

## TREES

A wise old owl once asked of me  
Do you know how useful you can be?  
I thought for a while and then replied  
Here are some uses that I provide

A home for birds, food for man  
Shade and protection for the land  
I help to hold the soil together  
And help provide man with water.

The owl shook his head wisely and said,  
That's true! Then why do men chop at you?  
Ah I sighed, because you see I am different-  
I am a tree.

Joy Anne Howell - Age 9



from photo by  
Rev. Luis Quinn  
Ocoa, DR

Drawings courtesy of CODEL Inc., N. Y., N. Y.  
KENGO, Nairobi, Kenya

Book design by Helen L. Vukasin  
Word Processing courtesy of A.I.D.E.,  
SUNY New Paltz

## THE TREE PROJECT

A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING  
AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

By

Susan A. Reed  
Coordinator

Text Edited by

A. Keith Smiley  
Charles W. Stokes

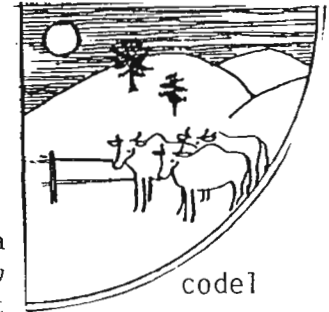
Mohonk Consultations  
on the Earth's Ecosystems

Lake Mohonk, New York

1988

## THE TRIUMPHAL CLIMAX

Twelve students from a middle school in upstate New York were standing in front of a large audience in the auditorium of the State University College of New York at Stony Brook, Long Island, on March 20, 1987. They were participating in a conference dealing with threats to the rain forests in Latin America. After hearing their responses regarding damage done to the land when forests are cleared and cattle raising takes over with resulting economic impacts related to export of beef, a professor in the audience remarked to me with amazement, "What's this?"



code1

My first instinct was to wonder whether Madeline Labriola, our Tree Project Faculty Coordinator and I had started something that the children could not be expected to handle. Then the professor put me at ease by a further comment: "They're doing all right." His admiration for their understanding of the rain forest problem was clear.

This exchange took place following a performance by some members of the Highland Middle School Tree Committee, Highland, New York. A skit in four acts entitled "The Hamburger Connection," was produced and performed by the children. It was heartily applauded not only for its humor but for its serious purpose.

This event at the Stony Brook Conference was the triumphal culmination of four years of activity at the Highland Middle School. It is recorded herein in order to demonstrate what one school can do to transform the energy of young people into a positive concern for the community and the world.

#### WHERE IT BEGAN

In the beginning, the United Nations International Youth Year 1985 provided an opportunity to focus on the global environment by using a tree as a symbol. This idea led to the launching of a program entitled "Every Child in the World to Plant a Tree". Millions of young people in other countries did so, but in the United States there were not many who heard the call. But in New York State, a plan was not only conceived but also implemented.

Henry Williams, then Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, had been one of the initiators of the UN Tree Project as early as 1983 when he took part in the United Nations World Environment Day and presented 1,200 pine seedlings, grown at the New York State Nurseries in Saratoga, to children from many schools. On the same occasion Pete Seegar sailed up the East River and UN Under Secretary General Robert Muller emphasized the extreme importance of reforestation. As I sat there listening, I had a vision of what could result from the program. I pictured children working in the sun to make far off deserts green! Then I was suddenly pulled back to reality. The children around me were not in tune with the fact that trees and forests are essential for global survival. It was too exciting to grasp one of those pine seedlings by the well-wrapped root and see if you could hit your neighbor with the pine needles!

#### THE VISION

As I recognized the challenge of linking noble aspirations with "reality" of youthful energy, I pondered on what I could do to nurture the goals of International Youth Year 1985 as epitomized in the slogan "For Every Child a Tree." Encouragement and a start came from May Ruth Sarsfield, a designer of the UN Tree Project, who gave me eight seedlings as a challenge to spread the word. Each was planted by Environmental groups in the Hudson Valley with a significant ceremony. One pine tree was planted at Lake Mohonk with four generations of the Smiley family taking part. The Smiley Family is well known for establishing a forest preserve of 5000 acres, open to the public, near New Paltz, NY. That incident became, for me, a special symbol of faith in the future.



#### ENDORSEMENTS

Just as in 1952 "Trick or Treat for UNICEF" served to raise the level of public opinion about the United Nations, I realized that the UN Tree Project could become a unique educational tool. With encouragement from some schools, I contacted New York Education Commissioner Gordon Ambach who enthusiastically endorsed the idea. At his suggestion, I was able to develop continuing support through Roger Green, Chairman of the New York State Arbor Day Committee. Thus the groundwork was laid for celebrating the International Youth Year, 1985, in Highland and acknowledging Governor Cuomo's Arbor Day proclamation in which he said, in part: "On Arbor Day, we also will be recognizing the efforts of the United Nations to urge every child in the world to plant a tree." Thus, "ripples" had been building up for one and a half school years through our groundwork at Highland Middle School.

