

RETURN TO PANGAEA
A SHAMANIC JOURNEY
BACK TO NEWFOUNDLAND ROOTS

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A Shamanic Journey
Back to Newfoundland Roots

ALISON NORMORE

BONNE BAY
NEWFOUNDLAND

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*In memory of Steve Omilinsky,
whose love gave me wings to fly.*

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Introduction

*Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead
where there is no path, and leave a trail.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I WROTE IN MY JOURNAL shortly after starting university at age twenty-eight, giddy with the excitement of a new learning adventure, “Let my life be a never-ending search for truth.” And so, I embarked on a journey down roads I could not even have imagined. Like most spiritual journeys, it was a winding path marked by achievement and loss, mystical experience, and spiritual awakening. Similar to the tip of an iceberg, visions, dreams, and synchronicities were evidence of another reality beyond the visible surface of my everyday life. These led me back to a homeland I never knew, a place of spectacular natural beauty and ancient wisdom that only open eyes could see, and a mind and heart made wiser could understand.

Along the way I shed many aspects of my old self and discovered a more meaningful, connected way of being in the world. A growing awareness of the consciousness of everything transformed me. When I paid attention, the world was full of beauty and mystery, and wonder awaited around every corner. In the light of this truth I became more aligned with my spiritual nature and instinctual knowing, the truest kind of homecoming—a journey of discovery that never ends.

This story demanded to be written. Bringing it to paper, which took several years, gave it form and meaning. I began to see how things fit together into a coherent whole. As I wrote, I was often surprised with unexpected gifts of insight. The excavating of memory also brought to the surface long-buried emotions, gave them breath, and helped me heal. For the longest time, the shape of the story was elusive. It refused to be defined, and its parameters shape-shifted with every attempt to pin it down. The story had an energy and momentum of its own, and could not be rushed. There was more yet to unfold. I began to see that my life as it was being lived was the story, and an invisible rudder was steering the course of its emergence. Most of all, I learned that the place that called me home is as integral as the journey itself.

As the pieces of my story were assembled into a tapestry, I pondered the nature of time. When I posed the question of where it began,

another possibility presented itself. The narrative could start anywhere. The final pattern developed as themes, so the book is composed of five parts.

Part One sets the context of leaving home and my introduction to the body of ancient spiritual knowledge and practice called shamanism. In Part Two, I describe the major initiations along this new path, as many aspects of my old life and reality fell away. Part Three tells about the role of my ancestors and how they brought me back to the place of my birth, and the greatest shamanic rite, death and transition to the world of spirit. The mountains loom front and centre in Part Four where I recount the teachings of the stone people as they made their wisdom and power known in unmistakable ways. In Part Five, I celebrate my deepening relationship with our fellow creatures, the animals, and how I came to understand their role as evolutionary masters and teachers on the Earth.

Once upon a time, long-ago, the great landmasses on Earth were connected; the most recent time in a supercontinent called Pangaea. The geology of the island of Newfoundland tells the story of how continents collided and separated over millions of years. I see in the physical Earth's evolutionary history of separation and reunification a perfect allegory for the shift of consciousness that I experienced, and which I believe to be our collective human birthright, and most importantly, our destiny.

While facts can be verified, that is, other people shared in the creating of them, my story is subject to the passage of time and memory. That said, I recorded most of the events, dreams, and visions in personal journals. None of the story that follows is intentionally fabricated. I did my best to stay true to what happened and convey the order in which they occurred. I revisit some events in later sections, fleshing out the narrative from a different perspective. In the interests of privacy, certain facts and names that could identify individuals have been changed or omitted. The warps and weaves of the story are my own.

Newfoundlanders are renowned for their hospitality. Not too long ago, before cellphones and email, one never knew who could show up at mealtime. Many traditional dishes are cooked in a single pot and it was common to add an extra serving—one for the pot. The image of a communal dish and the tradition of preparing for the unexpected visitor speaks to me of sharing whatever you have, no matter how humble—a practice that hearkens to a time and place, not too long ago nor

far away, when strangers were welcomed as bringers of news from afar, who brought blessings upon your home.

These concepts have stuck with me. When I envisioned this book, I imagined a story that would inspire others to recognize the mythic nature of their unique life journey, and spiritual interconnections with all of life. It is my hope that sharing my story will confirm your own mystical experiences, and throw open doors to the wisdom and sacredness of the natural world.

May this telling be the unexpected visitor, showing up at your door with news to uplift your heart and mind. I trust it will affirm your soul's promptings to follow your heart, and help you find your way home to the place you truly belong. Sending sweetest blessings on your journey.

—Alison Normore, Bonne Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador

PART ONE

❧ Initiation ❧

When you open your heart to discovery, you will be called to step outside the comfort barriers within which you have fortified your life. You will be called to risk old views and thoughts and to step off the circle of routine and image. This will often bring turbulence.... But your soul loves the danger of growth.

—John O'Donohue

A Circle is Cast

WINTER SOLSTICE, 2002—the darkest day of the year. Outside, under a full moon, the wind and snow whip up a blizzard but inside a magical feast is underway. Six flower-crowned women sit around a dining table set with a white-lace cloth found in a gypsy market in Portugal. Six place settings of fine bone china with tiny green and yellow flowers, a legacy of lost marital bliss, are set before six chairs. Crystal wine glasses sparkle, and white candles glow in a gleaming silver candelabra. Animated conversation is interwoven with laughter. We are getting to know one another, sharing our lives and passions. We open like large exotic flowers. We talk about the feminine deities who capture our imagination, who we identify with, and whose qualities we are drawn to embody. I choose Athena for her wisdom, and also because I'd recently been given an owl feather, the goddess's animal totem.

The women are old and new friends who eagerly accept my invitation for a solstice celebration. One woman helps me fashion fresh flowers into tiaras for the goddesses. The only instruction I give is to bring food they love to eat. As each woman arrives with her potluck offering, a perfect meal manifests. A seafood theme materializes on green and yellow flowered plates—scrumptious cream cheese and shrimp appetizers, seafood casserole, Caesar salad, lemon squares, and chocolate mousse for dessert.

After such a divinely inspired dinner, we gather around the fireplace for a ritual. One at a time we speak aloud, with growing confidence, our dreams and wishes, and write them on tiny pieces of white tissue paper. Mine is for a summer place in Newfoundland. We place our papers in the fire, watching them ignite and turn to ash. While the storm rages outside on this longest night of the year, we talk long into the night, in the crackling glow of the fire, about the revival of

divine feminine spiritual traditions. We make a pact to meet again to explore the healing rituals of women's circles, and set a date for our next gathering.

Over the coming months, other women, including my sister, join us at each full moon. We read Jean Shinoda Bolen's book *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and the World*. We are inspired by the idea of helping shift planetary consciousness. My oldest sister, a gifted intuitive, guides us in a visualization to energize our prayers and send healing light to the Earth. The group begins to report positive changes in their lives, which we attribute to the energy and intention of the gatherings. A woman who desires a romantic relationship receives an unexpected phone call from a childhood friend in France, and within the year they are married.

The circle becomes a safe haven where we can show up authentically and issues of power and voice arise as part of the group process. As the oldest child of divorced parents, I have a tendency to keep things together. My creed is harmony at all costs, and while not always the best way of dealing with differences, it is my default. I'll run a country mile to avoid a conflict. Perhaps it is Athena working through me, but I find myself advocating for more equitable allocation of space and time in the circle. We decide to offer a workshop to share our circle experiences with other women. It is well received and so we plan another for the fall after our return from Ireland.

The Ireland trip is my sister's idea. She had chosen Brigid as her patron goddess, and six of our group decide to visit the home of the spiritual mother of the Celts. We plan to visit her sacred sites and stay at Ballaughmore Castle, a fifteenth-century castle in county Laois, in the south. A woman in an online web group suggests we have tea with the "head witch" of Ireland. And so, we learn of Olivia Robertson, founder of the goddess movement in Europe and the Fellowship of Isis. Regular post is the only way to contact her, and as our departure date draws near, a letter is quickly drafted and sent by courier.

A couple weeks before the trip, I have a vivid dream. I awake feeling significantly changed. It is hard to describe. My journal entry on August 4, 2002:

I'm at the Bonavista Lighthouse. The tall concrete and wooden building is brilliant. It glows pure white, like it's been recently painted. It's a place I've been before. I retrieve a plate of cookies I'd left in one of the rooms inside the lighthouse, and my

INITIATION

cats. The realization that if I hadn't come back to visit I'd not have remembered where I'd left my cats leaves me both intensely sad and relieved. I begin to sob, releasing deep emotions that I fail to recognize as mine.

A few days before our departure, our letter to Olivia Robertson is returned marked undeliverable. Naturally, we are disappointed, but still excited about the adventure.

My parents moved to Bonavista on the east coast of Newfoundland when I was less than a year old and we spent a year there before moving to another coastal community. After the dream, I have a chat with my mother, and she remembers the lighthouse. This historic town is where the explorer John Cabot first landed in North America in 1497 looking for new lands on behalf of the British Crown. Already inhabited by indigenous peoples, Bonavista becomes a significant hunting and fishery base for Europeans who inhabit it for hundreds of years. The Beothuks, victims of ignorance, illness and greed, fall to history. I have no memory of having lived in or visited Bonavista and it will be a further thirteen years before I visit the lighthouse. When I do, there will be nothing recognizable about my life. By then, I will see my dream as a demonstration of soul retrieval, a shamanic process involving deep metaphysical healing.

The day before our flight, I attend a session with an energy medicine practitioner with whom I'd been working for a few months. The muscle-testing procedure she uses indicates the issue of personal power is active for me, and there are two people to whom I am giving away my power. The first persons who come to mind are two of the closest relationships in my life—my sister and my fiancé. I make the intention to own my own power. The guided visualization to seal this intention makes me feel a bit uneasy, but I go home and finish packing.

