



# No Way Out Many Ways Forward

compiled by the Global Youth Leadership Collaborative





# There's a Crack in Everything: No Way Out, Many Ways Forward

The Liberty Bell of the USA was ordered in 1751 by the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly for use in the Pennsylvania State House. And, in March of 1752, the bell was hung from temporary scaffolding in the square outside the State House. To the dismay of onlookers, the bell cracked during testing. And so, metaphorically, the Liberty Bell told us what so many of us have come to know.

There is a crack. And it runs right down the center of our modern world.

The work before us is impossible. We are being asked to do monstrously huge things. First, to unlearn what the system has taught us, heal and decolonize from it. Secondly, to dismantle old systems of oppression and third, to build new and beautiful ways of living together. No perfect solutions. So much work needed. Stopping the violence, creating alternatives and healing. Simultaneously.

And as we go about this work a new realization dawns on us: this same crack that runs through our modern world, also runs through the heart of every solution we try to offer to mend it.

And through our own hearts.

## What do we do when there are no perfect solutions?

What do we do when even the strongest and clearest among us look at our efforts and feel insecure about our own approaches to these things - often not convinced it's the best we could do. Is it radical enough? Are we working hard enough? Have we sold out to 'the man'? What happens when people realize we're not as clear as we wish we were? Should we work inside the system or from the outside? How open minded do we stay?

This is the reality we face: Cracks everywhere. Nothing is perfect. The reflection of ourselves in the mirror of our culture is fractured by the tremendous crack down its center.

We find chemicals in penguins in Antarctica, it is in the food we eat, the TV shows we watch (the existence of TV). This crack.

For many of us featured in this book, we have had the moment of realizing that, “We’re screwed. There’s no way out.” One of the main elements of colonization is the removal of escape routes. Land is taken. Language is taken. Traditions are taken. Where can one really go to escape from this culture? Some far off piece of land in the woods? And even if you could find land (assuming that those in power wouldn’t want to take it from you one day), we know that the crack of this culture also runs through our hearts.

**How do we escape the inescapable? We can’t run from it.  
It comes with us everywhere we go. No way out.**

**And yet - we know we must still find a way forward.  
Several things become clear . . .**

- ✦ First, we come to see that there is no ‘massive answer’. No unified movement. No single campaign we can all join together on. No single philosophy. No massive answer, just a messy, mass of answers. No way out. Many ways forward.
- ✦ Secondly, that we must change the way that we are doing change. Too much activism tears communities apart and burns people out. How do we challenge each other in a way that ennobles and lifts each other up (versus denigrating and destroying)? How can we make our activism an expression of the world we want to see, instead of recreating the very dynamics we’re fighting against in our activism?
- ✦ Third, we see that there are no easy escape routes. But we keep working anyway. Why? Because, what else is there to do? We’re screwed. But life is still beautiful. Our efforts are flawed. But they’re worthwhile.

As Derrick Jensen says, “The big dividing line is not and has never been between those who advocate more or less militant forms of resistance, or between mainstream and grassroots activists. The dividing line is between those who do something and those who do nothing. Do something.”

Fourth, as we increasingly let go of hope for massive, voluntary systemic change in the existing system, our hope grows in the new possibilities. There is an old Scottish Gaelic proverb, “Cha chaillear na thèid an cunnart.” It says, “All is not lost that is in peril.”

This book is imperfect. Put together by people busy with other projects. Far too little time and resources for even editing. But we have done what we can.

**What do we do when there is no way out?  
We find a way forward.**

**What do we do when there are no perfect solutions?  
We do something.**

*“Ring the bells that still can ring,  
forget your perfect offering.  
There’s a crack in everything.  
That’s how the light gets in.”  
- Leonard Cohen*

Contents

- Editors’ Note ..... 5
- Coumba Touré – Mali and Senegal ..... 7
- Tonio Verzone – USA and Vietnam ..... 11
- Valentina Campos – Bolivia ..... 13
- Faten Elwan – Palestinian ..... 17
- Seyi Akinbo – Nigeria ..... 22
- Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski – USA ..... 23
- Jennifer Awingan – Philippines ..... 26
- Evon Peter – Alaska ..... 30
- Augusto Cuginotti – Brazil ..... 34
- Julia Butterfly Hill – USA ..... 36
- Marie Kâ – Senegal ..... 39
- Emily Bailey – Aotearoa / New Zealand ..... 42
- Ocean Robbins – USA ..... 48
- Shireen Najjar – Palestinian..... 53
- Osmar Filho – Brazil ..... 58
- Malika Sanders-Fortier – USA ..... 63
- Nuttarote Wangwinyoo – Thailand ..... 66
- Levana Saxon – USA ..... 69
- Shilpa Jain – India and USA ..... 74
- Tad Hargrave – Canada ..... 78
- Acknowledgements ..... 87

Editors’ Note

Greetings dear friends near and far!

We live in a world of many worlds: where lives, communities, struggles and possibilities are all interlinked... where each one’s intentions and actions affect many others... where our abilities to connect and reflect have the potential to dramatically change our own lives and the places we inhabit.

You hold in your hands one effort to capture this reality. “No Way Out, Many Ways Forward” is a publication of the Global Youth Leadership Collaborative, a group of 15 activist-friends from 12 countries, who are dedicated to working on change at all levels: internal, interpersonal, and systemic.

The Global Youth Leadership Collaborative (or GC, for short) grows out of the YES! World Youth Leadership Jam community. YES! is an organization based in California, USA, that is dedicated to connecting, inspiring and collaborating with young change-makers to help build a thriving, just and sustainable world. In 1996, annually from 1999-2004, 2006 and 2008, YES! and other partner organizations hosted a week-long event called the “World Youth Leadership Jam”. 30 young social change-makers shared their stories, hopes and fears, struggles and victories, with one another, challenged themselves to live the way they want the world to be, and found life-long friends among a group of strangers. Though it lasts for only a week, many mark the Jam as a pivotal point in their life journey. To date, the World Jam community is comprised of over 150 people from nearly 65 countries. (To learn more about YES! or the World Jam, visit [www.yesworld.org](http://www.yesworld.org))

The GC formed in 2006 to advance the transformations that began at the Jam. We take the commitment to internal, interpersonal and systemic change one step further, to our diverse localities and regions. Through our ‘flow fund,’ we support the activists, gatherings, projects, documentation, communication, etc., that embody this spirit of change. We also support the next generation of the World Jam and many regional and local Jams. (To learn more about the GC, or make a donation to enable our work, visit [www.globalcollaborative.net](http://www.globalcollaborative.net))

“No Way Out, Many Ways Forward” is our attempt to pull together the stories and experiences of several World Jammers, in order to expose the deep insights and questions they are currently living with. It is not meant to be a history book or a pedestal for accomplished activists. Rather, we feel that by sharing these diverse and unique stories, we can bring all of our worlds closer together. As a Global Collaborative, we hope this book can serve as

a support and resource to those committed to creating a better present and future for all. It gives a sense of the lives, the work, the families, the sights, the scents and the tastes of a dedicated and vibrant group of activists from around the globe; hopefully, it will aid each of us in our own paths to make a difference with our lives.

We asked contributors to share with us, in the form of an essay, letter, poem, art piece, etc.:

- Your story: How did you come to be where you are now? Who are you?
- Your vision: How do you see the world you live in and the world in general?
- Your actions: What are you doing, personally, interpersonally, socially, systemically, to affect positive change in the world?
- Your questions: Where are your doubts, insecurities, confusions?
- Your hopes: What do you want to grow more of in this world?

These questions were intended as guides only. Ultimately, each author contributed what was present and came from their heart now. Over the course of a year and a half, 20 people shared their stories, 13 women and 7 men, who are connected to over 50 cultures and communities around the world.

Though geographically disparate, you'll find these stories intersect in many ways. We hope that you will see how your own story fits among them. If you come away feeling like you saw a piece of yourself reflected in others, we believe you will be able to walk stronger and truer in your own journey. Hopefully, you will feel that there are many brothers and sisters — not so far away — that too are striving to walk with you, to restore balance and justice to the world we share together.

With love and appreciation,  
Shilpa Jain, Kiritapu Allan and Tad Hargrave  
Editors

## Before I Was Born

by: Coumba Touré, Mali – Senegal

*A short story for little girls.*

*For my little sisters who are born beautiful, pure and free.*

*For those who walk head down and afraid.*

*For those who were hurt and forgot their inner beauty.*

Before I was born,  
Long  
Before I was born,  
I was made of LIGHT.  
Yes! I used to play with STARS...  
I used to travel around.  
I played around the sun  
And lay colors on the face of the moon.  
One day, I came by this WORLD.  
And I saw  
So many people struggling.  
And I said  
I want to bring some JUSTICE.  
And I saw  
A little girl crying.  
And I said  
I want to bring some JOY.  
And I saw  
Some children playing.  
And I said  
I want to play with these CHILDREN.  
And I saw

An old man frightened.  
And I said  
I want to bring some PEACE.  
And I saw  
Two lovers walking hand in hand.  
And I said  
I want to be in LOVE.  
And I saw  
A woman breast feeding.  
And I said  
I want to be a BABY.  
So, I entered this world through the first  
gateways I saw.  
Today, they are called my parents.  
Remember  
Every time you see me  
Before you touch me,  
Before you talk to me,  
Remember!  
Long before I was born  
I was made of LIGHT.  
And I used to play with the STARS.

I have been writing poetry from a very early age. It has been a sweet and discreet way of expressing myself. Still, today, I do it, even though I do not share it as much.

I finished my first book at the age of 16: 232 pages called “une aventure insolite”. It was a science fiction novel about another planet, a sister to our planet Earth but much older than our Earth. It was a planet where people had destroyed their environment and made it unlivable.

It was the story of a young woman (an extra-terrestrial being from that Earth), who falls by accident to this Earth. Kind of like me. She is found by a group of young people. Kind of like my friends. For a month, the story describes, day by day, her participation in their youth camp. She is disguised as the sister of one of the campers, and there are many exchanges between her and the young people. She is learning about this Earth, which represents the past of her planet, while the young campers are learning about her planet, which represents the future of their Earth, if their people continue on their current course of destruction.

I spent about four years writing it and wrote most of it in the fourth year, while our high school was on strike. At the time it was written, I didn't get to publish it for many reasons. Though the book was selected by a group of academics and writers in a

competition, I heard that the contest jury had questions and doubts about my authorship. It seemed too mature and elaborate for my age. They feared plagiarism.

Later, I started writing children's books through my work with the Institute for Popular Education (l'Institut pour l'Education Populaire). I first got published by a small publishing house in Senegal, then run by Fatou Ndiaye Sow. When she passed away, I decided to carry on her work. I am building a sustainable social enterprise, to make media materials and publications accessible for children based in west Africa.

Today, my goal for creating stories is to encourage African children to grow up to be confident about themselves and to be sensible and caring about their part in a peaceful and just society. I also see these stories as a way to help children from around the world grow up with some African cultures. I am trying to make these stories accessible to many children.

Through my work with Ashoka in West Africa, I am supporting innovators and social entrepreneurs, from all walks of life, working to bring about positives changes. I am inspired every day by their daring acts, their new ideas, and their life commitments.

They prove that wherever there are problems, there are also solutions, by and for people, in the very same places.

I am also currently building a family life that can model some of my belief systems. I am creating a home, where I can care for and receive friends and family. I am living with a man, raising children together. It brings new challenges and new growth. I

feel privileged to be able to count on a network of people from different parts of the world that I can work with. They are peers that help me grow.

*Fear is worse than fighting.  
Is mios' an t-eagal na 'n co gadh.*



## Streams

*To Bill Drayton  
in memory of our walk on the mountain*

Let me be strong like a stream  
Rolling down with time  
Touching even the heart of rocks  
Let me be strong like a stream  
Even a very small stream  
Caring for the living beings by my side  
With patience, with tenacity  
Let me be strong like a stream  
Mesmerizing your eyes  
Cooling your feet  
And forever moving  
Let me be strong like a stream  
Always the same but ever changing  
In thousands of drops  
Let me roll down fresh and clear  
Finding new ways, making new paths  
Let me be a strong stream  
And live only to be part of

A river  
A river of change  
A river of life



## Finding My Niche

*by: Tonio Verzone, USA – Vietnam*

Nearly a decade ago, I left my home in Alaska to seek new and challenging experiences. When I left, I felt all the answers that I was looking for existed outside my home and community. I also thought that I needed to leave Alaska in order to better understand my role in the world.

In 1999, I began my path of traveling and working with communities in different parts of the world. I met and learned from people in Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, India, Bangladesh, Iceland, and Ecuador. In late 2008, I moved back to the United States. I am now living in Washington, DC, continuing my path as a high school teacher.

After searching the world for answers, I am finally realizing that the answers I was looking for are patiently waiting for me in the wilderness of Alaska. The following reflections are from my last trip home.

September 5, 2008

Kennicott, Alaska

*When I look at nature, it is a miracle how everything fits together. The animals, plants and elements all work in concert to promote and support one another. It's a miraculous relationship based on interconnectedness and interbeing. Every animal serves a unique and meaningful purpose.*

*This beautiful concert of relationships makes me admire the animal world. They are born with an innate sense of their role in life and their connection to other beings. A sea otter, for example, knows that it will eat sea urchins. Their predisposition for purple spiny creatures means that the giant sea kelp forests will not be overgrazed. With little effort, the sea otter is fulfilling a very important role.*

*Unlike, the sea otter, I was not born with a predisposition to perform a certain task in this world. Instead, I was given the freedom to choose my niche. Self-sovereignty is a basic human right that I struggle to maintain. It is a privilege that I must understand and a gift I must fully actualize. Yet, this feeling of agency can be simultaneously liberating and overwhelming. I have found that with freedom comes a lot of responsibility and pressure. How do I know that I am indeed fulfilling the right niche?*

*In discovering the ecology of my life, a major challenge I faced was uncovering my ego. My upbringing in the West shaped my perception that one's purpose in life is rooted in self-promotion, status, and success. Now, as I go forward, my main motivation is seeking an integration of my beliefs and values in the different spheres of my life. Balance and congruency have become my new guiding principles.*

*Even with the awareness of ego, it is challenging to circumvent its influence. I am learning that my ego is not something that must be defeated, just simply understood.*

Overcoming my ego is dependent on inter-being with the world around me. My heart, not my ego, must shape the niche I fill.

The last few years have been a personal project to understand how I fit into this ecosystem. What role can I play to bring about understanding and compassion in the world? How can I interact with others in a way that promotes happiness and loving-kindness? What actions can I take that will lead to the cessation of ill-being and suffering?

Along with these questions, I have worked diligently to find balance between my passions and other parts of my self. How do relationships and family intersect in this web?

Is there space for spirituality and creativity in my work? How do I integrate my daily life into a larger framework of social change?

This fracturing of the self has led me to believe that the only course for understanding my niche is to stop searching. My ecology of life is right in front of me. The blueprints for a meaningful existence can be interpreted through an understanding of the gifts that I bring into the world. My challenge now is to create space so that my authenticity can emerge.

The very essence of a sea otter serves the world. Slowly, I am figuring out how to be more like them.



## *Todos Somos Wawas de la Tierra We are All Children of the Earth*

by: **Valentina Campos, Bolivia**

When I reflect on my past, on my growth, many rich remembrances flow like abundant rivers from my memories. At the same time, I feel that we are still living, as always, in the same open veins of Latin America. I think that the blood that runs through these veins is more tormented and obscure today than it was when I was a child. 'Progress' is catching up with us.

In times of open dictatorship, my parents worked as activists. Among the people in every community in which we took refuge, or where we went to bring 'consciousness', there was never a clear understanding of what our call was. My parents and their compañeros (guerrilleros of the ELN, led by Che Guevara) thought it was the peoples' traditions that were impeding their growth. They believed that transcending those traditions would end their oppression and unite them with *la lucha global*, the global struggle.

It was obvious that this *lucha* was foreign to the majority of the communities. They were still rooted in their own survival, in *crianza*, the ways of nurturance.

I can describe now what I intuitively felt as a little girl – a feeling of disconnection and discomfort among the people, who were, in reality, teaching us. They were saying: "Always we have been here, and we are who we are, and we don't fit in any of those social classes that you are trying to set us in." Without

words, the campesinos were saying to us: "Todos Somos Wawas de la Tierra." "We are all children of the Earth." They meant ALL of us: those from the city, like my parents, and those from the countryside, the rooted communities.





I am certain that I understood this silent message more clearly than the one my parents' party was trying to insert. The tenderness shown to us, regardless of whether what we were actually bringing was beneficial or damaging to the community — the unconditional willingness to share with us the essence of who they were and what they had — was the most essential and important thing I learned. There were also my grandparents, from whom I learned to see and value things as they were, and the respect for *la PachaMama* (Mother Earth) and all that She gives us. And my parents, all their faults aside, did transmit to me the ability to commit to my principles, take risks, and to rebel when necessary.

I learned to express art directly from the people of the countryside. They showed me the beauty and depth of their simple lives. I observed my grandmother, who was very inspiring. She was a weaver, a puppet-maker and a painter, who cultivated the earth and cooked with great pleasure.

I live in Totorkawa, Bolivia, with my two sons, my partner, my mother and our close friends and compañeros. It is a very threatened rural community outside of Cochabamba, which is trying to weave relations and fragile vernacular values. I should say that they are fragile but ALIVE. But from all sides, there are forces that try to tie us down to the dominant system.

For example, shortly after President Evo Morales was elected, he gave every rural community a free tractor for the modernization of agriculture. In some cases, he gave two tractors. Yet, here in the Andes, life is centered around the *chakra* (a ritual space for sowing-nurturing and being nurtured by *PachaMama*). It is all about *crianza* (nurturance), which makes a charity-gift of a tractor extremely destructive. It hurts not only the land, but also our perceptions and values, which sustain life in its wholeness.

