

Circle of Grandmothers

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September 2005

A Grandmother Speaks: Betty Merritt Births a Program for Returning Vets

I had just heard the fourth news program of the day detailing how many improvised explosive devices had gone off in Baghdad and how many trucks were being destroyed without protective armor and was beginning to boil emotionally when Aaron Brown, the CNN news anchor, began to talk about the soldiers who were coming home and their need for a safe place for trauma release. My boiling energy began to rouse my creative self and I realized that The Merritt Center provided a safe place for trauma release AND was very good at doing just that.

Our mission at The Merritt Center at The Merritt Lodge of Payson is to provide renewal and empowerment via classes, workshops and experiential programs. We have hosted many clients who have experienced trauma and needed a safe space to renew and become empowered to return to their lives. Therefore, a renewal and empowerment experiential program for returning combat vets certainly fit our mission.

Having observed the horrible abuse of the returning veteran from Vietnam and their subsequent self medication with drugs to quell the horror of the war I was determined that these combat vets would have a healthier option. They would have a chance to be welcomed home with a ceremony that would allow them to move from the world of war to the safe world of home. We could provide a place to lay down weapons and pick up the shield of a creative/productive home, community, self and spiritual life.

Over the next few days I began to research and reach out to colleagues and loved ones about setting up a program for these returning veterans. The response was very encouraging with first one and then a dozen therapists volunteering to be

part of the process. A group in Flagstaff joined in the support. I began to receive many emails suggesting approaches and successful strategies to launch the program. Then two retired VA nurses with substance abuse accreditation volunteered to put a program on paper. They had created the VA's PTSD program for Vietnam Vets in Phoenix and were "old hands" at dealing with the vet group process. We agreed on a six weekend program for those who lived within a two hour drive of Payson and a 30 day program for those outside of that area. We agreed that we would pair up a Returning Combat Vet with a recovered PTSD survivor of the Vietnam War as mentor.

We suddenly had five Vietnam Vets ready to mentor. Now we had a program, volunteer therapists, and volunteer mentors. The next step was a budget. To determine how much money we needed to make this happen we decided on the bare necessities: food and lodging. We determined that we needed about \$150 per person per weekend. So, six vets, six mentors and three therapists would give us a cost of \$2250 per weekend. We believed we should pilot the six weekend program first and that would give us the needed data to request extended funding for an on-going program. So we needed \$13,500.



We contacted a funding consultant and learned how to write a proposal. Then we started looking at funding sources. We did a Merritt Center May Day fundraiser and \$3,000 was raised. A leader of a spiritual group donated \$1,000 several weeks later. I have donated \$500, the proceeds from selling my book: Driving Lessons. So, now we just need two things to begin the pilot: \$9,000 and the six returning vets.

To enlist the vets we began networking, getting the word out that we are seeking applicants. We believe the National Guard and Reservists will be the first to return home without having to sign up for another stint in a combat zone. So, we began requesting the word to go out for these special six guys. We will screen for those who want to heal, referring those who are in severe PTSD. We would like to have these six identified before the end of the year and start the pilot in the spring. We believe we need to enlist these guys as soon as they return and not months later when self medicating to relieve the pain of suppressed memories makes return to "normal" life much more difficult.

So, as a grandmother, I am speaking out and in speaking out it is my intention that this program will allow healing for this part of the world. I am, also, asking for grandmothers' help. If any grandmother knows of a vet who could benefit from the program please respond via email: betty@merrittcenter.org. If there is a generous peace/vet loving person who would like to be part of this healing with a gift of that wonderful blue/green energy called money please contact Betty. And may all our grandmother voices be raised to bring healing to these horrors of war.



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Editors Corner

by Kit Wilson

The minute I opened the door and went outside for my morning swim I could tell the change was beginning. Just a subtle difference in the feel of the air on my face, a fresher smell. The trees were casting longer shadows and when I stepped into the pool the water was no longer a tepid bathtub, Now the first immersion produced a little shiver, a few goose bumps. By afternoon the temperature was back up over a hundred. but there is an expectancy. The Phoenix summer will, in fact, end. In a few weeks we will throw open our windows and breathe in the fall.

