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# Sharings

Summer 2011

*Brother Toby:*

## **THE HOPI FARMER AND THE SONG OF LIFE**

A gentle friend of mine has been diagnosed with melanoma. After her recent surgery a companion said to her, “Welcome to the planet of the vulnerable!”

Years ago I was visiting the Hopi region in the arid plateaus of North-Eastern Arizona. My guide was a Kachina doll carver. He lived on a high mesa, and had a corn field at the base of the hill. One evening I walked out in the field. It was late July and the corn was only about 10 inches high. There was no irrigation system and no rain in the forecast. The situation did not seem very promising to me. Corn was an essential Hopi staple. Talk about vulnerable!

“Hopi” means “People of Peace.” They call their corn, which was given them by a divine spirit, the Mother of Life. It must be planted with a good heart. Everything about the cultivation teaches us about spiritual growth. Facilitating the growth of corn and raising children is very much the same for the Hopi. A meal is made from the corn to use through the winter and at ceremonial times. Cornmeal is used at important steps in life much the same as incense is employed in the solemn liturgies of various religions.

Well, if the corn is so dang important why not dig wells and build irrigation systems? That is not how it works. To me, the Hopi lands are at the center of “the planet of the vulnerable.” I think the Hopi would agree with my friend when she says her vulnerability results in being open “to finding love and support and ways to be grateful.”

Singing is one of the ways to be grateful — to build a bridge between any aspect of our existence, including a corn field, and the sacred harmony of creation. I was told of several Hopi songs appropriate for the corn, the people, the season. I fused them into a canticle which we use here at Vespers during the summer. It is a chant of promise from the sacred forces that are the Hopi’s partners in life.

*In the summertime we will come again. We will come as clouds from the west, the south, the east and the north to bless the people of peace and to water their fields and crops.*



*Then the people of peace will see their corn plants majestically growing. They will be happy and they will joyfully sing praises to the spiritual beings who brought moisture.*

*At the edge of the cornfield a bird will sing with them in the oneness of their happiness. So they will sing together in tune with the universal power, in harmony with the one Creator of all things.*

*And the bird's song, and the people's song, and the song of life,  
Will Become One*

## A WEDDING AND A VICTORY SHOUT

It is pretty rare to have a wedding in the chapel of a monastic community but that happened here at Starcross on June 25<sup>th</sup>. Our Holly married Lance Baker from Colorado. Lance has relocated to help with our farm activities. His specialty is horticulture and he fell in love with the land here— well, he fell in love with Holly first!

The day was beautiful. The ceremony was very sacred. There were not many dry eyes when the 50 or so people present all raised their hands in blessing. And, the rest of the day was filled with the little joyful “Holly touches” that everyone values.

There is a back story. Many attending had memories of funerals in that same chapel and times of gathering to pray for strength. A friend from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, who has known Holly most of her life, said:



*It is definitely a victory shout over AIDS for Holly. She's sure come a helluva a long way. I think of that little girl who didn't get into the "right" school because she "lied" or was "unbalanced" when she told the teacher several of her siblings had died. They had!*

Holly has had much to overcome in health and in learning disabilities. But she has demonstrated she is a survivor. After a few years we were able to confirm that Holly was HIV negative. The AIDS pandemic cut many relationships short but Holly was one of those for whom it has also tied people together. One of her bridesmaids is HIV+. Although born a world apart, Romania and California, these two young women are as close as sisters.

Those who visit Starcross events will run into our happy newlyweds. Eating food Holly has prepared, walking fields Lance has cared for. Behind the scenes they are also volunteering to lend hands to activities at home and in Africa to make vibrant the words of the blessing everyone conferred on them:

*May God bless you Holly and Lance, and give you long years of joy in one another. May your marriage be life-giving and enable you to offer help and comfort to all who come to you. May your home be always a sacred place of peace.*



## DOUBLE GOLD, DOUBLE HAPPY

We have just been notified that Sister Julie's Organic Olive Oil beat out some well-known companies to win the DOUBLE GOLD medal at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair! The peaceful hillsides at Starcross are covered with olive trees. Not only are they beautiful, they were planted to provide a way to support ourselves by making premium extra virgin olive oil. It has been a steep learning curve but we have been able to grow healthy trees, master the art of milling the fruit, obtain ORGANIC certification, and produce a consistently high quality oil.

However, Mother Nature is fickle. While last year's crop produced delicious oil, there was very little of it. And this is an off year for the alternate bearing olives so it looks like there will be another light crop. That is the nature of farming. We are on the right track and our friends are going to have access to a superb, and dare we say it, “blessed” olive oil!