Gateway to Heaven

AFTER A SHORT DELAY DUE TO WEATHER, the six of us board our all-night flight and arrive in Dublin early the next day. We pick up two small rental cars, and drive southwest through the undulating countryside to Ballaughmore Castle. Our accommodations are impressive—a fifty-foot stone tower on a hill, surrounded by twenty-five acres of lush trees and fields. A guidebook tells us the tower was built in 1480 by a Gaelic chieftain as a fortress to defend the Old Irish Road.

The first thing we notice as we pull into the courtyard next to the castle is a female pagan symbol carved in stone on the front facing wall. We learn Sheela-na-Gig is considered the Irish Mother Goddess of fertility and rebirth, and is often found on medieval architecture. Inside the castle we discover immense Gothic arches, giant timber beams, exposed stone walls, heavy wooden doors, and a few resident bats. Like excited children, we climb several sets of narrow stone stairs to the turreted top, discover secretive alcoves, tapestried banquet rooms, and a cavernous dining hall complete with an immense stone fireplace. Except for a few lights and toilets, it appears little changed since the fifteenth century. Once settled in, it turns out our delightful hostess, Grace, knows Olivia Robertson. “I’ll ring her up,” she announces, and in short order our visit to meet the head witch of Ireland is confirmed for a few days hence.

After lunch at a nearby pub and grocery shopping in the village of Roscrea, our next priority is Kildare, the legendary home of Saint Brigid. We follow the signs to her sacred well in a garden surrounded by a low fence and fields. Next to the well is an old ash tree covered in prayer rags. A small stream flows from the well along a concrete channel. We make offerings and take pictures and notice an older man sitting quietly on a bench nearby. He reminds me of a leprechaun and I greet him, sensing he may have something to share, and he does. “This

is not the original well. It was moved for the road,” he says, as if this information is the purpose of his being here. He gives us directions to the original one which turns out to be close by and in the middle of a busy roadway. After several attempts, we find a small unmarked area in between the paved roads where water bubbles up from the ground forming a small pool. We make more offerings there, to be sure we have pleased the goddess.

Kildare Cathedral is not far away. Behind the impressive church is the site of Saint Brigid’s Fire Temple where local lore says nuns once kept a fire burning for a thousand years. Across from the Temple is a narrow round stone tower extending into the sky—a breathtaking monument. The sign tells us it was built in the 12th century, is 108 feet high and contains nine windows, each facing a different direction.

Despite a fear of heights, and with a friend guiding me one step at a time, I climb the steep ladders that never seem to end. I’m happy to make it to the top and spectacular views of the countryside. Later I learn that scholars believe these ancient towers, sixty-five of which can be found dotted across the Irish landscape, were designed, constructed, and used for storing terrestrial and cosmic energy. Their apparent random locations mirror the positions of stars in the sky at the winter solstice.

As we purchase woven Brigid crosses in the Cathedral shop, a woman offers directions to the back entrance of the nearby gardens adjoining the Irish National Stud Facility. We locate this back way in easily, accepting the unexpected advice as a surprise gift from the spirits of the place.

I am most drawn to explore the Japanese Gardens featuring a Path of Life that begins with the Cave of Birth, a cavern in a mound of rock crowned with a cherry tree. The stunningly designed trails lead to the Gate of Eternity, through which the soul departs this life. At the centre of the garden stands an elegant tea-room where three of us join hands to form a circle and invoke light. The space around us becomes still, even the birds are silent. Although there are many other tourists in the gardens that day, no one disturbs us. I find many bird feathers on the winding paths, signaling the presence of protective spirits.

Over the next two days we visit other castles and towns, discover old and new stone circles, explore the western shore of Galway, County Kerr, and the cliffs of Mohr. The day arrives for our meeting with Olivia in County Carlow. I don’t know what to expect, however, the woman

we meet for lunch at a pub is lovely and gracious. We sit together on the outdoor patio under a hazy sky and a canopy of trees. We are surrounded by flowering plants trailing down crumbling stone walls and the sound of rushing water from several fountains.

Olivia is the quintessential crone in her flowing purple dress, long black hair parted in the middle, hooked nose, and cast eye. She exudes genuine warmth and curiosity about her Canadian visitors, and our conversation is light and lively. She tells us she was expecting something special to happen, because yesterday was Isis and Horus's celebration day.

After a relaxing and pleasant lunch, we are beyond excited when Olivia invites us back to her home. We follow her to Clonegal Castle, which we learn was originally built by an Irish Clan family in the fifteenth century. The property is known for its lakes and fish ponds, as well as ancient sacred Irish trees. Supposedly haunted by Druids, the castle is surrounded by spectacular formally landscaped gardens that include incongruous palm trees, planted when the grounds were redesigned for a movie set, Olivia explains. We tour lavish main rooms filled with antiques before she leads us to low-ceilinged dungeons below. They've been converted into a temple with five chapels and shrines too numerous to count. Every space and alcove contains an altar dedicated to a feminine deity, and representing cultures from across the globe.

The largest shrine is devoted to Brigid. Olivia assembles us around a central raised covered well, lit by a narrow window. She shakes a rattle, hits a brass cymbal, and intones prayers to invoke the goddess. One by one we receive a water blessing and a personal message. When it's my turn, Olivia looks into my eyes and says, "You will suffer great loss. But the suffering will be your gateway to heaven." I feel unsettled by the unexpected portent.

Upstairs, Olivia creates a Certificate of Charter for our group, explaining that she sees a centre of learning unfolding from our work. We are christened the Lycee of Brigid and Merlin. Olivia inscribes the letters with a black ink pen using formal calligraphy. "It's a great honour, I'll announce it in my next newsletter," she says gravely. She reaches into her desk drawer and takes out a box of crayons. We watch delightedly as she draws child-like pictures in bright colours around the borders of the certificate. As we take our leave with warm hugs all around, Olivia tells us that our visit made her day. That night in my journal, I note that the whole experience felt strange. For the most part,

I put her personal message out of my mind. Thankfully, in the meantime, there are plenty of other distractions.

The next day we take the train into Dublin. But since we can't agree on what to do as a group, my sister and another woman set out with a plan to meet us back at the train station at the end of the day. The four of us remaining are standing on the sidewalk eating breakfast sandwiches and drinking smoothies, wondering where to start, when an older woman stops to ask if we are lost. She instructs us on the most important places to visit—Dublin Castle, Christchurch Cathedral, and Trinity College—and in that specific order, along with explicit directions. We accept this as perfect guidance and set off to do exactly as she says, with a little shopping along the way.

As we enter the courtyard of Dublin Castle, towering above us is a statue of Athena, the Lady of Justice, holding the scales in her left hand and a sword in her right. It is serendipitous. The other etched memory from that day is the *Book of Kells* at Trinity College. The lavishly decorated texts created by Columbian monks in the eighth century seem otherworldly, the images and colours vivid, alive and strangely familiar. Perhaps it's the fluorescent lighting, but to my eyes, the manuscript glows. I have a sudden past life memory of being a scribe in a monastery on the Isle of Iona. I know these pages intimately.

Back on Dublin's cobblestone streets I wander into a tiny shop filled with handmade crafts. A freckled red-haired doll dressed in a green sweater decorated with a shamrock beckons me from the crowded shelves. Her name is Brigid. On two separate occasions, we run into the other women. Once we get on a bus to find them inside; another time we meet them in a store. These connections seem unlikely given the size of the city and the innumerable shops and pubs. Near the end of the day one of the women realizes she lost her newly purchased Celtic drum. It is miraculously recovered, kept safe by the owner of the shop where it had been left. We each find a treasured memento to take home. Later I note in my journal that I was surprised the day flowed so easily, it was as if we were guided and connected, even when apart.

Our last full day in Ireland we head for the Hill of Tara, the burial place of the ancient kings. Throughout the week, I'd been acutely aware of the group's dynamics; the push and pull of strong independent women travelling together. This last morning, I notice that everyone is feeling particularly emotional. It has been a full and magical week. It will be hard to leave. After our morning circle and meditation led by my sister, I offer to lead the group in a sacred circle dance, thinking it

will help lift our spirits. We do this, but I sense disapproval from my sister and in the car one of my friends expresses hers as well, chiding me for stepping in.

By the time we arrive at the Hill of Tara, I feel quite distressed and preoccupied with the thought I have upset the group's harmony, and that my sister is angry with me. I remember little of that day's outing except that our guide around the site is a delightful Irish lass whose hauntingly familiar dialect reminds me of my island birthplace.

Two of the women depart for flights back home that evening, and I have time to reflect in my journal on "the power of this place, and my return to real life." Climbing up to the roof of the castle for much-needed perspective, I sit on a stone wall overlooking the grassy fields and hills of Laois County. A gentle warm breeze is blowing and while it has been cloudy all day, the sun now breaks through and the landscape brightens with a golden light, in sharp contrast to my mood. As my eyes scan the fields below, a white rabbit runs out from behind towering oak trees and across the green lawn. It wanders not too far from the shelter of the trees, but enough that I see occasional bright flashes flitting through the pasture. Notes from my journal, August 29, 2002, Ballaughmore Castle, Ireland:

Still feeling shaky. Not sure what to make of this day, this week, my relationships, my life. Feeling too much of everyone's emotions when mine are more than enough. I'd hoped for clarity on this trip but I don't have it yet. In fact, now I'm unsure of even the things I thought I knew.

That night I barely sleep, tossing and turning with strange dreams. In the dark of the early morning, the remaining four of us leave the castle and drive to the airport. The tense disconnect with my sister is still apparent. I feel confused, exhausted, and scattered. The several-hour wait at the airport gives me time to gather myself. By the time we board the plane, I feel a little calmer but rest fitfully on the flight home. I sense that a pattern between my sister and I, perhaps lifetimes' old, has been shifted by the events in Ireland. This change is now set in motion and all I can do is watch it unfold. Somewhere deep inside, beneath my swirling thoughts and confusing feelings, is a measure of acceptance and surrender.

Leaving Home

AGROWING AWARENESS of multiple levels of reality set the stage for my introduction to indigenous ways of wisdom and eventually take me back to the place where I was born. In the big picture, I suspect this story is lifetimes in the making.

