

The Return

A letter written by Betty
to her visiting guest buddies -
following a 4 day fasting solo high in
the desert. ^{20000 ft. alt.}

Dearest Buddies,

There was the long ride back from the desert, and as I rested I listened to your talk of family and loved ones. When we parted early Friday morning it seemed unreal to be alone again. Home at last, I gave thanks for our safe return, took that much needed bath, had a snack, and went to sleep about 4:00 a.m.

(It was so beautiful up there on the ridge; I knew that I was the mountain, the valley, the moonrise, the sunrise, the Earth itself and all her creatures.) And I felt the anguish for the State of the World, man's inhumanity to man and insensitivity to Mother Earth.) No demons came to torment me; also no great visions or prophetic dreams. Having lived alone for the past 40 years, except for 5, I was accustomed to being on my own. (Having back-packed for 22 years, I had carried many loads to the mountain top and was at home in the wilderness. Even the three day fast was no problem. I was surrounded by your love, and hoped that I was of help to you also in your vigils.)

But (a powerful medicine was at work within me,) as I came to consciousness later Friday morning (I felt my heart open up and beat with universal love - the love which you had so freely given, I was being transformed, the Fool, the Child again. I lay there and wept with love and gratitude for you all, and thankfulness for our coming together.)

The garden shimmered in the sunlight. New blossoms opened everywhere, fruit trees leafed luxuriantly, vegetables and weeds flourished. Here was the bounty of the Earth, with nourishment for body and spirit.

This is just the beginning of what I hope will be the transformation into a more openly loving and aware person. May your Returns be likewise blessed.

My everlasting love and gratitude,

Betty.

Ah, Marilyn

How did you bring this all about?

Letter written to Dr. Tom Frankson. He asked her to contribute to some material he was gathering about elderhood. 11-6-97

Dear Tom,

My apologies for not seeming to participate ^{in the} Wednesday gathering re: Becoming a Wisdom Elder. As I said, I get tired early, plus my old hearing aid was not working altho I'd just put in a new battery. I'm getting a new one, but it is taking time. I could hear the sound of your voice, but it did not form ^{many} intelligible words. The drumming did come across and was most beautiful. The words I did hear were confusing: you seemed to be talking about your 84 year old father's recent death, but in Flowers you said that he died before your fourth birthday, and that his spirit came to help you with El Toro. At the end of the evening, I could not make out what the others were saying so I remained silent.

The evening has stimulated many thoughts that have taken shape as I went on a morning walk on the hill behind my house. It is not exactly a wilderness here, but it will have to do, since I do not have the time or energy to go climb Mt. Tam. It is partly utilitarian and partly natural open space, with ^{native} oak, holly, bay, pine, cypress and imported eucalyptus. Dirt roads lead to a Water Company underground storage tank, and to a Sausalito Corporation Yard dump and composting area. It is littered with waste: streamers of downed eucalyptus bark and branches, rotting plastic and assorted chunks of glass, concrete, and lumber. It is a paradise for weeds. All of the local unwanted plants flourish here: poison oak, fennel, hemlock, nightshade, scotch broom, mustard, brambles, mushrooms, purple thistle, yellow thistle, flowering borage, alum, clover.

As I walk, I am thinking: Is some of this sacred? some profane? But they cannot be separated. It is all one, sacred, a miracle. This realization is an important step in becoming a wisdom elder: not just to know it intellectually, having read or heard it, but to feel the connection in this moment, to live it, to know that that is sacred because I am sacred and we are One.

As you said, the wisdom elder pays careful attention to the most important things, or perhaps, becomes the important things. And what is important? Love is the most important, perhaps the only important

thing. There is love (not to be confused with attachment) of oneself; of other individuals or groups of human beings; of other living creatures; of just causes; of ideals; of beauty; of nature; of the Earth; of Life itself; of the Great Mystery; of God. It is the opening of the self to give and receive one's true essence and all true essences -- the buddha-nature -- the Great Spirit that dwells in all things.

Becoming a wisdom elder is learning to live the pretty words we repeat. When we are young we often have deep insights and noble resolutions that slip away before they reach our hearts and become us. Each of us is a work in progress, always changing and growing, yet at any moment complete, ready to return to the source. Even a child can understand this, as you, Tom, know from your work. A small boy wrote this epitaph for a dead baby squirrel he found and buried in his garden:

Here lays

(Mobi Ho: Animal Dharma

a small dead squerl

p. 131, Dharma Gaia. Ed. Allan Badiner,
Parallax Press, 1990)

ready to become

(a great collection of essays)

a Rose

When I was about ten years old, I was troubled by the idea of death; I clipped this item from a newspaper, carried it in my wallet, and often read it for comfort: (I love the words ascribed to Charles Frohman as he stood on the deck of the sinking Titanic: "Why should I be afraid?

Death is the greatest adventure in Life!") I still carry it in my memory.

A wisdom elder has a sense of urgency to be present in every moment, and yet has a feeling of timelessness: all the time in the world is Here and Now.

Have you seen this book? Robert Gerzon: Finding Serenity in the Age of Anxiety. MacMillan, 1997. We find it useful in helping questers go within, especially his suggestion to draw a LifeMap.

Thank you for a very thought-provoking evening.

Love, Betty