

## **David Stang**

**Wake up boys! We are going to find mushrooms. Hurry up.**

**Dad at 7 AM took us to find mushrooms for eating for breakfast.**

**Dad quickly found the mushrooms in the woods nearby hidden under the year old decaying leaves that were enriching the dirt underneath. We quickly had a basket full and came home. He quickly got out the skillet**

**Cooked the mushrooms in olive oil and the three of us had a great breakfast.**

**Dad took us often into the woods to find berries, wild fruit, truly the diverse gifts of the earth. We even had**

**An organic garden filled with onions, okra, radishes, beans, and which we planted, weeded and often sold On the side of the road.**

**The two of us at 6 years old were common farm laborers at**

**Mummas Fruit farm where we worked with our siblings early every morning to pick fruit till 2 PM. We felt the cool early morning**

**Air, and the strawberries were our breakfast. No pesticides or chemicals in those days and the fruit was tasty and not diseased. Today what we did then would be called child labor but during those days of depression we all felt we helped our large family to survive.**

**We grew up loving the land near us. We were always outside even in the winter time, ice skating on the nearby river, sled riding, snowballs and making angels.**

**Going to the seminary at 13 was an enormous shock to both Tom and I but respect for our parents was a strong beliefs to both of us.**

**For me, as a Maryknoll Seminarian going to a nearby diocesan seminary I felt totally that I was an outsider, a country bumpkin. I had no**

**Tie, or suit, or expensive shoes. I had a t shirt and a sweat shirt and no handkerchief, my socks had holes in them. I knew I was a peasant and uncouth. The first day In the recreation room, One of the boys came up to me and said, "the no name room is down the hall." I quickly went there and found at least a button down shirt.**

**Maryknoll had a small house right off of the seminary property and I could hide there when needed which was often. My parents were now gone. They left for Europe for six years as my dad was military and was assigned to Germany to help them rebuild. So that little Maryknoll house with flowers around it was somewhat healing.**

**Going back to the seminary for class was a nightmare. Before the seminary, I went to school in a small wooden school where we had an outhouse and a beaten down building. The nuns were our teachers but there were no extra teaching aids or extra support. Our education was minimal.**

I was now in a sophisticated urban environment with students who were well educated, knew how to listen to words and read words but I felt many had no feeling Knowledge of the words or the land around them or love or appreciation for that which sustains us as human beings such as good food, clean air, the sun singing To us in the morning or the moon relaxing us at night. Needless to say I was in a new environment. Two years later I went to the Venard where there was a farm, Brother Fred and missionaries that knew that the classroom was not everything at least some of them did.

Years later I find myself in a great country called Tanzania, in the bush, in the desert in a land that was full of people who were close to the land, the animal kingdom, to clean air, fish thriving in Lake Victoria, in nearby rivers, land that gave one bananas, papayas, tea, coffee, and a large diverse array of herbs. I felt in many ways home. It was obvious the people were close to the land, with markings on their faces, long ears, copper on their wrists, bare footed, skins around their bodies, and living in mud houses, with their sheep, chickens, dogs, and cattle outside surrounded by large trunks and a sacred entrance called “oboori”. The women taught me how to fish with herbs and to find mushrooms around ant hills.

At Christmas time we built a crib, with a lean-to, a little baby, cattle, shepherds, parents, the stars very visible at night. Of course we heard the environment, singing to us, the only thing missing were the three kings but we quickly replaced them with the gifts of the earth which were all around us. We did not need the kings. For a boy who loved the land, and parents who taught him about the blessings of the earth I felt at home.