I found this example even more disruptive and symbolically harmful, because the gift came from Bolivia's first-ever indigenous president. For this reason, people are becoming more confused about principles like, "Anything that damages or offends *PachaMama* will not be welcome." They are starting to accept and open the doors of modernity unquestioningly.

And now, we are facing a new threat. The illness of *narcotráfico* (the production of narcotic drugs) and its whirlpools of violence and denigration, has entered our community. Families feel that they can earn a lot of money by growing coca leaves. What was considered a sacred plant is now produced in mass quantities: 250 tons of coca leaves yield one kilogram of cocaine. The chemicals, the drug cartels, the loss of land for food production, is all devastating. Some families are being torn apart by economic forces. They are ripped out

of their cultural tapestries and placed upon the hard surface of imposed needs and destitution. They are forced to denigrate the coca leaf, our *mamita sagrada*, our medicine and nourishment.

Truthfully, we feel a deep agony amidst the impossibility to openly denounce these acts, because of possible retaliation and because the reasons our people get involved in it are so very complex. This situation is brought about by the demand for cocaine in the industrialized 'First World'. Those who are in control here in Bolivia are utilizing the desperation of families and hiding behind their suffering. Many



times, we feel alone, without realizing that we have let these forces usurp 'community' one more time.

Many believe that liberation lies in adhering to a universal line of thought. We feel, instead, that we liberate ourselves by resisting vague universalisms (well-intentioned though they may be). We need to bring down the pillars of progress and development, of lacks and needs, and instead affirm our culture and our rooted wisdom.

My husband and I gave birth to our children upon the land where we built our home. We continue sowing diversity in our *chacras*, learning directly from *el pueblo* and our Andean life. The *fiestas*, rituals, and celebrations are still more important to the majority of us than making money.

I believe that herein lies the hope and the inspiration that we count upon — as *hombres y mujeres comunitarias* — in order to heal ourselves from individualism which is, in and of itself, violence. It's unnatural and it's a lie. We had been taught that freedom comes with having many things, or important titles, or fame. But a conversation with an elder at the festival La Rebelión de las Wakas this year reminded me, "Freedom comes with knowing that we are dependent on each other." The loss of this interconnection is the source of our illness. It is what has created a vacuum within us and an insatiable hunger.

Over the course of the last year, here in Uywana Wasi, my home-cum-center of learning, decolonization and cultural affirmation, some friends from the Apu Tunari collective and I have been meeting to share our senses of *allin kausay, la vida dulce*, the sweet life. We are trying to find paths that are outside the dominant system and that celebrate our truths and beauties. My friends and I have been taking learning journeys together, *watunakuys*, which have enriched us. We are experiencing different ways, forms of conviviality and community, and they are helping us to examine our habits and change our patterns. Instead of going to give (i.e., impose) something on another community, we have been approaching each place and each person with unconditional openness.

We are using our hands and care and drawing medicines, healing, and useful objects from the earth. We resist the urge to take on jobs that separate us from our daily life and keep us from the simplicity we seek. We are freeing ourselves from economic chains and from the fear of scarcity, by collaborating together and exchanging our products and abilities. Yawar Nina, Adrián, Tania, Marisol and Valentina create games, theater, paintings and stories with children; Lesli teaches us to make our own clothes and exchange designs; Don Irgidio shares the secrets of the *chacra*; Maria Elena and Rainer offer to film and edit videos; La Memina keeps us healthy through rituals and medicines; Marisol teaches us to speak and remember

Quechua, and to sing; Doña Leticia and Doña Carlota with their looms and weaving; Fernando with his Andean guitar; Don Damián with his *quinoa* (a local grain); Víctor with his carpentry... and on and on. We have such a richness of teachers and learners in our local community.

I have begun to appreciate the nurturance of the children, the plants, my relationships, the animals, etc., that comes with the light of each new day. Everything moves in its own time. So, I am letting go of time, as measured by the steep path of progress that limits my experiences, and embracing time that flows as a cycle, where I am free to imagine and create ways to live the sweet life.

## Hoping Against All Odds

by: Faten Elwan, Palestine

When I was 16, local TV stations started to open up to the private sector. During my first year at Bier Zait University, I specialized in journalism. Halfway through the year, I got a scholarship in documentary filmmaking; the course was given by Jean Marie Condon, a senior producer at ABC News. I started working for ABC News after I finished my course. Peace was still slightly alive, and I thought we enjoyed the most free press in the Arab world. For example, criticism of the president resulted only in a phone call and a cup of coffee or dinner with a high-ranking official to discuss your grievances.

Then, in 1999, the Intifada broke out, and suddenly, the whole West Bank was invaded by Israeli tanks. Bombing and clashes non-stop... During that time, I started working as a producer's assistant on night line and prime time programs at ABC news.

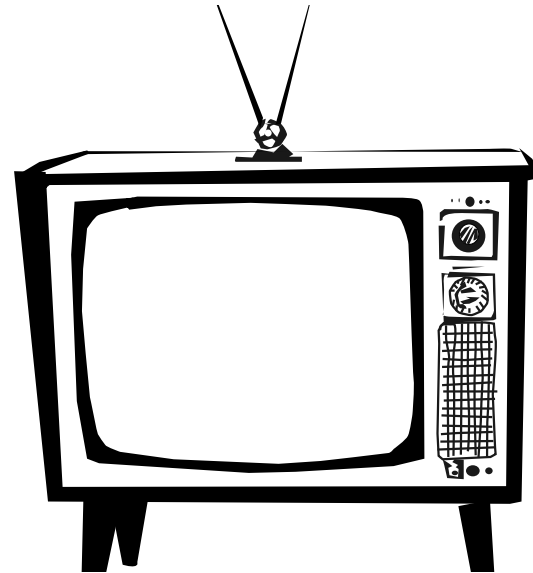
When things started to get worse, I wanted to tell the story myself. This was when I went through the training for becoming a reporter. After 12 years, I am still a reporter. But in this time, I have seen three enemies of the press emerge: the Israeli government (who has withdrawn or cancelled all our press cards and restricted our movements), Mr. Anonymous (disguised gunmen operating under the orders of Fatah, a political party) and the Palestinian Authority.

(who have shut down newspapers and radio stations, because they do not want any criticism of them to appear publicly).

After ten years, I realized that the shield I always held proudly, the shield of journalism, was only a nice memory from the past. It was shattered by these three enemies of the press. The fact is, the press itself isn't immunity anymore.

Living this reality has made me seek change. The rusty minds of officials and decision-makers has me looking for one thing – the best of a new generation to serve their country, not their pocket!

As a journalist who was shot, beaten and detained by Israeli soldiers, for no good reason, I am still looking for hope. I am still looking for a way to be able to hope against all odds.



## Crazy I'LL GO

Tiny little hands trying to grow  
Tiny little smiles trying to glow  
But how could they grow? or even glow?  
The circumstances are blowing up more.

One day, while he was going to school  
His smile was assassinated  
From his own world confiscated  
Martyr, they said, This is how he has gone  
Broken-hearted mother asks: Why?  
Asks: How should I accept his loss?  
Going crazy, thoughts start to cross  
A heart full of anger  
Trying to solve that huge mystery  
Caused by an inhuman soldier  
Sitting proudly on his mar kava'<sup>1</sup> toy

When this soldier was asked: Why?  
He said, Stones, Commander.  
This kid attacked me with his stones...  
But what about the other kid in Gaza?  
What about the other one in Jenin refugee camp?  
What about all the other kids killed around  
Palestine???  
Stones, Sir!  
I was attacked by stones, Sir!

But how am I to understand  
That angel cutie smile was assassinated for this  
crime

Throwing stones! This is his crime  
Though this crime was the only toy he knew  
No Play Station, no video games  
Why should they ask for them if they are living  
that game?  
"Run for your life" is the name of this game  
The rules are clear  
Israeli soldier dressed in green  
Olive green, once a symbol of peace  
But, in this game, "Enemy" is how it is seen  
By those tiny little children trying to dream

The random count starts  
1, 2, 3  
Soldiers in green: Shoot!  
Children: Run!  
Winner  
Is the one who survives till the end of the game  
This game continues  
On and on it goes  
Crazy, as well they go!  
Little tiny angels putting their life on the edge  
Facing a tank with a dare  
Dare to cross the line and destroy the phase  
Close to it they get, yet not scared  
On top of the tank they get  
But still not scared  
Crazy!!!

*1 A kind of tank.*

We could be, but take a deeper look  
Clear your mind and try to see  
Just yesterday my mama disappeared  
Into her own world of sadness  
I asked him: How?  
He said: A year ago, my dad got a new title  
They call him martyr now  
My uncle is a martyr, too  
But what killed my mama most  
My little two-month-old sis  
She is also a martyr.  
I asked him: How, how could this be???  
He said: Tear gas bomb, my angel couldn't  
breathe  
I saw her peacefully surrender  
Flying away up to heaven  
Martyr??? With tears on his face, he yells  
I don't even know to what this word refers!  
And then crazy we are, they said  
How can't we be?  
If this is the only term they taught us to be!

Trying to draw a smile on his face full of anger  
Words come out hardly  
He says: I didn't tell you about our dream  
A deep breath he takes,  
We just dream...  
Of a better night full of time to sleep

No bombing or tank shields  
No shooting no screams  
No tears falling from terrified sweets<sup>2</sup>  
Holding her kid tight to her chest  
Asking god to give her the strength  
To keep her sanity till the end  
Drawing her own mantra  
Chanting and claspings  
Trying to distract the fear

Getting himself together  
With a sound full of strength  
Once again he yells  
Now! I am ready to change the incoming faith  
My life I will dedicate to stopping my mom's  
pain  
To draw a smile on the tiny angel's face  
To light a candle for their way

I say, Is it hope? What I can feel in your words?  
In a radical voice, he says, No!  
For me, there is no hope for the future  
I'm building this hope  
Will I survive till the end?  
I'll have to ask my stone  
If they want to say I am crazy  
Then CRAZY I will go...

*2 Like 'sweet girl darling'.*

Where I am from is the story of who I am. Or, maybe, trying to know what I am. A free soul. That's how I feel inside. That's how I was born. Still, to keep this spirit alive is the struggle I face every moment, until I get to a point where I feel I have lost knowing who am I for real.

Palestine is land where every contradiction can happen. My homeland is a prison, yet it is also my paradise. Something about the air that blows into your soul... It can overcome all the humiliations of the checkpoints. They are spreading like cancer that has no cure. So, I have to learn how to live with it, as there is no other choice. Israel is the name of the one that makes the rules on how life should be lived, how borders can be drawn, and if people should live or die.

It's a story that has been going for more than 60 years. And if, as in the jungle, only the stronger survive, then it will be the state of Israel. They have the power and the sympathy of the world. The other side is 'Palestine.' And since it didn't earn the title of an independent state, the international world calls it the "Palestinian authority". In this story, they are the weak side; they just go along with the rules of Israel. In between the two live the people. Some citizens left, others learned how to go with the flow, and others decided to fight against the cruelty.

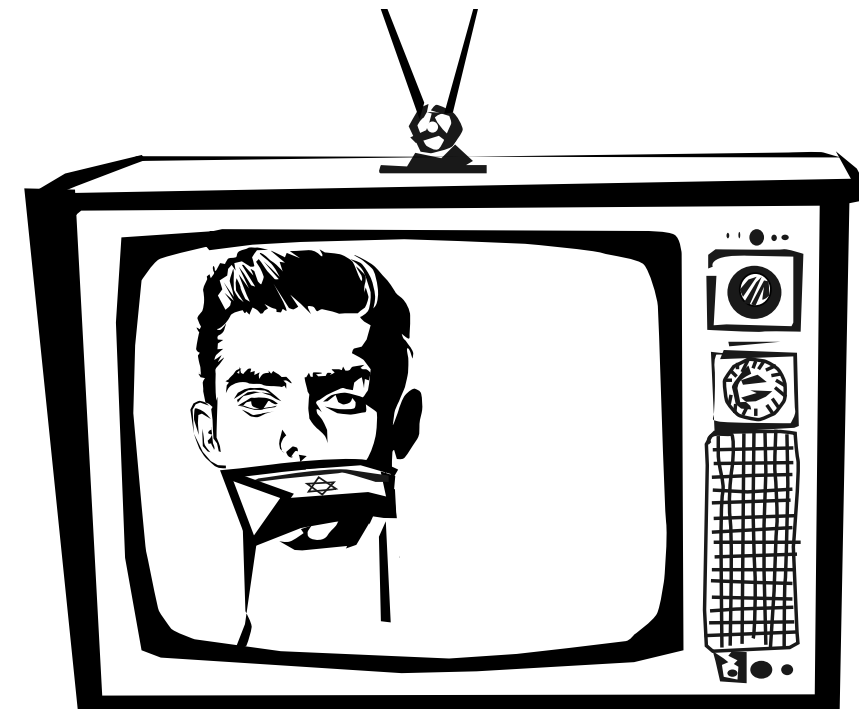


The first Intifada uprising took place in 1987. It was a direct confrontation between Palestinians civilians (because no army is allowed to exist in Palestine) and Israeli soliders. A lot of people were killed; others were held prisoners. After the bloodshed came a peace accord (the Oslo Agreement). For almost a decade, the Palestinians lived in peace. But a fragile peace it was. Right around the corner, war started again. In 2000.

By that time, I had grown up to be a journalist. I witnessed and reported firsthand on the unbalanced confrontation between tanks, helicopters, F-16 war

planes, and angry Palestinian stones! Again, blood, agony, funerals, suffering, and hatred was spreading fast.

This second uprising was called the Aksa. It still continues to this day. It only moves like a roller coaster; one day it's calm, the second day it's bombing and war. The last confrontation took place in the Gaza strip in December 2009. There a massacre of humanity took place, and though it was clearly executed by the Israeli army, many people are still debating. The poem I wrote is only an eye-witness account of some of the things that happened while I was covering the news.



## Coming through the Cracks

by: Seyi Akinbo, Nigeria

*Sometimes I describe myself as a bohemian. It is the artist in me. I enjoy poetry, though the sometimes crazy schedule I face makes the lines come slower these days...*

As a concerned person, I weep for the hazards that pervade our environment. It's very sad that many benefit from others' pain. Many people in the international community have heard about the struggles in oil-producing areas against oil companies, but few know about the tragedies around bunkering. In cities or towns, when oil pipelines burst, regular people go over to scoop up fuel for domestic use. A touch of a cigarette is enough to set off an inferno, and in a matter of minutes, numerous residential streets are engulfed in flames. Hundreds die most times, and even more sustain injuries. How can you explain that? Yet, the bunkers\* feed fat. That's the scenario in my land now. Having crude oil in Nigeria could be termed a curse more than a blessing.

As a woman in Africa, I face many hurdles as a working woman. I am expected to keep the home-front sound and yet stay relevant professionally. Not easy. I am a romantic, but I know that Prince Charming may not be as realizable as in fairy tales. So, I try to see people for who they are.

Right now, I am trying to redefine my work. I particularly wish to protect children. It's tough in the environment I live in. Many people would rather buy shares or pile up treasures. Sometime ago, I was part of a group of people who visited interesting places like orphanages, a home for deformed children and so on. I saw an abandoned child picked up from a dump site, whose head was partially eaten by a pig! I nearly tore off my fancy clothes, bling bling designer belt and sunglasses...

My doubts and fears are real. I dread cancer. I doubt that many international bodies are sincere about curing HIV/AIDS. If there's anything I would wish for, it's for the world to stop spinning so much. Why do we suffer armed robbery, illness, assassinations, police brutality, and war all the time? Why is the world celebrating negativity?

What would it be like to sit in any corner of the world and enjoy peace? When are we going to hear 'yes' and it will mean 'yes'? I write now and wonder what the next fifty years will be like. Hopefully, most of us will be around then.

*\* Bunkers is a term for people who siphon off petroleum products illegally.*

## Part of the Beautiful Struggle

by: Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski, USA

One of my oldest memories is of the back of my mother's feet, her black leather flats clicking against the pavement, and me, breathing hard, determined to catch up to her, keeping my eyes on my goal, until I reached it. We were always running. And it wasn't until much later that my mother taught me, and I began to realize, the importance of being still. We ran for different reasons. To catch the bus, the train, for work, out of necessity, desperation, and out of choice.

By the time I turned 14, we had already moved 16 times. After that, it slowed down. Then, I moved on my own, ran on my own.

When people ask me where I'm from, where my home is, I find myself frustrated by this very simple question. Only now have I been able to figure out the answer. I come from so many places, and so many places that reside in my bloodline, from before I was born. I give thanks for this life, for my experiences, the ugly, the beautiful, for my ancestors, homies, and family.

I grew up seeing my mother work her whole life. She has taught me so many things. I give thanks everyday that she taught me that I have choices in life. And so every day, every moment, is a choice. There is a certain kind of empowerment in believing in choice. Today, I am choosing to direct my work to creating beauty, elevating truth in the face of a sometimes

horrible reality. I choose to do this while building strong relationships with others. Most of whom share a similar vision, and some of whom don't. I really believe community is everything.

In 2007, I toured with a show called *BAGGAGE*, produced by a local all-women's circus company, here in New Mexico, called Wise Fool. *BAGGAGE* is a show that talks about domestic violence and women of color in the state of New Mexico. While on that tour, we brought the show to the youth prison facilities in Albuquerque, for both the young men and young women who were serving time there. After the show, we were all eating together, and some of the youth expressed the desire to create writing of their own, to share their stories. Out of this conversation, the B.R.E.A.T.H. (Building a Revolution of Expression and Action Through Heartwork) project was birthed; it was a collaboration between myself and two other writers and close friends in the area. Our program teaches poetry and performance to incarcerated youth as a means to heal,



resolve conflict, and uplift. Many of my family members and loved ones have been incarcerated throughout my life, and I have lost a lot, and gained perspective, as a result of this country's Prison Industrial Complex. It is a fast-growing epidemic here.

