

Circle of Grandmothers

Volume 7

Number 1

April 2001

What Does A Grandmother Offer the World?

By Mary Ann McClellan

It has been said that the word Grandmother means more love than anyone ever squeezed into one word. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have had the experience of such a person in our lives need no further explanation, for we are truly blessed! She has been called The Tree of Life, offering patience, understanding, guidance, happiness, compassion, acceptance, contentment and a connection to our family roots. Many grandmothers live simple lives, others extraordinary ones. Undaunted by difficulties, their tenaciousness has helped their families to survive.

Some of us are not so blessed. Today many older women have the attitude that youthfulness is the place to be. Our cultural norms persuade us to go to extremes to delay the natural aging process instead of celebrating it for the gifts that it offers. Our elders are seldom recognized for the wisdom they hold or the experience they possess.

In my community of Folsom, Louisiana, a group of twelve women all 50 years or older, have been meeting together for five years, working to change that image we originally formed from a larger group in the Southwest, who meet annually at the Full Moon in October. The Arizona group was initiated by the late visionary, Mary Diamond, and the gatherings evolved out of the wisdom of the Native American prophecy: "When the Grandmothers speak, the world will heal." Similarly, our local circle comes together twice a month on the Full Moon and the New Moon. Our gatherings have been enriching all our lives. The basic teachings we enfold and embrace have been guided by the Native American philosophy that "we are all connected - humans, plants, animals, wingeds, air, water, sky, minerals." We

are helping each other to find our way through this time of great turmoil and live up to our responsibility as grandmothers of our planet.

We have learned much from our indigenous sisters. For example, last year we were contacted by a Dakota Grandmother, Gertie Godoy, who shared her story with us. Gertie is the founder and director of the International Indigenous Grandmothers Society. This society has a mission statement which reads in part, "we hold the knowledge, wisdom and guidance of the indigenous culture for the next generation. We have now returned to bring you the teachings that only we have the right to give the younger generations. We are many grandmothers from many indigenous cultures, but united with one mind and the strength of many, many nations." Gertie is striving to open the door for indigenous grandmothers to reclaim their rightful place within our nations. She and her late friend Alice Red Elk believed that if indigenous grandmothers recapture their roles as leaders and advisors, the younger generations will follow them and the old customs and practices will return.

Gertie says that in the past elder grandmothers were the ones who made the decisions that affected the people because they were the ones who were

peaceful minded. In those times, it was the role of the grandmothers who were under 75, guided by *their* elders, to conduct the ceremonies and guide the young women into womanhood. As the maidens matured they were regularly taken into the grandmothers' council and taught about possible future experiences and responsibilities.

Gertie's grandmother's society is based on original tribal systems of spirituality, cultural practices, traditional wisdom, knowledge, and values. Gertie feels that on an international level the grandmothers need to be encouraged and supported by each other so they can give the teachings back to their children and grandchildren. "We don't want the grandmothers sitting home alone. Their knowledge is valuable to us all. We want to focus on developing this knowledge." Once the grandmothers begin to stand in solidarity, Gertie feels the people will once again look to them for guidance and knowledge. She says that it is a big and loving responsibility to be in the Grandmother Society. Today a woman does not have to be a biological grandparent. Being in the Grandmother's Lodge means you have acquired wisdom by experiencing the hardships and benefits of life. In the Lodge, Grandmothers also stand up for and speak for native rights regarding the land, water and issues facing Mother Earth.

We appreciate the efforts of Grandmothers like Gertie who travel the world encouraging older women to become a "Grandmother." By listening to her and other indigenous teachers our Grandmother's Circle feels connected to Grandmothers who have gone beyond. We feel the ancestral spirit that extends back through time and we are

—Offerings cont'd on page 7



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will

Attentive Listening

By Judith Toone

It sounds so easy. All I need to do is pay attention, right?

I firmly fix my intention to listen attentively. I look at the speaker. My mind is in gear.

“Oh, oh! Maybe I should put my mind in Park.” It has sped forward onto another path - unfortunately not the same path the speaker is on.

I switch quickly to the Speaker’s path with renewed intention.

“Wow, that’s an interesting idea,” I think, and my mind is off and running again. “Oops, she has gone in another direction.”

Is it hopeless?

