

# DARK

# MATTER

MAY 2018, Issue #6

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN, TO HEAL?"

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## EDITORIAL

Lise Weil, Kristin Flyntz, Kim Chernin, Deena Metzger, Erica Charis-Molling, Laura Bellmay, Wendy Gorchinsky-Lambo

*Dear Reader:*

*Once again—in what is now becoming a Dark Matter tradition—the contributors to this issue (with the exception of Cynthia Travis, who had a family emergency, and the Aftermath 11/9 dreamers) came together with Kristin and me for an editorial conversation via Zoom. What follows is an abridged version of that conversation (with editor's notes in brackets), which took unexpected turns and lapsed into deep silences. As a transcription can't convey the vitality or the emotion of the conversation (it was very emotional) we've supplied a link to the recording below.*

**Kim:** I had an odd experience from reading all the pieces. I was surprised that none of us wrote about dying. And I wasn't sure if that meant that healing in a nonmedical model, a model that opens to imagination and spirit, excludes dying, as if in that model dying is seen as a failure... If I had written something other than what I wrote, I would have written significantly about dying as a form of healing.

**Deena:** What struck me about most of the pieces was that they took in the dying of the earth, and that the relationship between the circumstances of the earth and the circumstances of our own healing was prominent and it was almost as if our own living and dying was, I don't want to say insignificant, but not as urgent as what was happening to the earth. And then of course there was your magnificent prayer to the Mother that substantiated my feelings that we were concerned with how the earth might heal and so the dying of the earth is not an option and is not healing.

**Kim:** No, the dying of the earth is not. I was thinking more at the personal level – writers who reported either having illness or working with someone who had an illness.

**Erica:** It didn't even occur to me to write about my body—which strikes me now as odd. I mean I have one, why didn't I write about it? But I was very outward-focused for some reason and didn't have a chance to go back to the prompt and see if there was something that pushed me out rather than in. I mean, I've had experiences I could have written about but it never occurred to me....

**Lise:** Kim, I just want to make sure that you were aware that Verena Stefan (who wrote "Quitting Chemo") died. I was surprised by the question because I thought her whole piece read as an answer to that question, or at least the last part of it.

**Kim:** Maybe I was looking for something explicit. The dying of the earth is unquestionably a bad thing. But the dying of the individual can be a transformative thing.

I didn't think I saw the distinction being made between the way we feel about the earth dying and the way we feel about individuals dying.

**Kristin:** I read Verena's piece and her decision to surrender to dying by turning away from chemo as an incredibly healing, revitalizing, transformative experience. The end of the piece spoke to me about how alive she came as she moved toward death, having extracted herself from the system.

**Kim:** Yes.

**Deena:** Lise since you put the piece together, was there anything in her journals later on that spoke about dying?

**Lise:** Of course she spoke about dying and didn't want to die. But she knew that healings were going on that had nothing to do with surviving and that probably these wouldn't be happening if she weren't on her way to death. I was under the impression that it came through in the piece.

**Laura:** I wasn't aware that Verena died and I needed a moment. I totally identified with her writing. I declined chemo when I first had cancer for all the reasons she speaks of. I identified with her experience of the cancer subculture and what it does to take away a person's will to do things the way they think they should. Everything is subsumed by the culture that says "we need you to survive" regardless of the cost to the person's spirit or soul which is never a consideration. There's nothing spiritual about it.

**Erica:** I have to say right now I feel like a ten-year-old who's wandered into a circle of shamans, there's so much wisdom on the other side of this computer and I'm barely keeping up... I'm thinking of a poem I encountered a little while ago that had to do with the Chernobyl site. One of the ways they're looking to see that that piece of earth comes back to life is if things start to decay again. The fact that these leaves can't actually die, return to the earth, is part of what keeps it from healing, because all the little microbes that used to do that aren't there.

**Deena:** For me the conversation about seeing death as part of the healing process is familiar because I work with a lot of people with terminal illness. I realize I'm sometimes impatient with that conversation... because I don't think the majority of these deaths we're talking about are natural or appropriate. I think they're caused by the culture and by the dying that we impose on the earth and so for me looking for healing is not looking for the particular survival of the individual it is looking for a path that will change our brutish and violent minds.

**Wendy:** In my work I appreciate that things die because I get to midwife the process of change. It's really important that things die so a different form can manifest and something new can come out of it.

**Lise:** Maybe that's a good place to suspend the discussion of Kim's question. I wanted you each to have a chance to say anything you feel like saying about what you've read.

**Laura:** I just felt a depth of continuity in all the pieces.

**Lise:** I agree with you. It was a beautiful experience putting it all together. I felt all of you were deeply related.

**Kristin:** Something that struck me was the exquisite attention that each woman paid to whatever her understanding of healing was or is, whether it's the sacred geometry and the worms and the devotion required to nurture that, or the exquisite presence of Laura as she bared herself to be witnessed in the fullness of her humanity. Or Deena's exquisite following of all of the threads related to her cancer experience and what's happening to the earth and the animals in our culture. The word that comes to me is "embodied." And it also strikes me that while I don't disagree at all with Laura about the depth of continuity in the pieces there are so many contributors to the healing process both in this material realm and beyond it. That it is not in any way an individual endeavour. That we are supported in many ways both seen and unseen.

**Wendy:** Deena wrote "I learned that the cancer cell wanted to be healed, restored, returned to its original nature" and I connected that to Laura's piece on beauty. Because it seemed to me that cancer cell wanted to be returned to a place where it was loved and found beautiful. And so do we all. We've all lost that vibration and are seeking to bring it back into the field, both personally and into the larger field. And Verena wrote about cells lighting up through creative activity. That reminded me of biophotons [Wendy writes about them in her piece]. We can see in this illness period whether it's personal or planetary that creative activity leading us back to the original nature of that sick cell. Laura summed it up—"can we see the medicine in the wound." It's that exploratory path. And it's a wonderful opportunity to see the beauty in the wound and not see it as something awful, disgusting, dirty, shameful. And Karen and Anne's dreams kind of summed up what all the pieces were trying to express in their different ways. It was just so magical.

**Lise:** What you said about beauty: it's not coincidental that you found it in both Deena's work and Laura's. Laura's piece begins with an epigraph from Deena. Laura can you read it?

**Laura:** "Beauty like love is a fierce power that restores the world. The healer's power is diminished if it is not associated with beauty. Healing helps align the individual with the trajectory of the soul."

**Wendy:** Laura also wrote "I'm not the sum of all the worst things that have happened to me." For me it was like the Earth Mother speaking to us: "I am not the sum of the worst things happening to me. It's so important that you not see me this way. I am not illness. I am not wounded. I am beauty."



**Deena:** I'm thinking that a healing path is complex. And that the pieces together may in some way be manifesting the complexity and all the differences that exist on a healing path where nevertheless the different ways of seeing and knowing resonate with each other. And if that is true then the pieces are in a field together and are creating the kind of consciousness that is dependent on the particularities in each individual piece.

**Wendy:** Each piece is a fractal.

**Deena:** Cynthia Travis if she were on the call might comment on how important Dr. Emoto's book on water [which plays a key role in Wendy's piece] was for her at a critical time in her life.\* It took her and us in an unexpected and profound direction and also in some way changed our lives. I was also struck by the fact that the Flower of Life [also key in Wendy's piece] is a symbol and image that I've used again and again... Nineteen interlocking circles...(Lise is exclaiming) So a lot of what's written is taking on yet another life among us.

**Lise:** Beautiful. And fractals are so important in what Cynthia wrote as well: "A healthy, resilient society is a biomimetic one: fractal, multi-dimensional... It is why indigenous languages, stories, rituals, songs and technologies matter... for these are the cultural algorithms that translate Life's healthy fractal structures to human understanding..." That's clearly the case for the Flower of Life design [and is exactly what Wendy's gardens do]. So we're definitely in a field.

**Wendy:** I wanted to ask Kim: It seemed to me that you were being used as a channel by the elementals. Did you feel that at all? It seemed to me you were getting a lot of ideas that weren't formed in phrases that we would know. That it was their way of communicating not ours.

**Kim:** I did feel that I was channelling something but I didn't know how to name what it was. And it was making such an impact on the ego part of my mind. It was practically destroying it. So I wasn't the person who could successfully translate it. I had to take it more like a dictation. The best I could do was just be open to it. It wasn't easy to be open to it. I'm glad it came out making some kind of sense.

**Deena:** I don't know if it made sense or if that's even the goal. I found it a force, an irrefutable force. A dynamic presence. Given voice and being addressed at the same time.

**Kim:** Oh I like that. It solves an uneasiness in me. Thank you.

**Deena:** I want to read this stanza "There are strangers out on the trail tonight, they carry messages. Send us the woman to enter the trance, the women who summon the guardian spirits, bring back tales of the new weather's force, the tread-path of walking between, the whiplash of raising up storms and bring our longing back to its source." Thank you, Kim.

**Kim:** Who the heck wrote that? It's so different hearing it from someone else. Thank you Deena.

**Lise:** It's interesting that Erica's poem also begins with "Mother"—I hadn't noticed that until I came back to it after reading Kim: "The signs of it in the bees, without any doubt/  
nearer and nearer. Mother, let me take you/ to blow across the deep in hurricane,/ flash on flash from heaven." I just felt such a rhyming with Kim's piece.

**Erica:** Yeah, I was also using words that aren't mine, because it's a cento so I'm grabbing lines from someone else. The voice is not necessarily mine in the same way Kim's voice was not necessarily hers.

**Lise:** I had the same feeling reading it as I did reading Kim's. It didn't make sense to me but I just loved it... and it pulled me along.

**Kim:** I was listening to a talk by a British psychoanalyst who had been a social worker and she was talking about working with children. She said when you work with children you have to have a third ear, an ear that hears the meaning even when they're not saying the meaning. I wonder if that isn't true for some of the writing we do that isn't entirely our own... The third ear—that has stayed with me. Most of us talking today have a third ear. Maybe all of us.

**Erica:** I love that. Thank you Kim.

**Kim:** I wish I knew everybody better.

**Lise:** That's a beautiful thing to say. When Kristin read Verena's piece she wrote to me and said "Oh I love it and I love her."

**Kim:** I loved the chimp who wiped the tears away from Jane Goodall's eyes in Cynthia's piece. She was crying because of the way they were being treated. The chimp reached up through the bars and wiped them away.

**Erica:** I loved that too. It reminds me that Goodall had a condition—she had trouble recognizing human faces. But she could always tell the difference between the different faces of the chimps. And when I read that in Cynthia's piece I thought "oh my god they knew exactly who she was too."

**Lise:** There was so much in Cynthia's piece. Kristin and I were talking earlier today about what she says about practicing the art of the impossible. How if you just go by calculation and measurement, it does look completely impossible. It's what Karen [Mutter] is saying about the black and white chart of the diagnosis [in her commentary on her jaguar dream].

**Kristin:** Yes, if we're going just by the numbers on the charts, by the test results then perhaps it is impossible. But if we look on the illness, on the wounding, with new vision then we have no idea what is possible.

**Lise:** Maybe if we listen with our third ear...

**Deena:** Well it's the third ear and in her dream it's the third eye. Because Sharon [a woman in the dream] loses her glasses in that chasm. If we continue to work in a linear manner trying to make sense of things in that way we will fail. I was thinking also about the parallel between the healing in the wound and Cynthia's wisdom of the breakdown.

**Lise:** I think it might be worth quoting that passage: "I remind myself that the nature of every dilemma reveals its cure. Since my time working in Liberia during the early 2000's, my friends and I have referred to this as the Wisdom of the Breakdown: Just as in the wild, antidote plants grow next to poisonous ones, the antidote to our murderous behavior lies at our feet."...Laura, I have a feeling you might have something to say about this.

**Laura:** I feel like part of the breakdown is that we are no longer able to see or know things in the way that happened before the breakdown before the illness before whatever the initiation experience is. The purpose of the breakdown is that we are made to look at our lives the world the earth in a way we wouldn't have been able to if we didn't have the illness.

**Lise:** It makes me think of what happened to Wendy. It wasn't disease, but your life fell apart... Your life broke down, couldn't go on the way it was.

**Wendy:** Yes. I liked what Karen wrote about her dream. One sentence was so important for me: "the ravine in the heart of the jungle." It's this warning to us to start to look at things differently. Jaguar's message was "you're not seeing it with the heart." So we can look at the ravine as a great divide that separates us from that intelligence.

And then Anne's dream... The number 7 kept coming up in that dream— it's the number of high spiritual attainment that comes through female enchantment. What's in those white mason jars, there's something special there that women are preserving. Again it's about the knowledge and skill to see with the intelligence of the heart not just the brain.

**Lise:** I'm going to quote Cynthia again because it relates to what you're saying Wendy. She writes about friends of hers who are working ("feverishly (ha!)") to mechanically remove carbon from the atmosphere. But she says this is a mechanized solution, whereas the Earth is a sentient being and we are Her body and so "have to remember how to live from that understanding." I also found it really interesting that she wrote: "What's wrong with sensually, or even sexually, loving the Earth? Why is that considered obscene and the Pacific Gyre is not?" The original title of Wendy's piece was "Having Sex with a 3-Billion-Year-Old woman." (A long silence) "I think there's a lot of shy people on this call."

**Kim:** Well we're probably talking about the things that matter most to us. And most of us don't know each other very well.

**Kristin:** I was just wondering if you could each say what called or compelled each of you to respond to this particular call in *Dark Matter*.

**Deena:** Kristin and I were just at a conference. It was billed as a conference to free elephants in captivity. I'm still reeling from it. I was unable to move yesterday or to think clearly I was completely incoherent to myself and every cell in my body hurt from the pain of learning things that I did not know about the brutal way that elephants in particular are treated—deliberately—in captivity. It's beyond horrific. What it awakened in me was the horror of the brutishness of this time and the way that we treat the earth and the animals and women. A former animal keeper at one point said "Just imagine men beating women with axe handles." So for me healing that is changing our minds and the way we think and live—what it is and how we do it—is the only question.

**Erica:** I think for me what was compelling about this call was that when I would read these two poems almost invariably someone would say how much one or the other had meant and it always had to do with people recognizing some piece of their own healing journey in those poems. It wasn't what I set out to write about but it was what came back to me when I read them. So when I saw the call I thought, "Oh. I think I found a home for these poems."

**Deena:** I just want to read this line of Erica's "You can see/ one certain lust drives every creature/ eating its way as it burns inside a furnace./ Leaving me weeping with so much still to say."

**Erica:** Thank you. You read beautifully.

**Kim:** I would like to say that what's stirring in me is this profound wish to know all of you better and a deep regret that we're not together somewhere. I think part of why we are silent is we can't see the expression on each other's faces. I wish we were together in the same room.

**Deena:** Sorry I have to come back in again. There is a little narrative, Laura, from the moment that you walk into the room and have to prepare yourself to step up on that little stage and present yourself to the artists who are going to paint you. That is such an extraordinary sequence and it is a moving image that is embedded in my mind in the way what I imagine the painting is is also in my mind. [The version of Laura's piece that was shared did not include the image]

**Laura:** Thank you for saying that.

**Deena:** It's absolutely stunning.

**Laura:** (sobbing) I felt in that moment I just want to be a surrendered instrument. And it made all the difference. And the quiet for me right now has nothing to do with that I don't know people because we know each other intimately. I feel like this conversation is an intersection of the sacred. I'm quiet because I don't have the words for what we're discussing. It's too important and so overwhelming. And I don't feel like I have the capacity to really hold it all and I'm so glad we could do it together.

**Wendy:** I would just like to say I ended up answering this call because Lise beat it out of me. She took a whip and said "You have to write this!" As you must be able to see in my piece, I'm not a writer. Lise had to edit me a hundred million times. But I'm grateful that she got me out of my little cabin in the woods. You kind of live it day to day but it's not till you write it that it synthesizes and you begin to say "oh my god I did that? This has been created?" And it's always such a gift and a relief – when I read everybody's writing—that I'm not alone. When you live alone in the forest you doubt yourself, you second-guess yourself and being with others in a call like this is such a relief. Yes there are lots of others out there. And I'm very very grateful to have met you and to have had the chance to read your outstanding pieces.

**Erica:** I want to echo what others have said. I'm just really grateful for having sat in this virtual circle tonight. I was already grateful for what you had written and it's all been amplified by this conversation.

**Lise:** There were a hundred ways this could have gone, but I think it was very beautiful and I'm thankful to all of you.

**Deena:** And this conversation brought the pieces to another life altogether. Lise, do you have something you could say to end it?

**Lise:** Hmm. That's a lot of pressure...

**Deena:** Well, why did you come up with this topic?

**Lise:** Because like you Deena I can't think of anything that matters more right now... And without the connecting I don't see how any of us individually can support it. We need each other to walk through it.... And, to quote Erica, [from "Requiem in the Key of Bees"] to "Sing as we walk—it makes the trip less painful./It's true for bees as it is for human beings."

\*Cynthia later commented: "I brought Dr. Emoto's books as gifts when I attended my first writing retreat with Deena back in \_\_\_\_ We had been discussing and writing about water and drought and the dire situation of the elephants in East Africa at that time. During the writing retreat, during our spirit journey, the elephants came. All they said was, "We are thirsty." As we ascended Mt Pinos (a ritual part of the retreat), I knew I needed to make some sort of water offering but had no clue where or how, or even if I'd recognize the appropriate place. In desperation, I plopped down under an inviting,



gnarled pine to rest and try to listen well enough to hear what to do. It was late and the light was beginning to fade. Soon we would have to make our way downhill in order to be home before dark. I wept in despair, and when I looked up I saw that, all around me, were plastic water bottles, most of them partially full or unopened. They had obviously been there for some time as the labels were faded and worn. Weeping, I poured out the water and brought the empty plastic bottles back down the mountain. I prayed for rain, for the elephants and for us all. The sky was a dry, unrelenting blue as far as one could see. When I arrived at the parking lot, I noticed that wisps of clouds began to form and gather. By the time we got back to the house, it was pouring, and rained for two days. Unbeknownst to me, Deena and I had poured water at exactly the same time. We have been visiting the elephants and making offerings to them ever since.

