



GREEN REVOLUTION

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YOU CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE BEANS By Jennifer Chesworth

When the coffee harvest has ended, the burning season is over and the rains have begun in Honduras, people put away their guns and count their losses. This was a bad year, and not because of drought, or fire, or too much rain. It was bad because of a bumper crop: so much coffee that farmers could hardly give it away. Ordinarily, guns come out during the harvest because coffee -- called "oro verde" or green gold in its exportable form -- is serious money. But this year, coffee farmers in Honduras and across Central America are more likely facing serious debt.

It's hard to say which is worse for the rainforest: a good coffee year or a bad one. For many small farmers, money from their coffee is the only income they will receive all year. Low prices mean they'd better get out there and plant more if they want to break even in the future. But when the price of coffee is high, people also rush to plant more, thinking that prices may continue to rise. Too often they plant it deep in the virgin rainforest, where no one will notice. That's another reason coffee and guns go together: stumbling across coffee in the jungle is like finding a marijuana plot in the middle of nowhere. It's best to just walk away as quickly as possible.

Even the authorities can do little to stop the encroachment of coffee into rainforest lands. Francisco Urbina, a forest ranger for the Sierra de Agalta National Park in Olancho, Honduras, gets death threats when he reports the gorilla plantations he finds routinely. "The Sierra de Agalta is a Park on paper," he says. "In reality, there are no laws here."

But for small farmers struggling to survive, what recourse is there? Coffee is the life blood of the economy in Latin America. It is second only to petroleum products in global trade, with more than half being grown by small farmers. In Honduras, the government promotes coffee as a promise of wealth for rich and poor farmers alike. It has been planted indiscriminately for decades so that now, Honduras has more hectares in coffee than any other Central American nation.

Unfortunately, this has meant the rapid conversion of rainforest lands, in the higher elevations where coffee grows best as well as the lowlands where it should never have been planted at all. Ironically, Honduran coffee is also considered inferior, and is discounted on the international market. It's not that gourmet coffee can't be found in Honduras -- it can. The problem is that quantity, not quality, drives the Honduran coffee industry.

In Honduras as elsewhere, big plantation owners dominate the export markets. They own the best land and frankly, they can afford the chemicals that go into high-yield, technified production systems which have made coffee the second most chemically treated crop in the world (next to cotton). When small farmers bring their coffee to market, intermediaries -- called "coyotes" -- buy it up (often by force) and sell it for a profit in a system

of "trickle down economics" which never hits the ground. Selling to a coyote is better than nothing, when you've got eight kids to feed. If the only land available is high up in the mountains, in what is supposed to be a protected area, who can blame the families who squat there, living hand-to-mouth on subsistence crops and an acre or two of coffee?

That's why Urbina and others working to protect the Sierra de Agalta think organic certification may be the answer for locals trying to make a living in the areas surrounding the National Park. They're going to plant coffee there; that's a fact. Making sure it's sustainable -- ecologically and economically -- is the only hope for local people and the forest lands upon which they depend.

Organic certification isn't perfect, but it's evolved for nearly 30 years into the best "watch dog" system we have. Although several attempts have been made in recent years to develop labeling for "responsible coffee" -- including "fair trade" and "Eco-Okay" -- only organic certification holds farmers and industry professionals accountable for a full range of production and management methods that create a truly sustainable product. What is "fair" about using chemicals that end up in local watersheds? Is that really "Okay?" Consumers have heard that "shade grown" coffee is somehow protecting biodiversity but if DDT, malathion, paraquat and other chemicals are in the mix, it's more accurately protecting Monsanto stockholders.

"If you compromise then you are continually damaging the ecosystem," says Stanley Kuehn, director of the Cooperative League of the United States, based in El Salvador. "The question we need to ask is, why would anybody want to use products that are damaging to our bodies, the environment, and most important, to future generations?"

