

## My Two Loving Mentors

Karen Harwell

When I was growing up in Colorado, I had a ritual that began every year as spring turned to summer. I would drag my grandfather's old heavy canvas army sleeping bag up the stairs from the basement and place it under my old friend, the Cottonwood tree in our garden. That was where I slept every night during the summer and into the autumn until it became too cold. As an adult, I was telling this story in response to the query: "What is your earliest memory of nature?" And this led me to wondering why I did that, especially since no one else in my family ever did.

Then one day I realized the connection. When I was born, my Mother was designing our home. She was not an architect by training, but she was working with a contractor almost as one. During my first spring and summer, I spent most of my day in either the baby buggy or the playpen in the garden.

My insight came as I recalled that, as an infant, I would have been watching the Cottonwood leaves dancing and glistening in the Sun and the branches swaying in the breeze and realizing that magnificent old Cottonwood was a significant source of my early imprinting.

The tree was home, Mother-Earth, safe and comforting. In those early years, our family home had been chaotic with a fair amount of tension, and I am sure escaping to the backyard and the solace of that dependable old tree was very comforting and restorative for me.

Many years later in my continuing pursuit for understanding, I came across the book, *The Dream of the Earth*, so eloquently narrated by Thomas Berry, and I knew how I would spend the rest of my life.

With immense gratitude and love for you both—my Cottonwood for rooting me in Earth and for you Thomas for revealing who I truly am.

Karen Harwell is Director of Exploring a Sense of Place—which is "a project, a course, and a guidebook" to help people reconnect to the natural world where they live. Following scientific studies resulting in a B.S. degree, she did graduate study in philosophy, cosmology and consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, completed a six-week Earth Literacy program at Genesis Farm in New Jersey, and became certified in the study of permaculture at Occidental Arts and Ecology in Northern California. Through these programs, Harwell became interested in bioregionalism and wanted to create the opportunity for people to experience their lives as part of an Earth community.