

Circle of Grandmothers

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Belonging to Mother Earth....Indigenous Wisdom and Healing

A Grandmother Reports on the Conference

By Shirley Tassencourt in Dragoon

Shirley has been a core participant in the Council of Grandmothers since the first circle in 1994. This year, after co-leading the opening ceremony at the COD Ranch, she left for Virginia Beach, thus connecting the energy of the Grandmothers in Arizona with the energy at this important conference. Now she shares that story.

The week-long conference at Virginia Beach, Virginia "Belonging to Mother Earth....Indigenous Wisdom and Healing" coincided with the Grandmother's Gathering this year. Three times I was asked to bring Grandmother presence as outreach and feedback. I went with big eyes, big ears, and big heart into this world wide web of elders, caretakers of "original ways".

Altogether five hundred folk met. Eighty keynote speakers, all holders of the ancient ways and all introduced by traditionalists, spoke for fifteen minutes then held workshops. One hundred and fifty children came and were schooled in Native American crafts and ritual. About two hundred concerned Americans of European and African descent came to listen.

From our indigenous peers clues and council seemed to arrive direct from the ancestors. Over and over we heard of the depth and intimacy of dialogue they hold with Mother

Earth, Father Sun, Brother Animal, Sister Plant Imagine! 30,000 years of survival skills and communal living almost lost in just Two hundred years. No longer is there room on our exploited earth for hunter gatherers - be they animal or men.

Our abundance is their abortion. And here we are, the younger brothers, technologically advanced and left with an insatiable desire for *things*. The high priests of our society, the scientists who opened this door, now rethink it. The informed scientists give us the full cost of our consumer atrocities - the world, its loss.

Our elder brothers give us warning: like canaries in the mine their hearts are sick with the tragedy of tragedies looming. Change your direction NOW, get back the fresh air, the clean water, the diversity of plants, the sun that doesn't bite, the mystery of the animal presence.

Buried inside all of us is an indigenous soul who is longing for harmonious livelihood, longing for

spirit-self, longing for the warmth of community, the joy of expression, the holiness of ceremony. Ignorant of this hidden hunger we stay restless and searching.

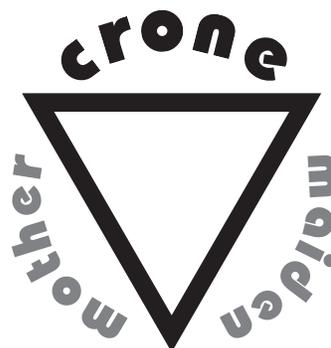
A black American woman wept into the microphone, "My lips are too thick, my skin too black, my hair too kinky. I'm nobody in this culture. It's HARD, It's HARD to forgive.

Forgiveness was the keyword, forgiveness was happening everyday. We all watched the meltdown. How was it possible? Oppressor and oppressed? We all inherited the stand-off that nobody wanted anymore. So we began the process of forgiving ourselves and each other. The dying planet pulls us together. No longer is it "What can I do", but "Do what you can - everyday!"

Mary Diamond asked us to work on a proclamation at our first full moon circle of Grandmothers at Cielo en Tierra. This is a part of what we wrote:

"We issue a call to Grandmothers to form circles to begin a process of restoring compassion and love to our vital institutions and to eliminate injustice and violence. We hear our children cry. We hear our grandchildren cry. We hear Mother Earth cry."

Our mission is clear.



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Let the Grandmothers Start

By Florence Douglas in Eugene, Oregon

Greetings. As a grandmother approaching the end of her eighth decade I celebrate a wealth of experiences, one of the significant ones being participation in the first of the Grandmother Gatherings in 1998 at Cielo in Tierra. Mary Diamond had shared with me earlier her hope for just such a council, and it was wonderful to see how she had brought that dream to fruition.

My plan to attend the gathering this year has not worked out, but if I were there, this is what I would say: let the Grandmothers gathered here bring forth the message that will truly lead to healing the world. From the first gathering, we have proclaimed that "when the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal" and I believe that is possible; our collective wisdom and experience

should give us that power. However, I feel that we have not fulfilled our promise...we have not, as a group spoken the words, led the way.