For a long time, I was coming at my work from a place of struggle, because that is what I knew about work. More and more, I am deciding to come from a place of love. There is a writing of Kahlil Gibran that I read over and over. In it, he says, "Work is love made visible." That is the kind of work I want to do in my life.

One of my close mentors asked me a question recently, that I wake up to every morning. "In the absence of struggle, who do you become?" I am learning how to become still enough to pray, still enough to hear the questions and sometimes the answers, still enough to heal and create work that has greater impact, stronger connection, and assists in the larger movement to build healthy community. Love made visible.

These days I am working on a show called *Sangria Cipher*. It is a one-woman show that compassionately confronts deeply social issues of identity, war, addiction, sexuality, spirituality, survival, dreams, and healing through the lens of home. What does it mean to find home in your own body when you have been raised with a 'homeless' mentality (literally, generationally, culturally, socially)? Through poetry, monologue, storytelling, graffiti and music, this show

is told from the eyes of a young queer U.S.-raised brown woman, but it touches on universal experiences that most everyone can relate to. *Sangria Cipher* aims to create space for untold stories to be shared, unheard voices to rise.

I believe in the power of speaking your truth, of story, of relations, relationships, community, compassion, love, and of actively working on myself, as transformation begins within. I give thanks for all those who have come before me, all those in my life presently, and all those who I have yet to meet. I give thanks for the work that you do, and for us each to grow in order to truthfully and authentically transform ourselves, our communities, our world for the better. In the words of Talib Quali, to be a part of this "beautiful struggle" across so many lines, together.

### What We Do To Forget An excerpt of *Sangria Cipher*

Have you ever sat on the edge of your own trembling memories waiting for falling or for floating? Did you pack up your candy, your bones, dandelion crowns, first star wishes and bicycle rides? Did you take everything sweet and run? Or did you come back because tongues move faster than knees and there were no road signs to help you get past where you come from.

And what do we barter for forgetting? Is it the wide open mouthed dreams that echo off the crevasses of skulls? Is it the sleeping soundly of tired hearts that are through with speaking? Or is it the weeping that comes out our mouths like a dancing to set our only souls free? Do we loose the fight? Or do we fight too much? What parts of ourselves do we slay in open sacrifice when we forget in order to survive?

Have you ever sat breathlessly in the corner of your Corazon to watch the setting of another day? Did you pace back and forth in sangria wakes just to make sure the sun came back? Did you write letters in glass bottles to toss out into the mess of ocean stretched out across the other parts of you? Or did you pray endlessly over worn rosary beads for God to press your soul into the bread of another body?

And is it that we choose to forget? When bones would bend more easily, and carefree was cement scraping knees, when we laughed truthful over the threads of wind, and opened up jaws to let the sun in, did we know it then? That we would be making deals with our shadows to maintain order in the silence of our brains? When we made believe stars into genies, and exhaled long enough to keep our memories, when we bellowed "Alakazams" across broken pavements, and had enough heart left to believe in magic, did we know it then? That time would kiss hollow promises across our cheekbones and carve our throats into compromise? When we would dream till the last

honey of sunrise evaporated and the end was the beginning for as long as our legs would take us, when love was found in the stretch between seconds, and reminiscing was as worthless as beds over demons, did we know it then? That our laughter would peel shameless off like a soiled dress finding solitude in our chests too embarrassed to come out naked? Or had we already signed contracts with our life lines to erase nerve endings and break pencils that would no longer write for us as long as we woke up each and every morning so help us God? Is forgetting our only light in the dark tunnel of forgiveness? Or do we mistake our salvation for a flickering streetlamp we built only to keep company with the moths of abandoned thoughts?

Have you ever sat on the edge of your own trembling memories waiting for the flying of maps into palms to memorize like the backs of hands? Did running morph into instinct as inherent to survival as water and breath?

*Did you forget how to stop?*  
Yes.

*How long have you been running?*

For as long as I can remember.





## She Who Fears to Suffer, Suffers From Fear

by: Jennifer Awingan, Philippines

**M**y first year in college, about 19 years ago, I participated in a protest against increasing tuition fees. That was my first political act, but definitely not my last. Since then, not only have I been joining protests, I've been actively organizing them as well. My initial query about the rising cost of education led me to a series of questions: Is education the government's obligation? Why does the government prioritize debt servicing? What is the IMF? What is the World Bank? The answers to my questions only left me with more unanswered questions; it was like Pandora's Box. Now, activism is my life.

Since my first protest the scope of my involvement has widened from the school to the workers, peasants and indigenous peoples. Every student activist was duty-bound to relate campus issues to the broader society. So, with other student activists, I joined the picket lines of workers, specifically the union workers of Narda's Weavers (a giant garment company) who decided to protest the company's anti-labor practices. Some of my classmates' parents worked for Narda. They were unable to pay their children's fees, and their children were forced to stop their studies. The miners' strikes in neighboring towns took place almost simultaneously, so I had to go from one place to the other to show my support, help man the picket lines, and facilitate

discussions on labor issues. The indigenous peoples also declared their opposition against the open pit mining operation of Benguet Corporation (a giant gold mining company that is the second largest gold producer in Asia). The people in the community built barricades around the company's offices, and there were daily arrests. All of these experiences opened my eyes and helped me make my decision to work full-time in social justice work.

My desire to change my community challenged me to get involved in organizing. I realized that other people, especially the youth, should have opportunities to participate, too. I helped to set up the Cordillera Youth Center in 1992, with the aim of providing alternative



education and trainings for youth and students. To this day, the center also serves as a campaign center for youth and students' rights and welfare. The work at the Center extended to popularizing women's rights and led to the formation of Gabriela Youth, an organization catering to the needs of young women and helping them cope with issues and problems they faced. (Gabriela is the name of Filipino woman who led revolts in the northern Philippines during the Spanish colonial period.) At Gabriela Youth, I facilitated gender-sensitivity trainings and ensured that women's rights are incorporated in all the Cordillera Youth Center's programs.

In 1997, our international solidarity work grew, opening the window for Cordillera youth to the global community. We organized an exchange program and hosted friends from overseas, rather than sending our youth abroad, because pressing work at home made it impractical. These conferences and workshops were designed to allow young people to learn from each other and to build solidarity between indigenous peoples.

Our international solidarity work and the campaign for the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights led to the founding of the Asia-Pacific Indigenous Youth Network. APIYN's participants ensure that issues concerning youth and children receive attention in the local, national and international arena. Recently, in response to the rising cases of human rights violations

in the Philippines, we started Young Defenders, a youth-led human rights group, with the help of YES!.

My activism is intertwined in my family life. I have four kids who are growing up fast! Ruslan, my first child, is already a teenager and is a junior high school. He loves wushu and playing guitar. He keeps asking me to buy him a guitar, but I keep telling him it's not bad to borrow one. Nina, my only girl, is in sixth grade and is always in the top ten of her class. She promises to become an activist like me, when she's old enough. She's already attended a number of trainings and rallies. Miel, my third child, is eight and in fourth grade. I had him start a year early. Due to the threat of extrajudicial killings, I felt I should prepare him for school so that if I'm gone suddenly, at least he has already adjusted in school and won't suffer as much for the lack of my presence and guidance. Amir, my youngest, is now four and is very independent for his age.

Being a mother makes me acutely aware of the social conditions in which most Filipinos find themselves. One in every seven students does not have a classroom. One in every three students does not have a textbook. Millions of Filipino families live on less than a dollar a day. Millions live in shanties or on the streets, and indigenous peoples are denied access to their lands. People are indiscriminately killed when they ask questions or make demands for a better living conditions.

This is not the world I dream of. This is not the world I want my kids to inherit. I yearn for a community where every child has a pencil, so she can draw her dreams, and crayons, so she can color them in. I yearn for a community where families have enough time to be families... where parents go to work and still have enough time to play with their kids... I crave a world in which individuals can freely express their thoughts and feelings without being shot.

Cynics say that we cannot change the world. They would say I'm a dreamer or an idealist. I say that dreaming is one of the few truly great things we can do. Because from our dreams, we hope and from our hopes, we act to realize our dreams. By working with other dreamers we can make changes in this seemingly unchangeable world. I keep dreaming with my kids.

### **Yes, I teach my kids to dream.**

At home, I tell my kids stories about other people. I tell them about the American Indians, about the Maori from Aotearoa, about other activists I meet in my work. I also talk to them about the negative bias they're exposed to by watching animated movies in which the Indians are depicted as evil and unruly. I teach my kids not to take advantage of others and not to discriminate against others.

For the past three years we've boycotted Nestle products in support of the local Nestle workers' campaign for better wages and working conditions.

It's been amazing to watch my kids become aware of the campaign and of why we support it. Even Amir, who is four, tells people, "Nestle yan, may dugo yan." ("That's Nestle, there is blood in it." This refers to the local union's campaign, "There's blood in your coffee.")

I believe that the little things we do as an individual, as a family, as an organization or as a community can become a powerful tool to change the world.

Of course, from time to time, despite my hope that things will change for the better, fear creeps in with the killings and abductions of friends and known activists. The Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (CPA), of which I'm also a member, is in the military's 'Order of Battle' with government apparatus going from school to school, preaching that the CPA is an enemy of the state. Through text messages and other means, people in the organizational network are subjected to threats and harassment. The CPA has already suffered the deaths of four active members: Marcos Bangit, Pepe Manegdeg, Albert Teredano and Alice Claver. A year ago, James Balao, another active member of the CPA, was forcibly taken by armed men and remains missing.

So, yes, I'm afraid to die. I have sleepless nights thinking about my kids and about the other people I would leave behind. I cry for my still missing co-worker, and I'm afraid of being abducted. Who wouldn't be?

The killings and disappearances are scary enough, but being on a hit list frightens me more. A few weeks

after Marcos Bangit was killed in 2006, and just a few days after my return from a conference in Canada, my parents' house in the province was strafed with M-16 rifles. My parents awakened to a sudden burst of gunfire hitting their house. Luckily enough, they survived the attack, but they went into hiding for two days. My brother, who is a policeman, received text messages claiming that the shooting happened because my parents are communist sympathizers. This message struck me deeply. Doesn't the military call my organization CPA a communist front? Doesn't the military tag CPA members as communists?

Things became clearer after the attempt on my parents. Some of my relatives who work in the police intelligence division told me that I should be concerned for my safety. They told me that I was targeted for 'neutralization', a military euphemism for killing. The supposed attempt on my life would have been the day I boarded a bus on my way to Manila. The day I was to fly from Manila to Canada for an APIYN activity. I was told my killers just missed my bus that day. I was dumbfounded when I heard of this.

Instead of running away I decided to continue with my work. These acts are meant to silence dissent and discourage people from voicing their opinions and concerns. All the love and support I received, including that from YES!, strengthened me in my resolve not to run away. It has helped me realize that this world can only be changed if people put public

interest before personal interest. For me, this is what it means to serve.

I am not without fear, but as the saying goes, "She who fears to suffer, suffers from fear". Fear must not be allowed to silence us. We should use it as a driving force to propel us towards creating the change we want to see.

At night, I think of my children. As I see them sleeping, I think of what their lives will be like and how their needs will be met. Giving them a chance to learn and play and dream their dreams in color, without being scared into silence, is the best reason I have for continuing my work.



## My Beginnings

by: Evon Peter, Alaska

When I turned thirteen years old, I started having vivid dreams. In one, I rose from my sleeping body and ascended into the night sky. I had broad wings and was no longer in human form. I flew above the city streets in the cold Arctic air, taking a tour of downtown Fairbanks. An hour later, I passed over the apartment buildings of a few of my friends before heading back to my bedroom and returning to my body.

In another dream, I was in a cleared, forty-acre field, surrounded by a dense forest with mountains rising from the tree line in the distance. I was among several hundred Indigenous peoples from Central America. They had built a waist-high, makeshift wooden stage towards the eastern edge of the field. I stood to the side of the stage watching and listening to speakers rally the people. There were twenty of us up around

the stage area, some sitting on steps and others standing on stage supporting the speaker and waiting their turn. The energy of the people and the space was powerful and radiant. A transformation was on the horizon. They were speaking in Spanish and I could understand every word.

I had many more vivid dreams during my adolescent years. The final dream I had in those days could be considered a nightmare. It is one I may never share with anyone in detail. It revisited me many evenings for half a year.

I saw two paths before me. One led to a life of compromise and blindness where I paid little attention to all that was happening in our society on a political, social, or environmental level. I also suppressed my emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development.

The other path would challenge me to grow in ways I was not even capable of comprehending at the time, but I was aware that it would require a commitment to manifest my capacity as a human being. It would be a very difficult yet fulfilling path. I imagined my future self as a loving and influential person. It was this second path that I committed to follow, knowing that only I can choose how to use my knowledge and my capacity.

Sixteen years have passed since that day, yet I feel like I have already lived a lifetime. I push the limits of comfort in search of understanding, truth, and justice. Over the years, I have been referred to as a student, half-breed, speaker, teacher, dropout, leader, catalyst, facilitator, activist, healer, peacemaker, and Chief. I continue to fulfill many of these roles although I prefer not to be attached to titles. I am simply who I am.

Thus far, my path in life has carried me to South and West Africa, India, Italy, Finland, Spain, England, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Canada, and across much of Alaska and the continental United States. It has also carried me into the depths of human suffering and consciousness.

As a young child, my mother sent me up to Vashraii K'oo ('creek with a steep bank') to stay with my grandfather, Steven Peter, Sr., and my uncle Walter Peter.

Vashraii K'oo is one of the most remote villages in Alaska; it's about a hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle and is nestled in the Southern foothills of the Brooks mountain range. You can walk for at least seventy-miles in any direction and see nothing but nature. There are no paved roads and the airport has a gravel strip landing pad for small planes. There is one school and a village of cabins flanking the main road resting atop a long hill surrounded by many lakes, a creek, and the east fork of the Chandalar River. The cabins vary in size. The one my grandfather, uncle, and I stayed in was about fifteen by twenty feet. We shared an outhouse, and had neither electricity nor running water.

My grandfather Steven was elderly and did not speak much English and my uncle struggled with epilepsy, so, in many ways, I raised myself as a young boy. My life in the village was simple and rooted in the natural world.

Steven was a special man, loving and full of history and humor. He seemed to get along with everyone in the village. I would sit in the cabins and listen to the way the elders communicated with one another. He rarely sat me down to speak to me, I think mostly because of the language barrier, but I learned a lot from him. In my twenties, I realized that he had shown me a way of carrying myself in the world without using words. It was a way of being at peace with those around me. Our people are sometimes referred to as the 'Caribou



people' because of our unique interdependence with a wild herd that still numbers over 100,000 animals. They migrate over 1000 miles a year, as they have for thousands of years, returning to our lands each fall and spring.

When I was young, the whole village would move up onto the side of a mountain to *Dachan lee*, which means "tree line", to camp. The hunters went up on top of the mountain to hunt for caribou. Each family set up meat drying racks, tents, fire pits, and temporary outhouse areas. As kids, we went down to the glacier creek to fish for grayling and went from camp to camp drinking tea, eating freshly fried or dried caribou meat, and visiting. I have a lot of fond memories from that place.

Winters in Vashraii K'oo are dark and cold, a serene form of silent beauty. For most of the winter each cabin has a cloud of smoke billowing from its stovepipe. We haul wood from the thicker parts of the forest to keep our homes warm through temperatures that can reach seventy below zero. Needless to say, the people spend a lot of time indoors during the winter months. These are the months of storytelling, ice fishing, sledding, dog mushing, snowshoeing, and celebrations. As kids, we would hunt for ptarmigan and rabbit among the willows surrounding the village.

We lived with nature and by the seasons, each bringing its own something that we looked forward to. When I was asked about my culture as a thirteen year old after moving to the city of Fairbanks in interior Alaska, I remember responding, "My culture is survival." The teachings of my culture are about how to relate with our environment in a wise, balanced, and respectful



way so that we can ensure our survival and that of future generations. In the Arctic, the significance of cultural teachings and traditional knowledge is magnified because any small mistake could result in death within minutes.

Traditional knowledge and understanding, carried by cultures still intimately connected to living from the land, is vital to the current situation humanity is facing. This knowledge is both scientifically solid and practical in its application. On a global level, we are facing the collapse of unsustainable practices in relation to economic systems, food production and distribution systems, fresh water depletion, and non-renewable resource exploitation. In addition, we are adapting to global warming, which is linked to these unsustainable practices. In essence, we must transition to sustainable ways of life, which will result in most people having to make significant adjustments to their lifestyles in order to survive. Three key facets of this transition are healing, sustainable relationship with the land, and building community. These are areas in which Indigenous peoples are experts.

We should not underestimate the challenges we are facing in our generation. We are being called to face unhealthy ways of being we have been indoctrinated into and which we have adopted into our ways of thinking and living. We are being challenged to raise our awareness of truth regarding the situations our communities and humanity is encountering. And

finally, we are being called to take positive action upon what it is we have come to understand for the sake of future generations. It is this mission that I am committed to fulfill among my people and with all others who share this vision of a peaceful and sustainable future.

*A good tale is not the worse of  
being twice told.  
Cha mhisde sgeul mbath aithris  
da uair.*

## Coming through the Cracks

by: Augusto Cuginotti, Brazil

I guess people who inspire me with their life stories are the ones who carry and shine a spirit of service. I've always looked at them as people connected to a powerful source, alchemists of light. I found them among international activists and local farmers alike and have been trying to unveil what is behind the stories they share. How would it be to always be connected to the spirit of service in me and to work from this place?



While some brilliant activists and leaders see their lives as if they were warriors, with a war to be won and a burden to be carried, others talk about their work with their eyes; they live what they are and do it like a blessing. Although both may get to similar places sometimes, I find that inspired and sustained change only comes from the latter. To constantly choose this path, and invite others to look at their own path, has been a challenge and a blessing to me.

