

CIRCLE OF GRANDMOTHERS

Volume 3

Number 5

December 1996

From Victoria, British Columbia via Phoenix

About the Raging Grannies

(I am including this extraordinary letter I received last September - yet another inspiring example of ways in which we can carry on with passion, humor, and a keen devotion to the belief that "When the Grandmothers Speak the World Will Heal.")

Dear Kit, I heard that you are interested in knowing more about the Raging Grannies.

A group of us, including me, started the RG's back in 87, when we saw that our little peace group had dwindled to women only, and most of us were old. Though not all. Two were in their thirties, and not all of us were grannies,

but we decided to take on the grannie persona, adopt outrageous old folks costumes and go out on the streets to bring our message to the unconverted. How to deliver the message was quickly solved when one of our younger members showed us her amazing talent of making up marvelous satirical songs. Not preachy, not long, not too complicated. When we discovered that some of our group of 12 were atonal, we made the very wise decision to ignore established harmonies, and just belt out our words, some of us singing a recognizable tune, some of us not. But all of us enunciating the words so no one could miss our message.

Since the beginning some of us have drifted away, others have joined us. We have survived power struggles, ego battles, hurt feelings, all the dynamics that seem to go with any group of people who work together, perform together and are deeply caring about issues.

The one guiding principal we use to judge whether we will put energy into an issue is this: DOES IT ENDANGER THE LIVES OF THE CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF THIS PLANET? We don't go out and sing about senior's pensions, but we do raise a rumpus about the budget cuts to social spending which are endangering the universal health care system, the educational system, and the general welfare of many lower income and middle income people.

The driving force that motivated our little peace group was the danger posed to all of us by the nuclear powered and nuclear weapons carrying ships that were coming into our harbours as well as sailing the seas. These ships are still coming into our harbour, but the local media and Victoria citizens are now fully aware of their presence, thanks to our press releases and street theatre. One of us phones the Naval base daily. "Are there any foreign ships in port or expected soon?" We get the name and number, look up the ship in our list of the world's nuclear ships published by Greenpeace, and if a nuclear one is here, we try to plan an action. I say try because our energy and our schedules don't always cooperate with our ideals. If we can get three or more of our group out, we'll do something. One action we enjoy doing is to launch our kayaks, paddle across the harbour and

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From Kit in Phoenix

As I assume my new role of typist/ mailer, I feel privileged to be able to carry on. This initiation issue has made me aware that by typing your words I integrate them into my being in ways not possible when only my eyes are involved.

You heard this many times from Ruth, our founding typist/ mailer, but it bears at least one more repetition: THIS PUBLICATION CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT YOUR INPUT.

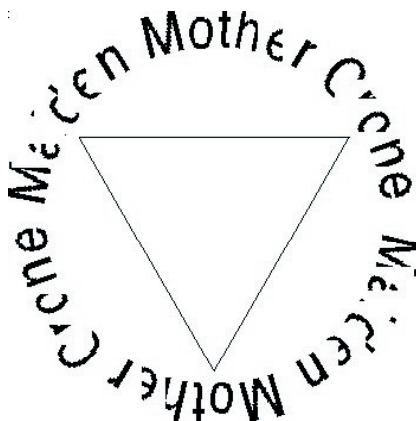
I cherish hearing about your insights and activities, your memories, reflections and challenges. Our stories provide inspiration, courage, and renewed determination to live this final time of life alert and conscious, whatever the Fates have in store.

I AM FULL OF WONDERINGS ABOUT YOU:

- The Third Council of Grandmothers is now a memory for the sixty-plus

women who gathered on the slopes of Mount Lemon near Tucson, Arizona. A few weeks later, some of us spent much of a day sitting in circle and carefully reading and discussing the evaluations. These have now been passed on to another circle of women - those who have agreed to help plan next year's Council. The wonderful comments provided by

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When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Poet's Corner

Crone

Crone calls the darkness
and then she takes you there
shows you where you can dare to be free
To feel what you cannot see
To be what you've been told you cannot be
Weird wild womoon - cunning cunt
cutting away what nurtures you not
undoing the know
unraveling, untying, unleashing, female fury.

The crone
ha
ha
ha
ha
is not always kind
The crone can drive you out of your mind
The crone can unwind your sanity
Crone weighs it all in the scale of Maat
Crone tells you what to cut away
Crone will have her say

Crone calls the dying
and sends them flying
far into the unknown
to rest their weary bones

Crone conjures up your fears
reduces you to tears

Crone creeps up on you
scares you half to death

Crone waits for your breath
to disappear

Then she takes you with her
into the darkness
that is your own

Antiga

Christmas is Another Moon

It's exactly ten a.m., and the nurse, Helen,
pulls into the driveway, bows her head.
The sun dresses her in a beaded necklace,
a bracelet - a single feather catches
in her hair. She becomes medicine woman.

Inside the house, feet hurry over
green carpet like cactus broken. Round
daughter washes plates; granddaughters learn
to spell canyon. Faces are brown and yellow
and down in this sallow light.

and in the vapored bedroom the old chief
and his hickory cane bend closer
to the prairie, eyes raw from its dust.
He asks medicine woman,
Can you get me through Christmas?