In the May-June issue of the *Circle of Grandmothers Newsletter*, Deena Metzger's article "Call to Council" expressed the despair, frustration and apprehension most of us feel about the present state of the world, and that of our government in particular. As I re-read the article, I am touched by the similarity of Metzger's individual searching for a way to heal the world and the Grandmother's searching as a group. I would urge that at this gathering (and in your small circles) Metzger's article be thoughtfully read and discussed and used as an incentive for specific action, be it ever so apparently small. We need some action that proves

that the Grandmothers are ready to *speak*.

My suggestion for a focus of how to heal the world is something as simple as *speaking for peace*. This would mean not only using *words* but also *living peace*. Remember the prophetic words of the song, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin *with me*". There are many precedents for the effectiveness of practicing peace...like the simple Peace Pilgrim, a woman who walked more than 25,000 miles in three decades, and Mother Theresa, and many other women awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and Gandhi, who accomplished the "impossible"...these and so many others. That these people did not change the whole world does not indicate failure. It shows what *can* be done by talking and living peace, and if a whole people were doing it, the world would heal! Let the Grandmothers start!



Editor's Corner

by Kit Wilson in Phoenix

Was the Gathering great, or what?? Hearts were open, connections were strong, and we did what we were told: we *Listened to the Earth and To Each Other*. The feedback shows that many participants think we came together more deeply than ever before. There was a strong feeling of community. We did some crying, struggled with some hard stuff, and I, for one, haven't laughed so hard in a long time.

To fully honor each person's contribution would mean eliminating any other news, so I will simply say Thank You to all of you: Planners, Presentors, and On-Site Contributors. You know who you are. There would have been no Gathering without you.

One name, however, popped up repeatedly in the evaluations. Like

a "volunteer" plant that enhances a garden, Wilma, so much a part of the C.O.D. Ranch, joined us for an evening, stayed for the duration, and remains with us as a symbol of the land and the transformative magic of community.

For those of you who couldn't make it, we missed you! The good news is that there *will* be a 1999 Gathering! This decision was reached by the entire Council, in circle, with a thumbs up vote that quickly demonstrated consensus. We went back and forth a bit with details, but it now looks as if, in line with majority opinion, we will return to the C.O.D. Ranch in Oracle, Arizona during the week of the full moon in October 1999. (The full moon is on the 24th so you can

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It's Newsletter Renewal Time

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When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

RANCH WOMAN
For Wilma

Her roots are deep, here, and widely spread,
holding together this eroding soil
like the roots of the Hackberry tree
that marks the entrance to the ranch.

Last night she told us stories:
How her mother planted iris
to keep the buildings from sliding down the hill
Her face lights up:
“You should *see* this place in the spring!”

The time she caught the kids
shooting holes in the water tank,
roped them from her horse,
tied them to a tree and told their parents in the village
she was putting them to work,
“Don’t look for them till night”, she said.
“They need to learn a lesson”.

She and her mother, running cattle,
doing the work of men all those years.

Her stories touch me,
the tender way she offers a mesquite bean:
“Taste this! The pink ones are the best”.
She says, “I had a stroke. I can’t find the words.
I know what I want to say
but they don’t come out right anymore”

I, a stranger on the ranch, walk slowly,
opening to smell of mesquite,
to arid textures,
to the subtle greens of yucca and buckwheat bush.

I feel her deeply here.

Her strength is rough textured, sharp,
full of thorns that draw blood.
Strong winds barely move the staghorn cactus.
She will defend this place to the end.

High on the hill she watches,
only the windmill, now, to stand with her in vigil.

Poet’s Corner

No horses anymore.
Just the smoke from the smelting furnace
filling the valley,
a bulldozer
cutting road for the new two story house -
an ugly yellow scar
that will wash out with the rains,
taking the top soil with it.

And her mother’s iris.

She tells us again:
“My mind comes and goes.”

But her stories whisper together
like mesquite pods,
Dropping themselves down
into the receptive soil of our hearts.

by Kit Wilson



On Turning 50 & Beyond

“Child” has no value in my culture
And baby-anything was to be
Discarded in favor of sophisticated
Repartee.

So I can’t really say why
“Baby Crone” holds me transfixed
Contemplating the paradox.

In a sense, like the baby elephant,

I look to see the Immensity

I am now destined to grow into....

And it thrills me.