The fair trade agency TransFair USA has at least tried to offer its services free of charge to farmers. But proponents of fair trade have done little to bring the issues forward into the mainstream. A recent campaign to bring "responsible coffee" to the marketplace targeted Starbucks as THE bad guy, while the real corporate coffee giants -- Proctor and Gamble (Folgers); Kraft/Phillip Morris (Maxwell House); Nestle (Hills Brothers); and Sara Lee in Europe, went quietly about their business of exploiting the world's farmers and the environment. It's not that Starbucks wears a halo. It's that these other, much larger companies are just too big to ignore. Have any of them ever even tried to be socially responsible?

Because organic certification requires farmers, processors, and distributors to keep careful documentation of all transactions -- called "the Audit Trail" -- it has what amounts to built-in fair trade mechanisms in the certification process. Granted, large plantations as well as small farmer cooperatives can be certified organic, while only the cooperatives can be registered fair trade. But whether it comes from an estate or a collective, no one is going to buy coffee if it doesn't taste good. Yet fair trade registration lacks standards for quality.

"Without years of work in developing quality standards for certified organic coffee there would be no fair trade coffee in North America.," says Garth Smith, president of Organic Products Trading Company in Vancouver, Washington, and one of the few U.S. coffee brokers who is registered as a fair trade distributor. "We believe that by promoting and supporting organic agriculture we are also addressing the financial and social needs of the people."

Dean Cycon, owner of another all-organic company, Dean's Beans in Massachusetts, believes that organic certification keeps the industry honest. "In a business community that often uses environmental or social language as a sales tool or to give an impression of greater commitment than exists ("greenwashing")," he says, "we have tried to structure our company in a way that reflects our values and supports our commitments."

Why not just quit drinking coffee altogether and wash our hands of the matter? There's plenty of evidence telling us that too much coffee is bad for your health, and certainly it's bad for the rainforest. But with millions of farmers putting their hopes and hard work into coffee, a few of us kicking the habit is not going to save the rainforest. "What needs to happen is to get people to stop drinking bad coffee," says Mark Inman, president and co-founder of the Organic Coffee Association. "True specialty coffee is grown in a bio-diverse setting. It produces a full, rich cup of coffee that does not beg the drinker to have a whole pot."

So buy the best, and make it organic. For better or worse, coffee is here to stay. As Inman points out, attempting to get people to stop drinking coffee, a beverage that is as old as wine, would be like attempting to get people to stop eating bread."

The author is an SoL member, herbalist, and co-founder of Sombra Buena Forest Stewardship Network, working to protect the Sierra de Agalta in Olancho, Honduras.

Heathcote

By Winona Parent

The Road In

If you follow the road into Heathcote, you are in for a treat, because this community is in the scenic, rolling hills of Maryland.

The first thing you will pass is a water-meadow, complete with sycamores, skunk cabbage and willow. This meadow covers a good half-acre, and feeds the stream that runs through Heathcote. Flowering bushes, almost small trees, screen the end of the meadow from the roads view. Just as the leaves are budding out flowers frost the bushes with sunlight, giving them an ethereal glow. Also you will pass a willow toppled into the road, then sawed off for firewood.

On the other side of the road to Heathcote, there are trees with vines tangled in their hair and arms. The power lines cut a swath through the trees, but give light to undergrowth: witch-hazel, wineberry, bird berry, and others. Beyond the lines is a pine wood crissed and crossed by deer trails.

The sides of the road are covered in brush, but if you look farther than that you will see tree-covered hills. Heathcote lies nestled in a small valley, surrounded by these hills. Logging roads of old climb through and around the trees, providing trails perfect for hiking.

But if you follow the road in there is much to see. There are old trees perfect for sitting under and reading, and others that have overseen years of child's play. Also, signs warning guests to drive slowly for there are children now at play. Perhaps a rabbit, that goes scurrying off into the brush, at the sound of footsteps.

There are gardens mixed in with the woods that produce much of the community's vegetables. Fruit bushes fill some space beside the creek, but then give way to partly-domesticated blackberries. More willows grow, providing shade in summer and wood in winter.

