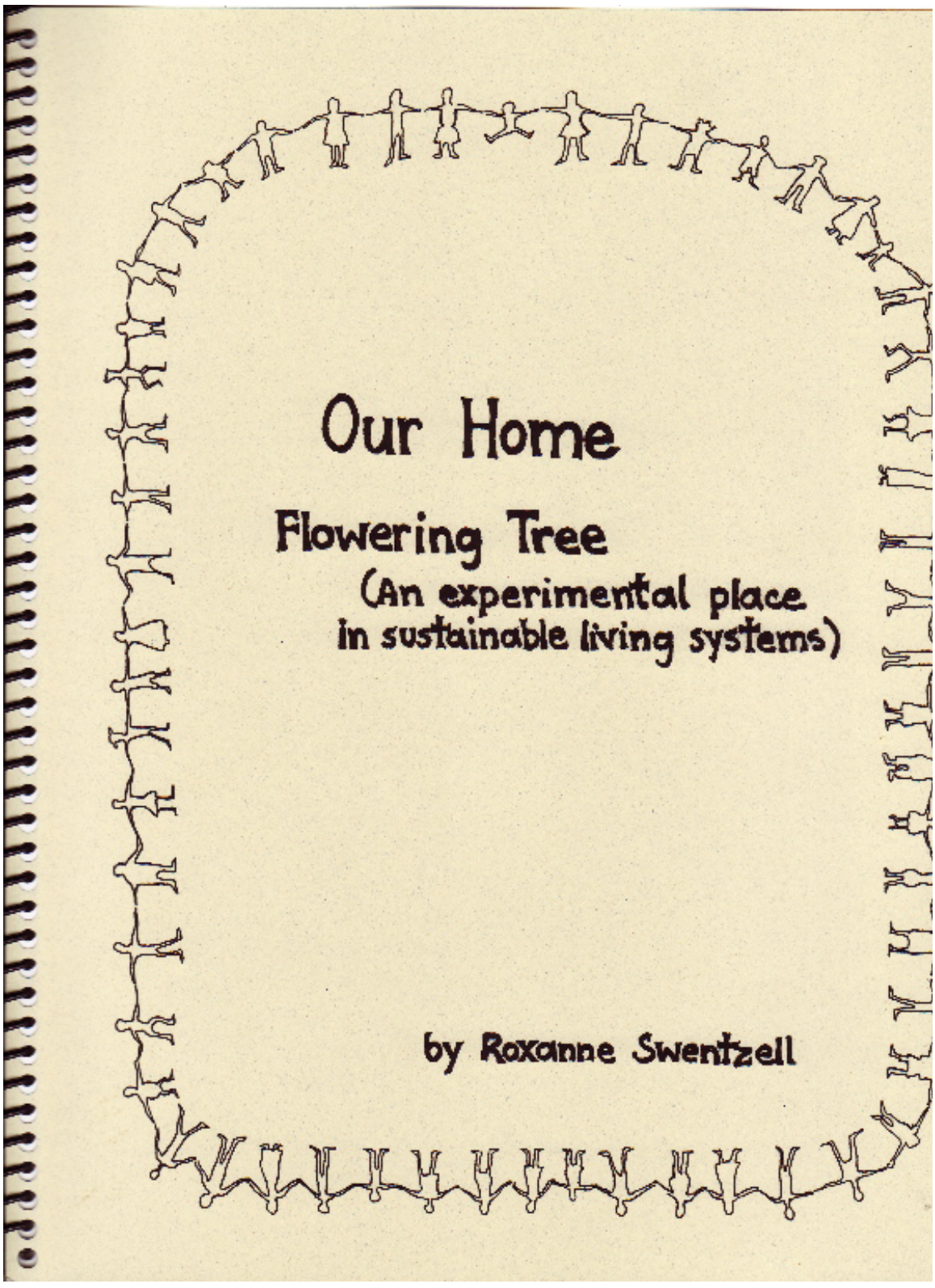

Our Home

Flowering Tree

(An experimental place
in sustainable living systems)

by Roxanne Swentzell

This book is dedicated to Joel Glanzberg. We could have never done this work without him. I hope he knows this. Thank You

