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Jamming with nature



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By Joseph Brockhoff April 5, 2012 11:36 am

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." – John Muir.

Earth Day turns 42 on April 22, and millions of earth's inhabitants will gather in groups large and small throughout the month of April to celebrate the concept of environmental stewardship.

While thousands will attend outdoor music festivals and events touting ecological themes featuring social-minded speakers and artists, most observers of Earth Day will simply donate a little time and energy close to home.

Some of us will volunteer with a local organization such as the Cotati Creek Critters, helping to restore the upper reaches of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, while others will get together with neighbors and friends to clean up a local park or host a screening of an environmental documentary. Whatever the event lends to the cause we all have something to gain by participating.

The creation of Earth Day was intended to gather together the collective efforts of many individuals and communities to become part of a larger, more complex social movement in order to foster consciousness and action around various issues of the environment.

Since environmental stewardship is key in the celebration of Earth Day, this would be an excellent time to take a moment to grasp what this means to us individually. Ultimately, it comes down to each person's own perspective and relationship with the environment and the responsibility we chose to take for its condition. While the motivations of us individually are varied, they generally focus around the desire to pass this planet on to future generations in a sustainable and healthy state.

The finer point of why stewardship is important was summed up eloquently by Chief Seattle: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

For me, environmental stewardship is about engaging in healthy communication with the environment in an attempt to live harmoniously with it. This means, listening closely to what the earth is telling me. Since communication is a two way street, I must act on what I hear and see in order to communicate effectively. The key is to harmonize with the planet, not march to my own beat.

The word "harmony" has special and specific meaning to a musician. Even to an untrained ear, harmonies are easy to spot and understand. We don't all necessarily have the vocabulary to explain it, but we definitely know when we hear it. We just know when something sounds right.

So, in order to live in harmony with nature, I propose we emulate the process of a musician.

First, we must pay close attention in order to understand the keys or tones that nature is already singing. Once we identify those notes and the order of them, we can make a choice as to how we will accompany them. The goal of a great musician is not to change the song, but rather, augment his or her skills around it while respecting the initial context.

Humans have a tragic history of ignoring the earth's composition and trying to rewrite the song, and we must rewrite that behavior lest we become the history. The planet doesn't need songwriters, it needs contributors, and environmental stewardship is central to that role.

Earth Day doesn't have to begin or end on April 22nd like a book, movie or song. There are no margins to stewardship. The beginning and end is open-ended and completely up to you.

So, when you're done singing happy birthday to Earth Day, carry the tune a little further and consider joining our band of stewards. We won't care if you're a little out of tune.

Joseph Brockhoff is an environmental studies major at SRJC, a musician, and an intern with Cotati Creek Critters. CCC will be hosting a "Trash Pick Up Day" along the Laguna de Santa Rosa channel on April 7, a Creek Stewardship Day on April 15, followed by a presentation on "Rethinking Plastics" by Stuart Moody of Green Sangha on April 20. All are welcome.

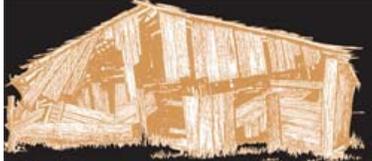
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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2038 Rohnert Park, CA 94927 **Office:** 100 Professional Center Dr., Rohnert Park, 94928 **Phone:** 707-584-2222

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