A pond fills the space between the road and the fruit bushes, cavorted in by frogs and sung in by peepers. Cattails and reeds line much of the pond. Golden fish, and red fish, swim just beneath the water. There is a rock, surrounded by daffodils, that you can sit on and look out over the community.

There is a mill, a barn, a carriage house, a little stone house and a greenhouse, all with living space incorporated. These make up the core of the community. Also there are several "shacks", leftover dwellings from the '60's. A few families live in more modern houses (those that meet today's building codes). But a community is not only the land or the buildings that stand on it.

Heathcote has a few families gracing it's fields and hills. The children's shouts and giggles can be heard long before you see the buildings. Also there are adults industriously working in the gardens or repairing the buildings after a winter's damage. The worker's noise can also be heard before they are seen. Yes, a community is only as good, or as bad, as the people who live there. So . . . let me give you some of the viewpoints of some of the people, big and small, who call Heathcote home.

The People

The first person I interviewed was Karen Stupski, and she has lived at Heathcote for eight years.

Karen figured out she wanted to live in community fairly early. She had been accepted to Twin Oaks community, but at the time Karen was involved in some activist work and when that was finished Twin Oaks had a six month waiting list.

Meanwhile, Karen met Merian Spidone. She came to visit Heathcote and just fell in love

with it. Heathcote was then a women's community with only two members, Merian and Ivy, and desperately needing people. Everything fell into place for Karen and she moved in.

"I wanted to help create a solution to some of the many problems facing society today, to help create a better way of living. Instead of always working against something, I wanted to work for what I believe in."

Jetta and Michael moved to Heathcote three years ago with their sons Benjamin and Jonathon.

Jetta and Michael had been looking for community for several years. Living in Massachusetts for a while, they then moved back to Denmark, where Jetta is from. In Denmark, Jetta and Michael looked for community. They found a few, co-housing and more intentional communities, but none fit their needs and wants. Environmentalism and sustainability, were part of what they were looking for.

"A lot of the places we visited in Denmark were great on all the political and interpersonal levels, but lacking more of the spiritual focus or awareness." They turned their attention westward.

Jetta's folks and family live in New Jersey. Jetta and Michael wanted to be close to New Jersey and live in community. Michael and Benjamin visited Heathcote, at an SOL meeting in March. The following summer the whole family moved to the community.

"We feel that we fit in, that it's a good place, the right choice It's been an easy place. We had friends right away, we were connected right away to the kind of things, the kind of people that we liked and enjoyed. So it's been a comfortable (transition). All of us enjoy what we're doing."

Outside of community, Jetta remembers feeling a bit silly. Because while she was doing something her neighbor was doing the same thing in his home or yard. "It didn't feel right that each person was doing their own little thing when we could do stuff together." Having tools and machines, like lawn mowers for each house, didn't make sense to Jetta.

Jetta found it hard to have friends and meaningful interactions with people in today's busy society. To do that Jetta needed to be with a group of like minded people, a community. "With this group of people there is a commonality to be shared . . . to be boosted by."

Christopher Madden has lived at Heathcote for two years and nine months.

For four years Christopher traveled all over the country going from one Contra dance to another. On the weekends he would dance but during the week Christopher wanted to do something useful. Living at a community and helping there gave him that use for his time.

Heathcote is close to Washington DC and Baltimore, where there are a lot of Contra dances. Christopher came to Heathcote to check it out and ended up liking it a lot. A work exchange agreement was worked out. This gave Christopher the weekend freedom he wanted.

The principals of Heathcote, with the permaculture and sustainability education work fit Christopher's principals nicely. The social aspect of community fit his lifestyle. It fell into place.

Associate membership worked better for Christopher, better than full membership. "I found that when I was going to the meetings I would become emotionally caught up in the Meetings."