Medicine woman says:
Christmas is four weeks.
Christmas is another moon.

She carries her leather pouch
poultices in vials. Silver needles and filled
syringes are raindrops fighting a blaze
in this forest. The chief's heart valves
open and close and drown
a man with only half an arm
he clings to a branch in a flooded river.

The old one unbuttons his red flannel shirt.
He coughs like a wolf choking on carrion,
lunges like a buck shot through his spine.

Medicine woman closes her eyes, listens:
heart sounds, breath sounds, life sounds.
Slow drums, the message painted on ancient faces
at campfires, smell of wood burning,
stories of mountain passes and thin blankets
and winter trees and blue sky opening.

Jeanne Bryner, RN

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When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

Raging Grannies, from page 1

sing to the submarine, which usually has a few curious sailors on deck. We invite the captain to have tea with us, (so far he has never accepted our invitation). Or, we go downtown, in front of the Empress Hotel in the heart of tourist land, on the edge of the city harbour, and wield mops, scrub brushes, dusters, to be prepared to clean up should there be a leak from the ship while in port. We can reach at least 200 people this way during the height of the tourist season, and if the media is there (we ALWAYS send out press releases if we have enough time) the word about A NUCLEAR SHIP reaches countless others.

We also sing to the converted. I mean we will accept invitations to conferences about environmental issues and belt out a few songs to liven up the atmosphere. Or we go to high schools, when invited, or to churchy groups or to women's seminars, because we role model active older women taking risks in public to say what we feel.

We do get negative reactions, but frankly grannies are untouchable. The police go out of their way to avoid arresting us when we are doing civil disobedience, most of our audiences love to hear and see us rocking the establishment. Three of our group got arrested and went to jail briefly for blockading (along with 800 others) a logging road in Clayquot Sound during the summer of 94. This was to protect old growth forests.

Others have taken our idea and created Raging Grannies groups all across Canada, and a few exist in the U.S. They pop into existence when there is a passionate issue and then stay vital, or else dissolve, so I have no idea how many of these groups exist at this time. Once a year we get together for an "unconference" and swap songs, discuss issues, cheer each other on. Each group is autonomous, and chooses its own issues to work on. Some if not most of the groups have people who can sing on tune, yet at these gatherings, our group always shines because

T O M M I E T H O M A S H O N O R E D

From Tucson, Arizona

by Ruth Gardner

Honored by civic leaders, family and friends, Tommie Thomas was her usual pragmatic self as she accepted testimonies of public figures and grateful friends talking about her tireless contributions to the community of Tucson. Awarded her were many plaques and tributes by loving, appreciative receivers of her services through the years. The occasion was her retirement, whatever that means, and the date was just prior to her seventy-sixth birthday.

Although I have lived in Tucson for six years I had no idea how far reaching her inexhaustible energy and attention spread. My first association with Tom-

of the extraordinary spirit we bring to what we do. Passion, not perfection, guides us. We also have a granny newsletter, and if you'd like to receive one, let me know. At the conference we decide which group will produce it for the next year.

The Victoria Raging Grannies, as we call our group, meets once a week, Thursday afternoons. We avoid bureaucracy as much as possible, take turns facilitating the meeting, taking minutes, hostessing the meeting. We always have a go-around, or weather report, from each of us ... how we are, how our life is going, what concerns us. Next we set the agenda, each of us saying what we want to discuss or decide on. Our present song writer often has a new song for us to warble, and we plan any actions we may undertake in the near future.

I could go on and on ... telling you about how we sometimes sing to the movie line ups because they provide a ready made audience that can't escape. Or crash the chamber of commerce luncheon for the Minister of Trade to sing our anti NAFTA song. But I need to end this, hoping you have enough information to carry on and do what ever is needed in your part of the world. I do hope we can stay in touch. Namaste, Fran Thoburn, 20 San Jose Ave., Victoria, BC V8V2C2.

mie was at the Grandmothers Council of 1994 at Cielo en Tierra. Since then testimonies to her children's haven, The Center of Attention, appeared in Time magazine, in both Tucson's newspapers, in Arizona Senior World, in Modern Maturity and I'm sure many other publications that did not come to my attention.

Tommie moved to Tucson from Texas forty-eight years ago and shortly after became Director of "A" Mountain Community Action Office and served as a member of the Chamber of Commerce Task Force to bring the Urban League to Tucson. She was on the Mayor's Task Force, and wrote the first proposal for the emergency food and clothing bank. She helped bring food stamps to Arizona, served as Director of the Community Action Program and began an experimental day-care and latch key program. She started the Seniors Nutritional Program and was instrumental in creating an emergency food and clothing bank. She helped secure funds to relocate flood victims in Greenlee County and was appointed to the Arizona Regional Medical Society Advisory Board. Tommie helped bring Kino Hospital to the south side, sorely in need of a hospital. She has worked to recruit foster parents for youngsters in need and worked with the Juvenile Court's incorrigible youths. Ms. Thomas was Founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Center of Attention, an off-the-streets program which operated out of her home.

