

Way Out Back



Blessing the waters of the Murray River at Banyandah Naturally.



Grandmother Agnes Baker Pilgrim, with Tom Cook, Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook, and Grandmother Aggie's daughter, Nadine, at our November meeting.

Australia events in December 2011 differed dramatically from the previous year's adventures, but were no less delightful, deep and rewarding. Participants, human and equine, continued their elegant and profound work in Journey Horse. I still bask in their brilliance, my heart warmed and my life enriched. Indeed the entire past year has been characterized by wonderful friendships that testify to the profound impact of working with horses as partners in our life journeys. Plans are in place for more **Journey Horse in 2012**, starting with Equitana in early November with three- and five-day clinics in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Details in coming weeks. See below for events already scheduled in Ashland and Ireland that have me looking forward to this Big Year with high anticipation, where you are invited to join us for more of our Journey work with horses.

Here is a tale of my baby elder adventure in Oz. Months before this year's trip, I began a search for indigenous elders on both sides of the pond, to enrich our studies in exploring inner and outer landscapes. Emails and phone calls went unanswered in both the US and Oz.

Finally in the last week the US piece came together, and on the last day before my departure, I had a wonderful meeting with Grandmother Agnes Pilgrim, leader of the 13 Indigenous Grandmother's Council, where she signed two books written by the grandmothers for me to take as a gift to their counterpart in the Aboriginal communities of Australia, and inspired me to conduct a Water Blessing for the Murray River. I also had fortuitous meetings with several other Native Americans who shared their own important stories for me to take along. Arriving in Sydney two days later, arrangements were still not finalized for the ceremony by an Aboriginal elder that we sought for one of our clinics. As those arrangements ebbed and flowed, the books finally were given to two women, Anthea in Albury and Fiona in Alice Springs, who felt honored to share them with Aboriginal elders in their area, and have their own remarkable stories of the work they do. I was entirely satisfied with how this had unfolded.

But there was more. On my last eight days in Australia I had traveled to Alice Springs for 8 days, five of which were spent camping and hiking in the 110 degree desert outback. On the last day of the camping, the greatest personal gift of the entire previous five-weeks arrived. Four of us were bumping down washboard roads and cross-country for several hours in our four-wheel drive Toyota Land Cruiser with our guide Chris. We were headed for Oak Valley Aboriginal community for a visit. As I reflected on the previous five weeks with deep satisfaction, a lightning bolt realization came to me. The elder search that seemed so perplexing at times was in truth a search for my own elder-hood! Instead of looking for these rather hard-to-find people out there, I needed to be looking inside of myself and getting acquainted with THAT elder.

You see, previous to 2011, I was among the youngest in my circle of friends and colleagues. For the past year, though, I was for the first time thrust consistently into situations where I was the oldest person in the group. As I constructed my home, and as I taught and did many things, like camping, for instance, I was the oldest person around, and I was consistently faced with differences between me and the others where I



Four foot water dragon greeted us at a Morpeth restaurant patio, harbinger of the Chinese Year of the Dragon.



Rebecca Kriegs, left, hosted a dinner party with Manolo Mendez and others at her home near Woodend.



Cheryl Cruttenden, Banyandah teaching associate, and me at the Lighthouse during our closing celebration.

was proficient at overlooking their implications. For instance, I was much slower in learning to wield a skill saw, a nail gun and all the other tools of construction, compared to the intuitive ease with which I work with horses. I was more affected by the intense heat during our outback hiking. I was perplexed by this, but succeeded in avoiding the obvious. Too, there were benefits to my years: I felt a more carefree attitude about vicissitudes that perplexed others, and stories from my own life were part of some really interesting conversations.

At a family reunion last spring, a delightful young teen from Burma had approached me and said with a polite smile, “Usually in my culture we call old people like you grandmother, but I’ve learned not to do that here in the US.” I was successful in politely responding with a smile as I said, “Well, since I am a grandmother, it’s OK with me if you call me that,” and equally successful in restraining myself from shouting “BUT I AM NOT OLD!” That scenario nipped at my heels for months.

The 65th birthday in the US forces you to face certain eventualities due to the bombardment for six months previous with numerous items in the mail about Medicare. Then the process of applying for Medicare requires answering a long questionnaire about all the possible health problems you may have. I am fortunate to enjoy excellent health, but this questionnaire cannot be ignored as a list of all the dire possibilities on the horizon sooner rather than later.

These and other experiences came to bear with a startling flash of wonder-filled, joyful, realization as I bumped along a hot, lonely road in the outback of central Australia. At that moment, our guide Chris said “Trish, we’re coming up on seven gates and I want you to open and close them.” Coming as his words did in the midst of my thoughts, they took on a mythic power. Gates figure in so many of the mythic tales that I am familiar with, like Inanna, for instance, who passes through several gates on her journey into the underworld. I could not resist thinking that there was likely to be something significant about each of these gates. I was not disappointed.