Flowering Tree Permaculture
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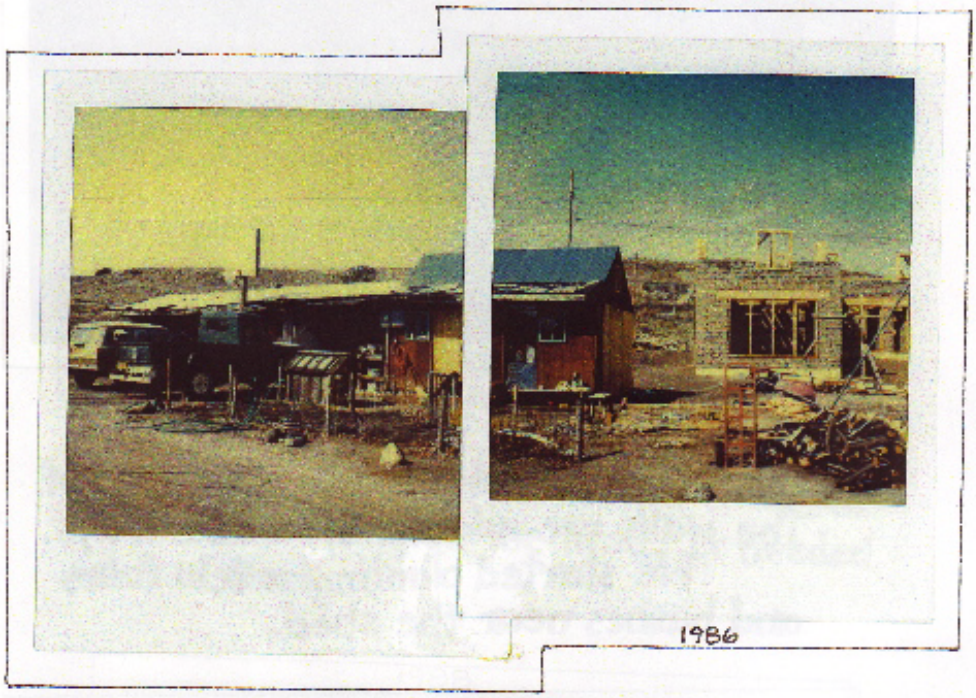
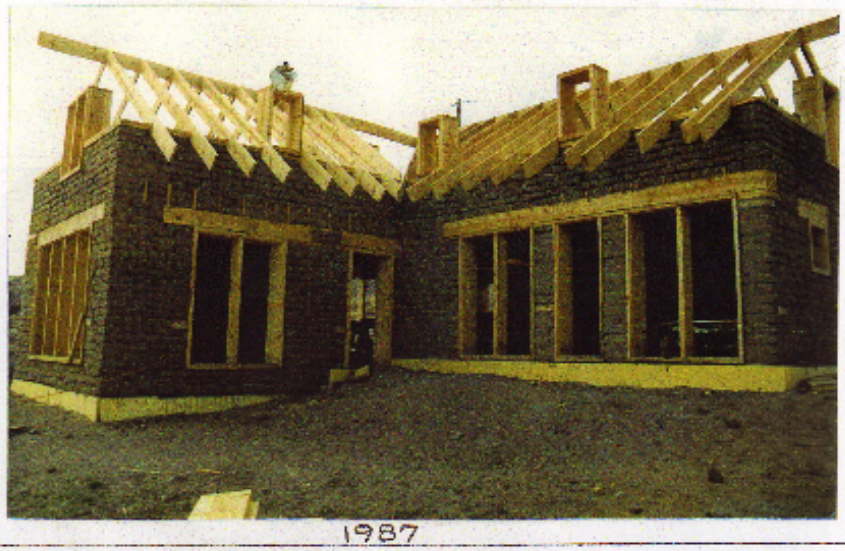
Thanks to Porter and Rosie, Mama loves you.

Flowering Tree is a non-profit organization. Donations are welcome.

This is what our place looked like when we started building. The drive-way extended from the corner of the house almost to the fence.



We lived in the shed while building the house. There were no trees, no plants, no animals just pounded down dirt and lots of ants.

