



D-Trois-Pierres: Listening, Learning, Befriending Life

By Rachel L. Jetté, CSC

In 1985, when the Sisters of Holy Cross made a preferential option for the poor, I was asked to develop a program for troubled youth - young people without jobs, resources, and social skills and connections. Initially, I created a series of workshops, but – a farmer’s daughter – I dreamed of a much more ambitious project: an ecological farm where young people could find roots by cultivating the land, a place where they could be in touch with nature and allow nature to bring them more deeply in touch with themselves.

We started small. On the grounds of what is now l’Ermitage Sainte-Croix in Pierrefonds, QC, Canada, we and 15 youth first established a “Petite Ferme”- an organic garden, a carpenter shop, an apiary, and a henhouse.

Around the same time, the Montreal government was searching for partners in opening the area’s Regional Parks. It happened that our “Petite Ferme” was located in the Regional Park of Cap Saint Jacques. In the spring of 1986, our program incorporated as “D-Trois-Pierres”* and assumed responsibility for the sugar shack and the snack bars in that Park. In 1988, we left the “Petite



Ferme” and began operating our first ecological farm in Cap Saint Jacques. Later we established a second farm.



Today the farms and their greenhouses are organically certified and produce vegetables for restaurants and 350 households. With the revenues generated by the farms, D-Trois-Pierres covers 60 percent of its operating budget; the remaining 40 percent is covered by government subsidies.

But D-Trois-Pierres does not exist for products or profits. Nor is it simply a job training program. D-Trois-Pierres’ primary goal is to provide youth with a welcoming, familial environment and a



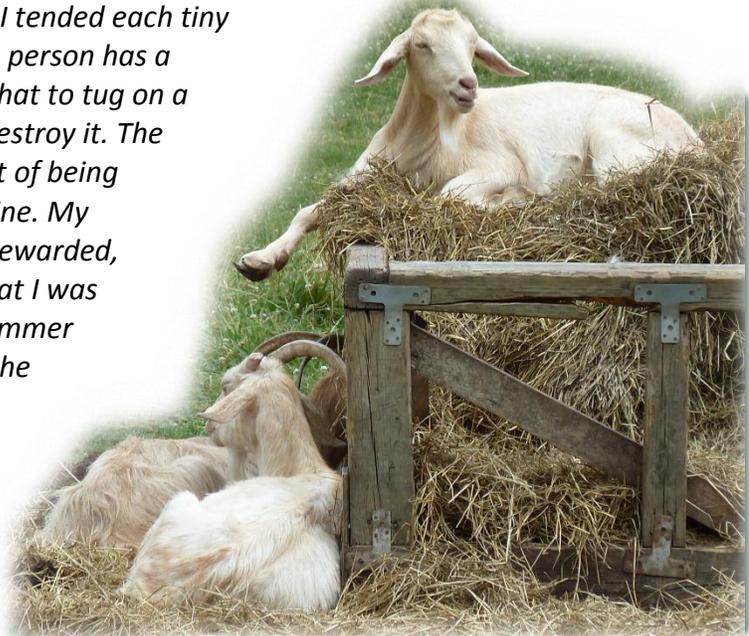
deeply holistic education that immerses them in nature, and leads them to know and believe in themselves and participate meaningfully in society. Its philosophy is “listen to the Universe, and trust the movement of Life and the gifts that it offers.”

At the heart of our program is faith development. Not “faith” in a formally religious sense, but faith as trust in the God of all possibilities, in human capacities to grow even through adversity, in nature as teacher, and in human community and solidarity.

To a large extent, transformation of participants’ inner landscapes occurs through their immersion in the natural world – interiorizing biological and cosmic rhythms through working with animals and the land.

(At D-Trois-Pierres,) I had the joy of planting my first garden. ... what was most touching was how this impacted my soul — I acquired patience and respect for the process as I tended each tiny plant. I also learned that each person has a unique growth pattern—and that to tug on a plant to rush its growth is to destroy it. The garden’s greatest gift was that of being profoundly touched by the divine. My deep love for my garden was rewarded, for as I transformed it, I felt that I was also being transformed. As summer waned, I knew that I was not the same. --Therese Deslauriers

At D-Trois-Pierres, we recognize there is no inner journey without a journey outward - into the natural world, and into relationship with others and



society as a whole. Participants learn not only work skills, but also skills for being and working together. Our milieu is a space that fosters emotional and social exchange, heals past wounds and draws individuals out of themselves into community.



(When I arrived at D-Trois-Pierres,) I didn't know how to love or receive the love that others showed me. Yet, something stirred deep within me. I began slowly ... and gradually discovered another woman within me. I continue my journey with God and with others. I am grateful for the family of D-Trois Pierres and the other young women and men who, because of their unconditional love, allowed me to go to the depths of who I am. --Gaetane Poulin

In the end, there is an aura about D-Trois-Pierres that is impossible to convey in words. To truly understand how our program touches young lives, you must see it yourself. Come visit next time you are near Montreal. Bienvenue à la Ferme!



* You might be curious about the name "D-Trois-Pierres." When our project was just beginning, I wanted to call it "Don de Dieu" (Gift of God) but I knew this would never be acceptable in secular Quebec. So I camouflaged the name as D-3 (D-Trois, in French). When I shared this with youth in the program, they noticed that phonetically, this sounded like "détroit" which means "strait" – a narrow passage symbolic of their own journeys. When I took the proposed name to members of our Board, they transformed D-3 into D-Trois and added "Pierres" to mark our place of origin: Pierrefonds.

