**Title: Swimming Upstream: Community, Hard Work, and the Big Picture**

Good Morning- and a hearty welcome to you all-

Welcome to our fellow Lancastrians.

Welcome to those of you from beautiful spaces elsewhere-

It is an honor to be with you this morning.

Thank you to Chante and Kristin, and all of the organizers- for making this conference possible-

Thank you to the Lancaster Marriot- for hosting-

and to all of you for being here- for caring so much about the water that we drink- and bathe in, and depend upon for life-

to be a part of this important conversation -

I want to begin with a few words from someone who continues to teach me about the world, and humanity, and even myself- (when I make time to listen)....

Mary Oliver

The Sea can do craziness, it can do smooth,

it can lie down like silk breathing

or toss havoc shoreward: it can give

gifts or withhold all: it can rise, ebb, froth

like an incoming frenzy of fountains, or it can

sweet-talk entirely. As I can too,

and so, no doubt, can you, and you [and you].

I Go to the Shore

Mary Oliver

I go down to the shore in the morning

and depending on the hour the waves

are rolling in or moving out,

and I say, Oh, I am miserable,

what shall--

what should I do? And the sea says

in its lovely voice:

Excuse me, I have work to do.

The lessons we glean from water are endless.

Water is all around us-...

And yet clean water is often -difficult to find.

Our bodies are made up of water- more than anything else.

Our earth is made up of water more than anything else- so how can some people in some places be dying for lack of it?

During these couple of days we are going to be focusing on water (many of us already do in our professions, or our personal lives- but here we will be doing it collectively)-

Water- how to appreciate it- preserve it- be good stewards of it- How to protect it from contamination and pollution- how to not be selfish with it... hoarding or excessively using...

But in my mind talking about water is an opportunity to discuss something else- something that will help us protect our water-

And that is for us to develop a greater sense of Community as human beings.

We all need Community.

 -to develop a sense - of otherness- of being in this world together- of working together, depending on one another- of laughing together- playing and living... having empathy for one another

together on this earth

Because if we do not have this sense of community,

we will not be able to do the work of protecting the water we depend upon for life.

The word "community" is one we use pretty loosely-

we may say community, and mean those who live on our street.

- if we have kids in school- we may refer to our school community

or if we work- we may say our work community.

But community is more than just people who are in close proximity to one another, rubbing elbows now and again. Community is a place where we depend on one another- rely on one another...

KNOW one another.

It is a place where we incorporate ourselves into the natural world around us-realizing that all living things have a symbiotic relationship to one another. And then valuing & respecting those relationships.

if we don't have a strong sense of connectedness in our human condition- we will never address the natural world around us with the humility and gratitude we need in order to make the necessary decisions that will allow the limitations of the earth to sustain humanity for generations to come. Our human relationship to the earth- and the community we build together must be one that guarantees permanence for us all.

There is a continual fight for power in our culture- grappling over who has power, and how are things changed- and who can change them?

But in our culture of complicity, we don't realize the power we could have in our local communities- to make decisions- and to demand laws that would keep the best interest of, we the people- and our local ecosystems healthy and safe.

Communities have power when they function without greed and selfishness.

Lao Tzu tells us in the Tao te Ching- water is the supreme good- nourishing things without trying to- because that is what it is.

It is nourishment- it is life.

It seeks out the lowly places- and is content to flow toward that place which others disdain- because it is in its nature to seek out the lowly places.

And yet it is powerful enough to dissolve the hard and inflexible.

It is strong enough to overcome and wear away even... stone....

It does what it does because that is what it is. It is in its nature-

and I will put forth- I contend- that we human beings are meant to live and move and make decisions, not as individual islands selfishly standing alone, concerned only about our own well being-

our own progress-

our own bank accounts

but

rather-

we are to live and move as communities-

working together.

It is in our nature-

It is how we are meant to function.

We are all called to be a little bit more like water-both powerful and pliable- persistent and permeable- magnanimous and stubborn-

all at the same time.

As members of the human race- living in community- we are accountable to those around us- who are affected by our actions and decisions. Because regardless of how much we think we pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps to be who we are today, no one lives in a vacuum- and no one got famous or successful on their own..

no one fell into poverty or into the depths of societal pain -

on their own either.

We are interconnected, whether we like it or not-

whether we acknowledge it or not-

and how we live as individuals-

affects who we are collectively.

The deceased Rhodes Scholar of economics, E.F. Schumacher, puts it this way, "Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature, but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side."

We do not see ourselves as being a part of the community of the natural world- and yet many of our actions today, especially as Americans, are depleting the what Schumacher calls "natural capital" - and in so doing, we are destroying our own communities-and threatening civilizations and perhaps life itself.

