



The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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In Memory of Dr. Dale Hess

Merry Lea Mourns Agroecology Founder

Merry Lea lost a beloved staff member on March 1. Dr. Dale Hess, Ecological Field Station director and associate professor of agroecology, died at home with his family following a three-year battle with cancer.

Luke Gascho, Merry Lea’s executive director, still has the agenda for his first planning meeting with Dale Hess after Dale was hired in July 2004. It has 14 points, each of which could have taken a year or two. The list hopscoches from the philosophical to the practical, from research questions to staffing needs, from equipment to student life goals. Its breadth emphasizes just how nebulous Merry Lea’s agroecology program was when this former researcher from the Sahel stepped into his new role.

While Merry Lea’s staff made the decision to develop collegiate programs as early as 1998, Dale was the first

person hired for this purpose. When he arrived, there was no academic team to join, no Rieth Village and no curriculum other than a list of courses. Furthermore, his future gardens were covered with autumn olive in fields so badly eroded that the architects who were designing Rieth Village at the time tried to get a LEED® point for building on a “brownfield.”

Luke recalls being impressed with the way Dale adapted to his new job at Merry Lea. In his previous jobs in West Africa and at Purdue University in Lafayette, Ind., Dale had worked as a scientist and researcher who wrote academic papers. At Merry Lea, he needed to create a brand new program in a liberal arts setting and teach all the courses. As if that wasn’t enough of a leap, he also had to shift from tropical agriculture to a temperate biome.

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Born: June 12, 1954

Shirati, Tanzania

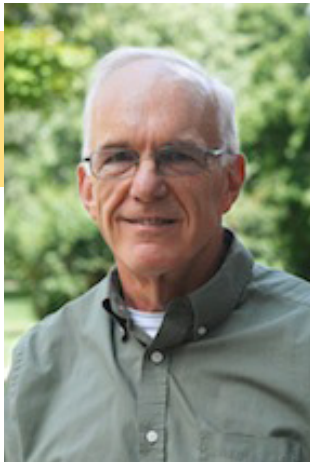
Died: March 1, 2015

Goshen, Indiana



Left: Dale Hess with ISA Brown laying hens.

Above: A handmade card by Mingla Charoenmuang, a student in the Master’s in Environmental Education Program who sometimes assisted with animal care.



Dr. Luke Gascho

Director's Desk

Remembering Dale Hess

by Luke Gascho

To me, Dale was a brother in Christ, a neighbor, a fellow gardener, a colleague—and a friend.

My relationship with Dale began a little over ten years ago when I hired him to lead the development of the agroecology program. In the years since then, Dale and I conversed on so many topics—land, food, politics, church, faith, family, climate change and plants.

Dale was an African. I recall how he fondly told stories of his birthplace and childhood in Tanzania. After earning his master's degree in plant pathology and his doctorate in genetics and plant breeding, Dale spent an additional fifteen years in Africa. Most recently, he worked for the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in Niger and Mali. He enjoyed the many contacts with researchers and farmers in these countries as they worked to produce healthy food sustainably, and I enjoyed hearing his stories from Africa and the other countries he visited. Dale loved to travel and had a great appreciation for many cultures.

A highlight of my time with Dale was when we traveled together for two weeks in Benin, West Africa,

in 2012 representing Waterford Mennonite Church and Merry Lea. My wife, Becky, and I observed his delight with the people, customs and language in Benin. Dale provided amazing links to Africa for us. He helped us understand the culture and freely translated the many French conversations. When the president of the Benin Bible Institute (BBI) asked us if we were willing to speak and preach in churches, Dale said to me, "You preach, I'll translate!" So in another way we became a team.

Dale loved the multiple contacts we had with sustainable agriculture projects in Benin. He had great conversations with the leaders of these projects about the common approaches between the work they were doing and what he was undertaking with agroecology at Merry Lea. He frequently reflected on the way that Africa is able to feed itself and how sustainable agriculture in Benin had much to teach us in North America.

"Dale was an African."

Bonaventure, the president of BBI, frequently introduced us prior to our speaking engagements in the university and church settings. Bonaventure would often introduce me first and then would introduce Dale to the audience. Bonaventure delighted in introducing Dale as an African. Dale always had a coy smile as he translated his introduction as,

"He is an African!" The audiences loved it.

