



Plants and Healers

A Stirring Moment with Frank (2010)

By Alan Dehmer

I would have liked starting a little earlier but that was contingent upon my darkroom activities. No cooperation there. So it's just about 6 pm and I've got a bucket with three gallons of water sitting between my legs. Beside me is a bag of BD500, a biodynamic preparation I purchased through the Josephine Porter Institute in Virginia. I've also got a bag containing some of Frank's ashes given to me by the family last year at Kenny's house after the memorial held there in the Fall.

The 500 preparation is based on the original indications given by Rudolph Steiner. Take cow dung from a lactating cow that has been fed an equal quantity of dry and green fodder for at least three days before collecting it. The dung is then packed into a cow horn and buried 1.5 feet deep for 6 months with the tip of the horn pointing upward. What comes out of the cow horn 6 months later is odorless humus looking BD500.

A small quantity—maybe 20 grams or so is mixed into 3 gallons of fresh water for one hour, stirring vigorously with a long wooden spoon. The direction of stirring alternates rhythmically. As soon as a deep vortex appears in one direction the direction is abruptly reversed, the vortex destroyed and built up again in the opposite direction. The basic principle operating here is this: the BD500 preparation is an earthly life force. Through stirring, cosmic forces like light and warmth but also lunar and planetary rhythms are also drawn into the mixture, activating and combining with the life force gathered in the BD500. That spray is applied lightly – three gallons/acre—acting in much the same way that homeopathy works on the human body. A small dose goes a long way. Today, September 9, with the moon and Jupiter in alignment, was a particularly good day for root growth, which seemed appropriate for this occasion.

It was our mutual interest in Steiner and biodynamics and probably most of all our mutual interest in alchemy that brought Frank and I together years ago to stir up the first batch of 500 used on this land. A year before that, I had introduced the soil to biodynamic practice by spreading compost that had been prepared for a year previous to that using a composting preparation also made by the Josephine Porter Institute. With that compost spread we could proceed with stirring up the first batch of 500. Where we sat that day is the very place I now sit with a fresh bucket of water before me.

I'm here now because of a wandering conversation Frank and I had a few years ago about what we would like done with our dead bodies. (I can't remember why we wandered there.) We both agreed that being buried had too many drawbacks and so being cremated was definitely the way to go. We strayed from there to what to do with the ash. That's when we came up with the idea of adding it to a 500 spray and applying it here at Woods Edge specifically. We both agreed we would do that for the other.

Being a decade older than Frank I was content in the assumption that Frank would be spraying my ashes some day in the future. So much for assumptions.

Both of us had made spagyrics in the past. Take the plant matter out of a tincture solution after tincturing is complete. Dry the plant matter then burn it in a vessel until it turns to black ash and then place the black ash in a 500-750 degree oven until the plant matter turns to a white ash, usually over night. That white ash is then reintroduced into the tincture and agitated once a day for a moon cycle. The reintroduction of plant matter into the plant essence/tincture is a way of potentizing tinctures, of reassembling body with spirit. It's in that context I suspect that we landed on this idea of blending our ash with the BD500. However we came about it, the idea of doing it made us laugh. And laugh some more. I'm remembering Frank's deep-throated laugh with a quiet smile.

So here then is an accounting of my stirring hour with Frank.

I put Ravi Shankar's *Chants of India* on inside the house loud enough that I could hear it on the porch where I'm set up to stir. I chose that music because it was a mutual favorite of ours but also, conveniently, because the CD runs 1 hour and three minutes. The CD would double as a stirring timer. I looked around before beginning and noticed a couple of butterflies eating away at one of the last pears remaining on a tree that I planted quite a few years ago. This is the first year we've gotten pears from it. They were deliciously sweet. I'm sad that Frank never got to eat one but right now it feels just about right that the butterflies are enjoying the bounty instead. I begin.

First I place the 500 in the water, followed by an equal amount of Frank's ashes. I begin to stir. The first observation is that the color of the slurry is quite different than previous stirrings. The 500 is brown matter which creates a light brown slurry when it's mixed with water. But Frank's mostly light grey ash made a big difference – not light brown but a light brownish grey. The next thing I noticed as I continued stirring was a rather putrid smell that was also different than previous experiences. Not pleasant and lasting longer than I wished.

But the dynamics of stirring are such that change is constant. Slowly, over the first 15 or 20 minutes, the color of the slurry matured from the original light brownish grey to a darker blackish brown and in the process the putrid smell vanished and for a few brief moments, was replaced by the smell that was Frank's, a smell that his niece commented on light-heartedly at the Memorial last year.

With the change in color and smell, now mostly odorless, foam began to form in the center of the vortex which is when I noticed that a certain stirring rhythm produced two vortexes covered in brownish white bubbles. It was that rate that I tried to maintain from that time on. I was reminded of chanting with Frank in the steam room. Two voices becoming one. One becoming three (or more) as we built on the harmonics of our mutual voices cast into the dark of a tile lined steam room. Cherished moments.

Stirring the two vortexes into one and back to two again had a meditative, even hypnotic effect on me and the next thing I knew, Ravi Shankar was finished. Not sure how long it was over before I reentered but when I did I looked up to see those two butterflies I'd noticed at the beginning of the stir one hour earlier still eating the same pear. I smiled at that and then laid back on the deck with my head facing west and feet to the east to rest for a few minutes. The sky was a cloudless deep blue we only get at this time of year in NC. It was nice to empty myself into it. But then a curious cloud formation moving from west to east came into my view, a single strand of cloud in an otherwise cloudless sky. Just a single thin strand of cloud maybe a half mile long moving slowly over me and the land I'm about to spray. The curious cloud departs leaving the cloudless blue sky in its wake.

With that, I got up, poured the mix into my sprayer, and began by going to all the gardens Frank had had a hand in establishing over the years – the golden seal, mayapple and cohosh beds in the woods, a double dug garden outside my darkroom that has in recent years become a beautiful rose garden and again in bloom now that this summer has begun to remove its tight grip on us. There were other places of note in our time spent together on this land where I applied the spray, and finally a generic treatment of the rest of the gardens around the house. Along the way the sprayer clogged up and I switched to putting the mixture in a small vessel and applying droplets with my hands throughout. I was happy for the clogging as the hand application was far more intimate than spraying.

The sun was setting by the time I finished distributing the three gallons of preparation. The day is done. My promise fulfilled. Time to hit the steam room.