

My Mantra for the New Year



*Diversity is the exquisite flower of our
awakening consciousness.*

*Disconnection from this beauty is a poison
of ignorance in our minds that seeks agreement,
as fear and misery want company.*

Do not look for like-minded people.

Look for like-hearted people

who are curious.



1. Greetings & Introduction

The adventure, challenges and mystery of life continue to inspire my path as I pray it does yours. I have been witnessing, as so many of us have, such a range of feeling this past year. There have been so many moments of gratitude, wonder and beauty, alongside so much shock and horror at the situations and conditions humanity is in now. It has been a tough year in that department. Yet, from this wild

range of experience, I feel moved to put myself out there a bit more again. As I surrender more each day to the great river of my heart and spirit, I discover more about how wild and unpredictable my life can get. So much arises to challenge even the best laid plans. For someone who has the ambition to be reliable, relevant, and safe, I fear I am falling short. And yet, I find myself filled with a deep, tender passion for the transformation that must now come for us all if life is going to be sustained in a good, just manner for the sake of all of life's children.

In this time of uncertainty, I do make a practice of keeping connected, each day to my prayers for others and intentions for myself. These are that we each find within us love, wisdom, clarity, strength, and the power to meet the world as it is. May we learn to share what is in our hearts in as beautiful way as we can muster and to keep balanced and healthy in this venture. Sometimes I think that this is all we are ever really here to do – to share and in so doing, ultimately to stumble upon and make real some tender beauty that is buried in each of our hearts. Like The Sun path in the Tarot, we will find ourselves outside of the walls of our habitual but limited reality and seeing life around us with fresh eyes and clearer heart. Certainly, I am promoting anything that supports a shift in consciousness and experience from a fear-based reality to a love-based reality. This shift is the key and my work is dedicated to support that shift.

I have heard it said that all the great teachers and masters that have ever lived are incarnated now, walking the planet at this crucial point in history. So perhaps, in our prayers, we can call upon those masters and teachers for the wisdom of the ages to permeate all our activities. Indeed, through both the privilege and challenge of these times, I am truly amazed how rich life is when I focus my identity on the unknown rather than the known and keep my mind and heart open to the unexpected. I realize this takes practice...I guess that is what my work in developing The Mystery School is ultimately about. So, what can I, cosmic cheerleader that I am, offer as nourishment or stimulation about my experiences and reflections on life at this time?



2. Sharing Ordinary Life & News of Community Life in Nelson

My dear, dear mother, Eleanor Waggoner, passed away this year at 82 years, a few days after the Iraq war began. It was a gentle passing, filled with tender messages in this midst of a time of great turmoil for so many. I could only imagine, from her timing, that she had gone to help the passage of so many wounded souls out of this life whose deaths came out of this horror. I certainly am grateful for the time I could spend with her these last couple of years. She was a remarkable woman, filled with unconditional love. Such a deep revolution occurs with the death of a parent and I am in the midst of that. I miss her so much and yet she is so present in all the really good and beautiful things that she did for me that I can now pass on to others.

My equally dear and only brother has just moved nearby - to Spokane Washington. I am so glad to have him closer to me. Even though the change is a challenge for him – winter snow and all, he's glad to be out of life in Southern California (the "fast lane" he calls it) into a more peaceful environment.

This February my partner, Jim, and I celebrate our 10th year together. Every year, we are learning more about the journey of true relationship. I am undeniably blessed to have his love and support in my life.

This coming May marks our 8th year living in the glorious, mountainous, lake region of Nelson, British Columbia. October was the beginning of our 6th year in a lovely old Victorian house, graced by the largest Copper Beech tree around...my real "Tree of Life" for sure. Such stability is new to me, yet I can see that this doesn't make me, or life, any more predictable.

This June I turn 60 years old. I was born in the hours that the troops were landing on Normandy beach toward the end of World War II. "D-Day", it was called. I take this event as one origin of my impulse to contribute to the deliverance - that must come for humanity - from all the wars, outside as well as inside us. I know with all my heart that this can happen if we persist in living from our hearts, not in sentimentality, but in the heart's passion for justice.

I thought I would have a big gathering to celebrate the my birthday, but our housemate, Terence, and my partner, Jim, have just offered me the gift of spending my 60th Birthday at Machu Picchu with a few friends who were going there anyway. I will spend the day in deep ceremony and prayer for a loving evolution of life to come. If you have read my book about my time in Peru (see below), you may appreciate the significance of this gift for me.