Today's New York Times tells me there are hopeful signs of recovery amongst the rubble on the Gulf Coast. There's been a turning point there too. A few minutes ago I talked with Judy McKee, standing outside her house working to clean up the trees that had blown down in her yard. She said there are weeks of work ahead but that she and her daughter are coping. Last week Terry Bourne reported that she and her family are safe and that Robbie Lapp is still tucked away in Minnesota. So most of our Gulf Grandmothers are physically OK and beginning to address the damages to their homes and lives. At this writing no one has heard from JoEva, our one grandmother whose home is in New Orleans. We are praying that she, too, is unharmed and in a safe place. Here in Phoenix I am waiting to be scheduled to do some counseling at the Convention Center where hundreds of evacuees are housed. I'll be grateful to have something "hands on" to do with my grief.

It has been a difficult summer for many of us. In August Shirley Tassencourt, one of our icons of sustainable living, had a stroke that sent her to the ER, the hospital, and then to a rehab unit in Tucson. As you can see from Allegra's email report, she, too, has moved into radiant recovery and has become yet another model for all of us of the importance of shoring up our spiritual foundations before the winds arrive. On another up note, following her surgery Marion Sinclair beamingly tells us that her doctors say she is in excellent

health. No need for a second operation!

Oh how we Grandmothers love our animals and mourn their passing! Judy O'Leary tells of the loss of Bonnie Blue and almost simultaneously Marion lost her feline familiar and Barrie Ryan had to put her beloved dog Sadie to rest. Condolences to these women and blessings to their loyal four-footed friends.

The time for the Arizona Gathering of the Council of Grandmothers will soon be here and those of us who are attending are looking forward to our time together. We still have room for more participants, so if you, or anyone else, knows of someone who has yet to register, contact our Weavers.

Still Room at the Ranch

Arizona Council of Grandmothers

**12th Annual Gathering
October 15-19, 2005**

Rex Ranch, Amado, Arizona
4 Nights/5 Days \$440
Contact Judie Garnet
jkgwildcat@comcast.net

The changes evident in our world, our country, and in our personal lives are also evident in the exciting growth and expansion of the Council of Grandmothers. In this issue we have a report on next year's Gathering on the Gulf Coast (and some pictures of last year's event). There will also be a new Gathering in Oklahoma in 2006 and at least two new small local Grandmothers circles have sprung up, one in Phoenix (see article) and one just birthing in Tucson. For this reason we here in Arizona thought it might be a good time to schedule a formal Council meeting at this year's Gathering. The intention would be to begin a dialogue about the future direction of the Council

of Grandmothers. Many questions have come up over the years. Here are a few I've heard discussed: How are we unique and different from other networks of older women? How do we maintain our uniqueness and where does our "mantra" (When the Grandmothers speak the world will heal) come into that process? How do we reach out to include all those who are interested and still remain small enough to experience the intimacy that has been a hallmark of our large Gatherings? Do we want a Web Site and if so what impact would that "opening up" have on the above questions? As we grow, what is the difference between a "Council" and a small local Grandmother's Circle. What are our core values and how do we pass those along to the next generations of Grandmothers?

Obviously each of these questions leads to many more. This Council meeting will simply be a starting point. If you are coming to the Gathering in October please think about what is important to you to talk about. If you are not coming but have thoughts that you would like to have put in the Center, please contact Kathie Murtey at kjmurtey@aol.com. Kathie has graciously agreed to facilitate the meeting.

For those of you who will not be at the Arizona Gathering this year, please remember to renew your subscription to the Newsletter. Meanwhile, from all of us here in this house, including John who is recovering from gall bladder surgery, our love and blessings. Go gently.



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Editor: Kit Wilson

Layout & Design: John Whitewolf

Submissions: Eleanor Gallagher

Spiral Logo Design: Virginia Hall

Contact information:

Kit Wilson

3907 E. Campbell

Phoenix, AZ 85018

Phone: (602) 955-6818

E-mail: kitw@cox.net

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

New Circle in Phoenix

By Marie Turano and Cathy Marley

The council of Grandmothers has a new chapter in Phoenix. On May 11, 2005, Marie Turano and Cathy Marley invited friends to Marie's home to learn about the council and about Peer Spirit Circling. Three women joined them for the first meeting, which was filled with honesty and openness, each woman speaking from the heart about what it means to them to be "Grandmothers." A subtle sense of excitement wound its way from one heart to the next and by the time the evening had ended and they closed the Circle, they had started building trust. A new Circle had been born.