I feel the need to reconnect to myself — both in my talents and weaknesses. As new challenges emerge personally for me, I believe that getting to know myself better will help me serve in the best way possible. For this, I cultivate personal disciplines that I find fascinating. So nowadays, you will see me tap dancing, doing aikido and raja yoga. And because I carry the passion of creating learning spaces, I keep hosting local and international gatherings of peers to explore this spirit of connection and service.

In the midst of insights, I also carry some confusion and anxiety. I'm not able to feel comfortable under those circumstances, but I guess it's not real confusion if you are comfortable, right? Questions arise like: Do things fundamentally change only when facing pain or fear? After knowing what to do, how can I figure out when? Do I make a better leader to others than I make for myself? Under which circumstances should we stop playing the game? If my answers are swimming a little further out into the sea than usual, I have to join

old man Santiago in his venture and take the boat out there, trusting myself as much as the weather.

To act in this inner and outer balance is what I understand as spiritual activism. I hope more of it will grow in this world. I want to see more conversations that invite us to learn both externally and internally.

I don't feel the need to be either an optimist or a pessimist about the future (or the weather!). Events happening in the world would keep me floating between the two, and I would not be able to set a course for my actions based on these simple perceptions of hope or despair. Instead, my choice is to trust that as we evolve in our consciousness, we will maintain what is dear to us, and everything else will change accordingly. I believe it is possible and feel content. And, even if sometimes I am lost and forget all this, it's always something to go back to.



## Love in Action

by: julia butterfly hill, USA

This poem came through me while I was living in the branches of Luna, the over-1000-year-old redwood tree that I lived in without touching the ground, from 1997-1999, in order to protect it from being cut down. When this poem came through me, I was thinking of forest activists in Humboldt County, California, USA, all wearing colorful clothing, kneeling in a line, with arms linked in prayer. In front of them was a line of police in all-black riot gear. They brutally pepper-sprayed the activists. At this time, Maxxam Corporation, the company whose destructive practices I was protesting, had already put my life in extreme danger, while trying to get me out of the tree.

In the moment this poem came through me, I was present to how profound the force of Love is. Love is more powerful than hate, violence, and small-mindedness. Even when our bodies are broken and falling apart, Love calls us forth into a realm greater and more profound than we even know is possible.

This poem is about Love being “That Which Is Deeper.”



## That Which Is Deeper

Worn  
tired faces  
streaked with dirt  
lined with age  
far beyond the years  
Hands held  
unity defying your desire to divide  
Hearts beating  
the drummer's rhythm  
bearing our warrior's cry to the sky  
Spirits  
lifting and moving bodies  
too tired to carry on their own  
Hearts  
speaking truth  
comes from deep within  
Endless souls  
marching  
pushing forward  
towards our goals  
And there you are

on the other side  
You lie to slander our names  
You steal what is rightfully ours  
You wrongfully imprison  
but what is deeper  
that  
you can never have  
You block our way  
with your twisted authority  
You tear apart our barricades  
of honor and truth  
You even hurt our bodies  
but what is deeper  
that you can never have  
And I know that makes you angry  
Your so-called power feels a threat  
because we all know  
that strength in us  
is  
what is deeper  
you can never have

## Planting Seeds of Knowledge

by: Marie Ka, Senegal

The greatest changes in history (and herstory) have come when people are willing to put their bodies where their beliefs are. Most of the rights we take for granted today came from the hard work, risk, and sacrifice of those who came before us, who were willing to give their comfort, time, energy, effort and, in some cases, their very lives, for us to have a more just, healthy, and beautiful world. We are the ancestors of the future. What do we want our legacy to be? Our legacy is in the life we leave behind.

For me, Love in Action is the motto to which I live my life. My commitment in my life is to Live so fully and presently in Love, that there is no room for anything else to exist. This is a commitment that calls me to live bigger than I know myself to be moment to moment. It is a constant inquiry, rather than an end goal, a guiding mechanism to hold every thought, word, and action accountable, in order to live as fully in integrity as I possibly can.

I do not use disposable products, because if we are throwing away our planet and our future, there is no Love present. I ride my bike and take public transportation as often as possible. I have not owned a car since I was 18 years old, because Love calls me to be mindful of how I move in my life. I am a joyous vegan, because Love calls me to be aware of the interconnection of all life, which includes my food

choices. I am very clear that our forks are weapons of mass destruction, or tools of mass compassion, depending on the choices we make. I will never give birth to a child because there are 6.8 billion children of Mother Earth. Mother Earth cannot sustain that many children. Plus, there are millions of children already here who need love and homes. I feel that to birth a child into the world today is profoundly lacking in Love for the Earth and future generations. These are just some of the myriad ways that Love is my guiding force in my life.

[www.juliabutterfly.com](http://www.juliabutterfly.com) and [www.whatsyourtree.org](http://www.whatsyourtree.org)

*"If you are going to tell someone the truth, you had better make them laugh, or they will kill you."*

Oscar Wilde

For as long as I can remember, I have had this dream to mix the two things that are soft spots in my heart: media and children. I've had an idea for African children's programming that would offer them education and entertainment. They would be shows that would not only promote cultural and humanitarian values, but also bring awareness on issues such as ecology or children's rights.

In 2006, just one year after I had left the States to settle back in Senegal, I threw myself into "Seeds of Knowledge". It revealed itself to be a colossal project. I dreamt of an audiovisual platform that would allow for sharing across communities. There is an African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could make it a global village?

As my mind explored the myriad of possibilities, the project literally took on a life of its own. My dreamer's team dived creatively into it. Authors, storytellers, teachers, directors and animators all brought their enthusiasm and energy to give birth to 'Safy' and 'Ibou Niebe'. It was exhilarating to witness those two imaginary bean characters come to life and create a world dedicated to children. I felt giddy like a four year-old, when I watched Kumba learn about the importance of kindness and generosity. And her wonderful odyssey of water reminded me of the precious gift mother earth gives us.

Writing, directing and producing the pilots for "Seeds of Knowledge" was truly elating.

But after almost two years of total dedication, I felt overwhelmed and in a great deal of confusion. Fear and doubt had seen an opportunity. They seeped in slowly and quietly. Being the obsessive person that I am, it did not even cross my mind to take a break. I defined myself as 'hardworking', so not reaching my goal meant that I had not tried hard enough. After all, I had come back from the US to share with my people the privileges life had blessed me with, so stopping or leaving the project was unimaginable.



I got married and pregnant around the same time. Marriage turned out to be a disaster, but pregnancy was amazing. The minute I knew I was expecting, it was as if my being became less important. I was able to look at the world from a more distant perspective. It wasn't that I was less involved, but more as if I was able to see myself as part of the multitude of other beings. This 'sight' gave me the incredible opportunity to fully give up fear for nine months. I am not sure how it all operated, but my theory is that feeling less significant freed me from egocentric considerations. As I was just a dot among other dots, it felt less pressing to achieve my goals.

In this way, failure became less disastrous and success less crucial. I truly enjoyed pregnancy for that. And some of this feeling remains now that I am a mother.

Today, I am absolutely uncertain of how it will turn out for "Seeds of Knowledge". My over-planning mind has no clue what to do next. But my heart and spirit are fine with it. I have learned that stepping back and listening is how I can do it best. Life has a way of working itself out.

My son has taught me to put less pressure on myself and to walk my path with more humility. Of course, I am still scared and sometimes even angry, but to a lesser degree. Unlearning takes time and goes through many setbacks. I have discovered that being less

obsessed about results and the big picture is far more manageable for me. It's not always easy to keep that in mind, though. Whenever I feel fear take over, I try to remember that not knowing and being uncertain of outcomes is what I do every day with the most important gift in my life.

I am grateful for Madani's presence. I love the fact that he can be a teacher for me. As he learns to walk, speak and master his body, he shows me that falling down is just falling down, and that I just have to rise up again and keep walking. I wish for him to keep that wisdom for his entire time on earth.

To me, parenting is as much about growth and understanding, as it is about raising a child. It is an incredible opportunity to reassess oneself, and as I go through it, it seems that self-love and acceptance have become more accessible to me.

At times, I still struggle with the idea of doing and being enough. That struggle had become unbearable and exhausting in the past. But when my baby wraps his arms around my neck, it reminds me that I should sit back. So, I work on appreciating what each day brings and try to let go and breathe through any dissatisfaction.

It's not easy. Surrendering is not natural to me, and Senegal can really test my patience, faith and endurance. My western sense of evaluating time and

action is completely inadequate with the way things flow in Senegal. And the fact that I am aware of it, funnily enough, doesn't help me one bit. In the midst of frustration, part of me is always amused by how the most insignificant actions can turn into challenging undertakings. It seems that almost everything requires so much energy to do... so much time to complete...

Yet, I am determined to learn to recognize what 'enough' is like. I know it will happen in due time. I hope my son can grow up knowing that he is enough and that walking the path is what matters. And, I hope that "Seeds of Knowledge" can grow and bring to African children, and other children of the world, a space where they can receive and share inspiration to change their world.



*If you wish peace, friendship and quietness,  
listen, look and be silent.*

*Mas math leat sìth, càirdeas agus cluain, èisd,  
faic is fuirich sàmbach.*

## Moving to the Country

by: Emily Bailey, Aotearoa/New Zealand

A year and a half ago I moved out of the city to a rural Maori village. I was sick of being slowly enclosed by polluted roadways and depressed by oppressively tall concrete buildings that blocked out the skies. I was tired of the fact that people refused to build communities that would actually give them some autonomy. I was done paying the ever increasing costs of living in cities and dealing with the lack of options to cover basic needs, like growing food and having a house without a huge income and council building permits. I thought that leaving for a rural community was the best thing to do and that I should encourage others to do the same. The reality was not quite what I expected but something I'd like to share.

I chose to move to my grandmother's pa because I don't have (and presume I never will have) enough money to buy land or a house. The 'Maori land' I co-own with several members of my dad's family is in pieces and all tied up in farming leases and ongoing family disputes.

Living there would be complicated and isolated. The pa seemed the best and quickest option.

On paper, the pa land is owned by 'shareholders'. Many years ago, after seizing our land and making it a debt we have to pay off, the Crown liberated a small piece of our land. Most people here say that all descendants own the land (yet they don't own it, as it is for our people in perpetuity, if you know what I mean). We can use it, but we are kaitiaki for the generations to come.

What that amounts to is that we can ask the pa trust for permission to build a small private home (or a larger whare for whanau to share) and they will mark out a section of land to build on, provided the families

who historically lived in that area agree. We have to pay for plumbing and wiring, as well as the house, and if we want to hold onto the house, if we ever leave, then we have to build it on stilts. As far as I'm aware, non-descendants and non-Maori are welcome too, if they become part of the community, but I've never heard anyone talk about how that could be done except for with partners and whangai (adopted whanau).

Living in the pa doesn't mean you just build your private home and keep to yourself (although some people try to). There's a lot of community work that you are expected to do such as cooking and cleaning for marae hui, mowing lawns, building maintenance, looking out for the pa kids and stepping up for duties such as trustee, kaikaranga and kaikorero, if asked to one day. Recently, some more land has come back to us (although still managed by outsiders) and a few paid jobs are finally opening up on the farm that surrounds the pa.

Plus, there are new projects that you can work on voluntarily, such as the riparian planting and growing food in the mahingakai. We have wananga for topics such as kapahaka and karanga, we have a new monthly hauora (health-check) day, including a ukulele jam at the end, and we have a polytechnic class for reo and tikanga on the pa. Every month we also have two open days on the marae, which has been a tradition since 1860, where people can come and learn about the pa and our people and share thoughts on things like tino rangatiratanga and passive resistance.

The larger problems of the world still affect us, of course. The natural environment here is very damaged. In lieu of roads and skyscrapers looming over us, we are overrun by industrial agriculture. About 90% of the arable land in this region is pastureland for cows, some sheep, and crops, such as corn. On a still day, planes or helicopters fly over, dumping massive loads of fertiliser or herbicides. Otherwise, they drive by filling the air with huge, white, billowing clouds of chemicals from big trucks. Often, these chemicals blow into houses, or over native forest blocks, killing off the few remaining trees. There are signs on the main roads measuring facial eczema levels like fire hazard gauges. In the 1970s, my sister developed, and died from, leukemia, after the council sprayed herbicide in the city suburbs. I want nothing to do with it, but it's the norm around these parts for now.

In addition to the chemical sprays, there is rampant animal abuse, deforestation, soil erosion and effluent run-off which seeps into waterways, causes flooding, kills the aquatic life, and harms those who eat it or who swim in the polluted waters.

While it was odd to not have many old people or children in my life when I was in the city, the pa is the flip-side of that. There is a marked shortage of 17 to 32 year-olds. This demographic represents the most passionate and physically able, the freest to create, yet they are all either in the faraway cities making money, building careers and enjoying themselves, or stuck



there because everyone else they know is there. You can hardly blame them, considering the media and that most parents and teachers encourage people to go to cities and get a better life. However, city lifestyles are almost completely dependent on rural resources and labour, so much so that rural shoppers now must go to cities to afford the food grown in their own rural areas, and rural communities are drastically shrinking. I have heard estimates that if you shut down the power supply and fuel and food deliveries, a city would come to a standstill within only a day or two. The likelihood of the state or the citizens organising and helping each other out would be slim, as was seen after Hurricane Katrina.

In rural areas, people struggle to get by without the young to help. Farmers who can afford it, turn to expensive machination to get their produce out and those who can't, abandon, sell up or lease out their lands in desperation to cover debts and rates. Then, the land gets bought up by big land barons, who create mega mono-crop farms or divide it up for expensive lifestyle blocks for yuppies, who pump out carbon on their daily drive back and forth to the city. It's completely mad.

Spreading our population and resources more equally across the land is way more socially and environmentally sustainable, as has been shown throughout the long history of humans, compared

to the past few hundred years of carbon-based globalisation. Also, it does not disconnect us from the realities of modern high-consumption, individualistic lifestyles.

Despite everything I've named, life is better here. I eat better. I'm way less stressed and get outdoors more, in much fresher air than in the city. I have to pay more attention to the rhythms of nature, and I



feel more a part of the environment again. There's also freedom to do things like have animals, build, garden and experiment. I feel like I'm doing the right thing by being with my people and helping take care of each other and our patch of Papatuanuku. I understand more where my ancestors were going now, so I feel more confident about where I'm going. It seems innate to live like this, like it's what I've always been looking for.

As an anarchist, I find problems with the politics and social behaviour in Maori communities, chiefly the physical abuse, high rates of drug and alcohol use, the mixing of christianity with our tikanga, the informal patriarchy, or the formal representative decision-making structures such as trusts and in some communities now, the corporations. It is easy to criticize, yet when I look back at life in the city and in other non-Maori communities, it is much the same if not better here, just that Maori have a certain stigma attached to their behaviour based on years of racist attitudes against them. It's as if people think Maori should still be modern-day noble savages, despite the generations of colonial abuse inflicted upon them. I, myself, need to remember that some days.

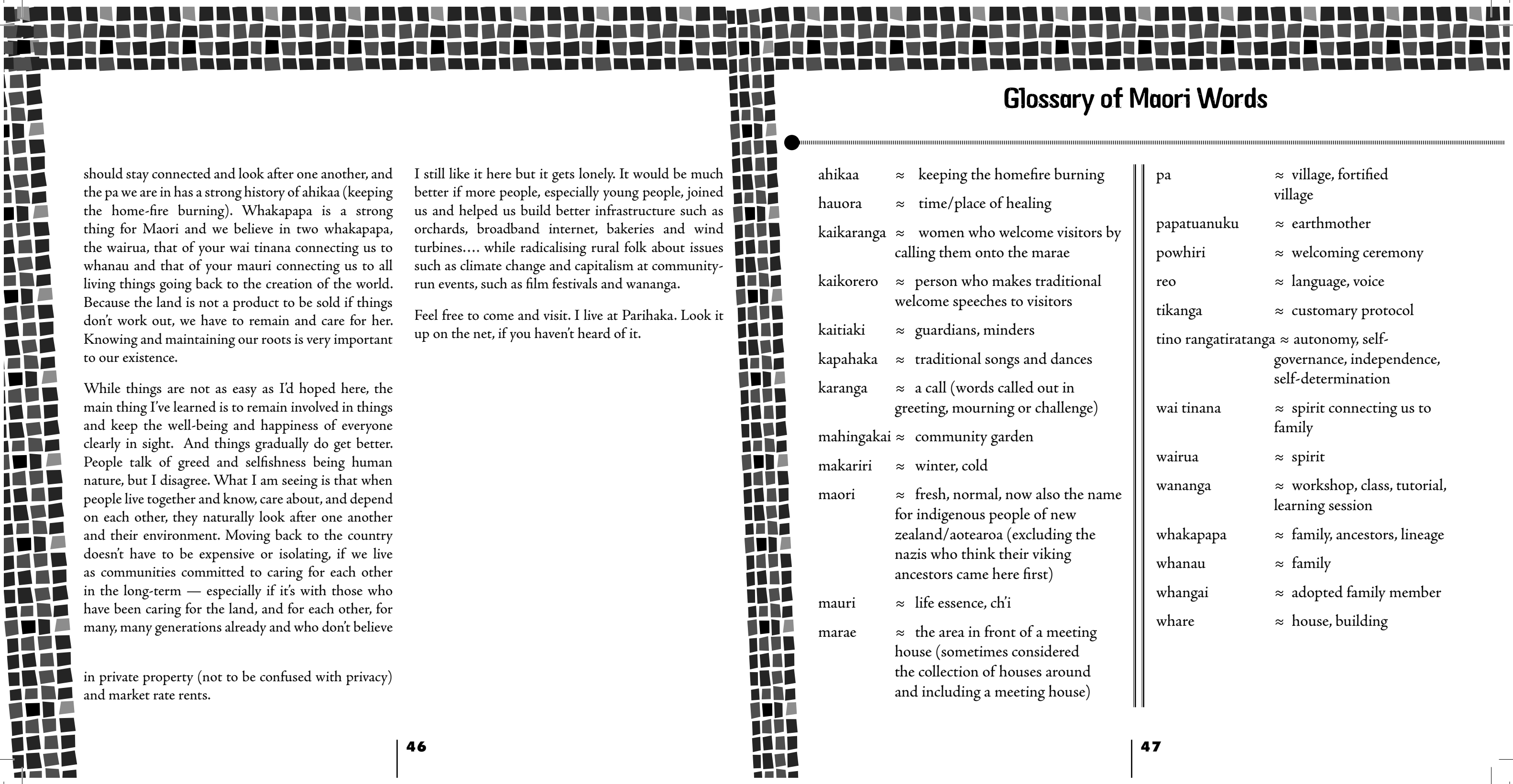
I'm still new here, and I have a lot to learn. Elders hold sway here, and rightly so. Given the many years of additional life experience they have on the rest of us, they are often a lot wiser (and more naturally

anarchistic!) than we give them credit for. Giving them the responsibility to influence tough decisions for the whole community is really honouring them and, I imagine, fills them with pride and a sense of worth, unlike many elderly who are shipped off to rest homes as soon as we can get them there.