Woven into my life is also the ever-deepening adventure of community in Nelson. A lot has been happening here recently. Last July, a group of us sponsored Joanna Macy to come and lead a weekend workshop attended by 80 people (more about Joanna below). Also, one of Jim's dreams is now a reality: a large group of people from the community have gathered together with a commitment to create ceremonies for 2 years around each Solstice and Equinox. The first two were inspiring. At Winter Solstice we had 110 people show up, twice what we had for the Fall Equinox so we conclude it's an idea, gathering steam, whose time has come.

Yet another dream being realized now is the creation of the Kootenay Network for Well-Being, founded by the devoted, creative efforts of many dear friends. A website (www.wellbeingnetwork.ca), of all the educational and healing opportunities Nelson has to offer, will be out soon. This will be an excellent resource for people coming to visit Nelson in the future. There is an incredible wealth of talent here in Nelson in all the creative and healing arts. When the website is up it will be linked with Nelson's website: www.nelsonbc.ca. Check it out! What an inspiration for other communities to frame their own community's talents!

I can say that the well being of my life in Nelson has made it possible for me to venture through some new doors as well.

3. My first book: Sacred Memory, Holy Yearning

For those of you who do not know, late in 1999, I completed, and humbly self-published a book on my spiritual journey in the Andes called: Sacred Memory, Holy Yearning, The Birth of Inkarri. All 185 copies have been sold and I hope to get out a revised edition this year. If you are interested in reading this tale about a historic meeting of a keeper of the ancient ways of the Andes and a Tibetan Rinpoche and the meaning of this meeting for our world, let me know and I will put you on the list to receive the next edition.

4. Reflections on The Mystery School

Life continues to be such an endless discovery process. It's humbling to realize how long it takes me to 'get it' and maybe, if I am lucky, I am always 'getting it'. There's so much to get. Here is what I'm currently getting...

When the last 3-year cycle of The Mystery School classes ended in 2001, I felt sad because there were

not enough people to begin a new class. I rationalized that I could not do enough advertising. Yet now, I understand the appropriateness and wisdom of The Mystery School (in the form I had been conceiving it) not continuing at that moment in time.

I have learned that creating and teaching this work has set a new course for my own growth each time I have completed a series. Offering The Mystery School is a 'big' yet rewarding project. Yet, I have needed a break after each cycle to explore what has been activated within me during the process. Some new adventures in consciousness were awaiting me. Then, grounded in a new level of my own reality, I have renewed energy to undertake holding a space for others in another 3-year cycle.

This work seems a good example of right livelihood. It is a delightful balance between giving and receiving, teaching and learning. No one can be an expert in the realm of mystery. In The Mystery School, we join together to live the discovery process. I may hold the container and guide this process of exploring the life archetypes of the Tarot symbols on The Tree of Life, but it is clear that the *form itself* is the teacher. When I was leading tours in the Andes, I remember experiencing such personal renewal over and over again each time we visited these power places on Earth. So why should guiding inner journeys and traveling to powerful places in our inner worlds be any different? I have an innate passion to explore life and its mysterious paths, endlessly providing me with the experiences that help me to be a useful guide for others.

Through the success of what two Mystery School students have been doing with their Tarot Group in Winnipeg, I'm totally clear that this work is transferable. Here is a vocation that offers endless awakening potential. All life one touches, including one's own, is quickened. I also remind myself that the first time I led a journey up the Tree of Life with a group in Quebec from 1980 to 1982, I had very little experience as I had only been working with the Tarot symbols for 5 years. I was drawing upon some years of training in personal growth, yet I learned so much more as I held the space for others. And, while that experience made many of us friends for life as it deepened the paths of these students, it also ignited an amazing Soul journey for me. My Tarot Reading work expanded into traveling around the country, which gave me the freedom to follow a call to Peru for a time. This was not a previous plan or even a thought but it was in life's program for me when I aligned myself with my own mystery! This is a deep practice! It was only after I completed writing my first book, "Sacred Memory, Holy Yearning," about my

experiences in Peru, that I was able to begin the next Mystery School, 1998 to 2001.

When I begin another cycle of The Mystery School, likely in 2006, I imagine looking for people who are interested, not only in bringing this deep practice of journeying up the Tree of Life into their own lives but also into the lives of members of their community. In my dreams, I'd love to see community-based Mystery Schools growing up everywhere - schools to awaken a deeper dialogue about life by educating us from the inside/out!

