



Photo Credit: Jason R. Henke

Greg Joly
Homesteader,
Independent Scholar,
Writer

I may have grown up in the Appalachian foothills of western Massachusetts, but I've lived in Southern Vermont for almost 20 years. It is the perfect place for a middle-class, white, long-haired homesteader with progressive ideals. Not to mention someone interested in historic social justice philosophies and movements, progressive metal à la Porcupine Tree, international monetary policies, earth-toned poetry and the fine art of letterpress printing.

I had gone to Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, to finish my BA work in historical social criticism and discovered what a real winter is like, not to mention what a community of scholars could really be. Three years later my partner, Mary, needed to do her student teaching, and we had a friend in the Brattleboro system who was willing to take her on. An 8' x 12' cabin on Newfane Hill led to a second-floor farmhouse rental in Jamaica, which led to a friendship with a WWII conscientious objector who sold us 20 hilly, but beautiful, acres in the western end of town. Vermont attracted us, but it was the good people who have made it our home.

We stay because we have become rooted to the land. We stay because we know people and they know us and there is an understanding of live and let live. We stay because we can grow our own food, live off the grid and no one thinks that we're odd, insulting or freakish. We stay because we can see the Perseid meteor showers in August on our anniversary. We stay because if we don't defend who we are and how we live here, there is nowhere else we'd rather be or could really go. We stay because a real snow storm can keep the world distant for an entire day. We stay because we know when the hummingbirds come back, because we can harvest our own fuel, because I can get most of my historical research materials through the state's excellent interlibrary loan system. We stay because people know how to have a proper visit. We stay for the carnival of weather. We stay because we have made and are at home.

Simply living in a place, over a course of years, opens you to the life of a place. Our most interesting visitors are the wildlife, even when they wreck havoc in the garden. It is truly amazing how high turkeys can launch themselves

when spooked from a newly planted seed bed now pot-holed into a sand bath. A bear that comes out of the tree line just as you come out the door in the morning. The myriad birds that migrate and find their way back to us. And the moose that climbed a snow bank to get a better look into our house just as we were getting supper.

We entertain ourselves, mostly with reading and chores. Our local art museum and refuge is the Elaine Beckwith Gallery in Jamaica village across from the post office. Elaine has an art connoisseur's taste and marvelous eye that brings in new work constantly. I visit weekly.

For literature, reviews and poetry, it's Bob and Susan Arnold's longhousepoetry.com., a world-class operation run on love, perseverance and a fine editorial eye. Most especially check Bob's Woodburners.



Photo Credit: Jason R. Henke

ALMOST UTOPIA:

The Residents and Radicals of Pike's Falls, Vermont, 1950



Greg Joly, *Nearing scholar*, as written the text for *Almost Utopia: The Residents and Radicals of Pike's Falls, Vermont, 1950*. The book captures Vermonters and people "from away" at work and play

during the summer of 1950. His background essay places the people, the community, and Rebecca Lepkoff's stunning black-and-white photographs in the larger context of state and national history. The Vermont Historical Society published the book and copies can be ordered at vermonthistory.org.



Photo Credit: Jason R. Henke

Hamilton Falls, Jamaica

And of course there is always the ever-unfolded, multifaceted, not-to-be-missed March Town Meeting and the church-lunch pie-table selections. We snowshoe in winter and scout old cellar holes the rest of the year.

Then there are my never-ending safaris in quest of information on Scott and Helen Nearing's 20 years of homesteading on the lap of Pinnacle Mountain.

And meandering through all the used and new bookstores between Manchester and Everyone's Books on Eliot Street in Brattleboro.

I also excel in the archaic sport of letter writing on my grandfather's Remington manual typewriter, with all the thrill of licking the envelope and stamping it out through the U.S. mail system.

Hamilton Falls surprises people I take there to visit. It reminds you that nature has a beauty which is dangerous and demands respect. I go there to look, to absorb, to listen, to smell the rock lichens after a rain. My visits are once a season to see each new garment. Frequent visits do not always sharpen one's attention. Savoring comes with memory.

As the old timers said of the most desirable wild apple: Search no further.



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