Community and whanau here, while damaged by urban drift, is far stronger than any I have seen elsewhere. It's built into everyone as a child that they







should stay connected and look after one another, and the pa we are in has a strong history of ahikaa (keeping the home-fire burning). Whakapapa is a strong thing for Maori and we believe in two whakapapa, the wairua, that of your wai tinana connecting us to whanau and that of your mauri connecting us to all living things going back to the creation of the world. Because the land is not a product to be sold if things don't work out, we have to remain and care for her. Knowing and maintaining our roots is very important to our existence.

While things are not as easy as I'd hoped here, the main thing I've learned is to remain involved in things and keep the well-being and happiness of everyone clearly in sight. And things gradually do get better. People talk of greed and selfishness being human nature, but I disagree. What I am seeing is that when people live together and know, care about, and depend on each other, they naturally look after one another and their environment. Moving back to the country doesn't have to be expensive or isolating, if we live as communities committed to caring for each other in the long-term — especially if it's with those who have been caring for the land, and for each other, for many, many generations already and who don't believe

in private property (not to be confused with privacy) and market rate rents.

I still like it here but it gets lonely. It would be much better if more people, especially young people, joined us and helped us build better infrastructure such as orchards, broadband internet, bakeries and wind turbines.... while radicalising rural folk about issues such as climate change and capitalism at community-run events, such as film festivals and wananga.

Feel free to come and visit. I live at Parihaka. Look it up on the net, if you haven't heard of it.

## Glossary of Maori Words

ahikaa ≈ keeping the homefire burning  
hauora ≈ time/place of healing  
kaikaranga ≈ women who welcome visitors by calling them onto the marae  
kaikorero ≈ person who makes traditional welcome speeches to visitors  
kaitiaki ≈ guardians, minders  
kapahaka ≈ traditional songs and dances  
karanga ≈ a call (words called out in greeting, mourning or challenge)  
mahingakai ≈ community garden  
makariri ≈ winter, cold  
maori ≈ fresh, normal, now also the name for indigenous people of new zealand/aotearoa (excluding the nazis who think their viking ancestors came here first)  
mauri ≈ life essence, ch'i  
marae ≈ the area in front of a meeting house (sometimes considered the collection of houses around and including a meeting house)

pa ≈ village, fortified village  
papatuanuku ≈ earthmother  
powhiri ≈ welcoming ceremony  
reo ≈ language, voice  
tikanga ≈ customary protocol  
tino rangatiratanga ≈ autonomy, self-governance, independence, self-determination  
wai tinana ≈ spirit connecting us to family  
wairua ≈ spirit  
wananga ≈ workshop, class, tutorial, learning session  
whakapapa ≈ family, ancestors, lineage  
whanau ≈ family  
whangai ≈ adopted family member  
whare ≈ house, building

# My Learning Journey

by: Ocean Robbins, USA

Each of my eight great grandparents were Jews in Eastern Europe who fled persecution. They found refuge in Canada and the United States. Some of them managed to build a life in the “new world,” others were driven crazy by the trauma they had endured. All four of my grandparents grew up with a great deal of terror, and they struggled to pass on a life of material security to their children.

My dad’s father succeeded — materially — beyond his wildest dreams. He created an ice cream business that flourished. Known as Baskin-Robbins, or 31 Flavors, it became the world’s largest ice cream company. My dad grew up swimming in an ice cream-cone shaped swimming pool, eating enormous amounts of ice cream, and inventing new flavors. My grandfather worked almost ‘round the clock, building the business. So my dad hardly knew his father, except at the corporate headquarters, where he was pushed from his earliest childhood to one day join his father in running the hugely successful company. But rather than commit his life to inventing a 32<sup>nd</sup> flavor, my dad decided to work for the growth of compassion and healing in his life and in the world. He walked away from the company, and from any access to his family’s ice cream fortune, and moved with my mom to a tiny island off the coast of British Columbia, Canada, where they built a 1-room log cabin, grew most of their own food, and lived on less than \$500 per year.

## That’s Where I Came In

I was born in that cabin, with few material possessions and a very simple lifestyle. I grew up monetarily poor, but rich in many other ways. I had all my basic needs met: clean air, clean water, time with my mom and dad, and beautiful nature all around me. As I grew up, a deep love of nature and the Earth emerged within me.

Then in the 1980s, when I was 10, my family moved to California, and my dad began working on a book called *Diet for a New America*, which was one of the first books to show how our food choices affect not just our health and happiness, but also the future of life on Earth. His book became a runaway bestseller, and he began appearing on most of the major national



US talk shows. The media had a lot of fun with my dad’s story, calling him the “Rebel without a Cone.” They said he was the ice cream heir who walked away from a life of sure riches because he wanted to make a difference in the world, and tagged him the “Prophet of Non-profit.” His work made him something of a celebrity. There were 20,000 letters-a-year pouring in from enthusiastic readers, and the response to my dad’s work brought financial security to our family. Inspired by his example, and feeling blessed by tremendous emotional and spiritual support from both of my parents, I felt that I wanted to give something to the world, and to do something to reach out to my generation.

At the age of 15, recognizing that the planetary bio-system was deteriorating rapidly under the impact of human activities, and that my generation seemed too cynical or too distracted meet these challenges, I and my friend Ryan Eliason started a project that would become YES!. Our goal was to help young people make a difference in the world. We organized a national tour, speaking to school assemblies about the environment and what our peers could do to make a difference. Ryan and I found other enthusiastic young people to join us, raised tens of thousands of dollars, and launched YES! as an organization. The response to my dad’s work opened many doors for us, as people who were inspired by his books would ask how they could help and he would often encourage them to

support YES!, or to bring us to their communities. Fueled by this support, tremendous passion, and a lot of hard work, YES! reached half a million students in high schools in more than 40 US states in the first half of the 1990’s.

## The Journey of Self Knowledge and Partnership

As we continued our travels from city to city, experiencing the realities and struggles of many different kinds of communities, we kept broadening our definition of the environment to include people as well as the planet. We diversified our performance troupe, our organization, and our message. And I, too, was challenged to see how privileged I was, in ways I had never recognized. I realized that I was coming of age as a white, heterosexual male with a US passport and financial sufficiency, and with all kinds of opportunities available for me and my work. Even more significantly, I had loving parents who had always helped me believe in myself. Stepping out of what had always seemed “normal” to me gave me a fresh perspective on who, and what, I was. As I engaged with young people from a broad diversity of backgrounds, I was beginning an ever deepening journey in my relationship to my own experience of privilege and the many questions and contradictions therein.

Why did I have so many opportunities when billions of people were struggling to feed their families, and when tens of millions of American young people were living below the poverty line? In a world with a vast wealth divide, economic resources give certain people more power, more influence, and more freedom than others. Sweatshop conditions and the treatment of farmworkers are directly linked to lowering the costs of goods, which in a consumerist culture means that some form of violence and exploitation is linked to most of what we consume. How did I fit into all that? I didn't want to be defined by the madness of the times, but at the same time, I was part of larger systems and institutions, and I was impacted by them in ways I did not intend.

The more I learned about the realities of oppression and injustice, the more confused I was. I knew that I had love and many other gifts to share with the world. From the age of 10, my daily prayer had been quoting from St. Francis, "*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*" Surely educating my peers about the environment, and inspiring them to make a difference with their lives, was an embodiment of this prayer. But the road I was on was slowly teaching me that there is a world of difference between being an instrument of peace and being on a crusade to teach the world.

I used to think that there must be some universal message that, if everyone heard it, would transform

humanity. Over time I was coming to think that human needs are as diverse as human experiences, and that sometimes it is a greater service to listen than to speak; I was beginning to listen – and learn.

YES! evolved with the years, and by the end of the 1990s, our focus had shifted from a high school assembly tour to week-long events we called "Jams" (initially launched as a project of YES! by my dear friend and colleague, Tad Hargrave) for groups of 30 diverse young leaders. Our "Jam" participants were founders or leaders in organizations or movements working for thriving, just and sustainable ways of life for all, and they came from many dozens of nations. I was developing yet another kind of privilege: A global network of friends and allies that worked, learned, and grew with me. The community of Jam participants, and my fellow conveners and facilitators, have taught me profound lessons about the real meaning of partnership, and about how we can bridge some of the great divides of our times in ways that are healing and life-giving for all of us.

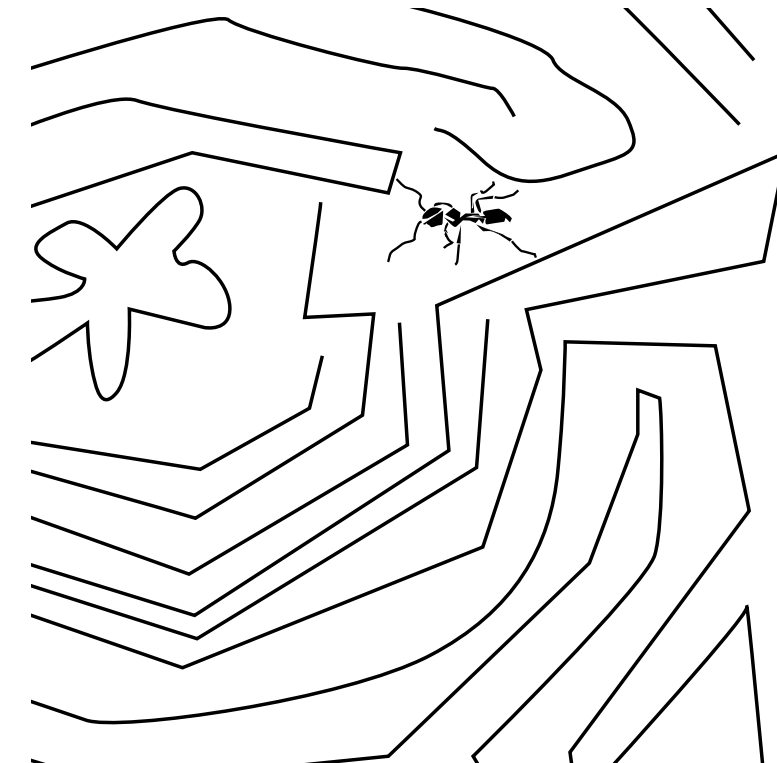
### What's Alive for Me Now

Now I'm 36 years old, and I am married to an extraordinary woman named Michele. Eight years ago, with a little help from me, she gave birth to identical twin boys named River and Bodhi. They were born prematurely, and spent their first six weeks of life in

intensive care at the hospital. Difficulty breathing caused them to turn blue from lack of oxygen many times per day, and when they finally came home, we were overjoyed, though we knew it was just the beginning of a long road. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and in our case, it seems to have taken two villages to raise premature twins. My mom and dad poured their hearts and souls into supporting us, cooking all our food and doing all our dishes for almost two years. River and Bodhi were deeply traumatized and needed almost constant care. To this day they struggle with numerous developmental delays and special needs. They are also incredible reminders to me, on a daily basis, of the power of play, of the simple healing beauty of love, and of what really matters most in life.

At the same time, sometimes it has seemed a heroic achievement just to make it through the day. Caring for my sons' special needs while directing an organization and trying to help a generation respond to the madness and violence of our times... There is never enough time to do all the things I want to, so I get to practice doing the best I can with the time I have, and letting the rest go by.

My parents spent twenty years building a solid nest egg of financial resources, and Michele and I also prioritized saving whatever we could to care for our children's long term needs and our own financial



futures. Then, on December 11, 2008, we learned that almost the entirety of my family's life savings had disappeared overnight in Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme. It was a rude and devastating first-hand encounter with the economic meltdown that has rocked the world's financial markets and wiped out pension funds, foundation assets, stock portfolios and jobs around the world.

For the past several years, I have offered the following prayer every morning: "May I be given everything I need to do what I am alive for." In that light, the fact

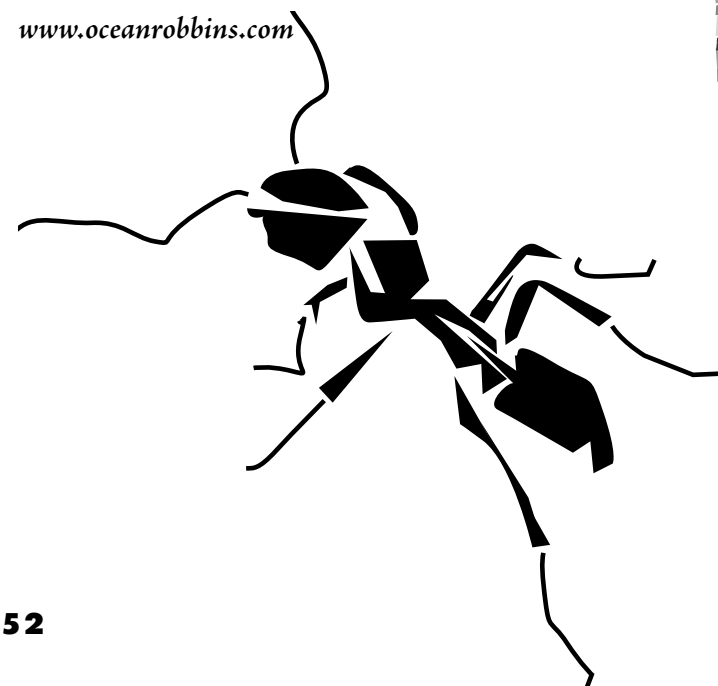
that my wife and I had lost our life savings, and the safety net of my mom and dad's earned wealth in one fell swoop, had to hold a crucial lesson. I felt that in some way, I was being tested again, and that this profound loss must be a part of my ultimate purpose.

We set about rethinking all of our expenses, and looking at what we could do ourselves, what we could make ourselves, what we could do without, and how we could live more simply, more healthfully – and more frugally. We began renting spaces in our home, and living in more community with loved ones, some of whom needed to downsize or save money themselves. We now share a bathroom between seven people – but it is working for us, and I love the community with whom I am sharing space. I think it is making life richer, and more beautiful, than it was before. Another thing I've learned is that if we ever have any savings to invest again, we will certainly invest differently.

What is clear to me is that we don't get to choose most of what happens to us. In my twin's premature birth, subsequent special needs, and the theft of our savings, I have been stretched physically, emotionally, and financially, in ways I'd never imagined. Some share of tragedy comes into every life, it seems. It is most likely that a lot of the pain I will experience still awaits me, and yet I *do* get to decide how I respond to it. Perhaps life, is mostly about what we do with whatever is given to us.

I used to pray to God to have things go the way I wanted them to go; sometimes I still do. But increasingly, I find myself praying for the strength, the wisdom, and the patience, to make the best of however things unfold around me. My favorite question to ask people right now, perhaps because it is so alive in my life, is: "What has been a defining struggle or challenge in your life's journey, and how has your response to it helped you to grow in wisdom, faith, or compassion?" In these times, when there is so much suffering and so much struggle for so many, we each need to be asking ourselves how we can make the best of what is, and striving to transform our own traumas and struggles into gifts for humanity. For in that transformation, I believe, lies the hope of the world.

[www.oceanrobbins.com](http://www.oceanrobbins.com)



## Gazza from Here

by: Shireen Najjar, Palestine

Between the breaking news  
Breaking the tears  
From this pain  
From this internal scream that is rising every day  
Welcoming the new year  
Mabrook! Congratulations! Mabrook GAZZA.

I was going to write you a blessing for the holidays:  
Chanuka, Merry Christmas, Hijri Islamic  
New Year's Eve and the silvester  
But these attacks were faster than me.

Gazza, Saturday the 27th of December  
(The crimes started much earlier)  
Stopped my heart from beating.

Killing me from the inside.  
Now counting  
Around 400 being killed, 1800 injured  
Seems like the number murdered is going to be a  
scale of three (Thousand).  
Oh my GOD  
Ya rab  
Just your mercy!

So huge  
So many  
So big  
I want to scream for that  
Khalas stop...

We are used to the USA's justification for Israeli crimes  
We are used to the European Union condemning Israel's 'overreaction' but never acting themselves.

We are used to the Arab states silence  
We are used to their speeches  
That are still ready from the time before  
Maybe they just add a new number and a new word of conduct.

But this time it is said that  
The Palestinian Authority knew about this plan  
So they are also a partner  
Oh my GOD  
The Palestinian Authority too  
Her hands are on this...

I don't want to believe it  
It is like to push a knife deep  
In the heart.

All of this is happening  
While Israeli morale is high  
So high  
To make huge attacks  
To kill so many  
To destroy everything  
Bomb everywhere and everyone!

