



## The Rituals of Spring

Since the beginning of time Mankind has celebrated the beginning of Spring with Ritual. Early Pagans, from the Druids at Stonehenge to the Mayans at Chichen Itza, knew the wakening of the earth was an integral part of the agricultural cycle and the appeal to the Gods for the enrichment of future harvests. Here in Northumberland it is no different. While we do not have the excitement of the Druids or the Mayans or even the of the folks in Eastport Maryland, USA. where their local Springtime festival is the “Burning of the Socks” (a celebration established in 1976 by a local Marina worker when he decided that the Spring equinox should be the day that he stopped wearing socks around his boats for the season and threw them on a bonfire and toasted them with beer - his friends joined in the next year and the tradition was on). Ours in Northumberland are so low key we do not even notice it - look around you as you drive the Hills and Dales and gaze upon the flatlands and you can see farming activity. Whether it is the final harvest of the corn, from last season, or the first till with the plough for this season, Northumberland farmers have begun their Spring cycle.

Sideroads went to talk to one of those farmers recently and discovered that the recent history of agriculture, with all of its ups and downs can be reflected in the life of local farmer Lyle Gallagher. Lyle now lives on Bowmanton Rd., In Alnwick, just a section over from the farm he grew up on. As Lyle tells his own history one can see those cycles of recent farming history come to life. The seventies brought education and expansion, the eighties brought recession and depressed prices, the collapse of the hog markets and divestiture of his land base and cattle just to survive, the nineties became the start of his long climb back and now twenty years after the start of his recovery he is reaping the fruits of his labour. Just another cog in the life of the Northumberland Agricultural sector.



As Lyle starts his own Spring equinox he reflects back to what brought him here - a life of experience and variety. "The last two years have been very good!" The emerging ethanol industry has made corn very profitable, but for a farmer who prides himself on rotating his crops and enriching the soil of his land, he only has forty percent of his crops in corn, but the others: soya beans, winter wheat and red clover, have done well also. But it wasn't always this easy. Inheriting, with his brother, the family farm, which was a 'mixed farm' - cattle and crops on one hundred and fifty acres, he dove right in. Going off to College he graduated from the University of Guelph in 1971, and immediately applied his knowledge, "Go big or go home" was the mantra in the days of easy money, inflation that allowed the easy re-evaluation of capital and available property. When the recession of '81 hit he was up to five hundred acres and had doubled the number of farms he controlled, now four. It hit hard and ten years later he was back the original size and loans to pay. "Young farmers always extend themselves, but I believed in having few loans, but I still had them." For the next few years he worked off the farm and still dabbled in farming, "I always wanted to be a farmer, it's the bit of a gambler in me." The long road back came with the help and partnership of a local custom farmer. The business model was now based on renting land instead of owning it, the operating costs were trimmed by using contractors to take off his crops. Bare bones farming; and he slowly prospered and is now to the point where he can afford to take foreign vacations in the off-season - "but only when the price of corn is good" he says.



A couple of weeks later Sideroads caught up with Lyle and his business partner Reuben DeJong at Reuben's farm at Clouston Rd in Haldimand Township just before the planting season. They were working on the newest edition to the machinery collection a John Deere 9560 combine. Bigger than the machine used last year this combine will be fifty percent more efficient. Reuben said that they had already finished half of the outstanding corn fields left for Spring cropping. "The fine weather we had this week (second week in March) meant that we could move the machinery into the high land but we bogged down in the low land because there was no frost in the ground (hard ground being a normal March happening)" Unseasonably warmer weather, in the Spring of 2012 has given the pair of farmers more time to prepare for what is looking like another good season. Planting will not start until the middle of April and they are working on it in another ritual

of Spring - the machinery cleanup. All of the needed machines, tractors, planters and the trucks that carry the seeds, have to be checked and made ready for the first run, the support vehicles have to moved in to the fields that are going to be planted and then they will be satisfied.



Celebrations take many forms whether it is just the day to day ploughing and cultivating for the next year or the welcoming of the new season with the reverence that people have with the Earth and its elements of life. Sideroads was invited to observe another Spring ritual that goes back to the Pagan times - a celebration of the Spring Equinox that connects the meaning of the Earth to one's inner life and personal peace.

The Sunday before the Spring Equinox, March 18<sup>th</sup>, saw a small group celebrating both the Earth's magic and pull to spiritualism and the urge to renew as well as a commemoration of "The international Day to End Racial Discrimination". Valerie Smith lives in a large house on Shuter St. In Port Hope. She is also the owner of a business - Peaceful Arts - that teaches people to find their inner selves and internal peace through the Holistic Arts; the large shop retails natural products that enhance the peace process. Valerie also leads the March 18<sup>th</sup> service. The theme of the celebration is renewal and the connection between the Earth and inner peace. Starting indoors Val reads some words of wisdom, "Let's celebrate the Equinox and understand the balance between busy and quiet days, this is the best time of the year to make new plans for the future."

Meditation started as the smudge sticks were prepared, 'smudging' is believed to be psychologically and spiritually cleansing, and is used to clear negative energy. Each person present chose to 'smudge' and waved the incense smoke over their bodies using a feather. As the pot was passed Snam Kaur, the international singer and songwriter, sang a selection of songs dedicated to Peace. Next was the identification of personal renewal and we all received papers to write the negative things in our lives that we





wanted to leave behind, in the old year. Writing the topics to be banished, in the little book, we all had to think about what we wanted to bring back into our lives.

The fire pit that we then moved to had been prepared by Doug who told Sideroads that the materials in the fire were the grasses and wood from last year, “We burn all the old stock and move into the new”. The renewal books were tossed into the fire and meditation about the old and the new phases of life continued by all.



The group filed into the circle of stones that surrounded the Peace Pole and prepared for the prayers to the elements. The Peace Pole has four sides and two purposes - an appeal to the world for Peace and the commemoration of the four elements that

make up the universe, each side in this location bore the inscription, “May peace prevail on earth”. The South side represents the element of Fire and is written in Brazilian Portugese. The West side is Water and the language is English, the North side is Earth and written in Inuklutut and the East side is Air and written in Japanese. Before the ceremony dedicated to World Peace and the “Elimination of Racial Discrimination Day” the ground had been prepared by sprinkling a mixture of herbs and grasses on the circle. This ceremony was finished by holding a personal prayer session and the invitation to sprinkle grass seed on the lawn surround - again a symbolic renewal of the earth.



In a later interview Valerie told of the construction of the Peace Pole and its circle area in 2007. “The Peace Pole Project is the official Project of The World Peace Prayer Society. It was started in Japan in 1955 by Masahisa Goi, who decided to dedicate his life to spreading the message, “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in response to the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Peace Poles are handcrafted monuments erected the world over as international symbols of Peace. Their purpose is to spread the message “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in the languages of the world. We built ours in 2007”

It certainly is reassuring to know that the message is carried to our little piece of the world.