Who would throw this away?

for my friend’s 50th

by Wren Breedlove (at age 51)

Tucson, Arizona



Poet’s Corner, cont. on page 7

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

An Artist and a Poet Speak

How do we, as elder women, *speak so the world will heal?*

In the final months of 1998 two remarkable *Grandmothers* are demonstrating their answer to this thematic question—bringing their unique talents forward into the world in a way that profoundly illustrates who they are and what they believe.

When the Iron Bird Flies: Paintings by Virginia Hall

November 6, 1998 - January 31, 1999

Last year **Virginia Hall** was asked to exhibit at the Tucson International Airport, coordinating with the 50th Anniversary of the Tucson Airport Authority. The result is *When the Iron Bird Flies*.

To quote her *Artist's Statement*:

“This collection of paintings reflects, paraphrasing author Leonard Koren, a respite between the pleasure of form and the pleasure of freedom from form.

“The exhibition, which was created especially for this site, offers a visual environment for the refreshment of travelers. Balancing between departure and destination or between intention and action, it is possible that such an environment will refresh us and nourish everyday activities.

“Informed by Buddhist practice, Virginia Hall’s current work is presented yearly as a collection.”

“The title of this exhibition is taken from a 7th Century Tibetan Prophecy indicating that “when the iron bird flies” Buddhadharmā will come to the land of the red man”.

John Montemerlo, a Tucson artist and poet writes:

Soap laden glass in hand,
Your wash cloth on the inside,
Cleaning...
When suddenly the glass slips.
During the fall to the sink...
You are in a state of total awareness...
You are “In the now.”

Virginia Hall’s works are visual manifestations of such instances.

Total consciousness!
To describe each piece is unnecessary.
It is what it is.
It needn’t be explained, only enjoyed.

The fore-mentioned analogy of her work is not to be taken as simplistic,
For it is as complex as it is simple.

To live with one of her works would be a most remarkable situation...

An aid to awareness...
A guide to living...
“In the now.”

Virginia Hall was one of the 16 women who gathered at Cielo en Tierra in 1994 to form the first *Council of Grandmothers*. She lives and works in her studio which is nestled at the end of a rural street in the artists community of Tubac, Arizona.

If you live in the Tucson area, are driving through, or are flying in or out—stop by the gallery.

The show will be exhibited through January 31, 1999.

How the World Is Given to Us Poems by Barrie Ryan

As we go to press **Barrie Ryan** awaits the arrival of her second book of poetry. Those of us who know her work share in her anticipation. You may remember Barrie’s poems from this Newsletter and from her reading at the Grandmother Gatherings. You may, for example, remember *Babocamari*, Barrie’s tribute to Mary Diamond and Mary’s beloved creek.

With humility and reverence Barrie’s poems speak her truth: her love for the earth, for creeks and living things; her work with the dying; the simplicity and complexity of life as it is, and the wonders of the human heart.

Nard Taiz, editor of Moon Pony Press, says:

“We believe that poetry is a transformative art...Our intent is to publish poetry books that leave their mark and linger in the memory. In Barrie Ryan’s book, such depth is achieved.”

The Boston poet T. Begley describes Barrie’s poems:

If compassion begot the world, Barrie Ryan was particle and wave of its impulse, as well as its witness, and, perhaps now in this

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

life, she is its speech. Letting compassion have speech means letting everything have speech, especially the unspeakable or the unspoken, and that means speech that is heard, not imposed. Few are capable of such grace, of such long hearing, but these poems and their poet are. And so, as Barrie walks me to the "brink of water," that is also my tears, I do not fear the immersion. "Here, whoever walks into a room/where a person is dying alone, and sits, is the one I will go with." These poems are the friend I will go with.

How the World Is Given to Us is published by Moon Pony Press, a non-profit division of the Pima College Foundation. To order the book send a check for \$10 to Moon Pony Press, c/o Dan Gilmore, 2146 E. Hawthorne, Tucson, Arizona 85719.

Barrie Ryan lives in an adobe house in Tucson, Arizona. She is a full time poet, dividing her writing time between her home and a small shed in the lush desert on the outskirts of the city, where the deer and cactus wren are curious witnesses to her work.