By the second meeting in June, they had grown to six, a number that they agreed is comfortable for the time being. The June gathering deepened their connection. Together, they chose a talking stick, the clean, bleached beak of a long gone sea bird. They felt it to be a particu-

larly appropriate choice. The beak, as the bird's way of communicating and nourishing itself, represents their own purpose for being a part of the Circle. They also found an even deeper meaning when they realized the beak is a lovely symbol of the transformation that takes place in everyone's life. And so, their talking stick has begun to take form. In coming months, they will be adding meaningful bits of themselves to create a piece that is uniquely theirs and will endure as long as the Circle continues.

Agreements were formed based on Christina Baldwin's basic structure for the Circle. The six women also added covenants that are their own. They include specific agreements to maintain the Circle as a safe haven for each Circle member, establishing it as a place where members can be authentic, open, vulnerable, and honest without being confron-

tational. The six believe their agreements will provide a foundation upon which they can build trust in one another.

Cathy writes:

Although most of us are still new to Circling, we are all thrilled by the possibilities we see unfolding for us through the support of five other incredible women. Each time we open the circle, our bond strengthens. Each time we close it, our commitment to one another grows. Who knows where these sisters will lead us, where we will take one another? We don't. But there is no question we are going to enjoy the ride!

"Whenever groups of women make connections with other groups of women ... we are affirming a network of change."

- Blanche Weisen Cook



Bonnie Blue: The Joyous Kissing Cat

Birthdate unknown – August 10, 2005, Approximately 16+ yrs

By Judy O'Leary

A resident of Cielo en Tierra, Mary Diamond's beloved Blue Point Siamese cat, Bonnie Blue, came to live with Judy O'Leary after the raccoons forced open the cat door to Mary's garage and frightened Bonnie into hiding for 10 days. Mary had passed in September and Bonnie* had resided in the garage loft until this incident. Jeanne Wirth, Mary's daughter, would hear Bonnie, and searched the crawl space and attic but could not find her. On the first day of a workshop when cars began to arrive and people milled about, Bonnie came walking up to the lodge house and then she moved to the Straw Bale house with JudyO.

Bonnie's adventures with Judy over the next 8 years brought her to several homes in Arizona. She was an exceptional hunter bringing mice and lizards to the front door and occasionally sneaking them inside. In 2001, she moved to Boise and in 2004 to Caldwell, Idaho.

Bonnie had a joyous personality. When the door opened and guests arrived, she greeted everyone with conversation and the opportunity to have her sit on your lap. She lay like a bejeweled princess with her right leg extended straight out as if she was showing off a 40 carat diamond. She crept up your chest and stuck the leg out next to your neck, kissing and caressing you with her warmth and purring. She loved everyone, though kids and dogs were a challenge. Her presence was total as she sat in Circle, at Grandmother meetings, at the dinner table, in her favorite rocking chair, on my computer desk and behind me in the desk chair, pushing against my butt so she got more room.

She was the perfect alarm clock waking me every morning between 6:15 and 6:30AM, creeping up to my pillow and extending her paw to my head and scratching it. Eventually, she would just sit there and meow until I acknowledged her wake

up call. She stayed in the bedroom until I left and led me to the kitchen and talked and talked and answered my questions

She graduated from cat food to roasted chickens from Albertsons and canned chicken and turkey - real people food, because the labels on the canned cat food, gave me the creeps. A visiting cat, Cartoon taught her to drink from the floor fountain and she believed that the glass on the bed stand, desk and end table were hers...until she got her own. In the summer she slept on the bed with a fan and in the winter on a heating pad set low with a polar fleece blanket for comfort. She was a Princess and deserved everything.