I left Newfoundland in my early thirties for graduate studies in Ontario. Apart from my immediate family I maintained only a few significant friendships back on The Rock—an affectionate term for the island of Newfoundland, which is a rocky, mineral rich terrain. There is no specific place that feels like home. My family moved often because of my father's job as a social worker. By age sixteen when I graduated from high school, our family had lived in thirteen houses and in six different communities. I had lots of memories and connections but no deep ties to any of those places. My dreams, however, told another story. In the dreamtime I returned to homes where I lived, and apparently where parts of me lingered still. Gathering those pieces will take a while.

I married at twenty and shortly after starting university at twenty-eight, my marriage ended. This opened up new broader horizons, including the possibility of leaving the island for graduate school. In the midst of endless choices, a direction became clear. Events and people conspired to guide my next steps. A friend introduced me to a former graduate of the University of Guelph. Phone calls and visits were arranged. The place and program felt right, and before long my acceptance letter arrived in the mail. My eldest sister and her husband decided to move to Guelph too, and found a house for us to live in. All the pieces fell into place.

I travelled light. All the stuff from dismantling a household was sold or given away. What was left fit easily into my Honda Civic. A friend flew from Toronto to drive back with me. On the way across

the island we make a spontaneous stop at my old high school in Grand Falls. There is only one other car in the parking lot that balmy August afternoon. As I pose for a picture on the entrance steps, a man comes through the front doors who I recognize as the brother of a childhood friend. He says his younger brother is now living in Ontario, although the name of the town means nothing to me at that moment. This meeting is an unlikely coincidence, especially since my childhood friend has been a consistent character in my dreams for many years.

I leave Newfoundland with mixed feelings—excitement and anticipation for what is to come but also sadness as I leave behind what I see as a “failed” marriage, close friends, and family, including a doomed romance.

The first months in southern Ontario are strange and exhilarating. Life moves faster. There is more of everything: roads, cars, houses, high-rises, malls, concerts, and people. In contrast to home, the flat landscape in late August is hot and bright and immaculately arranged flowers grow in abundance everywhere. Yet the expansive manicured green lawns are strangely empty. My new neighbours are curiously always out of sight and I wonder when they tend their perfect gardens. Perhaps gardeners descend in the night or early morning hours.

The store-bought jam is suspiciously red and short of berries. The food tastes bland. Most of all, I miss the mountains and the ocean, the wind and the rain. It takes time to realize I also miss the rugged unpredictability of the landscapes and wild weather, the raw unpretentiousness and dry self-deprecating humour of Newfoundlanders. My body adjusts to the food although never grows accustomed to hot humid days bereft of a cooling draft of wind. I surrender gratefully to air conditioning.

I become accustomed to a new social etiquette. I notice that people take a step back from me. At first, I wonder if I smell different, but discover I’m standing too close for comfort. Physical contact is another social no-no there. Mainlanders (a term used to refer to anyone not from Newfoundland) are clearly not okay with the gentle playful slap or nudge, usually accompanied with a laugh or wry joke which is a normal part of social interaction back home.

It takes an inordinately long time for people to warm up enough to talk to me about their personal lives outside of work. My stories of what happened at home on the weekend are likely to be met with awkward silences and quick changes of topic. I’m accustomed to hanging out with my professors, sharing a table in the cafeteria at

lunchtime, and socializing in the local pub after class. Here the students meet together at the pub, and socializing with instructors is rare and formal. It is a new world with a different rhythm and tone, and I feel like a fish out of water.

I adapt, of course. I make friends among the graduate students, learn how to keep step with my new companions, and not to take things too personally. "My people," as I begin to think of them, are a culture apart, a distinct breed. Soon other siblings and cousins move into our rented older two-storied house close to downtown. It is comforting and challenging to live with grown siblings who I have to get to know again. Yet I understand why immigrants stick together. It eased the transition.

The sound of a telltale dialect, song or news story about Newfoundland causes me to well up with emotion. Homesick, I note, pleasantly surprised to feel a new kinship with others who long for home. When a white seal stuffed toy arrives in the mail, I cry because seals had never occupied any special place in my heart before, but now they are a sweet reminder of what I've left behind.

In the meantime, I come to see beauty in the gentle rolling fields given over to agriculture, appreciate the consistent sunshine and lengthy growing season, and I fall in love with the grand old walnut tree standing protectively at the side of the house.

My family and I make friends with the ghosts of our rented home and paint the walls bright new colours. We plan parties with the cousins, make "Jiggs dinner," a favourite Newfoundland meal of root vegetables, cabbage, salt beef and yellow split peas cooked together in the same pot, and dance to traditional music suddenly dear and familiar. I discover and make frequent nostalgic trips to the "Newfie store" to buy salted cod and brewis, the makings of another traditional Newfoundland dish. Brewis is a hard, dry bread, once a staple for fishermen on long voyages at sea. "Fish and brewis" is becoming my favorite meal. In a long-neglected flower bed against the side of the backyard shed, I plant pink impatiens and dusty miller, encircling them with rocks dug from the garden soil.

During the first week of university orientation, I attend a seminar on coping with the inevitable stress of graduate school. The instructor leads us in a guided meditation to an inner place of retreat. To my surprise and without prompting, a woman I neither recognize nor remember in real life appears in my imagined inner meadow. She is seated and relaxed, as if she's always been there, waiting for me. Her

smooth shiny white hair is pulled back loosely into a bun at the nape of her neck, her body is solid, her smiling face and eyes exude love and wisdom.

During my early adult years, I'd often longed for a counsellor to talk with, to help sort out my tangled thoughts and feelings, but this is my first experience of the power of the subconscious. Over the years of graduate studies, I will often pick up my journal and begin a conversation with the Wise Old Woman, who I call WOW for short. She is always waiting in the meadow and her responses to my questions affirm that I am loved and all is well. This perhaps lays the foundation for an even greater expansion of consciousness about the invisible realms that comes a few years later.

While I notice coincidences, and want to believe something greater is at work below the surface, my sceptical self is cultivated by an immersion in academic environments and our predominantly rationalist and materialist Western culture. Yet at significant crossroads in my life, unpredictable events and chance meetings lead me to conclude there is something more going on than I can readily perceive. Not to mention the miraculous circumstances that bring me through multiple medical emergencies arising from having Type 1 diabetes, diagnosed at nine years old. I suspect dreams are also evidence of this invisible realm and I need to be alert and pay attention. "I'm on the breadcrumb trail," friends could hear me say.

A Natural Playground

GROWING UP IN RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND, my playground was the woods, the rivers, and coastal shores where I had enormous freedom to explore. Like other children, in the fall, winter, spring, and summer, regardless of weather, I spent most of my time outdoors. Each season had its delights. Spring brings luscious wet mud to play with and puddles to splash in. Warm summer breezes carry bright flowers and freedom. Fall's bounty, my favorite time, offers crisp air, tangy wild fruits, and gold and red leaves rustling underfoot. In winter, the prospect of being the first to make tracks in newly fallen snow makes me so excited I can hardly wait to go outside. I spend hours creating snow houses, hideaways among the tuckamores, exploring the forests, rivers, and shores.

Tuckamore is a name given to coastal white spruce and balsam fir trees shaped by the storms, onshore winds, and salt spray. Because growth occurs only on the protected side of the trees, they seem to lean away from the sea as they grow and become a contorted tuckamore forest, a unique feature of the landscape of the Great Northern Peninsula where I was born and lived for parts of my childhood. We climb trees, pick berries, eat leaves, chew frankum gum (the hardened sap of the balsam fir tree), and learn from other children what is edible and what is not. In an age before telecommunication technology, with television not yet a fixture in my home, the natural world with its endless variety of berries, plants, sticks, stones, and shells is my vast playground. Each thing becomes whatever my imagination needs it to be in the moment.

Hopscotch and outdoor games are a popular activity during my school-age years, and we play until dark or the voice of someone's mother draws us reluctantly home. The scents, sounds, and shades of sweet tangy green forests, lush spongy bogs, sweet wild berries, wild

flowers in profusion, seagulls, rotting fish, salty riotous wind, and rain—the endless expressions of nature—are not merely the backdrop of my childhood but are infused deeply into my soul.

As a teenager and into adulthood, in times of confusion and distress I always turn to nature. Now I see how solace and clarity arrives in the sight and sound of waves crashing on the shore, the steady deep voice of a river or the quiet enduring presence of the boreal forest, the rustling of aspens, the cheerful bright innocence of birches, and especially, the songs of birds—robins in spring, the clear siren call of sparrows, the incessant cawing of crows, and the soaring shriek of seagulls.

Connection with nature also comes later from cultivating plants and gardens, getting my hands into soil, and the satisfaction of seeing things grow. In a seventeenth-century literature class the romantic poetry of Wordsworth awakens this sensibility and give voice to what lay under the surface. From the poem *Tintern Abby*:

... Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains, and of all that we behold
 From this green earth, of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear—both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

—William Wordsworth

DREAMS AS PORTALS

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN INTELLECTUAL EXPLORER, reading voraciously since I was a child, so finding my groove in university studies as a mature student is not a surprise. Before the internet I'd comb the libraries of wherever I lived for new reading material. After moving to Corner Brook for college at sixteen years old, I discover New-Age books, often in the occult section of the bookstore. I devour them fur-tively. Holistic and alternative health, energy medicine, critical studies, ET and UFO phenomena, ancient civilizations, mystical traditions, and near-death experiences find their way onto my reading list. When I move to Ontario, a plethora of new teachers and resources await me. I excitedly sign up for yoga and meditation classes.

What is unexpected is how unfulfilling academic work eventually becomes. While my graduate school colleagues plan their futures in university teaching and research, I'm increasingly sure the academic path is not for me. It doesn't feed my creative and freedom-loving soul. I've had my fill of intellectualizing. It has been a challenging learning experience but I have grown bored of what is for me, a limited way to perceive and exist in the world. While I'm determined to finish the doctoral program, I yearn for more.

