This land was bought by my God Father, Lewis Deane, after his return from the second world war in 1945. He started homesteading, returning to New York each winter so he could make enough money to live up here during the Spring, Summer, and Fall. Slowly he built his studio and established a year round home. In 1959, my mother was having dinner with Lewis and mentioned wanting to get out of the city. Lewis suggested Poultney. He knew of an old tannery built on a gorge. She bought it, and in 1960, we moved in and started making the mill into a home. Lewis patiently gave me my first lessons in construction, a field that became my career. I learned so much from him: about the rewards, artistically and functionally of design, about the satisfaction of a job well done, about the worth of tools and keeping them in order, about trying to live simply, about community service, about generosity, and most importantly, to me, about not being afraid to march to my own drummer.

When Lewis gave me this land I was honored, and although he said he didn’t care what I did with it after he was gone, I knew I must do something right by it, and by Lewis.

During the last millennium we have experienced so much, but heeded so little. In the last hundred years we have leapt forward technologically, yet our virtues have not. The intolerance and indiscretions of our cultures and religions are indicative of an illness that infects us all, a blindness that has isolated us from each other. We convince ourselves we are right, and therefore, they are wrong, not realizing there are many paths that lead to the truth. We are incapable of distinguishing the difference between freedom and license.

Looking at the world around us, you cannot help but see the insanity, the skewed priorities. People bent on destroying each other through some inbred belief in the law of taboo, nurturing hatred, rather than mustering the courage to find peace, and each blaming the other for the misery that is their own. The media argues they supply what the public demands while the standards continue to slip lower, we become more reactionary and less rational. We honor the spoiled, overpaid celebrities of our culture, in ceremonies, oozing with obsequious praise. Politicos hiding behind bibles, preach like Jesus, yet live like Caesar. Our politicians constantly give credence to “absolute power corrupting absolutely”. The rich convince themselves they are deserving of the obscene luxuries they lavish upon themselves. Tyranny still flourishes. Our children still starve, and we accept it. We ignore their plight, march proudly behind our flags, and espouse freedom. We could be talking of ancient Egypt, or the Roman Empire; it is a lesson that has been repeated since the dawn of civilization. Many wise witnesses have advised Man to heed these lessons, but we are self-serving, arrogant, and slow at maturation, consequently we remain the link between ape and civilized man. We live in denial. Mankind insists on “fiddling while Rome is burning”, and is incapable of being humble enough to realize that we too may go the way of the dinosaurs.

If the Earth is an organism, a whole in its entirety, then Mankind is a cancer. Someone, from celestial heights, observing this remarkable blue marble, blue only because of the miraculous existence of water, from whence life sprang, would notice the metastasis of mankind. The species we have annihilated, the ecosystems we have destroyed or threatened, the poisons our festering releases, are all symptoms. Mother
Nature is ill because of us. Life, as we know it, is threatened today, as never before. The frequency of catastrophes and warnings increases. Our only hope for the future is with our next generations. We need young people to carry the message. We need to become one with the whole. We need to learn how to love ourselves, love each other, and love the Earth. We must begin to cherish life. These must be our new priorities.

I hope Green Mountain College will continue to become more involved in the environment. I hope they will continue to teach and offer more courses that will enable students to go forth into our world, and teach others about our relationship with the Earth. I hope this land might help some find a connection with the whole, with the continuity that links us all together, and take comfort in that. I hope to some this might be a Walden, a place where they can come to learn, and above all, enjoy. Somewhere to lie back at night and stare at the star studded welkin. Somewhere to gaze into a campfire and wonder. A haven to seek the wisdom and fortitude needed to fight the good fight, and save ourselves, from ourselves.

It does not sound it, but I am an optimist. That is the main reason we have given this land to Green Mountain College. We hope that in some small way this may be a part of the cure.

In closing I would like to share with you an Indian Prayer:

Oh Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds,
And whose breath gives life to all the world,
Hear me! I am small and weak,
I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever behold
The red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things,
You have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so I may understand
The things you have taught my people.

Let me learn the lessons
You have hidden in every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother.
But to fight my greatest enemy – myself.

Make me always ready to come to you
With clean hands and straight eyes.

So when life fades, as the fading sunset,
My spirit may come to you without shame.

William Osborne
Toad Hall