They claim they are defending themselves  
After years of silence and reconciliation  
That their problem is not with the Palestinian  
people  
But with Hamas 'terrorists'  
That they have been bombed by Hamas for  
years.

REALLY ?!!!  
No problem with Palestinians?!  
No conflict?!  
Maybe there is just a football game between  
you?!!

You are trying to minimize the conflict  
To make your attacks look humane and justified  
Like the people on the other side deserve to be  
killed and destroyed.

Mabrook for you!  
Mabrook for your moral 'democracy'  
At demonstrations, you are arresting and  
detaining people  
Your elections begin by counting how many  
more you have killed  
The closer you are to win the election  
The more you will kill  
To get more votes from your people  
And you say this is just the beginning  
Then the end is happy...

In this time  
I am struggling to say that I am praying for peace  
I am struggling to find the meaning of peace.

Or, what am I demanding?  
What is the way?  
I don't know  
To say peace

It feels like to shut my mouth with the word  
'peace'  
Instead of declaring the crimes and the criminals  
We say we demand peace  
It's like hiding dignity.

I would rather say  
I am praying to GOD for mercy  
For the safety of the people in Gazza  
For GOD to help them and protect them  
For I am cursing the Israeli state, army, attacks  
And whoever agreed to this  
Ya Allah  
It's my scream till now  
From me.

I know I was long in my sharing with you  
Take your time  
I don't think things will change dramatically  
But soon  
Somehow somewhere  
Insh'allah for the safety of the Gazza people  
Welcome the new year.

*Silence is consent.  
Is ionnann tosd is aideachadh.*

I was the first Arab girl born in Wahat al-Salam~Neve Shalom, a one-of-a-kind village, established to join Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Israeli Jews in a community. It was founded in the hopes of creating a reality of more equality and dignity between the groups.

I grew up with the community-village, experienced the first bilingual education system, and clarified my identity as an Arab+Palestinian+Muslim girl in Israel. I later attended a private high school in Ramle. Though it is a 'mixed' city of Jews and Arabs, it is so far away from any semblance of equality. There, I felt aware of myself as an Arab-Palestinian in a way that I had missed before. At university, too, I was the only Arab student in my class for the three years it took to graduate with a degree in biochemistry and food science.

Now, I work in the public health services in East Jerusalem. My employer is an Israeli institution, but it is based there, in the Arab-occupied part. I find it difficult to work in Jerusalem. It's a window into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Not only Israeli society, but my own society continuously challenges me. To many, I am coming in as an 'foreigner', i.e., from outside Jerusalem, with Israeli citizenship, etc. Being a Palestinian Muslim woman in Israel, I represent a minority within a minority within a minority. This situation continually forces me to prove my status

— to prove that I am Palestinian *enough*, that I am woman *enough*, that I am Muslim *enough*, in a country where I am considered guilty until proven innocent. I am managing to build a place for myself, but it is full of struggle.



I work as a facilitator for groups in conflict as well, both binational dialogues (Israeli-Palestinian groups) as well as uni-national groups (Palestinians). I work to challenge the participants to discuss important topics within the society, the conflicts, of course, but also gender issues... Sometimes, I find myself in international groups, like with YES!, trying to work through our own humanity, in our deep places. I feel like I am working on my place as a Palestinian-Muslim-Arab woman with Israeli citizenship. I find my way of expressing my beliefs and demands, through my lifestyle, through my work. Especially with kids and teenagers, in my society... I find my way by working and living with them.

I have many periods of doubt, looking for the way, feeling that I am missing the way... I remember the second Intifada, when massacres were happening in Jenin refugee camp and in Nablus. We were stuck in front of the TV, watching Al-Jazeera, looking at the screen, between tears and heavy breaths, looking at the murders, silently... Then, watching the attacks on Iraq... the 'winning', the humiliation of Arab dignity. With more silence. With Lebanon, there was no breathing, no sleeping, no answers. Still silence. Last (and, it seems, not least) came Gaza. Congratulations again for the humanity of these crimes, that much blood, with that much more silence...

With Gaza, parts crashed inside me — the blood of humanity, bones to hope, my mouth a scream, eyes to witness. I was seeking a taste of optimism... but where? from here to where? what? how? where? My poem is an expression of that moment.

Between these struggles, to walk the way, to light my steps, I count on God. Inshallah, with belief, within God, I will find a way to love and dignity.

## Mom, What Is a Leader?

by: Osmar Filho, Brazil

When you are a child, you don't know the difference between your social life and your private life. My mom used to say to me, "You're a street boy." She was describing my need to always be outdoors: playing soccer, organizing competitions of table soccer, table tennis, or just spending time with friends. If anyone asked me about my personal life, it would be impossible to separate. I naturally connected my house, with the street, with my family, with my friends... I have to say that my first teachers were my parents. They provided a home and educated not only me and my sisters, but also my poor cousins from the countryside. I grew up in an atmosphere of sharing and solidarity.

My parents considered me to be too contemplative. They thought I lacked attention to practical matters. I had profound interest in philosophical questions like "What is life about anyway?" With time, I realized that poetry could better express all those musings in my mind. For awhile, it was difficult to integrate together my inner call for justice, my engagement in social movements and my poetry. Poetry to me now is no longer something that lacks reasonability, but is my best guide to a better and more profound life. So recently I built a web blog to release my poems. I am not afraid now to say out loud: I am a poet.

I grew up in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. In the building where my family lived were some retired

colonels. One morning, the building elevators were tagged with ketchup. The colonels organized a march to my apartment. My mother called me into the dining room to face my prosecutors. I heard for the first time a word: "He is the leader." I was judged guilty. After receiving the verdict, I faced my mom and asked her: "Mom, what is a leader?". My mother answered that leader is someone who sets a direction and then everyone follows him. I replied to her that to be such thing would be so boring.



My primary school was Catholic; my secondary one was military. With both, I learnt a lot about power, hierarchy and control. My parents said to me that I had to wait until university to choose whatever I wanted. I only started dreaming when I went to university. Indeed, I started dreaming about a perfect lover, a perfect job, a perfect life. Reality woke me up little by little.

*Oak:*

*It wasn't a tree that rooted itself on the ground.*

*It was a root demanding the sky.*

To see hunger in the streets of Brazil, with people digging for food in garbage cans, was a shame and heartbreaking. So, I went to a state university in São Paulo to study food engineering. From the moment I arrived there, I started to organize poetry meetings in the student co-op I lived. In the arts, leadership is easily shared and appreciated. I admired artists because of their freedom and willingness to say what they wanted and believed in. For a time, I believed that artists should be engaged with social causes. But now, I came to think that what social movements need is more free art, to show them where the paths of freedom really are.

Because of my participation, I was invited to be the cultural coordinator of the university student

government. Later on, I was chosen to be a representative of students in the university council. Two projects I proposed and participated in at this time became nationally known: preparatory schools to public universities for low-income students and free radios. Student groups competed for power in student government; each group tried to distinguish itself based on ideological differences. It was a very dynamic environment, full of opportunities to learn. Although the university was divided into departments, the campus was an amazing laboratory of diversity and respectful of differences.

*A huge red metal wing*

*A girl and a bird are on it.*

*The girl wants to fly*

*the bird passes by to teach:*

*Each one flies with her own wings*

*on under through behind besides*

*ideas about liberty.*

My next leap was to participate in a national coalition of social movements, including the Landless Workers' Movement and the Homeless Movement. I continued to work on the creation of a common vision of a country with proper living conditions for all. During this time, I accepted an invitation to spend a year and a half doing an apprenticeship at the Center for Agroecology at University of California in Santa Cruz.



There, I met YES!, who later invited me to their World Jam program. This experience opened up my view of the world's several layers of complexity. I organized Latin American Jams in 2003 and 2005, which led to a network of young activists in this part of the world.

Throughout all of these amazing opportunities, I have seen victories and losses, life moving, and myself as part of this drama. I have seen creative ideas arise, crystallizing people as leaders. At the same time, I have also seen groups claiming to be leaderless but, in fact, building walls of ghettos.

I am not against governments and political parties, but I would like to see that big powers controlled by organized groups of people, working in networks. The principles of respectful relationships among people would be the cornerstone of all governments. Unfortunately, strong forces prevent meetings and face-to-face talks among people. This world would be another if people could talk freely. In fact, I have seen a myriad of young people building their own groups of interest. I put them in contact with each other to find ways to collaborate and face the enormous tasks of creating a better world. The seeds are out there; we just need lots of gardeners.

I have started to realize that each social movement wants to fight prejudice, but among their members are other forms of violence that break their unity

and dilute their power. For instance, macho culture is so present among socialist groups and movements. While fighting for equality, they take the gender imbalance for granted. At the same time, I have seen how some feminists can engage in a power game with men, while hiding behind claims of justice for women. Such relationships, and identities based on power over others, are very different from what I had dreamed of for a sustainable society.

*An essential talk exists between sky and sea.*

*Unfortunately, we can't figure out  
what they're talking about.*

Step by step, I realized that power games, which pass as 'leadership', end up blocking social energy. To counteract this tendency, I proposed councils to run the projects, so that decision-making would be shared equitably among people. I encouraged each participant to lead an activity or action. Without naming it, I was practicing a type of decision-making that tries to respect the time and creative perspective of each person in the group.

I came to study food science at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro in 2007. I became part of GAE, a 30-year-old agro-ecology group, which has empowered communities of organic farmers

around Rio de Janeiro city and beyond. My role in GAE has been to teach and organize short courses on agro-ecology for young university students and small farmers. I give classes on the dangers of genetically modified foods. I also consult with small companies and universities departments to help them to curb their carbon emissions and understand carbon credits assessments and energy balances. I also help organic farming associations in post-harvest food processing and commercialization. I became a bridge, bringing people to help communities reach a sustainable way of living. The agro-ecology I stand for matches up plants and animals with their environment. It is an extension of what we see in traditional agricultural communities around the world.

Since returning from a trip around South America, in which I visited and interviewed the participants of the Latin American Jams, I have dedicated myself to identifying opportunities to create such contemplative spaces for networks of diverse grassroots activists and groups. I have helped to organize gatherings in the southwest Amazon region, where indigenous tribes came together, in spite of their differences, to resist the advance of oil and mining companies. I also helped to organize a World Jam in Chinchero, a small community near Cuzco, Peru, that has been practicing a sustainable way of living for centuries and centuries. The first time I visited the mountains of Cuzco and its communities, I saw how words like 'sustainability',

'consensus', 'democracy' and 'ecology' are lived in a very practical way. I could see the love of nature as a concrete and common thing that guides the social life of people.

Through these experiences with indigenous peoples in Chinchero and in the Amazon forest, I realized the power of cultures that are based in unconscious feelings and thoughts. A spiritual leadership calls to us right inside our hearts and minds. An inner movement that connects our personal life and our social life is the core of a strong and unique identity, from which each one of us can discover their own destiny and life path. In this understanding, the boundaries between social life and private life are neither rigid nor fixed.

I have given up trying to be in total control of my life, because it is part of a greater thing. I don't know who I am, but I know where I came from and who are my ancestors. I feel I have been guided by something I can't name. I am a work in progress. I came finally to understand what it is to act without action and the creative power of having dreams.





*The language of stones is the same  
in the whole world  
I am fluent in the silence of nature*

Along the way, I have burned out a couple times, because I didn't understand the value of doing nothing, the value of opening space for others and being out of it. Today, I do not go to every meeting or participate in every movement. At the same time, I feel my life is part of everything that values and empowers life. I am part of the Global Collaborative, a group of gardeners working with YES!. The Latin jammers network is alive, connecting and being fruitful to South Americans. I am also part of a Rio de Janeiro agro-ecology coalition that brings together organic farmers, scientists, social activists and consumers to build a sustainable food chain. I am thus learning to accept my life as a creative process that I share with comrades and partners in only one movement — a movement of love, where each of us is a leader, a co-creator of the environment in which we live. What is next? I am very excited to find out.

## Linked Across Waters

by: Malika Sanders-Fortier, USA

The summer of 1994 was a life-changing summer. It was after my sophomore year in college. I had a boyfriend in New York who I usually spent time with during the summer. He couldn't believe I was going to spend a summer in Mali, West Africa, instead of being with him. But off I went.

I was to come of age on the continent of my ancestors' birth — in fact, the birth of humanity. Ife, Vernetta and I, from 21st Century Youth Leadership Project, set off to a place where we didn't speak the language and did not know the people. But 21st Century had prepared us for adventures as leaders.

As part of this journey I met Coumba Toure'. The earliest picture I have of her — hair flying in the wind, black dress with orange and yellow accents around the top, and a beautiful smile — is one that feels like a memory, but, in fact, is really one that remains on the wall at the 21st Century campsite, to this day. I remember her translating a play for us from Bamana to English. She spoke four or five more languages, and I was impressed. She was an amazing young woman to my American mind, where language was like everything else in our self-centered world — all about us. We shared the 21<sup>st</sup> Century motto, "I am a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leader" and sang freedom songs from the Civil Rights Movement like, "I Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around", which she translated for

our new-found family in Bamana.

I did not know it at the time, but my whole life would be impacted by meeting Coumba Toure'. Thoughts about motherhood, marriage and family, and what it means to be Afrikan, would be shaped and reshaped by our conversations and collective growth.

We were similar. Both passionate about liberation and seeing our communities change and grow and recover from centuries of oppression. We were both committed to a new day for Afrikan women — for all women. We shared similar fears about everyday things



in life, like men, marriage, and being in love. We gave ourselves freely in community, but giving of ourselves personally, especially in romantic relationships, was a much more challenging arena — precisely because of our understanding of the collective.

One of the things that struck Coumba and I most were the similarities between the women who had shaped us into freedom fighters: Maria Keita and Faya



Rose Toure'. They were free. They were boundary-less. They lived by a different set of rules than the other people around them. They danced to a different Afrikan beat. We marveled at the opportunity to learn and grow under their care.

We worked with young people, sharing opportunities to exchange our stories, our language, our ideas, our smiles, our ways of coping with life. One of the things that left an imprint on the American 21st Century leaders — coming from such a materialistic society — was that you could have a smile that reached your eyes everyday, and it didn't depend on what kind of shoes you had on your feet, or what kind of label was on your clothes, or what kind of house you lived in, or car you drove. They began to see another world of possibility from the lives they were used to living, especially since, in the context where materialism rules, many of these leaders are considered valueless. Or, they feel they have to fight to be valued.

One of the things I remembered most was a song-story of what it meant to be left behind, waiting for those who had been kidnapped and taken to the Americas. It was about the gate being left open, anticipating family members' return. It was about the loss of loved ones and the hopes and prayers that they would come home. It struck me, because African-Americans have a sense of being out of

place, of not belonging, in the US, and in this story, we were called the 'lost ones'. It was so good to know that we were missed, and it gave us the sense that we had been found. Coumba, in many ways, represented a reintroduction to myself as a young woman; she represented what I had missed as an Afrikan woman, torn away from my motherland.

Coumba and I were old women. Old before our time and getting younger with time, rather than the usual way of aging. We were old, at least in terms of maturity. We learned to be more carefree together. We shared stories of the Afrikan journey from our perspectives, hers from the continent and mine from a place in the Diaspora. We marveled at how we still had so many similarities, after so much space, so much pain, so many centuries. We cried together when we shared life's ups and downs across the waters. We took an honest look at our people — our inextricably linked people — even after years of forced separation. We sympathized with the victimization in our past and were determined to be victors in the future. We assessed how our brokenness in one place, could find healing in another, when it came to our families, our culture, our way of being. We dreamed of growing old on Goree Island together, writing about our culture and envisioning new ways of life for our people.

We have also been accepting together that dreams change, as we grow. We are learning that love isn't

just for our communities, but also worth the risk in more intimate, daily ways of life, like husbands, motherhood, and children. We both married men who are connected to the cause of Afrikan people. I met and married the love of my life, Rev. Franklin B. Fortier, while working on education reform to destroy the myth of Black inferiority; and Coumba met and married Tidiane Ba, while publishing children's stories that affirm the Afrikan value system. We each have children; mine have Afrikan names, and Coumba named her little boy after my father, Hank, forever symbolizing the link between our families. We now nurture families and are trying to implement all those lofty ideals of our youth, on a day-to-day basis — one of the toughest jobs ever — while continuing to work with our communities to do the same.

There have been so many changes in our lives since we met. Our dreams of a better Africa, a better Diaspora, a better world, are still the same. We still work towards ways of bringing together young people, from all over the Diaspora, so that we can piece together the broken pieces of our past, as we create a new reality. We still support organizations standing for social justice, to repair the damage long since done. We still reach out across the waters, to use our history and our culture to help 're-member' our communities, as part of our road map toward the future. God-willing, we will get a glimpse of the world we envisioned, by the time our work is done.

## Lessons from Fatherhood

by: Nuttarote Wangwinyoo, Thailand

I became a father on the morning of Friday, October 17, 2008. Witnessing birth was gracefully amazing. I could not believe how much pain my wife had to go through to bring my little girl, Momo, into this world. Tears of joy and relief came to my eyes, after long hours of laborious anticipation. I saw how a mother and a child cooperate to survive together. I could not believe that women, for generation after generation, have gone through such a life-risking rite of passage. The experience enriched my appreciation for life and its precious vulnerability even more. I gained more trust in the capacity of human body.

I asked the doctor to keep the placenta for me to bring back home to perform a bonding-ritual between the child and the land. Many modern hospitals would deny such a request, because they don't want to have anything bloody and smelly leaving their antiseptic cleaned rooms. Plus, 'superstition' is not one of their standard procedures. But since my mother was the former head-nurse of the delivery room, my request was honored.