Practical grounded work, applying what I have learned and making a difference in people's lives had been my deeper calling and one of the reasons for starting university in the first place. After twelve years in academia, including seven years of graduate study without a break, I'm exhausted and aware of how out of balance my lifestyle is. It is time for a different focus—to nurture and develop my creative and intuitive nature, to integrate and put to use what I have learned. A period of recovery from academic life begins. One of my first steps is to read *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* by Julia Cameron. It sets out a program of daily journalling, questions for

reflection, and processes for unblocking creative potential. While I'd always had dreams, and remembered certain ones from early childhood, for the first time, I begin to record them consistently.

During the fall after defending my doctoral dissertation, I get up early in the predawn to sit in a favourite blue wingback chair in the quiet suburban house I share with my fiancé. On those quiet mornings, I record my nocturnal experiences and meditate, inviting my mind to stillness. Images and insights come during these meditations, as well as during the in-between times of waking or falling asleep. While I'd recorded a few dreams over the years, my dreamscapes are largely unexplored territory. Opening to the possibility that dreams bring insight and guidance to my life, I begin to pay closer attention. A journal entry from those early days reads:

My thoughts are confused, there's a need to connect things... the connection is love, alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. That is the answer to a puzzling question as I awake. It's all about love, and what I think of as God IS love.

Certain dreams I can understand as my mind processing events from daily life. Other dreams are vivid and move me profoundly. On Christmas morning this same year a significant dream awakens me to the possibility of a spiritual purpose for my life. My journal reads:

This morning a dream I can't remember except it is related to why we're all here, the fundamental reason for life—it is to learn and grow in relationship with each other. In the dream, I went back in time and space and changed in an essential way. It is difficult to describe this experience. The closest words are unity, oneness. In the dream I know and see things clearly. Once awake I know I've been given a tremendous gift of understanding. An expansive feeling stays with me for a while but fades with the morning light.

I'd been having a series of recurring dreams that unfolded like episodes in a story. I reflect on the significance of people and places in the dreams. One recurring figure is the friend from early childhood who lived directly across the road during my preschool years, and who I'd learned now lives twenty minutes away. He'd been my first love. A few months older than I, he'd gone to kindergarten before me, leaving me at home feeling lonely and abandoned. I'm nervous making that

first call, but fortified with a glass of wine and my younger sister's sage advice to "remember who you are," I muster the courage.

We have a wonderful conversation. I confess my long-time crush and tell him how he fanned the flames of my love affair with learning by sharing his schoolwork with me. He shares his memories of playing together, how we'd chased wild rabbits through the woods near our homes. The reminiscences are sweet and interspersed with wry laughter about our lost innocence and aging. After this conversation, my dreams of him stop, as if the loose ends of this significant childhood relationship are finally tied up and I can move on.

I begin to appreciate the deeper meaning and fabric of the inner life that reveals itself in the dreamtime. It is as if there is someone else inside me with a life different from the one I live day-to-day, and I'm getting to know her better and trust her guidance. The idea of spirit helpers and guardian angels is intriguing, and while I want it to be true, my rational mind demands evidence. That Christmas I receive multiple angel gifts from friends and relatives. It is synchronistic because certain ones have no knowledge of my spiritual interests. I take it as a sign.

I often identified with the doubting Thomas of biblical times and so make a deal with the invisible realms, or whoever may be listening—If you, in fact, exist and are helping me, I need evidence. If there's something you want me to know, you have to send the message to me at least three times. Aware of my preoccupations, distractions, and scepticism, I reasoned, the first time I may not even notice. Being particularly sensitive to repetition, the second time will get my attention. The third time will be my sign to take the message seriously.

Nature as Healer

THAT WINTER, AFTER FINISHING MY DOCTORATE and accepting another research job, I begin to exhibit symptoms of burnout. I need a therapist to point out that the headaches, insomnia, mental, and emotional exhaustion are my body's way of saying enough. This is the first long-term therapeutic relationship where I'm ready to share my life experience. With the therapist's help, I tap into deep wells of sadness and tell her if I start to cry, I'm afraid I'll never stop. She suggests it may be time to process long-held grief accumulated like so much baggage along the road of life, to take time from my work to do this and consider my next steps.

After talking it over with my fiancé, I resign from the research job and sign up for gardening classes, throwing myself into designing a landscape plan for the backyard of our new home, by learning about annuals and perennials, sun exposure, and soil composition. As the ground warms, I dig flower beds and line paths with rocks. My fiancé and I gather and move wheelbarrows full of stones, topsoil, and truckloads of mushroom compost. We dig a small vegetable plot and lay a flagstone patio with a water feature in the centre. I call one of the flower beds "the prayer garden" because of the many hours I spend on my knees there. A corner plot under the shade of a large neighbouring maple tree becomes "the Newfoundland corner." There I plant things that remind me of home—potentilla, blueberry, gooseberry and raspberry bushes, spreading juniper.

While thoughts of work fade, I spend long bright spring days in the backyard until the dimming light forces me inside. I discover a love for the English country garden and aromatic plants, finding places for fruit trees, shrub and climbing roses, daisies, foxglove, solomon's seal, and evening primrose. Combing the many nurseries in the area becomes my new pastime, and many more plants find their way to my

garden—violets, carnations, delphiniums, lavender, peonies, lily of the valley, and clematis vines among them. The garden takes shape and by the following summer it explodes with growth, colour, and fragrance. Visitors are amazed how the garden has matured in only one season. My gardening instructor attributes the unusual maturation to a micro-climate, while friends comment that clearly a green thumb is at work. I'm learning to listen to the plants.

A few months later, in the fall of 1999, I feel renewed enough to take on a sessional teaching position at the university and in the winter, am offered a research contract in Toronto. Commuting for four hours a day, I continue my explorations into spiritual topics, journalling, and meditation. In April, 2000, my sister invites me and our sister to join her at Findhorn for a conference on angels. The location is an intentional spiritual community, learning center, and ecovillage formed in the 1970s, located in the north of Scotland.

Looking at the conference lineup, a few workshop topics jump out, such as "Dances of the Great Mother," a workshop facilitated by Laura Shannon, an internationally known teacher of traditional women's dance. To my surprise the presenters are not the flakey New-Age types I'd expected, but credible educated professionals at the cutting edge of ancient wisdom and spiritual healing for the modern world. Sandra Ingerman is a well-known psychologist and teacher of shamanism. Wondering how this topic fits into a conference on angels, I'm intrigued enough to attend her session and buy her book on soul retrieval. It is a bit like visiting a foreign country, interesting but I can't imagine living there. At the first opportunity, I give the book away. Out of sight and out of mind, for now.

During a period of commuting for work from Guelph to downtown Toronto, I write this poem:

Unexpected Joy on Yonge Street

Walking, temporarily freed from my Bay and Bloor office tower,
 I see a larger-than-life, red-brown horse with heavy iron-clad hoofs
 Effortlessly echoing on gray concrete and slick shiny black asphalt;
 A mythic creature emerging from the mists of Platonía.
 As fluorescent signs flash erratically along endless tacky shop fronts
 A sudden fire-red truck with a screeching siren careens around the corner,
 Making painful progress through bumper-to-bumper metal
 Carrying someone I imagine clinging precariously close to death.
 The pressed sidewalk filled to overflowing with oblivious chattering

RETURN TO PANGAEA

Pointing tourists with video cameras,
And a steady stream of end of day pedestrians resolute,
Focused distantly on home.
Riveted now by the metronome footpace of a great Trojan horse
Clunk-clopping towards me, its uniformed rider swaying
In synchronized rhythm, as the sidewalk sea parts.
As close and welcome to this traveller as a desert oasis
After a lifetime of walking on blistering sand.
One longing look into deep dark liquid eyes that see I wonder what.
Velvet antennae ears that take what I wonder all in.
A warm earthen rippling body reflecting glimmering sunlight.
A sudden vision of sparkling blue ocean, and my surprised heart
Opens on a late summer day in the city.

Message From the Future

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, I'm at work downtown Toronto, watching with disbelief the surreal scenes of the Twin Towers crumbling as a deep calm place inside me registers that the world will never be the same. The events that day cause me to reflect on my choices and priorities. The end of my research contract is looming with the realization that while I enjoy the work, and am fairly competent, my heart isn't in it. A career counsellor helps me see I do not want a regular job but I can't imagine what else I can do. I have explored alternative health and energy medicine modalities, and have a sense there is something else I'm supposed to do. It hasn't found me yet. Shortly before Christmas, my sister tells me about an intuitive reader she's heard of who channels messages from spirit guides. The next day my three questions, cheque, and hope are in the mail.

The cassette tape of the reading arrives a couple weeks later, along with two small smooth stones, one with a painted deer, and a feather from a snowy owl. Standing at the kitchen counter listening to the recorded session, the content is both fascinating and amazingly accurate. The intuitive identifies the core wound that is calling me to a healing path—a loss of sweetness and joy that had caused me to develop juvenile diabetes at the age of nine. This is a connection made by Louise Hay in her book *You Can Heal Your Life*. The reading also describes one of my spirit guides as a native medicine man. Of more interest to me at the time is specific career guidance. She sees me “working with children as a play therapist in a school that's not a school, and a classroom that's not a classroom.”

Helping children heal from trauma was what inspired me to start university in my late twenties, something the intuitive could not have known. It was after I read the book *Dibs in Search of Self* by Virginia Axline, a classic in the field of child therapy. My undergraduate

degree in primary school education focused on child development, and my graduate studies focused on children at risk. Children's picture storybooks had been gathering on my shelves since taking a children's literature class in my undergraduate program, as well as the basic equipment for a therapy playroom. It is a perfect fit for me and so obvious I wonder why I didn't put it together before. It is what I call a *duh* moment.

When I began university back in Newfoundland, I envisioned working with children in school settings in a helping capacity, as a counsellor or educational psychologist. On high school career days, the main occupations open to girls then were: teacher, nurse or secretary. I remember getting a nurse's kit for Christmas when I was seven. It was a disappointment because the doctor kit had more interesting things in it. That was an early sign of what became a mostly quiet rebellion against culturally prescribed norms. Once in university, I entertained a wider range of career possibilities. And the shift from primary prevention and community research to counselling was a natural one. As a counsellor, I could help children and families in a more direct way. The foundation of my therapy practice would be a blend of story, art, and play.