Bonnie transitioned at 4:30 pm August 10th due to kidney disease. She was the perfect loving cat and leaves sweet memories and a hole in my heart and home.

Her final resting place will be under a tree in my garden.

Thank you all for loving her.



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Profiles in Living - A Look in the Grandmother Mirror

Continuing our exploration of the lives of women who have played an active role in the Council of Grandmothers. *Compiled by Marti Beddoe.*

An Interview with Bobbe Goodman

Tell us about your early life: Where and when were you born?

I was born in New York City on December 3, 1944, the third of four children in a supportive and functional family. All my growing up years we lived in the same tall building in an apartment on the 14th floor. That became my perch from which I viewed the world while I waited to get out of the concrete canyons of Manhattan. Each summer I went to camp amidst the woods and lakes of Maine where Nature gave me a delicious taste of connecting to God. I met my husband Allan Goodman when I was 15. We married when I was 18 and he was 21 years old. Together we left New York and headed west to go to school. Tucson, AZ has been our home base ever since.

Tell us about people who have been a major influence on you.

My mother was my first major influence. She was a very intelligent and grounded woman. Her life was dedicated to her husband and four children and to service. She seemed satisfied with her life. She had no pre-set agenda of how her kids should be and so was able to be supportive of each of us as we found our individual paths.

My husband of 42 years, Allan would be next. He saw things in me I did not see. He has supported my unfoldment, my search, and my unique manifestation. Allan has always seen the glory that was there and encouraged me in countless ways.

Then there's Swami Amar Jyoti, my Guru for 20 years. Allan and I and our sons lived in his ashram community for 11 years. Swamiji was a very major influence in my spiritual unfoldment. Like

a good parent, he brought out my soul nature with praise and correction. He taught me to live a God-focused, disciplined life and was a very strong presence for both Allan and me.

My sons have also been my teachers, teaching me what total selfless service really is and reminding me to "Be present and to attend to what is." Michael is now 34 years old, a physician with a family of his own. Noah is 27, currently study-



Bobbe Goodman

ing Cognitive Science in a post-doctoral program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Both are wonderful beings!

When I was 5 years old, I read a biography of Clara Barton that influenced me to become a nurse.

What have been passionate priorities in your life? (i.e., how have you spent your life energy in paid or volunteer work/hobbies/family?)

God has been my passionate priority, though I did not always know it. I was

blessed to grow up with the stability of the 50's and the expansion and excitement of the 60's. I was quite involved in the Human Growth movement. I became a psychiatric nurse and woke up to the seeking of my life. In the 70's I was led to my Guru. By that time, I had started reading on spiritual topics and realized that psychology did not hold the answers I was seeking. I became aware that my seeking was to know the Absolute Reality behind the Relative Reality of everyday life.

The adventure and excitement of the 60's morphed into a life of discipline and service in the 70's. I learned to balance the external freedom of the 60's with the inner discipline of the spiritual life. We raised our sons in the Ashram community. Parenting was less traumatic for us because we knew that we were only one part of a larger picture in our sons' lives.

In 1996, after 20 years with our Guru, it was time to move on. We moved from a vertical path of seeking upwards, back into the world where we found a broader horizontal path. Now we were learning to balance the vertical path of discipline with the broader path of being in the world, seeking with delight and joy, finding that God is everywhere.

My passion for God continues and is expressed in my Hospice volunteer work, which has repeatedly reminded me to Be Here Now and to Live-In-The-Moment. I also have the opportunity to serve through the Johrei Fellowship, a hands-off healing energy work where divine energy is transmitted from person to person. Here in Tucson we have a beautiful center open to all.

Bobbe Goodman cont. on page 5

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Bobbe Goodman cont. from page 4

One of the delights of aging is that I can look back on my life and see that there was an incredible plan. I can see that I was/am guided all the way, even though I was often unconscious, thinking I was in control! Through many great serendipitous moments, in 2000, Allan and I were guided to go to Bali. Our guru was Hindu and Bali feels so familiar to us. We have found our spiritual home in Bali, a sweet haven where it is common to be seen in a deep and spiritual way (a rare experience in the West) and where our continuing unfoldment happens. During the past 5 years, Allan and I have served as "Spiritual Tour Guides", taking people to Bali. It has been a deep and rich experience to help hold the space as people encounter the Divine.

