



Memories of Jerry Sipe

I first met Jerry and his family in 1977 when a small group of friends met around the idea of forming an Appropriate Technology interest group via the Free University at KU. Soon we were meeting frequently in the homes of various members to discuss applications of solar and wind energy and the techniques of organic gardening and farming.

From this beginning, it was a short jump to the formation of the Appropriate Technology Center in downtown Lawrence, from which a tight collective, tolerant of endless meetings, promoted our motto: "Self-Reliance in Energy, Food and Health."

The AT Center hosted several projects in which Jerry was integrally involved. One of these was the Neighborhood Solar Project in which he was a prime mover. His gentle

energy helped make the sometimes rancorous group more cohesive. Another project he was deeply involved with was Project SEAL (Save Energy Around Lawrence). Whenever he had spare time, which was rare because of his full-time job and being a dad to two young children, he would spend time in the center and attend endless meetings of our collective to plan projects and deal with the day-to-day business of running this volunteer center.

Soon the Center was evolving into a more all-encompassing bioregional organization, based on our mutual love of the earth and all its beings, and, for us, focused on the Kansas watershed. This group soon became the Kansas Area Watershed Council. Jerry was very sympathetic to the evolving goals of this organization and helped organize the first Spring Camp in 1982. From then on we spent many fun hours at the spring events at Camp Hammond, looking at and talking about the prairie and its denizens, prepping food in the kitchen and playing in various ways, especially with kites (and sometimes kites and photography). I wrote this cinquain telling about it:

He could
call up the wind
with his hands held just so
when it was kite weather—he could
and did.

I tried it and it worked...kind of...but I think maybe that it was just his personal magic.



As a part of Kansas Area Watershed Council's affiliation with a continent-wide bioregional organization, the North American Bioregional Congress was formed and eventually met many times over the years in different regions. When it was KAW's turn to host the Congress in 2002 Jerry took part in a very involved way in organizing it, including being treasurer and coordinating travel. A fun time was had by nearly all at this event held at Camp Wood in the Flint Hills.

Later in life Jerry married Dianna Henry, and they became involved with the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers gatherings and organizing events. I attended one of these gathering featuring Grandmother Margaret at the Light Center. A vivid memory from that event is riding back to Lawrence with Jerry in his new car. Heading north on Highway 59 Jerry hollered, screeched on his brakes in the middle of that busy two lane highway, and pointed to the sky. He saw some birds there that seemed to have special significance for him. As we sat still in the

middle of 59, I made a mental note to always drive myself to these events.

Before long, Jerry, Dianna and Laura Ramberg jointly cooked up the KAW Valley Seeds Project. It had some fairly grandiose goals, and about five of us on the organizing committee were soon putting together the Kaw Valley Seed Fair every spring. And then Dianna moved on to the lure of seed projects in other states and Jerry and I kept on with others in keeping the Seed Fair going. In these later years, Jerry's participation in discussions completely left the realm of the business, and nearly every meeting ended with a long retelling of how he had some spiritual or esthetic experience with some kind of animal or natural phenomena, sometimes involving the taking of photographs.

Photography walks in the woods or prairie with Jerry could be painful because when he would lock down on a photography subject. His walking companion might as well not be there for up to a half hour. To say Jerry was meticulous is a way understatement and this was especially evidenced in his photography projects.

Jerry and I also participated in weekly peace vigils at the beginning of the interminable wars in the Middle East, and in protests of the destruction of the wetlands south of Lawrence and everywhere. Jerry had an active role in trying to protect the Haskell Wetlands.

Jerry and I had a social relationship beyond the organizations, of course, and he called on me a number of times, especially with his growing health problems and I was glad to help. When he fell off a roof and broke a leg I went to get him from the hospital in Olathe. After a near fatal infection I visited Jerry in Lawrence

Memorial Hospital. He seemed normal at first but then sat up in bed and jerked the IV out of his arm and got up and walked down the hall in his hospital gown. I said "Jerry, whoa, do you think you should...". On he went but the nurses seemed unperturbed, and more or less ignored him, which was hilarious.

As Jerry aged, he kept saying he just wanted to focus on his photography and the various projects he had undertaken in relation to his picture taking. He could tighten down his focus on this subject to an amazing degree and perhaps not to his benefit...certainly to the deficit of time spent on exercise and eating good healthy food. In the last years he seemed to be cognitively and behaviorally slipping. While many of us reached out to him, mostly he just wanted to be alone in his apartment.

The last time I saw Jerry was a couple of weeks before his final illness. He attended a poetry presentation that Caryn was doing with photographer Stephen Locke in the Public Library. He looked good, and seemed to be tracking excellently. I wondered if he had maybe turned a corner and was going to be much better.

As it turned out that was not to be for he collapsed soon after that. It was an honor to be a part of Jerry's final week. He drifted in and out of consciousness. At one point the day nurse asked Jerry if he knew who I was. He raised up as best he could, pointed at me with a weak finger and hollered, "Danny Bentley."

One regret I have is that when, several years ago, he asked me to go with him to a Crosby Stills and Nash concert in KC I did not go. I was off them at the time but due to his enthusiasm I have begun exploring their amazing music again. Thanks Jerry, sorry I didn't

explore it with you. After Jerry died I was getting ready to strip his personal material off of one of his computers that was going to the Social Service League; when I started it up I heard this Crosby Stills Nash and Young song: “Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground/ Mother earth will bury you, lay your body down.”

~ Daniel Bentley



Daniel Bentley writes of himself: LOVING: Kat, cats, family and friends, nature, photography, life drawing, writing poetry, memoirs and novels, recording things, reading biographies and history, growing, preparing and eating delicious food, keeping house, yard and gardens, studying plant behavior, Lawrence, Kansas area (hate the urban sprawl), the beauty of Lane and Gove counties Kansas (where I grew up among fossils).