With renewed focus and enthusiasm, I now consulted professionals, sign up for additional training in a variety of therapeutic play modalities, and begin looking for office space. In exchange for clinical supervision, I spend one day a week volunteering at a mental health clinic and get a job as a child and youth crisis worker. Sand tray training takes me cross country to Vancouver Island where I fall in love with the rows of tiny figures on shelves lining the walls, baskets of materials, sticks and stones, shells and fabrics, and multi-coloured boxes of sand in the therapy room. It is like being in the kindergarten I dreamt of but never had in the tiny two-room school where I began my formal education.

The depth of insight and feeling brought forth by the sand play processes amaze and delight me with the possibility of healing. One sand tray scene I create is of an ocean shoreline dominated by a lighthouse, large water worn stones, blue-green foamy sea with whales, seals, and polar bears. As the class reflects on the connection of the scene with my east coast island home, the teacher asks why I don't live there. I say "There's nothing to go back to." I believe it.

Once home in Ontario, I proceed with preparations to hang my shingle as a play therapist in a tiny office-cum-playroom in downtown

INITIATION

Guelph. Almost nine months from the day I received the reading in the mail, a new work opportunity appears and the next phase of my professional career begins.

My first clients come from a newly-opened treatment facility for children located in a renovated school outside town. The director hires me on the spot. Driving away from the interview, past an old church, I hear what sounds like a choir singing. A quick glance reveals an empty parking lot. My immediate thought is 'My guardian angels are celebrating.' The next ten years finds me offering play therapy to children and youth in classrooms that are converted into multi-purpose therapy rooms. It will be the most challenging and rewarding work of my life. During this period, I will delve even deeper into the spiritual healing traditions of indigenous cultures that anthropologists called shamanism. This next part of my path begins on the heels of the trip to Ireland. It is a difficult transition period when many aspects of my old life fall away.

PART TWO

❧ Moon Reflections ❧

Some nights stay up till dawn, as the moon sometimes does for the sun. Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way of a well, then lifted out into light.

—Rumi

Loss and Transition

THE MONTHS FOLLOWING MY RETURN from Ireland are, as predicted by Olivia Robertson, a period of loss and transition, personally and professionally. Back at home it is clear my relationship with my fiancé is also in crisis. In characteristic fashion, I'd avoided the conversation, not ready for what may come, or have to go. Attempts to talk and resolve things with my sister fail to help; she withdraws somewhere beyond my reach. I'm unable to communicate how I feel—a confusing mix of sadness, guilt, fear, and anger. Discussions with friends and a counsellor help to sort things out in my own mind and calm my distress, but the relationship with my sister becomes more distant. The goddess circle unravels and though my friendships with certain of the women continue into the next decades, our group never meets again.

My fiancé and I start counselling and stay together for another year, giving me time to become more stable, and for us to part on amicable terms. Leaving the beautiful home and garden we created together is painful—a lot of time, love, and energy went into it. Seeing our home now with eyes made appreciative by virtue of imminent loss, I couldn't have loved it more.

My heart rejoices in the pungent evening flower fragrance of the climbing honeysuckle vine wafting through the dining room window. I watch the ornamental pear trees blossom that spring, admire the floribunda roses tumbling down to the Earth, and the iridescent blue delphiniums reaching their brilliant double flower necks past the top of the deck by midsummer. Their persistent after-winter emergence and beauty reassures me that no matter what, life will carry on. I decide that after ten years in a marriage, and another ten years in this relationship, the next ten years will be devoted to getting to know myself better.

Morning yoga and meditation practice help still my anxious mind and calm the stress of change and loss. When I awake at night

and can't fall back to sleep, one of the recordings I listen to is a ninety-minute guided meditation called *Anchoring Your Lightbody*, by Aeolia. Around this time, I begin to have out-of-body experiences. I become aware of my consciousness as separate from my physical body. During lucid dreams I'm aware of flying into space, over surreal vivid landscapes, through expansive, unusual buildings covered with Egyptian hieroglyphs.

I learn it is possible to navigate in these spaces with intention, that "I" can go through walls. My mind can pose a question and it will be answered with another illuminating experience. At times I feel afraid, not knowing what is happening or if I can get back. But as soon as I register a thought of fear, a warm presence envelops my back, like the wings of a great angel enfolding and reassuring me I'm not alone. These altered-state experiences open my mind wide to the existence of other dimensions of reality beyond the physical. I'm fascinated and want to learn more.

Our house goes on the market that fall and sells quickly with a closing date in February. Instead of the usual Christmas entertaining during a particularly intense and difficult winter, my younger sister helps me pack dishes and personal belongings. Scouring newspapers for a place to live is disheartening. It appears that in this university town in mid-winter there isn't an apartment to be found that isn't dingy or dark. My counsellor is optimistic. "I see you living in a house with red flower boxes, on rolling hills in the country," she says. It sounds idyllic. The only thing available remotely similar is a shared living situation in a big ranch-style house on a rise overlooking a tree-lined river. It's located half-way between my two workplaces. There are no flower boxes and the inside is a little unkempt, but I need to move as soon as possible. There is at least one point of commonality with the owner; he has spent time in an ashram and practices yoga and meditation.

The truth is I don't feel comfortable in the new house from the beginning, but it was the most attractive option I could see. I was born under the sign of Taurus, and both the sun and the moon were in the sign of the bull the day I made my appearance in this world. A fixed Earth sign, it can explain why I sometimes stay in situations longer than is necessary or healthy, and once I make a decision, stubbornly stick to it. This tendency had been pointed out to me before, but it will be a while before I see the pattern clearly in terms of its gifts and challenges. In the meantime, my new bedroom has two large windows and

en-suite bathroom. My sister helps me paint the rooms a fresh bright green.

My new private practice demands long hours and with the commute to two workplaces means I spend little time at home. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the relationship with my new roommate becomes strained. Rather than address the issue directly, I practice my usual conflict avoidance until he becomes angry and confronting. I always locked my bedroom door before going to sleep, but one night I awake to his energetic presence hovering over me as I lie in bed, unable to move my limbs or make any sound. While I had heard of such things, this is a new and frightening experience. I was uncomfortable before, and now worry about my safety.

Thinking my two cats are better off in a familiar place, I'd left them with my ex-fiancé when I moved. One of the cats gets sick, and an astute vet says Button is stressed because he is missing me and doesn't know where I am. Button is a black-and-white three-legged stray I'd rescued from the wharf in Port aux Basques one frosty winter thirteen years before. He was huddled under the hood on a warm engine and lost his leg when the oblivious driver started his truck—leaving only a short bone sticking out of his left front shoulder. Button had been through a lot, and I couldn't abandon him again, so I bring both cats to the new place. They don't like the atmosphere either, sticking close to me, rarely leaving my bedroom.

It is during this time, within months of the breakup with my fiancé, that my eldest sister leaves the country and severs all ties. Her unexpected departure stirs up unresolved emotions which I handle by throwing myself into work even more. For a long while I feel responsible. I worry that her leaving is my fault, thinking if only I had or hadn't said or done this or that, things could be different. The memory of the session with the energy practitioner before I left for Ireland, in which I intentionally took back the power I had given away, haunts me.

This sister and I share an interest in energy healing and the spiritual realms. She encouraged my explorations, and we'd supported each other's learning and growth, through good times and challenging ones. But there is also a significant feeling of relief with her departure, for which I feel guilty. While we've shared a home, holidays and celebrations over the years, there were currents of tension and distance between us at times that I could never quite bridge. For now, it appears our paths have irrevocably split, and we each have our own journey to take.

When I tap into deeper wells of wisdom, I can sense, and increasingly believe in, the unconditional love that binds us together beyond this human incarnation, that surpasses human understanding, and sets all life free. Still, the absence of my sister and her family from my everyday world is a tremendous loss—a hard one for my human mind and heart to accept.

Unexpectedly, another ending is yet to come. During this same period, a counselling supervisor abruptly terminates our professional relationship without notice, and I think unfairly. This person has been a mentor since the beginning of my play therapy work, and the ending closed the door to the possibility of my being certified as a play therapist, which had been the purpose of our supervisory arrangement. Now I question my future career. A dream during this time gives me insight about the evolving nature of my therapeutic work. Perhaps neither the play therapy field nor the supervisor can hold the space for what needs to emerge. Still, the loss of a mentor's support for what is difficult work could not have come at a worse time.

Looking back with the perspective of one who supports others through crisis, it is obvious that any one of these events is high on the life stress scale. At another level, I know there is a reason for what is happening, that something new will emerge from the ashes. Deeper capacities are being called forth, and my commitment and strength are tested and forged. At times I feel lonely, overwhelmed, and completely out of my depth, but I only know to keep going. In spite of fear and the pain of loss, there is also magic, beauty, and mystery at work in my life.

These circumstances force me to reach out to other people; work colleagues and friends that I ordinarily would not have called upon for support. Admitting my neediness is tough but now I find myself seeking and accepting help. Unexpectedly, useful advice comes from an energy practitioner in an online group I belong to. When I describe what is happening with my roommate, the woman gives me instructions for grounding myself and creating a bubble of protective white light. Surprised to discover the difference this simple practice makes, it becomes part of my daily routine.

A New Door Opens

FINDING ANOTHER PLACE TO LIVE is a priority. Recognizing the importance of a home of my own to my well-being and work, I begin searching. Over a couple of weeks, a realtor helps me find a perfect place. It is a newer townhouse that is closer to both my workplaces. While there are no window boxes, it comes with a garage, Jacuzzi, and built-in cat doors. It is more luxurious than I hoped for, and is a good sign that things are about to shift. The number on the house, 244, is the day and month of my sister's birthday, another good sign. It is spacious and bright, with a small, empty backyard ready for my green thumb. There is only one wrinkle—we can't move in until August, four months away. I wonder how the cats and I will manage till then, but there is no choice but to trust that we will.