# **MOTHER OF US**

## **A Prayer for Healing**

**Kim Chernin**

Grief, grief unutterable in the trade winds of your passage. We are here upon a shadow's generosity, ley lines undone, winds burrowing through the parched soil that say not whither or whence we wander, why we are here and what we have come to fathom. Is there work for our hands the last drop having fallen? Is it the beginning or the end of prayer? Let the tall grass teach us to speak your name, bent low beneath your urgency. Mother of god, mother of us, mother of what is, restore us.

Breezes hurrying in from the far east with transports of nostalgia, what is beauty for if not this, a kind of memory? Now beauty burrowing at the core, speeding the south wind eastwards, where evil is said to lie in wait, where winds are losing their locations, meanings have been undone, storm, outrage, blistering skies call up the flood beyond its natural ebb. Tell us what part to play, instruct our hands, where is the needle, where the thread?

Give us this day should it be our last, and we bound upon its darkening skies to take as the spoils of memory one seed of our world, a future will harvest. Here we wait at time's unseeing edge, cousin to tempests, born to the air, raucous bunch if ever was bounding up daybreak's broken stair.

Word is, dancing will do in the fissures of headlong, feet never touching the earth, leaping, howling ever falling, gone to the wild on the wave of a windswept, turning and tumbling and tripping the light foot, race to the wild to conserve what remains. Leave

mourning to our mother of sorrow, her grief in the pollen that laces the aster, her brace of winds bleating hard from the north.

The poppy turns back into herself at the turning of our longest night, did you mix sorrow in the dying soil with just enough grief to drive her into California gold? Needful it is Mother that you return, forgetting feeds on our world, a toothed poison gnawing our roots.

I know you by some other sense than sight, a practiced touch wiping sweat from my eyes, transplanting the parched bush close to the fence, its blue berries hardened to lethal pits, your whispering, a quickening breath, you say you are not weeping but you seem so old, you who never began, began with us, trusting this precious to our hands and we have failed you. Give us this day some humble work, some small, seemingly dispensable toil, show us how many hands it takes to hold the waters back, here we stand at the outcrops of time, Mother, to work for you.

There are strangers out on the trail tonight, they carry messages. Send us the woman to enter the trance, the women who summon the guardian spirits, bring back tales of the new weather's force, the tread-path of walking between, the whiplash of raising up storms and bring our longing back to its source.

Death: delirious forester, lay down your knife, your work goes on, you are no longer required, you who were planning to carve out a unique death for every dying thing, off they all go by the barrel, your hopes shattered. Death, endangered species, sit down with us beneath this heart-sick oak to mourn the passing of your necessary. Rivers on their way to the sea don't speak of dying, you, creation's sister, leave it to time the great sweeper, mighty the broom, invincible the brush, we have no need of death, you weary forester.

Bare, barren, most barren the soil, most achingly barren, awaiting the touch that brings back life. She sees the future sprouting among the ruins, our beginnings beginning again, forms spread out on the sand, fish forms, mollusks, single cells, a gill, a fin, a tail not meant for walking. Are there takers? She summons the seed-carrying winds, they have been carousing in emptiness, she touches the fingers of both hands to her breast, the gesture of continuance, puffs out her cheeks, sends forth the teeming breath; earth begins again bearing her own fertility, settles the name of mother on the soil, invites the sky knee bent to render homage, hurries to make the flowers first, beginning with the brindled rose; coiled fire leaps up out of the soil, requires taming, she pricks venturing into spring, harvests autumn, beholds the bark climbing the winter tree, the hoar berry ripe, the stunned leaf yellow, invents the three-stringed harp, begins the long wait for the harper, the one who will sharpen the lathe at work by day, at rest in her lap at night, singing the blueprint of possibility.

Notes:

I'm not at all sure I can claim this piece of writing as my own. It showed up on several distinct days with a flood-like pressure that made me feel exhilarated but uneasy, as if I had left a faucet open and didn't know how to stop the flow. I wrote the words out fast on the computer not sure what form they should take. Was this a poem, a rushing piece of prose, did I even understand what it meant? I reassured myself by remembering some words of T.S. Eliot I had read when a freshman in college, not that I was (or am) sure that I had them exactly right. "A poet is in no better position than anyone else to say what his poetry means." I had taken dictation, or so it seemed to me. Why fuss about meaning or origin?

This cataract of words, however, was having a considerable, negative impact on my mind. I said things I didn't remember saying to people to whom they should not have been said. A client experienced me as "weirdly other," saying things she did not understand. My driving became difficult; I would struggle to stay awake but would fall asleep and drift over the double yellow line, fortunately when no cars were coming towards me. I had a trance-like sense of the world around me, which looked intensely beautiful and flooded with presence but in the next moment I would find myself suddenly awake again. Several times I pulled over to the side of the road to 'catch a few winks,' as I said to myself, but would find myself instead writing down words. My partner experienced me as "just not there"; apparently, I would stop in the middle of the kitchen with a pan in my hand and stare fixedly at nothing. After many tests it was determined that I had not had a stroke and that my brain was "100 percent the way it should be." But I was growing tired and I found it difficult to sleep at night. Finally one day I got the words that would turn out to be the end of the piece: "[She] begins the long wait for the harper, the one who will sharpen the lathe, at work by day, at rest in her lap at night, singing the blueprint of possibility." What's that? "At rest in her lap at night?" So be it! And with that, the whole thing came to an end.

When I started to pull together the scraps of paper from the glove compartment of my car, littering the floor around my bed, under my pillow, on the sheets of paper I printed out from my computer, the words stopped rushing about and seemed willing to stay in the order I sensed they had when they'd first shown up. What was needed now was quiet, patient work to find their correct form. I first wrote them out as a poem but the line breaks required the words to give up their momentum; things went better when I worked them as prose, although I had to apply more commas than had seemed necessary when they were little verses. It was odd to work with words I didn't fully understand; and there were so many of them. The work became an exercise in getting rid of some lines, perhaps the



most obscure, but then again I didn't know what made some more obscure than others. Nevertheless, as I kept working with them they began to lose their strangeness and a meaning, admittedly only my interpretation, began to emerge. They were evidently a prayer to the great mother of us all requesting healing. And they bore dark witness to the disaster of nature occurring around us. Their purpose was evocative. It wasn't necessary to understand each line or every image, but it was essential that, to my ear at least, they evoke something.

Kim Chernin is the author of many books in many genres. She has written and published fiction, non-fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry and essays, including *In My Mother's House*; *The Hungry Self*; *Crossing the Border*; *The Flame Bearers*; *My Life As A Boy*. These books are deeply concerned with women's lives, as are all the books she's published. She lives in Point Reyes Station, California, with her life-companion of 30 years, Renate Stendhal.

## THE WISDOM OF THE BREAKDOWN

Cynthia Travis

My son is, by nature, a cheerful person. When he was in high school studying world history, there was a unit on the rise and fall of empires, with inevitable comparisons to the United States. During that time, he would come home uncharacteristically dejected and quiet. One afternoon, he seemed especially sad. I asked him why. He thought for a moment, choosing his words carefully. When he looked up again, his eyes brimmed with tears as he said, "It's just that in previous times, the empires that collapsed didn't take the entire natural world with them."

I must have muttered the requisite *You're right* and *I'm so sorry* but really, what the hell do you say when your child recognizes that Life itself is threatened and no one in charge seems to care? I have carried this conversation like a stone in my heart ever since. It has become the koan at the core of my life.

In Nature, everything is designed to ensure the survival of the Whole. How did we humans step outside of Nature's design? The only three reasons I know of for murder and suicide are illness, addiction and trauma. We're suffering from all three. Most of us alive today are children of the atomic age and so cannot remember a time when the future mattered enough not to risk it. But it goes back farther than that. Centuries of compromised nutrition due to erosion, monocropping, and, in recent decades, industrial farming, and overuse of antibiotics have robbed us of the health we need in order to make competent decisions. Multi-generational trauma has eroded our capacity

to envision a vibrant future and live accordingly. Empire, power, greed and gambling are addicting and now it seems the survival of Life on Earth is on the table. It is significant that men are leading this reckless charge (more prominently than women): we would do well to understand what makes males more prone to distorted judgment (along with heart disease, autism, dyslexia and violence) and we need to ask ourselves how we as parents - especially those of us who are mothers-- have failed to ingrain in our children a love of the Earth and the mandate to protect the Future.

Why are we participating in our own slow murder, and the murder of all that we love? My outrage, my grief, cannot be met by marching, signing petitions, voting, or calling my representatives. Though I still do many of these things, I find it far more comforting to talk to Nature directly and do my best to listen. In 2012 I bought a beautiful, degraded piece of land here in Mendocino County (Northern California). Before the work of restoration and remodeling began, I sat on 'my' hill and listened. It was one of the first times I had had a sense that the land was, indeed, speaking to me and that I could understand what she said. She told me that there were five permanent underground springs and two intermittent ones. I sketched their locations in my journal. When my contractor insisted that he knew the proper location for the construction of a new greenhouse, I told him that the place he suggested was between two springs that the land had showed me. But I was a newcomer to the area, and he insisted he knew best, so I yielded. Three years later, it cost countless remorse-filled sleepless nights and money I did not have in order to build a retaining wall and a system of stepped pools and drains to handle the accumulated water from the springs I had been shown.



*"Edgewalker Sanctuary", 10 Mile River, Ft. Bragg, Ca*

I look at the forests on 'my' land and in this beautiful place that I live and can't help but feel that the trees are disappointed. We have failed them with our ravenous logging, clear cutting and massive lumberyards. We have failed them with our roads that hasten erosion by changing drainage patterns, and with our fences that impede the animals whose presence is integral to forest health. We drown out birdcalls with our machines, and ravage insects and microbes with our mania for poisons.

The reforestation begins in our bellies. The ph of our mouths must be slightly alkaline, so that the bones of our words will be strong. One begins with a pinch of dust on the

tongue, savoring its grit, grateful for the minerals scraping the backs of our teeth. This, too, is art. Slowly, a flicker of recognition will come that feeds the heart without damaging the patience of trees. And while we taste the dust that we will become, there will be no rain. Or too much rain. The wind has been telling us this for years, though we have not listened. There will be no more being-OK of things, no going back, at least in our lifetimes - only more droughts, more flooding, more mourning, more demagogues. We will learn to do whatever the wind asks of us, whatever the rain might have asked if it had been in its right mind, and had arrived in time, in manageable or predictable amounts. There will be signs that the trees are listening, and that the whales and the deer can hear our praises. Just last Tuesday the whales came to 'my' cove and seemed to listen as I played my singing bowls to them - at first a mother and calf, then another adult. The three of them stayed all afternoon, so close to the cliff I could hear them exhale, that great rush of breath that sends a misty plume shooting into the sky. As the music continued, they rolled on their sides and waved their flippers. When I came indoors at twilight, they were still there. Coincidence? Perhaps. Then again, how else can animals communicate with humans except by interacting with them in ways that demonstrate intentionality?

In 2015 a friend said, "When things get really bad, we should go into the mountains and make art for five hundred years, like they did in ancient Japan." I pictured monks in pristine forests building shrines and practicing calligraphy. I liked the ring of it then, and the idea has stayed with me. I told myself I would recognize when the moment came to activate such a plan – at the time it all still seemed at arm's length. Now that the Great Barrier Reef is actively dying, and extreme weather is commonplace; now



that Trump and his cronies are bulldozing the EPA, banking regulations, health care, civil rights, the arts, the media, internet access and diplomacy, well, the emergency is undeniably underway. Our art-making must begin in earnest, though I have not fled to the mountains, but to the sea.

Refugees of weather and war have, by some estimates, surpassed 65 million with projections for climate refugees alone to reach 150 million by 2020<sup>1</sup>. Some refugee children in Sweden have lost the will to live but do not die. As happens with plants that have been too long without soil, the trauma of extended uprooting has pushed these teenagers into impenetrable comas. One day they are fine, the next day they are on life support. This new illness has been named *Uppgivenhetssyndrom* – resignation syndrome.<sup>2</sup> We might consider that the children’s resignation, their apathy, mirrors that of the adults who have failed them, in particular the governments of the countries that have not (yet) fallen into chaos. Mahmoud Darwish’s words appear like images from a dream: *Longing has a country, a family, and an exquisite taste in arranging wildflowers. It has a time chosen with divine care, a quiet mythical time in which figs ripen slowly and the gazelle sleeps next to the wolf in the imagination of the boy who never witnessed a massacre.*<sup>3</sup> In my guilty heart, I give silent thanks that my son did not fall into comatose despair. Given the sheer numbers of refugees swelling humanity’s edges, it may only be a matter of time before the disease of resignation to a futureless future becomes an epidemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Various sources: UNHCR, *The Guardian*, Amnesty International, Environmental Justice Foundation

<sup>2</sup> *Letter From Sweden: The Apathetic*, Rachel Aviv, *New Yorker Magazine*, April 3, 2017

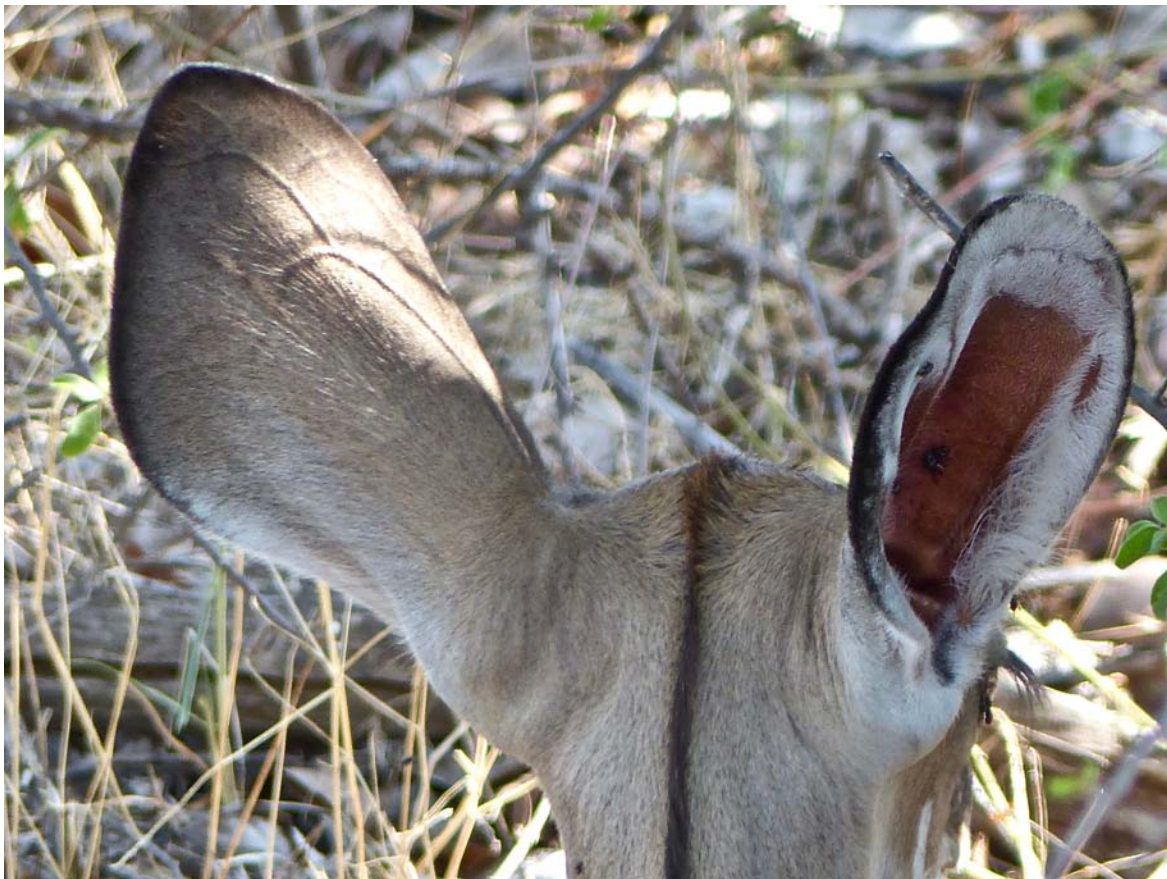
<sup>3</sup> *In the Presence of Absence*, Mahmoud Darwish

John Paul Lederach, considered to be the father of modern day peacebuilding, says that it takes about as long to get out of a conflict as it took to get in. In that case, five hundred years is just the beginning. I imagine that's how long it will take for us to return to ourselves and to the Earth's embrace, for the trees to trust us, for the wind and the ice and the animals to believe us. We must use our art to bow in gratitude. Though this is a plausible first step in repairing our tattered relationship with the Earth, five hundred years of droughts and floods is a very long time for humans. I remember the words of the rabbi one Passover. He was speaking of Moses and the 40-year trek of the Israelites through the desert. "*There is only the long way,*" he told us. "*No shortcuts.*" I am grateful for this wisdom. It has become one of my mantras. *Only the long way. No shortcuts.* Five hundred years on our way to unwinding the spiral of the millennia that we humans have been enslaving the Wild and each other. How does a millennial time span reshape our lives? How does it bend each individual life span to respond to the instantaneous synapses, chemical reactions, bacterial and microbial telegraphy while simultaneously diluting the now until it leaves barely a homeopathic trace in Deep Time? It is essential to yield to this reconfiguration so that it can begin to reshape us now. Contrary to what we have been told, Time is not money. It is the sensory experience of the rhythms of Life. Like Moses, we will practice the art of the impossible. It may take five hundred years to learn it. Until now, we have reserved our practice of the impossible to mean conquering natural limits. Now it is time to add the understanding that it's impossible for us to continue as we are.