I have been assured that attentive listening is both possible and desirable, and because it is a key component of our circle process it is worth working on. A quotation heard recently suggests that listening can be enhanced

when we use our other senses as well as our hearing.

By looking at the speaker we can get nuances of expression that are not available to us otherwise and thus enhance our understanding of what is being said.

How would our noses and our sense of smell fit in here? By being mindful of our environment we can slow down those run-away thoughts and keep a better focus.

Our mindful awareness of physical sensations could also help us in the same way.

What about our mouths? Keeping them closed would certainly be a big help. It is hard to concentrate on what someone else is saying when we are speaking ourselves.

It is clear to me that those who practice meditation and/or mindfulness

are at an advantage in this process. Perhaps the most crucial ingredient is our desire to listen attentively. If our desire is strong and we are willing to keep practicing we can grow in our ability to listen attentively. I doubt that there is any other single skill that would increase our communication effectiveness and contribute so much to better understanding among all people.



“Old people love to give good advice; it compensates them for their inability to set a bad example.”

Duc de La Rochefoucauld

Tympane ergo sum.
(I drum, therefore I Am.)

Intentional Speaking

By Judy O

This is another personal story of how the principles of “Peer Spirit Circling” are part of one’s life.

In grade school the nuns in their black robes and mantled heads were forever telling me to stop talking, disrupting. Flying erasure marks were a decorative part of my maroon uniform as the boy in the front of me I was talking to ducked. I visited the Principal often. That dark room with its’ massive polished desk, that black robed authority with her hands tucked into her sleeves, was the first I heard of Hell. “How could you?” “What a disappointment?” “Your Parents will be so unhappy?” “Your Parents will be so unhappy?” She was a bit wrong there. My Irish ‘gift of gab’ put a twinkle in my dad’s eye.

In high school speech class, the nuns told me to slow down—no one would or could understand me! My 20 minute planned topic would last 10 then I filled the additional time. I learned to ad lib, use humor, and as an adult, kiss the Blarney Stone and MC Style Shows before 1000 people.

Speaking, for me, has been a verbal

skill of fearless forward. It is hard to tell this Irish lass to stop anything!

I never thought about intentional speaking - or Intentional Silence! Never thought about concentrated, purposeful, expression and communication - except maybe in Prayer. Of course, there have been fleeting moments, times, but as a real conscious Practice! To actually exercise the skill in frequent, repeat performance for learning or as a Principle, a concept I choose?

Three years of working with Circle, with Kit Wilson and Barrie Ryan teaching, has worked its’ miracle.

With my Concussion from the auto accident, word search and thinking was forced upon me. I couldn’t do it the old way, couldn’t find the words fast enough, especially at meetings or the end of the day, when I was tired. Stopping in mid-sentence searching for words, groping, leaving it unsaid. A novel idea for me!

Maybe it needn’t be so bad if I couldn’t find the words. I found/find myself opening my mouth and closing

it. Opening and closing tightly, pursing my lips, clenching my teeth to find “my Intention”. Was/Is it necessary, relevant, is my opinion needed? How can I state my intention succinctly, directly, kindly? Am I speaking from my heart, my god-center?

Practice makes perfect! My lips are less pursed; my jaw is relaxed, more often than not. I still search for words, which is a good thing. Intentional speaking, coming to the place of “what is my purpose in saying this”? Is becoming a practice. The nuns would not believe it took 60 years!



The **Circle of Grandmothers** Newsletter is a labor of love published four to six times per year. Subscriptions are \$10 for a January to December year (simplifies bookkeeping).

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When the Grandmothers speak, the world will

Honoring Corn

We are here to honor corn
Bless the Mother Earth
We are holy goddesses

Face the East to plant the corn
 cover it with soil
Face the South to tend the corn
 joyfully we toil
Face the West and harvest it
 for everyone in need
Face the North and let it sleep
 store wisdom in its seed.

Sentamental

Old trinkets, paper dolls
Memories of my past resurface
When I handle them
Ready to give birth

Letters, knick-knacks
From loved ones long ago
Kept safely in a trunk
Which I visit sometimes

Faded fabric, smell of old paper
Things not made today.
Unique, antique, oblique

Tears in my eyes, songs in my heart
Memories of voices, places, events
Are they not part of me?
Must I detach?
Will part of me go too?