Barrie has served on the planning committee for the 1997 and 1998 Council of Grandmother Gatherings, facilitated poetry and journal workshops, and read us her poems. She is a member of a small circle of grandmothers - nine women who meet every other month to support and share their spiritual journeys.



judy o's column

by Judy O'Leary in Tucson

Gathering News

When I review the critiques from the October 1998 Gathering, I am reminded of just how much fun I had, with so many inspiring women, speaking their truth and singing and dancing as if no one was watching. From the first opening of ourselves to the earth and trees, to the final opening of circle in the barn, love was spoken. 'Twas a grand place to be, esthetically, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. I thank the COD Ranch for existing, each grandmother for sharing, the Council for your confidence in my work, and Spirit for guidance.

This is a consolidated version of your answers to the questionnaire:

1. *What did you find the most rewarding at the Gathering?* Small circles, the women, large circles with elders, location, food, Barbara Rose and Pam Hyde's walk/talk, sharing/bonding/connect-edness, silences.
2. *What would you like to see included in future?* Full large circles daily with Elders, singing and movement, increase our skills for sacred circle, creative expression, storytelling,

open times for contributions, bodywork modalities.

3. *Work/volunteer?*... ooops, Judy O forgot to put a place for your signature, so many of you offered but I don't know who you are. Please call, Email, or drop me a card.

The menu was again a hit and some changes were requested which will be incorporated in 1999. The COD Ranch was the overwhelming majority choice for next year, some expressed an interest in having it be 'our home'.

The agenda this year was the best to date, allowing more freedom and still staying on task. But is there ever really enough time?

Should we include Grandfathers?... My, my... That was a hot button! BIG NO, this is a Grandmother Council — and so it is.

If you wish to send a critique, have not received the mailing list, or just want to connect, I'm at: Judy O'Leary, Council Of Grandmothers, PO Box 50512, Tucson, Arizona 85703, (520) 792-6459 voice mail. Till then, Many blessings, the Weaver.



Heard at the Gathering, 1998:

I'm lost, I've gone out to look for myself. If I return before I get Back, Ask me to wait for myself!

There ain't a mesquite tree on the place that looks like a barbie doll.

Sing songs of experience — like "growing old Disgracefully"!

If the angels deem to notice anyone, it will be those who always are beginning!

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Ruth's Story in Two Parts

By Ruth Gardner in Tucson

Part One

OCTOBER 1998

Early this year the great star who had shone
with me so many years flashed
Out of my sky, out of my world out of my life
I dimmed, grieved and mourned.

Then one bright day another star appeared
He who had glowed in my life sky fifty years past
Blazed across my course, rippling the clouds and
Bringing fun and caring, making me laugh again.

He played and courted, loved and teased.
He moved me out of my grief
We laughed and frolicked and remembered
And found joy and happiness together.

And then shortly after our first touch by phone,
A few hours after he raced up the plane ramp
And held me lovingly in his arm
He too moved out of my sky, out of my world, out of my life
To join all those who go before.

The contact was so brief, his touch so soft, his leaving so quick
I sometimes wonder if I dreamed the joy he brought to me,
Dreamed of the new life I felt
For death has again left me alone.

Part Two

I thought my world had ended when in January my husband of forty-three years died. I grieved and tried to shut out the world but my wonderful friends wouldn't let me. And so I recovered. I began to accept that my life would go on. I started to make plans for my future alone.

And then a man I knew fifty years ago, whom I had not heard from in all those fifty years came back into my life. At fifteen I thought he was a god and he often told me how much he loved me. The sadness in that long ago time was that he wanted to get married. Even at fifteen I knew that would be disastrous. When I said "No" I knew it was the right

decision. So he disappeared from my life. But now fifty years later he was back.

For two weeks we were on the phone two to three hours at a time, sometimes twice a day. I felt like a teenager. And the e-mails flew between our computers when we weren't talking on the phone. I grew to love him all over again. When Tom told me his wife had died 11 days before my Ron did, it seemed fate had a hand in our lives. He sent me gifts, cards, little surprises and he gave me joy and lifted my heart.

Finally I met him at the airport and as we raced into each others arms it was as if no time had passed. We

were still the 15 and 20 year old kids for whom nothing but each other existed or mattered. Back at my house we spent the afternoon remembering and exploring each other and each other's past. Although he said he was a bit tired I thought he looked wonderful.

He spent a restless night and I worried about him. When morning came he wasn't any better and his condition rapidly worsened. Shortly after he got up I called 911. He was rushed to the hospital where surgery was done to close a perforated esophagus and inflate a collapsed lung. He never woke up.