Also there was Christopher's need/want to be useful. That would be better fulfilled if he could just work on the land and buildings, rather than pay a monthly rent. It was arranged that Christopher would work 38 hours a month to live at Heathcote. Although he often works much more than those hours.

With his interest in permaculture and sustainability, Christopher lives a life of voluntary simplicity. With this lifestyle, he hopes to reduce consumption, the usage of fossil fuels and ecological damage to the planet. A lot of the communities Christopher has been to work in those areas, which is one of the main reasons he joined community. "Some of the side benefits to community that go along with those are . . . people working together, playing together, singing together, and getting to know each other and developing meaningful relationships. That's an important aspect to community."

Charles moved to Heathcote almost six years ago to find a sense of family, having realized that he would need to create that situation in a different way. "I think that was a big piece of it for me. Sort of, the social-emotional part."

"Then there's another part that just has to do with everyday living. That is that it made a lot of sense to me that by co-operating with others we could all give each other mutual support, financially Instead of each one of us living in our own little ranch house and having our own little power mower to mow the grass we could share resources and there by have a better lifestyle. So we wouldn't have to work outside (the home) so much and keep earning more money to pay for everything that a more typical American lifestyle costs."

Since Charles doesn't care so much about owning the land because, "I'm only here for a short while, then I'm gone." Having the land in trust, to protect it from over exploitation appeals to Charles. "Even if I had children and left the land to them, who knows what would have

happened with it." The idea of living of community land-trust land fit all of Charles' ideals.

Having lived in the area and established himself as a teacher at a Montessori school nearby, Charles looked for community. Coming from southern Michigan he was taken with the longer growing season. As soon as Charles drove into Heathcote he knew it was a beautiful place. "It's a little more warmer a little more often."

"I would say one of our (Heathcote's) successes is sharing meals together and that has it's challenges. I feel that it's a real community building activity. So to have a common dining/kitchen area is It sounds like a small thing in a way, maybe a little subtle, but I think it's pretty important."

Haney or "Haney" and Katherine or "Katerina" and Ben or "Benhamin" were three of the kids running around Heathcote while I was there.

Haney and Katerina were just visiting for the weekend but wish they could stay longer. Ben has been living at Heathcote for about three years and, "It's pretty good. Nothing real bad's been happening, I'm glad."

From a kid's eye view, the best thing about out living at Heathcote is meeting new people, new friends and see new things. "I think, what I like about here is that it's always warm." Haney states.

Ben disagrees. "Well, no it's not."

Everyone agrees that Heathcote is a pretty place to visit or live. Haney likes the views. Ben, who sees them all year round, likes the view best in the Spring. Katerina brings up the scenery and everyone agrees that it's pretty, with the stream and all.

Ben points out that there are several things to watch out for at Heathcote. One of them being ticks and lyme's disease. "Dylan has lyme's disease in his knee."

Dana Bloomfield has lived at Heathcote for five years and was very busy when I asked to interview her.

Sustainable living and people who could help her do that drew Dana to community. Also the educational work Heathcote is doing on those subjects caught Dana's interest. "I wanted to be part of a supportive community and I also like being part of the educational mission of community."

Paul and Carol Philips came to Heathcote two years ago with their children Dylan and Anna.

The want/need to be part of something bigger than himself drew Paul to community. Like a group of people working towards alternative ways of living together. Unlike a neighborhood, where people live side by side but don't know each other very well. Having been part of spiritual communities, Paul realized that community living mattered to him.

"So, I came to Heathcote . . . because . . . I've got a lot of roots in the area and I wanted to have the proximity to Baltimore and the roots that I have there, in addition to being in a community. And that's what Heathcote is, a community that's real close to Baltimore."

I ask Paul what his favorite thing was about living in community and Heathcote in particular, this was what he said.

"That's a hard question to answer, but the first thing that pops into my mind is [this]. I often go off to work in the city and spend a day in the city and come home just at dinnertime. I walk into the Mill, where we have dinner, and about three or four people there say, 'Hey, Paul, how was your day? It's good to see you.' So it's like coming home to family. That's probably my favorite thing."

