

## Intern Reflection

By Adella Barrett

I am a Virginian, born, raised and still residing in Lynchburg, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains along the James River. The area was settled by the English in the 1700's and the town named after its' founder, a Quaker, John Lynch. At the time of his arrival the area was part of the territory belonging to the Monacan Indians. Contemporary members of the tribe still reside in Amherst County, just north of Lynchburg.

*(Grace Singletary and Adella, middle, with Elaine.)*



If I have learned anything while interning with BCM this fall it is the importance of place, of learning its stories and of careful, intentional practices of re-inhabitation that seek to be a part of creaturely communion and restoration. The commitment to bioregional discipleship was apparent within my initial few days at Casa Anna Schulz (named after Elaine's great grandmother). One of the first things you see here is the mural beneath the sycamores that tells the story of Elaine's people and their journey to this continent. This reflects Ched and Elaine's agreement to honor "his place, her people." So while they are committed to living in the place where Ched's family has been for generations, they extol the story of Elaine's people, which through the power of visual art has literally been brought "into this watershed." They have *placed* themselves, and the stories of where they come from, into the bioregion they call home. It is from this sense of belonging to a people and a place that they live out their discipleship rooted in Gospel teaching, and alive to their context. Surrounding the house is a garden with an array of native plants, fruits and vegetables, utilizing the philosophy of permaculture design. Choosing to plant natives affirms the goodness of the unique natural design and make-up of the bioregion, and participates in its restoration and flourishing. Choosing permaculture design acknowledges that the land we inhabit speaks to and informs our imagination about what is possible there.

Being present to the place they find themselves and participating in the process of its redemption is present in nearly all Elaine and Ched do. Whether it was leading a workshop for Korean Christians in Los Angeles on issues of reconciliation particular to their community (*right*),



or bringing a gathering of folk together to mark the Equinox under a *Sukkah* (*left*),

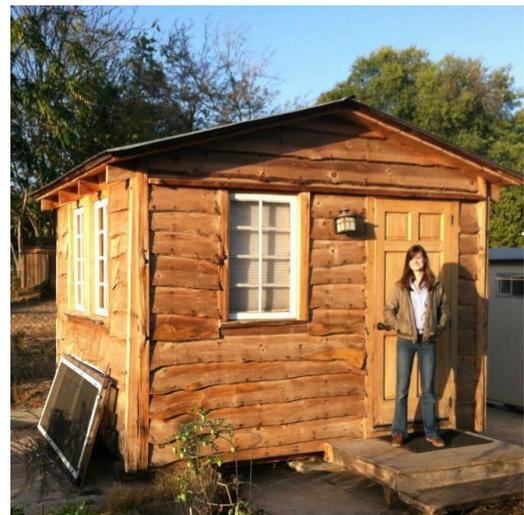
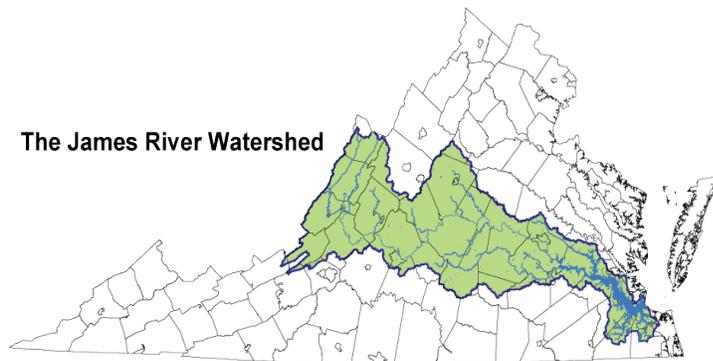


they invited those around them to align themselves with

a God who is alive in this place, be it inner city or community farm.

Some of the most profound lessons and insights for me came during the October Bartimaeus Institute. The theme was “Coming into the Watershed: Permaculture, Ecoliteracy & Bioregional Discipleship.” Ched and Elaine were joined by their good friend Chris Grataski (also from Lynchburg!), and the three collaborated in a weekend of dynamic teaching and exercises at the intersection of environment and discipleship. We re-examined the importance of place in Jesus’ own baptism and ministry, illustrating the power of his being baptized *into the Jordan River* as well as re-imagining how this story might take place in our own watershed. Grounded in scripture, we pressed on to issues of water scarcity, environmental degradation, and the legacy of settler and indigenous conflict and injustice. We were invited to re-imagine possibilities for renewal, as personal as learning the plants in our bioregion and as broad as bioregionalism representing a new/old political and economic paradigm.

It was a staggering realization for me to see just how much my imagination and perception has been shaped by the dominant culture, despite the ways I think I am able to see through it. As Chris put it, “The story the dominant culture tries to tell us is that *there is no story.*” We are enculturated and educated to identify only with carefully tailored tales of national political history, and made blind to the rich layers of story within our particular bioregion on Great Turtle Island. We were invited to re-engage ourselves as not apart from nature but as part of it, as animals who inhabit our towns in ways particular as a species.



As I reignite my imagination for how to see myself as part of a community of animals, plants and the watershed around me, I find that “watershed discipleship” truly offers a substantive and holy alternative to the dominant narrative. I am part of a generation plagued by a sense of placelessness, prone to extreme transience and noncommittal attitudes, who are better at being *against* things than knowing who or where we are *for*. As I reflect on my time here and prepare to make the journey back to Virginia, I am grateful for a renewed sense of belonging to the place I call home. I am grateful that this time away with wise elders has opened my eyes and mind to reimagine what discipleship can look like and can mean when I take my context seriously and acknowledge my responsibility to a

place and a people that call me theirs. (*Above: Adella's home watershed; and "Croatan West," her cabin home while interning with us.*)