It is the blessing of our times that there are many forms of this kind of self-awakening occurring now in our culture. They may not always be identified as such, but they are encouraging life into a very necessary process of inner connecting, empowerment and transformation. The work that I have developed is one of many such forms...bring them on I say! This kind of work is needed to inspire fulfilling and life-sustaining paths for our lives so that the project of our physical/psychological/spiritual evolution can continue. I'm filled with the wonder of this, a "collective journey" that I have been witnessing my whole life. I cannot say how many lifetimes it will take to accomplish my part of this but I'm clear this work is where my path with a heart lies now. Oh, how grateful I am to feel immersed in such tender meaning when so much around me seems to be on a destructive course. One does not cancel out but rather serves to illuminate the other. To maintain that vital balance, I understand that things have to flow in their own time.

5. "The Mystery School" - a new book

As you can see, The Mystery School is the deepest and most creative form of my heart's work of spiritual initiation. My project this year is to complete a book entitled: The Mystery School. There will be a subtitle that will be something like "A Guide Book for Growing-up in the New Millennium" or "Innovation in Education toward the Renewal of All Life" or "Educating Ourselves from Inside/Out". I'll be looking for suggestions on that as time goes on.

A Request: Because of this work, I am asking my friends out there in "email land" hold back the "Forwards" for the rest of this year as I focus on giving birth to this work. I welcome emails about work and personal matters. However, I plan to only open my emails 2 or 3 times a week and wish not to be overwhelmed each time I do. I ask also for your supportive prayers for this writing journey. It is a daunting task to sum up what I have learned from over 28 years of exploring the Tarot and Tree of Life

Symbols. I believe it is worth doing and encouragement and prayers ease my way.

I will, in time, develop a long overdue website. Any thoughts, interest, feedback or input will be gratefully received about this project as time goes on.

6. Tarot Readings - Traveling & in Nelson

At this time, I am doing a limited amount of traveling to offer Tarot readings in other cities close to Nelson, where I can drive and work for short periods.

I have also begun to do long distance readings by email, phone, mail which has worked out well for clients in cities I cannot visit. If you are interested in more information about that, contact me by phone or email for details. During this writing time in Nelson, I will be doing only 3 readings a week by appointment either in person or long distance. Doing readings is very stimulating to my writing process so I welcome the opportunity to do so.

Once The Mystery School book is written, my focus will likely move toward traveling and promoting this work. Once again, I will be offering to do talks, workshops, and readings on the road again in cities across North America (if you are interested in sponsoring me to come and work in your community, let me know. I will put you on a list for future planning).

7. August 28-31, 2004, a Tarot Workshop at Johnson's Landing Retreat

This summer, I will be offering my first workshop in some time - an overview and direct experience of the work - entitled "Tarot and Tree of Life Mythology". This 3-day workshop is scheduled for Saturday, August 28 to Tuesday, August 31 at Johnson's Landing Retreat Center, north of Kaslo, B.C. - not far from Nelson. After March 1st, you can check out their website (www.JohnsonsLandingRetreat.bc.ca) for more information on this workshop and other programs or contact me for a brochure. If you register & pay for this Tarot workshop before May 31st, you will be entitled to stay free for an extra night's lodging on Aug. 31st with food included. That is a great deal! I plan to stay that extra night so it can expand the time we can hang out together. There are some beautiful walks nearby. I will return to Nelson on September 1st.

8. Dances of Universal Peace Camp

The weekend following my workshop at Johnson's Landing (just before Labor day), Thursday, September 2 to Sunday, September 5th, there is a

Dances of Universal Peace camp at Camp Koolaree, just outside of Nelson, on Kootenay Lake. This is an amazing and delightful tradition of dancing the dances of many spiritual paths. Every religion, every way is honored. This is a beautiful practice that I also plan to take into future Mystery Schools. It is a lot of fun too! If you are interested in more information about this camp, pass on your name to the organizer, Megan Elliot, (leggymeggy@hotmail.com) who says the information will be out in April.

9. An Invitation

I would like to invite you and your friends to do either or both (as space permits of course) the Tarot and Tree of Life Workshop and/or The Dances of Universal Peace Dance Camp. For me these two events are some of the ways I wish to celebrate my work and life in this 60th year. It will be a joyful way to gather together with many friends for both learning and play.

10. Other Adventures

Since the last Mystery School ended in 2001, Jim and I, along with some dear friends, have been taking other great leaps in learning.