Unfortunately I didn't have enough time to interview everyone, and some people were gone for the weekend.

The School

The Educational Aspects of Heathcote:

Heathcote is part of the Greater Baltimore Permaculture Group, along with Spoutwood Farm, Cromwell Valley Community Supported Agriculture and Riverpearl Farm. Each of these host different hands-on permaculture workshops. Last year, 2001, Heathcote hosted a make-your-own paint and a composting workshop. This year, 2002, there will be a bread making, make-your-own paint, composting and gardening workshop.

"Part of where these workshops came from," Karen explains, "was there was a bunch of us, we had all taken the permaculture design course and we wanted to continue our learning. But we realized we really wanted to get out and do hands-on projects. We didn't want to be just sitting around talking or reading or thinking about it, we really need to do things. So we decided to help each other design our sites and at the same time make it a learning experience."

One of the other educational things Heathcote does are their visitor weekends. It used to be that visitors could arrange to stop in at Heathcote anytime they wanted. Karen remembers that it got pretty overwhelming. It was decided that one weekend a month would be set aside for visitors. There's a structured program of events, including social times, work projects, a community tour. Saturday evening of visitor weekends there is a potluck and sing-along with an openstage. When they say openstage they mean it. Anyone can come up on stage and do anything, whether it be reciting a poem, telling a joke, singing a song or anything.

"We've been doing this for a couple years now and it's been working really, really well."

Karen tells me. "Because, as a community, we can really set aside that weekend and focus on the visitors and give them our full attention and really make it a good experience for them. Also it doesn't overwhelm us and interfere with the rest of our lives."

Quarterly retreats help Heathcote members to stay close. An evening and a day of discussions. If there's a conflict or a decision that needs to be made that might be the main issue. If not there are always dreams to be shared, plans for the future and relationships to strengthen. "This past year we've been doing a series." Again, Karen speaking. "Where we worked on our core values at one retreat, and our vision at another retreat, and did some brainstorming and visions for new building at the last retreat." This needs to happen, but is hard to fit in at business meetings or in smaller increments of time.

"Here at Heathcote," Paul says. "We would love to see more educational stuff happen. Some homeschoolings happening here, with some classes for homeschoolers. Even some adult education in the areas of permaculture and community lifestyle."

The Families

One of the things that drew Jetta to community was the thought of raising a family there. With her two boys, Benjamin 9 and Jonathan 4, Jetta said that for her raising kids in community has been perfect.

"Benjamin is very outgoing. . . . He's really thriving on contact from other people and on a lot of stimulation. So having all these other people to disperse his energy and feed off of is great. Plus the fact that these people are supportive of

who he is and the values that we appreciate."

With so many adults to take care of the kids the young ones can see that there are different ways of looking at the world, different views. "From the beginning this group, it really fits. Like . . . the feedback, the interactions [the kids] have with everybody fits well into how we like to do things, how we like to interact with our kids." If not just a parent says something but two other community members say the same, it's very good for the kid. (They may just listen. I'm speaking as a kid here.)

If there are other families at the same community, like there is at Heathcote, the kids can play together. Also the parents can talk about the values that they uphold, so that the kids get the same message all the time.

One of the challenges, at least one that Jetta has found, of raising a family at Heathcote is family time. "The challenge of living in community and interacting with people but also maintaining the family unit." Says Jetta. "So that we're taking time away to have one family night. We just decided to have two nights where we don't eat dinner with the community but we eat dinner at home. We also try to make sure that over the weekends that's part of that time that's our time, just the four of us together. But it's something that we really have to set up a system or work with to make it happen. Because there's always some thing happening. We can always go out and about and get involved."

When you go to other communities you might find that there's a limit of the number of children that can be in community. That's one of the things that's special about Heathcote, there is no limit put on families.