I Belong

Mother Earth makes music all around
me.
Wind water animals
Sister Sea sings splashy lullabies
Brother Forest hums a tune
Birds squawk phrases to each other
My breath matches their songs
My heartbeat keeps time

New Experience

Blue birds, pelicans, salt water sea gulls
new place, new friends,
Awakening of thought stirring up wisdom
that was always there.
Rituals, ceremony, acceptance for being me
Pain, healing, joy, celebration of old wisdom,
Grandmother Gathering — — I will return.

The four poems above and to the left are by Jeanie Frattallone.

Circle Drum

A dance floor that is empty
Calls to the resting drum
To gather up the dancers
With a beat that says 'welcome'.
For on an empty dance floor
The illusion rules the game.
With motions to match the rhythms
Not seen or called by name
When filled with visible movement
Vibrations that fill the space
Human forms all dancing
To drumbeats interlaced.
Moving, touching relating
Sharing of personal times
All because the drums do call
For a dance spirit circling entwines.

Penny Baker

When the Grandmothers speak, the world will

Editors Corner

by Kit Wilson

In the Wilson household the orange cat curls up beside the computer, his purring mixed with a gentle wheeze, which announces that it is allergy time, even in the world of cats. Spring: I have spring fever, grandson Heath has "senioritis", and John, who has a new woman in his life, is as "twitter-pated" as the doves outside our window. Meanwhile our Arizona desert treats us to a breathtaking show of color. A few weeks ago, driving to Dragoon to celebrate a visit from **Sister Virginia**, the grandmothers in our car passed by mile after mile of vivid red-orange poppies blanketing the ground. It was as if the artist upstairs had dipped Her paintbrush into a giant pot of vermilion and had at it. All I can say is "Good show God"!!

The registration for the annual Gathering in October is included in this issue, along with a "press release" from **Judy Atwell**. The Planning Circle paid careful attention to your requests on the evaluations. We're excited with the results! We've brought the cost of the Gathering under \$400. Shortened the time. And located a setting that responds to your expressed need for a lower altitude, easier walking, and handicapped access. Although we still hold a warm place in our hearts for the COD, the Rex Ranch is an outstanding choice to meet the special requirements of the Grandmothers: family owned, heart-operated, and extremely user-friendly. Please note the due date for the registration. Sign up early. Space, as always, is limited.

More changes. **Judy O** is moving to Boise, Idaho. Her one daughter and family lives there and the rest of the clan are re-locating. This exodus leaves a hole in the Arizona Planning and Facilitators Circles, and an empty place in all our hearts. We'll miss her physical presence but expect the internet will keep her tightly connected to our process. We're enormously grateful for Judy's years of incredible hands-on organizational skills. And grateful too that our Circle principles have guided

us in the art of rotating leadership. I, for one, will look forward to seeing what happens to the grandmothers in Boise when Judy O hits town. Goodbye, Judy. Thank you for all you've done. We love you very much.

And hello, **Grasshopper**. Grasshopper departed San Francisco early this year and is now firmly planted in the Arizona soil. She has a new job, has volunteered for both the Planning and Facilitators Circles, and as of last week is the proud owner of a house in Catalina

Elsewhere, word has it that the Gulf Coast Grandmothers have truly come of age. An email from **Maya Levy** in Louisiana reports, "Just got home from the Gulf Coast Grandmother's Gathering, and wanted you to know what a great success it was. A treasure to keep in your heart forever. Robbie asked me to read *Babocamari*, **Barrie Ryan's** poem about Mary.Diamond, which I was honored to do. I told the group about Mary and *Cielo*. It was such a joy to share with them a little bit of history, and to know I'm a little bit of that history myself. Please tell Barrie how much her poem meant to the gathering. She's a brilliant writer." And from **Robbie Lapp** in Florida: "Thirty-nine Grandmothers sat under the Birch Medicine of the March Full Moon and 34 of us completed the four day three night Council. Much more will follow from this event of honoring the earth mother. In our "sacred objects collection," we keep **Grandmother Pauline's** talking stick and a copy of *Remembering Mary* (gifts from the "Arizona" Grandmothers). We use PeerSpirit circle as our form of council in both our large and daily small circles. We sing the Grandmother Song, and read *Babocomari* by Barrie Ryan. We request the blessings of all the "Arizona". Grandmothers.

