

STOWEL LAKE FARM RETREAT, SPRING 2011

Picture if you will, softly rolling hills, ancient gnarled trees, yurts clustered here and there, birds aflutter, cats on the prowl, a croaking cacophony of frogs, brilliant tulips blooming, daffodils waving morning greetings, fields about to burst with impending produce, plus! ... 16 meditators arriving for instruction in the Buddha's teachings from one of the best, Shirley "Jayanta" Johannesen. She certainly didn't disappoint!

Eight days we shared a space specifically built for meditation retreats. The Buddhist energies and intentions of the owner were palpable. With each inhalation I felt the inherent love and generosity, with each exhalation, loving kindness and compassion.

When not in sitting mode, we walked our path [literally], chosen from an array of terrain and 'distractions' - would I like to walk near the amazing curvy, varied and extensive stone wall?, or how about next to the pools of running water? or by the bullrush pond, home to a myriad of chirping birds, the 'army' of frogs, and initially imperceptible, black slugs? I selected the latter, and walked 'my' path intentionally, umbrella nearby. Yes, we had our share of soft and heavy rains [never stopped us :)], and also brilliant sunny skies, a blessing for us Calgarians! Insights and ah-ahs! abound for me when walking, and this time was no exception. When in a natural environment, or as close to as possible, layers seem to drop effortlessly from the proverbial onion, inviting me to experience greater freedom from self-imposed suffering.

My nature of employing excessive effort for all I do was no where more apparent than when daily cleaning The Barn bathrooms. No aversion, no desire to quickly get this job over with, left me, one morning, grinning at my awareness ie. "I am again using too much soap spray!, and 'scrubbing'! the toilet like it had weeks of encrusted matter everywhere!" From that moment on, I discovered the ease with which not only the toilet could be 'refreshed', but that I could apply this appreciation each moment, of every day.

I would be remiss to close before mentioning the nourishing foods prepared in the kitchen. Daily the table spread was creative and oh so delicious. Another daily dose of nourishment came from the yoga offering by Patricia Galaczy. Learned [loved her poetic insertions!], and respectful ["if this pose isn't for you, rest on your mat, we'll be with you in a moment"], Patricia helped us soothe the customary aches and pains associated with retreating.

Ah, the stillness which awaits us through the portal of silence and tenderness, revealing insights and understandings.

In Gratitude,
Barbara Downie
participant in Sakyadhita Canada's ***Joy of Meditation Residential Retreat***