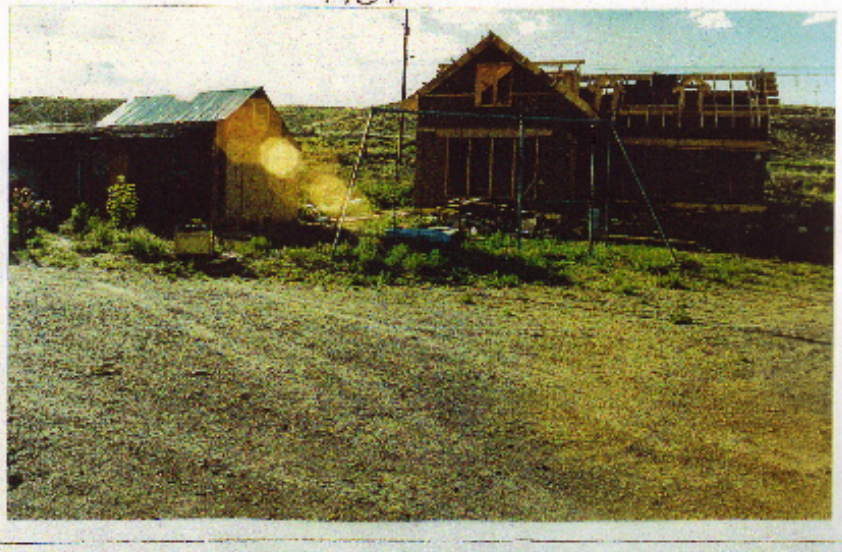


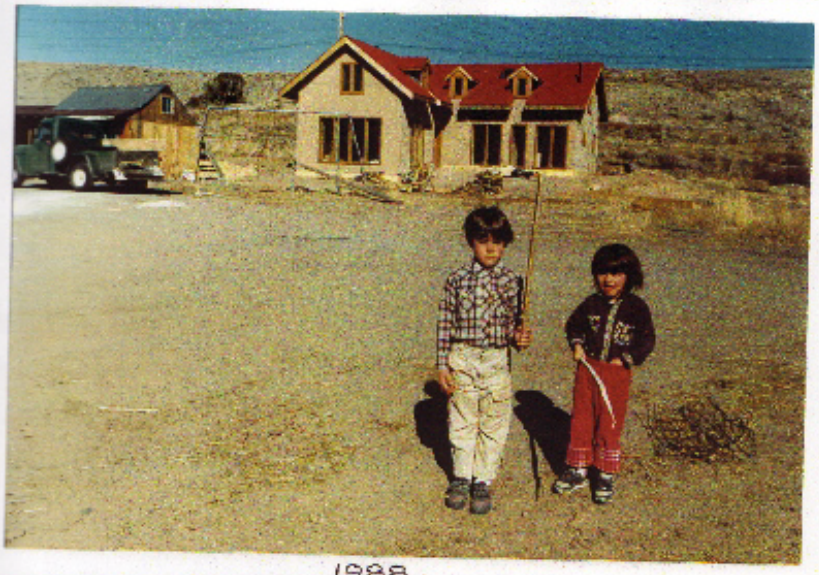
1987

The house is solar and is well insulated in the footings, floor and roof. The walls are adobe, layed thickways.

We started planting a few trees and bushes near the shed.

1987





1988

When the house was live-able, we started focusing on the land. It needed alot of work.

1988

We hauled alot of manure and straw and anything we could get ahold of to build up some soil. We had turkeys and chickens and let them roam around to help fertilize the yard.

1988

1989

We laid out trails so other parts of the land could heal and build up it's soil again. Around the trails we started planting bushes, trees and herbs. All the plants in the yard started as small sticks or seeds.

We built a cold-frame onto the house. It has a cover to keep it warm in the winter. In it we can grow greens, year round. In the summer, we open it or take the lid completely off. It helps keep the house warm in the winter, also.

1989

1989

Places that needed to be moist, we put straw mulch down, which keeps the soil from drying out. We contoured parts of the yard with "swales", which are shallow ditches that are level, so that they will catch water flowing downhill and hold it there until it seeps into the ground. This helps to hold water on the land which waters plants and also keeps the dirt from washing away. These places were where the plants thrived, first, and became full of life — all kinds.

1989

We needed more diversity of areas to plant different kinds of plants. Some wanted shade, some wanted bright sunlight. Some wanted cool wet areas with rich soil, while others wanted hot dry places with sandy soil. No plants grew well out in the open. They wanted to be next to a rock, under another plant, in the shade of the house, etc... So we built a wall to make a courtyard with many micro-climates for plants. This protective area would be our starting point.