Dale applied his energy, his African sensibility, his gifts and passions to the development and delivery of the agroecology program at Merry Lea. He continued to think of ways to build and enhance the learning opportunities for students up until shortly before his death. And he continued to plant trees—something he loved to do.

By planting trees, Dale let the trees speak of his long-term view of life and living it to the fullest. As he said, "If you never plant a tree, you won't be able to pick fruit." And there is and will be fruit to pick as a result of his actions.

Dale was also passionate about his faith in God. He clearly expressed that through his commitment to peace and justice, the need for quality food for all people and the love of God for all.

During the last six weeks, Dale and I developed a little ritual every time I left his bedside. We would hold each other's hands—something we had never done before. This act was a reminder of our many bonds through the last ten years. I would then say to him, "The peace of Christ be with you." And he would look at me intently and say, "...and also with you."

Shortly before his death, as I was about to leave, he said, "Let me pray." He prayed an amazing prayer of gratitude—for family, friends, colleagues, work—and gratitude for the expansive love of God. I am still touched by that prayer.

Dale, the peace of Christ is now fully with you — and in you. Ω

Merry Lea was created with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and through the generosity of Lee A. and Mary Jane Rieth. It is operated by Goshen College. The center provides a comprehensive program of environmental education and recreation.

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

Janie Beck Kreider, Associate Coordinator of Public Pr.
Luke Gascho, Executive Director
Kerry Goodrich, Property Supervisor
Carol Good-Elliott, Environmental Science Educator
Tom Hartzell, Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs
Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator
Bill F. Minter, Director of Land Management

Lisa Myers, Interim Pre-K to 12 Environmental Ed Coordinator
Dave Ostergren, Director of Graduate Programs
Jonathon Schramm, Assistant Professor, SEED
Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Coordinator of Public Programs
Maria Tice, Admin. Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator
Lisa Zinn, Assistant Professor, SEED
Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager

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The *Merry Leaflet*, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. Jennifer Halteman Schrock is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. Look online at www.goshen.edu/merrylea/latest for more news.

Despite the learning curve, a draft of the new agroecology initiative was completed in 2005 and pilot groups ran during May Term and the summer of that year. The first Agroecology Summer Intensive ran the following year in 2006.

In the years that followed, Dale refined the curriculum for the ASI, recruited students, enhanced the soil, oversaw research projects, networked with a wide variety of stakeholders and found time for occasional games of broomball and Ping-Pong as well.

“What Dale enjoyed most was working outside in God’s beautiful creation,” his wife, Ursula Hess recounts. “He really enjoyed seeing his plants grow well, his animals grow well and teaching his students to tend them well. He wanted to work outside with his students; not just show them what to do.”

Ursula also remarked on Dale’s love for animals. “I knew he grieved when they got rid of the chickens before Christmas because he was not able to help with their care,” she said. Dale believed that plants and animals belonged together on a farm and was pleased that the new barn, completed in 2014, would enable that to happen. “That was his dream,” Ursula said.

Another of Dale’s dreams was to expand the ASI into an agroecology major at Goshen College. In the past nine months, he worked hard to imagine what such a major would look like, and he spent his last days at Merry Lea laying future plans.

Other staff members will need to carry out those plans, but the agroecology foundations are in place. The gardens are fertile, the fences are strong, the barn is built and the woody perennial polyculture plot is planted. Whether they serve undergraduates or sustainable farmers in the community, whether they inspire city visitors or conventional farmers looking for a change, agroecology will remain an important part of Merry Lea’s mission. Ω

Nature’s Farming Summarized:

- Plants are always found with animals.
- Monoculture is never attempted.
- Soil is protected and erosion prevented.
- Processes of growth and decay balance each other.
- Plant and animal wastes converted into humus.
- Large reserves of fertility are maintained.
- Rainfall is stored.
- Plants and animals protect themselves against disease.

—a quote from Sir Albert Howard that Dale included in a traveling display



At the Benin Bible Institute’s agro-pastoral farm in 2012: Left to right, Bonaventure Akawanou, president of BBI, Dale Hess, Luke Gascho, Dominique Houngnon, director of the farm.



At Merry Lea in 2012: Dale Hess with agroecology students. He is in the center, holding a shovel.

