
Interhelp Newsletter, January 2012

Dear Interhelpers and Friends,

Greetings in this new year.

Gathering 2011 was a great success. It was well attended, with a nice mixture of old and new participants. Our theme, Holding On, Letting Go, was resonant and satisfying. One very unexpected thing happened; find out what by reading Carol Harley's article below!

Mark your new calendars now: Gathering 2012 will take place October 12 - 14, again at Woolman Hill in Deerfield, MA.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone will be released in March. See www.joannamacy.net for more about the book and for pre-order information.

I'm wishing each of you well. Please be in touch if you'd like to submit something to this newsletter.

Paula Hendrick
interhelpeditor@gmail.com

2011 Gathering: Snow Surprise!

by Carol Harley

I can't think of anyplace I would rather have been than at Interhelp Gathering. When an October 30th storm (initially projected to bring "an inch or two" of snow) developed into a heavy branch-breaking blanket, we were amply warmed by the wood stoves at Woolman Hill. We also were fed well, despite the loss of electricity overnight into Sunday, and we were surrounded by loving, caring members of our tribe. For those who weren't able to come be with us: you missed a great Gathering.

All afternoon Saturday, we were aware of the snow descending and swirling outside our meeting space, and by bedtime those of us in tents and cabins were very glad we had packed our boots! Although we lost three commuting attendees once the snow began sticking to roadways, the power stayed on long enough for the rest of us to enjoy a full evening of planned activities. We provided our own entertainment as always – intergenerational scavenger hunt and theatrical

improv, a circle Dance of Universal Peace, piano and song by our talented Molly Ruggles, and more.

While Paula and I may have had the longest walk to a cabin Saturday night, our experience was relatively mundane compared with that of those who tented out. Kirstin Edelglass has winter-camping prowess as an outdoor trip leader, so being within a stone's throw of a heated building made it relatively simple and tame. She enjoyed "the peaceful sound of snowflake feet tip-toeing on the tent, the fun of getting up in the middle of the night to shake off the heavy blanket, and the ecstasy of rising in the morning to a soft field of sun sparkles." For Karina Lutz tenting in a heavy snowfall was a new experience, a little edgy but one that she claimed eagerly. I remember Karina commented the next morning on levels of meaning she found: solidarity with the Occupy movement, and mental preparation for potential times ahead.

Sunday morning's stunning blue sky and promised warmth contrasted with the daunting task of snow removal – although most of that work, road-clearing and such, was done for us. It seemed that everyone wove our spirits together in good humor. The program went ahead as planned, with a few minor delays and interruptions. We each saved a breakfast dish to use again at lunchtime, because dishwashing would be complex. No running water meant melting snow, in kettles and bowls, atop wood stoves. No electricity for the boom box meant that for Elm Dance accompaniment, Paula and I sang the Latvian song Ka Man Klajas (which we recently memorized for Carolyn McDade's choral CD project "Widening Embrace").

Looking back to late October, and comparing this time with earlier Interhelp Gatherings I notice that something was different, yet something was the same: In reviewing evaluations written by the weekend's participants, we learned that overall, what mattered to people was the opportunity to be together in community, in deep sharing.

's no surprise!