

Why Vermont

All of the issues that were raised in the White River Junction gathering are tightly entwined in my whole life's sojourn—which has not been simple, and which has, in fact, brought me—in my twilight years, yet!—to living in HUD-subsidized housing, with Social Security as my sole source of income. In Vermont. For the last 4 years only. First to say that I was raised in small mill-town Massachusetts, where the dominant intelligences were industrial, agricultural, hands-on, day-to-day problem-solvers—and where the fine arts, if they existed at all, were at best hinted in the ecclesiastical bastions of small-town churches. It was for me, (an introverted, high-strung, dreamer-thinker), a suffocating childhood intellectually. I did not come to *believe* in education—I did not know the excitements of real intellectual stimulation. What I had suffered was suffocation. Graduation from high school was for me *escape*—not deliverance to a future I imagined could be greater, more enriching and engrossing.

I did, of course, go off to college, but given the social/intellectual deficits of my formative years, my college years were vastly wandering and un-focused. In fact, all my educational choices were flat-out *wrong*. I did not give myself permission to write until I was 48 yrs old, and by then, of course, I had missed the institutional and financial supports necessary to earn by writing.

I did spend my mid-years in urban centers, held jobs in corporate worlds, learned policy analysis and discovered I had organizational acumen—by natural instinct, it appears. But all of that seemed only peripheral to the inner creation of Self, to claiming meaning, from my highly verbal and observing intelligence. I did not care about gathering wealth—or even spending my time contributing to someone else's wealth.

In 2,000 I returned from 15 yrs in Atlanta to NH, where other high school friends were also returning. My task was still—but even after 60 years of bumbling along, the critical need still unacknowledged—to find the artist/intellectual community in which writers thrive. I had always thought I had to do it all myself. And so there I was, inadvertently, right back in small mill-town life—only now the mills were not even running.

I looked across the river, and there was Vermont, where the political scenario—compared with NH?—was quite entralling. A Republican senator leaving the party to become "independent;" a Patrick Leahy, as down-to-earth and savvy as he was experienced in jurisprudence and government halls; a Burlington mayor committed to Green and egalitarian legislation—even at the city level, and savvy enough to move into national government and still as grittily independent and "onto" the Common Good as any Vermonter ever thought to be; a citizenry insightful and courageous enough to pass civil union protections; a Grace Paley and William Sloan Coffin retired to VT—it seemed VT probably had the greatest density-per-capita of artist-intellectuals of any state in the Union—excepting possibly Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I couldn't afford to live. I decided I should, by-god, move across the river. (And not have to sport "Live Free or Die" on my license plate? Hear the constant resistances to participating in community life through taxation? A no-brainer decision.)

Opportunities and Challenges for Vermont

Unfortunately, my dependence on mean resources happened to place me once again in small, abandoned mill-town—this time in VT, yes—but not the cultural environs of either the Upper Valley or Burlington. Whoo-hoo. I was *close* to the culture I craved; just beyond peeping distance.

But by participation on the local Planning Committee and on the Board of the local community access television station (and a major producer of their local programming), I have gathered much data regarding the challenges (and *not* opportunities) of small, abandoned mill-town municipalities, who necessarily stand apart *watching* the shenanigans and accoutrements of the thriving towns surrounding them, trying to maintain balance and basic safe-guarded sanity (not wealth, notice, just plain old functional sanity) in the midst of their impoverished and impoverishing, draining responsibilities. I cannot say that I see many "opportunities" for these communities, though they do their darnedest to stay up-beat and optimistic in their determined efforts to pump the waters of economic development and fantastical tourism.

There is no "fix" (in market systems) for this dreadful isolation of the industrially abandoned small river towns along the Connecticut. I watched the VT gubernatorial debates last evening. *Imagine*: all three of them fighting to figure how to distribute the same meager resources--which markets aren't going to generate . . .

