

Good News From Colorado

by Trina Paulus

Hi Cornucopia Newsletter readers!

I was in Colorado for the first time in ten years this August. I was invited to share the last days of the two week 25th anniversary **Permaculture Design** course at **Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Inc.**, CRMPI, and the ending celebration. It turns out this humble, small, site has hosted the longest running annual Permaculture Design course in the world, not just in the USA!

What a thrill to see 25 young people camping on the side of the mountain in this little green jewel of a place. 2400 feet above sea level in barren, red-clay scrub oak dotted landscape. They are learning the art of designing for sustainability, a permanent agricultural approach, with inventive water systems, renewable energy systems and human habitat integrated on levels from the very small to towns. The

Transition Town movement is one of the offspring of the Permaculture movement. I believe that the sort of knowledge and careful observant thinking that Permaculture requires is essential to build the better world we know is possible — if...! (to paraphrase the theme of my book *Hope For the Flowers*, which appears more relevant every day) ... if enough of us risk to become those butterflies able to carry the seeds of love from flower to flower, .

It also appears that the realization of the importance of raising one's own food may be that key bond that can unite people of very different political, religious and philosophical ideas. We all have to eat. A personal story about this: I ordered several canisters with seeds that are supposed to be viable for 10 or more years. The website was a Patriot website and I knew I would get e-mails from them afterwards. I can't go along with their antigovernment and extreme religious positions, but I do appreciate their understanding of our need for solar, wind

and renewable energies and their emphasis on growing our own food with non-genetically engineered and non-hybrid seeds. They claim these will be more valuable than gold in the future, and I happen to believe that as well. So there we are, partners in some very important ways, though coming from different analysis.

Back to CRMPI. Out of seven steep mountain acres there is only about one-acre on a relatively level slope where intense growing happens. One can scarcely imagine such a green, verdant



oasis until one walks through the berry bushes, apple trees, grapes and other perennial crops in the forest gardens and enters into one of the two greenhouses to a total feast of edibles and beauty. The whole inhabited and cultivated acre is protected by a high deer-fence, which occasionally is asked to also serve as an

unsuccessful barrier against mountain lions and recently, a bear. The chickens, ducks and rabbits are their main quarry so further fortifications have been needed for their particular premises.

The place is accessible by the most scary road I've ever been on, with a sheer drop and no guard rail, winding up the main road from Glenwood Springs to Aspen. 20 years ago when I was first driven up to CRMPI, I thought to myself I could never live here with that road! Little did I know that two years later I would live on this for six months and drive an old beat up truck up and down that road myself, occasionally having to get out and move stones so I could pass. I think you can guess that I love this place. It is in fact the most



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sustainable place I have any relationship to. In the midst of the surrounding, barren landscape are two greenhouses and two Forest Gardens. One greenhouse is attached to the house and helps heat it in the winter and cool it in the summer, while producing subtropical edible plants all year round. There is a 15-year-old fig tree that wants to burst out of the top of this two-story greenhouse, so it is pruned at the top every year, forcing it to grow sideways. I was there as thousands of figs were ripening and we would sneak under the branches to feel which ones were soft enough to pick, impatient to wait for the big harvest. The other greenhouse has another type of tropical abundance including fruit. For example, there are huge banana trees only 18 months old which are beginning to ripen their fruit for the first time. Besides other marvelous delicacies, a hammock and a high platform make lounging, observing and sleeping possible. The whole place is a very happy spot in winter and summer. On the north side is a sauna that helps heat the greenhouse and the human caretakers. The sauna of course is attractive in other seasons as well, for the well-being of body and soul.

If a person stays at it, like CRMPI's founder, Jerome Osentowski, has done for 27 years (at least), it is possible to build a wonderful legacy for the earth, its people, and environment. To do this, one needs to get in touch with good information, attract wonderful people to help at critical junctures, and, (not least) have the fortune to have access to a property with a southern slope able to receive the sun.

We each can do something like this if we stay with it long enough! We can each find a way to help build a world that is sustainable. One does not have to be alone. It is probably better if there's a community to do this work. But there has to be a vision, and it is often the sustaining vision of one person that make something like this happen, through thick and thin, year after year. So with CRMPI! There was and is such a vision and such a person.

Besides my days at Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Inc., CRMPI.org, I spent three days at "Sustainable Settings" down in the Valley. It is also a place attempting to model a responsible agricultural and Permaculture approach. This place is a ranch on about 300 acres. It is spacious enough to hold large gatherings, raise cattle and sheep, but the same spirit of modeling systems that can be sustainable over a long period pervades. www.SustainableSettings.org.

We need hundreds of thousands of such efforts. This is noble work! The high point at Sustainable Settings was meeting Woody Tasch, the author of "Slow Money," a vibrant movement encouraging us to invest in good work that does not necessarily produce swift and high money yields, but yields of a different — and more important kind.

I feel so fortunate to be associated with both these fine places which pioneer ways to live on this Earth that we have largely lost. We need to look to the indigenous peoples of every land for ways to do this, and combine their sensitivities with some of our more recent understandings. Permaculture does this!

The brilliant global report on agriculture released in April of 2008 (you can find this report," Agriculture at a

Crossroads," online at www.agassessment.org), also combines the wisdom of peasants, women, small- and large-scale farmers, to show us how we can feed the world in the future. They concluded that it will be small-scale organic farmers that will feed the world, and that Big Agriculture and Genetic Engineering will have little roles. I've written about this important report in earlier newsletters. One other thing about this report that strikes me is that Monsanto and other large corporations and agricultural consortiums originally asked for this report four years before it was released... but when the conclusions in the report became apparent, they pulled out of the proceeds to months before the release of the study. I really hope you take the time to read this critical report. 🐦



Sustainable Settings

Ed. Note: Trina Paulus is a vice president and longtime Cornucopia member. She is also vice president of Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Inc. and on the board of advisors of Sustainable Settings.