Yes- I know- life is busy and full- and we find ourselves in a rat-race of a culture that requires inhumane work schedules- we even pride ourselves in our work ethic- (I am 10th generation, Lancaster County german heritage- guilty as charged) - but we aren't any more productive than other countries who have more civil balances of work and play and time to cultivate relationships with loved ones.

We get bogged down and feel miserable over the decisions we face in our everyday lives- trying to just pay the bills and attain to some kind of idealized (and more and more elusive) middle class status-

we ask as Mary Oliver quiries in her poem- "what should I do?"- we lament- "oh, what shall we do? "

When sometimes what we really need to do is to be more like water.

realizing- that we have agency-

You have agency

we have work to do- and it is time to get to it.

The work is not easy if we try to do it alone -

But if we band together- and focus on creating healthy communities among us- supporting one another, tending to one another's needs- taking responsibility for those in our communities in a way that our sum total work becomes greater than our individual parts-

then we have hope for a better future for generations to come, which is something we cannot expect from how we are living now.

Jiddu Krishnamurti- the great spiritual teacher who in the 80s was awarded the UN Peace Medal says- "...we as individuals, as human beings, in whatever part of the world we happen to live or whatever culture we happen to belong to, are totally responsible for the whole state of the world."

Now we needn't live in anxiety over this- but we do need to take our place in the world more seriously- our part in this community- Earth.

Here in Lancaster County over the past four years, I have had the honor and privilege of being an active member of a beautiful community. I know some of you have had the same experiences in your own grassroots work- and you will know exactly what I mean-

In Lancaster, our movement has grown out of a resistance fighting an injustice in our midst. An environmental injustice- an injustice against the community that includes both humanity and the natural world-

The relationships we have built and the beauty we have come to see in one another is powerful- tender and life-changing.

I have a story to share with you this morning

a story that is tragic and heart-breaking-

as well as encouraging and life giving.

at least I hope

Let me tell you about what has been going on in Lancaster-

Here is a little bit of MY story.

I was born and raised right here in Lancaster County- in the rural southern end as locals call it. I presently work half time as an Associate Pastor at Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster- where I work with children, youth and young families, writing curriculum, and focusing on the formation of individuals in our community. I also just came on board a few months ago- working half time with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund- where I focus on community organizing with an outgrowth org of theirs- the PA Community Rights Network: I travel the state organizing and educating around the need of our local communities to gain the right of self-government so we can make the decisions-at the local level- that most directly affect our health and safety and welfare- a power that has been taken away from us because our local communities are pre-empted by state and federal laws, which inevitably make decisions benefiting large corporations over our communities and individuals and our local ecosystems.

And, I am one of the founding members of Lancaster Against Pipelines-

I have been working with a core group here in Lancaster over the past 4 years to resist the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline Project- an export transmission pipeline that is being installed as we speak - through our communities by a company based in Oklahoma, who has contracted the fracked gas that will flow through it to be sent to India and Japan for at least the next 15- 20 years.

I am also the mother of two teenagers, 15 and 16 years old- and am married to a man who is a Professor of Native American Religions at Montclair State University in NJ.

Life is full- and rich- and ... ever changing- probably a little bit like each of your lives.

I live on the same 8 acres of woods along the Tucquan Creek that my father bought when I was 1 year old. Oh, I went off to college, got married, and moved all around the country for 20 years- from grad school studying psychology in Pittsburgh- to a Chippewa Cree reservation in Montana- to teaching high school in Wichita KS, to working in Higher Education in Washington DC- before returning to PA- and eventually to living in my childhood.

There is something about the southern end that I feel is in my bones- and that has taught me to value the earth, and the life she provides for us.

We have here in Lancaster County some of the best and highest quantity of un-irrigated farmland in the world. We live in privilege-

and sometimes privilege leads to abuses and living in excess.

My father died in December of 2005 of cancer, and my husband and two young children at the time, bought the family home to keep it in the family- and moved back after being away for over 20 years. In my time gone, the Lancaster County Conservancy bought up much of the land surrounding my home and our wooded acres- so now we live in an idyllic spot in a hollow - with the tucquan creek flowing through our property, and little chance of the land around us being developed, ever.

It is indeed a great treasure and gift.

You can imagine, then, the shock, surprise, fear, and outrage we experienced in the spring of 2014 when we had a knock on the door from a land agent, who wanted our signature to survey our property because, he said, a pipeline was coming through.

I had no idea what he was talking about- but began to research and find out information about this proposed Atlantic Sunrise Project- and within two weeks, we held a townhall meeting at a local church to share with our neighbors what we were learning about the pipeline- and what our rights were in trying to stop it- 350 people came to that first meeting. It was the first of dozens of such meetings.

