

Reflection on My Summer Internship and the July Bartimaeus Institute

By Rachel Hudgens

Rachel Hudgens was with BCM in Oak View as summer intern for the month of July, 2012. She grew up part of Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago, one of the oldest intentional/neighborhood Christian communities in the U.S. All photos are by Tim Nafziger.



Amidst the smell of sage and good coffee, we began our first morning together with a prayer written by our brother Ken Sehested (from Circle of Mercy in Asheville, NC). Prayer in the morning –homage to our liturgical traditions –has become one of the most important elements of my time here in Oak View. “Rouse yourselves, oh creatures of clay” we pray, “for it is I the Potter of heaven who commands your attention!” My attention, and the prayer that dwells within the act of giving it, is called by this place. The mountain ridge. The golden hills. The smell of warm soil below my feet. (Left: Rachel at the local beach.)

Coming here I’m not sure I knew exactly what I was in for. I had read some of the books, done a good couple of scans of the web-page. I knew Ched and Elaine well enough by name to know there would be more than enough to learn here. But putting my feet on this soil, and being greeted by Ched with his almost ceremonial “Welcome *here*,” it began to become clear that this was a *here* that held something particular. I’ve grown into great gratitude for it.

I grew up just outside of Chicago, seven blocks from Lake Michigan, in a house under an ever growing maple tree. The city feels like home to me—though I often miss the stars, and sometimes I have to escape to places where the air is clear. I come from a community called Reba Place Church and its legacy of working hard to learn what it is to follow Jesus while living with one another intentionally. I have just finished a dual degree in Spanish and Global Studies from North Park University, and I am the newest of the growing group of interns welcomed into the honor of living in the place that Elaine and Ched call *here*.

What I have come to love about the team at BCM is the wide web of disciplines they consider essential to the work they do, and the broad network and community of people from across the globe they consider part of their circle. There is a deep respect of tradition and ancestry as well as the cultivation of a new generation. I have the sense here of connecting many interrelated disciplines that far too often seem insular.

As soon as I arrived, I found myself plunged right into preparation for the most recent Bartimaeus Institute. This gathering worked to bridge the disciplines of permaculture and theology, and after our time together I find more and more that they are inextricably tied together for me. What does it mean to consider biblical tradition as the root of ecological sustainability, to examine the ties between cultural and ecological injustice and then root these in scriptural truths? What is the role of the Church as a body of disciples in engaging the call to be reconciled both with one another and with the land we live on? The institute offered a well rounded opportunity to grapple with these kinds of questions, as well as to participate in hands on work. Ched and Elaine's garden served as a beautiful site to explore some important permaculture techniques.

I am incredibly grateful to Chris and Melissa Shank-Grataski, as well as to Elaine and Ched, who facilitated workshops and Bible studies. The grace and integrity behind the work these good people do have been such a gift. I was challenged to think about my own sense of place, and the part of my identity that is grounded there. Ched talks about the history of our world being divided roughly into two broad general cultural categories: those whose identity is defined by the place they belong to, and those who presume to conquer, *own* and commodify land. If you step back, it doesn't take long to center the major conflicts of our world today around this basic cultural distinction.



For me the Institute was a time of coming awake and making connections. I understand the purpose of placing the two disciplines of theology and permaculture in conversation with one another. It is to cultivate a "Bioregional Discipleship" that is defined strongly by ties to the creation around us and by dismantling the structures and systems of injustice that continue to perpetuate violence towards our neighbors and our earth. If we as the church would learn about our own places, beginning with the ebb and flow of water in our own particular watersheds, perhaps we would feel more responsibility to care for them. *(Left: Rachel working on the Institute mural project.)*

I am beginning to better understand that in order to love and serve my Creator, I am responsible to my fellow creation. Following Jesus holds implications on how I interact with my neighbor, my enemy, and the dirt beneath my feet. It calls me to come awake to the world around me and begin to listen differently. It is a listening that is grounded in traditions that are "so old, they appear new," as Catholic Worker founder Peter Maurin put it. We were reminded at the Institute to ground this push towards bioregional literacy in our scriptural traditions, telling the stories of our foremothers and forefathers whose relationship with the earth was one of mutual trust and respect. There is a need to re-member the old ways of being in and with the world.

I am also grateful for the variety of stories and experiences brought together in the Institute. Coming together and bringing our different exposure to permaculture and theology meant that the kinds of conversations we had around meals were dynamic and important. Being in community with others whose experience is different than my own is essential to my discipleship. We can't face the legacy of consumerism and destruction of our neighbors and our earth on our own. The systems set in place are simply too large, and too destructive. It is in cooperation with one another, and working with and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that I find myself able to hope. If I am not alone, I can learn to stand upon the essential recognition of and lament for what has gone wrong, and find energy to reach towards something new. *(Right: Chris Grataski talks about how to observe nature at a local oak grove.)*



I am reminded of my dust-ness: that my bone and flesh is created out of the same clay that is below my feet. And that is good news, for it is the Potter of heaven who calls us to attention.

Below: Storytelling around the bonfire at dusk, Bartimaeus Institute, July 4, 2012.