Robbie asks some interesting questions: What makes a grandmother's council a grandmother's council? What does each new seed group need? What is needed to/from/of the original group? What must be sure to be included to

make the gathering an authentic grandmother council? Good questions to ponder as we continue to expand.

A few weeks ago I was an invited elder at a circle practicum taught by Christina Baldwin and sponsored by *From the Four Directions*, a global initiative to empower life-affirming leaders. The project is the brainstorm of Meg Wheatley. (If you don't know Meg's work you may recognize her as one of the most knowledgeable voices on the Internet during the Y2K crisis.) I plan to write more about my experience for the next Newsletter. Right now, however, I want you to know that I was able to share our Grandmother circles with this diverse gathering of good people from Brazil, Columbia, Mexico, Canada, Singapore, Senegal, and Nigeria. The story of our history and how our circles have spread was well received. Yesterday I received an email from Nafi, a young woman from Senegal who was in my small circle. She says: "How is going Grandmothers' network? I already discussed with the association of grandmothers I was talking about and let them know that another one exists in (Arizona). They were very happy to learn it. You have, you and your network the greetings of all of them."

And one more connection from across the waters. From Hamburg, Germany, Grandmother **Hildegard Reinhardt** writes: "Dear always 'loved friends'! Grandmothers who will change, together with spiritual friends, this Planet! I cannot come direct. The Dollar is too expensive, sorry! I will send you the last letter from Mary Diamond - coming too late for me. I never forget you! Love to you all."

Don't forget that this Newsletter is an interactive process. What goes out must first come in. Please send me the stories of your circles, your family, and the things you are doing to make a difference in our troubled world. John and I send you best wishes from Arizona in the springtime. Namaste.



When the Grandmothers speak, the world will

Last Name _____ First _____

Lodge me with _____ and _____

Council Of Grandmothers

Eighth Annual Gathering

September 30 to October 4, 2001

at Rex Ranch, Amado, Arizona



Registration

Check Applicable:

	Amount
1. Lodging, Meals, Events: 5 Days And 4 Nights: \$395 (financial arrangements are available upon request)	_____
2. 1 only RV space w/ electric & water hookup: \$295 /person (this single RV space is the only camping available on the Ranch)	_____
3. Sweat Lodge: (Tohono O'odham led) Donation/wood: \$25	_____
4. Newsletter: 1 Year Subscription: \$10	_____
5. Scholarship Contribution (Many Blessings)	_____
Total \$	_____

Return registration form by: **July 1, 2001**

Please remit "Total" to: **Council of Grandmothers**

Judith Toone
5701 E. Glenn #116
Tucson, AZ 85712
Phone/fax: 520-298-7557
jtflowerpower@juno.com

Refunds: (less \$35) when requested in writing by August 1, 2001.

Volunteer: Work at event _____ Service to an Elder _____

Submit workshop proposals: One hour workshops are welcome for submission and review along with additional gifts, talents or ideas towards "balancing" the Gathering:

Needs/Concerns/Questions (note: wheat and dairy free selections will be available at each meal):

Rate (1=low, 5=high): _____ Need smoking area _____ Avoid smoking area _____ Avoid stairclimbing
_____ Avoid walking _____ Your snore level _____ Tolerate others' snoring

Other: _____

Last Name _____ First _____ Birthdate/Age _____

Address (during the **winter**) _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone/Fax _____ E-mail _____

Address (during the **summer**) _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone/Fax _____ E-mail _____

Early arrival, late departure: Rex Ranch has agreed to extend the conference room rate (subject to availability) of \$90/night for a single and \$125/night for a double if you would like to arrive early or stay late. Meals will be from the menu with prices about \$5.50 bkfst, \$10 lunch and \$24 dinner. Arrangements should be made directly with the Ranch if you choose early arrival and/or late departure.

Rex Ranch

Phone: 800-547-2696

From Tucson: 398-2914

Web: www.rexranch.com

Please indicate if you are extending your stay (early arrival and/or late departure) and we will accommodate your lodging accordingly: _____.

If you are unable to attend, please do pass this to a friend!



