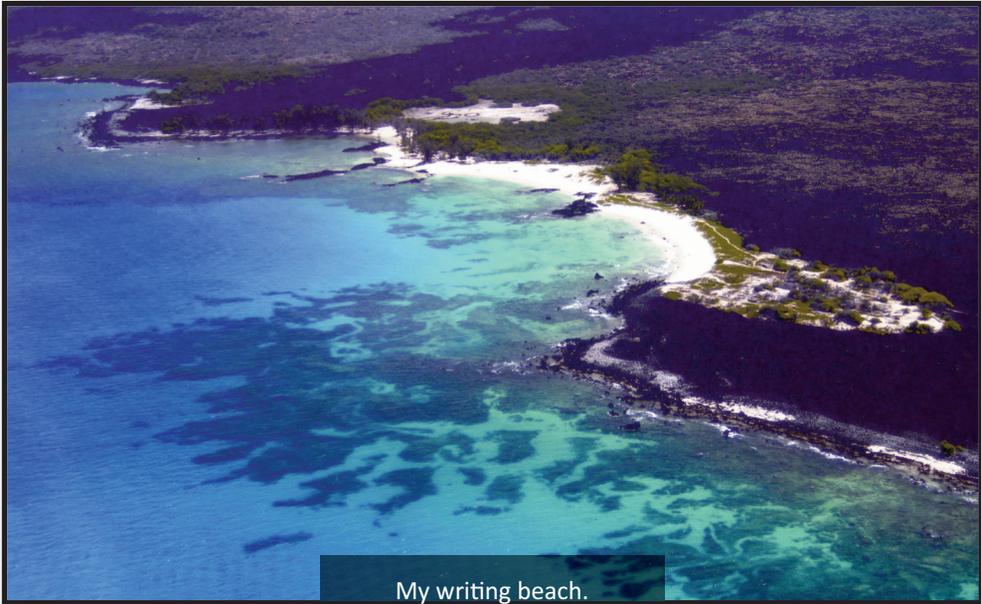


—Prologue—

“What I know as the Divine Science and Holy Scripture I learnt in the woods and fields. I have no other master than the Beeches and Oaks. Listen to a man of experience, thou wilt learn more in the woods than books. Trees and stones will teach thee more than thou canst acquire from the mouth of a Magister.”—Saint Bernard

Being a lazy student, having always had an impossible time with indoor classrooms and studies, reports and tests—indoor-about-anything—I am a devotee of the Saint’s words. Some may find a balance between the academic interior world and outdoor activities...I never have. I am not a natural writer but so admire those who have the discipline to write, study, and research for long hours and days. I find it arduous and would rather be working in the woods or gardens, even building fence. I just have to get dirty to feel my connection to this life.



My writing beach.

Photo courtesy Alana Galt-Theis

The majority of the content of this book was written in pencil on a hard-to-reach Hawaiian beach under the shade of a Kiawe tree, over a



period of seven years. In this place my daily work would be kayaking or surfing, hiking, shelling, snorkeling and swimming, often with humpback whales, spinner dolphins and green sea turtles. These are some important things my farm does not provide. But for pond swimming, I do not have close access to the water bounty that helps balance my intense farm life. But I do get to this beach most winters for a month or so, and stuff myself with ocean. It is then easy to eat, relax, read, write, think, and take a break from my 11-month job on the farm while it's in Ohio's winter dormancy. It's here I've written most of *The Big Herbs* while connecting the dots of this amazing earth and this good life.

Being able to write this book has been a long but enjoyable way to pass on The Green Spark and reach others, especially the young—to let them know that there is a different way to live and think than the current model. The earth could use you now. It is good to share all that our multi-species forests provide, and advocate for their sane use and protection. I hope these words, experiences, and insights of a life married to a farm and forest might be thought-provoking enough to change lives. I would love to have found such a book at a young age. *Living the Good Life* by Helen and Scott Nearing did inspire me in my early teenage years and I am grateful to them for that.

In the scheme of things, the last 45 years on this farm are barely a drop in the bucket of time and history, but in the scale of a human life they are a large chunk. The farm is my classroom and my teacher, and I never graduate. It also happens to be my business, my food and water source, my heat source, my drugstore, and my inspiration, all wrapped into one.

Over the past years there have been big changes for the good here, and of course, some for the bad. The 80 acres I originally bought had never been strip-mined but some of the surrounding farms were in the early 1950s. Human greed, carelessness and short sightedness seem to play a major part of our shared human history. These areas were not reclaimed for 40 years. You know the human pattern of take/take, profit being a major life motive at all costs for





so many. It's a pattern that does not value the sanctity and protection of our earth.