Yes, of course. Able people—not just the young—get up and leave. The leadership potential remaining is highly under-educated and under-experienced—not that they are not bright or caring. They are. But in *general*, the leadership in small abandoned mill-towns partake of that manual, detail-oriented intelligence that thrives and is *enjoyed* in agriculture and industry. They are *not* global thinkers. They are not *discursive* folks, have no experience in group process, do not know how to simply "brain-storm" a range of ideas. Ideas are, in fact, anathema to them. (I speak here from a near life-long fascination with Jung's delineations of the various *kinds* of intelligence.) The Regional Planning Commissions and the League of Cities and Towns do their best to provide training seminars for local leaders, but they cannot provide the experiential seasoning of modern visioning and administration that ex-pats learn in the greater world. In the mean-time, dying towns attract more poor people. The burden invokes more and more "entitlements" and stifles the growth and exercise of interactive creativity. This particularly is what fixes the evil eye on abandoned industrial towns. (In the South, the govt had to impose enforced bussing to overcome stagnant social forces. Here in the north, where the cultural line is not brightly marked by *color*, we do not see the cultural (intellectual) fences.)

I am particularly concerned about the divides (mentioned in the White River Jct meeting VT Future convened) between native Vermonters (called "woodchucks. Really?") and the Vermont-attracted "flatlanders" coming in, who tend to be more educated and world experienced—*more* likely to see change—and their own particular notions of change—as critical to surviving the frightening spectres on our 21st century horizons. What concerns me is the defensive postures so easily taken *politically* in these circumstances. Nothing

could be more hideous than the Red-State/Blue-State divides (the exact same split in *kinds* of intelligence, I believe) currently preempting our national decision-making in this most hopeful—and perhaps frightening—of election years. It is my *hope* that Vermont has the stuff to avoid this pitfall. As I describe below:

Some shared Vermont Values [flat-lander and woodchuck] that may offer hope.

It is interesting to observe a phenomenon in VT I believe to be true, but do not have documentation to support, but I think Vermonters *do not value wealth*. Vermonters are not *climbing any ladder to extraordinary success or recognition*. Vermont has, already, I believe, *left off* the competitive model of markets—(although they are not yet free of thinking of labor as competitive, its differential labor compensation). But Vermonters *are* free of *cultural* competition. Many of the values expressed in the meeting attested to that. The admiration and desire for environmentally sound public policy, the understanding and commitment of the investments required for educating our youth, the search for cultural lives that are inclusive and not exclusive—these, even *most flatlanders who choose to join Vermonters* in their pursuit of the good life—understand. People (who have means) do not ask, can we afford it? (There are, of course, towns that do not have means, and they *do* neglect education.) But in congress together, to the degree that we do communicate across boundaries, Vermonters ask, how are we going to do it. This observation, *if true*, is truly extraordinary, and a decided distinction from other over-populated states, and even other largely rural states which attract and hold both *introverted Intuitives* and *introverted Sensing* intelligences. This conscious attempt to integrate the two kinds of intelligence is a long-standing virtue founded in the earliest days of our broadest New England culture. That's what always made New England stand out from the South.

Flatlanders who choose Vermont for its grounded values and extraordinarily breathtaking terrain and climate *do*, however, value intellectual sophistication (in contradistinction to wealth). They trust and prize science; they believe in and trust (and are likely even experienced) in rational problem-solving, in *group* problem-solving. This, also, is highly fortuitous, as this commitment, however based in verbal acuities "unnatural-seeming to well-meaning woodchucks," can be the means of bridging the gap between wood-chucks and flat-landers. I might suggest that community access television providers attend particularly to bridging that gap.

9-15 addition

I've been thinking a lot about the blue-state red-state phenomenon--and what I thought was a similar divide in Vermont between "woodchucks" and "flat-landers." Verbal differences cannot be an entirely sufficient explanation of it. I think (ideologically) one has to merge Maslow with the verbal differences, to get the "economic Respect" (or disRespect) that occurs in markets,to really define it. (Because I'm thinking that many non-verbal persons live in Blue States and accept and participate in the "Blueness" of those politics. So something different is going on to ameliorate that. I'm thinking that it is either a) educational (or perhaps only "travel" related) and b) economic (with the

differences in Self-Respect that occur in successful or unsuccessful economic positioning, if you will.)

But the Sarah Palin "phenomenon" is highly related, which pains me greatly (because a) neither campaign strategists nor the pundits bring any focus to the phenomenon, and b) there are significant feelings of hostility--particularly within the Red State dominions). This is particularly pressing because New Hampshire has been declared one of the pivotal races in the Obama/McCain face-off, and I surely would like to bring to the public's awareness (and perhaps some resolution) to whatever underlies it. I am going to see if I can do a CATV program getting some women (on both sides) together in NH to discuss their insights into it.