As I fumbled with the latch on the first gate, taking longer than seemed due, it surely reminded me of my rather overdue embracing of my own elderhood, however much it may be in its infancy. Additionally, I noticed a handful of beer cans lying about and gathered them up to dispose of later, since they surely were an eyesore on an otherwise elegant desert landscape. This action reminded me of my growing stewardship of the earth through my work with horses. Yes! As I hopped back into the truck, I apologized for taking so long with the latch, and Chris said: “The good news is that each one of the gates has an entirely different system.” Perfect, I thought, with a smile.

Gate One: Care for the Earth.

The second gate had a three foot square red sign on the front of it, official looking, rather like some kind of caution sign but with a flower-like symbol in the middle. Chris said it notified people that they were entering Aboriginal Territory. That made sense for my own journey. I am entering “New Territory” of my own that is characterized by a



Joseph Lowey and Sir Rupert at Jaspers.

kinship with indigenous ways with Journey Horse.

Gate Two: Explore Indigenous Wisdom.

The third gate was littered with hundreds of cans scattered around the immediate area of the gate. “Why in the world,” I demanded of Chris, “would they desecrate the land this way?” Because, he said, alcohol is not allowed in Aboriginal Territory, so the young people dump their cans at the gate on their return home. Significance for me: Time to leave behind wasteful and childish ways, guiding words I have held as I unpack items from the past 65 years as I move into my new townhome, practicing discernment for what needs to be ushered into other hands or is due for recycling.

Gate Three: Leave Behind Childish Ways

Gate four was hanging wide open and Chris told me to go ahead and close it behind us. Upon closer approach to the gate, I realized that it had been crashed into by a vehicle, with considerable violence. It was bent and the latch was broken off. I tied the chain in a half hitch to keep the gate closed and pondered the calling I have always had for healing the suffering or brokenness of others, a calling that has led me into my particular work with horses and humans the past three decades.

Gate Four: Heal the Wounded

During the longer ride to the next gate, I wondered with considerable high humor what else might unfold. Gate five, though, was actually relatively uneventful so Chris’ comment got my attention as I jumped into the truck: “You don’t need your safety belt for this one. The other gate is just down the road.” The issue of safety is important to attend to these coming years.

Gate Five: Pay Attention to Safety

And it was a perfect segue into my favorite gate of them all. Next to gate six in two-foot high hand-painted letters, a sign declared HORSES CLOSE GATE. I enjoyed the play on words that horses know how to close this gate, will carry me through this time of my life, and by carrying forth the promise of safety from the previous gate, I can count on and must ensure their safety, my own and that of others.

Gate Six: Go the Way with Horses

Finally, arriving at gate seven it was wide open and had a sign of the company that held the tour: Wayoutback. It was their area on the property of Oak Valley aboriginal community, a model farming community, completely self sufficient, with no government funding supporting it. There was a sense that this final gate pointed to traveling “way out” to apply the benefits of expanded states of consciousness for social demonstration or community well-being purposes, certainly an aspect of the social artistry work I am already doing with people in Journey Horse.

Gate Seven: Travel Way Out



Peter joined Jaspers event one evening for drumming, aboriginalian story telling and didgeridoo.



Michaela Kennedy, Jaspers teaching associate, works with her horse at Jaspers.



Wayoutback Desert Safari



Magnificent Uluru, up close.

So, now here I am arrived back home, feeling I am on wholly new terrain in my life. This is enhanced by moving into the new townhome that I spent the past year building. Now I have these interesting Seven Gates as signposts for lending enlightenment along the way.

I am in my infancy as an elder and will tap the advice of my older, wiser friends. This time the honoring of their wisdom is different than it has been in the past. I am one of them now, not the kid sister anymore. I am glad for my healthy, aging body and am taking more attentive care of it. I feel eager anticipation for this year, a significant one in the Mayan traditions, and significant surely for me. I can sense its potency, and am so grateful for the friendships, human, equine, and canine, that enrich my days, for the richness of the entire earth within which we live.

I hope to share this grand year with each of you, some where, some time soon.



Tina

MORE PHOTOS on next two pages. . . .



Yola begins solitary journey quest with her horse.



Liberty work at the Banyandah beehive.



Trish, Sue and Jane prepare for the water blessing at the Murray River.



Yola, Cheryl, and Maggie at Banyandah Naturally



Camels run in wild bands in the Northern Territory of central Australia, as do Brumbies.



Mythic Journey, now one year old, was born a few days after Journey Horse Banyandah, 2010, and was named for our gathering.



Sally walked barefoot on the hot sand and narrated aboriginal stories of the rock formations at Uluru.

