

Morninglory celebrates 50 years of Back to the Land movement

By Debbi Christinck
Staff Writer

Killaloe -- When Robbie Anderman first walked onto the old Beanish farm in March 1969, he had little inkling this would be his home for the next half-century or what a community-altering experience it would be to have these "back to the landers" transform an old homestead into an intentional community.

"As a 20-year-old, I had no idea what I was getting into," he said, sitting by the woodstove in the original homestead farmhouse which dates back to 1878 on Morninglory farm. "Look at the snow. That is what it was like when we came here. I did not even think then about things like electricity or running water."

"The movement was enough," he said. "The government was going crazy and lying about the Vietnam War, and this was just finding a different way."

In the next 50 years, it evolved from the "back to the land" dream to an intentional community which 20 people continue to call home, high in the Wilno hills on land which was once considered marginal farmland, but now sustains a community with a harvest of cabbages, root vegetables, apples and even pears. There is wood for heating the cabins dotting the property and pasture for the milk cow and goats, and an indoor trampoline in the barn for the kids to play on.

"But none of this would have been possible without the help of our neighbours who taught us in those early years how to do things," he added. "We would not have been able to grow without our neighbours sharing with us."

So as the community celebrates 50 years, they are not just focusing on the past but are giving back with a communal concert celebrating not only their story, but the stories of others, neighbours and friends, who have loved the land and nourished it.

"We want to celebrate and thank the pioneers who came here and their ancestors who came here," Robbie's wife Christina said. "They were very friendly and tolerant even though we did not share the same religion or values."

Celebrating the "back to the land movement" is also part of recognizing the Algonquins, who stewarded the land for centuries, she added. But most of all it is about celebrating the back to the landers, without whose help the "enduring and thriving" Morninglory would not be possible.

The evening story and song night at the Killaloe Lions Hall on Saturday, March 30, will be a time of sharing music, stories, bringing in press clippings' and old photos to share.

"It's a show, but a collaborative show, so we want people to be able to come and share," she explained.

Sponsored by Morninglory, it celebrates others and community, which follows in the spirit of what has enabled this community to continue to thrive while many others have changed or dissolved since the years of the 1960s and 1970s when everything seemed possible.

"It was the whole peace, love and Woodstock generation when this began," she noted. "It was an attempt to find a peaceful alternative instead of war. Another value was to live simply on the earth, and some of us still try to preserve the old ways of homesteading."

In this, they learned from their neighbours who taught these young city idealists about proper food preservation, harvesting, keeping warm in winter and surviving on what can be a harsh and unforgiving landscape with poor soil and rocky outcrops. In the late '60s when Robbie, more commonly known as Beaver in the local area, came to the land, many people were leaving rural farms in droves. "It was the post-war era and people wanted to find work in cities," he explained. "Prices were low for farms then."

For others like him, including Erika Neuman, Mario

Langois, Chas Estes, Barney McCaffrey, Lee LaFont and Mike Nickerson, it was an opportunity and a vision of a different kind of life, working the land and living off it again. They were young, idealistic and hopeful of shedding the constraints of city life. Many remained in the area, and continue to contribute to the greater community, but few have continued the communal-style living embodied on many of those early farms. In those early years there were many communal living farms in the Killaloe, Golden Lake and Wilno areas with names like Doyle Mountain, Sahajiya, Straw Farm Mimosa, Echo Farm, Rochdale Farm, Heaven, Mustard Seed Circus Farm and Cloud Mountain.

Morninglory has remained, and for many outside the fringes of the back to the land community it is known as a place where people continue to live what some would refer to as the by-gone "hippie" lifestyle of the 1970s. Yet it continues to draw others and for those who continue to live there, it is a special place for people who choose to live gently off the land, in harmony with the land and others. New families continue to come, drawn to a different approach to life, not quite communal, but centred around cooperation and living in harmony with the land.

Christina explains they call it intentional community, where they live separately, have a community building and all adults share the communal expenses such as taxes and they benefit from some communal purchasing.

"It is expense sharing," she explained, adding each family also is responsible for their own family expenses.

Weekly they still gather in the old farmhouse, now painted in blue and nestled in amongst other homes on the property. Music and art are a big part of the life on this mountain farm.