During the worst of these months of stressful transition, I'm inexplicably reassured at night by the sight of the moon. In the dark winter nights, as I drive to and from my temporary home, the moon looms large in the sky behind the hill. From the wide window at the head of my bed, the bright face beams directly into the room and I fall asleep comforted by its presence. On a full moon, days before attending my first workshop on shamanism, a dream speaks to me of a happy homecoming. Whales often show up in my dreams, and when they do, I feel inordinately blessed. Unknown to me then is the belief of indigenous peoples that whales and dolphins are our star ancestors, here to help us remember our soul origins and destiny. My journal, May 5, 2004 reads:

I'm on a big ship, a passenger ferry, arriving at Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. The ship begins to toss. I look out the window to see tall waves and six or seven whales lined up as if to greet the ship. Then we are docking. Everyone is surprised. We didn't realize we were so close to shore.

This dream foretold a life-changing event on the horizon that I did not see. Receiving clear guidance from the invisible realms, the three times rule, I sign up for a workshop on shamanism with Alberto Villoldo, founder of the Four Winds Society, an organization that trains Western shamanic practitioners. Many doors had closed in the previous year, but that day a window opens. Alberto shares his own story of coming from academia to ancient wisdom traditions, and leads us in basic exercises in energy sensing and journeying.

Journeying involves a guided meditation to retrieve information from the collective unconscious, called the underworld by indigenous cultures. First, we journey for ourselves, then for someone in the room who we don't know. The specific details I receive for the man sitting nearby, as unlikely and far-fetched as they seem to me, are uncannily right for him.

This blows my mind. How can I have known those details? What part of me knew? I learn that shamans are those in traditional societies who bridge the worlds of matter and spirit; those who know how to navigate the spiritual realms on behalf of their village. As I listen to Alberto talk that day, a knowing comes from somewhere deep inside me that everything in my life (and perhaps beyond) prepared me to be there that day. The window becomes a door, and underneath my racing thoughts is a quiet still voice telling me this is the next step on my path.

Despite the doubts and fears that are arising, and two more moves yet ahead of me, three months later I attend my first training intensive with the Lightbody School of Energy Medicine in Park City, Utah. The group of almost eighty people is intimidating, yet strangely reassuring. From the beginning I'm fascinated and excited by the shamanic cosmology that is inclusive of the feminine aspects of divinity, and acknowledges the sacredness of the natural world. Although so much of the work is new, it is also known in a deep place of memory. Many of the classmates I work with that week also feel oddly familiar, like we've met one another before.

During that first week-long training, there are a couple of defining moments when the realization hits me that this new path requires a commitment to which there is no turning back. I know my life is going to radically change, and I panic. My heart begins to race, my chest and head constrict, and my vision starts to darken. I imagine running out of the room, down the street to my hotel, grabbing my suitcase, and heading home. It takes a huge effort to resist this urge. What stops me is the gripping effect of my physical symptoms and a reluctance to

draw attention to myself. Fortunately, those terrifying moments pass, and by the last day, and for the first time in my life, I feel like I belong.

While I feel trepidation about the road ahead, knowing there is a lot to learn, I also feel excited for the possibilities. In this work I can be truly and fully myself. The sense of kinship with my teachers and classmates is like nothing I've ever known. These are people I can relate to, who truly see me, and with whom I feel accepted and understood. Heightened awareness, emotional sensitivity, and strong intuition, qualities that up to then often made me feel awkward and out of place, are skills that serve me well, in fact are invaluable in this work.

Years later I learn that I fit the profile of a highly sensitive person. Approximately one in five people have extra sensitive nervous systems, and process sensory information in a deeper, more reflective way than others. For now, the shamanic worldview gives meaning and relevance to all my experience and ways of knowing.

Looking back, it is clear I've been preparing for this leap. I've taken training in alternative trauma treatment and energy medicine modalities that are gaining acceptance in the clinical field as the limitations of conventional psychotherapy are becoming evident. In spite of the several brief encounters with shamanism before, I have no real sense of what lies before me. It still feels edgy and mysterious, the ideas strange and improbable, yet compelling. Shamanism is a path of direct revelation. My new teachers will share processes and practices; my work is to cultivate relationships with my spiritual allies and helpers and learn to trust my own experience. I'm now ready for the teachers who can help me bridge the literal, physical, and mental world and the spiritual, energetic, and mythic realms of indigenous cosmology. I dive in.

Indigenous teachings are often organized in the framework of a wheel that sets out the four cardinal directions plus heaven and Earth. It defines what I come to understand as the energetic field of creation. At one level, the medicine wheel is a map for the human journey through life, and at another it describes our collective mythic-spiritual reality. I learn that the forces of creation have their counterparts in physics, biology, and other scientific fields of study. The gap between science and mysticism grows narrower.

My journey through the medicine wheel curriculum begins with intensity and gains momentum. During the next six months, I complete three more classes and take a trip to Peru. Over the next year and a half, I complete the four directions of the medicine wheel and

other courses for certification as an energy medicine practitioner with the Lightbody School. It is a period of intense learning, exploring the landscapes of the spiritual worlds as my dreamtime intensifies and my journey work spills over into everyday life.

Within six months my world has shifted dramatically. My new home gives me the space and solitude needed for the work. Life takes on a new rhythm revolving around the lunar calendar. Having known of the moon cycles and their role in ritual, I'm now encouraged to have fire ceremonies at the full moon. I'm delving into the metaphysical side of nature.

In many traditions the moon holds the energy of the feminine and through her dark cycles, the energy of the unconscious. Known to earlier peoples as the Moon Goddess, the moon rules the movement of all water on Earth—the tides and saps of plants, trees and creatures, carrying life sustaining and regenerating fluids. As the turner of tides, the moon also affects the ebb and flow of emotions that inform the feeling, intuitive, and creative aspects of our being. I learn moon people do a lot of work at night during the dreamtime. It is early days yet, but I suspect I'm a moon person.

Machu Picchu and the Moon

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS AFTER MOVING and beginning shamanic studies, a friend and I join a small group of travellers to Peru to visit sacred sites and spend time with indigenous teachers of the Andes. On the summer solstice (winter in the northern hemisphere), we are visiting Ollantaytambo, a town in the Sacred Valley along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, an impressive Incan ceremonial site. We are up at four in the morning to catch the train, and before sunrise are waiting in the town square for someone with a key to let us into the gated ruins. The area is dominated by vast terraces called the Fortress or Temple Hill. At the base of the terraces are granite carved ceremonial baths, the most famous one called the Princess Bath.

We climb stone steps to the Temple of the Sun as the sky is lightening. Across the valley from the terraces are storehouses and the face of Wiracocha, the Incan deity of creation. My friend and I sit on the stones to meditate and watch the sun rise from between two tall mountains in the east. According to Peruvian wisdom keepers, the first ray is a time to receive a powerful initiation and energetic transmission from the sun deity called Inti.

It is said that when one receives the first ray of the solstice, every intention and prayer he or she carries within the heart will be actualized. Sitting on a smooth rock on the side of the mountain, my heart is filled with gratitude for the many blessings and new learning opportunities that are materializing. I long for peace and happiness, to continue to deepen my understanding of the mystical aspects of life. And I want to make a difference, to contribute what I can uniquely offer, whatever it is, to leave the world a better place.

Later that morning we are introduced to a traditional healer and herbalist living in a white stucco house near the main square. Dona

Julia greets us at the door, smiling broadly and speaking in Spanish, welcomes us into her home. Our guide translates her story. “Mama Kila (Grandmother Moon) woke me from my bed in the middle of the night.” She leads us to a courtyard garden where she raises her arms to the sky and downward around her body, explaining how the white light of the moon poured down, filling and surrounding her. The sudden softness of Dona Julia’s voice and the glow on her face speaks of a profound spiritual experience. She shows us a white stone altar built to mark the site of her initiation. Fresh flowers and statues of Mother Mary and other female deities decorate the altar.

Stepping into the Mythic

I LEARNED THAT PERUVIAN HEALERS spend regular periods of time sleeping and meditating outside under the light of the moon to connect with lunar energy and wisdom. It sounds wonderful and romantic, though improbable. It's been many years since family camping trips in my childhood, and I've grown accustomed to my creature comforts. Nevertheless, I begin a new relationship with the moon, not because I have to, but because it is nurturing. Full moons especially call me to sit out on the back steps and watch it move across a clear night sky, or to walk in the moonlight in order to follow the moon on her nightly transit. There is much about this new path to appreciate. The spiritual connection I feel and long to cultivate with the natural world is finding expression in regular prayer and ceremony.

Rituals, a key part of this time-honoured path, create a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds. I learn how to call on the invisible forces of creation for healing and the restoration of balance. When the moon is high and full, or when her face is hidden become occasions to express longings and desires for love, connection, and fulfillment.

Although I come to enjoy solitude, at times I feel the absence of a mate acutely. One night I have a dream of a man who I meet at school. As we come together in the dream, our energy bodies merge completely in a state of blissful union. In the dream, I know we will be together again. So, one Valentine's Day when the moon is full, I create a ceremony for new love, expressing my desire for this partner who will share my life, a soul-mate relationship. I feel confident it will be only a matter of time before we meet. Over the next few years, two different intuitive readings confirm that my new partner is a blue-eyed man from the west coast; and one of the readings specifies Oregon.

This new world isn't all sweetness and light. It is a conscious moving towards light, illuminating the darkest parts of my own psyche. All spiritual paths, and nature herself teaches us about the dark and shadow aspects of life. Discernment and the ability to see clearly in the dark, even what others say is not there, is the domain and skill of the shamanic practitioner. It is a deep dive into the quintessential nature of reality, the duality of our third dimension, and of human nature itself. The work will bring me face to face with my deepest fears, erroneous beliefs, and unhealthy behaviors. My eyes will be opened wider to the mysteries of life and death.

From the beginning, I felt anxious at outdoor fire rituals, hyper vigilant even in the presence of teachers and large groups of fellow students. I worried not only what others thought of me, but that something bad could happen as a result.

