

Dear Friends.....

Over Betty's objections we share this article by her that was published this year in "Sacred Reflections," the theme being Politics and the Sacred. Everyday we are inspired by Betty's all embracing love and personal example. Betty discovered her "personal myth" in college and has lived it with integrity.

Marilyn and John

A COLLEGE ACTIVIST COMES HOME

by Betty Warren

A young woman stood near the college campus gate, handing out leaflets about a peace meeting. Daily, I watched her. I was a naive freshman, preoccupied with the problem of handling a full academic program while earning enough money to survive. This was in the 1930s, long before the present era of huge student loans (and debts), and the crippling costs of higher education that shut out so many impecunious young people today.

Finally, I took a leaflet and struck up a conversation with my new acquaintance. As we talked, I began to see that there was a very real world beyond academia, where terrible forces of "good" and "evil" were colliding, crushing the poor and helpless. Young Davids were challenging the Goliaths of money and power. My own ambitions appeared insignificant in light of the suffering of humanity. Here was work to be done, a public to be enlightened by the truth, and bold actions to be taken toward these ends. I became a campus "radical."

As I entered more fully into the peace movement, life took on new meaning. Although I continued my academic work, my passion was for political action. I was learning to devote myself to a higher cause, to work without reward, to take risks, to love beyond my immediate circle, to see myself as a citizen of the world.

In due time, I finished my degree and teaching credential requirements and focused on my teaching career. But there was always a call to action: a peace march to attend; a letter to write in favor of protecting the environment and endangered species; work to do in my community to stop pollution, toxic pesticides, nuclear power and nuclear weapons; a stand to take for justice and human rights.

My attention turned inward, and I became aware

that my activism had opened a door into the vast realms of spirituality. I studied meditation. The outer and inner worlds were coming together. Nature was no longer something separate from myself — it was myself. It was not to be comprehended through television documentaries or comfortable motor tours, but by whole body and soul immersion, by backpacking and by living simply in the wilderness.

Today, everything seems miraculous and sacred to me: people, plants, animals, landscapes, cycles, forces — all that comprises this living planet, Gaia. I see my entire life as a Vision Quest and an opportunity to ease, perhaps, the suffering of my companions on the Way. If you would find yourself, first lose yourself in some work or action that manifests your deepest love. Your action may help others find their path. Follow your heart; it knows the way Home.

The young woman at the college campus gate has been a life-long friend. Many, many years later, she is still an activist for peace and justice, a whole and loving human being. I wonder if she knows how many others like me she has inspired.

Betty Warren, 80, is co-director of Wilderness Transitions, a non-profit, educational organization based in Marin County, California, which runs 5-6 wilderness vision quests a year in the mountains and deserts of California and Nevada. A devout Buddhist, as well as ardent backpacker and political activist, Betty has meditated daily for 35 years.



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