Founding Morninglory

Robbie, originally from New York State and introduced to the idea of Killaloe through an article by the late Barney McCaffrey who spoke of the cheap land in the area, was one of the original purchasers of the land, although he has remained reluctant to apply strict ideas of ownership to

it since and the property is now a more communal land sharing arrangement. Along with Mike Nickerson, they had set out to purchase the land from the Beanish family for \$2,700, but inadvertently set off a bidding war amongst themselves. When they arrived to seal the deal, they heard from Mrs. Beanish there was another interested buyer, so the price was going up.

"She had an envelope from a guy in Toronto who wanted to buy the land," he recalled.

They ended up paying \$4,300 and then discovered they had been the guy in Toronto as well.

"In those days the government was buying farms to plant red pine, but we basically turned the whole economy around and the land prices suddenly went up," he said.

Life was hard as they began to garden with neighbours opening up old homestead gardens again for them with horse and plough. Many of these young adults had higher education, but little in terms of practical experience. Learning to farm required a new kind of skills and the reality was often harsh. Yet, more kept coming, in the enthusiasm of their late teens and early twenties, working the land and trying to find a new way of living.

While seen as an oddity at first in the communities of Killaloe and Wilno, eventually the "locals" saw these newcomers were bringing value to the land and accepted them.

"I like the way Ish (Theilheimer) said it, when he said we provided entertainment value," Robbie laughed.

At the same time, this influx of long-haired young people living a simple lifestyle impacted the area.

"There were one million young people who moved to communes and back to the land then," he said. "There was a war going on and we did not want to feed the war machine." They are also proud of the contributions the back to the landers made to the area, including the founding of the Killaloe Library, Community Resource Centre, Stone Fence Theatre and other things, including the CHCR community radio, Rainbow Valley Community Health Centre, Beaver Tails, Cool Hemp and Stephano's Natural

Food Bakery. At one time there were various schools run by the "back to landers" as well as natural food stores, yoga classes and craft galleries. Many of those young alternative lifestyle immigrants are now teachers, realtors, nurses, doctors, politicians, log builders and alternative power specialists, among other things.

Building Intentional Community

Christina, who came along a bit over a decade after Robbie in 1980, rode her bike to Killaloe in search of a different way of living. She had a backpack and \$100.

"I came because I could not contribute to a polluting society," she said. "I wanted to learn another way to do things by going back to our own ancestral roots."

The couple raised three sons on the property, one of whom lives on Morninglory and two of whom now live and work in the hustle and bustle of New York City. For parents who forged their own path many decades ago, it is a matter of making a life choice that works for the individual, and this transition is as natural as their own exodus from cities years ago. Their own path is still clear at Morninglory, just as it was 50 and 40 years ago.

"When I saw people could live off the grid and have a homesteading lifestyle which encouraged arts and music, consensus decision making, peaceful conflict resolution and learning the skills of living off the land, I wanted to find a way to live that lifestyle," she said. "I learned to pump water from the well and cook on a woodstove. I met Robbie through the alternative school he was organizing."

On a sunny March day, Morninglory is a quiet place. The many outbuildings are surrounded by piles of snow, and Christina is jaunty as she travels down the hill on a sled to share a jar of sauerkraut with an inquisitive reporter. Solar panels dot the hills, an outdoor stove is ready for firing, the cow is in the field and goats feed in the barn.

"A few houses have washing machines and running water so we cooperate by using less," she explained. "Each house has something to contribute."

John Williams is a young man who recently moved to Morninglory and has been working with the Andermans to plan the music for the upcoming concert. He and his wife are both musicians and they find the pace of life at Morninglory helps them focus on music.

"We are inspired by our surroundings," he said. "We love participating in whatever is happening here. It is all a new adventure in a way."

As he plans for the evening of celebration, he noted people don't have to be in the area for 50 years to feel like they can contribute to the concert.

"We welcome any song or story about what it means to live in the area for people," he said.