Agroecology Beginnings



Left to Right: Trevor Kauffman, Whitney Kulp, Dale Hess and Jane Litwiller pause for a photo during the Agroecology Summer Intensive's pilot run, May Term 2005.

"I had the opportunity to work closely with Dale as one of the first agroecology interns. May Term 2005 was a pilot run for the longer Agroecology Summer Intensive and ended up being a great learning experience for all of us. Every time I turn over ground by hand, I remember Dale and the time he made us do a whole garden plot using the French intensive method, which involves double digging. It was a lot of work and very tiring. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the time with Dale and my two fellow interns. I think doing physical work together is a great way to get to know people more deeply.

My current role at Merry Lea often involved one of us asking the other to borrow equipment. I appreciated Dale's willingness to share and the trust he had that I would bring things back in good condition. More often, my interactions with Dale were informal. I think he and I shared a kindred mischievous spirit. We would often joke with each other in passing. I will greatly miss that, along with Dale's quick, witty responses here at Merry Lea." Ω

—Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator

"You could tell he loved what he did and genuinely wanted his students to love it as much as he did."

—Ali Fretz, Goshen College, class of 2013

Roughly 100 students, interns and volunteers worked under Dale during the decade he spent at Merry Lea. A number of them responded with notes of appreciation when they heard he was ill. The Hess family chose to have excerpts from students read during Dale's funeral. Here are some of them:

"Dale was a champion. Last summer, he would work alongside us in the blazing heat and teach us what it meant to tend the land at any cost."

—Christina Gomez Shirley, ASI 2014



"I've been reflecting on my time at Merry Lea and have realized just how important it has been as I develop ideas for my future on the farm. Often I find myself thinking about permaculture and a wholistic worldview as I shape my plans. You've affirmed my desire to do agriculture differently and inspired me to learn more about God's wonderful creation."

—André Eisenbeis, ASI 2014



"I find something that reminds me about my time at Merry Lea every day. I have told my roommate stories about the gardens and even about how your keys got tilled into the onions. I have so many great memories. I just wanted to let you know how important that time was in my life.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate the patience you showed as I was learning and the friendship you have given me ever since. You helped me gain confidence in my abilities and subtly guided me toward the person I am today."

—David Stoesz, intern, 2012-2013

In Memory of Dale Hess...Professor...In Memory of Dale Hess...Professor...

“You’ve been such an influence to me, not just academically but also personally.

Thank you for all those hours working on the arboretum, not only learning about trees but also developing my confidence. You allowed a really shy sophomore to express herself and be heard. You allowed me to become a leader.

Thank you for all the places I got to explore during agroecology. For all the different farming methods I was able to experience, and the people I met.

During my last semester, you helped me put together real scientific research. You also gave me the courage to present my research, not only to peers, but to professors and farmers as well.”

—Krystal Pierre, ASI 2013



“I hope I can be as hard-working, cheery and enthusiastic for learning as I remember you being.”

—Sara Siebach, ASI



“Although you never had me as a student, you have greatly influenced me through my friends who have done research or taken classes with you.”

—Caleb Longenecker, Goshen College, class of 2015



“I learned a lot in the one semester that I had you for a prof. Your passion for biology inspired me to find something that I truly love to do.”

—Avery Bischoff, GC class of 2015

“Thank you, Dale. You taught me so many things and even more importantly, paved the path that I have been called to follow. Your passions and teachings will live on past your time and well past mine.”

—Darin Schwartzentruber, ASI 2009

Botany Moments

I have been an office mate of Dale’s for over a decade, so his passing leaves a hole not easily patched. There were many things about Dale that I appreciated: his way with language, his helpful pointers on car maintenance when we carpooled; his kindness to me when I needed help with something and also the ready affirmation he gave me when I did something well.

What I loved best about Dale, however, was his enthusiasm for botany—which I shared. One year, I audited his botany course on campus and along with the youthful crowd, memorized the scientific names of many trees. No, they were not correct if they were misspelled!

My favorite part of the class was the daily “botany moment” when Dale would leave the textbook and share news about plants that was timely, relevant to the day’s lecture or just quirky. I also remember a lab where we explored a damp and mysterious corner of the Merry Lea property for mosses, ferns and liverworts.

Thank you, Dale, for deepening my affection for the natural world and expanding my knowledge base.