Here is what was, apparently, impossible for me last fall: Like so much of what we must repair, it starts with a blunder, a cruelty. I had been reading in bed, reviewing a

manuscript I had just finished, wanting to complete the reading in one go. (It's the story of two men who have been crushed by modernity, but whose love for the natural world revives them. The irony was not wasted on me then or now.) I finished at 2:30 a.m. - too late to sleep, too early to stay up until dawn. As I finally reached over to turn out the light, a mouse scurried across my small room and skittered past my bed, ducking beneath the hem of the comforter that trailed on the floor. At first I didn't see where she had gone because I was too busy leaping to my feet and shouting at her, "NO! NO! YOU CAN'T BE HERE!" I ran for the broom, switched on the overhead lights and slid the dimmer to its brightest position. I pulled the nightstand away from the wall, and the mattress. No mouse. I eased the dresser towards the middle of the room, shouting the whole time, and there she was, cowering in the corner, looking up at me with the full beauty of her wildness and the intelligence of all the mice of all time, unblinking and terrified as our eyes met. Poised with my ludicrous broom, I saw in her terror a seed of acceptance that shamed me. I asked myself out loud, *Is this any way to behave in a drought?* I checked my breathing, relaxed my shoulders and lowered my voice. *Where are my manners?* I asked the mouse, and myself, and added *Please forgive me.* I looked away, then back at the mouse. *I'm sorry,* I told her, *but please understand that you cannot be here.* I thought for a moment and decided to tell her the rest of the truth. *You mice chew things up and poop all over, and I can't live with that because I need to sell this place and move to the ocean, where I belong. There are lots of safe places outside for you to be. Maybe not as warm, but safe nonetheless. I'm so sorry.* I leaned over, opened the door and out she went. As she climbed over the ridge of the threshold, her hips widened a little, and as she disappeared over the edge of the deck, her muscles rippled beneath her fur, which was a lustrous light brown edged in black, with black around her ears. Slowly, I pushed my

dresser back into the corner against the wall. Later, a friend told me that he, too, had had to usher some mice outside. He and his wife had returned from a trip to find a nest filled with young in their bedroom. Unlike me, they had had the good manners to say to the mice, *"I know, the waxing moon is nearly full and the owls are hungrily calling, but don't worry. We'll move you to a safe place."* They had searched outdoors for a protected spot and gently relocated the whole nest, praying for the mouse family's wellbeing. I reminded myself that I was still learning, that at least I had calmed down and the mouse had left, uninjured – that there's only the long way. I sheepishly told myself that 'my' mouse had a good chance of reaching the protection of the nearby hedge, or a corner under the deck, before any owls could swoop down and catch her, but the metallic taste of shame lingered on my tongue.



*Baby Nyala waiting for her mother under a tree, Mashatu, Botswana*

On the eve of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, I heard a talk by a Peruvian teacher who said, *A cancer cell is a cell that has lost its connection and communication with the rest of the body. When we break reciprocity with the Earth, we become a cancer.* I remind myself that the nature of every dilemma reveals its cure. Since my time working in Liberia during the early 2000's my friends and I have referred to this as the Wisdom of the Breakdown: Just as in the wild, antidote plants grow next to poisonous ones, the antidote to our murderous behavior lies at our feet. The severe depletion of our soils has caused an epidemic of digestive—and therefore—immune disorders while our ravaged oceans will soon mean global collapse of fisheries along with potential oxygen depletion that could threaten all life on Earth.<sup>4</sup> The first step to reconnection with Nature is to show respect by reestablishing communication – to observe, acknowledge, listen and respond. And look: the *root* of the word *culture* derives from the Latin *colere*, which means *to inhabit, to cultivate, to honor or worship*. In Middle English, it meant *place tilled*.<sup>5</sup> Culture and cultivation are rooted in the Earth. Life, water and soil are inseparable. Remembering where we came from will free us in unimaginable ways because, by so doing, we will be part of the Whole once again.

Cultures that have 'bought in' to Western thinking have been taught to ignore any personal connection to the Earth on pain of ridicule or death. 'Free trade' means

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<sup>4</sup> "About two-thirds of the planet's total atmospheric oxygen is produced by ocean phytoplankton -- and therefore cessation would result in the depletion of atmospheric oxygen on a global scale. This would likely result in the mass mortality of animals and humans." Dr. Sergei Petrovskii, University of Leicester.  
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/12/151201094120.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary; Wiktionary;



permission to sell the future for profit today. But just one milligram of curiosity and a pinch of gratitude is all it takes to enter into dialogue with the Earth, whether or not you 'believe' in climate change or have experienced Gaia as sentient. Intimacy, in addition to its romantic connotation, can be defined as seeing and knowing someone or something deeply. Why are we no longer intimate with the Earth? What's wrong with sensually, or even sexually, loving the Earth? Why is that considered obscene and the Pacific Gyre is not? We are all, literally, being sickened by those who insist that we who love the Earth must constantly 'prove' that She is generous, wise and miraculous. But "proof" is everywhere. Miracles are the essence of Life. Without them we wouldn't be here. We breathe in and breathe out and live another day. We make love and a child forms. What are these if not miracles?

We have created a culture where it is dangerous to live from the truth of the Earth's wise aliveness. Bacteria communicate continuously, inside and outside of our bodies. The mycelia that connect most plants share nutrients and warn each other of danger. Sightless microbial predators in the soil can sense each other's presence from up to two miles away.<sup>6</sup> Jane Goodall has described how she wept during a visit to a science lab filled with tormented Chimps in cages, and one of them reached through the wires of his cage to wipe away her tears.<sup>7</sup> What kind of madness is it to doubt that the Earth and her myriad life forms can and do communicate with us when they are in constant communication with each other? Certainly it's a madness that merits its own category in the DSM III: Hubristic Suicidal Gaiaphobia.

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<sup>6</sup> Jill Clapperton, PhD, workshop at Paicines Ranch, April 11-15, 2018

<sup>7</sup> *Visions of Caliban: On Chimpanzees and People*, Jane Goodall and Dale Peterson



*Fractal patterns: Giraffes at Ruaha National Park, Tanzania*

A healthy, resilient society is a biomimetic one: fractal, multi-dimensional, dependent on interconnection with multiple, self-similar, random and often incomprehensible invisible, unknown and unknowable elements. This is why the remaining intact remnants of once-vast ecological splendor matter. It is why indigenous languages, stories, rituals, songs and technologies matter as well, for these are the cultural algorithms that translate Life's healthy fractal structures to human understanding, enacted in relationships for us to model our lives on, with each other and with the natural world. To be clear: the world's remaining beleaguered indigenous cultures have their own inherent beauty and sovereign right to exist, on their own terms, for which no justification is necessary. Nevertheless, these precious, intact ways of being

are of especially great consequence now. Their vast knowledge, both practical and esoteric, understands what we in the West do not: how to live in balanced humility with the natural world. In the words of a Navajo colleague: *“Natural Law was here before and will be here after we’re gone. Western law was not here then and will not last.”*

Evolutionarily speaking, this means that the ultra-wealthy are actually, with few exceptions, dismally *unsuccessful* because they are utter failures at symbiosis, truly a burden on society and the natural world. Most of the very poor understand how and why to weave themselves into a vast and deeply personal web of relationships that go beyond survival to include shared meaning and vitality on a scale unknown to most of the world’s one percenters. This is not to romanticize suffering and poverty. This is to view it through a biomimetic lens. The dominance of wealth as a goal and as a socio-economic measure of success is a death knell for all the natural systems the world depends on. Odd, then, that disproportionate wealth confers disproportionate power to continue the damage. In Nature, true power is held within the infinitesimal and the invisible (think microbes, and underground mycelia). Dominance behavior is neither a natural nor an effective way of being. In Nature, dominance, like fire, has a specific, focused – and limited-- purpose. Apex predators such as lions and sharks are not ‘winners’ and their prey ‘losers.’ Each is essential to the balanced functioning of the Whole. The notion of survival of the fittest is misleading because it has been de-contextualized and spun to mean that being at the top is the best place to be. But being at the ‘top’, in the human context, means being without a functional niche -- a very dangerous place, indeed. Predators only survive if there is prey. Total dominance leads

to starvation. (Imbalance causes extinction. Complexity (not complication) creates vitality. Fractals, webs and symbionts are Nature's insurance policy.)

People like Trump, the Koch brothers, Mugabe, Putin, Carlos Slim and other bandits are the suicide bombers of Life on Earth. No need to wait until the afterlife for their reward. They can grab pussies, silence opposition and bankrupt countries with equal impunity right now. But they cannot hide behind the curtain of power indefinitely because it is not made of whole cloth. It is just a fragment, and a fragment cannot survive much less thrive on its own. Without the servants, the home security companies, the fire departments, the emergency room doctors, the car manufacturers and minimum wage factory workers, and yes, the miners and the Earth they gouge, the 1% would perish--which they will, along with everything else. A healthy, resilient culture is one whose presence benefits at least as many elements as it depends on. A healthy system means, among other things, that aberrants cannot co-opt it. In Nature, unhealthy cells are induced by either mitochondria or bacteria to, literally, sacrifice themselves.<sup>8</sup> It's interesting to speculate how this would play out biomimetically in humans.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Zachary Bush, MD, in an interview with Dr. Joseph Mercola, April 9, 2017  
<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2017/04/09/soil-microbes-intracellular-communication-affects-health.aspx>



*Namibia from the air. (Notice the dry riverbed and fractal vegetation patterns, indicating underground water. In Namibia, on average, it rains less than five inches per year.)*

The quest for peace, for healing, for health and resilience is a quest for recognizable, exquisitely beautiful, self-replicating patterns of reciprocity. Robust biomimetic social and economic models show us where there are tears in the tattered bio-fabric of Western culture--- the information gaps, the silent zones, the extinctions, the disease patterns, the crime statistics and, yes, the global system of banking and commerce. We need to re-learn to see and engage with what feeds and sustains all Life rather than what we can extract for profit.

Those who negotiate business deals, trade agreements and peace treaties, those who pass laws and create media do not include, much less satisfy, the communities affected

by their actions. The stakeholders at the wide base of the social pyramid and the even vaster base of the ecological pyramid, i.e. those most directly and deeply affected by the decisions made by the small subset of white males within the subset of a single species at the pyramid's top are not asked for their input. Unintended consequences are simply the cost of doing business. The individuals, the communities (human and non) who are inevitably or intentionally excluded become invisible, voiceless. But without those 'invisibles,' Life could not continue. And, those voiceless invisible ones must live the consequences of top-down decisions day by interminable day, seeing their killers on every street corner. Mahmoud Darwish wrote: *You wonder: What kind of a linguistic or legal wunderkind could formulate a peace treaty and good neighborliness between a palace and a shack, between a guard and a prisoner?*<sup>9</sup> I would add: *between a human and a tree?*

What would the mice tell us if we asked them? And the whales, and the fungi?

Imagine what might happen if developers consulted the ancestors of a plot of land; spoke with potential occupants of a building; or considered the effect of the materials they use on sub-soil microbes. Imagine if peace treaties pondered seven generations hence, along with the unquiet dead, the widows and orphans, the traumatized veterans, and the displaced masses, including devastated forests and threatened species squeezed into fragments of degraded and diminished habitat. A whole new paradigm of negotiation must be re-invented, one that considers the Whole first and foremost, and includes All Beings across time.

A group of people I know is working feverishly (ha) to restore the Earth's pre-global-warming temperature within the next twenty years by mechanically removing carbon from the atmosphere. They want our children and grandchildren to have the

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<sup>9</sup> *In the Presence of Absence*, Mahmoud Darwish

climate we were born with. I support and applaud them. They have gathered the world's most brilliant minds and are busily calculating metric tons of sequesterable carbon, cap-and-trade schemes, carbon injection, and other strategies, economic, political and scientific, for removing enough carbon over the next 20 years to bring the global CO<sub>2</sub> level down to 300 ppm. They have at their fingertips every conceivable statistical and financial argument to make it not only possible but irresistible for everyone, of every political stripe, to embrace mechanical and natural removal of carbon from the atmosphere and a warp-speed switch to renewables. I love them for their brilliance and especially for their fierce devotion. And yet... theirs is a mechanized solution that relies on science, politics, and unsustainable, unforgivable, western economic models in order to achieve the impossible by attempting to solve the problems we created from within the old paradigm of separation and dominion. I assume that this mechanistic scrambling is, at its heart, a howl of grief, and the manic calculations are choruses of praise. And, yet, the machinery of carbon sequestration would be enhanced immeasurably - and may not work without - a relational shift as well. The Earth is a Sentient Being. Mechanization of our relationship to her has caused lethal harm. She/He/It/We are her body. We are one of countless expressions of Life's intricate infinity, interacting with itself. We can and must remember how to live from that understanding.





*Homes in the desert, Damaraland, Namibia*

As we begin to awaken from the trance of materialism and the myth of the rugged individual, the imperatives of deep ecological and social change seem overwhelming. We do what we can, but it's often hard to feel the tangible, cumulative reach of each ameliorative gesture day to day: that bottle we recycle, that thing we don't buy, that ride we share... playing music to whales.





*Sand dune, Namibia*

But in modern times, we have not, *as a way of living*, expressed our devotion to Earth. She is suffering without us, and we without Her. We do not know-- have not studied and pay no attention to-- what is possible when we remember that the Earth is alive and sentient beyond our imagining. We have not sought to engage with the responsive capacity of the Earth in order to find out what healing could occur if we were to humbly seek alliance with Her by singing Her praises, asking Her permission, and requesting Her guidance. Now that the Doomsday Clock has moved intolerably close to midnight, it's time to find out.



*West African sculpture, Mendocino Coast*



**Cynthia Travis** - is a writer and documentary filmmaker, and is Founder & President of the non-profit peacebuilding organization *everyday gandhis* ([www.everydaygandhis.org](http://www.everydaygandhis.org)). Since 2004, peacebuilders from *everyday gandhis* have been working with traditional communities, women and ex-combatants in Liberia, West Africa, and with selected schools and communities in the US. All projects arise from dreams and community dialogue. She recently launched the new blog, *Earth Altar* ([www.earth-altar.org](http://www.earth-altar.org)). In a former life she was a teacher and mediation trainer for children in California and New Mexico. She lives on the Mendocino Coast.

**Deena Metzger**

## **CAN THE WORLD MEND IN THIS BODY?**

Between the Worlds  
Flesh like metal, spirit like mist,  
teach me the gait  
of the luminous wolves drinking  
from the dark river.  
In those waters the stones sing.  
Can the world mend  
in this body?  
~ Deena Metzger, *Ruin and Beauty*

Can the world mend in this body?

These last lines of the poem do not answer "What does it mean, to heal?" but they open the discussion by inquiring if the World can mend, can heal. If we imagine it can, we have to consider what illnesses or anguishes it is suffering, where and how it is broken and whether someone like me or you can bring some healing to the world. Not by enacting anything toward the World as if it were an object outside the poet or speaker, but by some mysterious process within the body of the speaker, perhaps by healing herself or performing acts of healing within or on behalf of her body, a human body.

Or maybe the poem is implying that we cannot know by ourselves what healing might be, but that we have to go to other ways of knowing, stepping out of our linear minds to stand between the worlds so that the luminous wolves and the singing stones can teach us. Or mend us? Or heal us?

That would certainly mean that the more conventional healing activities which have taken so very much focus in the last years as our little worlds contract into little jewels of self-concern might not be the answers at all. I do not think the singing stones, luminous wolves or the dark river will inform us to seek medical advice or engage in self-care. We will not come to health through taking supplements, exercising, getting enough sleep, bathing or not bathing regularly, eating or not eating kale or salmon, signing four petitions a day, contributing to two good causes a week, eliminating stress – lots of luck or any of the myriad self-help – can/will no one help us? – regimens. These activities may ease human lives and may make the world a better place for humans by our definitions – they still won't heal us. Or the World. Whatever healing is. Which is the great unanswerable question ahead of us.

When I had breast cancer in 1977, I wanted to heal, wanted my body and soul to heal, that is regain its autonomy, rid itself of the invader, as I had wanted my body and soul to heal, regain its autonomy, rid itself of the invader, after I was raped in 1969 at gun point at the community college where I had just finished entering grades and was preparing, by dumping the contents of my purse on my desk, to put on a cap and gown for the very first time (I hadn't attended any of

my university graduations) when I was interrupted by a gun to my temple held by a masked (white) man.

What I didn't immediately understand, forty-eight and then forty years ago was that healing the world would be the most direct way of healing myself, as the number of women who can expect to be raped in their lifetimes and the number of women who can expect to have breast cancer is about the same —about one in five—and that is not the natural order. So if we heal the World ... I was still caught by the adamant conviction that one heals oneself before tackling others' difficulties (no matter, it seems, how long it will take for one to heal), extending the 'wisdom' of the 'enlightened' flight attendant who commands us to put on our oxygen mask before we assist another. Now I'm not so sure. Yes, after rape I had to return to functioning and that took a year or so. But had I for one moment taken my eye off and removed my heart from the other women who had been and were being raped, now that I knew what such an experience meant to one's self, I would not have healed. To heal is a verb that reaches out to the community and the entire World. It is a verb that does not conjugate with first person singular.

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I gave a Keynote address for the Annual Conference of the American Holistic Medical Association entitled 'The Soul of Medicine' in 2004, suggesting that the patients we would be discussing were (Western) Medicine itself and the Earth. Both patients were gravely ill, but the Earth especially.

As a medicine woman, I am no less responsible for the World than I am for the man or woman who seeks my help because she or he has cancer or is suffering from panic attacks. And I am also aware that what I do on behalf of healing any individual or being must also be healing, even if not directly extended, for the World itself. The medicine path into which we are being initiated insists that each word and activity has to be healing by its nature so that the single gesture has consequences in all the realms.

*Holistic medicine is committed to seeing the patient as a whole and to attending mind, body and spirit in the activity of healing. Now we are required to go another step and see that in healing the patient, we are given the opportunity to treat the World, as well.*

*It is no accident that so many of the illnesses that we are suffering at this time in history are analogous to social and global ills, and so in treating the individual we are being trained and called to bring healing to the society at large. No matter our politics, philosophy or perspective, we can't avoid being conscious of the implications of the co-incidence of symptoms and complexes in individuals and in the society. And seeing how different diseases ravage the body, we understand the ways they ravage the earth, the soul and the society. This is essential wisdom that the physician can bring to the World.*

*This and the realization that Healing is a real event. Complex and multi-leveled. To experience its reality is to bring medicine into the realm of spiritual activity. Healing occurs in a harmonious state of joint consciousness. The healer and afflicted one, together, carry the*

*wisdom, knowledge, skill and energy to harmonize relationships and situations that are disquieted.*

That was fourteen years ago. I gave the talk and one thing led to another as they do and I entered another phase of being a healer. It seems I took the talk I gave seriously and in relation with others—physicians, psychologists, healers of all sorts—took on the patients described in my talk as my/our own. It would have been irresponsible, wouldn't it, to talk about Medicine, Earth and the World as our patients, and then to take them on only for the night, then leave them in an overcrowded ER without anyone who knew how to treat their ailments and a staff who, discovering quickly that neither Medicine nor World had insurance policies, decided there was nothing to be done for them. Leaving the two where? On the street? With the other undocumented and uninsured?