Joanna Macy

One such leap has been to do some further training with Joanna Macy who is the author of many books, the most recent is "Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World." Joanna is a dedicated environmentalist, systems theory visionary, Buddhist scholar, and translator of Rilke's poems. Check out her website at www.joannamacy.net. Joanna's gift is in devising forms and methods for people to face more deeply and to act more effectively to the difficult challenges of being alive on the planet at this time. Politically and environmentally, humanity is running some serious and dangerous endgames right now. We know it inside us but feel helpless. Joanna's work addresses this directly so that more life-sustaining ways of being can emerge through direct action, changing consciousness, and creating alternative solutions. I plan to use some of Joanna's practices in The Mystery School in the future as this is part of the process of our interconnectedness. For me personally, her work is about awakening to all levels of life in order to embrace the responsibility of becoming an elder in this world. I wish the work I do to reflect and be relevant to the biggest possible picture of everyday life on this planet. Spiritual awakening practices must embrace this aspect of life as well.

The Amazon

Jim and I, along with others, have also made two trips over the last two years to the Amazon in Peru. Our task was to go deeper into the mysteries of that ancient world by connecting with shamans there who work with plants as medicine and teachers to heal and clarify the mind and heart. All this experience seems to be taking me deeper into the work "I am". In other words, I find myself in a place where I can no longer visualize or imagine others or myself as 'having' or 'possessing' a vision and a work. Rather, I see that each of us 'is' a vision and a work. What I experienced affirms my faith that each of us are, in the depth of our natures, naturally beautiful. Our truth lives in realms way beyond comparison or competition. Each of our lives carries a unique message, meaning and purpose to be discovered and shared. Simple as that! Ha! The trick is to find forms and experience the love that help us realize this and, of course, to abandon our habits of inappropriate comparison and competition.

From this time in the Amazon, I now know more about interspecies communication. I return more respectful and greatly inspired by the deeper reality of existence and of all our relations, feeding us all the time with endless creative impulses and inspiration. We can fling open the doors of our perception and trust our instincts and impulses – humility is natural in this place. Another powerful learning was how cultures in that part of the world evolved through connecting with the natural world and being guided by that world into a saner, gentler, heart empowered existence.

Mandala Painting

We also have been exploring another soul-awakening practice of Mandala painting with a California based artist, Paul Huessenstam. Under Paul's liberating guidance, I have been painting mandalas to each of the four directions and elements, which – you guessed it – will be used in The Mystery School. For my Medicine Wheel work, I have already completed three mandalas: to The Tree of Life at the Center, to Air in the North, and Earth in the South. This year, I will do Water and the Divine Feminine of the Moon in the West and Fire, the Divine Masculine of the Sun in the East.

Paul was a student of Jungian analyst and writer, Robert Johnson, and so is also skilled in remarkable ways of exploring dreams that arise when we are working and creating so passionately together in a group. His website is www.mandalas.com and is definitely a treat to see.

11. Final Words...

A Declaration of Patience & Empowerment

While in the jungle this past year, one of our guides asked us to do a version of a "lifeboat exercise" in which we each were called upon to advocate for ourselves in some way as to why we should be among the ones to get on a lifeboat, when only some of us could go. I found myself saying, without hesitation, that I could easily give up my seat on the lifeboat because my experiences of the first year in the jungle taught me "I am inevitable". What that spontaneous and surprising declaration meant for me, I only realized later. I just knew, at that moment, that such competition is not a reality for me or in me. Comparing ourselves to see who deserves what is not appropriate to the essence of life. We all deserve life and life deserves from us that we each take responsibility to discover what is in our hearts and to live from that place no matter how many lifetimes it takes us to do so. That is the Great Work.

What I learned from that spontaneous declaration of my spirit, was that it didn't matter whether I live or die in any particular moment, as what I am is somehow inevitable, unfolding naturally in the bigger picture and is a part of eternity. It isn't about competition, or politics, or survival even. Talk about the mercy of finding this glimmer of true patience! What a gift!

I have been clear for some time that 'none of us are home until we are all home'. Our lives and spirits must be shared, not as a banner of ultimate truth or reality, but as food for each other, as nurturing stimulation to quicken our collective awakening. For me, someone put me against a wall, and I had to admit my sense of Truth or Ultimate Reality, I would say it is when all of us - and I mean every living thing, all our relations - find ourselves dancing in a gigantic orgasm of collective enlightenment of love and joy. This arises from each of us, fully able to celebrate the whole mystery through realizing the utter beauty and ultimate necessity of our diversity! Whew!

