



REFLECTIONS FROM GROUND SCHOOL

...On Collective Intelligence



CLAIRE KNUTSEN

To introduce myself I'd like to take you through one of the most interesting projects I've worked on this summer at Sweet Mountain Farm, my "intern mural." This is a project Sue Dompke has been doing with all her interns to memorialize their time here and their impact on her farm. The general layout of mine is meant to highlight the things I've experienced this summer, a little bit of my personal history, and my current life goals. At the bottom you can see the different species and tools I came across at the honey bee farm and in the middle I've got sort of a past/present/future representation of my life. I spent three years as a child living in Nanjing, China and then growing up I lived in suburban Wisconsin and spent summers on the island, and in less than a month I'll be off to London, England studying political science and global relations as a freshman at Northeastern University. Which leads me into my overall goals of working to be a global citizen and environmental advocate.

- Spending time working on this mural has given me a space to contemplate several important occurrences from this summer that have helped me to realize why I did this program.
- John Jessen: master volunteer and tractor wielder asked me why I was interested in foreign service, a question I sort of toiled to answer at the time. I confided in the group that I struggle to be encouraged by the state of our environment, especially when thinking on a global scale.
- Sue, of Sweet Mountain Farm, introduced me to the wonders of a bee colony and got me thinking about collective intelligence or "hive mind," a phenomenon I couldn't stop thinking about and still can't really wrap my head around. I was inspired by the wonder of a species completely understanding the scope of the threats to their environment and

- working together under a collective understanding of how their respective jobs work to mitigate those threats- they feel a collective sense of responsibility towards maintaining their habitat- kind of novel for us humans.
- And finally Matt Poole, of Hotel Washington, told us that he has found oftentimes people get into this line of work either to do something to make a difference or to do something to make themselves feel less guilty and that there IS a difference between those motivations.

I did this internship because it gave me a reason to be up here and spend the summer working outside but also because in the face of environmental issues I felt guilty about the way I was contributing to environmental decline, in my lack of knowledge, in my lack of concern, and in my general lack of action. In reflection, I've found that coming out of the internship I'm still partially motivated by guilt, but also by a genuine urge to utilize my interest in global citizenship to help assuage my fears about the direction of our climate policy and education worldwide. I'd like to contribute in a way towards a global collective intelligence- a collective interest in maintaining our world and environmental wellbeing in the face of human threats.

I'd like to be apart of a global society where people collectively recognize the threat to our livelihood and the livelihood of our planet, where they understand how their work putting climate-smart practices into place actively helps to mitigate those threats, and to take the knowledge given to me by the incredibly intelligent and passionate people of this community and apply it to a field I'm interested in. I'd like to conclude by thanking everyone who's contributed to my education this summer and helped me to realize important things about myself and my goals, and a special thanks to Sue for introducing me to the bees, whom I've come to really love.

On the future and the present moment

I have seen these grounds before. I once heard the shrill cries of the sandhill cranes overhead, I once smelled the sweetness of the earth at my feet.

There was a time when I yielded a shovel here. A time when my back ached and my arms burned as I dug meticulous rows of pot-sized pits.

Oh, how I yearned for a place to rest.

A body to lean on which was stronger than mine.



I knelt here once, gently easing saplings into holes, packing sandy soil around their fragile, thin throats. The sun beat down on my neck.

Oh, how I yearned for shade in that vast open field.

Today I stand here in that field, but these grounds have been transformed by the spells of time. I kneel before a tree, which was once a sapling in a hole in a field. The trunk is thick, the bark solid and smooth. This tree is stronger, sturdier than me. I press my back against it, sitting at the base, and I rest.

My body aches no longer.

Above me a bouquet of oblong leaves shimmy in the breeze, clusters of sun-shaped fruits ornamenting each branch. Shadows pool at the base of the tree, and nestled beside the trunk I find relief from the harsh August sun.

My neck burns no longer.

Here, where plant meets soil, I trace a root's path into the Earth. My fingers follow the woody vein, probing beneath the surface. Where there was once barren sand, my skin is now tickled by dark, damp humus. Bits of Chestnut shell speckle the ground, promising to melt into the black soil and feed the tree which bore them. Once again, I smell the churning earth, but today it smells sweeter, richer. Today it smells fertile, alive. Once again, the piercing cry of a crane echoes through the air, but with it, I hear the rhythmic tapping of a woodpecker, the low buzz of a bumblebee, and the joyous giggle of a toddler. Rising from the orchard floor, I see them. A family, laughing over their picnic, resting in the shade of a tree born long before their children.

Here on these grounds they gather.



ISABELLE KOO

On Reciprocity

The importance of reciprocity between people and people and people and plants is one lesson that stood out to me from Gathering Ground's summer internship. By building and participating in the community garden at Gathering Ground this year, I felt that I was reintroduced to a concept that is simple but lacking from the urban society many of us grew up in: the act of gift-giving.

When thinking of what is involved in creating a garden, there are obvious steps people take to make one; planting seeds, watering plants, pruning, etc. But to people who do not have the opportunity to garden, like people living in the city or people who do not own land, they can't easily experience the give and take relationship between people and plants. Helping to grow food made me see the fruits and vegetables we buy from the grocery store as more than a commodity, as a gift. Being a part of the process of growing food has made me value the privilege we have of being able to go to a grocery store and get food; so much effort done by both plants and people goes into the process of getting food onto our tables.

Looking back at my time as an intern, I realize that doing work at a communal space like Gathering Ground involved more than I first thought- I got to talk to and spend time with people I don't think I would have met otherwise because of different ages and interests. The community garden had allowed me to work while talking with these people, hearing their experiences and how they have lived their lives. By talking, we exchanged gifts of new perspectives and unique experiences that helped me relate to and understand more points of view.

Because of the experience the internship has given me, I see potential elsewhere for community gardens as a place that helps to build relationships between people within communities and establish respect for plants, nature, and farmers.



Pollinator Gardens Planted by Ground School interns and Community Members



GATHERING GROUND
Planting for the Future

Ground School, our summer internship for young adults interested in agriculture, conservation, and environmentalism combines hands-on learning with seminar discussions in sustainable food systems and community living. www.gatheringgroundwi.org/ground-school

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