Speakers at her retirement party vowed they would have to see her retire to believe it; she says her nine children are forcing her to do so. She has been a grandmother to so many people I'm sure she has lost count. Tommie Thomas is an inspiration to all and I view her with reverence and awe. She is truly a marvelous example of a contributing old woman. We are fortunate to have her identify herself as a member of The Council of Grandmothers.

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.

From Kit, from page 1

participants read like the story of the elephant and the blind man! There were some common threads. But the richness of the tapestry that was the Gathering - from the challenges of rigorous weather and physical discomfort to the surprise and pleasure of creation - were a product of our collective (and subjective) experiences. I am left yearning for more!

- Send in-depth descriptions of your experience at the gathering: Your adventures with clay, dance, poetry, or play production. Your angst and/or joy; feelings of isolation or connectedness. Your thoughts, after attending the gathering, about how the words "When the Grandmother's Speak the World Will Heal" will resonate in your life, how you will bring it forward into your spiritual circles, families or communities.

- So many grandmothers came forward at the gathering with poems to share. Send your work for inclusion in the newsletter.

- Have you read a book you feel is relevant to our time of life, our spiritual journeys, our focus on health and our challenges with illness, our struggles to live for the 7th generation to come? Write a brief review, share your enthusiasm with the rest of us.

- Let's include recipes - those that were passed on from our mothers and grandmothers, and those we are inventing as we learn to cook with more veggies, less fat, and more spirit.

- Who are you, and what is going on in your life? These stories help as we continue our mostly uncharted journeys into the mysteries of conscious aging.

- How many small circles of women are represented in our Grandmother Council. How are you structured? What is your stated purpose? How is it working? Please share. Those of us who sit in Circle regularly are hungry for news of others and what they are doing.

I am sending this issue to everyone on the original mailing list and I have added the new names from the recent Grandmother Gathering. If you know

from *Redmoonsong's Newsletter* 11/96

A close friend of mine was healing himself of cancer while we were in D.C., giving us the opportunity to spend more time together than we have for several years. His involvement with a woman gave us much food for discussion of 'romance' - what is that feeling about? What do we project on one another when we are feeling it? What triggers it? Are we projecting our best qualities? Or ones we lack? How does culture define the way we perceive it? How we act on it? I find when I'm not propelled by physical desire, I'm free to examine "attraction" in other ways. This phase of my life presents so many more options, especially spiritual and emotional, than ever before. I'm not as driven by my needs. The conversations with my friend have been so much fun. I've learned a lot too. Thanks, my friend!!

.....Hitchin' out here to Jackson, Wyoming I again became aware that so many folks share my political/spiritual values, don't have the day-to-day survival skills that I'm interested in. Most truckers, however, come from low income rural communities in the

of anyone who should be receiving this and is not, please let me know. If you have not renewed your subscription this will be your last issue. Ten dollars works fine.

My apologies - I am about a month behind in putting this issue together. Look for the next issue at the end of February. **Deadline for submitting material for the next issue is January 31th, 1997.** Mail to

**Kit Wilson
3907 East Campbell
Phoenix, Arizona 85018**

I do not want to sign off without paying tribute to **Ruth Gardner**, without whom there would be no newsletter. She devoted time, effort, and love to this commitment, and we owe her much thanks.

southeast. They grew up hunting and fishing and farming and are comfortable in the woods. One trucker I rode with told me great stuff about how to catch a fish with your hands, how to skin an elk, and walkin' a 20 mile trap line with his grandpa when he was a child. We had a good time. I used to be against hunting, but now I figure that if folks are willing to go out and establish a relationship with that animal in that way, I'm OK with it. (Much better than store-bought, factory-farmed meat of any kind, I'd say.

.....Attended Crone Council IV in Boise, Idaho this past weekend with over 200 wimmin. What an amazing experience! Story telling every morning from 9 - 12; stories of courage, joy, abandonment, abuse, secrets, strength, adversity of all kinds, resurrection. It saw so inspiring! We cried together (boxes and boxes of tissue were passed around) and laughed together and gave each other standing ovations. The vulnerability and trust were wonderful. There were workshops in the afternoon. I did one on alternatives which was well received. And we had a "No Talent" show which was casual and clever. There is such a diversity of our gifts! We talked about sexuality and healing and Baltic grandmothers and Crone leadership and communities, and, and, and, and.....

We also did ceremony, lit candles, shared gifts of honor and affection. It was unfortunate that it was the same time as the Grandmother's Council in Arizona. (I went there last year and met some wonderful wimmin!) Hopefully, next year the dates won't coincide. It was also unfortunate that everything was inside a very expensive hotel with all that entails - not my style at all. The site for next year is in San Diego and I'm hoping to influence the venue that folks choose. I figure if folks are gonna' spend mega bucks, then why not some kind of alternative retreat center or what have you? My choice would be a place that could accommodate hotel-like environments and tipis. We'll see.

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal.