

Voluntown Peace Trust

News from "The Farm"

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FRESH New London: Planting Food, Harvesting Change

VPT is privileged to be connected with many organizations working for social change. In this newsletter, we invited Laura Burfoot, Associate Director of F.R.E.S.H. New London, to reflect on her work in building this new program.

A professional Black American male acquaintance of mine recently expressed this about his middle-class, two-parent childhood background in Queens: "I did not buy into the American dream, but I was lucky enough not to get caught up in the American nightmare."



The American nightmare of which he is speaking is a web woven with the threads of under-resourced public schools, racial profiling, the street drug trade, the criminal justice system, all funded by racism and capitalist exploitation. It is a nightmare that exists in many of the streets and neighborhoods of New London, it is a nightmare that lives in the minds and lives of many. It is accelerated by the absolute refusal, on the part of the majority of the institutions and agencies which "serve" these youth, as well as society, to recognize and address this crisis. Such silence is a form of complicity not to be overlooked.

The youth with whom I work, all youth of color, occupying low-to-middle income economic classes, exist in the world of this web. Can I as an educator choose to ignore this reality? What is the result of that ignorance or indifference? If I choose not to ignore it, how do I begin to create a program that turns and

faces this reality, their reality?

The connections between the work of building community food security and addressing systemic inequalities facing urban youth are many. As the Community Food Security Coalition notes, community food security is "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice." Poverty, marginalization, racism, and corporate, rather than democratic, control of resources all contribute to food insecurity. Our vision can, and must, be wide. In addressing community food security we can simultaneously address the oppressive forces impacting the youth with whom we work, because they are in many cases one and the same.

F.R.E.S.H. works to contribute to a more food-secure community by increasing the supply of organic, locally-grown fruits and vegetables into New London's food system. We do that by growing the food ourselves, which has been an incredible lesson in self-reliance for all of us involved. Our goal is to distribute organic food to people who otherwise could not access it, either by donating it or selling it at sliding-scale rates. We figure that if people cannot get to the food, we will bring the food to them! We are hoping to procure a diesel van or truck (to be run on biodiesel) with which we will deliver our produce. We are developing an educational campaign in addition to our farming work that will begin to combat much of the ignorance around

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History of "The Farm"

Before Dr. Campbell and other colonists moved here, the VPT property and surrounding area was home to the Pequot Nation's Monhunganuck village. At the time of their first contact with Europeans, the Pequot controlled the area of Southeastern Connecticut from the Nehantic River eastward to the border of Rhode Island. Both the Pequot and the Mohegan were originally a single tribe which migrated to Eastern Connecticut from the upper Hudson River Valley in New York, probably in the vicinity of Lake Champlain, sometime around 1500. The primary language of the Pequot Nation was the Algonquin Y-dialect, which was also spoken by the Mohegan, Nar-

ragansett, Niantic, and the Montauk and Shinnecock from the Metoac on the Eastern end of Long Island.

In the early part of the 1600s, before contact with the Europeans and smallpox, the Pequot numbered between 6,000 and 8,000. The Pequot War (1636-1638) was the first major conflict between colonists and an indigenous New England people. It had a devastating impact on the Pequot Nation. When the Pequot War formally ended, most of the Pequot had been killed and others placed in slavery or under the control of other tribes. Those placed under the rule of the Mohegans eventually became known as the Mashantucket (Western) Pequots. For a more in depth history, read Lee Saltzman's online article on the Pequot—www.dickshovel.com/peq.

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Ella Baker: A Life of Solidarity and Struggle

As we read and studied together Barbara Ransby's book, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement, we realized that this was the right book to begin discussing in the midst of our processes of organizational visioning, community formation, and trying to understand what value VPT can offer to the social change movements of our day. Ella Baker (1903-1986) was certainly one of the most important African American leaders of the 20th Century and arguably one of the most influential leaders of the civil rights movement. She was a national officer and key figure in the NAACP, one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and a prime mover in the creation of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. Baker made a place for herself in predominantly male political circles that included W. E. B. Du Bois, Thurgood Marshall, Bayard Rustin, and Martin Luther King Jr., all the while maintaining relationships with a vibrant group of women, students, and activists of various ethnic, ideological and class backgrounds.

Aside from her many accomplishments, it was the way in which Baker lived and worked that has so much to offer activists, organizers and peacebuilders today. She was a creative thinker, a tireless strategist, an activist organizer and a community educator, encouraging an educational process that was democratic, inclusive, and based on the collective experiences of those involved. "In Baker's view, people had many of the answers within themselves; teachers and leaders simply had to facilitate the process of [eliciting] and framing that knowledge, of drawing it out."

Ella Baker believed in the "importance of tapping oppressed communities for knowledge, strength, and leadership in constructing models for social change." Baker believed that education and ideas should be employed in the service of oppressed people and toward the goal of social justice. Similar to other leaders in education pedagogy during her time, such as Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, Baker advocated an education of lib-

eration and empowerment, which was intended to promote new self awareness, a sense of dignity and a belief that change is possible. At the same time she avoided dogmatic ideology, be-

lieving in the importance of being open to different ideas and perspectives. Her focus on the process of social change highlighted her belief that any movement for social change must transform the individuals involved. For Baker, the journey was as important as the destination.

Ella Baker was a consummate coalition-builder, which was a challenge in the divisive Cold War politics of her day. She sought to work with people across movements, gender and

sexual orientation barriers, class biases and political ideologies. Baker concentrated her efforts and attention on the grassroots and local movements for change, believing that in strengthening these efforts, broader change would be possible. At the same time, Baker promoted local autonomy among groups and organizations encouraging them to "develop their own vision and strategy based on the transformative experience of confronting injustice personally and collectively." Because of her long experience as a grassroots organizer and her commitment to movement-building from the bottom up, she was often frustrated by the predominant charismatic leadership style of the day, believing that charismatic leaders did not identify closely enough with the people and most often tended to remain above the people instead of among them. Baker's commitment to grassroots activism engendered a style of work that encouraged a new form of social relations that prioritized cooperation, collectivism and egalitarianism over competition, individualism and patriarchy.

As we continue our life together in community and our work as a social change organization, reflecting on Ella Baker's life fundamentally challenges us as her ethos is radically different than the dominant culture, even within social movements today. In our work for cross movement integration, where we are seeking ways to bring together the skills, knowledge and

concerns of the social, economic and ecological justice movements, Baker's ability to build diverse coalitions and broad-based movements has inspired us. Her dedication to the poor, marginalized and oppressed communities in seeking strategies for constructive change strengthens our belief that those most affected by structures of violence should lead the way toward integrated, just and sustainable relationships. Ella Baker's legacy is one of struggle and solidarity, constantly engaging ordinary people in a collective and democratic process for justice. At VPT, we seek to follow Miss Baker's example in this work of liberation and empowerment, learning from the least and the land, and working together to build a society rooted in values of justice and peace.



Peak Oil Watch

Peak oil is creating record profits for oil companies. ExxonMobil's 2005 profits were up 43% to a U.S. record \$36.13 billion. However, further examination of its 2006 financial plan reveals that it is not reinvesting these windfall profits into finding new oil fields or expanding refining capacity. This choice may have something to do with a new report Exxon issued this year that quietly forecast the global oil production peak in 2010. Other companies are also reaping the benefits from peak oil. Royal Dutch-Shell, which was forced to revise its "proven oil reserves" downward in 2003, still managed to set the British profit record with \$22.94 billion in 2005 despite a drop in actual production. Chevron, which recorded the highest profits in its 126 year history with \$14.1 billion, has been more forthcoming about the world oil situation. In a two-page ad taken out in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and several other prominent publications, Chevron explicitly states, "One thing is clear: the age of easy oil is over." As peak oil expert Kenneth Deffeyes of Princeton put it, "I can now refer to the world oil peak in the past tense. My career as a prophet is over. I'm now a historian."



How does your garden grow?

With so few hands to do all that VPT envisions, we did not know how the garden would grow this year from its humble beginnings. To our surprise and delight, Voluntown neighbors recently approached us about working together to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers. Over the past several weeks, a small group of committed growers has been meeting to discuss this year's VPT garden. A vision is emerging and the group has decided to work together to expand the garden little by little.

Evolving is a cooperative effort led by members of the local community. Experienced farmers DJ and Mary Hill are guiding us and working with Matt to assemble a greenhouse. Cheryl Thevenet, Nancy MacBride and LaDonna Cardin are working together on field preparation, water sources and seeds. We are hoping to plant about a 1/2 acre this year. The garden highlights a core value of VPT, being responsive to the community and working collaboratively.

This new community partnership allows VPT to grow the garden aspects of its work and be: a source of nutritious food for neighbors, guests and the on-site community; a classroom for children and youth from the city; and an opportunity to build community while learning from one another. VPT is grateful for our neighbors and friends and we are looking forward to learning and growing together.



Matt and D.J. Hill have been working to set up a greenhouse to support the cooperative gardening effort.

VPT Welcomes our first Intern!

Matt Turcotte recently joined VPT after spending two years at Connecticut College (Conn) as the Environmental Coordinator. While at

Conn, he started a bio-diesel program, increased the recycling rate, helped to start an organic garden, and doubled the amount of renewable energy used by the college. Matt also spent a year working for the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) in New Jersey and California organizing support for environmentally sustainable policies. A New Hampshire native, he enjoys playing the guitar, baking bread, listening to Phish, and watching the Red Sox and Patriots. Matt has a Bachelor's degree in Government from Connecticut College.



*Ancient Futures:
Learning from Ladakh
by Helena Norberg-Hodge*

"The author is right to highlight the humane values of Ladakhi society, a deep-rooted respect for each other's fundamental human needs and an acceptance of the natural limitations of the environment. This kind of responsible attitude is something we can all admire and learn from." Excerpt from Foreword by H.H. The Dalai Lama.

Wish List

- Dehumidifiers (2)
- Speaker Phone
- Bunk Beds
- Storage Shed
- Toro Timecutter ZX Rider Mower
- Water and Energy Efficient Washer and Dryer
- Combination DVD/VCR
- Digital Camera
- HP Laserjet Printer
- BBQ Grills
- DreamWeaver Web Design Program

The Birgitta Grimm Scholarship for the Arts

This scholarship fund was created in September, 2005 for artists from marginalized and oppressed communities to spend time at the Voluntown Peace Trust either as part of a program or on retreat. Birgitta Grimm was a Swedish born artist and poet who died of cancer in March 2005 in Voluntown. Birgitta moved to New England at 18 and was the late wife of our dear neighbor Gil Grimm. She was also the mother of three children including our friend Cecilia Grimm, a visual and trapeze artist now living in New York City.

Voluntown Peace Trust Donation and General Information

The work of VPT is possible because of your generous support. Please make checks payable to *Voluntown Peace Trust* and send to 539 Beach Pond Road, Voluntown, CT, 06384. All donations are tax-deductible. Thank you!

_____ I would like to support the work of the Voluntown Peace Trust. A check is enclosed for the amount:
(Please circle) \$50 \$100 \$500 \$1,000 \$5,000 \$_____ (Other)

_____ I would like to donate to the Birgitta Grimm Scholarship for the Arts. My check is enclosed.

_____ I would like information about becoming a VPT Founding Donor.

_____ I would like information about Voluntown Peace Trust programs and/or partnering opportunities.

_____ I would like information about VPT internship opportunities.

Contact Information: _____



Voluntown Peace Trust

539 Beach Pond Road
Voluntown, CT 06384

Phone: (860) 376-9970

Email: voluntownpeacetrust@gmail.com

Our website is *still* under construction. Upcoming VPT event and program information will be announced on the website soon. Thanks for your patience!

The Voluntown Peace Trust is a non-profit center for social change and sustainable living. For nearly 50 years, the 57-acre property in Voluntown, Connecticut has been a place for equity-based community economics and nonviolent living, organizing and action. Grounded in this history, VPT brings together individuals and groups that are developing constructive alternatives to the violence of our age.



Pictures (l-r): A) Raul Matta and Kasha Ho, from American Friends Service Committee, were two of the coordinators of the Youth Action Camp at VPT in October, 2005. B) Chuck's Cabin, situated alongside the Farmhouse, was refurbished by Chuck Mathai in the late 1990's and is ideal for individual retreats and getaways. C) Former residents of the Peace Farm Ellie Kastanopolous of Equity Trust, and Joanne Sheehan of War Resister's League (WRL) with Kris Wraight (WRL), catching up before WRL's Youth Peace Weekend at VPT in March.



Spring Events
at the
Voluntown Peace Trust
539 Beach Pond Road (Route 165)
Voluntown, CT 06384
(860) 376-9970

- March 9, 2006:** Seeds, Hope & Concrete
VPT closes its Winter Film & Discussion Series with this film of concrete hope. Highlighting inner-city youth learning to grow vegetables in urban garden projects, this film shows how, by so doing, they contribute to building community while learning vital life skills. Featured in the film are urban agriculture projects in Brooklyn, Chicago, Little Rock, Toronto and Wisconsin supported by Heifer International.
- March 10-11, 2006** Dreams: Source of Healing and Wholeness
Based on Judeo-Christian tradition and Jungian psychology, this retreat/workshop will explore dreams as a source of inner wisdom and wholeness for the individual and for the world. Participants will experience practical means of working with their dreams led by Retreat Director Carmela Garofalo, RSM. Suggested contribution is \$100.
- March 31-April 2, 2006** Activist Retreat
Following the global days of action (March 18-20) responding to the 3rd anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, activists will gather to rest, reflect, learn and strategically analyze the actions. Retreat Facilitator Cybele Locke, Ph.D. will guide this exploration. Suggested contribution: \$25.00, but no one will be turned away based on ability to pay.
- April 7-9, 2006** Arts for Trauma Awareness and Resilience
Educators, caregivers, social workers, community leaders and others who would like to gain a deeper understanding of trauma will benefit from this weekend workshop. Retreat Facilitators Odelya Gertel and Jeff From will guide participants through engaging ways of using the arts as a medium for developing skills and tools for trauma resiliency. Sliding scale: up to \$150, based on ability to pay; scholarships are available.
- April 22, 2006** “Down on the Farm” Workday
Come celebrate Earth Day here at VPT: Plant something in the garden, prepare the trails for summer use, build a composting toilet and more. Food and fun is definitely on the agenda.
- May 21, 2006** Ched Meyers - A Theology of Sustainability
Ched Myers is a theologian committed to popular theological education and social analysis with faith-based activists. He will be joining us for a time of liturgy, meal sharing and bible study reflecting on *the Prophets as Defenders of Creation*.
- May 27-29, 2006** Youth Theatre for Social Change Workshop
This introductory workshop is open to youth between the ages of 15 and 20 who are interested in theatre as a medium for developing social change strategies. Facilitators Amy Marsico and Michael Shank will expose the participants to a wide variety of arts-based approaches, including Forum Theatre, Street Theatre, and Playback Theatre in order to gain skills for effecting constructive change in their communities.
- June 24-25, 2006** VPT Friends & Volunteers Weekend
VPT's viability is possible only because of generous & amazing friends and volunteers. Our friends and volunteers are invited to come spend the weekend at VPT to celebrate the beginning of the summer and the past few years together. We will also offer a ritual celebration honoring the life of Fred Pfeil.

**All workshops and retreats are subject to availability. Call us at (860) 376-9970 if you have questions or would like to register for any of these events.*



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healthful eating and food choices.

F.R.E.S.H. has the opportunity and the responsibility to create a space that acknowledges and addresses the systemic inequalities that impact the lives of our youth. We have begun to do that, and we will continue to do so. We understand that the work that we do is grounded in relationship. Meaningful change in the lives of the youth with whom we work can only happen when trust exists. By building trust, and by openly addressing the challenges that face these youth, and the broader community, we are beginning to combat the nightmare of which my friend was speaking. Slowly yet surely, we are beginning to create change. And we are eating well in the meantime.

F.R.E.S.H. New London links community health, natural resource preservation, ecological education and youth empowerment by addressing community food security. Our summer youth program provides a paid internship for eight New London youth ages 15-18. The program teaches the youth the skills of farming, cooking and critical thinking on the wide range of issues involved in analyzing food security. We believe that the building of self-esteem and empowerment can best occur as we respond creatively and constructively to the struggles facing our community.



Bliven Brook, which winds through VPT land.

A Message from the VPT Board of Directors

Dear Friends,

We had a remarkable 2005 with a tremendous rush of new energy and hard work by the new VPT partners. The space is being opened up to a wide array of diverse communities in ways that were only dreams a year ago. We are especially excited by the various workshops and retreats that will be drawing participants into a deeper understanding of themselves and the ways they can engage their communities. In January, Matt Turcotte joined the Partners as the first VPT Intern. Matt will be working on sustainability issues around the property, including researching alternative energy projects and helping to manage the organic garden. The Partners (with much help from friends) insulated and renovated several rooms in the farmhouse this last fall, have submitted four grant applications already this year and have continued to do outreach in the local, national and international communities. The beginning of 2006 has also seen VPT's first film and discussion series for the local community highlighting issues ranging from peak oil and corporate domination to genetically modified organisms and urban agriculture. All of this has kept the Partners busy as they continue building a broad base of support for VPT.

As the Partners have been actively pursuing grants and other funding possibilities we have come to recognize that VPT needs other means of support. The 2006 budget puts VPT in the red for more than half the year. Reflecting on the grassroots nature of VPT, we have come to a point where we are feeling called to ask more of our supporters. We need to get the word out about the great things happening at VPT and encourage new supporters to make a financial investment in this project. Thus we are asking each of you to help us out in various ways:

- Organize an event for the Partners to come and meet your group or congregation. This can be as easy as asking some friends over for a potluck where they come speak.
- Tell a friend about VPT's work and ask them to join our Founding Donor Program.
- Organize a fundraising event with the Board. We'll have a blast and raise some cash!

This outreach is critical to continuing our work at VPT; please let us know what you can do to support our ongoing efforts.

Thank you,
VPT Board of Directors



Ahimsa Lodge is a favorite for retreats and gatherings. It is situated alongside Bliven Brook and can accommodate up to 20 people. The Sanskrit word "Ahimsa" is interpreted most often as peace and reverence; and it advocates nonviolence and respect for all life.

VPT FACILITIES AVAILABLE FOR RENT

VPT's 57-acres have two retreat houses, a meeting center and cabin available for rent to individuals and groups doing sustainability, peace, and justice work. If you or your group is a VPT Founding Donor, the facilities are available to you at \$10.00 per person per night. For others, the rates begin are \$25.00 (sliding scale). Reservations can be made up to one year in advance. VPT does not discriminate, nor does it support discrimination, based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identification, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or lack thereof, or disability.



Books We're Reading

Trans Gender Warriors

By Leslie Feinberg



"I believe this is the only nobility to which we should aspire—that is, to be the best fighters against each other's oppression, and in doing so, build links of solidarity and trust that will forge an invincible movement against all forms of injustice and inequality."