In this tradition, big cats represent the archetypal and protective energy of the west direction, the place of shadows, death, rebirth, and transformation. To one of the classes I wore a jaguar print jacket that my teacher Alberto noticed and commented on. "I need all the help I can get," I told him. "Oh, I don't think so," he responded emphatically, as if he knew something I didn't. His confidence surprised but also reassured me.

Fire ceremonies are one of the key practices, but it will take a long time to feel even a degree of comfort and ease with them. My fearful reactions had no precedent in my current life that I could determine. Dreams revealed past life memories of being persecuted for this work. I knew certain religions continue to identify indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices as suspicious and evil. I suspect there are many layers of these beliefs in my psyche yet to be uncovered.

On this path, the serpent represents the healing energies of the south direction. The archetypal energies of the serpent can be called upon to help us shed old stories and wounds, the way our past traumatic experiences live within us, as the serpent sheds its skin. Over and over again, I ask for help to be free of the past, to be fully present, and to walk with more innocence and joy in the garden of life—the beauty way.

Moon Rituals

A BAG OF DRY FIREWOOD and ceremony supplies take up permanent residence in the trunk of my car. Living in a suburban neighbourhood, finding a place to carry out a fire ritual without attracting attention is sometimes challenging. My first backyard fire brings the scrutiny of curious teenagers next door. I try to be discreet, leave my Peruvian rattle and feathers inside, and quietly hum to myself. Still, it obviously doesn't keep the teenagers from noticing I'm up to something. The boys hang over the fence watching my every move. "What are you doing, Alison?" I mumble that I'm burning old papers. While I'm committed to this path, I'm also sensitive to others' reactions. Another neighbour wastes no time informing me of the town's fire regulations. "Do you have a permit?" As I consider what this could involve, I realize backyard fires are not going to work. After a while my neighbours may lose interest in my rituals, but then I have to worry about the fire department coming to check. I need privacy.

Now I'm on a mission to find a private spot for outdoor fires. After moving to southern Ontario, I realized most of the land is privately owned. The only public spaces are parks. In Newfoundland most of the open space is public land. One never had to go far to walk into the woods, even in a city. There are 29,000 kilometres of coastline and beaches, plenty of space to safely have a solitary fire. But I'm living in a fairly densely populated urban area, and Newfoundland is far away.

That first year I explore many possibilities. While looking for a sacred fire site closer to home, I join a group in Ancaster, an hour's drive away. As summer approaches, I go to an overnight camping park outside the city. I explain to the teenage park attendant, "I want to have a fire but not stay overnight. I'll only be an hour." He looks at me curiously, peering into the car. I hope he sees I'm an ordinary middle-aged woman out to warm her hands over a fire; nothing dangerous or illegal.

Thankfully, he appears to think I'm harmless enough. He points in the direction of the lake. "Stay on this road till you come to the beach. You can have a fire to the left of the public swimming area. There's a sign."

I follow his directions and carry my bundle of sticks and ceremony supplies to the beach. I survey the view. It's a windless night, the water is still, reflecting the sky, the wide lake spreads out in front of me. The moon is hanging full over the water, partially hidden by clouds. In the distance is the sound of traffic from a country road bordering the east side of the lake. I can hear occasional distant voices from nearby campsites and a radio faintly broadcasting what sounds like country music.

I prepare my fire, dry evenly split wood in a combination of log house and tipi style, with paper and dry leaves inside. I begin a prayer invoking the four directions, Earth, and sky. It takes a few attempts to ignite the fire, which sputters at first. Perhaps the ground underneath is damp. Thankfully, I have extra newspaper and am soon rewarded with flames. Good. Shaking my rattle, I begin to quietly sing my fire song. I look up to see clouds shape shifting into interesting forms, glad to be here under the big open sky next to the water. I relax a bit, grateful for the space and solitude.

The sound of an approaching vehicle breaks my reverie. It is driving directly towards me, its headlights bouncing over the uneven ground. The sound of rap music gets louder as the park attendant's head pops out the window. "Is everything alright?" His flashlight beams into my fire. My carefully cultivated sacred space bursts like a bubble. I feel angry and deflated, like a chastised child. Clearly, this is not the solution. I keep looking and began to pray more earnestly for the right location for my fires.

On another full moon I feel an urgent call to ceremony. Full moons do that, I discover. Whatever emotions are present will be amplified, especially for sensitive types like myself. I drive around the outskirts of the city in the dark looking for any place on the side of the road where I can have a fugitive fire. I stop my car on the side of the road, walk down into the ditch and into a fenceless field bordered with trees. At the first clear space between the bushes and brambles, I hurriedly make a tiny fire, go through my invocations, blow my prayers into the tiniest stick and place it into the flames.

I never cease to be amazed at the way my prayers are answered. By the next spring, I have a new office space at the north of the city in a building owned by the Jesuits. I'm ecstatic to learn there is a designated

sacred fire site on the ample 600-acre property. Finally, there is freedom and space for gatherings, and I can share the work with the many people who are beginning to express interest in these indigenous traditions.

My next-door neighbour, who I approach to cat sit while I attend a course, becomes a student. She eventually takes advanced training to become a shamanic practitioner, as do a number of clients during this time. I meet many who are searching for a grounded spirituality and who are drawn to ancient healing traditions. At least once a month, summer and winter, I lead small and large groups across the fields to a sacred fire site next to a rustic retreat cabin.

One evening in early autumn, I create a personal prayer bundle and make my way alone late at night across a field of broken cornstalks to make an offering. Coyotes frequent these fields at the edge of town, and we often hear their howls. So, I feel a bit of fear, wishing too late that I had someone to accompany me. It is one of those clear velvet blue fall nights with no moon to brighten the sky above the dark alcove. Intent on the mission, I brush my anxieties aside and build the fire. When my prayers are complete and the fire blazing, I place my bundle in the midst of the flames and settle back on a log in the circle of its warmth to wait.

Suddenly, out of the darkness to my right appears a stranger, his pale face lit by the dancing flames. In a strong yet tentative voice, he asks "May I join you?" Surprised to feel relatively calm at this unexpected visitor, and with only the slightest hesitation, I gesture for him to sit. We share a few quiet words. He is on retreat. Mostly we sit in pleasant silence as the voice of the chatty fire crackles and hisses, happily dominating the conversation. When the bundle is transformed into ash, I take my leave, thanking him for his companionship. Walking back to my car, I silently thank the guardian spirits who sent him to hold the space with me.

The presence of creatures, and even nonphysical beings, is a regular occurrence at sacred fires. On a full moon night in early spring a group of us gather at the fire. We've been meeting for a few weeks to deepen our connection with the archetypal energies of the four sacred directions. This night we are honouring the south, the place of healing represented by the serpent.

There are perhaps a dozen people, including several students who recently began their shamanic training. As usual, when other medicine holders are present, we take turns invoking the directions. Each person offers prayers for healing into the fire, and finally our collective

prayers for Mother Earth. Those on the far side of the circle watch as an emerald green snake, native to the area, slips from the woodpile behind them and into the circle up to the edge of the fire pit. The vividly coloured snake then turns and slithers away between the legs of the woman who had invoked the south direction. After the ceremony, we celebrate this miraculous manifestation, and are in especially high spirits as we tramp over the fields under the full moon to our homes.

During the next seven years we have many ceremonies at that site. Photos taken during and after often show luminous light orbs, generally now accepted as spirit beings. Near the end of my time in Guelph, the administrators of the property decide to change the sacred fire site to a more accessible location. For those who had been coming to this particular place longer than I, this is upsetting news. However, it feels like an old cycle is ending, and this is an opportunity to let go of the past and start anew. I'm ready for the change.

The new site, in a grove of tall birch and aspen trees with ample parking and a modern meeting facility close by, is more open and spacious. A group of women gather with me to shut down the old fire site and transition it to the new location. In a beautiful ceremony of celebration and new beginnings, we open and prepare the ground with prayers and offerings. Looking back, I'm amazed to see how far I have come. Much of my fear has been transformed by the work of holding space for others to delve deeply into the mystery and power of nature's healing forces. But there is yet more for me to shed and to learn.

Past Lives Converge

THE EFFECTS OF THE SHAMANIC PATH felt like a quantum acceleration, confirming the existence of the spiritual realms, and shaking up many old patterns of thinking and behaving, especially in my relationships. I could no longer believe I was doing anything alone. My life is interwoven with others; we are all on a great mythic journey together. We are participating in a revival of feminine consciousness around the Earth. The re-emergence of nature-centered wisdom traditions and knowledge is a key aspect of this renewal.

The exploration of past lives, or stories that live within us, is a key part of the training. In one class, we journey to a life where we had power and gifts, and misused them. I find myself in a village in Africa as a powerful medicine woman, motivated more by the possessions I can acquire than in the well-being of my village. In that life, I'm willing to push the *causay*, the Quechua word for life force energy, in exchange for the right payment. Past life work helps us understand the consequences of our actions. Having brought those soul lessons into consciousness, we can allow them to inform our choices in the present.

As soon as I settle in back home, I call a friend to catch up. We had met in graduate school. She is one of the original goddess group women, so we have interests in common, and have travelled together. But today she is unusually distant and tells me she needs time to process past-life information that has come to her awareness. Her pronouncement leaves me confused and defensive. There had been tension between us after I'd begun these new studies. She took a couple courses with me, but decided the path was not for her, and began work with another teacher.

After our conversation, I reflect on this friendship, preparing to let go of yet another important relationship. I remember how we

met and worked together, the moves and changes that helped forge our friendship. She is a loyal friend who cultivated and nurtured her relationships. A good listener, she always offered kind yet honest opinions and practical help. When I'd moved into my new home, she helped paint the main floor, amazing me with her perseverance and attention to detail. She is one of the few close friends I counted on. I missed our late-night conversations and her perspective. A dream during this time offers insight:

I'm in a church with people who are talking about their relationships, speaking their truth. I'm listening through my father's ears, realizing he will get an unbalanced view of the work we do. But I wait, sensing things will unfold and become clear. "X said so and so, but the fact is when he came into the program he wanted to heal a friendship about which he was sitting on the fence." And I say "Yes, at the beginning it was egos talking, but really the work is related to spirit and the work of spirit..." In this group, there is a lot of connection between the men and women, a lot of healing and support going on.

