

Mount Wolfe Farm celebrates Winter Solstice

Written By KIRA WRONSKA DORWARD

To the North: Hail the Great Bear and the fertile darkness of the North

To the East: Hail the Hawk of Dawn on the gentle breath of the East

To the South: Hail the Many-tined Stag and the rekindled spark of the South

To the West: Hail the Salmon of Wisdom and the trickling drop of the West

Hail to those who lived before us

Hail to those who follow us

All see the turning of the wheel,

The endless cycle that connects us all.

Guide us to the returning light

This greeting, adapted from the Celtic tradition was recited by Jim Jones as the sun reached its zenith at 12:19 pm on Dec. 22, after the shortest day of the solar year. From this day on, the earth will slowly tilt back toward the sun, with the eventual promise of spring after the long winter to come. Hailing from Surrey, England, but with ancestors from Celtic peoples in Wales and Scotland, Jones is currently employed by the University of Waterloo as a visiting scientist at Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation & Resilience. Jones, his partner, Caledon native and Mount Wolfe Farm Manager Sarah Dolamore, and the Crandall Sisters, gathered friends, family, and those wishing to participate in a circle on one of the farm's fields for their premiere Winter Solstice celebration.

"Who I've become as a person is connecting to the land and finding guidance in the cycles of the natural world," said Dolamore. "It felt more authentic to put time and energy into something like the Solstice, enhancing this time of year in a secular way. Being a farmer and choosing a life where the beat of the drum is not working nine to five, it makes sense to me for these being the days to celebrate because I rely on the sun. Part of the motivation of having this is for people to reintegrate recognizing the value of the natural cycle and the role it plays in our life whether we recognize it or not. There's an opportunity when there's a transition to re-evaluate, shake things up, reinvent."

Each participant held a candle that they lit with a wish for the New Year as the wind blustered over the ten acres referred to as the "Crandall Common", threatening to blow out both candles and hopes. "Sometimes," joked Jones, our dreams aren't easily won. Sometimes we have to wait until the wind is in the right direction." With four torches to mark each point on the compass, the year might have been 2018 and the place Caledon, but all gathered might equally have been part of the many communities to celebrate the winter solstice through time and across the globe.

Honouring the Indigenous peoples of the Mississauga of the Credit (Ojibwe) First Nations, on whose traditional territory Mount Wolfe Farm is situated, begins the ceremony. Looking to his own ancestors, Jones then brings in insights from his experience of Druidic traditions. This is to get the ball rolling, encouraging others in the circle to share their own traditions and hopes, as they simultaneously bid goodbye to the past year and look forward to the coming one.

"I would say that for me the one word that summarises [the Solstice] is connectivity," said Jones. "Connectivity of people to the earth on a physical (rational) and emotional/spiritual (non-rational) level. The importance of celebration and ritual in creating and

maintaining connections [and] recognizing that all traditions and cultures have something to teach us about connectivity?We shouldn't be afraid of change or making new traditions and rituals where links are lost, broken, or have lost their meaning?we hope in future years we can be hosted by members of other traditions. Inclusivity and respect is firmly in our hearts as we look forward.?

Inclusivity and respect is also the mandate of Mount Wolfe Farm. Purchased by Sheilagh and Arnold Crandall in 1966, the property was passed down collectively to the five Crandall children, who in turn intend to pass down both the business and property to their children. The vision of the senior Crandalls was ?a succession plan that worked for our family,? explained Debbie Crandall, the youngest of the four Crandall sisters. Contributing to a vibrant local food system for Caledon, employment of young people so they can stay in the countryside, and being a part of the movement for sustainable farming and a shortened supply chain are the driving ideals behind the farm, located at the intersection of Old Church Road and Mount Pleasant.

The farm operates on the concept of collectivism and community in every aspect of its being. A community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm operation, Mount Wolfe is unique in that it shares not only its produce but also its ideas and values year-round, as the Solstice celebration demonstrates. Products and foodstuffs brought in are only from farms who share the same environmental and social values as Mount Wolfe Farm. The produce grown on the farm itself is done by Sarah and Assist and Farm Manager Stefan Ferraro, Workshare CSA members, students employed through the Canada Summer Jobs program, and both domestic and international WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) program participants. Over thirty varieties of vegetables (including carrots, beets, cabbages, broccoli, peppers, garlic, onions, kohlrabi, Asian greens, ground cherries, winter squash, and tomatoes) are grown from spring until fall, and some are able to be stored over the winter. This is in addition to chickens raised during the summer, processed and frozen, and stored at the farm for sale throughout the rest of the year.

Aside from the tangible farm products, Mount Wolfe Farm also endeavours to offer the members of the community holistic and spiritualistic experiences that reflect the back-to-nature spirit of the farm. On-farm events, like the Winter Solstice and skills workshops such as spoon carving for Jones's other project the Ontario Rural Skills Network are put on throughout the year. Sarah also runs Farm to Table workshops in partnership with nutritionist Angela Wallace of Eat Right Feel Right. ?Cultivating community through food and relationship to the land is at the heart of our farm's existence,? Dolamore summarizes.

And when it comes to food, Mount Wolfe knows its business. The blustery ceremony in the Crandall Common gives way to lunch around the Yule Log, whose fires cooked the delicious squash chilli that warmed the cold fingers of the Solstice goers. Locally-sourced bread and home-made scones, as well as mulled wine and Wassail (a Solstice-recipe for spicy apple cider) completed the meal, as participants gathered again in a circle around the log, burning written offerings of what each person wished to leave behind in 2018. A Germanic tradition of renewal, the Yule log is traditionally burnt for twelve days, with the leftover log kept in the house to ward off ailments and bring good luck, and reused to light the next winter solstice fire. Story-telling and sharing began, as those gathered relaxed in comfort and like company. Jones shared the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and many including this reporter recounted family tales and traditions, so many of which had been altered by war and circumstance. ?Whichever tradition, [the stories] remind us there's more to life than the material realm. Our winter solstice stories seem to tell of light, no matter whether flame light or star light, the inward light, or the sacredness of light itself. In the telling, we are unburdened and feel lighter,? writes Gary Gach in Psychology Today.

?Everyday we have a choice to listen to the bad things, or take strength from the good things in the world- to put more energy into being hopeful and not be crushed by the weight of what seems an insurmountable challenge we're all facing,? Dolamore bravely shares with those assembled. ?Everyday I want to renew that choice, to seize the light and work for it.?

?I think,? added Jones, ?the only thing that remains to be said is may the world be filled with peace and love and light.?

Mount Wolfe Farm's Winter Solstice celebration was an uplifting and deeply moving event, reminding us all in Caledon of the importance of a return to nature, tradition, and connectivity- whether it be to the Earth, our ancestors, or our community. We can all look forward to the events and celebrations to come, including the second annual Summer Solstice on June 21.

For more information on becoming involved with Mount Wolfe Farm, attending future events, and purchasing produce, please email

info@mountwolfefarm.ca, or call 647-335-8897. Mount Wolfe Farm also has an active Instagram account (@mount.wolfe.farm), a Facebook page, and an official website, www.mountwolfefarm.ca. You can learn more about Jones's work at Waterloo University and sign up for skills training workshops at the farm through www.ontarioruralskillsnetwork.com