—Jennifer Schrock
Coordinator of Public Programs
Merry Lea



Shrew Loo

When a 19th century botanist first encountered the Low’s pitcher plant in Borneo, he described it as “a very elegant claret jug.” Like other carnivorous species, this pitcher plant needs to obtain nitrogen from animals because it grows in nutrient-poor soils. However, it doesn’t trap insects; it harvests feces. The vertical leaf structure on the left side of the photo produces a sweet substance that attracts tree shrews, and the rest of the process is self-evident.

As far as I know, it was Dale who christened this unique species, “the shrew loo” for the amusement of his botany students. Ω



Dale Hess, right, does battle on Merry Lea’s broomball court.

Merry Lea’s Staff Remembers...

“I loved that even in middle age, Dale liked to climb on curbs and balance on tree trunks. He was the only other adult I know who allowed himself to experience the joy and silliness of childhood even later in life.

- I could always count on Dale to go for the **funny** answer to a question before giving you the factual answer. The world is full of facts. We need more humor. Bravo.
- I appreciated Dale’s passion: whether about the injustices of the world or about people taking coffee into church sanctuaries. Life was never boring or apathetic in Dale’s presence.
- And finally, I appreciated that Dale always seemed genuinely happy to see me. He was glad I was there, and I am glad he was there too.”

—Lisa Zinn, Director of the Sustainability Leadership Semester



“My favorite memory of Dale took place when I was a grad student living at the Kesling Farm. I would wander

out to the orchards to glean whatever fruit had fallen onto the ground and was still edible. Dale said he would rather it were eaten than go to waste, and I loved whatever peaches, apricots and plums I could find. Then one day, he was pruning the grapes from the arbor and I spent more than an hour helping him fill the bed of the red truck, all the while learning everything I could about grapes from him. That arbor will always remind me of Dale.”

—Lisa Myers
Interim Pre-K to 12 Environmental Education Coordinator



“To me, Dale was a caretaker in all the best senses of the word. On countless occasions I walked into Oshtemo Cottage to find him doing something vital in a patient and careful manner, knowing that the details mattered and he wanted to get them right. Many times that task was the construction and revision of class lecture material on his computer,

which he was always peering at from a distance of about six inches.

What was even more classically ‘Dale’ were those days in the late summer when I would find him painstakingly cleaning small batches of tomato seeds from the gardens. He would set them into small glass vials to lightly ferment in preparation for drying. Then he would save them until the next year’s planting.

It was clear in all that he did that Dale was a patient and wise person. I will miss him.”

—Jonathon Schramm, Assistant Professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Dept.



“Dale was always a learner. From those workshops and meetings I attended with him, he always took copious notes.”

—Bill Minter
Director of Land Management



“I first met Dale in the summer of 2011. I had just come to Merry Lea as a graduate student, and Dale was gracious enough to accept my wife as the agroecology intern. The next year, I was brought on to the team to facilitate student life components of undergraduate programs. He often thanked me for my work, as he was always looking for ways to improve the already strong ASI.

I always admired Dale’s passion for what he did. He cared deeply about keeping the earth and caring for others. I will carry his spirit as an inspiration for my work. I will miss his sense of humor, his love of life, his remarkable botanical knowledge and his endearing mannerisms. Being Dale’s office neighbor for the past couple of years has been a gift that I will treasure forever. It is an honor to be a part of continuing his legacy.”

—Tom Hartzell, Coordinator of Residential Undergrad Programs

In Memory of Dale Hess...Colleague and Friend...In Memory of Dale Hess...

“Days spent with Dale and David Stoesz (a yearlong intern) working at a kitchen table my first summer and fall at Merry Lea are special memories for me. I felt so welcomed by Dale and truly enjoyed the culture of good conversation, meaningful work and laughter that we all shared. We also inoculated mushrooms together, made molasses and shared hilarious political satire.

I’ve continued to value Dale as a co-worker and friend. His encouragement meant a great deal to me.”

—Janie Beck Kreider
Assoc. Coordinator of Public Programs



“I have been one of the diehard carpoolers traveling between Merry Lea and my home in Goshen every day. This is the context in which I spent the most time with Dale over our ten years working together. During these trips, Dale frequently commented on recent news events (often with humor, sometimes quite scathingly). He shared his delight when his zebra finches at home hatched babies, he often updated me on birds he’d seen in his yard, he talked about the work he was enjoying at Merry Lea and shared about visits with his sons. During the times when we happened to be the only two in the carpool, Dale always had beautiful music playing.