This often-grueling time period, when so many of us do seem awake or awakening, just may be the deep heart-wrenching, pains-taking labor crucial for a birth and rebirth of love that is being called for in every heart. Love is an essential key to our further, more collective awakening. While patience is a virtue, at the same time, the tragedy of our ongoing ignorance must also be challenged through clarity and creativity. We must stand with the Earth and her children, and risk living in the faith that one's own humble unique heartfelt truth does matter in each moment we live. The messages are everywhere. A new kind of

warrior is emerging when we allow our hearts to break open over and over, demonstrating the powerful love that can help us to discover and stand with what we are for, rather than focusing on what we are against. Wisdom, understanding and knowledge grow here, helping us to see more clearly and to make better choices for our lives and for life itself.

In the past, many indigenous cultures came from the 'experience of interconnectedness' with all life. They lived in innocence not knowing there was any another way. Pause for a moment and consider what a short period in history the actual "idea of interconnectedness" has rooted itself in our western minds. Conscious awareness of who we are is of deep value now. Ideas are what create forms to live this. We must become "whole" now rather than "right". This is not easy, as we have to embrace vulnerability as a reality, not as something to fix or to run from, but to appreciate and move toward. Joanna Macy refers to the Buddhist concept of the Shambala Warrior who knows that everything that is life negating - all the various forms of inner and outer weapons of mass destruction - have been made by the mind and can be unmade by the mind. In facing our disconnected separation (not to be confused with naturally unfolding gifts of individuality), we can discover that we have a choice now, as never before, to grow our lives with a consciousness of interconnectedness. We can advocate for this in a way never before truly possible. I feel there is a great river emerging in us that is equally wondrous and inevitable. I cannot imagine a better way to spend my life or help others to spend their lives, than the conscious quest into the great, sacred mystery within.

So here I stand in my own shining moving toward 60 years on this planet and I pray everyday that I know what the hell I'm talking about! So much just seems to pour out of me. There's always a bit of chutzpah or lunacy (or both) to stick out in this way, take up so much time and space, to be so verbose. If you had a mom that had told you to trust yourself and a dad that told you to freely express yourself, this is one result. I can only encourage you to do the same! I am keenly aware that I am in a great deal of reaction to the world as it is. Yet, still I would want to stand with those trusting that aiming to express one's voice and to stimulate dialogue is useful. As Mrs. Maggione, an 86 year old cherub of an Italian neighbor, who raised 17 children mostly on her own after her husband died, said, with the palms of her hands and her eyes turned up to the heavens "What are you gonna do?" Hopefully ever more "artful means" will come as time goes on.... I'll need that for my book!

With those thoughts I send out the wild passion I feel for existence. I wish that each one of us, in time, were healed, made whole and holy so that the sacred that is life will be forever recognized and honored in our time and place. In this manner, the magnificently delicate dynamic of life eternal is brought into everyday life. For those of you who might resonate with what I have said, and are willing and ready to bear the appropriate suffering and joy of this awakening, we have a lot of work ahead of us in this time of great transformation. Becoming the mystery you truly are is your piece of this transformation and for this, you need space and forms that allow that birth. Look for such forms all around you, create them, and support them in how you live your life.

I feel fiercely clear in this intention, and dangerous to all that cling to the notion that the inappropriate suffering we have allowed to happen in this world, is the truth of life. There will always be appropriate growth pains, and the need to let go of old forms. That we stumble and fall while learning to walk is natural even though we may suffer the pain of a scraped knee or worse. Inappropriate suffering is the perpetuated cruelty of inner and outer wars and abuse that keeps humanity fearful and disconnected from its essential nature and tries to convince us that we deserve what we get or life is just like that. I don't think so! That is a mistake, a big fat one, from my point of view.

Our ideas about life do matter. Through my work, I add my voice to the dialogue about what life is. I intuit and experience that there is a path of being alive together that is way beyond the disconnection many seem to assume is the reality of life here. For my own path and what I have to offer others, the Tarot and Tree of Life symbols have been such powerful guides to consciousness and are keys to creating a more life-and-heart-sustaining world. It's what I have to share.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart if you have taken the time to read this long letter, to be stimulated one way or the other by what I have said. Many voices are speaking similar words now. This is a challenging time of a great awakening for us all and I am deeply committed to serving what Paul Tillich once called "The Reunion of the Separated".

Until we meet again, blessed be with a love that knows neither a beginning nor an ending,

Carol Stewart

P.S. Comments, Feedback, Dialogue welcome