The baby's placenta and the umbilical cord are what connect the baby to her mother. Once the cord is cut, the bay needs a new bonding, another sense of place and belonging. This is a tradition in many cultures of Southeast Asia. Some people bury the placenta and cord under their house, so that the baby's soul, when

lost, can always find a way home. I buried Momo's under one of the auspicious trees in our garden. In my prayer, I asked the spirit of the land to accept the new born soul, protect and nourish her with love. I had never done this before. But being a father gave me some inner power and passion to do it, and it felt great.

That same day, we had our housewarming. We invited monks, our parents, relatives and friends to come, bless our house and family and celebrate. After my wife, Jasmine, was well taken care of and the baby was safe, I rushed back from the hospital to our house to greet our guests. After being a part of the birth, the house blessing just added bliss to my day.

The birth of my daughter gave me a chance to reflect and take a break from my work routine, which usually requires a lot of traveling within Thailand. I took a month off to stay home to help my wife raise the baby, help around the house with cooking, cleaning and washing, and nourish my wife with our traditional Thai postpartum wisdom.



Jasmine was not supposed to walk too much, especially not up and down the stairs, in order to let her womb heal and regain its place. So, it was my job to carry food and water up and down the stairs. My family was a great support during this time. I realized how much work one has to do to keep the house clean and livable. I appreciated my mom and others who had done this job, since it required so much time and energy. It was a good learning process for me to be grounded and practical. Living my life through my body and housework really refreshed my mind – especially after reading, writing, and sitting, day after day, in dialogue workshops.

Growing up Buddhist, I was trained to see children as a kind of baggage. To pursue a spiritual path, solitude and denunciation are of higher value than family life. But instead of feeling chained, this intimate bonding is liberating. I feel so free and loved in the presence of my little girl.

It may sound easy, but there is work to do, like cleaning up. My wife had to wake up several times in the night to breastfeed. Despite that, there is great joy in being a parent. From moment to moment, I find myself at ground zero, learning how to grow and evolve with this little life in my hands.

Every day, she blossoms and moves with natural instincts. Her eyes are fearlessly curious and

unconditionally wide open to devour every color and the vibrant surroundings. Her delicate skin and baby hair are like soft silk, which reminds me of our bodies when we were young. She is very sensitive to her environment and teaches us to take care of our space as a sacred life-nurturing ground. Day by day, she enriches my sense of purpose and helps me to be more present with every detail of life. She can draw both the tears and laughter that assure the beauty of being human. This profound transformation took place in me far beyond my imagination.

As a social innovator who seeks to meaningfully and effectively engage with the world of chaos and instability, I find a need to ground myself in the reality of what is, as well as the hope of what is possible. I try to see more clearly which direction to take, in order to create impacts and induce changes. Being a father helps me to feel rooted. I feel no conflict between growing intimate awareness and love and engaging with the world. Thailand has gone through political instability, with stronger divisions in society. There is less trust and more fear and anxiety. More violence, less alternatives. More comfort, greater conflicts. More debt and less joy. More capacity and performance, but less freedom. When I feel trapped in a divided perception of the world, I seek home to connect with love and create more trust within myself and the world.

## Weathering the Storm

by: Levana Saxon, USA

Fatherhood had deepened my connection to life and expanded my capacity to accept the diversity of life. Which has tremendously contributed to my personal growth and leadership. My ego has softened. I allow myself to be more like an ordinary man. My heart recognizes the vulnerability of the inner child in human beings. I am unlearning the mindset that isolates me from others. As my wife gives her life to nourish our daughter, I connect to the great potential of motherhood in women. I honor my mother and our ancestral mothers even more fully.

My community has also been a fertile ground for my consciousness to grow. It's almost impossible to live in a community free from judgments and aggressions. Yet, as a leader, I have learned to support all voices as valuable and try to find way to strengthen trust and personal connections within a group. Our differences reflect the greater potential for us to grow and become fuller human beings. However, if differences are handled poorly, they can be a source of distrust and conflicts. Without a community, I think I have less of a chance to learn about what is missing in myself. When I realize what quality needs to grow in me, my leadership grows and my community grows. Our personal growths are clearly co-dependent. This is a deep call for me to give myself up not only to my family, but to my community as well.

Through this opening, my work has developed with greater inspiration and confidence. We founded a new organization called *Kwanpandin*, Soul of the Earth Institute for Contemplative Learning and Transformation (SEI), with five founding members. Within five months, ten other people with common values and vision joined us. Soul of the Earth came from a call for deep connections between our souls, our ancestors and the land. Our goal is to live as a learning community, in which we support ourselves to sustain our personal health, mind and body and to engage with the learning of society. We try to expand and awaken human consciousness to that which is precious, present, and pressing in our modern time.

While keeping my eyes on larger issues, such as poverty, social and environmental justice, I keep pondering how we can pay attention to what is present in our time? How to grow the love and trust to bridge the social gap and co-create a dialogue space among all stake-holders? How can my skills and intentions effectively contribute to this transformation? Where to do more, and what to do less? How do I sustain my spiritual connection to myself, my family and nature and keep allowing greater possibilities to actualize in me and others? I will hold all of these questions in my heart, as I continue my quest into the future.



I was raised next to strawberries in Watsonville, California. From my car seat each day, I would watch people picking strawberries, as I passed by. I could never understand how someone could spend so long bent over in the sun. When I started school, I had friends who picked strawberries; they would come and go with the strawberry season. They would always sit in the back of the classroom. The teachers would ignore them; the students would ignore them. I was instructed by my classmates to ignore them, too. In order to succeed in school, I thought it was necessary to become subservient to all of the social and institutional rules. And so I did,



and so I succeeded. Sort of. In truth, I had succeeded primarily in supporting the sorting of young people into different social classes, with me towards the top.

Like so many, I despised school and loved learning. I left school a year early to set out on my own and try to learn from the world. I began to learn about how I had been trained to passively watch the world go by. 'Changing the world' meant consuming a little less, or recycling a little more, or waiting for a leader to come and tell me what to do. I learned how I had been trained to consider my white, US-born, blond-haired, blue-eyed self as incredibly important and entitled to comforts, safety, employment and other niceties, like strawberries, regardless if others have them, or not, or who is impacted by the way in which they make it to my table.

Not an easy or pleasant process by any means, my beautiful untraining has required my whole involvement. It required shattering the glass between myself and the rest of the world. It engaged my heart, body, mind and spirit and moved me to act. The media, peoples' treatment of me, the comfortable advantages that give me the upper hand in interactions everyday push me to stop untraining. This work to untrain is never over.

After a while I stopped ignoring people and got involved in activism, and education. I created participatory theatre projects with the families in Watsonville who pick strawberries; I worked with the United Nations Environment Program; I organized Jams with YES!; and I then went on to organize and facilitate more conferences, events and actions. I desperately wanted more people to feel as inspired and ignited to take action as I did, and so I created educational experiences outside of schools. I made giant puppets and created theatre projects, as my piece in the larger movements for sustainability, global economic justice, social justice, labor rights, immigrant rights, and peace.

### **And now, I think about the weather. A lot.**

Each day I think about what I will wear, if it will be hot or cold. I think about the differences this time of year. I think about the record high's and lows. I think about how hot and dry it has been in Acre, the Eastern Brazilian Amazon where my friends (and Jam alumni) Laura and Tashka live. I think about Tashka's cousin-in-law who recently showed me pictures of her well drying up — in the wettest place on earth. I think about the Alaskan glaciers melting, and the houses sinking into the tundra in Evon's community. Then I put on my boots, or my sandals, and go to work.

### **At work, another email in my inbox will read “climate worse than previously predicted”.**

Every day, some version of this email will arrive. Sometimes, I read them; sometimes, I don't. Sometimes, I forward them on, with the hope that someone who hasn't looked up in a while, or noticed the crazy weather, will consider our planet's climate. I think about what it will take for this slowly growing movement for climate justice to yield enough power to prevent people in coastal cities and island nations from becoming refugees, to prevent total ecological collapse, more wars over resources, or my family from moving when the long drought hits California. I am hanging on, by a thread sometimes, to my hope, but still, I have it. I envision the global economy localizing, with green, union jobs for everyone who wants them. I envision bicycles and trolleys replacing cars and an end to coal and oil mining. I envision urban gardens and free health clinics and media centers and the strawberry fields broken into smaller sections, becoming worker-owned, detoxified and used to grow food for the community.

I envision a different kind of education. I think about Ecopedagogy: Paulo Freire's anti-capitalist arts-based experiential critical eco-justice education that isn't finished until action projects are completed. An education where the learner is at the center, his

or her liberation from oppressive structures and conditioning is at the center, life is at the center. I envision a movement for change, where the people most impacted by the climate crisis, and by social and economic injustices, are at the forefront. I think these movements will strengthen and grow, in part, through this kind of radical education, where people unlearn some of the ridiculous notions we have been taught about power and change, and relearn who we are.

So, I turn to an education that encourages people to critically reflect on their society and to understand their location and context in it. To notice the breeze on their face, and the people who live on their street. Practices that provide opportunities to rehearse what changes we want to see in ourselves, our communities and our world, and that, in turn, require us to act. Practices that spark our imaginations, that enable us to envision, and then, in solidarity with many others, to create a better world. I turn to Augusto Boal, bell hooks, Francisco Gutierrez, Richard Kahn, Coumba Toure, Malika Sanders, Shilpa Jain, Osmar Filho, and the young people I work with. I turn to theatre, to popular education, to participatory action research. I turn to puppets and music and dance.

I live in Oakland now, where testing is at the center of education, and where 50% of African-American

students don't graduate from high school. The systems of white supremacy and capitalism are rigorously maintained by our schools, which track students, from a young age, to either be bound for college, for the underground economy, or for the pesticide-laden, greenhouse gas-emitting, industrial agribusiness fields. I currently work at Youth in Focus, as a participatory action research coach. It is based on the principle that the people most impacted by an issue are the experts of it, and also the ones who can create the most lasting change. We run projects that last about eight weeks to nine months, in which young people explore things they want to improve or change in their schools or communities. They decide a research question, design the research methodology, collect data from their peers, analyze it, create a powerful artistic presentation of their findings, make recommendations, and, from there, develop actions. One of the projects I have the privilege of working on now is with young researchers involved in the food justice movement in the Bay Area, bringing me back once again to look at how our food is produced, who gets to eat it, and who is impacted on its way to our tables.

**“If love is at the heart of the revolution, might imagination and the artistic fermentation of possibility be the soul of social justice work?”**

*Ananya Chatterjea*

## Blue Jay

Blue Jay hops down the tree, seed in beak  
same routine for 40 million years.

She knows something that  
we are pretending to not know.

She knows this will all be over soon.

The wave of extinction is catching up to her  
a dark hungry Death approaching, unsure

of when it will arrive  
there is nothing to be done  
except continue to collect seeds.

Death used to swing in step with life,  
but then we stopped the music,  
we messed up his flow.

Pretending he doesn't exist, he grows  
bigger, trying to get our attention  
but we are too caught up in our own self-  
absorption  
to notice him.

And now  
he's got a serious addiction.

We avoid Death,  
try to box him up and bury him like he never  
existed as soon as he appears.

We pretend we aren't causing the fastest  
annihilation of life in 65 million years.

We are smart enough to get to the moon,  
peer into the universe, peek into our molecular  
structures,

build skyscrapers and blow them up,  
but we can't figure out how to get out of this  
predicament.

We can't figure out how to stop some highly  
programmed and  
uncreative humans from destroying it all.

I guess 'cause,  
we are highly programmed ourselves, and not  
nearly as creative as we could be.

While we play the capitalist games of the  
aristocracy,  
doing our part to uphold patriarchy and white  
supremacy

Death creeps closer  
straight laughing at us, because he knows that if  
we got our act together

we could stop this whole mess overnight.

Death has already arrived  
taking up hundreds of thousands of us  
now ancestors singing from the other side  
to the seeds in our DNA to germinate,  
urging us to get together  
and sprout some dormant potential to create.

Not so mysterious what we can do you see,  
Like any co-dependency,  
Death needs an intervention.

Death will stop short when his supply  
of global capitalism and colonialism runs dry  
and is replaced with networks of local  
autonomous co-ops loosely organized  
When racism is replaced with justice and fear  
with liberation  
a culture of rape replaced with love and reform  
with revolution

When the prisons are replaced with gardens and  
schools replaced with learning  
coal replaced with wind and solar, Death will  
stop his yearning.

When agribusiness fields are split up into 40 acre  
sections

detoxified and given back in reparations  
When borders become passageways and all the  
fences fall over,

Death will sit with Life, and renegotiate our  
future.

*"To become the subject instead of the  
object in the long convoluted sentence  
of one's life is intoxicatingly liberating."*

*Lorraine M. Lopez*



## Practicing Connection

by: Shilpa Jain, India-USA

### What do I feel the world is calling for?

Connection. More than anything else, what I hear over and over again from people is a desire for connection. To their food. To the land they live on. To the forest. To their neighbors. To their families. To Spirit (or God or the Divine). To their Selves. It's like a hunger, rumbling from deep within each of us.

I think it's because we have been so ripped up, so divided for so long. The scattering started a long time ago and spread like a virus, insidiously and quietly in some places, viciously in others. Now, it seems that there are more and more forces pulling us apart instead of banding us together – militaries, corporations, nation-states, schools, mass media... Even technology, which was heralded as a means of uniting the whole world, has herded us into separate compartments, rarely meeting face-to-face, trying to summarize our thoughts, hopes and fears in 200 characters or less.

### And so, somehow, I feel my fight is for connection.

I think it lives inside of me, from my ancestry and my history. Where do I come from? I think of the stubborn rebelliousness of my grandfathers, their courage and integrity. I remember the steadfast rootedness of my grandmothers, their wisdom and generosity. My parents came from India, but I was

born and raised in the midwest of the USA. I'm both an Indian and an American, an immigrant and a native (not indigenous – but the other kind!). I feel an affinity with the gypsies, who started out in Rajasthan and travelled for 1000 years to make home anywhere and everywhere. I'm always at a crossroads and always crossing roads. But where am I going?

### I uprooted myself.

I had put down some roots for nearly ten years in the beautiful (and rapidly changing) city of Udaipur, Rajasthan, northwest India. I worked primarily with one movement called Shikshantar, but through it, I worked with a great many organizations and



individuals around India and in other parts of the world. I worked on connecting the dots: what we need to do, what we need to learn, who we need to learn from, what we need to unlearn, where to go to do it... our dreams, our actions, our friends, our neighbors, our families, our Selves. I worked on supporting border-crossers, mis-fits, and walkouts like me, so that their resistance and movement and creativity could find a place in making a better world in our troubled times.

Then, about eight months ago, I chose to be with my love. It was a hard decision and simultaneously effortless, because it was true. I realized that the only thing I can do is be true to my Self; it's the only place I can build from. So, I uprooted myself. And now I'm in California trying to find my place, trying to grow new roots.

Some days, I struggle with depression, hopelessness, grief and loss. I feel untethered, like a dandelion seed blowing in the wind. I am waiting to land and find my soil and make a home.

Other days, I feel I can make the world I want, and I know I am *exactly* where I want to be. The sun shines those days. I pump my legs and feel my sweat, as I move through my neighborhood by bicycle. I meet local activists and have terrific conversations; I spend time with friends old and new; I am honing in on

my community and finding my way around my new home, bit by bit. I am working with Other Worlds Are Possible, a group interested in sharing and growing the vibrant alternatives in economics, ecology, education, etc., that exist all over the world. I work with YES! to make Jams happen, to bring together the dynamic 'leaders' of social change, from all walks of life. I support my friends and compañeros in their work in India and other places, by doing whatever I can from a distance. And I try to practice every day, in my relationships, through my lifestyle, being true to the real me and making the world I want to see.

In a way, I am getting the training I need for what I feel the world is calling for: connection. In myriad ways I am working to practice my own role as a bridge-builder, a spanner of distances, for myself and others. Mostly, I try to find inspired hopeful people and connect them with other inspired, hopeful, people. There is power in these connections and I want it to increase exponentially. Not in the sense of hoping for far-fetched dreams (though, those aren't bad to have), but rather the hope that comes with real practice, when your heart is aligned with your hands and head. When what you do is what you believe. And when you feel strength and security that things will be better because you are a part of making it so. *That* kind of hope.

For the last several years, I have been trying to see into things more deeply. In my work as a connector in India, the US and elsewhere, I have convened people from divergent walks of life and we have sought to find our points of connection together. The places where we are all Spirit. Ways we can move past the labels and pre-conceptions we have of each other. How we can free ourselves from institutionalized blindness and the hatred we were taught by systems and isms? Where



do we feel our relationships to our selves, to nature and to each other as a living, breathing tie, linking one heart to the next and the next. Where can we each find the knowledge, the meaning and the action we need to find and fulfill the next step in our life's purpose.

I think my next steps involve philanthropy. I've been thinking about what it would mean for each person to see themselves as a philanthropist. I believe that each person, no matter their hurts or pains, does love (or wants to love) humanity. We all want to keep our faith, and we want to do something right. I believe that we each have something to give – our own unique gifts and blessings and skills. And, at the same time, we each have something to receive. We are woven in a web and flow of human relationships. We each feed the flow and need to be fed by it.

For example, I've been in an inquiry with peers about 'leveraging privilege for social change' for the last seven years. It has been a powerful journey, full of insights

and understandings, and I've come to this point now of fully embracing my role as a supporter of connections.

I've also come to realize that privilege comes in a lot of forms, like fame, money, skills, networks, etc. But what can we leverage that is neither money nor time? Loving words, tender touches, compliments, big smiles, belly-aching laughter, deep prayers, sweetness, heart heart heart!

Yet, could this kind of philanthropy lead to social change? After all, the violent economic-political-social system is still there. Still exploiting. Still producing concentration camps and wars. Still destroying mother earth. Can leveraging the privileges of the heart stop or slow down that system?