When I moved here in 1970/1971, not an insect—let alone a fish, frog, turtle, or mink—lived in the creek. Acid mine runoff had killed all life in it. Surrounding parts of the old farms looked like the moon with garbage. Back then, to see a deer was a wondrous event; it is common now. Bobcats were not even a thought back then, but they're back, as are bear sightings. Turkey did not even exist here then, they are everywhere now. Raccoons, squirrels, groundhogs, and opossum populations, though noticeable back in the seventies, are far more numerous now. We did have a songbird population then, but now it has doubled, maybe more.

But even then, down in the deep hollers there were the herbs, large populations of hundreds of species, a veritable botanical ark. The big old timber was selectively cut over the past 150 years, but there are still some old ones left, along with thousands of acres of mature forest. Next to me and the United Plant Savers Botanical Sanctuary, on Joe and Wendy Viny's property, there is still some old growth that is protected and will never be cut. And those herbs down in all our hollers are absolutely going crazy, taking over the place. Our creeks are again full of insects, turtles, frogs, fish, and mink.

It's a good story. Finally reclamation took place in the 80s by the government and also by me on the acres of land I bought to protect the forest and watershed. We now have a young, like-minded community who have bought up many of the local farms around me, thousands of acres. And of course there is the United Plant Savers Botanical Sanctuary (aka The Goldenseal Sanctuary), the first sanctuary in the United States dedicated to at-risk medicinal plants. Hard to believe in Meigs County, Ohio, known more for the extractive industries of coal mining and logging, along with deer hunting, tomato farming, and marijuana cultivation, we now have something that has always been here to be very proud of, a herbal botanical ark worth protecting and promoting.





As a means of simple, local conservation, for there is more land to protect than I can handle, I have encouraged many friends, interns, and students to purchase land when it comes up for sale in the neighborhood. I have also sold a few parcels from my farm. It is nice to know that herbology and farm life—besides being simply self-sustaining and self-fulfilling—have the ability to protect land and build community. At the same time, because of my relationship with botany professors at Ohio University in Athens, I have allowed and encouraged many students to access this land for their Masters theses. Oh, and in no way am I the leader of this community. Every one of these families has The Green Spark and has figured out their own way to live green on the land. I was only here first and it was evident to me that conservation of this bountiful herbal land was of prime importance.

I have always been a truly spoiled herbalist. I've taken my good luck—having access to so many important medicinal plants—for granted. As I have our plethora of food and survival herbs. It's just the way it is. I know Bill Clonch took it for granted. Being spoiled is good when it can do good for all.

My understanding about just how spoiled I was took place about twenty years ago while teaching with herbalist Rosemary Gladstar. Rosie has served as a conduit for herbalists everywhere for a long time. Her teachings have taken her far and wide and have positively impacted so many. I also have been doing this plant work for a long time, but more localized because it took a long and concentrated effort to acquire the skills I needed to rebuild this particular farm and forest. Rosie and I were taking a long hike through the land that would become the UpS Botanical Sanctuary, walking through the area now called Hydrastis Heaven because of its abundance of the miraculous plant Goldenseal, not to mention big populations of Black and Blue Cohosh, Trillium, Virginia Snakeroot, Hepatica, Wild Ginger, and Bloodroot, all so thick and high it was impossible not to step on some of them. I noticed Rosemary was missing. I knew she was loving and appreciating the walk on this beautiful early summer day and I couldn't imagine where





she was. So I took the time to backtrack and found Rosie kneeling and weeping in the thickest stands of Goldenseal. It truly was a beautiful sight, this amazing herbalist totally surrounded by Goldenseal. The stand is so thick I could only see her head, as if Rosemary was being swallowed up by Goldenseal. How perfect! But I can admit I copped an attitude and said “What’s going on, Rosemary?” Rosemary looked up at me with her large tear-filled dark eyes and says, “Do you know what you have here?” My comment back was short, something like, “Yeah, a lot of freaking Goldenseal.” And Rosemary’s response leading to my needed lesson was, “This is soooo rare.” In that moment I knew just how terribly spoiled I was. I’ve been laughing at myself ever since.

Later on it became obvious that we needed to turn this land into a botanical sanctuary. Rosemary had just formed the organization United Plant Savers, which is dedicated to protecting At-Risk native medicinal plants. I became a member of the board of directors of UPS and my dear friend and Naturopath Richard Liebmann became its first director.

It is one thing to think about making a piece of land a botanical sanctuary but it is a much bigger task to purchase it and make it happen. Talk is cheap. One of the methods we used to accomplish this goal was to hold an herb conference on this land in September of that year. Many people attended the conference that day, including all of the UPS board members who gave so much time and effort to make it possible. Our ultimate goal was to figure out a way to purchase the property.

