

Morninglory at 35

By Robbie Anderman

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Morninglory at 35. What a concept. There's certainly myriads of more trees here than there were when we moved here, and even more deer present commonly on the farm. In 1969, there were only 30 acres with trees, now there are closer to 90 and cleared fields are a rarity. And the deer challenge me in the night when I answer nature's call close to the compost pile. Five babies have been home birthed on the farm and several more were born elsewhere while calling Morninglory home.

An 'offshoot' of the Toronto experimental Rochdale College, Mike Nickerson and I saw ourselves as moving out of the city to the country... became acutely aware that we needed to learn a whole new way of life just to survive in this relatively harsh environment (yes, one can die from exposure around here, though we don't hear of many doing it).... So we came up with the idea that Morninglory could be "Rochdale in the Country", a place where people could come and learn some basics about country survival skills, like gardening, wood heat, dipping buckets down the well for water... And so it has been. Hundreds of people have passed through our gate and learned what they needed to learn here... not necessarily what they consciously came looking for. Since we started, as a community, talking about the 35th anniversary, we've been considering the question of "why us"? Why, of all the communities that started in 1969 and before, are we still here on the land, surviving and even thriving in some ways?

Amidst mention of the concepts of respect for the land, respect for each other, evolution of the individuals in the group, patience, tenacity, etc. There is also the consideration that, being off the common energy grid and thus not vibrating at the same frequency as most folks in this society, and not paying a monthly bill for that energy, we have had to work harder just to keep the basics together... while being more in touch with the basics: water, firewood, shelter, gardening, food storage, transportation, etc. While most people flick a light switch, most of the years here have seen us reach into a pocket or into a match box for a stick to flame to light a candle, a coal oil lamp, a propane lamp.... and only the last 15 years or so have seen solar panels opening the option of flicking a switch... though even that has been tempered by the need to watch the battery meter during the short cloudy days of winter... when the match still has its active place in our lives.

So things that most Canadians take for granted, we have to work harder at... At the same time, we have the best water I've tasted in any of my travels... and we share the land taxes so we pay relatively next to nothing for "rent"... and I do say rent because the deed says we own the land, except for those rights retained by the

Crown. Considering that we're about 18 people (of all ages) and that the land taxes are about \$1400 a year, we do get to work more directly for what we consider to be of value... rather than a monthly "rent". And we get the peace of quiet as a bonus... a feature that many many new arrivals comment on.

One of the greatest values is community I've noticed that values and beliefs change over time through experience... and this "evolution" of consciousness has seen me allowing myself and my neighbours to change and to place our friendships above my earlier beliefs. Survival is challenging enough, I need friends and neighbours, even if we disagree on some key things. Judgement serves no purpose, especially of myself, though discernment has its place.

One of the greatest sources of disagreement has arisen around land use. and this has mostly arisen between those who have been working and living for a long time on the land, in contrast with those who are relatively new to the land... and don't want to cut down trees... even though their heat during a cold winter comes from someone cutting down trees somewhere to deliver to them. Again, beliefs change. Then again, land use includes which tree to cut, is that one your favourite friend? We all have "spots" on the land that nourish us... and the others don't even know they exist. Here is where communication and respect come into play.

Communication is a key element. We noticed that, in the past, meetings were often unpleasant, as some powerful speakers dominated the floor and the quieter members kept their opinions to themselves while awaiting the right moment to speak. We have moved into the circle as a means of working through meeting issues these days. Either with a talking stick, or not. We go round and round until consensus is reached, usually one topic at a time... with passing allowed, and a limited time per person if need be. Interruptions are allowed ONLY by permission of the person whose turn it is.

Maybe the biggest realization of this 35 years has been the friendship and support we have felt from our neighbours and fellow inhabitants of this wide rural area. Again, people living in such an environment know that even if we don't go to the same church, that there may well be a time where they will need and appreciate our lending hand... and we do offer it in many ways in the larger community. We don't claim perfection, nor constant harmony. We have become friends, we have offered shelter to those in need, we have shared our resources and we have benefited from the peace of the hills we live in. The beauty inspires us to stay here at home, even when things are not doing so well amongst us...and then the season changes and we're working and playing together amidst the beauty once more.

I would like to amend the above to say that, though there have been times in our history when we were close to being a commune and shared all work, resources and income and expenses, we're not doing that actively now. Our members harvest maple syrup, honey, vegetables, fruit, trees, chicken eggs, etc... and teach school, make tie dye garments, make Cool Hemp non-dairy frozen dessert, do auto repair,

do ad sales for other companies and Eco Farm and Garden magazine, craft wood work and musical instruments, manage the programming and tech on the local community radio, do web work, and play music,,, and much more.

We work alone and we work together.

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