"When you do that [have the limit on children]," Paul points out, "is that you have alot of single people, which means you have alot of younger people. Which is great. Except that there's a quality that a family has, there's a quality parents have that they bring to community. Especially people trying to raise their kids conciously, there's a level of spiritual maturity

that I've seen can be missing in community. I think that's special about Heathcote, we've got a higher child to adult ratio than a lot of communities. So we've got a lot of parents here, a lot of families."

The Place

Heathcote got started when Bill Anacker offered to sell 35 acres and the old Mill to the School of Living, in the 60's. Bill Anacker was a member of School of Living, he gave them a very good deal on the land. The School put the land into a community land-trust. With the idea being that the people living on the land would lease the land. So that the people could come and go as the years went by but the land would be preserved. Covenants on the land restrict usage. Insecticides, pesticides and the amount of logging are restricted. All the people living at Heathcote are land stewards, so the rural flavor of the community has not been lost.

People work for the community at their own pace. The gardens always need work. There's cleaning to be done. Or things that need fixing.

There are two historic buildings at Heathcote community, the Mill and the barn. Heathcote Mill was built in the 1850's. It was a water powered gristmill, three stories tall, built mostly of stone. The Mill is still in pretty good condition and has been converted into a community center for Heathcote. With a meeting room, a kitchen and dining room, and one residence the Mill fits this use well. The mill-wheel is gone and the community doesn't own the millpond anymore. So there's no chance of converting it back, to get the water power going. This is a good

use for a historic structure.

The barn is probably of the same vintage as the Mill. It is approximately 38' by 52' and in fairly good condition. In the past few years it has had quite a bit of fixing up.

A lot of the buildings at Heathcote were built during the hippie days of the community. A lot of them were not built well. Because they weren't insulated well, they're drafty. Those buildings have been dubbed "shacks". It's a constant struggle to keep the shacks heated and livable.

Many members have put in hundreds of hours of volunteer work at Heathcote. "Most of the buildings here at Heathcote do need maintenance. That's one of the challenges at Heathcote, to try to keep up with these buildings. They're all old and there's constant maintenance."

Now that you've heard something about Heathcote, I hope your interest is caught and that you'll go see if I've got the facts straight.

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Editor: Rebekah Hicks

The School of Living, founded in 1934 by Ralph Borsodi, is dedicated to the learning and teaching of personal responsibility and right living. It aims to foster self governing communities, which are democratic, humane, globally conscious and ecologically sound. All of its resources, especially the land it holds in trust, are held in responsible stewardship for all living creatures. We are happy to receive your comments and suggestions. Articles for publication are welcomed and greatly appreciated.

Comments and Articles can be sent to GreenRev@s-o-l.org or the below address.

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Visit our website at www.s-o-l.org

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Return by Winona Parent

My, Me, Mine
This world is mine
Mine to borrow
World, Planet, Earth
She is my mother,
We are kin
Mother, Daughter, Family
We are related,
By blood are we bound.
Wander, Traipse, Travel
I will wander,
Ten-thousand miles or more.
Return, Retreat, Recover
And I will return
For this is home
Because, For and so
I believe this world
Is mine to borrow
Beg, Borrow, Steal
I will return it.
I promise!

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School of Living

432 Leaman Rd.,
Cochranville, PA 19330

Prayertide by Dana Bloomfield

Shifting, turning drowsy Goddess,
Feel warming air for your face.
The age of your winter is lifting,
Your sleeping court, wrapped in ivy,
Waits.

Yawning, budding, Remembering Woman,
Rub the shoulders of your daughters,
We begin to feel a rumbling,
The change emerging, the millennial
Spring,

Come.

Weak totem animals
Navigate our bloodstreams
As ancient and space age
Negotiate for the stage...

Feel for the prayertide in our blood.
Our impact for seven generations
Must be understood.
Let us cast personal wants on the fire
In favor of the collective life desire,
Every cell and atom as miraculous
As mine,
All a part of the waking Goddess,
Part of this feminine epoch, divine.

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