I have also come full circle in my appreciation of my Judaism, my birth religion. I am able to now appreciate the depth and richness of its teachings in a way that was not available to me as a child. The Hasidic teachings stress that to live in Joy is what we are designed to do. To live in Joy is to please God. Life is the path to manifest my highest Self.

When and how did you connect with the Council of Grandmothers? What has been its impact on your life?

After we left the Ashram, I was faced with an empty nest and a completed "to-do" list - children raised, profession and career achieved and finished, discipleship over. I had no known agenda for my future. My mother's life in her last years did not give me a model to follow. One day, I was wandering down the video aisle of the Tucson Public Library, browsing the shelves. I found a video that would not leave my hands. It was Connie Spittler's A Sage for All Seasons about Grandmother Shirley Tassencourt. I thought, "I have to meet this woman!" Connie sent me to Judy O'Leary who told me of the Grandmothers' Gathering and arranged for me to attend. In 1998, I attended and I liked what I saw! I met Shirley and many other wonderful women, each one being herself. In the safety of that container, these women were free to express who they were and to be honored. I liked

that here was a place where there was no enforced uniformity and no expectation of similarity, simply acceptance and encouragement.

In circles, I deeply appreciate Attentive Listening. Though I had had many years of experience listening as a therapy group leader, being in PeerSpirit circles showed what a powerful gift it is to listen to another. Listening becomes an act of honoring, and of love. Circle also fit my Heart path with its principle of Reliance on Spirit. Ever since then, I have been in the Facilitator Training circle. I know I am supposed to be with the Grandmothers, that I have been guided there.

The Council of Grandmothers allows me to feel connected to an untold number of women around the globe. It is comforting and exciting to be a part of a network of women who are at ease in their similarities and differences. I have found myself more attentive to older women I meet in the world. When I am on the other side of the globe in a tiny village or at a temple Ceremony, my eyes meet those of older women and we recognize each other. We nod and smile and I know that there are no barriers. They remind me that God is everywhere. Everybody is important and a reflection of the Creator/Divine Mother. Perhaps Grandmothers don't need to speak to heal the world, they just need to Be.

What wisdom do you offer the future generations?

Strive to know yourself! We are much more than we usually dare to acknowledge. Explore the inner and outer landscape of your world in order to know yourself. Each of us is a unique creation, a manifestation of the Divine. Our mission in life is to Be, fully ourselves.

By knowing and loving ourselves, we know and love the Divine, the Great Spirit, the Divine Mother, the Holy One-that is what we are here to do! The "script" we are living is awesome in its perfection, even if we don't see it. Breathe, laugh, dance, and be in Joy. Love yourself and each other!



Shirley Tassencourt

A Letter from Allegra

Dear Friends,

Thank you for all of your prayers. They worked!

This morning Shirley and Liz drove off to the airport with Alana after telling doleful Joey goodbye. Shirley looking very beautiful and radiant, wearing the lei of flowers Nama put around her neck at the center of the spiral on the medicine wheel last night. She will be back, we are certain. She wants to be here and we need her here, the land needs her wonderful spirit as do all of us.

Shirley is speaking quite well after two weeks of therapy at Health South. Her mind as sharp and deep as ever, she is very clever when she can't think of words, to make gestures or think of new words to describe what she wants to say. Her life force is very strong.

She is a jewel of an elder and last night was honored as such. A beautiful evening on the land with Shirley sitting in the center of the medicine wheel spiral while Namapriya honored her in the way they do in India for very high beings--a lei of fresh flowers placed around her neck, fresh sandalwood paste on her forehead and her precious feet washed in rose petal water.

The ten of our local friends gathered on the flower strewn path of the spiral, then took turns in paying loving homage to Shirley and hearing her beautiful responses. Her long time friend, John Townley, drove the 500 miles from New Mexico and arrived just in time to be part of the circle.