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Events/Announcements

Press Release

From Judy Atwell

The **8th Annual Gathering of the Council of Grandmothers** will be held at the lush Rex Ranch in Amado, Arizona, one hour South of Tucson. We'll embrace old friends, meet new ones, learn and grow. Following guidelines from Christina Baldwin's book, *Calling the Circle*, we'll share small circles each day, take part in ceremonies, attend workshops, and have free time to just 'be'.

Located in the Santa Cruz River Valley, the Rex Ranch is a family-owned

retreat center offering comfortable altitude, spacious casitas, incredible scenery, world-class dining and easy access for those with physical limitations. This year's Gathering will run four nights and five days. The cost for lodging, all meals from the Rex Ranch award winning chef, ceremonies, workshops and materials, will be only \$395! Horseback riding, Sweat Lodge and spa services will be available at individual cost. Plan now to join us - attendance is limited.

For further information on the Rex Ranch, visit www.rexranch.com

A Grandmother Gathering in New Zealand

October 7 - 13, 2001

Lakeshore Conference Center, Auckland, New Zealand

An Announcement from Joyce Kovelman

I recently returned from my visit to Aotearoa, The Land of the Long White Cloud. Many of you know this beautiful country as New Zealand. While there, I met with Chieftess Dell Wihongi and several other Grandmothers. The Maori on the North Island have graciously offered to hold our First Gathering in their beautiful land. In the Cosmology of The Maori, Earth's southern hemisphere represents the energies of the Feminine.

We encourage all of you who wish to come to our First Gathering to seek the necessary funding, grants, and sponsorship that will enable you to do so, as soon as possible. Many of you may need the assistance of a

caretaker or companion as well.

We hope that each Grandmother will bring a flag or symbol of their nation, tribe, or community that will be joined to those of all Grandmothers who participate. In this way, our voices and our visions will become One.

We look forward to meeting you, and to the birthing of our Circle. It's visions and its service are based on the Hopi Indian Prophecy, "When the Grandmothers speak, the Earth will Heal".

For further information contact Joyce at 10690 Winnetka Avenue, Chatsworth, California 91311; (818) 998-4228; Asoul1@aol.com.

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empowered to "do the work" we were intended to do in this life. We bond with the loving energy of the Grandmother who always gives the best guidance possible for the benefit of future generations.

So, in asking ourselves, "what does a grandmother offer the world?" perhaps we can say that she is our link, truly our connection to the past, the present

and the future of our existence, our very lives made meaningful and purposeful - to continue the renewal of all life possible on Earth, in whatever manner our individual experiences of her hold for each of us.

With that spirit in mind and the belief that we are all connected I close by sharing a poem by Mary Fredricks:

Kit at Antigones Books

By Barrie Ryan

As many of you may be aware, **Kit Wilson** has an essay on the Arizona Grandmothers in a recently published book of essays by older women, *Our Turn Our Time: Women Truly Coming of Age* (Beyond Words Publishing, Inc. 2000). Antigone's, the local women's bookstore in Tucson, invited her to do a reading and discussion for interested older women last February 23rd.

In addition to the warm introduction by Kathy from the bookstore, what was notable about the evening for me was the contributions of the grandmothers from our group who showed up for the event: **Cora Miller, Bobbie Goodman, Star, Judy O'Leary, Marion Sinclair, Paula Olch, Trina, Grasshopper, Connie Spittler, Jeannie Wirth**, and myself. After Kit read part of her essay and spoke a bit, each of these women also spoke about an aspect of the Grandmother's Circle which was meaningful to her. Each mentioned something different, and each was articulate and brief as well. Wow! It struck me that the attributes of circle we'd worked on like careful listening, self-monitoring and speaking from one's heart had been integrated by all.

Though new women who had come to the event were just a handful, the information and community spirit were infectious and they participated and asked good questions. When the evening was over, I felt all of us there had shared ourselves in a genuine connection, giving ample evidence of the value of older women getting together.

My Grandmother opens her mouth
And her mother wakes.
We are wrapped in one
Rainbow shawl.
Somewhere hidden,
Their words whisper as snow
Held in the sky.
Their bones that once shaped
Their bodies lift an arm.
Our hands move.
All the ancestor's arms write
With my pen.

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