



STARCROSS  
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# Sharings

Autumn 2015

## A QUIET PLACE WITH A BUG

Autumn, a time to take a breath? Not true this year, at least for me. From serious global issues such as the refugee crises to very personal crises in the lives of people I love, the river of time seems to be speeding along. What do I do? Two helpful images come to mind — a bug on a branch and a twenty-something Jew looking for a quiet place.

Let's start with the man. In bad times for Israel, Jesus of Nazareth had traveled from his hometown to give a message of hope and joy. Suddenly he was no longer in a peaceful carpentry shop in Nazareth but surrounded by a whirlwind of unaccustomed activity. So what did he do? (Mk 1: 35),

*In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.*

That is good and practical advice. From time to time I give up trying to sort out my thoughts and anxieties. I just try to get outside of myself. Modifying a simple practice of the Vietnamese Zen master and political activist Thich Nhat Hanh (1928- ), I just breathe in and try to calm myself (a sort of DIY Prozac substitute.) Then I slowly exhale and look around.

What I saw this morning was a new crop of little Fence Lizards beginning to explore the tiny patch of earth they will inhabit and looking for shelter from the occasional blasts of autumn wind. It occurred to me that I was doing the same thing, indeed that is what all of us are doing in the small patches of the cosmos we inhabit.

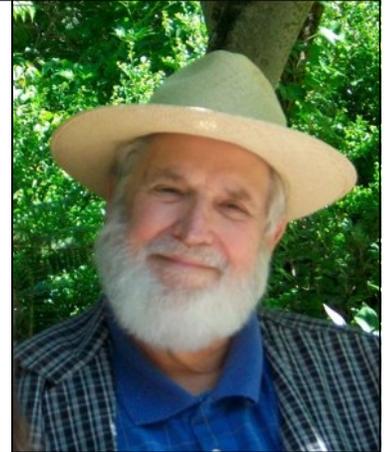
The cold blasts this autumn come from a lot of sources. The infantile political dramas both domestic and international. The suffering and dying of millions of men, women, and children attempting to escape from brutalizing situations. Destruction of our planet. Poverty. Shallowness. And, closer to home are those we love who are valiantly living with medical conditions which will eventually kill them. I think the important thing, just as with the little lizards at my feet, is that we must all keep on going. Which brings me to the bug on a branch.

Our friend Cliff Edwards is eloquent in his description of Issa's (1763-1828) stories of little creatures. "Their persistent will to live, to build their nests in the presence of danger, to sing their song, through every loss." This is how Cliff translated what I consider one of Issa's most poignant and helpful poems,

*A bug on a branch  
Swept away down the river  
Still singing his song.*

That's the point, isn't it little lizards? Even though we are caught up in the strong current of circumstances, everything is as it should be if we just keep singing our song!

***Brother Toby***



**THIS SACRED SPACE CAN BECOME A PART OF YOUR STORY!**

Both despite our remoteness and because of it, more and more people are fitting our little island of peace into their experience and dreams — either for hours or for weeks! Here are just a few of the ways.



**TAKE A BREATH DAYS!**

Like the TAO states — there are times when every one of us needs to just let the muddy water settle and become clear again! Barbara Johannes has put together a simple *Self-Guided Tour* booklet for the use of friends coming on appropriate days.

**SPECIALY ARRANGED FRIENDS BRINGING FRIENDS AND FAMILY.**

There have been lovely “family days” when three generations of a family come to enjoy the land. At other times friends bring their spiritual community.

**NEW RESIDENT PROGRAM.**

Folks who have walked separate but parallel paths with ours will live at Starcross for various intervals, participating in our spiritual practices to the extent they wish and helping out. For example, a couple from Rhode Island will spend 3 weeks of summer here. More details at [www.starcross.org](http://www.starcross.org).

**SEASONAL CHAPEL TIMES.**

There are a number of times during the year, especially as the seasons change, when special ecumenical gatherings are valued by a number of friends.

**UNIQUE WORK TIMES.**

Olive harvest is fun for friends and very helpful to us. There are also regular work days planned for everything from baking pies to clearing forest trails, and helping with the food pantry.

**A QUESTION FOR SISTER JULIE:**

*What is happening these days at Starcross, especially with the land?*

**ANSWER:** I realize every day how blessed it is to live here. We are working on a conservation easement to perpetually protect Starcross as a sanctuary for people and nature.

People who come here always comment on the peacefulness. And it is an island of tranquillity and fertility amongst some nearby agribusines vineyards. However, behind the scenes there is a lot of activity going on.

All summer long, friends, Farm Interns and volunteers from the WWOOF (WorldWide Opportunities on Organic Farms) program have been toiling away in the garden, orchards and kitchen. We’ve produced tons of wonderful food to feed ourselves and others at the Food Pantry.

Despite the wealth of Sonoma County, there is poverty in this underserved and remote area. Besides food, our biweekly Food Pantry also distributes clothing, garden plant starts and household items, appreciated by neighbors, some of whom have only seasonal work.