## FROM ENDORSEMENT TO LOCAL ACTION

Starting with the theme, "Act Locally: Think Globally," the following briefly outlines some of the "acting locally" ingredients which built our school program. I found an influential person, in our case Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey, who was willing to publicly express full endorsement. I was able to develop a "connection" in the administration of the local school - Michael Hinchey - who has concern for the environment. Then the real challenge was to find a teacher who would be willing to take on an extra load. I discovered that such a search should not be confined to the expected departments; indeed, I found Madeline in the Physical Education Department. She was also Faculty Advisor to the Student Council.

### THE DEDICATED TEACHER

Madeline soon helped me realize why many teachers believe that the Middle School students are at a most important age for shaping attitudes for the future. I had no idea there was so much sensitivity hidden underneath that noisy exuberance. There were many fertile brains waiting, sometimes impatiently, for adults to show some sense, some fun, and some personal interest in *their* needs. It was exciting to watch a teacher like Madeline patiently answering all their questions and never appearing distracted by them.

### THE KIDS TAKE HOLD

I gave Madeline an article about the rain forest. A few weeks later I arrived with a slide/tape presentation from the World Wildlife Fund to "educate the kids." They did not need educating; they already had written a skit that covered the topic. The

performance of the skit turned out to be the true "pilot project" for International Youth Year 1985. The New York State Arbor Day Committee spread word around the State, and other schools were influenced.



### CONTINUING CARE

Information about care of trees had been supplied by the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Arbor Day Committee. Soon after the exciting drama of tree planting on the school grounds in 1985, we were reminded of the importance of continuing care when a dry summer killed many of the trees. Those students who had worked so hard to earn money for the trees will never forget that the less exciting ongoing stewardship of trees is as important as the original

planting. It was a sad awakening for the boys and girls, after they had learned so much about such practices as soil preparation, mulching and keeping roots wet during the first few weeks.



#### LOCAL LINKAGE

One of the surprising results of The Highland Middle School Tree Project was that it led to the formation of the Lloyd Tree Committee. This group of local residents from the town of Lloyd brought a variety of activities related to stewardship of trees to the area and later became an official Environmental Conservation Commission with our teacher Madeline as Chairperson. The Commission addresses all the environmental issues that are coming with such sudden impact to Ulster County, and it works with the County Environmental Management Council. It encourages all the activities of the School's Tree Committee which has many sub-committees. This linkage came about as a result of a trip to the Town Hall to give the Middle School Student Council an opportunity to observe a town board meeting. A chance discussion of damage to woodlots at that meeting led to a community concern for stewardship of trees.

#### CONTINUING MOMENTUM AT SCHOOL

After the first Arbor Day celebration in 1984, the pilot project for International Year 1985, we began to be more aware of the potential of focusing locally on global issues, and the need for a broader basis. We had worked with Betty McKnight, who teaches Science and Environmental Studies in the Education Department of the State University College at New Paltz. She had helped put together curricula for the Elementary and Middle Schools. Additional material was supplied by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. Further work at school was stimulated by such outside influences as an award from Mohonk Consultations and by a New York State Arbor Day report which included Highland's accomplishments and was distributed to schools around the state. Also, the Lions Club and the Rotary Club of Highland presented awards to the winners of an essay contest to celebrate the Centennial of the New York State Forest Preserve. With the help of the school librarian, Louis DiCocco, students participating in the contest learned about the far-sighted individuals who established the New York State Forest Preserve in the Catskills and Adirondacks.

These outside stimuli served to abet the experience of camping trips in the mountains and facilitated the transition to new leadership in the Tree Committee when former members moved on to High School. Claudia Rose, who had won first prize for a poem about trees at the 1984 Arbor Day Assembly, became Arbor Day chairperson. She took the lead in a skit about the Forest Preserve as an avid bird watcher whose hobby was threatened by a gang of motor bikers, then a group of litterbugs and finally by a crew with chainsaws who cut down all the trees and dragged our best actors off-stage! Along

with tree planting ceremonies at all three schools and a luncheon served by parents Arbor Day became a major event for members of the community.

#### SELF-DIRECTION IN THE COMMITTEE

By 1986 the Middle School Tree Committee was well established, as were the town's Environmental Conservation Committee and its sub-committee on trees. Meetings at school had become routine but just as noisy and exuberant as ever. It is surprising that the brainstorming worked so well and that so much was accomplished.

