them. We find that "Preppers" tend to be about isolation and distrust of others. They work from a premise of fear versus working from awareness about life. Can you rely on "the system" to provide all that you need in an emergency? This is called consumerism and means we spend money so that others take care of us.

Homesteaders like us think in a different way. We are simply being squirrels. The squirrels don't worry about zombies, raging tornadoes, flash floods or a nuclear event. Squirrels do logical things working to prepare. All animals in the animal world practice this concept to survive. Squirrels work hard all summer and fall to prepare for the winter, storing food and building nests. And if they don't get hit by a car crossing the road, they will survive the winter.

Even trees attempt to survive. Sap from a pine tree is a healing agent used to seep through the cut that has harmed the tree. The pitch can also be used by humans in healing our cuts.

Huge ice storms have been known to leave an entire town out of food and no power for weeks. What do we do then? If the people have canned food, gathered firewood, set up generators, cultivated neighbors that we can call on to help; we build a strong sense of community, where we can all survive.

Clear thinking is a prerequisite for survival by using our logical frontal lobe, not the fear portion of our brain, the fight-or-flight part. Learning to adapt is a fundamental law of life. Every living being contributes to the good of the whole. We are all in this together and we can use our brain to develop a sense of awareness and creativity that helps us to adapt. We know how our ancestors survived in the past by being prepared. Even our government encouraged Victory gardens during WWII. Before 1950 when big agriculture was developed to feed the world, many of our ancestors had two gardens; one for food and one for medicine.

Being prepared is not about running away but what we are working towards--a community effort. See you there!

*We finish out this newsletter with an article by Mike Phillips. Living with, and in nature can require difficult decisions, but often they have positive outcomes.*

## *The Scheme of Things*

### *by Mike Phillips*

It's no small feat to extricate an extremely agitated raccoon from a live trap. It takes patience. Usually, one can wait it out until the creature exhausts itself. Then the latched sprung door can be released and it will run into the woods without retaliating. But there was one time when a strange, particularly robust, raccoon got caught in a big live trap set for a woodchuck that had been decimating the vegetable garden. This particular raccoon was spooky. It just crouched towards the back of the cage and seethed. It was saving its strength—of which it had a lot. Any approach towards the cage and it would suddenly explode baring fangs and flailing claws and whirling like the Tasmanian devil from Looney Toons. It had tremendous energy and was really mad (it may have been *really*—like rabid—mad). It literally rocked and rattled the live trap. I am sheepish to report that I was unable to wait it out and eventually dispatched it with a pellet gun.

I don't like shooting or otherwise killing animals. More often than not, spiders and other bugs that get in the house are carefully captured and released outside. This is just a personal position on the general scheme of things—and it's wholly inconsistent. Mice attempting to settle in cupboards and pantries get a Victory trap with smear of Jiff peanut butter. And, as previously mentioned in these pages, we had been overrun with chipmunks and these were often live trapped and relocated to greater Lawrence. But they are no longer a problem. An agile stray cat that has been hanging around all summer long has apparently decimated the chipmunk population.

We encroach upon nature and sometimes it encroaches upon us.

Nearby, there was this old metal fabricator who once unintentionally caught a skunk. But he didn't live trap it. One night the skunk was just nosing around the man's house when it fell into a basement window well. The man found it, he carefully offered it a wooden gang plank but the climb was too steep. Then he tried flooding the space so that the skunk could float up and waddle away soaked but no worse for wear. Unfortunately, the bottom of the window well up against the house foundation had real good drainage. Out of ideas, the man finally went into his metal shop and came out wearing one of his big thick welder's gloves. Then he sprawled out next to the opening slowly lowered his gloved arm. Carefully he began stroking the skunk's torso. Acting on pure intuition—if not remarkable affinity—he then moved his glove under the skunk and slowly lifted it up and out of the window well. He set it down and it wandered unperturbed and never releasing its spray.

Last week, I was walking in some bulrushes when I heard faint sporadic croaking. It was a frog and it seemed caught on something. I could only see its head and some of its body. Then, pulling back some reeds and grasses I looked down to see that one of its hind legs was firmly caught in the mouth of a small garter snake. Slowly, methodically, the snake was gobbling the frog whole. The frog was alive but motionless apart from bleating an infrequent, pitiful croak. Although feeling bad for the frog, I let go of the reeds and grasses and walked on. There aren't as many snakes around here as there used to be.

Please visit: www.michiganlandtrust.org for more information about us, along with previous issues of this newsletter. Inquiries (such as for a brochure) along with donations through PayPal (if desired) may be made:

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