## BABIES BORN WITH AIDS, THE UNITED NATIONS — AND MILLY

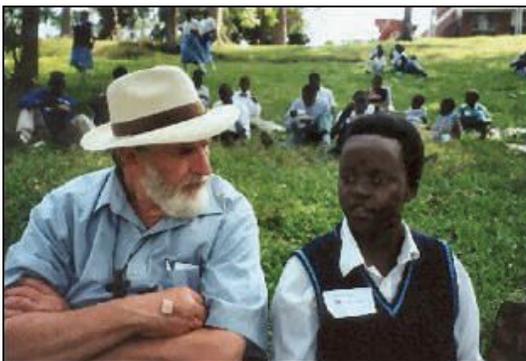
370,000 children were born HIV+ in 2009. The UN recently announced a goal of eliminating the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child by 2015. “That is impossible” was our Brother Toby’s reaction. All of our friends who have worked in Africa agreed. Most of the babies concerned are born in sub-Saharan Africa. A significant number of the mothers live in remote areas without access to the care and medications available in urban settings.

Then came that look on Brother Toby’s face many of us have learned to recognize. “Because it’s impossible,” he said “we ought to do what we can to help.” That is the somewhat irrational and visionary attitude that got a monastic community into caring for children with AIDS and AIDS orphans in the first place!

We were updated on the latest methods and strategies for prevention of mother to child transmission. A fair number of friends and former colleagues have been helping out in various ways. Soon we began to focus on a rich source of both need and talent. Several of the young people who were taken into the Starcross Kin Worldwide *House of Hope* in Kampala, Uganda as AIDS orphans when very young are now working in healthcare and social work. Some of them are in remote and seriously underserved areas. Soon our attention began to focus on Milly Nakazzi, a nurse and midwife in a desperately remote and impoverished area. We’ve mentioned Milly before. For more on her earlier story you can link to <http://www.starcross.org/aids-milly.htm>. Sister Julie maintains contact with all our Uganda alums after they have been launched in life and we already knew the sober basics of Milly’s life and occupation.

Milly works in the densely populated, largely Muslim, Iganga district. Life expectancy is 46. There are pronounced problems with gender inequality, polygamy, illiteracy. Only 27% of the children finish primary school. HIV infection is the highest in Uganda. We could not think of a more needy area and we have a very dedicated person already working there. Milly delivers between 20 and 30 babies a month. Many are born with the virus. For complex social reasons not all mothers are tested for HIV. Many do not come to Milly’s attention for pre-natal care or continue with post-natal care. The issues are as much social/cultural/poverty as medical. Milly is also having great difficulty promoting AIDS prevention.

At the end of August, Julie will be making the necessary field trip to collaborate with Milly in designing a practical, sustainable, and culturally sensitive program. This will involve working with two other of our alums, a creative social worker, and a star mechanic, solver-of-all-problems. They will form a team and craft a project to help more of Milly’s mothers give birth to children free of the AIDS virus.



As Brother Toby put it, “Sure this is a drop in the bucket. But this is a part of the bucket that the people in New York and Geneva are not going to be looking at. In the next 10 years Milly will be helping to deliver about 2,400 babies. If we can help ensure that a substantial number of those children will not have a short and painful life, this venture has enough significance for any of us.”

## VOLUNTEERS LIGHTEN THE LOAD

We like the Shaker saying, “Hands to work, hearts to God” and sometimes extra hands are needed to get everything done. Then it’s time to put out a call to the trusty volunteers. They come from all over for an hour or a day to harvest lavender, blackberries, olives, bottle oil, make bows for the Christmas wreaths, stuff envelopes, can tomatoes and applesauce...the list goes on. And working together we always have a good time. If you’d like to be notified by email when volunteer work projects are happening, please contact sister Julie, [sj@starcross.org](mailto:sj@starcross.org).

# STARCROSS

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## SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2011

### AUTUMN GATHERING: October 14-16

Last Spring we began having gatherings here to find the sacred in each season, and to share the beauty and wonder of our sacred space with others.

The autumn gathering will be October 14-16. We begin Friday evening with a meal together, and spend the next two days exploring the particular gifts and challenges autumn is offering for our spiritual growth, through talks, sharing, and listening to our own inner quiet.

If you are able to join us, call 1-800-960-1500 or e-mail [community@starcross.org](mailto:community@starcross.org).



### LOOK INSIDE FOR:

- OUR NEW AIDS PROJECT IN AFRICA
- HOPI REFLECTION BY BROTHER TOBY
- A WEDDING AT STARCROSS
- DOUBLE GOLD FOR SISTER JULIE'S OLIVE OIL!
- VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



*Sister Marti is our computer attacker, numbers cruncher, office administrator and general keep-it-all-going person, and also at this time of year, our canner-in-chief!*

### BROTHER TOBY'S "FRIDAY REFLECTIONS"

Several times a year Brother Toby writes a series of "Friday Reflections" and we send them out only to our e-mail list because of costs. The HOPI FARMER in this *Sharings* is a selection from a recent piece. To receive these reflections and other news, send your e-mail address to [community@starcross.org](mailto:community@starcross.org).