



**STARCROSS**  
community

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# Sharings

Winter 2008

*Brother Toby's reflection*

## FINDING HARMONY IN LATE WINTER

Mud is everywhere. Running down the slopes, every place you step, wherever you look, our whole world is mud. On a few stark bushes standing above the chocolate ooze, salmon colored quince blossoms incongruously appear. Mud and quince – the symbols of February at my California home. They don't give way to each other. They alternate. Mud/blossom. Blossom/mud. And, all human activity must dart into an appropriate opening.

I am reluctant to travel in February but David was performing a violin concerto in the northern part of the state and I went with him. As we drive along, first come the vineyards where small yellow mustard flowers are springing up between the dark, pruned vines. Any day now, they will be mowed down, but for this moment they spread a bright blanket over the land.

Leaving Sonoma County, we drive through the chaparral of the Coast Range to the fertile valley of the Sacramento River between the Coast Range and the snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains. Acres and acres of purple plum blossoms come into sight as we drop into the valley.

I find myself a bit panicked that winter is slipping away. Have I missed some opportunities for reflection? Of course I have. Has time run out? I want things nailed down. Is this winter? Is it spring? Neither of the above? At my age I don't like transitions where I must move quickly. But, that is what we have to do. Nature is shifting gears and so are the farmers as they edge out their tractors. For them there will be no more days of hanging out in the local restaurant. The land calls. Here deep in rural California, far from the lights of San Francisco and Los Angeles, a beat is beginning. For a little while, this land is the heart of the state.

Soon we pass rice fields. Some dry. Some underwater. A few are green. I think of Basho's (1644-1694) haiku poem:

*The beginning of culture / deep in the country / a simple rice planting song.*

Basho was probably resting under a tree and listening to farm women, ankle deep in water, singing as they planted the rice seedlings. I don't hear that. Out here it is agribusiness and the planting is by giant noisy machines. Perhaps what I call "noise" is the beginning of our culture. There are also flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds calling to each other as they explore the paddies. I would like to take that quieter sound also as the beginning of our culture.

So, out of mud and blossoms comes an awareness that the great wheel of nature and of what we experience in life is always turning. For every ending there is truly a new beginning, and we don't control the process. We just learn to cooperate.

So where is the sacredness? In the mud? In the blossom? Could it be in both?



## SOME DATES TO REMEMBER

*We understand that many of our friends like to know in advance about events. Call or e-mail for more information, including housing options. Usually it does not work for young children or pets to come.*

Feb. 28: **SKW AIDS ORPHANS SPONSORS MEETING – Sister Julie’s report on Uganda Trip** (Santa Rosa, 7 pm, Congregational Church, all interested folks welcome)

March 21: **GOOD FRIDAY DAY OF PEACE** (Starcross 11 am – 4 pm, a quiet day for awareness of Holy Week and springtime)

May 2 (& 4): **DAVID’S SENIOR RECITAL** (Boston, New England Conservatory – also David’s Honors Quintet on the 4<sup>th</sup> in Jordan Hall, Boston)

May 24-28: **FRIENDS OF STARCROSS ORGANIZING RETREAT AND WORKDAY** (Starcross from lunch Sat. to breakfast Monday – This is Memorial Day weekend)

Aug. 25-28: **CHAMBER MUSIC RETREAT** (Starcross, invitational, no public performances. Artistic Directors: Bonnie Hampton — Juilliard, and David McCarroll — NEC)

Nov. 22: **OLIVE HARVEST GATHERING!!** (Starcross, 8 am - 5 pm. Festive lunch provided!)

Nov. 29: **CHRISTMAS FAIRE** (Starcross, Old Farm House, anytime 9 am to 5 pm. Sales of wreaths, fruit, books, olive oil and products. Also Shaker items. And more!)

Dec. 10: **A WINTER EVENING** (Santa Rosa)

Jan. 4: **BROTHER TOBY’S BIRTHDAY CONCERT WITH DAVID AND FRIENDS** (Santa Rosa, 7 pm — music, wine & cheese, fellowship!)