My last day at Merry Lea with Dale, I had the opportunity to drive the carpool and have Dale sit beside me in the front seat. My last email from Dale was sent very early in the morning he went to the hospital, making sure the carpoolers knew he’d not be joining us that day. I can still hear how he would answer the phone when I called to arrange carpooling. I wish I could capture the inflections and pauses to share with you:

“A ride from my house? Splendid!” Ω

—Carol Good-Elliott
Environmental Science Educator



In 2014, Merry Lea’s weekly produce sale on the Goshen College campus fell on Halloween. Above, Farm Manager Jon Zirkle (the fox) and Dale Hess (the raccoon) inject a little fun into the sales process.

ASI Director Models Creative Marketing

Beginning in May of 2013, I got to work with Dale very closely as farm manager and as an instructor in the Agroecology Summer Intensive.

I appreciated that Dale wasn’t always serious; he had a great sense of humor. I remember the time last fall when I proposed that we wear Enchanted Forest costumes for our weekly produce sale on the Goshen College campus, as that particular sale happened to fall on Halloween. Dale was more than agreeable. I dressed as a fox, Dale as a raccoon, and we drove to campus wearing our costumes.

When we arrived in Goshen, it was a struggle to turn left onto College Ave from Dierdorff Rd. Finally, I pulled out at a moment when I should have waited longer, irritating the driver of a westbound truck. Minutes later, as we were unloading our produce cart all in

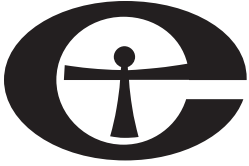
costume, the truck pulled up behind us.

“Who is your supervisor?” the driver yelled. I pointed to Dale who was standing next to me dressed as a raccoon. We both felt so ridiculous and struggled to keep straight faces despite the hilarity and humbling embarrassment of the situation. I apologized to the gentleman for pulling out in front of him.

Later, we had a great time selling vegetables to students and faculty in costume. It was a first for the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm produce stand.

Dale was a great supervisor, and I enjoyed our many moments of humor and seriousness together. He taught me not to get overly stressed out when I mess up. Ω

—Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager



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“Where Earth and People Meet”

Spring 2015 Public Programs at Merry Lea

Spring Birding Challenge March 1 to May 31

Each year, Merry Lea gives nature lovers an extra reason to get off the couch: team birding. The Spring Birding Challenge invites teams of up to four adults and any number of children to record and submit their bird sightings for the months of March, April and May. It's not too late to enter a team! We'll celebrate the results in June.

Sustainable Farm Open House Friday, April 10 4 p.m. until dark at Rieth Village

This event provides an overview of the farm's programs and opportunities such as the Agroecology Summer Intensive and volunteering. We will also have a cookout, lawn games, farm tour and campfire. Prospective students, volunteers and the interested public welcome. No charge.

Midwest Birding Expedition Saturday, April 18 through Monday, April 20

This year's Midwest Birding Expedition will head to Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge and Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge south of Indianapolis. \$295 includes lodging, transportation and guiding. See www.merrylea.goshen.edu for details. A few spots left.

Friends of Merry Lea Dinner Saturday, April 18, 4 to 8 p.m. Farmstead Barn

This year is the 35th anniversary of Merry Lea's relationship with Goshen College, and we'll take a walk down Memory Lane. Property Supervisor Kerry Goodrich will lead a hike in the Shew Wetlands area, beginning at the machine shop at 4 p.m. Goodrich has been employed at Merry Lea all 35 years. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. followed by input from Dr. Larry Yoder

and Dr. Luke Gascho. The leadership of these two executive directors covers 34 of the 35 years. Free to friends of Merry Lea. Others pay \$15 per person or \$25 per couple.

NatureFest 2015 Friday, May 1, 6:30 p.m. to Saturday, May 2, 2 p.m. Farmstead Barn Site

Merry Lea's NatureFest gives people of all ages a chance to get outdoors in the springtime. Camp overnight if you wish, roast marshmallows, run the Turtle Trot 5-K, decorate a birdhouse gourd, take a hike with a trained naturalist. Ω

Please register in advance for all programs. Email mlevents@goshen.edu or call 260-799-5869.