Medical and health practitioners, medicine people and healers who gathered around the crisis continue to meet in council. We have developed a set of 19 questions of concern to guide us:

1. How can medical people also be medicine people?
2. How can medical people remember their calling to be healers?
3. How can spirit and earth-centered ways be fundamental to medical practice?
4. How can we restore right relationship with the Earth as essential to all healing?
5. How can we incorporate indigenous wisdom traditions, ceremonies and rituals into medical treatment?
6. How can we restore the role of community as integral to healing?
7. How can physicians and health practitioners serve the community in the best ways that medicine persons served their tribes or indigenous communities?
8. How can the patient's individual and cultural wisdom be central to the healing process?
9. How can we recognize that individuals may carry an illness on behalf of family and community and the healing on behalf all beings?
10. How can we develop practices where Story is central to revealing the nature of illness and the paths toward healing?
11. How can we take the war mindset and language out of medical practice?
12. How can we ensure our medical practices and treatments do no harm to people or the environment?
13. Can we bear witness to the harm created by Corporate, Big Pharma, Insurance and Government control of the medical system?
14. Can we bear witness to iatrogenesis as the third leading cause of death in this country and the cascading harm it creates in our communities?
15. How can we cease the recurring reenactment of colonization in medical practices?
16. Can we speak openly, honestly and from the heart about the grief and vision we carry about contemporary medical ways?
17. Can we examine, together, what we want to change and what we must reject?
18. How can we bring ReVisioning understanding to medical training?
19. What is our calling as healing presences at this time in history?

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We aren't the only ones who have taken on these patients, Earth and Medicine, but we are among those who knew we couldn't abandon them and so my/our lives changed and no matter what and whom else we had to attend, these two and their cries of pain and distress had to be attended. Even if we didn't know what to do. We had to ask the question: what heals? Carrying this question is a beginning.

At the time of the Keynote in 2004, I had had some thoughts of what heals or what healing is, and so had ended the talk with some encouragement:

*Healing is not necessarily restoring the original condition. It is not returning to paradise. Healing is helping to align the individual with the trajectory of the soul. Healing is the field of beauty through which the details of the larger purpose of an individual's current life in relationship to his//her own history, ancestors, spirits, the present, the future, and global healing are revealed and enacted.*

*Now, what about our gravely ill patients who are the subject of these grand rounds? As it happens, these patients cannot go through the process of transformation necessary for healing on their own. How shall we assist them? What healing can we offer them?*

*We have come to their bedside in community. This is pleasing to them. It affirms that we know something of the relationship between all beings. We have come with heartbreak and compassion and offer ourselves for healing on their behalf. This pleases them. We are not separating ourselves from their fate. We have undertaken the healing of every aspect of their beings. We are working on the cellular level. We are taking our lives down to the marrow.*

*There is a strong possibility that our beloved patients will survive if we continue to call the soul of medicine to us. There is a good possibility that healing will come as we offer to walk the path of a healer and the path of the seeker. Together we stand by our invitation to the soul of medicine, that it enter into us. We provide the soul of medicine a permanent home from which all healing can emerge. The prognosis for the world is good. We see that healing is in our hands.*

It is fourteen years later and my/our patients have not improved. Rather, their conditions have worsened. Plagues of mental illness are adding to the physical conditions affecting humans, non-humans, Western Medicine and the Earth. There is little sanity left in the atmosphere, which is increasingly violent and aggressive in all ways. Medical practice as we knew it, or imagined it – kind, compassionate, intimate, caring response to suffering – has been subsumed by robots, drones, formulae, arbitrary standards and regulations, in the service of a bookkeeping system that benefits the few and does great harm. We can call the condition that Western Medicine is suffering in this country soul loss.

The World and Earth are convulsing as a result of a myriad toxins that we secrete relentlessly. And we brainwash ourselves, insisting our way of life is healthy, better than life has ever been, is progress. We are evolving and progressing, we tell ourselves, and so the World and Earth must be doing so, as well. But they are not.



So, then, what is healing? What does it mean to heal? To extend healing to self or others? What is the nature of healing? Or, what modes will heal these conditions? Or, what is the entity that is healing or being healed? What does healing look like? How will we know when our approach is appropriate? Or real? These are not easy questions to answer and so we must address all of them, continuously.

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I learned a few things from having had cancer. I learned that cancer, a physical phenomenon in an individual's life, is also a condition in the world. I learned that humans are living cancerous lives. I learned that cancer is a dynamic in Western culture. An imperialist dynamic. That's a short hand, we'll use it for now.

I learned that if I studied the broad, deep and complex etiology of cancer I would find a healing path. I needed to know the nature of it, how the disease manifested in the body and what might ease, heal or cure. But I also needed to understand the illness from other perspectives, how ~~different~~ Native American medicine people from different tribes would understand the nature of the illness, its causes and treatments, or how a Southern African Ndebele or Shona nganga (medicine person) might meet the illness if uninfluenced by Western medicine. Or, most especially, how a patient's ancestors or lineage understood illness and cancer, in this instance, in particular.

I also needed to consider the roles that my own history, my people's history, my country's history, play in this illness. And then the environmental impact, the nature of the air I breathe, the earth I walk on, the food I eat. I needed to consider the state of being of the natural world around me and to consider my spiritual life, the Story I am living, and the dreams that come to me. Everything about my life matters as part of this story and my family's lives and my ancestors. I had to know everything that affected my life and the lives of others.

Once I brought all of this together the illness itself would dictate the path of its own healing – because that is its desire – and following that path would be answering a call, for which illness was the means, to live my own life to bring healing to the Earth and/or the World. All of this would be possible, if I were faithful to a certain fundamental principle: What I sought or enacted on my own behalf needed to be equally beneficial for my family and community, for the World, for the Earth, for all beings and the future. Cancer that devoured everything taught me to live on behalf of and consider all beings.

I learned that healing required a broad and inclusive view as outlined above and the long view—back into history and forward into the future. If I didn't examine history and didn't consider the possible implications of medical treatment for others—the poor fish with lesions, the Earth—I would inevitably be acting against my own health. Five, ten, twenty years is not a long view. Rather, what people have understood, over centuries, about vitality and restoration, about which treatments or responses are effective and harmless is essential knowledge.

Maybe I had cancer because my childhood physician had been fascinated with the fluoroscopy machine and it took many years to discover and take seriously the fact that radiation causes cancer. He needed a long view.

Or maybe it was caused by taking the first birth control pills and it took some years to discover that the dosages I was given ~~using~~ caused cancer. I also learned over time that the treatment of cancer—kill all the cancer cells as quickly as possible and try not to kill the patient in the short term or the long term—is not a healing approach.

I learned that trying to kill off all the cancers is in a thousand ways adding to the toxicity and pollution that is destroying the earth and causing cancer. I quickly saw that participating in a culture of killing, which was adding to the increasing melee, when I was trying to prevent the crazed cancer cell from killing me, was not a treatment of choice. I learned that I couldn't heal from cancer if my life and treatment were causing cancer. I had to stop acting like a deranged cancer cell.

Then, over time, I learned a secret. I learned that the cancer cell didn't want to be a cancer cell. I learned that the cancer cell is the first victim of pollution, toxicity and environmental degradation. I learned the cancer cell wanted to be healed, restored, returned to its original nature.

And so?

What is healing? What does it mean, to heal? What does it mean to heal...?

Restore original nature!

What does that mean?

There is something I gradually came to recognize I had gotten wrong in the speech to the AHMA. Something I had not understood sufficiently:

*Healing is not necessarily restoring the original condition. It is not returning to paradise*

Healing *is* restoring the original condition, but it is not seeking some imagined paradise. When I questioned restoring the original condition, the way we were before the illness, or the accident, or when we were young, I meant healing was not having the body at forty that I had had at thirty-nine or twenty-five. It was not having two breasts again after one was removed. It was not being wrinkle free. It was not looking, acting, or thinking like a girl or a young woman.

I was forty years old. I was a mother. I had to know what it meant to be a Mother. I had to understand what the Mother is. I had to think about caring about and caring for and taking care of the world and the Mother. First.

About eight years later, as I was entering the dining room at Omega Institute where I was about to lead a workshop, a young woman approached me and said, "Thank you for being an elder."



Why did she say that? Did she know me? Was it my graying hair now entirely white? I was taken aback. I haven't volunteered, I thought. But she had turned away so I couldn't challenge her and so I was left with that injunction: Be an elder. After all, she was a young woman and I, as an elder—I was already getting the hang of it—was obligated to her and the future.

And so, I have spent the years since trying to understand what it means to be an elder and how to be responsible to it. At such a time. In such a world, a world increasingly influenced by a culture that has no elders and no respect for elders at a time when we need elders if we are going to heal. Original peoples respected elders. Aha, here we are! *Restore original nature*. Indigenous wisdom. Elders. The old, old ways.

The cancer cell was once a functional, cooperative, life-giving entity. It was a breast cell, a kidney cell, a prostate, a bone or pancreatic cell, working with other like-minded cells, giving and sustaining a larger life. It did its work and the larger organism, composed of its kin, survived. Until the organism tired, wore out, as it must in all of us in its own time. Until then, the cell did its work together with the others—it could accomplish nothing, nothing, nothing, on its own. And maybe we can even say the cells, together, did it joyously. That joy is what we call the life force.

And then the cells, our bodies, our lives, our culture, our world, all were undone. The life force, the natural world, original nature was attacked, distorted, diminished and abandoned in favor of ways that are human-centered, artificial, inorganic, manufactured, manipulated, all life threatened.

There we have it. When I had cancer, I didn't know how to transform the cancer cell, so I cut it out. Surgery on my body, a mastectomy. Then I sought out the cancers in my thinking and in actions and did my best to change my life.

I developed a mantra: Heal the life and the life will heal you. I was only thinking of that for myself, for individuals, in the beginning. As if I/anyone could heal without considering the whole field in which I was living and from which cancer emanates. The cancerous world that, without my knowledge, emanated also from my activities and was making me ill.

So at first it was simple, like self-help steps: exercise, eat differently, give up stress, find other work, leave the city etc. etc. But then it deepened. So many had cancer, more each day, why? Could I possibly be well if the field was profoundly injured? While I was exercising, the poisons were accumulating. While I was meditating, a thousand ways of killing were being developed. While I was worrying about the balance of supplements, you were being diagnosed with cancer. How could I possibly think I could heal separately from you?

I listened more deeply. I hadn't said, Heal my life and my life will heal me. I had said, Heal the life and the (healed) life will heal us. So I had to examine my life. Examine our lives. Examine the culture? Bear witness. Look at the suffering of the Earth and the World. Humans and non-humans. Those living now and in the future.

What are the cancerous forces? From what do they originate? How do I collude with the destructive forces in the culture? What is the antidote?

Divest. Detach. Undo.

Tobi Fishel, Ph.D., a colleague who participates in ReVisioning Medicine, dreams billboards. One billboard which now directs our lives is “Stop all poisons.”

Easy and noble to say – damned hard to practice.

The spirits upped the ante and sent her/us another billboard: “No compromises.”

I get it.

What does it mean to heal?

It means, Stop All Poisons.

To heal, to heal self and others, to heal World and Earth, means stop making ourselves and each other and all beings ill.

Stop all poisons. No compromises.

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## **MEDICINE WAYS FOR THE WORST OF TIMES**

There is no way we can win against the elementals.  
They will take us down by our own hands.  
Uranium belongs to the realm of Oya. Everyone knows  
you don't mess with Oya.  
Earthquake. Tornado. Lightning.  
Storms of all sorts describe her even temperament.  
The EarthSea Mother rises up, despite her pain.  
There is no telling what will occur and no restraint. It is all herself.  
She does not make those divisions we insist are there.

EarthSea Mother, Fukushima and the waters at the Columbia Gorge.  
Fire next time? Burning waters.

Warning:

“If you eat a hundred pounds of fish from the Columbia river a year, one pound every three or four day, the normal and sacred diet ...”

Cancer is one name for her rage.

There is nowhere we can go.

She is everywhere. Didn't you know?

The Spirits are sassy. That line in the water  
between Japan and the USA isn't firm enough to stop her,  
nor the legal border between Oregon and Washington.  
And, temporarily, or forever, she is in this body. See?  
If and when she rises and tries to rid herself of the fires ...

Beware.

Sometimes a cloud is just a cloud,  
and sometimes it's the entire sky racking down endlessly.  
Don't get lost in minutiae while the world is destructing,  
Be aware that you are destroying your little life,  
and also the ten gold finches on the arc of the metal chair,  
and the humming bird dipping  
into the waters bubbling from the Buddha fountain.  
Another thing: let us not argue so that peace can descend.

The best medicine has not been invented yet,  
but you know what it is and it takes you  
completely by surprise. All the fevers,  
tumors and agonies were created just for it to emerge.  
How else will it get into the world?  
Do you want to wait until you are struck down?  
Or do you want to try to carry it now  
on behalf of what you love inconsolably – the Earth.



**Deena Metzger** has been writing for over fifty years. Story is her medicine. Her latest novel, *A Rain of Night Birds*, a confrontation between indigenous knowledge and the modern scientific mind, bears witness: climate change arises from the same colonial mind that enacted genocide on the Native people of this country. It was published on Earth Day, April 22, 2017. Her other novels include *La Negra y Blanca* (2012 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award for Excellence in Literature), *The Other Hand*, *Doors: A Fiction for Jazz Horn and Feral*. Other books are *Ruin and Beauty: New and Selected Poems*; *Entering the Ghost River: Meditations on the Theory and Practice of Healing* and *Tree: Essays and Pieces*.

## QUITTING CHEMO\*

Verena Stefan

### Quitting Chemo

December 31, 2016:

*On a big city street, I come face to face with an old man, soft white hair on both sides of his face, soft round cheeks, incredibly sweet smile and attitude. He looks me in the eye with such tenderness and benevolence as I've never experienced before. We are actually lying face to face on our bellies on a sidewalk.*

*He asks: "What's going on with you? What's at stake?" Waving one hand over me with a friendly smile, as if he wanted to indicate: this (chickenpox) is not such a big deal after all."*

*"I don't know," I say, "I don't know yet."*

*He is nodding, seriously: "I see," and wants to get up.*

*"Yes, I know!" I exclaim with the next breath: "I don't want my body to be intoxicated any longer. I want to stop chemo."*

*"Oh?" He says, surprised and getting more serious. "I see."*

*I feel that my answer is taking us to a different level and would like to go on talking but he is already walking away, talking into a cell phone on his left ear. I know he is delivering my decision to higher spiritual guides.*

In January 2017, I tell my oncologist that I wish to quit chemotherapy. I am relying on the messenger of my dream, feeling backed up by it. However, once inside the hospital, in a small examination room, I feel the pull of the institution. The oncologist is not pleased with my announcement. According to her, the cancer might take over rapidly in my body, especially in the liver.

“I would consider radiation, should there be more brain tumors,” I tell her as she washes her hands and dries them with a paper towel. “And I would continue to do the CAT scans and the brain MRI’s.”

“Why would you want to do the scans if you don’t continue with the treatments?” she retorts, turning her whole body abruptly to face me. I am struck dumb. Does she mean to refuse doing follow-ups if I don’t continue chemotherapy?

“Would you reconsider your decision until we meet for the results of the last scans?” she asks. I nod. I’ll think about it. That’s as much as I can manage to end this conversation without overreacting.

Oncologists brandish the threat of death without chemotherapy here. Having lived fifty years in Switzerland and Germany before coming to Montreal I was used to complementary medicine, a combination of allopathic, naturopathic and homeopathic approaches. In Montreal I have had to face a rather dismissive attitude toward complementary medicine.

The doctor and I meet again a week later both knowing a decision will be taken. My friend Ginette is with me. The oncologist enters the room with her usual friendly smile, stops in front of Ginette, introduces herself and offers a hand shake. I hold my breath. It took her several years before she greeted Lise, the woman at my side who takes notes and asks questions. I can’t remember a handshake between them. A murky sensation is creeping up my spine. I can feel the pull: Look, how friendly we are! Be-a-good-girl, do-as-we-say.

The oncologist repeats her concern about possible liver deterioration within the next three months. If that should occur, the liver won’t be able to deal with another chemotherapy, and she won’t be able to do anything more for me. She wants me to understand the facts fully. I reassure her that I take full responsibility for my decision. That I’d like to take that weight off her shoulders. “You can’t,” she says. “The weight is there, but that’s ok.”

For many people cancer has turned into a chronic disease and can be treated with long-term chemotherapy. I have benefitted from it myself. But with the dream message a shift has taken place. A veil is lifting. It is a daring decision I am taking. A deep breath moves through me pushing me to stand on my hind legs. Sniffing a fresh breeze. The salty taste of freedom, of setting off towards a new shore- or towards the other shore.

I wish to take my life back into my own hands, my whole life. I am taking back the part that had started to rely on the treatments. They may prolong your life all right but you hand over a big part of your innate vitality. You forget what you know. You let the drug handle it. The drug is a dimmer. It attenuates your life force, your knowledge. It suffocates your own voice. Fills your mind with fog and fatigue (e.g. maybe slack off in your daily Qi Gong practice to renew life force and build up energy).

Walking away I can feel the hospital at my back and everything I no longer have to do. When you enter the cancer clinic a huge machine grabs you. You have to follow the machine's programmed orders step by step. Between individual steps you still meet a real human being from time to time. You still have a sheet of paper in your hands that you hand over to the receptionist for the blood test. The receptionists at all the desks are now typically staring at a computer screen with furrowed brows, tense backs, tense shoulders.