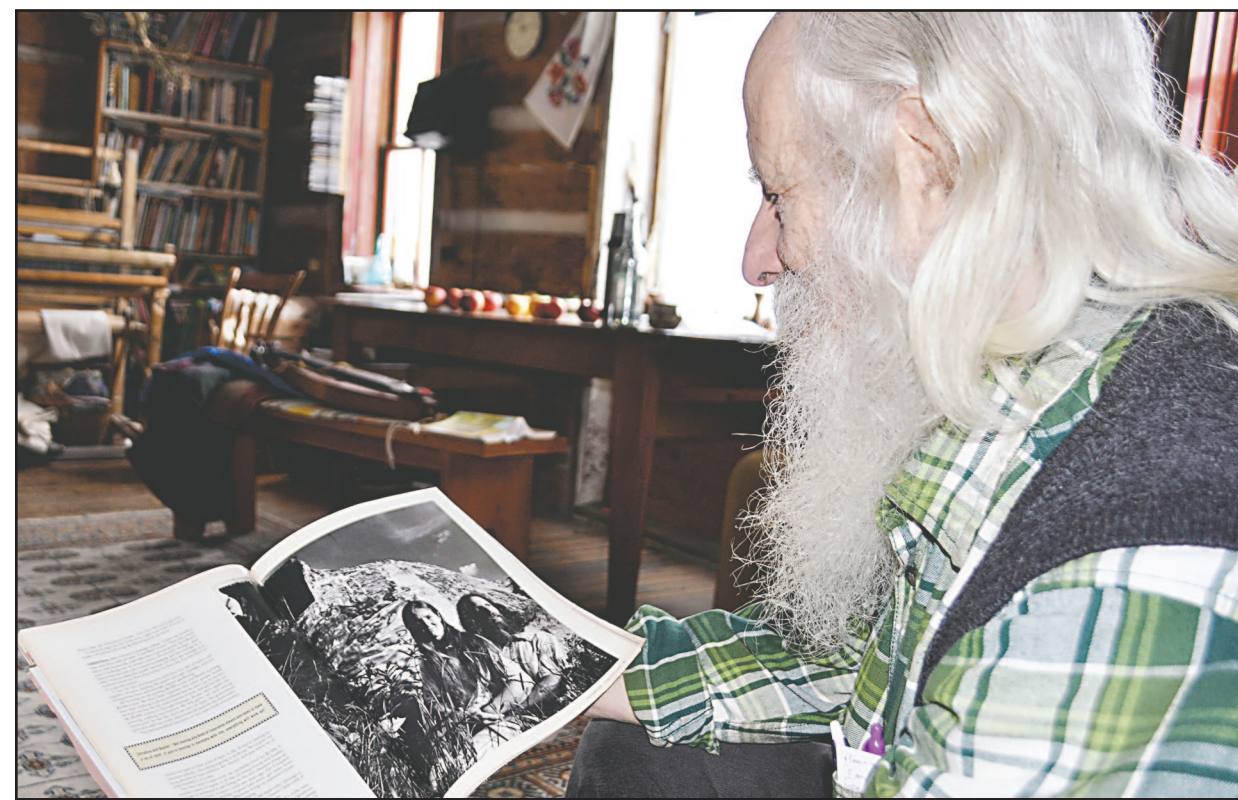
This type of collaboration, acceptance and sharing fits well with the concept which began the dream which became Morninglory and has continued to allow it to thrive for half a century.

"Our culture has a way of encouraging us to compete with each other and overpower each other," Christina said. "What I was raised to believe with the Quakers is nature cooperates for mutual benefit and humans have cooperated for mutual benefit. We are learning to do this."

It is intentional community, and the celebration of the movement, the farm and those who made it happen is all part of sharing again for them.

"So we are celebrating the 'back to land' movement in general," she said. "Those who came and those who were here who helped us."

Tickets for the March 30 show held at the Killaloe Lions Hall are available in advance at Grandma's Pantry and Garth's Kitchen in Killaloe, as well as through etransfer. More information is at info@morninglory.ca.



Robbie Anderman looks at an old magazine which featured local "back to the landers" around Killaloe. In the picture, he and his wife Christina are pictured by the dome at Morninglory. The dome collapsed sometime later.



Robbie Anderman sings a song on the dulcimer which celebrates the "Back to the Land" movement and those who came to this area.



Christina Anderman sitting by the woodstove in the old farmhouse on the Morninglory property.



The Morninglory mailbox on the hills outside Killaloe.



Apples at Morninglory taken out of cold storage.



There are several dwellings on the Morninglory property. About 20 people live there now.



John Williams recently moved to Morninglory and is co-ordinating the music for the upcoming celebration.



A friendly goat in the barn at Morninglory.

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Wednesday March 20	Thursday March 21	Friday March 22	Saturday March 23	Sunday March 24
Mix of sun & clouds HIGH 7°C (45°F) LOW 0°C (32°F)	Scattered flurries HIGH 5°C (41°F) LOW 0°C (32°F)	Light snow HIGH 2°C (36°F) LOW -14°C (7°F)	Mainly sunny HIGH -2°C (28°F) LOW -7°C (19°F)	Mainly sunny HIGH 8°C (46°F) LOW -6°C (21°F)

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