## AIDS @ STARCROSS

Our website evolves very slowly but the new section is attracting attention. It explores our response to the AIDS pandemic. There are 5 parts covering 1986 to 2008: Introduction, In Romania, Tina, In Africa, Milly. You can go to [www.starcross.org](http://www.starcross.org) and click on AIDS. As it says “It’s a story of people, mostly children, and of dreams.”

## SISTER JULIE’S OLIVE OIL “Extra Virgin and Extra Good”

We had a wonderful harvest and premium pressing. A great blend of our Tuscan varieties, hand picked, 1st cold pressed. Our testing for “extra virgin” certification came back showing a nearly perfect balance of flavor. So now we are waiting for the oil to “calm down”. It takes about 3 months. Then we will be ready to share it with you!

## FRIENDS OF STARCROSS

We have been wanting to develop a more personal relationship with people who encourage and support us. The 40 people who came to help with the olive harvest made us feel this more strongly. We have always had help with everything we’ve done – contributions of ideas, money, and physical help.

We plan a first event on Memorial Day weekend. If you are interested in being part of this beginning gathering and work day, contact Sister Marti ([sm@starcross.org](mailto:sm@starcross.org) or 800-960-1500).

## PLEASE INVEST IN THE FUTURE

We can function as we do only because of contributions. Bequests in wills are an important part of our support. Together with our self-support projects (wreaths, fruit, books and soon olive oil) they guarantee the long-term future of the Starcross influence in lives and in the world. All of our self-support endeavors originated with bequests.

Please consider a bequest to support us for a long time. You can decide if you want to give for our general needs or for a specific activity (such as children, self-support, etc.)

You or your attorney will draw up the clause you want but it will probably include something like this:

*I give and bequeath the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to Starcross Monastic Community, a non-profit organization at 34500 Annapolis Road, Annapolis, CA 95412. IRS Tax Exempt ID # 94-1687876.*

Thank you for this blessing.

## YOUR CHILDREN IN UGANDA

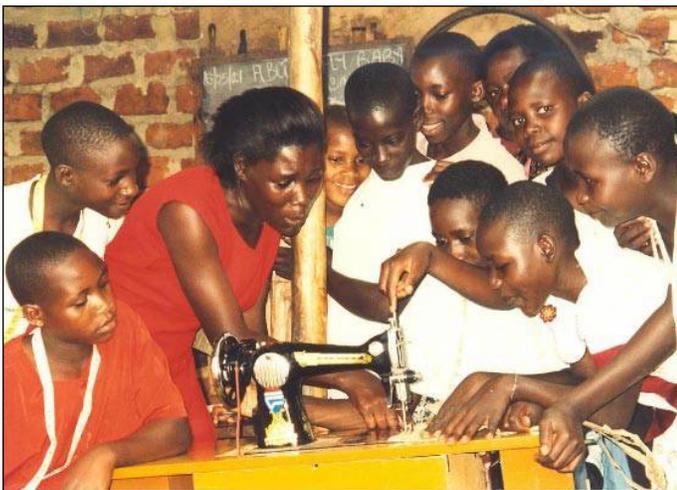
The Starcross Kin Worldwide program for AIDS orphans in Uganda is having great success and some of us find it frightening! What if we had not found this kid on a bundle of rags, or when he was kicked out of school for no money, or sitting in a shack when her last relative had died. Looking at these young people grow over the past 12 years has been a remarkable adventure. SKW now cares for 96 children and 21 have been successfully launched in life and are elder brothers and sisters to those who have lost their first family.

As we write, Sister Julie, SKW's CEO, is in Uganda. We have taken in 26 new children and she is there to get to know them and their needs. Her daily reports remind us of the condition in which most of the children were found over the years. About an 11 year-old named John —

*His people have nothing, literally nothing, but they approach life with big sunny smiles. John is stick thin. Seven kids and a grandmother – all in rags living in a hut. I don't know how they survived. Yet, as I was leaving they brought out two big baskets for me. I wanted to cry!*

That is the same rural village Timmy, Silvia, and Teddy came from 12 years ago. Teddy is now a second year scholarship student at Makerere University – the most prestigious school in East Africa and the assistant director-in-training at our House of Hope in Kampala.