After the blood test you have to wave your health insurance card in front of a check-in screen. You have to hold it at the right angle so that a red vertical line on the screen hits its bar code. Your first name and the first three letters of your last one appear on the screen. One of the many dissociating moments of the day. "Hi Verena," you say to the screen. Everybody fiddles with their card to hit the right angle for the machine. Volunteers are ready to help. Like with bank machines, in super markets and airports you have to learn to check yourself in and then "be in the system." After that, you head over to reception and hand over the hospital card to a live secretary to be registered for a doctor's appointment or

a treatment. Then you take a seat and wait amidst the piercing Ding-Dong from loudspeakers and human voices calling patients into doctors' offices. In terms of noise level it is not that different from a bus terminal. The waiting hall is full. Each and every person waiting there has cancer. Treatment rooms are full, the machines are running, the drips are dripping drip-drip-drip.

There is a poster in some examination rooms that announces: *Your chemo day*. It shows picture by picture how chemotherapy is applied to a smiling female patient by a smiling female nurse. They suggest a friendly procedure and an easy-going treatment. The pictures don't inform you about dizziness, nausea and fatigue, to name some of the milder side effects. Nor the constant lack of energy that sometimes morphs into listlessness. There is no such thing as *your* chemo day. The possessive pronoun doesn't apply. A chemo day is not an achievement or a cherished belonging. It is neither inspiring nor nourishing.

The nurses are busy administering different drugs for different patients, putting on and taking off light blue disposable coats, blue rubber gloves, a mouth protection or even a transparent visor that makes them look like a blend of a police officer and a medieval knight. They put on the visor to protect their face in case a plastic bag breaks and toxic medication splashes at them. "It happens rarely," one of the nurses explains, "the technology has been improved. But nonetheless we are exposed to the chemicals eight hours a day." They have to check the computerized machine that times the different drips. From time to time the machines are replaced by new models. Pharmaceutical computer technicians, a female technician in high heels and a tight black evening dress and a male one in a banker's outfit give instructions and supervise the correct procedure. The nurses have to learn the programming of the intricate machine. They are responsible for setting the exact timing and dosage for the medication. For weeks, their gaze stays fixed on the slim screens when they approach my seat. To serve the machine properly is paramount. Once the procedure has turned into routine, their extreme stress level lowers. They are again able to switch their gaze between machine and patient.

The small plastic bags with the toxic drug and the saline solution dangle from the IV stand. Just looking at them makes me nauseous. The fact that I'll deliver part of the toxins that drip into my blood stream with my urine into the water table and will add to the pollution of the planet is utterly depressing. In bad moments, it makes me feel like a collaborator with Big Pharma. Consider non-recyclable waste alone: plastic bags, tubes, syringes, gloves, coats and visors. From there it is only one step to despair about the situation of the planet, its cynical destruction by corporate companies. Chemo waste is burnt at a very high temperature, I hear. Where? How? How are the emissions dealt with? Is the heat generated used for a good purpose?

I haven't learned how the toxic liquid of chemotherapy running through my veins actually works on my cells, except that it is meant to kill any fast-growing cancer cells in my organs or tissues. The information I get, first from the hospital pharmacist, then from the internet, speaks of possible side effects only. It feels like murky offshore business.

What about the depths and hollows and cavities of my body, the veins sunken or vanished, the mucus membrane, the intestinal lining, my muscle tone? The streaked and brittle nails, the constantly broken skin on my fingertips-- all that I can see with my eye. It is the invisible damage that worries me more. For each side effect there is a pill, which might have another side effect for which there is another pill to pop into a patient's mouth. "I feel nauseous when I approach the hospital," I once told the oncologist. She nodded smiling: "We have a pill for that!"

On a chemo day, a chemo burn may occur. I feel a strong sensation of burning as soon as the new drip with Navelbine starts. The nurse immediately increases the flow of the saline solution. Later the area around the IV needle starts hurting and gets numb; the nurse wraps my forearm in a warm, moist towel. Navelbine takes only ten minutes to run; the flushing with saline solution will require another twenty to thirty minutes. The last minute of vein-flushing I sense a huge pressure



and congestion all around my chest as well as muscular pain. There is congestion in the head, too, and a chill again.

Without the monthly trips to the hospital a spell is lifting. In the space of freed energy, the connections to my body's memories grow stronger. As I did as a small child I am pulling my hand away from an unwanted grip and guidance. I am repeating one of my earliest gestures, an early manifestation of my desire for autonomy and freedom: I want to walk by myself.

I can still feel the pull of the institution at my back. I am overwhelmed by my decision, and shaky. Can I do without their suggestions, their promised safety nets? What will become of me?

With time, out of the growing distance of time and space, something new is being born. It is tender like gossamer wings. Hopefully it will become as strong as a spider's web. For the time being I feel its fragility.

I'll never again have to lie in a comfortable reclining chair looking up at the plastic bags dangling from the drip stand to my right and wait until the toxic substance has entered my body, drop by drop, through the tube plugged into the port in my chest. Never again will I have to feel the venom seep into my blood and into layers of body tissue. ( I often wondered why the nurse would squeeze the bag repeatedly at the end of a 30-minute treatment with Herceptin, pressing out every single drop. "One of these bags is worth 2000\$," she informed me. A sick feeling. How much profit is the pharmaceutical industry making) Life inside the body turned into wasteland, greyish and chemically alien. A pasty, lifeless skin and the smell of burned rubber. I want my life back in full colour and with all my cells sparkling.

No more chemo-related questions to answer: Tingling, numbness in fingertips and toes? Mouth sores? Any rash? Hives? Dizziness? Shortness of breath?

“It feels like small cushions under my toes,” I say. The nurse is nodding and ticking it off on her form. “Do you still feel the floor under your feet?” she asks. That would be the next stage, I assume. She doesn’t ask how do I feel with those padded toes, whether they make me feel insecure or anxious? It is a given that they do. Each question is a statement of what has happened or might change in my body. The body is rearranged and composed anew: This is how your future body will look and feel, disturbed and distorted by chemotherapy. The patient is supposed to familiarize her or himself with the drawbacks or losses, all for the greater good, the destruction of cancer cells. Like the proverbial frog put to boil in a pot with cold water getting gradually used to the heat until it is too late to jump out. With or despite chemo thirty percent of the cancer cells will stay in a patient’s body anyway. Who or what is taking care of the remaining thirty percent? My immune system, the very immune system that is damaged by chemotherapy. On and on the vicious circle churns in my mind.

With friends we share stories of fever, cuts, infections, accidents, fractures. Even vomiting or diarrhea are the stuff of dramatic and comic accounts. Trouble the teeth can give us offers great storytelling; everybody can chime in. The routine of treatment after chemo treatment is difficult to communicate. It is a downer. It is not a riveting story to share with friends. No sharing, more isolation.

Or could it be the myth of the descent to the underworld and finding the way back up? But this is not a heroine’s inner journey or a vision quest. It is a chemically imposed descent into a wasteland. Chemotherapy lacks the human dimension of myth. There is no space for the soul in the experience. The foggy mind and draining fatigue make it difficult to connect with the creative and spiritual realm.

There are no nature-related metaphors in chemotherapy

The pattern of illness and healing is reversed. The body’s self-healing capacity and self-regulation are silenced. White blood cells that normally deal with a cold or an infection are hit by chemo toxins, too. The white blood cell count drops. The body becomes more vulnerable if not defenseless.

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I am still walking but don't know whether I want to continue being alive or not. What exactly is my life? What does strength mean? And what am I meant to do here for the time being? Love for my life companion of twenty years is growing daily. Gratitude for the good life we share is paired with the distress of leaving her behind. The love relationship will come to an end because my life will come to an end in the foreseeable future. When I move closer to that thought my heart clenches. I turn my head abruptly around as if I could look away from it. We don't talk of this often. What else can be said than: I don't want to lose you, I don't want to leave you?

It has become difficult again to believe that I could bring cancer, or rather the many cancers in my body, to a halt. There are moments and hours and whole days where I can't feel the connection to a self that would orchestrate self-healing. Cancer is a big story, located in a barely deciphered territory. It seems too big for a singular I. With cancer, I am thrown into a void.

Breast cancer can lead to lung, bones, liver or brain metastases. The mapped territory is laid out on the other side of the table where the oncologist sits or the radio-oncologist or whomever you will meet along the road. Maps or a map do exist in their mind. You don't know of a map. Cancer exposes the patient to an unmapped territory.

You stumble along.

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### **There are healings.**

In body awareness practices, I explore listening to the body and seeing it in my mind's eye. I compare temperature and weight of both sides of the body, and colours. I scan volumes and spaciousness of organs, bones, limbs, and follow

the breath everywhere from the many spaces in the head along the rib cage, the lungs, the sternum and the whole spine, the pelvis and down to every single toe. Doing so I am breathing life into my body, I am connecting with it. I am having a conversation much like a conversation with flowers and trees. Like on an outdoor walk, I am going for a walk inside the body, moving from place to place and over time getting to know them better and more deeply.

Life wants to be attended to with never ending presence like the incessant current that streams through a snake's body. Life requires being present with every beat of my heart, fully.

Healing doesn't primarily mean to get rid of something. Sometimes it means sorting out and mending. Sometimes it means transition and evolution, in short, the potential any crisis may offer.

Cancer cells are darker than healthy cells and need to be suffused with light. Mistletoe injections insert light into body cells. Visualising light I can move it through my body. Cells light up through creative activity, colour, drawing, moving and music....



***"The Slippers: A self-Portrait." Exercise in charcoal and conté***



*Original Artwork by Verena Stefan*

A friend suggests organising three to four long-distance treatments per week by different people from our healing group. During a treatment my body temperature typically builds up from my navel where it is said that there is an ocean of Qi.

The heat continues to increase steadily and spread through my whole torso. Both arms and hands tingle symmetrically. The tension in the neck, the fog and

pressure in the head lift and vanish and with it the pollution from the hospital, the machines and the city noise, too. After forty minutes I feel completely restored. This is how it would feel to be connected to universal healing energy. It becomes almost palpable. Practising Qi Gong on a regular basis I might become capable myself of producing the same heat.

Sometimes the healing energy stays with me the whole day. The greyness and the numbing chemical substance start to lift. There is colour, and once a while, an image. I clearly saw my bare left foot, its toes covered with rich dark fresh garden soil dangling from my bed. My faculty of visualisation re-emerges after having been muted.

To life I cling passionately and stubbornly, to each leaf on the maple tree across the street, to the skies that open blue and hazy and thundering and filled with sheer light. To beauty I cling wherever I go and still, my body continues to tell me a story of its own and I don't know the alphabet. I don't know a first line to start with.

During a shiatsu treatment I saw a huge tree, one of those giant trees that stand their ground bow-legged so that a car could pass through underneath. Such is the level of comparison in our world: the size of cars. The image of the giant tree unfolded in the middle of my chest, where, a year ago, the surgeon had filled medicinal cement in the caved-in vertebra. In the middle of the tree trunk a concavity opened and in it sat a dark wooden goddess. The wood had blackened with age or with fire. She reminded me of Kali or of a Black Madonna. When I told the therapist afterwards, he said no wonder you were growling like a grizzly bear when I worked that area. Release ferocity. Release radical healing power...

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“Do you have to be productive rather than just be?” was one of the questions the psychologist asked me when I talked again about my fear of becoming marginal and useless. I have been living with cancer for more than twelve years. During that time, I wrote and published three books in Switzerland and Germany. I paid my taxes in Quebec, little as they were, in some years none. I benefit from a health care system that granted me all the necessary tests, surgeries and treatments for little to no financial contribution on my part. I definitely want to be productive or at least useful. Fact is, I am moving further and further away from it.

“Do you rest enough?” is the question every homeopath, astrologer, naturopath, massage therapist and acupuncturist has asked me throughout my life. Tilting their head and casting a scrutinizing look at me.

For the longest time I did not understand their question.

Sure I did rest enough. Weekends I slept in. I napped after love making.

Sometimes I even held a siesta on a Sunday afternoon. Year after year I took long holidays. I went travelling, once or twice for months. I kept a dream journal, I spent hours hovering over tarot cards. For many years I did yoga and belly dance.

Why then, after the first shock and tears, was my emotional reaction to the cancer diagnosis in 2002 a deep relief and the sigh: *I don't have to do anything anymore.*

Not to meet expectations anymore. No need to present anything, to perform something because performance has become a new currency, a tyrant. Not earn my life any longer teaching creative writing and not getting enough students. Not to have to prove to a jury that I am worth the grant for a next book. Not to prove anything at all anymore. Not to wriggle along in a parallel life to institutions that demand degrees and CVs. Not to be part of a system that wants you to compete, to be better, stronger, more important than somebody else.

My deep relief after the first cancer diagnosis was buried again by me picking up my busy life of being somebody in the world. Four years later, with the first recurrence, I experienced the exact same emotion. Much like before a flight, a birth, a death, everything was suspended. Nothing else to do. *Arrêt sur image*. Again, I “forgot,” again being haunted by: I haven’t done enough, written enough. Only in 2012 on, with the first bone metastasis, did a shift begin to take place.

## **The Coarse Voice**

Somebody is dying. The person who can’t go on as usual. The person who was coping all the time for years, decades. Coping puts stress on every single cell in the body: I am able, I am fit, I’ll rise to any given occasion: as a feminist, a lesbian, a writer, an immigrant and now as a person with cancer: I’ll overcome the odds, I’ll adapt to what is not familiar.

Lively conversations with more than one person have become too demanding. I look around the table where friends eat and drink and talk and laugh and move their arms and heads in whichever ways. I am acutely aware of how much is going on from my neck up being attentive and engaging in a conversation. Paying attention alone and keeping the neck for a while in the same listening position creates a strain. How rapidly eyes and ears switch between faces! I never noticed before how each of these minute movements strain my neck muscles. Everything happens too quickly, friends talk too rapidly, too nervously; voices and ideas and associations whirl in whichever direction and I get dizzy.

I take liberties. I get up from the table and stretch out on the sofa. In deep relief, I hear the low rumbling of a voice on the horizon that wants to be heard. It is approaching from the near future. Although still faint I can tell it is coarse, rough-hewn, without a refined syntax. Like a child that grew up in the woods and all of a sudden encounters civilisation. The voice is raw, knowing, radical.



In 2015 I temporarily lost my voice, and the Coarse Voice made its entrance. The ORL specialist confirmed the family doc's assumption. A metastasis had touched the recurring nerve to the larynx and paralysed the left vocal cord.

The coarse voice enters this text bellowing. It is blunt, croaking, hot and blurring. It does not always follow grammar and the known order of syntax. It makes its entrance with eruptions. The coarse voice tells me what to do.

*Me taking me in my arms. My voice and my spine need me connect with them, and stay connected.*

*"What would you do if spine was a sick person?" it asks, growling.*

*"I'd hug it and touch it;" I say, "and give it a massage."*

*"Yes," says coarse voice, "you do that and you tell your spine that you love spine and you stop treating ailments the way childhood illnesses were approached: What is it again? What does she have now? Then some care taking and get rid of it. You stop doing that now; you switch to love and love your bones and strange voice and touch them." Hot gets in every cell, whole body gets hot and big, heat evaporating from soles of my feet.*

*"I love you deeply," I say to me, "you just wonderful, your life meanwhile vulnerable like nature, attacked by cancer and polluted by chemical treatments. We fight to protect environment, but why say environment? Wrong thinking to think we in the middle and something around us. That something is nature. Why not say protect nature, she in big danger, somebody been stabbing her for so long, she already in emergency room and still somebody stabbing her. She our mother, she center stage. She life. "I am my care taker now," I say to life, "I can tell what you need."*

*....What is body? We together in a different manner now. What does liver need? I ask. Spine, neck, T12, coccyx, brain, throat with scarring tissue after radiation?*

*What story does my right arm tell me? Numbing like a blood pressure cuff. Does it say: nerve from C7 leading down to small finger or does it say: brain tumor?*

*Body is a big reliable ally. Says: Take rest. Repose. Take more rest. Enjoy rest. Rest a lot. Enjoy being, carefree being. You don't need to worry about money anymore. Not worry about achievements either. You done a lot. You do have time and you can do what you like as you like.*

**By Garden I Mean... \*\***

**Summer, 2016**

By garden I mean energy. By energy I mean benefitting from the earth in my muted fatigued post-radiation and dizzy steroid-state. Walking the land and sitting on the ground sends a current of energy through my body. Within hours I am again able to climb the narrow staircase in the house without effort...

By garden I mean the heat rising from the soil. I never know how this happens here, on this continent. Lakes may still be partially covered with ice or you might even walk on a frozen lake, and all of a sudden heat is evaporating from the earth. She is breathing in and breathing out in hot tidal waves...

By garden I mean indulging in summer's light...

By light I mean we are falling upwards into the enormous skies swimming in the incessantly streaming light...

Summer Solstice, and a jubilant morning with 4°Celsius at six am. Summer fruit, a mouthful of berries; they crunch with the first bite, then juice and munching. Barely out of winter the high season of the year opens with light and dry heat...

Divine evening light, blue skies with rosy-fingered and dove-blue ribbons of clouds. The water lilies will soon open their yellow cups; the bull frogs have started their uproarious nocturnal mating...

By brief glimpses of beauty I mean moments in which I am fully present. Daily images and sensations I know from sixteen Quebec years return, *les gestes et sensations* that belong to Quebec summers. Breathing in the fragrance of pine trees and their resin's drip I shuffle along with naked feet striking dry needles and tiny cones. The soles of my feet meet different textures with each step. Each and every sensation seems stronger and more in focus. By focus I mean I am trading my dazed state for a more familiar quality of perception...

By garden I mean bliss. Every time I walk around the house I put my nose into the opening flowers of the jasmine, breathing in its beloved fragrance. Around the pond orange daylilies and the white chrysanthemum will start blooming anytime now. In front of the house it is the blue low tender campanula. The flaming red of bee balm, *des monardes*, will follow soon neighbouring the tall queens, hollyhocks, *les roses trémières*.