### **The truth is that I don't know.**

But I have to believe that it's possible...that positivity ripples outward. We've all heard of the butterfly effect — that a butterfly's wings flapping on one side of the world can start a hurricane in another. Hopefully, our small actions can yield the same result (through spreading beauty, understanding, justice and peace, instead of ravaging coastlines) like a Pay It Forward of the things that matter. Slowly but surely, maybe the gift economy can overtake the economy of production, consumption and waste.

I know we are up against a lot, but I've come to believe that each of us has a light within. I want to use my time, my money, my talents, my gifts and my heart make things brighter— for me and for others. *That* is the kind of philanthropy – the kind of resource-raising and re-distribution – that *I* am interested in.

### **The choices I make can change the world.**

I don't want to make those choices in isolation; I want to share them with others and create space for others to do the same. I believe the interlinking of these choices will make the difference.

On a daily basis, I pray. I ask that I be able to live my truth. I have gratitude for the love I receive, the opportunities and the challenges. I forgive others and I ask forgiveness for my mistakes and transgressions. I try to surrender and release my attachments to outcomes, results and control. And I try to accept that what *I* can do, *my* part in it all, is guided by forces higher than myself.

Probably, the hardest part for me is being more forgiving to myself. I hold myself to such a high standard it's easy to fall short. Maybe that's true of many activists. These days, I ask myself, what would it take for me to be more vigilant about my downward spirals and catch myself before I fall?

I come back to the same answers again and again. Faith. Strength. Patience. Connection. And, ultimately, Community.

Will you join me?



# Confessions of a Hippie Marketer

by: **Tad Hargrave, Canada**

I started doing magic when I was 12 years old. And if there's one thing I've learned – it's how very easy it is to fool people. I pretend to bend spoons with my mind (no one can really do that by the way). I have someone deal a face-down deck perfectly into red and black piles. And people are fooled. I tell people I'm reading their minds by reading their body language in response to my questions – and people believe me. I've had jocks at universities pull me aside, after I pretended to read someone's mind, and say, "Hey man . . . now . . . what you just did . . . I need to know . . . like was that a 'trick' . . .?" And they seem scared.

To be fair, you would be really disappointed if you knew how I did half of my tricks. The solution is always so simple. In fact, a general guideline: the more amazing the trick, the simpler the solution. It's all bullshit. I'm lying the whole time I'm doing my tricks. Really. I knew the card in advance. Because I made you pick that one. I can't actually read body language that well (no one can). Sorry sorry. Love me love me.

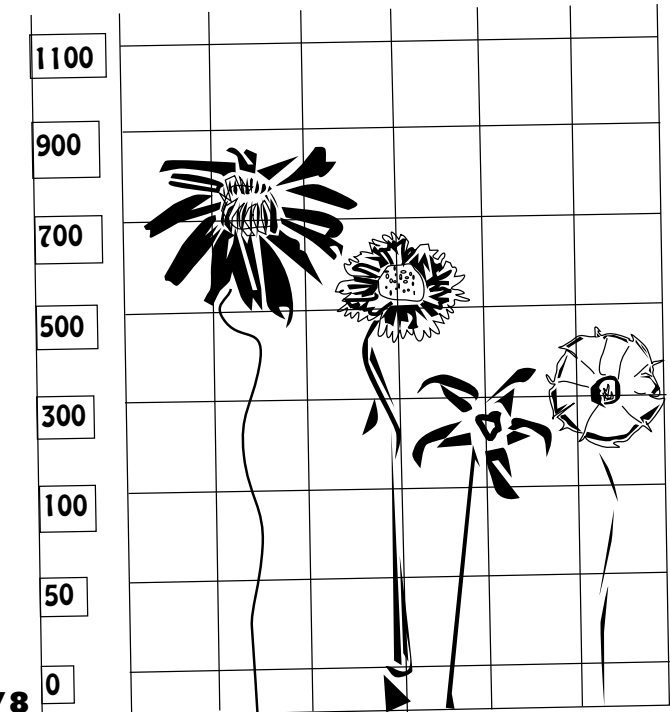
A part of me is often a bit disappointed too. By how easily people will fall for a seemingly rational solution to the problems before them. How simple it is to 'help people believe'.

I think the green economy is sort of like my 'faux' explanations of how I'm doing my trick. The green

economy has been sold as the answer to all our problems. And people believe it... And, I'm a bit disappointed.

I live in the heart of the most violent civilization the planet has ever seen, so do many people I know. So many want to walk out of it, and I'm glad they do, but, what if some of the paths 'out' of it are actually just slower paths 'into' the heart of it?

**What if the things we're told can save us are only going to kill us more slowly?**



Confessions of a Hippie Marketer

I think that the Green Economy has become just that. A slower path of destruction – not the road to our salvation.

I was born and raised in Alberta – the Texas of Canada. But at least I was born in Edmonton (Austin) vs. Calgary (Dallas). Even so, Alberta is now the site of the infamous Tar Sands project – one of the biggest environmental devastations the world has known. Of course, they call it the Oilsands, because that term makes it sound nice. In magic, we call that misdirection.

By the time I graduated high school, I was a proud, personal-growth doing, perma-grinning, Christ is my saviour (who I accepted into my heart while watching Billy Graham on TV) capitalism-touting young man. I was deeply convinced that 'the system worked if you worked the system.' I also believed that 'your altitude will be determined by your attitude!' and 'if you can conceive and believe you can achieve.' Aahhh. The indiscretions of youth.

As I began working with YES! in their camps and then the Jams project, slowly, kicking and screaming, I came to see that the system is well and truly screwed. I wish I'd been so intuitive and open minded and 'got it' immediately. But, after years of learning about what corporations were really up to (insert dozens of conversations here that sound like this, "They did

what? . . . But they didn't realize they were doing it . . . But they didn't mean to . . . They did? . . . Then they've stopped . . . They haven't? . . . Surely people know. They don't? . . ."), after years of hearing the most terrible stories of injustice, of questioning my own whiteness, of reading everything written by Derrick Jensen and exploring my own ancestral Scottish indigeneity, it slowly began to come together for me. And it really took me a long time to come to it. After all, I did accept Jesus into my heart from a televangelist speaking in a football stadium.

You'd think with the amount of decolonization and anti-oppression work I've been exposed to that I'd be living off the land or running some radical non-profit somewhere, but noooo. I do marketing consulting for hippies. I work with green, eco-friendly, holistic and otherwise conscious entrepreneurs to help them get more clients and increase their cash-flow. I help them find sustainable livelihoods doing the things they love...

## And I have a confession.

*I don't think the Green Economy is sustainable.*

*I don't think it's the answer. In fact, it's part of the problem.*

These days you can't go two steps without seeing the word 'green' being tagged onto some product or service. Magazines have their 'green issues', businesses are going green, Walmart and other huge companies

are seeking to reduce their environmental footprint. Every time I'm at the organic food store, I see some new eco-friendly cleaner, some new organic/raw/vegan/alkalizing food bar. I've got mixed feelings about it all.

### **The Green Economy is a bit like Barack Obama.**

Last week, someone asked me what I thought about the Obama Presidency. I told them, "Well . . . It's new, fresh, inspiring and makes you feel good. But, it's not sustainable. Is Barack Obama a good thing? Well, what we can say for sure is that his Presidency is less shitty. Profoundly and deeply less shitty than Bush's presidency. So much less shitty that it's worth celebrating for months. But, can the corporate, nation-state structure of the USA ever be sustainable? I don't think so."

### **And neither can the Green Economy.**

Consider how much metal would have to be mined to create the number of wind turbines we need. Or how much copper would have to be mined to create the wiring for solar panels. Consider how bio-fuels, once deemed the answer to all our problems, are now seen to be one of the leading causes of deforestation and food shortages, as land goes to grow crops for fuel instead of food to feed people.

Shouldn't green marketing be about making green things seem normal (instead of making normal things seem green)?

Even better, shouldn't we be trying to make natural things seem normal instead of normal things seem natural?

I travel around Canada leading marketing workshops for local, independent and 'green' businesses. And wherever I go, I meet people who are more radical than their businesses. They're done with working for 'the man'. They secretly want to go live in some groovy eco-village, off the grid, and walk away from the whole system. A lot of them really 'get it'. But, they're stuck.

They've got to pay bills. They need food and a place to live. Some are hardcore about their values, and do their best to barter, but it's hard. They're trying to leave the Suicide Economy – but they haven't even made it fully into the Green Economy, never mind anything that might lie beyond that. And, it's understandable. Sure, most people want to spend all their money and earn all their money in the green economy, but, let's be real. For all the hype, only 1% of US farmland is organic (and most of that is large-scale mono-cultured farms). Only about 2% of the coffee sold is fair trade. Even the 'less shitty' green economy isn't even close to competing with the mainstream Suicide Economy.

I feel stuck myself. I mean – I love doing the workshops. I love helping people articulate what the hell they do, so that people don't just nod and say, "Wow. That's interesting. Um, I'm going to get some more punch." I love helping radical people find ways to support themselves financially. But I know that the green economy I'm a part of is just the slower descent into destruction.

I'm not sure what else I would do if I wasn't doing this. I've got vague fantasies of living in some Gaelic village. But I know I'm a city boy at heart. And hell, with only 60,000 Scottish Gaelic speakers alive today (being optimistic), there are no villages left to move to.

I feel disappointed with myself somedays. Like my work is a settling and selling out of what I truly believe. Like I am vesting so much of my life energy into a solution that isn't really a solution at all.

Sure, I challenge my friends. I talk a lot about what's beyond the green economy and criticize it as a solution (even while I support people using it as a means). But, I have a frequent and sinking feeling that I could be doing something more radical and effective.

**I know what we really need is  
a brand new world.**

But how do you get people to leap into a new world that hasn't been created yet?

No one wants pollution of our land, waters, air or energy sources . . . but that's exactly what we have. We have to face the sobering fact that we are collectively creating what nobody wants individually.

It's become increasingly clear that the seemingly disconnected, vast array of problems we face are not separate at all, but merely different outgrowths of the same system. And it's a system that is rotten to its core. The same core set of assumptions. The same worldview. This system has been labeled a lot of things: Empire, Civilization, The Suicide Economy, Modernity. Put another way, we don't have an economy in crisis. The economy IS the crisis.

I was talking with a friend a number of years ago at a Second Cup Café. He was, and really still is, a hardcore capitalist business man. But this new more conscious economy was waking him up. To the smell of dollars anyway. This new green economy is full of chances to make money.

"You got to admit," he said, leaning forward, holding the now ubiquitous soy chai latte in both his hands, "The green economy is more sustainable than what you'd call our current Suicide Economy."

Of course, he was right. I sat for a while, sipping on my own chai latte (don't you judge me) and ruminated on his words before responding.

“Okay, sure. It certainly is more sustainable, but it's hard to argue that it is sustainable. And it's a dangerous frame to use because saying that the Green Economy is 'more' sustainable implies that the Suicide Economy is at least somewhat sustainable. And it isn't. At all.”

Are we letting the good come at the expense of the best?

Is it possible that the Green Economy is better, but not the final destination? Is it possible that the Green Economy is still violent to the planet?

A few weeks ago I'd bumped into a neighbour of mine, Mark Anielski, author of “The Economics of Happiness”. I told him that I'd just spoken at the Greenfest (the world's largest green business consumer expo). “My friend just spoke there! And she told me that she just went off about how the Greenfest wasn't much better than the mainstream. Just a green capitalism.”

I liked her already. So, I emailed an early draft of this piece to her.

She responded, “Yes, I did ‘go off’” on the whole shocking insanity of the event. I was blinded by the

flash of visa cards. And, when the radio interviewer asked me if I wasn't just so delighted to see such a fantastic expression of sustainability, I burst into tears, right on live radio, and said, ‘WE can not eat our way out this mess... One can not buy their way to the salvation of the mother. This is an abomination. Everyone here is on dopamine and is walking around in a trance... a consumer trance. We are doing nothing but selling a new drug that is organic. And it is the same drug addiction and core problem that is keeping everyone asleep and trapped. It is a grand co-opting of the change. It is like giving a heroine addict a new drug and saying, “Don't worry. You can do this one without feeling badly about it, because it is organic!!!” I was in shock.’’

Perhaps the first place to start is to acknowledge that there is something beyond the Green Economy. And to work for that.

Here is what I notice when I contrast the suicide economy with the green economy and my understanding of what's beyond it . . .

What do YOU think?

THE SUICIDE ECONOMY:	THE GREEN ECONOMY:	BEYOND THE GREEN ECONOMY:
GOAL: global corporate capitalism	GOAL: <i>local living economies</i>	GOAL: happy and healthy local communities
PEAK EXPRESSION: Multi-national corporations	PEAK EXPRESSION: <i>Conscious, local business</i>	PEAK EXPRESSION: Healthy and happy local community
MINDSET: The system is good and works (if you work the system)	MINDSET: <i>The system is good and basically work – but it does have serious problems that need to be addressed.</i>	MINDSET: The system is rotten to its core and will never, ever change in its own. It will never “work” to create happy and healthy communities
WAGES: Minimum Wages	WAGES: <i>Fair/Living Wages</i>	WAGES: Getting Out of the wage economy
TRADE: Free Trade	TRADE: <i>Fair Trade</i>	TRADE: Local Trade and focus of self sufficiency
RESOURCES: Seeing world as full of resources to exploit - objects	RESOURCES: <i>Seeing world as full of resources to use sustainably</i>	RESOURCES: Seeing world as full of relatives, not resources – subjects, not objects.
SPEED: Accelerating pace	SPEED: <i>Slower and more varied pace</i>	SPEED: Slower, Seasonal pace

ECONOMY: Globalized	ECONOMY: <i>Local first</i>	ECONOMY: Highly localized & bio- regionalized
TECH: High levels of technology (Nanotech, Biotech, computers)	TECH: <i>Appropriate technology (e.g solar panels, wind turbines)</i>	TECH: Hand made things. Human technology. The technical term, I believe, is “work”
ECONOMIC GOAL: Unending Growth as measured by money through GDP of national economy	ECONOMIC GOAL: <i>Unending improvement as measured by real quality of life indicators of the nation</i>	ECONOMIC GOAL: The end of the nation state
WHOSE NEEDS MATTER: A society of white, straight, monied, able bodied male privilege	WHOSE NEEDS MATTER: <i>All humans treated as equal partners in co-creating a better world.</i>	WHOSE NEEDS MATTER: All of Life (plants, humans, animals and spirits) treated as equal partners in co-creating a better world
LINES AND BORDERS: Money/capital able to freely pass through borders but not people	LINES AND BORDERS: <i>People allowed to more freely cross borders than capital</i>	LINES AND BORDERS: The end of national borders and nation states.
FAMILY MODEL: Strict Father Model of Family	FAMILY MODEL: <i>Nurturing Parent Model of Family</i>	FAMILY MODEL: Community Model of Family “it takes a village”

DEVELOPMENT: Focus on forcing developing countries to develop into free market capitalist societies	DEVELOPMENT: <i>Helping developing countries to engage with the global economic system on their own terms and develop their economies in green and sustainable ways</i>	DEVELOPMENT: Questioning the entire notion of development
EDUCATION: Mandatory state run education (likely two tiered)	EDUCATION: <i>Alternative education: waldorf, home school etc</i>	EDUCATION: Cutting the link of school and education – people learn from life, their community, elders etc
FOOD: Fast food restaurants & chain grocery stores	FOOD: <i>Slow food restaurants and cooking at home</i>	FOOD: Traditional, local foods made at home and shared in community
ARTS: we are a passive audience entertained by a global, highly specialized cadre of performers to whom we have no personal connection. Celebrities	ARTS: <i>we are a passive audience entertained by a local, highly specialized cadre of performers to whom we have some personal connection</i>	ARTS: The arts are a part of everyone’s daily life. There is rarely an audience or a performer. The arts are highly participatory
MODE OF TRANSPORT: Car	MODE OF TRANSPORT: <i>Bike &amp; Public Transit</i>	MODE OF TRANSPORT: Bike or walking
INDUSTRY: Make machines more efficient	INDUSTRY: <i>Make machines more sustainable</i>	INDUSTRY: Question the IDEA of machines and mechanization no more heat, beat and treat

<b>JUSTICE:</b> Super Prisons – how to make them more efficient & profitable. Justice by punishment, exclusion and shunning	<b>JUSTICE:</b> <i>How to make prisons more humane. No more prisons for profit</i>	<b>JUSTICE:</b> Questioning the IDEA of prisons and retributive justice at all – restorative justice. Working to weave people back into the community and dealing with the source of crime - broken communities
<b>INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:</b> Indigenous people are a burden/ problem to the state to be dealt with	<b>INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:</b> <i>A commitment to make indigenous people full citizens of the nation</i>	<b>INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:</b> Recognizing that we all were at one time Indigenous. That the relationship with our non human relatives and the earth is a human experience not just for a select few. Find our way back to the land and our ancestors. Allowing indigenous people to be members of their own, equal nations
<b>PRODUCTION:</b> Mass produced: factories in majority world countries at exploitative wages	<b>PRODUCTION:</b> <i>Locally Produced: factories in home countries at living wages or fair trade</i>	<b>PRODUCTION:</b> Hand made locally or traded regionally

## Acknowledgements

You hold in your hands a labor of love.  
It's the fruit of many hours of work from many, many people.

We would like to thank the members of the Global Collaborative for providing the support and encouragement to take on this project.  
We would like to thank Jazzmen Lee-Johnson for her elegantly thoughtful illustrations and Tidiane Ba for his beautifully creative layout.  
We want to thank each and every contributor for being part of the process, often going through multiple edits to reach this final piece. It's your stories that inspire and sustain us.

And, we want to thank each and every person out there,  
young-by-age or young-at-heart,  
who are doing every little bit they can to make our world a better place.  
It's because of you that we are still here,  
still fighting,  
still growing,  
still laughing,  
still dreaming...

With deepest gratitude,  
Shilpa, Kiritapu and Tad





## Notes