*Today Teddy collapsed in my arms, sobbing as we stood by her father's grave. She thanked me for being there for her, for being her family so that she and her younger sister would not be alone in the world. She said she needed us to care. Although I see Teddy only once or twice a year, the connection is an anchor in her life.*



For Sylvia, too, Julie discovered an important bond. Apparently we had written a note wishing her luck before she took the national exams required for completing primary school. Sylvia is now preparing to enter university.

*That letter has been unfolded and reread many times throughout her academic career whenever she needed some parental encouragement. It is humbling to learn how much a simple gesture of caring can mean to an orphaned child.*

Timmy's relatives had all died from AIDS. Somehow he survived but was kicked out of primary school for no money to pay the fees. He was 11 when we connected with him. We got him back in school. He wanted to go on to journalism school but his grades were not that good. Julie went around with him to schools and found one that would take him provisionally.

He took off in journalism like a rocket! He finished the first level journalism with a thesis on "The Role of the Media in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights". Timmy asked to go on for a university degree. We found the money with the help of sponsors and he is graduating in 2009. The next step will be exciting to watch.

When Julie got off the plane in Uganda she was handed a very complete brief of the present political, medical, and social conditions in Uganda. It was signed,

*I welcome you in Uganda and you will see my happiness soon. From your son, Timothy Kasaali.*

*The funds for Starcross Kin Worldwide come from sponsors. If you want more information contact Sister Julie: [sj@starcross.org](mailto:sj@starcross.org). We are trying to establish a blog for the sponsors with more detailed ongoing information and a chance to interact with people guiding the program.*

# STARCROSS

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*Dorothy Bebee*

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2008

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH REQUIRES SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

On the last day of 2007 we received an e-mail from a large foundation saying a donation was directed to us by someone impressed with our activities. However, we would need to make a “statement of faith” including a profession that, “The only hope for the salvation of any person is faith in the shedding of Christ’s blood as atonement of sins, Christ’s death on the cross and Christ’s bodily resurrection.” Friends told us this foundation was a major channel for support of the “religious right”. In her response to them Sister Marti wrote “In our spiritual life as a monastic community, in our ecumenical activities, in our attempt to follow the corporal works of mercy set forth in the New Testament, and in our work with children impacted by the AIDS pandemic, we have been open to people of all faiths, and to women, and to homosexuals. We have reason to believe that this would likely make us unacceptable to you.” It did.

Starcross has been privileged to have affirmed many people as they grew spiritually. One close friend was an Episcopal archdeacon moving to a Quaker faith at the same time as another dear friend moved from being a Baptist divinity professor to Dean of an Episcopal Cathedral. Christian to Buddhist to Atheist to Jewish. Secular humanist to Catholic. Catholic to Buddhist to secular social activist to independent Christian. And how many, many start out saying “Well, I was raised Catholic ... or Jewish ... or Muslim ... or atheist... BUT ...” You name it, we have seen it from our place on the spiritual crossroads. And hardly any were trivial about the quest. They were at all times authentic and deeply spiritual. By contrast, there is a lot of trivial God-talk associated with the present political campaign. Much of it seems frivolous and some of it, as Rabbi Jack Moline recently observed, raises to the level of bigotry.

Tests for orthodoxy do not bring a person closer to embracing what is sacred. And, they can do great harm. In Afghanistan a 23 year old student recently downloaded a critical article on the Prophet Muhammad, added some thoughts of his own on women’s rights, and showed it around. He has been sentenced to death by firing squad. Also, how many great teachers have church schools lost by imposing professions of unquestioning faith and loyalty?

An awakening and awareness of the divine spark in our lives must unfold in the way a flower blooms. And at every stage, including doubt, the process is holy. If we must have a creed, let it be from Micah 6:8

*This is all that the Lord requires of you: act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God.*