1989

Inside this courtyard, would quickly become a very lush, wild, wet oasis. The bath-tub water runs down into a swale and helps to water plants. Also, the run-off water from the house seeps into rock-filled ditches, so it doesn't escape into the driveway. What was once barren ground is quite alive today.

1993

1986

Other parts of the yard needed attention. We started planting all kinds of trees, bushes and vines that would grow in this sandy dry ground.

These two pictures are taken of the same place but seven years apart.

1993

Plants need nitrogen to grow well. Nitrogen can be provided by some plants such as; peas, beans, alphalfa, russian olives, pea shrubs, and locust. Bacteria live on the roots of these plants. They breath in nitrogen from the air and store it on the roots in bumps like in this picture.

So we planted lots of these kinds of plants among other plants to help them grow better.

1988

We have experimented with all kin of plants and ways of planting. Trying to find the plants that do best here and are useful to us and other plants and animals takes time. But each year we learn more and more.

1993

1992

Irragated field with rows

We have used many methods of growing food. Finding the right kind of plants with the right kinds of conditions, is whats happening here. It's a slow process, but very rewarding when something works and we can see our place coming alive.

terracing / waffle-gardens / hedges / trellises

1992

1989

Along with plants, we raise turkeys and chickens. They help us by giving us eggs, meat, manure, and they are fantastic grasshopper, and other pest, eaters. We brought in bees to help fertilize the flowers and give us honey. No, they don't bother us.

1993

Our latest experimenting has been with water.

1992

Storing water is important for us in this dry climate.

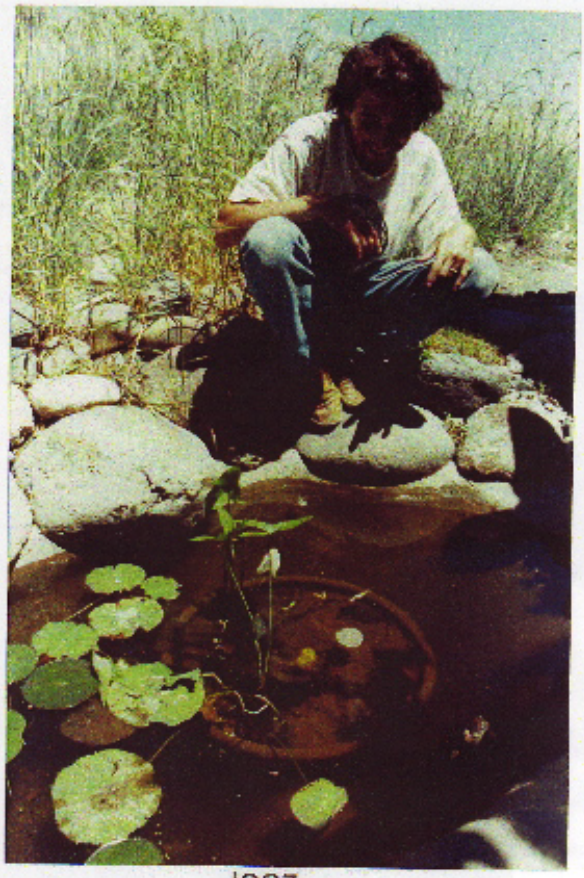
We store run-off water from the roofs in tanks. Then we can use this water to water plants when it's very dry.

Growing trees around this open water tank (see below) helps to shade it so the water doesn't evaporate away.

This water can be used to water a small plant nursery (also protected under the trees).

It also makes a good swimming pool.