I could write a book about the details of the past four plus years- the regulatory meetings we have attended, the elected officials we have met with and written to- the hours spent on the phone with lawyers - and the tens of thousands of dollars we have spent on lawyers' bills, and travel and trying to learn what our rights are, and share that information with as many people in our community (and beyond) as possible so we might have a fair shake in the process-

We found out that there is no fair shake in this process.

There is no justice for "the people" in the system we presently live under-

and there is no justice for the earth.

What it comes down to is- the fossil fuel industry has unfettered rights to exploit and harm our communities

more than we have the legal right to resist them.

Williams pipeline Co put a line on a map and filled out all the required permits- and submitted them to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission-

and because all of their i's were dotted and t's were crossed, FERC had no choice but to permit the project. That is the law.

Williams has the status of "utilitiy" - so there is no need for them to prove this project is for public need or necessity. With the status of utility comes the right of Eminent domain. And many people's land was condemned through eminent domain and used for this pipeline- the private benefit of Williams Co.

They advertise that this project will heat 7 million homes- but they don't mention that those homes are in India and Japan- and there is no accountability that requires them to prove what they are doing is right- or justified or necessary for the public.

Besides that- there are even more landowners who signed on with Williams not because they wanted to- but because they felt like they had no choice- some were bullied- called up to 50 times a day with offers, some were lied to (Amish neighbors were told that Eminent Domain means their land would be used against their will and they'd receive NO monetary compensation, which is NOT true), some were intimidated- (pipeline workers have trespassed regularly on private property, and the police refused to arrest them for trespassing, but have arrested landowners who step into the industry's right of way- on that same landowner's own property- charging them with trespassing--on their own property).

And I say- how-

How did we get to a point that the government has given large corporations so much power- at the expense

and harm

and destruction

of our communities?

I think part of it has to do with the fact that in our culture we have allowed our greed and pride in individual power to supersede our understanding of and need for a sense of community.

Our elected officials and our judicial system has allowed corporations to have the right of personhood- so that their rights and their greedy capitalistic tendencies

(and it could be argued that not all capitalistic tendencies are greedy- although I'm not so sure)-

their capitalistic tendencies have taken precedence over the health and safety of people-

of "we the people."

You may have your own stories of devastation and heart- ache- in your experience of how these injustices are played out.

I've watched neighbors cry because they have lost the ability to build their retirement home on their property as a result of the ASP.

I've seen my neighbors lose their status as organic farmers because this pipeline cut through their land and through their fields- and their resistance and their loss meant nothing to the industry. Or not more than they could put a monetary value to- and the eminent domain judge agreed was fair and just. Those farmers just sold their dream farm and moved away.

I've watched the industry taunt and ridicule and even threaten the lives of youth and children and adults involved in non- violent civil disobedience-

Our peaceful protests have been drawing attention to the injustice of a system that privileges corporate gain over the health and safety of people- and over the value we place on the natural world around us...

We have been ridiculed, demonized, our jobs threatened- shameless personal attacks on social media - and people's employers' have been written to in an attempt to get these peaceful protestors fired from our jobs by industry trolls and henchmen.

I have to admit that the past few years have been a wake up call to me- that our government does not function the way I thought it did- that our country is not the country I thought it was.

And I am at a point where I know I cannot be silent about it.

And what's more-

I don't think any of us who see what is happening should remain silent anymore.

I've been talking with legislators behind closed doors who say the fossil fuel industry owns Harrisburg, and until we get money out of politics, nothing will change.

I've talked with DEP representatives behind closed doors who say they walk a fine line and don't tell the truth publicly about the damage fracking is doing to the land, water and air of Pennsylvania because their funds are threatened by legislators to be cut even more. So the damage remains hidden, at least on public record.

Our movement here in Lancaster

has been learning about the destructive ways of fracking- the fact that each fracked well consumptively uses 2-6 million gallons of fresh water- from our watershed-

what kind of impact is that going to have over the next 20 years? 30 years?

and is anyone regulating- monitoring- caring?

I say not nearly as much as we need to-

The wealthy corporate minority and their rights have come to legally trump the rights of the rest of us- as well as the rights of the natural world around us-

and this is a fundamental violation of who we are as human beings-

as human beings in community with the natural world-

as human beings living in balance with the earth,

an earth which provides us with life.

This upside down system is a direct assault on the values I hold most dear-

the need to nurture ourselves, the earth and one another-that is-

our need to build strong communties.

That may sound a little naive and simple- but I know of no other way that human beings can exist in the world- and survive

We need to nurture ourselves, the earth, and one another- and we need strong communities to have the power to do this.