By garden I mean gentleness offered in fathomless sleep: My lover hears me announce loud and clearly at four in the morning: Life is good.

By garden I mean listening to Thich Nhat Hanh:

*Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.*

*You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you.*

*Mother Earth is not just your environment.*

*Real communication with the Earth... is the highest form of prayer.*

By garden I mean a language that exists in the now. Now is reality. Now and now and now. Green caterpillars on black currant leaves. The first shoots of peonies, of rhubarb. The first two tiny leaves of a calendula, a green bean.

\* Editor's note: Verena died November 30, 2017. In the last years of her life, she had been working – in English for the first time—on a book about living with cancer, a book she was not able to finish. I had been one of her readers in those years and before she died I got her permission to excerpt from the manuscript for this issue. “Quitting Chemo” has been culled, edited, and pieced together from the writing in that manuscript.

\* \* “**Just Being**” is a short video Verena made about living with cancer, gardening, love, and thinking about death.

[https://digitalstories.ca/video/just\\_being/](https://digitalstories.ca/video/just_being/)

**Verena Stefan** was a renowned Swiss German writer. She left Switzerland in 1968 at the age of twenty-one to live in West Berlin and elsewhere in Germany for about thirty years before coming to Montreal in 1998, where she lived till her death in 2017. Her books include *Häutungen*



*photo by Myriam Fougère*

(1975), (English translation *Shedding*, Daughters, Inc., 1978), and a new and expanded edition of *Shedding* and *Literally Dreaming* (The Feminist Press, New York, 1994). Among her recent publications are : *Fremdschläfer*, (Ammann, 2007), French translation: *D'ailleurs*, Les Éditions Héliotrope, Montréal, 2008); Italian translation: *Ospiti Estranei*, (Lucian Tufani Editrice, 2012) “Doe a Deer” in: *Best European Fiction* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2010, trans. Lise Weil) *Als sei ich von einem andern Stern* (As if I Were from a Different Planet. Jewish Life in Montreal). Co-ed. with Chaim Vogt-Moykopf. (Wunderhorn, 2011) *Die Befragung der Zeit* (Nagel & Kimche, 2014), French translation: *Qui maîtrise les vents connaît son chemin* (Hélotrope, 2017).

## **LAURA D. BELLMAY**

### ***The Unveiling: Notes on Illness & Beauty***

*Beauty, like love, is a fierce power that restores the world. The healer's power is diminished if it is not associated with beauty. Healing helps align the individual with the trajectory of the soul.*

~ Deena Metzger, 2004, keynote address, "The Soul of Medicine"

"Shouldn't she be better by now?" my friends quietly asked each other.

It was December of 2001, nine months after my mastectomy for a recurrence of breast cancer. The regimen of intensive chemotherapy left me as close to death as the cancer that had tried to consume me. I felt depleted in body and spirit, my soul water-boarded.

Those close to me said, "Aren't you glad chemotherapy is over? Why don't you get out of the house?" What are your plans for the holidays?"

Between the lines, I heard annoyance and a demand that I 'move on.' But I had no idea how to leave cancer behind.

Friends stopped calling; their visits were fewer. Flowers no longer came in robust bouquets and cards and calls of encouragement ebbed. My husband's patience wore thin.

In the upstairs bathroom one evening, I turned off the faucet after washing my face. My husband yelled up from the living room where he was watching television, "Go easy on the pipes!"

I looked into the mirror. An emaciated, bald, crying ghost stared back. My eyes would not look at the crater where my right breast had been in a body I could not seem to love.

I'd lost what I thought defined me as a woman and my husband was concerned only with the plumbing.

I had worked so hard to live and now I just wanted to die.

Then, at a gathering of women, an artist friend suggested I pose for an art class at the University of Hartford. She hoped it might give meaning to my ordeal while providing young art students a unique and challenging painting opportunity.

The thought of posing nude horrified me. I remembered summer camp when I was eight years old, changing into my bathing suit in a 100-hundred-degree bug-infested outhouse so the other girls would not see me naked.

Surviving cancer twice meant that I had been poked, prodded, and pricked repeatedly over many years. When I was hospitalized for six days with a fever of 104 degrees after my third intravenous chemotherapy, IV antibiotics could not relieve the bloom of painful and "mysterious" lumps that flourished on my labia. A mob scene erupted in the examining room when five "medical specialists" gathered for the view between my legs.

I no longer felt I was in control of my own body. I was afraid if I posed, I would be objectified as I had been before. But I could not allow fear to win. I wanted—and needed—to take charge of what I could in spite of all I'd lost. Posing felt to me like one thing I could do on behalf of my healing. I no longer cared if what I did made sense to anyone else.

I arrived at a tiny room in the Art Department of The University of Hartford. Easels, unfinished oil paintings, and old rags lay scattered around. I took off my winter boots and coat and met the painting teacher, Stephen Brown. After introductions and small talk, he revealed that he too was a cancer survivor and had lived many years with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. I felt heartened by this connection.

I changed into a fluffy white robe. Professor Brown then brought me to his classroom to meet his students, all eighteen of whom started talking simultaneously.

“We don’t bite. You’ll have fun today, really,” said a woman with a wide smile and dreadlocks. The mood in the classroom was festive and I calmed a bit. Stephen brought me over to the raised platform where he told me I could sit or stand whichever was more comfortable for me.

I laughed, “Really, I’m not comfortable at all. I’m scared.”

Professor Brown stationed four space heaters in front of the platform where I would soon stand. My body gave an involuntary shake anyway.

“If you need a break from posing at any point, just say so,” one of the students said.

“Most models,” Stephen said, “ask for water, or need to move after holding a pose for twenty to thirty minutes. You’re in charge really.”

Yes, I was. I liked that.

Once on the platform in the class I was too frail to stand in front of the canvas backdrop as other models did. I prayed in silence, “May what is created here today benefit all beings.” Then I adjusted my bony rear end into an old wooden rocking chair, placed my long scarf across my lap, and dropped my bathrobe.

Goose bumps formed on my upper body and the chill turned my fingers white. After the initial jitters wore off an intense calm embraced me like a warm cocoon. The buzz of the heaters became a comforting whirr as the students focused on their canvasses. Occasionally, a student looked at me for what felt like a long time, but they did not stare. Nor did they chatter among themselves.

I closed my eyes. I felt holy.

Stephen left the room. I remembered nothing until he returned an hour later and asked, “Are you tired? Do you need a break?” Leaning back in the rocking chair, I arched my chest and stretched my arms overhead as if making a snow angel in the air. “Nope, I’m in the zone, best not to interrupt the flow.”

One young woman released an appreciative sigh. Echoing Stephen, she said, “Most models move around a lot or take breaks after fifteen minutes.”

“Yeah, she’s right,” said another. “You can come back any time.”

The vote of confidence from these young men and women brightened me. For more than ninety-minutes, I rested in a living prayer. The only sounds I heard were the space heaters at my feet and the soft scratching of paintbrushes across canvas.

For most of my life, and for years as a survivor of sexual abuse, I had been treated as an object. As the subject of the student artists, however, I did not feel objectified. Their respect, consideration, and regard loosened something inside me. The emotional noose twisted around my throat by the symptoms of cancer, a diagnosis of mental illness, and the grief of abuse unraveled.

While the students bore witness to the wound on my chest, they also mended my heartbreak. They were an antidote to all the ways my humanity had been stripped away. And in choosing to pose, I had authorized a new way to be seen in the world—as real, raw and vulnerable.

When the class was over I walked around the room and studied each image. The paintings were so different. Some were in high contrast colors of red, yellows, and blues; others were somber, muted with hues of gray. There was one pastel. Only one student painted the seventeen-inch path of my mastectomy scar that moved from my



right armpit to my breastbone. Some students painted one breast and some did not paint breasts at all.

The students had transformed my loss into eighteen soulful images—each one different from the next. In giving myself over to these students, I had allowed them to breathe new life into me.

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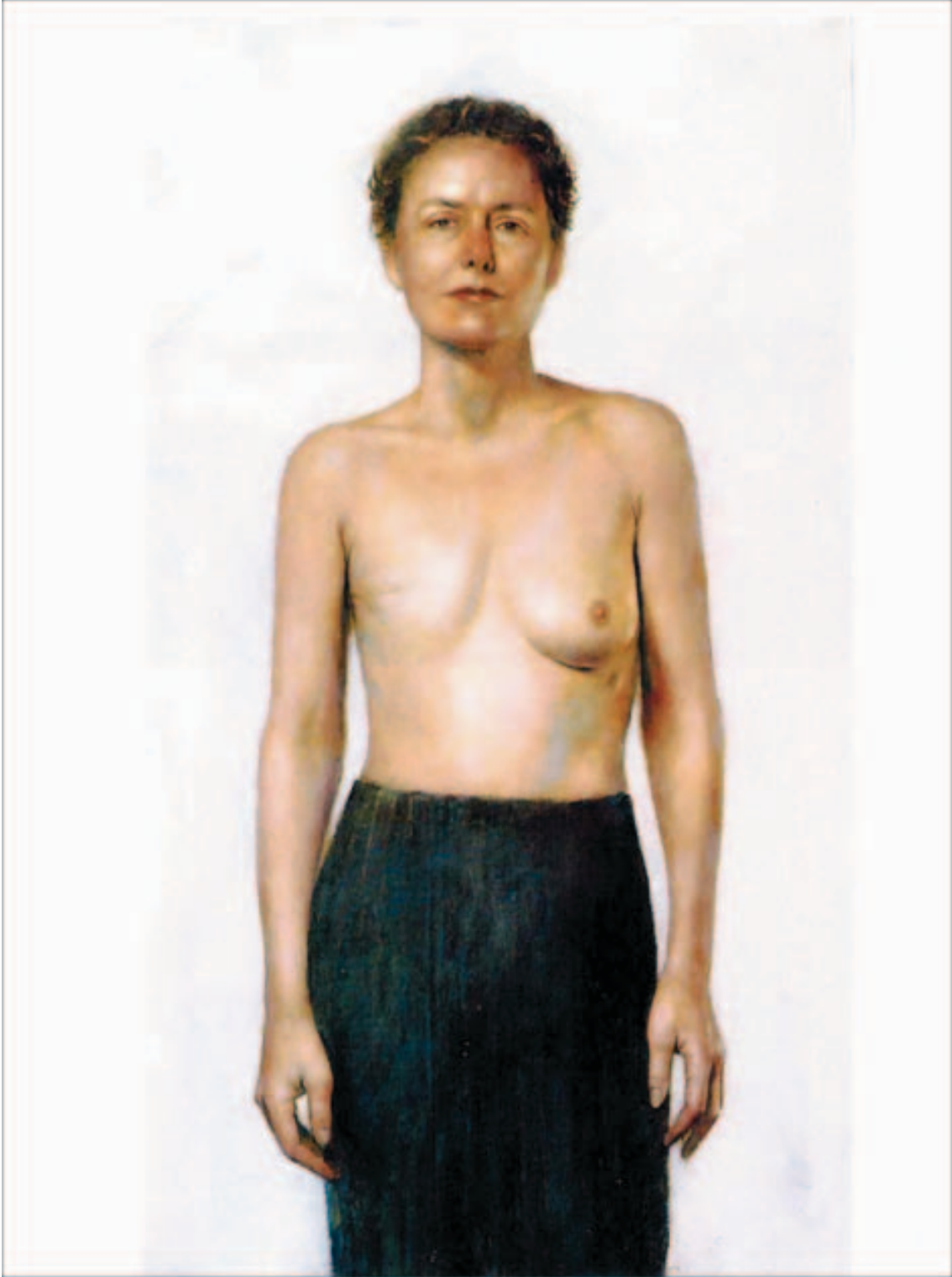
In 2002, after I had posed for two classes of students, Professor Brown asked if he could paint me. Though my husband was against it, and I felt more trepidation than I had about posing for his class, I said yes.

Stephen's completed painting became part of an art exhibition at The Forum Gallery in New York City. He did not want me to see the painting prior to the opening of his exhibit; by the time I walked through the door of The Gallery, my legs were Jell-O.

Stephen took my hand and guided me to the main Gallery. There he pointed to a 25 ½ x 14 ¼ inch oil painting on a wooden panel titled "Laura."

Although I had posed for Stephen nude, his painting of me was not. In his work, I am naked from only the waist up. His "Laura" is half-veiled. She is semi-nude in a black skirt that might just as easily be a shroud. There is honor, mystery, and paradox in the juxtaposition of the black skirt and the one-breasted, white-skinned woman. "Laura" stands squarely before you with a shoulder jutting out into the world—bearing witness—her gaze meeting yours. Her left hand moves towards you out of the plane of the picture.

The painting shows me in a moment in time when I was filled with despair. When I looked at the painting I recognized that in some ways I had healed from that woman on the canvass. Yet, parts of me still carried heartbreak. What was healed and what was broken existed side by side in my body just as they did in the image.



Stephen Brown called me late in 2006 with good news. “You’ve found a home.” “My painting of you is now in the permanent collection of the Springfield Museum of Fine Art in Springfield, Massachusetts.” The write-up in the Museum’s newsletter read: *In the*

*painting, “Laura” is nude from the waist up. It is the portrait of a woman struggling to come to terms with the loss of a breast, her sexuality, her femininity, and beauty. Ultimately though, the picture is about beauty, strength, the triumph of survival and this woman’s irrepressible spirit.”*

Healing is not an individual experience. I believe witnessing is essential to healing and in this case, my witnesses were the students, the teacher, the friend who suggested the posing and the participants at The Forum Gallery opening. They are also each person who views the painting that now hangs in the art gallery. Each witness offers the genius of their own healing.

Stephen Brown’s painting is both witness and testimony to the fact that I am not the sum of the worst things that happened to me. Anyone who looks deeply into “Laura” can see the medicine in the wound. The students and Professor Brown helped me learn to carry the beauty and the wounding side by side, moment by moment. I saw that I could not become one who heals without being seen also as one who carried the physical, spiritual, and emotional wound.

I have made several trips to the Springfield Museum to see “Laura.” Each time I witness her I am different. And each time “Laura” looks back at me I am made whole in a new way.



**Laura D. Bellmay** is a retired fundraising and development consultant. She began writing for the love of the craft after her first cancer diagnosis in 1996. She won the “Best of Letters to The Editor” from *The Hartford Courant* in 1991. Laura was featured in a series of articles in *The Uxbridge Times* in 2006 and her essay “Into the Garden,” about coming to terms with her mastectomy after a recurrence of breast cancer, was published in the 2011 Winter Issue of *Barefoot Review*.

## **NOTES**

Stephen P. Brown died at the age of 59 in Granville, MA on October 21, 2009 after a long journey with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He was a full professor at the Hartford Art School, University of Hartford. He won an Academy Award for painting from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York and was a member of the National Academy of Design, New York. His paintings are in the collections of Hofstra Museum, NY, Albany Museum, GA, New Britain Museum of American Art, CT, Springfield Museum of Fine Art, MA, Speed Art Museum, Kentucky, New York Academy of Design and the Mattatuck Museum, CT.

## ERICA CHARIS-MOLLING

### Requiem in the Key of Bees, a cento *taken from Virgil*

*The signs of it in the bees, without any doubt  
nearer and nearer. Mother, let me take you  
to blow across the deep in hurricane,  
flash on flash from heaven. Every sign  
easy to see because from a single root:  
Life brings sickness with it. You can see  
one certain lust drives every creature  
eating its way as it burns inside a furnace,  
leaving me weeping, with so much still to say.  
Could any star rise at night, single and marvelous  
or sing what I, in silence, had picked up from you.  
Sing as we walk—it makes the trip less painful.  
It's true for bees as it is for human beings.*

#### **Notes:**

*Centos are like a quilt, my mentor told me—you find the used fabric in other people's poems and then you stitch it together to make it new. The lines I gathered here from various Virgil works have different weaves and textures from their various translators. Yet when stitched together, the fragments form a new whole—much the way a wound might heal when stitched together, with a new implications forming an interconnective tissue that bridges the pieces that have been brought together. Little is known about the actual life of the Roman poet, but his work bears witness to much war and destruction of the land; some of it in an apocalyptic tone. There's much in the world and its current climate that feels that way to me right now. The tenu-*

*ous existence of bees, the busy pollinators who do so much to hold our food system together, often seems a portent to me. Who knows if they buzz to comfort one another? I know that as long as I can hear that buzz, it will be a comfort to me. A sign that not all is lost—a sound that tells me there are still enough scraps left to stitch together a new whole, to begin to heal this planet.*

## **The End of Night**

*For you fleas too  
the nights must be long,  
they must be lonely.*

*~Issa*

For the fire ant, the sun is a large coal; for you it is a slow sentence. And looking up the fleas can guess the weight of the moon, stars too if you asked, far more accurately than you, the isolated animal. The questions you ask nights and cockroaches go unanswered, but you must know, it's only because you never ask of be and us, instead always asking why and how long, as if the planets held only reasons and they kept time in countable grains. Sit, if you must, on your antsy feet. Say with the silverfish: be, be, be. Watch the night end without saying lonely. And when the sun burns again, say we.

**Note:** This poem came from a conversation with a friend. We were both mourning the disintegration of “us,” how isolated and selfish much of our civic and personal discourse

had become. Our inability to value or even acknowledge others, as a society, seems to go hand in hand with our inability to value or even acknowledge the environment around us or the damage we seem so willing to do to it. When I came across Issa's haiku, the interspecies empathy radiated off the page and I immediately wanted to dialog with the poem. How had we lost our capacity for empathy with each other as humans, never mind our empathy with the "fleas? The form is one I believe Richard Garcia made up, something he calls a "haiku acrostic." Each word of the original haiku becomes the first word of the line down the left hand margin. As I wrote, I used the new poem to dig into my question. In a world of isolated "I's" taking their pain out on the world around them, I believe that Issa's empathy holds a beginning toward healing—both for humans and the world around them. It starts with the realization that in the "slow sentence" we're under as a planet, humans and non-humans are in this together.

#### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***



Erica Charis-Molling is a creative writing instructor for Berklee Online and was the Eco-Justice Anthology Support Intern for Split This Rock. Her writing has been published in Crab Fat, Broad!, Anchor, Vinyl, Entropy, Mezzo Cammin, and Apricity. An alum of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, she is currently pursuing her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Antioch University. More of her

work, both published and performed, can be found on her blog:

[lettheceleryrot.wordpress.com](http://lettheceleryrot.wordpress.com).

**Wendy Gorschinsky-Lambo**

## **MAKING LOVE WITH A THREE-BILLION-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

*Editor's Note:*

*When I drive up to my cabin from Montreal in the summer, I'm always in a rush. I'm especially pumped once I reach the long hill that takes me to our little road in the woods. So for years I ignored the sign that stood on the corner at the bottom of the hill – PRODUITS ECOLOGIQUES OEUFs BIO . The area surrounding my cabin is mostly undeveloped—no health food stores, no enlightened eateries – so the sign made me curious. But not curious enough to stop. Then one day as I rounded the corner I saw at the bottom of the sign the words “SACRED SEX.” On my next drive down the hill I stopped.*

*The door was open. I walked past a sign reading “Sacred Sex Boutique”—and was welcomed by-a woman about my age with long hair done up in a bun. Surrounding us were bookcases filled with titles about ecology, sound healing, eco-feminism, sacred geometry, the divine feminine and yes, Sacred Sex. In the corner was a basket full of freshly harvested vegetables. It soon became clear that the sex at issue here was not exclusively or even primarily between humans. As Wendy and I talked—I told her about my teaching at Goddard and Dark Matter—it did not take long for us to feel very glad to have discovered each other. The following March I returned to her home to participate—along with twenty other women, most of them from Montreal—in a women's water ceremony that the Algonquin Nation had transmitted to her. And the following summer, she gave me a tour of her remarkable garden which she had designed according to the teachings of a Micmaq' tribe—and the no less remarkable home she had made for the worms who made this garden possible. Not far from this home Wendy walked me to a small tent. She told me she sleeps there six to seven months out of the year, to be close to Mother Earth. Rawdon is about an hour north of Montreal and at least 3C degrees colder. I was impressed.*



*I had wanted Wendy to write about her relationship to her worms for one of our “Making Kin” issues – but she couldn’t meet the deadline. As she has pointed out to me several times, serving The Mother is a full-time job. In this article, which she finally was able to make enough time to write, Wendy not only writes about her worms, but explains how she came to develop the relationship she has with the earth, to be connected to the Micmaq’ tribe and to do the work she is doing. All of it could be said to be a lifelong experiment in what it means, to heal.*

I was a big-time social activist in Montreal for many years—demonstrating, writing, going to meetings, carrying placards, making speeches. I was a home-based entrepreneur, raising worms and selling books, fair trade coffee and ecological products out of my flat, a single mother who wanted to do it all the right way. In 1998 an occasion arrived for me to demonstrate the worms and vermicomposting at a huge Home and Garden Show, way off the island of Montreal. The organizers had invited some alternative vendors to show their wares in an allocated “Green Aisle”. On a break during this three-day event I sauntered into the end of the aisle space where the Lnog were set up with a tipi and herbs for sale. As we packed up after the Show, I noticed a small poster they had on the wall, advertising Saturday nights in Montreal, with an organic buffet, dancing and music for \$5. I asked to take it and it sat on my desk for months.

One evening, exhausted after another exhibition, getting the children from different friends for child-care and my lover in from out of town, I suggested we go across the city and check this out. It was an awesome evening. We ate delicious vegan food; we listened to music composed by the Lnog and later there were tam tams for dancing and my young children loved it and so did I. We kept returning and gradually came earlier and earlier to prepare food with the Lnog. Their buffets were always an education; food was displayed in beautiful geometric patterns and we feasted on wild-crafted fruits and veggies. Over time we got to know them—a little. My body had lost its sense of rhythm after ten years of fatigue and severe depression, but the Lnog called my bones back to life with their tam-tams. I started to dance again.

We learned many songs and heard many stories in our time with this tribe but our time together here was to be short-lived. They received an invitation to help in Haiti

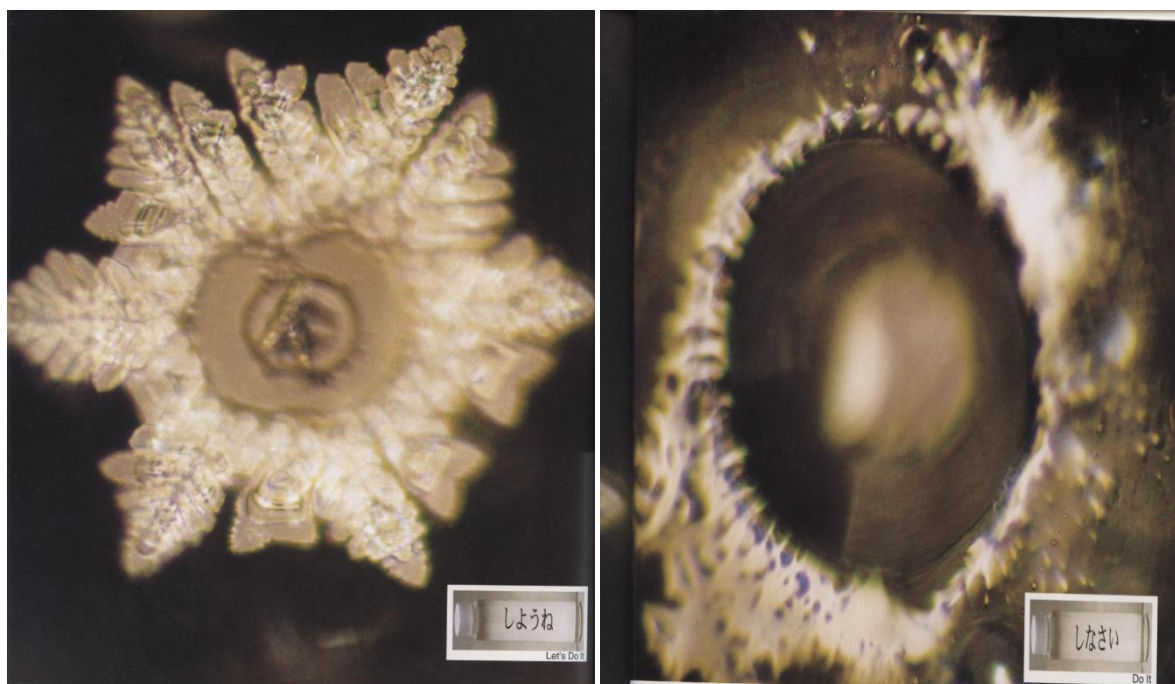
by setting up their way of life there on a donated barren piece of volcanic rock. This gave me and my children the opportunity to go visit them in Haiti a few times and it is there we experienced what miracles they could achieve with their patience, knowledge and way of life. In this place we witnessed primordial tribal life, their incredible knowledge of trees and tree planting, and constructions of *quams*, or vegetable-based tipis. It is here one day under a tree that I would first learn about “Alvéoles” (from a man whom, amazingly, I had had my picture taken with back at that Home and Garden Show). I had seen a sister Lnog constantly in their gardens in a kind of euphoria and I found her so beautiful and had wondered what she was experiencing. This man took paper and pencil and drew “Alvéoles,” a system of surveying, gardening and building construction, explaining that they were fundamental to the Lnog way of life. As a former math teacher, I was fascinated by the geometry and exactness of it all, but more than this I did not truly understand. I could not appreciate yet what kind of gift I had just been given.

In spring of 2001, there was a two-week period in which my life as I was living it came undone. My business suddenly collapsed when my worm partner’s wife died unexpectedly. I found out an ecologically-socially responsible business venture I was involved in was being deceitful—and so was my lover. I had to evict my tenant (my lover) out of my home in the country, which was financing my living in the city for my children’s education. The school, a Waldorf school, had a huge financial melt-down, which put a halt to my daughter’s continuing there. I handled it all by crying, journal writing, meditating, and dancing for about forty days.

It was during this intensely stressful period that I started receiving a constant message in my head: “It’s in the Water. It’s in the Water.” The voice even woke me up at night, asking me to pay attention. “It’s in the Water,” it whispered. Then a Japanese friend showed up at my door unexpectedly, just back from a visit to Japan. She stood there with book in hand, hardly able to talk from jet lag. “It’s hot off the press and I wanted you to be the first person to see it,” she declared. The book was “Messages from Water” by Dr. Masaru Emoto. “No way!!!!!!” I screamed. I invited the book (and my friend) in and it changed my life.

The first thing I did was to go through the images, hoping to understand what Dr. Emoto was saying. When I came to these two images, side by side, I got suddenly very frightened and I broke down sobbing. I am crying even now as I think of it.

The second image was me speaking to my children—and in fact me speaking to everyone, because I was so damn tired and had taken on way too much. I had been doing battle, just as every other activist I knew had been taught. I was fighting the good fight.



But gosh! The images demonstrated that our intentions, our thoughts and feelings, our scoldings and judgments have visible effects. I was giving all my energy to the “dark side,” which was the opposite of what I was trying to achieve. I saw that despite my good intentions of trying to provide the best of education, food and mothering to my children, I was in fact providing a role model of exhaustion, negativity and victimization. This is not a healing scenario for anyone. This is not a healing scenario for our planet.

One month later, in disbelief, I was packing to return to our home in the country. So much was directing me there now, as if I had no choice. The children were overjoyed. They kissed the walls as the movers moved us in. My old gardens were all overgrown after seven years, so I decided to put into place what we had learnt so

far about making Alvéoles from the Lnog. Alvéoles are an extremely precise hexagonal surveying system that is aligned with the Stars, Planets, and the Telluric Forces, the Energy points of the Earth. The Lnog use this memory system to *work with* the Mother (Earth and Cosmic), instead of dominating Her, in everything they do and live. In this way they constantly stroke Her, adore Her, communicate with Her, provide for Her safety.

I was blessed to meet the Lnog, who taught me where to locate this grid and precisely align my garden with Her, harmonizing with Her Rhythm. These hexagons are alive and the Lnog also taught me all parts of the Alvéoles are aspects of the female form. This teacher/student was privileged to learn how to entrain *myself* to this wise map.



The Alvéoles enabled the Lnog to guard the memory of Sacred Sexuality (also an element of Water) within the tribe, both in their relationship with the Earth Mother and amongst themselves. Their adoration, their caresses of the soil and the plants and the flowers turned the wheels of transformation and communication with their Earth Mother and the other Star Beings in the galaxy. It was a Oneness Consciousness



that was lived by all a very long time ago. I am so grateful that they have kept this flame alive for us.

By now I had discovered the book “The Ancient Secret of the Flower of Life.” The Flower of Life design is a specific hexagonal grid that exists all over the planet’s surface.



This incredible design creates a matrix field, which is nature’s most efficient way of holding information. It is a kind of neuronet, a brain that feeds information about us and what we are truly feeling to water, which holds and transports memory. The hexagram is the shape of a Water crystal, which as Dr. Emoto’s work has demonstrated, carries “Memory.” The word Micmaq’ means the People who hold the Memory, and they believe themselves to be descendants

of Atlantis. As a math teacher I had never come across this important material on sacred geometry, but I recognized what the Lnog had been teaching us in a right-brain way and I saw that Alvéoles and the Flower of Life were the same. Living, breathing with them daily and tactilely studying this ancient wisdom has given me a more profound understanding of their ancient secret than I could ever had learned from a book.

Before we went out on a large expanse of land to trace out Alvéoles, I wanted my children to have fully integrated the Flower of Life design in the core of their being. We drew it precisely with a compass and colored it; we decorated cakes and windows with it; we embroidered it, and we danced it all winter long. Then we went outside. We found the starting energy point and aligned it at night with the North Star and then my daughter and I set to the task of measuring the design to the exact millimeter and digging out the wild vegetation with our bare hands and sticks, because the Lnog had taught us that metal breaks the energy field and the cut hurts

the Mother's skin. There were still many things we would eventually learn about making Alvóles, but we got this part right. We made three of them and I devoted them to the Divine Feminine - Isis, Magdalen and Sophia. At the same time I registered my land and house as a Community Land Trust, called La Magdaliene, to protect them forever.



## WORMS

Having developed a small worm and vermicompost business in Montreal, I had about twenty boxes full of worms in a basement, not so hard to move, but I also had fifty pounds of worms and a ton of vermicompost growing in a back alley in the city, all of which had to be moved to the country. Not an easy task for a lady with only pails and her station wagon. Worm growers typically grow worms in rectangular/square arrangements and it was my intention to reset up along the house that way, but my internal voice strongly guided me to a place in my forest near the house. "Ok", I said to the voice, and when I went to dig, my hands unconsciously worked with the hexagram, same as the Alvóles but on a different scalar measurement.

I ended up with something beautiful – a circular nest, which made so much more sense for the worms. They have a hydro-skeletal body, which means they are made up of water and water always prefers to be in round places. Later on I would go on to develop an outside system of vermicomposting, even for winter, which is virtually maintenance free and requires no construction materials and the worms are so happy there! <http://www.terramies.com/english/workshops.htm#Exterior>



The Aisenia Foetida, commonly known as the Red Wiggler Composting Worm, is the only animal on the planet having *five* hearts. Each of their hearts has a double chamber and each heart is connected to another heart above and below in a row. In addition to being all water and muscle encased in a skin, they are a warm-blooded annelid, which makes them a feeling being, and their blood circulates through their five hearts in a figure- eight movement, much like a biodynamic flow form. This purifies what they are processing, like polluted water, which comes out clean and potable. They re-digest their materials eight times before the process is finished, refining and re-defining it again and again, so that it may be offered back again to the Earth Mother with an altered vibration and a new frequency—Re-Memory<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, the numbers associated with Venus are the number 5 and the number 8. The planet Venus traces a pentagram(5) in the sky and she takes 8 years to do it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWwOrUjFOFY>  
The Micmaq' Symbol is the 8 pointed star of Venus.

If you naturally compost human waste, it takes two years before it is safe, but if you offer it to the *Aisenia Foetida* worm, it is transformed and safe in six days!! And in twelve weeks it is totally transformed into a valuable nutrient for the soil, as well as a natural protective barrier against dangerous bacteria/fungi leaching into the water table. These little earth beings carry a strong Dragon Energy, the fire of transformation.<sup>2</sup>



The Red Wiggler loves getting newspaper as bedding, which they also transform, and I get excited thinking about what they can do with all that bad news. Gaia loves and is healthiest when She has diversity, so I like to make sure the worms have lots of diversity in their litter and in their diet. This includes cardboard, mouldy straw,

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<sup>2</sup> As a worm grower, I had the opportunity to attend International Conferences on the *Aisenia Foetida* Worm and Worm Composting. It was at these conferences that I was able to learn a great deal about scientific trials and data from scientists all over the planet. I brought home hard core results and proof of the *Aisenia Foetida*'s ability to safely transform human waste within short periods of time.



leaves, kitchen waste and shit. Using all these components will give the highest quality broadcastings, colloquially known as vermicompost. When the worm's broadcastings are finished being edited, they go out into the world to entrain us, just as our newspapers and TV's do.

This is an amazing instance of what I call Mother Technology. The Technology of the Mother is much like a tuning fork. It is timeless, all-encompassing and costs nothing to put into practice.



Broadcastings are usually given to plants, but they are safe for humans to use as well. An enormous amount of vitamins, minerals and hormones is stored in them, but this is not the reason I infuse castings in my bread baking and in my bath water. The vibrations in broadcastings coming from the worm's five hearts are packed with *biophotons*. Biophotons consist of UV light with a high degree of order or coherence. These particles of light, which are existent in all life, serve as the organism's main communication network. Biophotons also principally regulate all life

processes. Science is still learning so much about them, but we do know that the more alive a subject or material is, the higher the biophoton count. They are what makes your eyes twinkle when you are in love or makes you shine brighter when you are passionate about something. Imagine biophotons as fairy dust entraining all living beings around them. The more there are, the more life you have. Worm broadcastings, loaded with biophotons, feed the energy field of the Earth Mother.

## HEART, MATH AND WATER

I first heard about the HeartMath Institute in a conference with sound healer Tom Kenyon. I had written it down in my book several times before my light bulb finally went on—you're a math teacher raising worms, the only animal on the planet having five hearts! You better investigate this.<sup>3</sup>

My father was an electrical technician and the first person to introduce microwave technology to Canada. He built the first TV' and microwave tower for ham radio operators in Montreal. His workroom was a mess of probes, scopes and wires. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps by studying computers—and although I refused to do that, I have realized that in fact I have followed in his footsteps--by studying and learning to make use of frequency and vibration.

HeartMath had a training conference on the East Coast which I really wanted to attend. I was hoping to introduce this technology in Quebec through my work and so I tried to organize a personal Patreon type request to those I knew, in exchange for teaching them free of charge how to use the EMWave. In the end this scheme did not work and I could not attend for lack of funds, but HeartMath was so touched by all the effort I put into it, they sent me an EMWave device at cost. This simple tech program allows me to see the wave graph of my heart on a monitor. I learn to watch

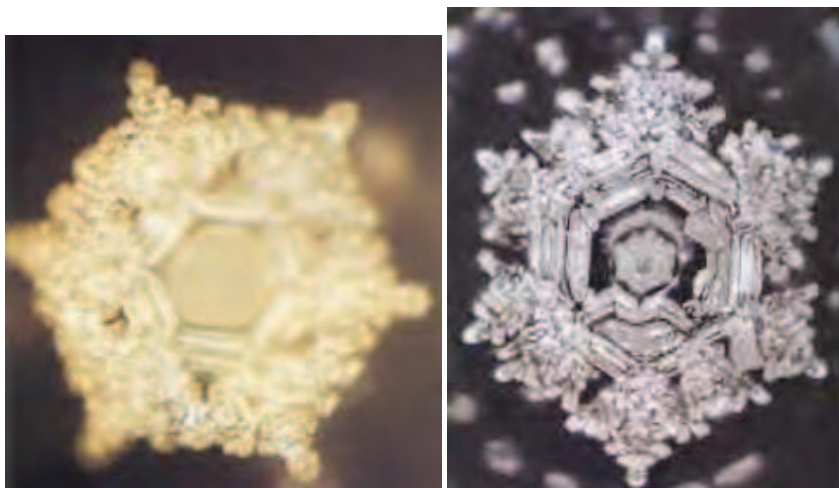
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<sup>3</sup>The HeartMath Institute is an internationally recognized non-profit research and education organization whose mission is to help establish heart-based living and global coherence by inspiring people to connect with the intelligence and guidance of their own hearts.

