

How to Feed a Community from a Brier Patch

by Pat Horton

It all started with a voice in my head, so how could that go wrong? Then out of the blue I happened to tell a stranger about it. Turns out he was a professional fund raiser. I had a spot in mind, it was a real brier patch. Praying for favor, I approached the church, Evergreen United Methodist Church; turns out they just loved the idea! That's the short form of how KOINONIA, A Community Garden sprang up along the northern corridor of 15-501 in Chatham County.

Imagine a coin bouncing on a knee. Coin-O-Nee-ah. It's Greek and means a gift jointly contributed, the share which one has in anything, fellowship, joint participation, a collection. That's what we aspire to. To make a space in this growing 15-501 community where folks can connect with natural spaces, dream dreams, share ideas and personal knowledge that connects one with their neighbors. I know this sounds like some big whoo-whooh idea but a dear friend told me once; "if you're going to dream, dream big!" The idea is not to limit what can happen in this place but to say yes, believing the how will come along at its proper time. Community Garden is just the platform. So I hope this place can become a big idea for anyone who connects here. In our first year a retiree wanted to try mushrooms so we were like "go for it!" He took a free class with the Agricultural Extension Service and ordered the mushroom plugs. His challenge was to get the logs. Because he lived a neighborhood with an HOA it was difficult. Another member stepped in who just happened to have grown mushrooms before and offered to get the logs. They talked, set up a project date and together created a mushroom nursery. Next thing we know everyone at the garden had shitake mushrooms! Last spring a daylily breeder needed space to start a new project, so we said yes. This is a three year project. It's exciting to imagine in just a few years we will be seeing blooms that have never existed before. By providing space and resources others can share their new found knowledge or expertise with a ready group of learners as well as find partners who are willing to share in a project's success. But projects like this are not possible without the basic structure of the garden.

Basically Koinonia is a production vegetable garden with flowers and berry bushes on the side. We prefer to plant, grow and harvest as a group, that way no one worries about being out of town a few days. The weeds will not have taken over on return and a big tomato is always waiting. Having The Take and Eat Pantry located on the church campus makes it easy to share our overflow. We like to grow the standards of a typical three season garden found in North Carolina plus try what we call a challenge crop. A challenge crop may be a difficult vegetable to grow or process properly for the home gardener. Last year we grew orange and purple sweet potatoes. At harvest we asked area day care centers to put our event on their newsletters, (which they were happy to do), inviting families to our Sweet Potato Bash and discover "buried treasure." Lowes Foods catered the event. Jeff, one of the managers at Lowes has been a great supporter of ours from the very beginning. It was a sweet morning as toddlers and others dug large and small potatoes, adults chatted and discovered who their neighbors are and everyone departed with facts, recipes and potatoes to try at home.

I would say this: Koinonia is about connecting with yourself, those around you and the big other with gardening on the side. Relationships—that's the whole of life.

KOINONIA, A Community Garden 2018 season opening is April 14. Stop by Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, 10 a.m. — noon, check us out, Try It for free, or join. No experience or tools needed, children adored when accompanied with parent. Located at: Evergreen UMC 11098 US HWY 15-501 N Chapel Hill, or contact 919.969.8820 office@christmethodist.org

Pat Horton is Director of KOINONIA, A Community Garden.

FEVER

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in person". A man in his mid-life crisis finds himself going downtown to an office building to find out more about the ad. As he enters a room, he starts getting thoughts in his head that are freaking him out because they do not seem to be his thoughts. It is as though he is on some kind of drug. Then, he notices that the room is completely empty except for an easy chair facing a glass wall. On the other side of the glass is a gorilla looking back at

him which turns out to be the source of his thoughts. The gorilla is named Ishmael and he tells the man to sit down in the easy chair because what he has to tell him will be hard to accept. As they communicate through their thoughts, the man begins to ask many questions about why things are the way they are. As a great teacher, Ishmael tries not to directly answer the mans questions, but instead tries to lead him to discover the answers. Eventually, the man comes to understand that most of his questions lead to Mother Culture as the answer. We think and do because that is what

Mother Culture conditions us to think and do. I guess you could say that Mother Culture is kind of a cabin fever. A lot of our irritability and listlessness is because we tend to accept what Mother Culture expects of us rather than becoming aware of another way of thinking or doing, and I might add, feeling.

For me, getting into Nature, being on the Haw River, is my Ishmael; is my way of dealing with cabin fever. The river has no agenda. It communicates by sights, sounds, smells and motions; not in words that have hidden meanings. If you recognize and understand river patterns, you learn very quickly to go with the flow and trust your feelings and not your intellect. The river is reliably consistent. It never changes its mind. You can count on its communication because humans cannot influence it. I guess that is the difference between Mother Culture and a river. You can trust a river. Always.

Joe Jacob, a Chatham resident for more than 30 years and a marine biologist by training, is president The Haw River Canoe & Kayak Co., www.hawrivercanoe.com, 336.260.6465. He worked for The Nature Conservancy for 20 years and served as Director of Science for TNC's Southeast Region.

Look at the Frame of Winter

BY MELODY TRONCALE

Look at the frame of winter
 All has died and brings a shiver
 Hidden in the depths of despair
 Is new life soon warm and fair
 Roots are twining upwards in the dark
 Giving life blood to God's ark
 Consider winters frame
 The hinds tired breath blows exhausted in snow
 As she noses sparse earth for her doe
 Beneath her feet she feels only ice
 But she continues on for her family's life
 This is the essence of hope
 The inexhaustibility to cope
 Examine the frame of winter
 New life is coming hinter
 As Spring creeps into Winter

Melody Troncale has lived in Chatham County over 30 years. A teacher, artist, and analyst, she has worked with numerous non-profits.

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