Lancaster Against Pipelines- evolved as a movement against the overreaching fossil fuel industry in our county-

the egregious arrogance, greed and exploitation that precedes that industry is in direct contrast to the community we have found in LAP.

Our community has found that we share values that cross political borders.

We share a joy and appreciation for the earth- and the natural world.

We care more about people than we do about politics,

and more about supporting one another than tearing one another down.

We have walked with one another through divorces and deaths, as well as new births and new jobs and celebrations of life changing accomplishments.

We eat together. We walk together. We do actions together.

It is the community we have built that has created bonds deeper than we realized was possible in this dog-eat-dog world we are surrounded by.

55 of us have gotten arrested together and 23 of us spent a night in jail together after that first mass arrest-from Non- violent civil disobedience-

and those bonds of standing together for what is right has bound us -

and empowered us to do the right thing over and over again.

This pipeline is going to be installed no matter what we do. Our group knows this- and many people ask us why we keep doing actions even though we "lost."

And it is amazing to me to hear my friends - who are like family- and who are still actively involved in this movement- explaining why we still do this work

it's simple-they explain-

because it is the right thing to do.

that is-it is in our human nature.

we care about the earth- and are concerned that outside corporations have the right to come in and benefit from our destruction and exploitation. The pipeline is being installed as I stand her and speak, yes,

but that does not make it right.

Have you heard of the story of Robert Smalls?



I think of him a lot lately when I think of our movement. He didn't stop slavery.

He didn't change the world- well-

unless you were one of the slave families he rescued- or the Americans he came to represent in Congress- But he played a part by doing the right thing.

We haven't stopped this pipeline yet - but we have been following our convictions to stand against injustice- and actions against injustice, no matter how powerful the elite who control that injustice-

such actions are never in vain- and are never wrong.

I've been wondering lately-dreaming maybe- but

what if we started thinking about community a little differently? What if we began to see and treat nature as if the environment has a right to exist and flourish independent of any value it provides for us - rather than treating the natural environment as though it is only there for our use and abuse.

As it is, we look at nature only as a piece of property and what it can give us-

In our culture- and in our laws- going as far back as the origin of the history of this country, we have only sought out to control and own and exploit the natural world for what it could give to us or what we could take from it.

But I wonder-

what kind of progress could we make if we gave rights to our community- even the community of the natural world herself?

Could we give the Susquehanna River -rights?

Rights to exist and flourish and be healthy? outside of human benefit?

What about the "rights of the Chesepeake Bay?"

We would have to throw out our ideas of us being the egocentric gaurdians of nature

and rather, come to understand human beings as

a part **of** nature-

That would take a lot of working together on our part.

But seeking clean water for our world- immediately

and for the greater world-

beyond our local communities has to do more with these systemic changes than merely choosing to not buy certain bottled water.

We need to think big.

We need to act bigger.

We need to be bold and courageous- flexible and stubborn-

just like the power of water- which flows to the lowest place- and carves out the grand canyon in the process.

You see- our community- this one right here -

in this room-

has power!

You have power-- to bring about the needed changes.

But we need to set aside our egos- and our petty differences and figure out how to work together in this community- of concerned citizens.

We need to not tear one another down because we don't agree on a particular word or don't like a particular person- but find our common ground in bringing about the needed big picture changes-

we human beings are responsible for too much damage to the earth-

and we won't stop the damage, or reverse it- unless we work together.

boldly, collaboratively- expecting and working toward the unimaginable.

Our movement, LAP, sees the situation we are in as a systemic problem-

The system is set up in an unjust way, with unjust laws.

And in the history of our country, unjust laws have only been changed through the rising of the people- and we adhere to a rising of peaceful and non-violent actions-

The freeing of slaves, giving women the right to vote, the fight for civil rights.

Only through the people- boldly standing for justice and challenging unjust laws maintained by a powerful minority- were these victories achieved-

Our challenge, then, is to be a part of that body of people, to rise with power against the injustice.

The Buddhist Mary Huber has a book entitled *how you do anything is how you do everything*- and I've been sitting with the words in that title (I haven't even cracked the book yet)

and I've been thinking about community-

About values and what binds us together.

Let us hold tightly to our values of

non-violence, courage, justice, health and safety- love and generosity-empathy and compassion-

and as we practice taking care of the needs of one another,

as we stand in front of bulldozers that destroy-

or enter the office of a legislator (or maybe run for office as a legislator)-

I do believe we **will** make a difference.

I think our commitment to and involvement in a selfless community is the only thing that can.

Let us Join the lovely voice of the sea and say to (the corporate minority?)

Get the hell out of our way-

we have work to do..