Six days after he entered the hospital his unresponding body was disconnected from life support at my request. I told him I loved him, kissed him good-bye and held him in my arms as the life left his body. And he was off on a new exciting adventure. The greatest adventure any of us ever experience and I could not go with him. We would separate and again each would go on without the other. My life would continue without him just as before only this time it was his choice.



More Heard at the Gathering, 1998:

The riskiest thing to do is to not take a risk!

Come to the grandmothers to get "shook-up, unset in my ways!"

Steve has held 100 women in this room!

Challenging to be a brown frog in a pond of green frogs!

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Poet's Corner, cont.

Dependence

Subtle
Soft-spoken messages,
Of earth, and air, and us,
Passed over,
By everyday life.

If we cannot hear, our mother
How do we know, our sisters.
If we do not listen, to each other,
Why would we be aware, of the earth.

We have nothing,
If we are alone.
If we ignore our family,
As one connection deepens,
So will the next.
They grow together.

As we understand
Each other,
We shall understand,
the earth.
As we listen,
To the earth,
We will hear,
Each other.

by Elizabeth Rodis

Elizabeth is a student at Villa Montessori, a Montessori school in Phoenix, Arizona. She and her classmates have been connected to our Grandmother network for several years. Each month for two years, with their teacher Mary Orlando, these young people journeyed to Cielo en Tierra where they spent time in the wise presence of Mary Diamond, experiencing her earth based wisdom and working on her land. With Mary's passing they now go to Dragoon, Arizona to Whirling Yellow Way, the land stewarded by Shirley Tassencourt and Allegra Ahlquist. Thus, in their interactions with these Grandmothers and the land, they continue to deepen their ability to "Listen to the Earth and Each Other". Since this was the theme of the '98 Council of Grandmother's, they were asked to write a piece of poetry or prose reflecting on those words. This poem is Elizabeth's contribution.



Editor's Corner continued from page 2
mark your calendars NOW.)

Especially missed was **Allegra Ahlquist**. Allegra was Mary Diamond's appointed vision keeper for this, the last of the five Gatherings in Mary's dream. She would have been at the head of the Full Moon Procession had she not fallen ill. I am happy to announce she is finally on the mend after a serious bout of pneumonia followed by a bacterial infection. **Nana Gaia** came from Oregon to attend the Gathering, stopped in Dragoon, took one look at Allegra, and stayed there to nurse and nurture. Nana arrived at the final Circle to report on her patient and receive our thanks for her service.

This issue contains news from two other missing Grandmothers. **Shirley Tassencourt** came to Oracle, helped with the opening ritual, then left for the indigenous conference in Virginia Beach. Her report is a call for renewed effort, as is the letter from **Florence Douglas**. Both Shirley and Florence were among the 16 women at Cielo en Tierra in 1994.

Those of you who were a part of **Ruth Gardner's** excitement at the Gathering will be moved and saddened by her follow-up poem and story.

Barbara Furniss still has some copies of her wonderful collection

of **Mary Diamond** stories, *Remembering Mary*. Barbara wants the books to be where they will be appreciated, so if you didn't get one contact her at (520) 648-8495 or 685 S. La Posada Circle, #902, Green Valley, AZ 85614. The books are a gift but Barbara would appreciate help with the postage.

The Grandmothers of Dragoon, **Allegra Ahlquist**, **Sister Virginia Barta**, and **Shirley Tassencourt** were interviewed by Nancy Gedney for the *Inner Odyssey*, a spiritually based newsletter published 4 times a year. The article, *Life Between Two Worlds, Three Elders Speak from their Wisdom* is available in some healthy food stores in Tucson. All three women responded to each question — questions such as *What is God?* and *What is the most significant lesson you have learned in your journey?* I'll include some of their answers in future Newsletters as space permits.

Keep your poems and articles coming. Deadline for submissions for the next issue is January 10th, so sharpen your pencils. Meanwhile, from my heart to yours, a warm, safe, and blessed holiday season. Whatever you celebrate — do it with love!



More Heard at the Gathering, 1998:

*Small fires around the country, and sparks come here!
Come and have all your answers questioned!
Get into gettin' old!
Take care of yourself and one other!
Watch men — its wonderful!
Share your house with someone who likes to do housework and cook
and don't let them go on too many vacations!
Sit on your negatives!
If we cannot hear our mother earth, how can we hear our sisters?*

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