1993

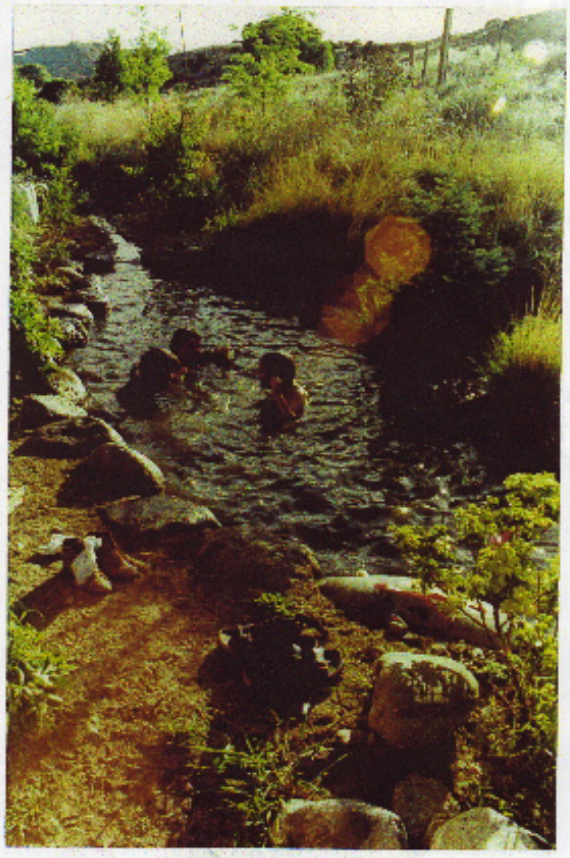


1993

We thought that if we could store more water, we could have fish, and water-plants. So we dug two small ponds, and lined them with cement because the ground is very sandy and would not hold water.

The ditch water runs through the ponds on the weekends which helps clean and aerate the water so that the fish can breath.

After the ditch water runs through the ponds, it goes into a corn and bean field, carrying fertilizer from the fish ponds to the plants. All kinds of animals like the ponds.



1993

1993

These are cement things, we made, called "flowforms". They are used to aerate, energize and clean the water which helps the plants grow.

The water falls into one basin, and, because of its shape, the water spins and splashes down into the next basin, collecting air in the water.

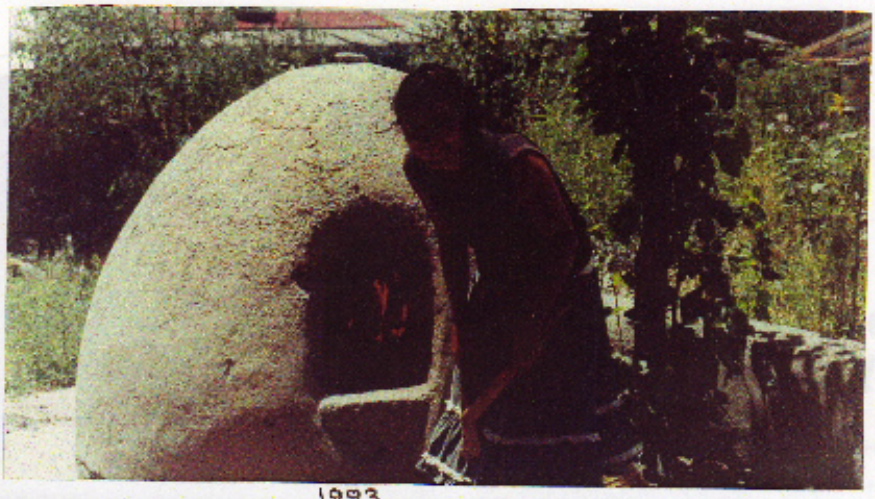
This is happening in natural streams and arroyos all the time. Look for natural flowforms in sandstone canyons where water is falling or cutting through the rock.

1991

We are always learning how to process the food that comes in from the yard. It's a good feeling to eat our own food that we grew. We also save the seeds for next year's garden and for others who want to grow some of the same plants. Some are very rare.

1989

19



1993

We built a bun-te' (or horno) to bake large quantities of bread, corn, pinions, cakes, pie cookies, and even meat.

After building a hot fire inside the bun-t we take out the ashes and put the bread (o whatever) in to cook. We close it up tight and wa It cooks much faster than a regular oven, because it uses radiant heat like a microwave

1993

1993

This place is called Flowering Tree. It is very young, but if you can use your imagination, you can see what it can be. There are at least five hundred trees, bushes and vines on this 8-th of an acre piece of ex-driveway. All the plants have been carefully sellected for their hardiness, fruits, and their help to the soil and other plants and animals. We hope it will become much like a natural wild system that can help feed and home us and many others after us.

As I pick lettuce out of the pathway I am amazed at how much can happen in a small area. The more we diversify it, the bigger the place becomes. There is so much happening, that I am easily lost in the wilds of the yard.

1993

This photo was taken in and of the same spot four years after the photo on page

The End