This year’s garden was our best yet thanks to more use of organic compost and some excellent volunteers. We chipped brush into mulch and were able to water less, which really helped in this fourth year of drought.

The two olive groves, *Francis of Assisi* and *Teresa of Avila* are thriving. Years of organic fertilization and supplementing needed nutrients have resulted in vigorous trees which literally could produce olives for centuries.



*Sister Julie with our violinist David McCarroll, before he leaves on a concert tour.*

The forest land, about 50 acres, remains undeveloped and forever wild. Our hope is to work with an AmeriCorps team and other youth this winter to do some selective thinning to reduce the threat of

## IT'S TIME TO ORDER YOUR STARCROSS WREATHS, OLIVE OIL, DRIED FRUIT, BOOKS!

Attached to this newsletter is our Holiday flyer for this year. The sale of Christmas Wreaths and Dried Fruit are our primary source of self-support, so we ask that you consider sending them to friends and family, and celebrating the holidays by bringing them into your own home. For premium quality and much appreciated gifts at moderate prices, please remember us!

We have been offering wreaths for the past 39 years, and we thank all of you for including us in your Christmas. We know that many are on fixed incomes and we are pleased to be able to keep the same low price. We do not like to ask for money and send only one Fund Appeal each year. None of the members of Starcross Monastic Community receive a salary. We have no Development Director. Our only support comes from our friends, either in contributions or sales.

So, thank you for helping us make the world a little better. We are very grateful for your support.

*The Starcross connection to the land is genuine. They have farmed their land since their beginning in Annapolis. Before organic farming was the "in" thing to do, they knew it was the right thing to do. Their connection to the land is a gift to all of us to look around and see and appreciate nature unfolding throughout the year.*

*Sandra Bodley*

## GET EVERYTHING WE HAVE!

Many friends, and their friends too, find Brother Toby's Friday Reflections and Sister Marti's Monday Haiku very encouraging and helpful. Just send us your email address or go on our website at [www.starcross.org/forms/mailling\\_list.htm](http://www.starcross.org/forms/mailling_list.htm). We NEVER give our list to anyone.

Also, if you have someone you would like to be remembered annually at our daily Vespers service, just send us the name, the date you would like us to remember them and a phrase or two about them, by mail or e-mail ([community@starcross.org](mailto:community@starcross.org).) We would be honored to remember your loved ones. Of course there is no charge for any of these things.



## ***A QUESTION FOR SISTER MARTI:***

*How are you? Has your life changed?*

**ANSWER:** Since I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer I have been showered with good wishes, prayers and support. People are driving me to appointments, bringing things I need, and doing whatever it takes to keep me going with a good quality of life. I am truly grateful.

There have been so many hidden and surprising blessings that have come with this sudden change. I work when I am able, and otherwise live a quiet, enjoyable, contemplative life.

Each moment is precious. Awareness of everything around me has increased. I am letting go of things I treasure, and also of many things that weighed me down. Gratitude is a kind of state of being for me now. Just being aware of breathing in and breathing out brings peace and harmony.

I am grateful for unhurried times with other people; all the beauty around me; the love that people don't ordinarily express; the sight of people going by, living their normal lives; the ability to just quit doing something if I need to; all the support I receive, and many, many other gifts.

So thank you for the part you are playing in making my life rewarding.



## A QUESTION FOR BROTHER TOBY:

*For over 50 years Starcross has been a small autonomous group accomplishing a lot of things; BUT the reality of life is that all founders, even you, will eventually fade away. So how long will Starcross last?*

**ANSWER:** Well it would probably be presumptuous to say “forever.” Many years ago I asked the same question when I was working with First Peoples. Their answer was “*As long as the mountain shall stand and the river will run.*” I think we at Starcross can promise that! We have been concerned about the future for many years. The land has to be protected. We are working with a group of people to ensure that it is perpetually preserved as a sanctuary for folks, creatures, trees, water and the like. Also, we know at some point there has to be a transition between the original monks who have been guiding things and a larger group. Our legal structure now provides for that. Already there are a lot of special friends who are helping to make decisions and/or bring plans to reality. We have a really big compassionate circle of involved people and a non-profit legal structure, that will make sure Starcross is around for a long as that mountain is standing and that river is running!

## STARCROSS

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AUTUMN 2015

In This Issue of *SHARINGS*  
You Will Find Out About:

**Needed: Quiet Place and  
Singing Bug**

**Gathering with Friends and  
Family at Starcross**

**Answers to 3 Important  
Questions**

**A Perpetual Sanctuary for  
People and Nature**

### STARCROSS MONASTIC COMMUNITY

is a small independent and autonomous community of lay-people trying to live peaceful lives in the contemplative tradition and offering encouragement and affirmation to gentle folk on all spiritual paths. Our home is in Sonoma County's coastal hills. We adopted and have been caregivers and advocates for children who have unique gifts and needs, most of whom were born HIV positive. We also support individual children around the world and established HOUSES OF HOPE for children impacted by the AIDS pandemic in Romania and East Africa.