



ERDKINDER SCRAPBOOK

Nick Meiners – “Low Res” Cohort #1



A variety of crops grow at Gorman Heritage Farm in the midst of suburbs and factories outside of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Reliance on Land

"Therefore work on the land is an introduction both to nature and to civilization and gives a limitless field for scientific and historic studies...We have called these children the "Erdkinder" because they are learning about civilization through its origin in agriculture. They are the 'land-children'."

- Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, p. 68

Journal Entry (July 13): "The act of making crackers was surprisingly difficult. We tend to take simple things like crackers for granted. This helped to drive home a point about sustainability. We must develop knowledge of how food is produced and prepared in our students so that they can develop an understanding of sustainable and unsustainable practices."



The entrance to the wooded trail at Hope Springs Retreat Center in Adams County, Ohio – much easier to traverse during the daytime.

Cycles of Nature

"There are no seasons in the American supermarket. Now there are tomatoes all year round, grown halfway around the world, picked when it was green, and ripened with ethylene gas. Although it looks like a tomato, it's kind of a notional tomato. I mean, it's the idea of a tomato."

• Michael Pollan, *Food, Inc.*

Journal Entry (July 12): "An early morning run in fog and darkness forced me to rely on my feet and night vision to traverse road, trail, and meadow..."

Reflection: Immersing ourselves in nature reminds us of the ancient realities of our world: morning grass is wet and dewy, summer nights are hot and balmy, and fog can be treacherous. Our modern life tends to numb us to the perpetual cycles of nature. We must make an intention to be present and experience these cycles with some humility so as to deepen our understanding of the natural world.



Honeybees search busily for nectar around the Farmhouse at Hope Springs.

Animal Husbandry

"A culture that just uses a pig as a pile of protoplasmic inanimate structure, to be manipulated by whatever creative design the human can foist on that critter, will probably view individuals within its community, and other cultures in the community of nations, with the same type of disdain and disrespect and controlling type mentalities."

- Joel Salatin, *Food, Inc.*

Reflection: Our experiences at Hope Springs and Gorman Farm provided many reminders of the roles that other creatures play in our survival. Our need to ensure the survival of other species goes beyond moral justification; the simple honeybee is a powerful symbol of our reliance on the Earth's wealth of biodiversity.



A worker bee takes a break from pollinating to watch us carve spoons (whether he was impressed or not, I am afraid we will never know).

Ethics and Issues

"I think it's one of the most important battles for consumers to fight: the right to know what's in their food, and how it was grown."

• Joel Salatin, *Food, Inc.*

Journal Entry (July 14): "The work that we did at Gorman was important because it reminded me of the nature of the work that goes into agricultural practices. I thought of my own station in life, as a teacher, and the average day-to-day of people employed as farmers and laborers. One is not necessarily better than the other, but one cannot deny that this work is harder on the body, generally more demeaning, and compensated at a lower level."



My surprisingly weatherproof tent pitched outside the well-furnished, air-conditioned farmhouse at Hope Springs.

Individual Choice

"People have got to start *demanding* good, wholesome food of us, and we'll deliver; I promise you. We're very ingenious people, we will deliver."

• *Food, Inc.*

Journal Entry (July 13): "I started off day two knowing that it would be harder than the day before. I know very little about cooking...I enjoyed the challenge and the opportunity to learn. I felt that the skills we practiced were genuinely useful for my own life."

Reflection: It is important to have people and systems around us who will challenge us to learn and perform. Our increased knowledge and capability not only makes our life more enjoyable, but also enables us to make better informed decisions for the betterment of our community. Camping is not something I would have chosen to do several years ago, but I greatly enjoy it now. Similarly, cooking and living more sustainably can become an enjoyable part of our daily lives.



Personal mess kits and dishwashing bins are left out to dry after mealtime.

Resource Use and Abuse

“Ecologists recognized that resources are finite, and that nature is in charge. That's basic science. Capitalists believe that nature exists to be exploited by humans, a tenet perfectly in tune with Western religion.”

- Mark Bittman, *Animal, Vegetable, Junk*

Journal Entry (July 12): “I know that our current system is unsustainable. I know a little about government's surpluses and our over-reliance on corn and soy products. What I am still not sure of is the solution. It may be that Montessori philosophy holds some helpful tips in this regard, but it is hard to find a way to offer hope to our students. Awareness will only get us so far.



Half of our cohort works together to help staff at Gorman Heritage Farm install a new storm drain.

Service Work

"To quote the philosopher Max Roser: "Three things are true at the same time. The world is much better; the world is awful; and the world can be much better." There is plenty of good work to do."

• Mark Bittman, *Animal, Vegetable, Junk*

Journal Entry (July 14): "Day 3 was bittersweet because I knew that it would mean the beginning of the end. I greatly enjoyed not having my phone for 3 days. Once I go back on the road, I found myself alone and already diverting my attention to the weeks and months to come. It was probably this fact that drove me to dive in to our work at Gorman. I felt a little silly when I looked up from my shoveling and realized what a "hard guy" I was being (AKA, working way too hard for the context)."



Four of the guides who supported us during Erdkinder and our summer intensive:
Anne, Tori, Claire, and Gideon.

Leadership

"We teachers can only help the work going on, as servants wait upon a master. We then become witnesses to the development of the human soul; the emergence of the New Man, who will no longer be the victim of events but, thanks to his clarity of vision, will become able to direct and to mould the future of mankind."

Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 9

Journal Entry (July 12): "I was inspired, however, at several times by our community members' zeal, passion, and knowledge in this regard. For example, I felt that Brandt was completely enveloped in his element while teaching wood-carving. Similarly, Matt was in his element while carving. I was also impressed with the way members of our group embraced Maria's yoga class. The fact that this was voluntary contributed to its meaning."

Reflection: Our group had many leaders, which made the task of leading it that much harder. Thankfully, our guides exemplified Montessori philosophy by supporting us from the sidelines, maintaining a state of calm, and carefully selecting challenges and activities that would direct our development.



Camp chairs left out in the morning seem to hold echoes and images of the fireside conversations from the night before.

Community Building

"There is a balance between freedom for the individual and the needs of the group. It is in seeking an optimal solution to this tension between personal independence and dependence on the group, that social being is formed."

- Mario Montessori,
Education for Human Development, p. 42

Reflection: While our time together was short, our group made important strides towards building a close-knit community. I noticed a change in my own social self as I spent more time with other people than I have in almost ten years. It was an important reminder of our limitations as individuals and our need to balance our own inner life with that of others.

Resources

- Bittman, Mark. *Animal, Vegetable, Junk: From Sustainable to Suicidal*. Mariner Books, 2021
- *Food, Inc.* Directed by Robert Kenner. Magnolia Pictures, 2008.
- Montessori, Maria. *The Absorbent Mind*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967. Print.
- ---. *From Childhood to Adolescence*. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.
- Montessori, Mario. *Education for Human Development*. New York, Schocken Books, 1976.