Shirley will be with her daughter Zoe Tassencourt for further outpatient therapy. Her address is 8145 Valley View Sebastopol, Ca. 95472. I'm sure she will also welcome phone calls after a few weeks of therapy. Her number is 707 823 0894. Please don't call her until she gets settled. Love and thanks to all, Allegra.



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Gulf Coast Grandmothers Gathering for 2006 *By Janice Prince*

In 1854 Chief Seattle said “Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it, whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves; all things are bound together. All things connected.” Each Grandmother Gathering is another thread in the web of life. From the first thread spun by Mary Diamond have come what we now call the Grandmother Gatherings. All the Gatherings are bound together which help us realize our connections.

My name is Janice Prince. My title is Spider-Women: She who throws out the first thread to co-weave the Alabama Gulf Coast Gathering at Camp Beckwith on April 18/21 2006. Planning the gathering can be as much fun as the gathering itself. We at the Gulf Coast Council have figured this out. Last year the planning committee met in Louisiana and had the most creative and inspirational time hosted by Grandmother Maya Levy. This year the planning committee will meet at Camp Beckwith on Sept. 20, 21, and 22.

Camp Beckwith is a beautiful camp that sits on Weeks bay. We will enjoy the beach, the swimming pool, canoe the bay, take long walks, drum by the fire, and experience planning next years gathering in Circle.

We agreed to document all details of the process so we can give it to next years planning committee and be able to offer it to others who want to start a gathering. We also would love to exchange information with other Grandmother Gatherings that are already

taking place. This way new members can have a clear understanding of the process and can spend more time in joy being creative.

There are parts of the gathering that we know through experience that need to be done. For example: checking in and getting the grandmothers settled into their rooms and then checking them

out with minimal chaos. Also we know grandmothers will be coming from other states and arrangements need to be made to pick them up from the airport. They may come early and stay longer, which we encourage. We will discuss in circle what problems we had in the past and what information the weaver will need to successfully create an experience of

Gulf Coast cont. on next page



Poster (this page) and photos (next page) from the 2005 Gulf Coast Gathering

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

A Grandmother Speaks: Walking for Hunger

By Hannah Rees, Lombard, IL

After meeting with the Heartland Grandmother Council and taking time to open myself to Spirit's leading, I had an opportunity to head up the first Petoskey- Bay View Crop Walk for hunger. Three quarters of the money generated is used by Church World Service to ease hunger by providing self sustaining projects (seeds, animals, wells, sewing machines etc.) in third world countries throughout the globe. The remaining 25% stays in the community to aid local

food pantries. I feel very blessed to have had so much support in this endeavor. Time and again, people were willing to help in whatever way they could.

On the day of the walk well over 100 walkers appeared and we raised almost \$15,500! We had a combo of a singer, keyboard and bass, who entertained throughout. They provided a great ambience. Some of us were Crop Rockers and occupied the old porch rocking chairs, cheering as each walker returned

for a treat of nutrition bars and lemonade. Folks just stayed around and visited! What a great community spirit among Petoskey and Bay View people at various ends of the religious spectrum. By joining together in the spirit of caring and compassion, their differences dwindled!

The support of the Grandmother Circle was invaluable throughout. Thank you.



Gulf Coast cont. from page 6

abundance, joy and grace. The weaver of this project will be responsible for all details at the gathering. Through shared leadership and responsibility everyone will be able to enjoy the gathering without burn out.

At the planning meeting in September we will start with the phrase Color Me Human. The human experience is very colorful so we will incorporate lots of color in our plans for the gathering. I will introduce the medicine wheel of the thir-



teen-clan mothers. This medicine wheel uses the 13-moon cycle. Each moon cycle is represented by a color and offers understanding of the gifts, talents and abilities of the feminine principle. With the use of colored yarn and sticks each of us will weave a moon calendar. From this experience we will decide what colorful human experience we will explore at the 2006 gathering and that will become our theme.

Guided by group consciousness each member of the planning committee will weave a part of the gathering. For those out there that have not been to the

Gulf Coast come down and enjoy some southern hospitality and for those who have come before U ALL COME BACK NOW... YA HEAR!

[For an update on the Gulf Coast Grandmothers following Hurricane Katrina, see the Editor's Corner. - ed.]



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