#### NEW PROJECTS

On Arbor Day in 1985 the focus was stewardship of land according to Indian tradition as Chief Jake Swamp of the Mohawk tribe planted a "tree of peace." On its branches were attached four ribbons as symbols of the four races: black, brown, red and white. In 1986, seven maples were planted on town land as a memorial to the astronauts. The Tree Committee took part, with the State Arbor Day Committee, in planting two Liberty Elms, a new variety that is disease resistant. Riah Mazzetti, a second grade student, faithfully watered one of them through the hot summer and received the first "Stewardship Award" a year later. Forty students took a trip to Quebec and presented a Liberty Elm to the 4-H Clubs of Canada as a tribute to the Statue of Liberty. These varied projects received consistent support from Carl Cioppa, Principal of the Middle School, who encouraged every activity as a learning experience. The Highland School Superintendent, Ronald Revelle and the Board

of Education kept close watch and remained flexible in approving programs that were innovative, imaginative and also served to enrich the curriculum at every level. Many teachers and students have taken a lively interest. Special recognition should be given to teachers: Agnes Dziehko, Patricia Gebo, Cynthia Lee, Kathleen Mazzetti and Patricia Picco. Special credit should also go to student pioneers of the committee, especially: Jessica Bell, Theresa Labriola and Andrea Paporto.

#### SPREADING THE WORD

By 1987, "act locally" was well established, and "think globally" took over much of the planning. The Tree Committee members became very much concerned about the state of the world's rain forests. This was the theme of Arbor Day 1987. But this did not divert them from continuing to spread the word within the school system. At a Middle School assembly Eleanor Brown, District Representative of Congressman Matthew McHugh, congratulated the Tree Committee and put its work into the context of the Congressman's concern for the global environment.

#### TOWARD GLOBAL AWARENESS

As early as 1984 the first trip to the United Nations took place. The Highland school program was selected for the presentation at the United Nations because it was the only school program which designated that there was a global dimension along with a local focus. Madeline gave a packet to the representative of the United Nations Environment Programme. It contained snapshots taken during the Tree Festival and a videotape of the Arbor Day programs. Rory Becker, President of the Student Council,

gave the viewpoint of the students. He said "we students gained a greater awareness of the problems of deforestation in the world and are dedicating our efforts to working with youth in other parts of the world in the hope of ending deforestation."

On Memorial Day 1987, Madeline introduced forty students to the crowd at the Botanical Garden in Montreal, Canada, where they came to plant a "friendship tree." She quoted Pablo Casals who called the children of the world "miracles." After a native spruce of Yugoslavia had been planted, Gretchen Semmelhack, the vice-chairman, gave the dedication: "In honor of peace and friendship - peace among all nations and all peoples." President Robert Fiorentino gave a summary of the Tree Committee's activities over the past four years since their establishment as a pilot project for the United Nations International Youth Year. He said: "Our main goal is to educate the community about the delicate state of the world's environment. We all drink the same water and breathe the same air. What we do in Highland affects the people of Canada; it is this interconnectedness of which we hope to become more aware." Later, during the evening, the students presented their skit and showed slides of the destruction of tropical rain forests. They called upon everyone to take an active part in educating others about the dangers we all face if this destruction is allowed to continue. This sharing of concerns with Canadians was the first step toward reviving "Partners for Tomorrow", started in 1965 by the High School Council of the United Nations, a program now discontinued, for New York City schools, established by the US State Department. Progress is being made with "Partners for Tomorrow" in three other countries.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO OTHERS

The children have great potential. They are resources that merely need to be nurtured. Materials developed by the Highland Middle School, Highland, New York 12528 are available for a nominal fee. These include informational letters for parents, and the curriculum with specific classroom activities. Also available are two skits, "Forever Wilder" and "The Hamburger Connection".

## SUMMARY OF INGREDIENTS

Recipe for The Tree Project: Start with Middle School students; find a committed teacher; develop a supportive administration; educate the community. Then you will discover that The Tree Project is an idea whose time has come, especially in the United States.

It would be easy to replicate all the activities described. There are many teachers who have discovered the miracle of the Middle School age level. The exuberance and energy will go into whatever path it is directed. When the direction is guided by genuine love and patience, then miracles do seem to occur.



WHAT TREES DO FOR YOU

TREES REDUCE WIND SPEEDS



PROVIDE  
SHADE

IMPROVE  
SOIL



↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓  
MODERATE  
SOIL TEMPERATURES

BRING NUTRIENTS  
UP FROM SUBSOIL



↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑  
REDUCE  
SOIL WATER  
LOSS

code1