
Interhelp Update, Feb. 2008

Greetings, Interhelpers and friends, from your new Update Editor, Paula Hendrick.

I moved to Mass. from Seattle in November, where I was involved in a similar networking/support group called Great Turning Northwest. I'm thrilled to be an Interhelper again, as I was when I lived here in the early 1980s. Please contact me with submissions, letters to the editor, comments or questions, at editor@interhelpnetwork.org.

The Feb. 2008 issue includes announcements of upcoming events, a report about the month-long Seeds for the Future II with Joanna and Fran Macy, held on the Oregon coast this past fall, and a poem.

As I watch gentle snow falling outside, I gift you with the words of a midwinter (Imbolc) chant:

*the earth that is old and deep
the earth that is old and deep
the earth that is old and deep
dreams in her sleep and stirs*

*Yours, in service of the Great Turning,
Paula Hendrick*

Annual Interhelp Gathering

Nov. 14-16, 2008

Woolman Hill in Deerfield, MA

This beautiful site served us well last year, and we hope to see many of you there in 2008. For more information, watch for future Announcements and Updates, or contact info@interhelpnetwork.org.

Visions of a Positive Future: Interhelp Workshop in Albany, NY

Saturday, March 1, 2008

9:30-4:30

Albany Quaker Meeting House
727 Madison Ave. (just above Washington Park)

Are you feeling sad, numb, afraid, angry, exhausted or guilty about the state of the world? Join us to mobilize your best thinking – and your feelings – to envision the sort of future you'd want to live in. Build Community. Get Moving. Build a Movement.

FEE: \$20 includes lunch (can be waived, if necessary), Questions and Registration: Call Sondra at 518-475-1929. (Please register by Wednesday, February 27 so that food can be ordered.)

Cambridge, MA Afternoon Get-Together
Sunday, February 24, 2:00-6:00

Rosalie & Paul Anders' home, 154 Auburn St (near Central Square)

We will do one or two exercises designed to help us uncover and share some of our feelings about what is happening in the world these days. We will discuss possible future activities, and end up with a potluck meal. Come at 1:30 if you can and share a cup of tea.

RSVP to Rosalie Anders at 617-868-6058, e-mail her at randers@cambridgema.gov

Seeds for the Future II
A report by Paula Hendrick

Seeds for the Future II, a month-long retreat led by Joanna and Fran Macy, took place this past fall. Sixty of us from around the world gathered at the new moon in September and traveled the lunar cycle together. The first Seeds, held a few years ago in Australia, was attended by two Interhelpers, Rick Gottesman and Cindy Squillace. Seeds II was at Westwind, a pristine wilderness on the Oregon coast (www.westwind.org). I can't begin to describe what the month was like. However, I'd like to share three of my deepest experiences, one relating to nuclear issues, another to indigenous cultures, and the last one a journey in Deep Time.

One morning several Seedlings, activists on nuclear issues including disarmament, power plants, weapons and waste, offered a presentation called the Nuclear Dragon. We learned facts like these: there are 103 nuclear reactors in the U.S., each site containing high level radioactive waste. The waste is lethal (carcinogenic, mutagenic) for hundreds of thousands – in some cases millions – of years, and there is no safe storage solution (www.beyondnuclear.org; www.atomicmirror.org). One presenter shared with us how lonely it is to be an anti-nuclear warrior these days, when nuclear issues often seem far in the background of the concerns of our culture, even among activists. She said that each of us, by simply listening to and absorbing this information, was becoming a carrier of the story. So, her burden was lighter, because she shared it with more people.

During a subsequent evening of circle dancing, Maureen Wild of British Columbia led us in a dance called Wholy Circle, or Guarding the Plutonium. The candlelight in the center represented the larger fire that we need to be attentive to - the nuclear waste that humans must diligently guard for hundreds of thousands of years. Slowly we danced, while the recorded music - a deep, ancient sounding Russian song - played. Holding in our hearts our responsibility to the future beings, we circled the Poison Fire.

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Each week we honored our pain for the world, creating a Truth Mandala the first week and a Cairn of Mourning the second. One morning during the third week we shared a new ritual in honor of indigenous cultures called The Bowl of Tears. The ritual was created by Joanna and Bolivian participant Jorge Milton Sanjinez, who came to Seeds representing the indigenous people of the Andes. Here's my memory of how it went.

We began by sitting in a circle, close together. The circle contained two focal points. In one area were two baskets, one containing slips of paper on which were written facts about the decimation of indigenous land, culture and people, past and present. The basket beside it was empty. The other focal point was a large bowl of water, the bowl of tears.

Whenever anyone felt so moved, they stepped inside the circle. Some chose a slip of paper, read it aloud, and placed it in the other basket. Others knelt by the bowl of tears. Some of them expressed the shame of being a perpetrator (or the shame of having ancestors who were perpetrators). Some revealed their anguish about the terrible harm done to their own people, their ancestors, their land. Some wept for all that has been lost. Others knelt silently.

At the same time, other participants walked counterclockwise, just inside the circle of seated ones. They walked in solidarity with the indigenous people. Those remaining seated were the witnesses, and the keepers.

This strong container held us for a long time, as we wept, raged, forgave, released and witnessed. The ritual came to its own closing, and without preplanning a young man, our youngest participant, carried the large bowl down to the ocean, the rest of us following. We witnessed as he stepped into a cresting wave and poured our tears into the sea.

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The final experience I'll share relates to Deep Time, a theme throughout our month together. We called often upon the Beings of the Three Times (Ancestors, Future Beings and Earth Others – the latter referring to Beings other than human).

I found myself able to imagine and call on the Ancestors and the Earth Others. However, except during Deep Time exercises, I found it hard to imagine or call upon Future Beings. This scared me, because I know how much I need them to fortify me, and to

clarify my choices, in these times. I was pretty sure that the reason I couldn't find them was because I didn't really believe that humans would exist very far into the future.

Late one afternoon I walked up and down the windy trails through the ancient Sitka Spruce forest, feeling the Ancestors all around me and within me. All of the natural world felt ancestral, because my own body and mind evolved as part of the evolution of Earth. However, my heart was heavy. I could not locate the Future Beings, and so I could not call upon them.

I continued walking and began to notice a pulsation in my solar plexus, at the core of my body. It was my intense desire that the Future Beings (humans in particular) exist. This desire was so deep and so strong that it began to pull me forward on my walk toward the future. I realized that I had located the Future Beings in the depths of my being - in my passionate desire that they exist. I began walking with determination and courage and authority, held and informed by Ancestors and Earth Others, pulled forward into the Great Turning by the generations to come.

As I circled back to the lodge where dinner would soon be served, a thought occurred to me. What is the present generation of any plant or animal but the product of the life force, the passion, of all previous generations? Present beings exist simply as a moment in the flow, inheriting from the past and pouring out into the future. Any present being may add an innovation, thus making that particular being - and the whole web of beings - stronger. With this realization I felt myself settle into a sense of myself as a part of that powerful river, connected with it all. Now as I write I recall fragments of a chant we shared....let it go, let it flow.....the earth she wants it, the earth she wants it, the earth she wants it.....

The month was a rich and intense time, and I hope I've conveyed a bit of that to you. I recommend that you read the newly edited and revised version of Joanna's book *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal* (Parallax Press). The themes of our month together flow gracefully through the text.

Thank you to Interhelp Council member Karen Zeiders for submitting this poem:

First snow	out of our heads
Gibbous moon	through our hearts and
	down further
First light	to our point of connection
low across the floorboards	
This is winter light	And the snow records
guiding footsteps	our passing
heads in the shadows	That we do indeed
	leave traces
We are drawn down	