<https://www.heartmath.com/institute-of-heartmath/>

my heart rhythm either expand or shrink, depending on what I am feeling. HeartMath also taught me very simple exercises to get my heart into a zone that is more beneficial to me, my problem-solving abilities, and that will entrain those around me to be in sync with their heart. They have also expanded this to monitoring the Mother Earth's heart rhythm and our effect on Her, the rhythm in trees in communication with Her, and the effects of global Heart-based intentions on the full moons, at specific times. <https://www.heartmath.org/resources/videos/hearts-intuitive-intelligence/>

Dr. Emoto's "Messages from Water" taught me that my thoughts, feelings and intentions are registered in water. He discovered that memory is stored in the hexagonal crystalline structure and that intentions in the form of vibrational signatures show up in the water. He also discovered that malformed hexagonal water crystals can be corrected with the emotions of appreciation and gratitude. Through his work but also through the wisdom of our First Nations, I came to understand that rhythms or vibrations, like music, like waves, like our heartbeat, etc.... all imprint memory and water carries memory



In my time visiting the Lnog, I always got involved in their composting activities. They do not use worms but they do use human waste. These are very precious resources for them, particularly in countries where there is so little water or carbon material, like leaves. Haiti, for example has few trees left. The Lnog see their urine as Golden Water and their feces as a gift to the Earth. They know they can be generous in all ways with Her.

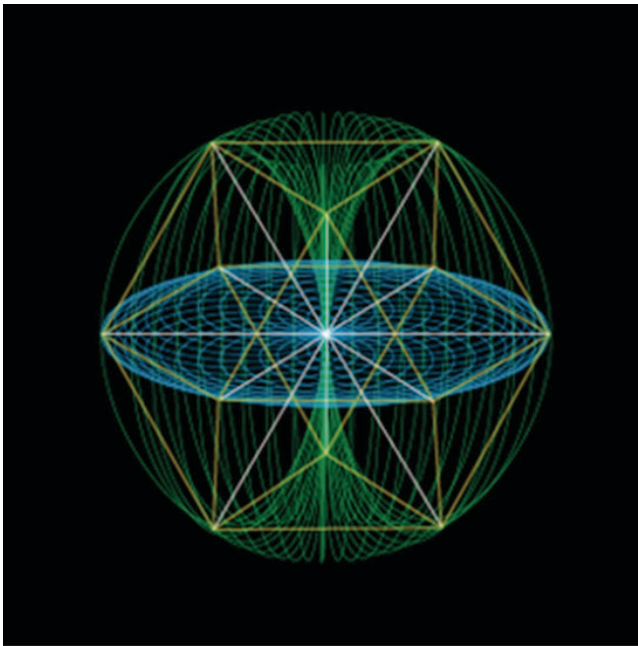
I never used to give it a second thought when I sat on a toilet. Get to it and then get off. I saw the pictures in Dr. Emoto's book and I wanted this to change. It had to change for myself, for my loved ones and if I truly wanted the planet to heal. Now I had to urinate in a pot. I had to pay attention and be a bit careful and then pour water over my genitals to clean them and then wipe them with a soft cloth. I found myself afraid to do this. I felt shame arise in me and it was different from the self-pleasuring in my bed. I was emotionally challenged by such a simple act and it brought me back to my infancy. Sex education starts when your first diaper is changed and what is the face you see, what are the words you hear? To face myself, observe my own surprising feelings about peeing, having or losing control, embarrassment and pleasure, rocked my daily world. I had to go in there so often and meet myself!! It helped that I knew scientifically that urine is sterile; it carries no bacteria and the smell is caused by minerals. But now I had to take the pot out. I had seen this often with the Lnog but never done it. To my surprise, I found a great pleasure in humbly bending my knee in beauty and grace and offering "my" Golden Water to the Earth Mother. I started to notice great changes in my flowers and certain vegetables. Disease disappeared and the leaves got brighter and brighter.

Then there was defecating. A different pot in a different place in the bathroom. Same issues and more. Great guilt along with the shame. I heard "Don't touch it or yourself. It's dirty! It's dangerous!" If it were not for my devotion to this experiment, I could not have gone on with it. And I would have missed out on learning about the great shadows hiding out in my psyche, hampering true Intimacy with myself and eventually with others. As I brought this pot out to the Alvéoles, and to the worm beds, I knew the worms could take care of it. In fact, they were delighted to get all this food. Again, I was moved to bend knee and offer it. I had a sense of co-creation, as the worms would transform it and the geometry would take it out into the universe. Biophotons would make their way into the soil, into the plants, flowers and fruit, and also into my bread and my body, when I soaked the infusion of broadcastings for my dough or my bath.

As my self-esteem slowly grew, I found I was generous to the ground in giving Her my vibration of bliss through my Golden Waters. Or I could be generous in giving my high vibration to my septic system to travel to other parts of the region and perform



their magic, or in passing my Waters to a city sewage system, so that all Life may be served. But all this took time.



We here in Quebec and lower Ontario are holding on to the largest store of freshwater in the world. And women are the guardians of water in all indigenous nations around the globe. Over time, I learned to work with the Torus energy depicted above for the sake of the Water. The vortex at the heart is a place of honour, where I direct my bliss and send my intentions to the Water table, so that it may be disseminated out into the world.

When I am in joy and appreciation, Dr. Emoto's work showed me that my waters inside were being imprinted and the waters outside were receiving the same imprint, even from very far away. This was exactly what the Algonquin and Micmaq' Nations were also teaching me. They instructed me that my urine, my saliva, my blood, my tears, my generous genital fluids, and *all* the water outside of us, polluted or unpolluted, are receiving messages from us, as individuals and as a collective. The Native women taught me a song and a ceremony for Water that says, "The water that I carry is the blood of the Mother Earth." I concluded from this that the Earth Mother receives an orgasmic vibration when we are in orgasm. (I wish I had known this in all the years I taught sex education to high schoolers!) Pleasure and appreciation can all be directed to Her and recorded in Her memory-- and what a memory a three-billion-year-old woman can have.

It is the principal reason why I sleep outside on the ground for six to seven months of the year. The Mother and I are in Love and so I sleep as close to Her as possible. She whispers to me, offers Her fragrance and regenerates me, so that I can hold an energetic force when I am separated from Her. It is a lived eroticism.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wendy Gorchinsky-Lambo owns TerrAm(i)es Enterprises (Soul Sisters of the Earth) in Rawdon, Quebec. She was the first person to sell Fair Trade coffee commercially in Montreal, and brought Dr. Masaru Emoto and his wife Katsura to Quebec to present “Messages From Water” in 2003. Wendy has been a high school math and sex education teacher, the regional editor for Green Teacher Magazine, and has homeschooled two

children with dyslexia. She is a guardian of the ancient Algonquin women’s water ceremony. She may be reached through her website [www.terramies.com](http://www.terramies.com)

***AFTERMATH: 911***  
***PRAYING AMID THE DAMAGE:***  
***DREAMS, NIGHTMARES, VISIONS***

***JACQUAR MEDICINE***  
**KAREN MUTTER**

***THE SEVEN JARS***  
**ANNE BERGERON**

## Jaguar Medicine

Karen Mutter

After the election in November 2016 and then the inauguration in January, there was a sharp increase in the number of people who seemed to be taken down by illness. Some of those illnesses were life threatening. When those needing help came to me asking for assistance, I asked for dreams. Several helpful dreams for individuals came through, but the call for help escalated faster than I could keep up. In the beginning of April 2017, I asked for a dream that would address the root cause of illness, regardless of the diagnosis.

This dream came that very night. This is an abbreviated version.

*I am with my friend Sharon (who in waking reality was trying to navigate her way through a diagnosis of metastatic pancreatic cancer). She has asked me for help to further her understanding of a vision that has come to her. I drop into a trance and her vision comes clearly into view.*

*Sharon is in the jungle lying in a hammock reading a book. Suddenly, a very large wild cat—a magnificent spotted jaguar-- leaps over the hammock, narrowly missing Sharon, and knocks Sharon's glasses off of her head. They fall down into a ravine over which the hammock is perched, lost forever. Sharon is startled both by the abrupt, close presence of the jaguar and also, that her glasses have been ripped off her face. The jaguar reappears at the edge of the jungle and clearly speaks this message: **'You must see with new vision.'***

I was awakened briefly by my alarm then fell back deeply asleep. The writing that follows came upon awakening. This is the essence of my understanding of the dream.

This dream is for all of us who are seeking a path towards healing and true health. It is also a dream for the medicine people, the ones who hold the space for healing to happen. It is imperative to see with new eyes the previously hidden possibilities, the encrypted ways forward, the metaphor in the test result. The startle factor itself is essential—as we need to be startled into awareness. The glasses come off so that we can really see what is before us to be met.

No matter what the medical reports say--CT scan, pathology, bloodwork—there is an entirely different way to see them. It is the one-dimensional black- and- white medical way that incites such fear in us because it is not natural to move through the world without the imaginal realm. There is no imaginal realm in conventional medicine and because we are fluid creatures born of that realm, conventional medical treatment creates a panic response that only worsens the illness and keeps us firmly under the control of the people who create and perpetuate the medical language.



This is our dominant thinking: Illness happens to us. We are like sitting ducks when it randomly descends. Then the medical establishment with its published studies says, "Here is the science. Do it our way or die" (And by the way, you might die anyway.)

Science will never catch up to the mysteries of the natural world. There will never be a way to unlock, decode, map out each and every miraculous unfurling that nature produces in every nanosecond. But we can tap in, merge with mystery. Include ourselves emotionally and mentally. We don't have to ask, we already ARE a mysterious force of nature. Without conscious recognition, however, we have become frightened outsiders. Afraid of the dark, afraid of the Not Knowing. Not knowing is a great fear of most doctors. Many patients are in fear of the not knowing what is going to happen next when the dreaded diagnosis lands on them. So often we become lodged in the fear of dying, the fear of pain and suffering or becoming dependent. This is understandable. And also, in this state of mind, it is most difficult to see beyond the diagnosis to the deeper wisdom that often only can be realized when we are taken out of our ordinary reality through illness.

But imagine now if "the diagnosis" were offered with an understanding that the illness that has appeared has hidden within it an extremely particular and specific roadmap that will unlock an unseen aspect of your truest nature and path forward. What if the illness has come to reveal to you an entirely new perspective about the life you are living and the places that need healing? One must delve deeply into the mystery, going through and beyond the CT images or the cells on the slide. If we pay close attention and also allow the mind to gather up the strands of the story that have woven the life to this point, the exact path that the illness is asking us to explore will emerge. This process requires companionship and community. It requires stepping out of old patterns of thinking and then listening deeply to the language of our bodies, dreams and signs.

Can we allow ourselves to step out of fear, both patient and doctor? To step out of the dominant scientific way and stop long enough to rest in the hands of a life force that cradles us in a web of love so profound that fear cannot penetrate. A web so omnipresent, omnipotent that the natural response can only be love for the thing that has shown up in our bodies to help us find our way back home.

It may be the greatest challenge before us: not healing from an illness but pulling ourselves out of the magnetic field of the mental construct that rules our culture, our minds--the illusion that science is supreme over nature. *That* is the illness to be healed. In order to do so we need to break the spell that keeps us separate from our very truest nature.

Science tells us that we are at war with our environment and our bodies have become battlegrounds. Our governmental leaders tell us that we must live in self-defense at all times.

In Sharon's case, she understood that she was being asked to give up a war against the microbes in her body and a worship of the scientific method. It took a life-threatening illness, a complete surrender to following the guidance of the natural and spirit worlds, and a community of humans, animals and ancestors to radically transform her worldview and way of life. To find a way to live in peace with all beings. Today she is alive and well and seeing all of life with new vision.

From across the ravine in the heart of the jungle, wild leaping Jaguar has come to set us free.



**Karen Mutter** is a practicing physician in Clearwater, Florida. She founded Integrative Medicine Healing Center in 1998 to pursue the exploration of healing outside the confines of western medicine. Informed by specialty training in internal medicine, she relies on shamanic practices, dreams, the natural world, nutrition, osteopathic practices and principles, compassion and love as her primary healing modalities. She is an aspiring writer, peacemaker and policy changer of medical education and practice.

## The Seven Jars

Anne Bergeron

I sit cross-legged on the floor, among a dream council of thirteen women, in a warm stone house, high on a quiet New Hampshire hilltop. It is early April, a night of cold wind and falling snow. We are gathered here to listen to the Earth and to our dreams so as to understand how best to act and heal in the knowledge that hard-won environmental regulations are being eviscerated daily, along with women's rights legislation, both in public and behind closed political doors. Together, we are here to dream and speak a language of survival.

We encircle a medicine mandala representing Mother Earth whose diameter extends five feet and is aglow with candlelight. At the very center of the mandala, lavender amethyst sparkles, and flowering verbena, ferns, stones, and antlers cast soft shadows. Fanning out in all directions on cornflower silks, terracotta mud cloth, blue-green linens, and russet velveteen are the inhabitants of nearly every ecosystem of the earth, hundreds of tiny ceramic, glass, plastic, and stone mammals, reptiles, avians, insects, amphibians, and fish. I feel tears well as the candlelight illumines women who live both in fear of these ecosystems' demise and in belief that it is possible to work in concert with the Earth to restore the systems that support all life.

In entering this circle, I cross a threshold into a place where the veils between waking and dreaming are translucent, where the language of our dreams holds the answers we need to survive. Right now, in our world, there may be nothing more important than this.

In the next two days, time suspends as we flow from sleeping to waking to drumming to speaking to dancing to singing to eating to walking, to visioning, and ultimately to waking once again.

On the last morning of our council, I wake at 5:00 am with this dream.

*I stand in the kitchen of my old cabin in front of my 1920 Glenwood gas stove. An ample warming bin stretches across the top. Standing on each side of the stove and facing me are two Native women, both taller than the stove. They look like the medicine women who represent wind, rain, sky, bird, buffalo, birth, and death in Frank Howell's paintings. The woman on the right side of the stove wears a white flowing dress that seems to be fluttering in the wind and her long white hair is wiry, loose, and streaked with bright blue. The woman on the left side wears a red flowing dress, and her long black hair, also loose and streaked with white, seems lifted by the breeze. The women exude calm, warmth, and benevolence, and it seems that they have flown into my cabin on the wind.*

*I step toward the stove, and I open the door to the bread warmer. Inside, the warmer is divided into seven small cubicles, equal in size and open in the front. In each compartment is an identical, pint-size, white mason jar with a white cover on it.*

*The medicine women are looking at me and smiling, and somehow I understand whom the seven jars are for and what I am meant to do with them. Each jar will be given to each continent on the earth, and I have been given the task, the honor, of giving one jar to one representative of Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, North America, Australia, Antarctica. The medicine women remain on either side of the stove, hair and clothing billowing, and then seven children appear from the shadows and from all directions around us and walk toward us. Each child comes from one continent on the earth. The children appear to be genderless, approximately seven or eight years*

*old, and are barefoot and simply clothed in white or gray. They have all different colors of skin, hair, and eyes.*

*Without speaking directly to the medicine women, I come to understand that in each white jar is everything that we need to survive, to continue on and through these times. One at a time, each child steps up to me, and I take a jar from the bread warmer and hand it to the child. The process takes a long time; it feels like is meant to be slow and deliberate. As the children reach their hands for the jars they are silent, but our eyes meet and there is recognition. Once each child has a jar in hand, the medicine women and I watch as the children are lifted by the wind and spirited back to their continents, holding their jars close to their chests. The two women and I remain by the stove, standing in the kitchen.*

In this dream, the contents of the jars will ensure our survival. The knowledge stored inside of them must be both protected and shared, and in this dream it is the female lineage, the women, supported by native teachings and earth medicine, who hold the knowledge and who have been reminded where it is stored and how it can be passed on. The knowledge of how to survive lies deep in female consciousness, in female awareness, and has been occluded and buried. Yet, it remains. We have kept it stored, its contents protected in jars, in a place we knew was safe. In the dream I am every woman on the planet.

It is up to women to give this knowledge of how to live and survive beyond these dark times to the children. Women know deep down how to appreciate the earth's nourishing gifts, and how to feed the earth in return by protecting all species of plants and animals that live with us. The survival of the next seven generations is in peril, but we hold the knowledge of survival in our hearths, in our kitchens, in our wombs, in the places most sacred to all women, who create, carry, birth, and nurture all life on earth.

We must tend, create, carry, and birth, as we have never done before.

In the language of dreams, a jar may symbolize a womb and fertility, and the act of bringing a jar to another person can represent a gift of respite or safety from a trying situation or a place of danger. Women are the stove tenders, the fire builders, the protectors of our one true hearth and home, the Earth. We store the food that the Earth gives us in jars so that we may survive the winters of our future. We have the skills. What we are doing now is remembering and sharing these skills and the language of persistence and protection with children everywhere so that we may all continue to live.

In my dream, the jars are white, a color that represents purity, safety, and protection. One of the spirits is clothed in white and has long white hair. She is a protector, a hearth tender. The color red, the dress of the medicine woman on the right side of the stove, may signify blood and violence. But red is also the color of warning, of stopping and recognizing the danger we are in. There is a harsh beauty in being able to see and name the peril so that we may open the jars of knowledge stored deep inside of us. Right now, sharing that knowledge may be the surest way to restore our humanity and regenerate the Earth.

**Anne Bergeron**, M.A., I.M.A., is a teacher, writer, and Thai Massage therapist who lives in Corinth, Vermont. Much of her writing explores rural living through the lens of our changing climate. Anne lives off-grid on a homestead that she built with her husband, where she tends gardens, sheep, and chickens. She also teaches yoga to people of all ages, and is a 2011 recipient of a Rowland Foundation fellowship for her transformative work in public education.