The conference was a great success, every person who attended it was totally floored by the monstrous herbal bounty of this special property. Richard had gotten in touch with Michael and Judy Funk, who owned a large and very successful natural foods distributorship in California. At the end of the day, I remember it clearly, it was a very dry September, Richard, Michael, Rosemary, and myself were taking a walk right down the rock bottom of Main Holler Creek, which was mostly dry. Rosemary and I were twenty yards ahead of Richard and Michael and totally engaged in talking about the abundance of plants around us and the success of the conference. We were walking to the West and there were





clouds in the sky. Near the end of our walk the sun broke through the cloud cover and illuminated the area all around us in a ball of golden light. I turned around to make sure Michael and Richard were aware of the beauty of being surrounded by light, a phenomena I call light holes. I could see that Richard and Michael were engaged in deep conversation and right above their heads, maybe four feet above Michael's head, was a group of perfectly ripe Pawpaws, a perfect picture shimmering, absolutely glowing in the light. Earlier that day, when talking to Michael, I had mentioned the abundance of Pawpaws on the property and he told me that being a Westerner he had never tasted a fresh Pawpaw and always wanted to try one. The moment was set. I broke into their conversation and alerted Michael that right above his head were large, ripe Pawpaws, at which point we of course picked them and give Michael his first taste of this unique and delicious native fruit. As Michael ate his first taste of this sweet soft custard-like fruit a smile formed on the corners of his Pawpaw covered mouth. I have always felt that these light holes are temporary transformational moments and whenever I see them I immediately stop what I'm doing and get in them to be bathed by the light. An hour later, Michael generously gave us the money we needed to finish purchasing the UpS Botanical Sanctuary. Magic does happen, I was there. This event is forever apart of the UPS history and is referred to as The Magic Pawpaw Moment.

Even with all this earthly abundance, there are many problematic issues around here today. Many farms are now being clear-cut for pulp to burn at coal-fired power plants, something American Electric Power is calling "green energy." And there is always the specter in this energy crazed world of re-coal-mining, which we have already had to battle, and of course large scale gas and oil drilling (Hydraulic Fracking). Luckily, our area doesn't seem to have the geology to destroy this land again. Even so, toxic fracking water is being brought here from out of state to be put into local injection wells, and even though power plants are putting on scrubbers, airborne pollution can always be a problem. The advance of invasive species is terribly alarming and widespread now because of international trade and abandoned farm land and human beings being unaware or not caring about it. We lost our Ameri-





can Chestnut years ago; Dogwood is in decline; Slippery and American Elm are succumbing to Dutch Elm Tree Disease and Elm Phloem Necrosis; two of our pioneer species, Sassafras and Black Locust, are both in decline. Ash trees may be wiped out in the next twenty years due to the Emerald Ash Borer that came here from trade with China; and Sudden Oak Death Syndrome seems to be hitting some of our Oak populations. So much of our prime White Oak population is being cut for use in whiskey and wine barrels. The Asian Long-horned Beetle is now in Ohio and will negatively affect many tree species. The Woolly Adelgid from Asia is starting to destroy our Hemlock population. Our Butternut, Walnut, and Basswood populations have been drastically reduced by logging. Invasive species such as Shrub Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive, Garlic Mustard, Multiflora Rose, Japanese Stilt Grass, and Tree of Heaven have moved into large tracks of fields and forests unabated. What will our forests and farms look like in twenty years? What will my daughters and their young friends have left?

What can you do to help? If you want to change the world for the better start locally...

Plant native trees and prairies. This is common knowledge. It has been a wonderful success in Kenya, find the story of Wangari Maathai who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her tree planting in Kenya. Trees meet so many needs at once: they give oxygen; eat CO₂; clean the air; are a sane source of local building materials; give heat; provide food and medicine; increase insect, bird, and all wildlife populations; and provide erosion control.

Buy and protect abandoned farms and forest. We have reasonable land prices in Appalachia and amazing botany.

Join local organizations like United Plant Savers (www.unitedplantsavers.org, 802-476-6467) and Buckeye Forest Council (buckeyeforestcouncil.org, 614-487-9290).

Take your children and friends into the woods and fields and teach them about our precious botanical and biological bounty.

Consider becoming a UPS intern. Contact Chip Carroll (740)742-1111 or go onto the UPS website, unitedplantsavers.org





Be aware and destroy invasive species. Contact Rural Action (<http://ruralaction.org> or call 740-677-4047)

Educate your neighbors and offer to help them

“Be the change you want to see in this world” –Gandhi

Live simply and grow as much of your food as you can. Confront your consumption and vote with your money. Consider the social, environmental, and biological implications of every purchase.

Make a difference.

Be aware. Out of all the humans who have ever lived throughout all history and time—over 5,000 generations—our lives now are blessed to have choice and bounty and peace. Make no mistake, this is just not so in all of America and much of this world today. Don't take choice and bounty and peace for granted. Give thanks and give as much as you take.



Golden Healing Salve in different stages of setting up.
Photo by Paul Strauss