This dream helps me see our situation more clearly as the opportunity for learning and growth it presents, and to trust that things will work out if I surrender to the process. My friend gets the space and time she needs, and within a couple of months our relationship is stronger than ever. As she shares the details of her past-life memory, we discover it is a story that dovetails with the one I uncovered during my past-life work. She remembered that we were sisters in that lifetime in Africa. She found it difficult to stand up for herself. We see how this theme of giving away her power manifests in our current relationship. We both want to heal this pattern, and we commit to a mutually supportive relationship, even as we change and follow our unique life paths.

As I contemplate the themes arising through my current work and relationships, I see a larger pattern that connects to my earlier academic study where I'd been drawn to address issues of power and voice among vulnerable groups of people. Now I can recognize these threads as woven throughout my life. I see more clearly that my soul creates the perfect situations for me to learn and grow.

My dreams bring not only insights and guidance, but also evidence of the support of spirit helpers. I can no longer question their existence. From my journal dated December 26, 2005:

A strange experience last night. I'm having a conversation with an old woman with piercing eyes that burns holes into you. Its about healing a past life relationship with someone in my present life, and giving the old woman permission to do it. There's a sudden explosion. I'm catapulted backward or forward in time, spinning, spinning. I see ancient grey-and-white letters carved into a wall or perhaps inscribed on a tablet as I hurtle towards them but not into them. I woke in a sweat.

After this, I experience a definite shift with that person. While other issues could arise, the change in the quality of relationships after healing interventions is notable and permanent. I can't go back to the old ways even if I want to. The result is a greater more consistent sense of well-being, and an ability to act with greater awareness and kindness towards myself and others.

Christmas during the second year of living on my own is different from the previous two years of transition. This holiday season I cook a traditional turkey dinner and invite residents and staff from the treatment centre. It is a happy time. The disappointments and worries of the past seem far away. My journal a few days later on December 28 reads:

What a state of happiness and peace I've felt the past couple of days. As I cook and clean, waves of well-being wash over me. I'm so blessed. Everything in my life is good.

I'm learning an ancient body of processes that show a holistic path to optimal health and wellness. The shamans of old understood that physical, emotional, mental and spiritual issues are interrelated, and that all imbalances have an energetic basis. The luminous energy field of spirit contains the etheric blueprint for who we are capable of becoming, and it informs the DNA, the genetic code governing our physical expression. The natural healing process never ceases to amaze me.

Compared to my previous way, I can now work at multiple levels to facilitate clearing of what is preventing clients from moving forward. In sessions with children and adults I witness how the issues that had incapacitated or severely impacted functioning often simply disappear. Clients report freedom from addictions, improvement in relationships at home and at work, and even pregnancies after trying unsuccessfully to conceive for many years.

A nine-year-old client suffering from an obsessive fear of spiders is brought to me. It kept her awake at night and caused an inability to focus in school or play outside. After a brief intervention, in response to my question, she answers incredulously, “Why would I be scared of spiders, they’re just God’s creatures!”

I witness new levels of peace, clarity and freedom among my energy medicine clients. At the same time, I notice a growing sense of detachment from my stories, and an increasing sense of freedom from longstanding fears and social anxiety

The Long Way Home

A MAJOR PART OF THE TRAINING is developing and trusting our instinctive knowing. In one class we are asked to do intuitive readings for each other. My partner and I find a quiet corner and open our medicine bundles. I focus my thoughts on the future of my work while holding one of her stones. She takes the stone in her hands and begins to speak. From my notes, March 2005:

I see three forks on the road ahead. Three possible pathways that eventually converge. There is a rocky road of ups and downs. Many lessons: short, tough, and gritty. Another path is straight, wide and easy, but too few lessons. Unsatisfying. The third is circuitous, travelling the long way, but satisfying. It will get you there but will take time.

There is a path within a path that doesn't give up its own identity. It is its own river. There are two places where the path breaks. These are tough situations. There are two caverns. Once you move past these, the path becomes bolder. There's the pain of change, regrets, and messing up your constructs, holding back.

There is a bridge to your chosen destination—a feeling of safety, security, and continuity. There's a sense of things being lined up; you don't want to mess them up. The bridge is a person who will help you make the change. There will be a mess, a muddle, it's murky in the middle. You will shed many icy tears across the bridge. The bridge is mandatory; you don't have a choice because you need its support to go from A to B.

This will transform into something magical. You'll become a wounded healer. Bitterness will transform into something useful and become the cornerstone of who you are.

This feels like important information and I make detailed notes. The part about taking the long way when there are other options makes sense. While I often feel impatient for things to unfold quickly, in truth I'm more like a turtle, plodding along at its steady pace. Certain things take longer to figure out. The *bridge of icy tears*, which turns out to be prophetic, scares me.

I continue to expand my knowledge and skills beyond the Four Winds Program. Allowing myself to be drawn by my fascinations, I read extensively and study with other teachers, including Barbara Hand Clow and Drunvalo Melchizedik.

The sacred landscapes of Arizona and New Mexico also call me. I notice how different indigenous wisdom teachings converge and complement each other.

The Ancestors Call

IT IS NOW FOUR YEARS SINCE I began the shamanic path. In March, 2008, I have an unexpected mystical experience at an ancient Mayan site in Palenque, Mexico. A dream leads me to invite a group of women to come with me to Newfoundland the following summer. We visit sacred sites along the northwest coast of the island. It is a magical time that reopens me, again, to the possibility of living there.

When I return from Mexico, I get itchy feet. It's time to move. I schedule an appointment with realtors. As I answer the door, the security alarm shrieks, and within seconds, the carbon dioxide monitor is triggered. Except for the day I moved in and learned how to operate them, this is the first time they have sounded. The agents help me shut them off, laughing, "At least we know they work."

In the end, I decide to stay a while longer, as I seriously entertain the idea someone or something had intervened to let me know now is not the time. In fact, I hear these alarms only once more—when faced with another critical decision. The reminder is I need to pay closer attention. I'm recording experiences and dreams in my journals, but rarely take the time to sit and reflect on them. During those intense days of learning and discovery I write: *Attention. The act of tending, purposeful noticing particles of perception. A hall of mirrors reflecting, projecting figments, imaginings. Seeing every thing, all ways, possible, probable, or changeable.*

In the spring of 2009 the need to act is stronger. I return to the island several times to explore where I could live. St. John's is a major metropolitan area where I attended university and have friends and family. For the first time since starting university more than twenty years before, I take the summer off to meditate, write, and reflect. And even though I'm not certain where I will go, I put my house on the market and start packing.

As if to make up for my long wait, it is a fast sale and closing. In early August, with the house and most of my possessions sold, with the remainder in storage, I prepare for the drive home.

A couple of days before I leave, I bump into one of the original members of the goddess circle. She insists on connecting me with her friend who is also driving to the west coast of Newfoundland. Somewhat reluctantly, because I'm looking forward to solitude and rest after an exhausting marathon move, I arrange to meet her friend for tea. We exchange contact information. After dropping my cats at the sitter, and the keys at the lawyer's office, I'm on my way.

Three days later I'm at the North Sydney ferry. And once in Newfoundland my first destination is the northwest coast of the island. Port aux Choix is an archaeological site with burial grounds and evidence of more than 5,000 years of continuous human habitation. My family has lived in that area for many generations. There I plan a ceremony to reconnect with the spirits and ancestors of the place.

After I settle into a local bed and breakfast, I take a walk along the windswept limestone cliffs and collect wild flowers for the offering. The completed bundle is so beautiful, it glows. I wait until the sun sets before making my way to the north side near the Point Riche Lighthouse. It is a barren, exposed, and now uninhabited place that slopes down to the ocean on all sides. The wind howls and waves crash against the rocky terraces as I drive slowly two kilometres along a potholed gravel road. It's dark as there are no streetlights nor moon to light my way. I have to brace my body against the wind when getting out of the car.

I sense the elemental spirits and ancestors greeting me. The lighthouse towers above, and the ocean pounds the shore only feet away. The tiny beam from my flashlight is lost in the inky night. I walk slowly along the rocky beach searching for dry sticks and large boulders to shelter my fire, even though I seriously doubt matches will light in this gale.

Amazingly, the fire ignites on the first attempt. I sing a water song and shake my rattle as eager flames leap in anticipation. I feel the presence of many others with me at the fire. Within minutes, the bundle offering is burnt to ash and my work complete. I carefully make my way to the car, pushed by the prevailing winds against my back.

The presence of spirits is so strong that several times I turn to look behind me, greeting only darkness. I will return other times to offer prayer bundles at this same place, sometimes in daylight with only

MOON REFLECTIONS

the slightest breeze. On one occasion I arrive with a group of twenty people, among them a few Peruvian shamans. Every time the bundle burns so quickly I can scarcely believe it. I always sense the presence of many hungry ancestor spirits here.

Dreams Beckon

THE NEXT DAY I DRIVE SOUTH to my friend's beachfront inn to relax and walk the beach to Portland Creek along the sandy wind-swept shore edged with tall grasses and speckled alder. A couple days later, I drive to the library in Cow Head, thirty minutes away, the closest place with internet connection, to check my email.

My inbox contains an invitation from the last-minute Ontario contact to visit Woody Point for a Writer's Festival. I'd never heard of the festival, but he writes that his daughter can't come so he has extra tickets. I politely decline the invitation, saying I'm a few hours north enjoying the quiet and solitude. There is a second message and a third that I open. It has two photo attachments: one of a full moon in the sky above Bonne Bay, and the other, a tall three-mast schooner docked at a wharf beneath a hill. Without a moment's hesitation, I reply: "Okay, I'm on my way."

The two photos are exact images from a vivid dream a few months before. From my journal on March 11, 2009:

I'm on a hill overlooking a bay surrounded by more hills. The views are spectacular and oddly familiar. Across the bay, the sun is setting over the rounded mountains. As the sun disappears behind the hills it leaves a gold-ringed rainbow sphere that flows down the front of the mountain in a stream of creamy luminous light. A moon-like orb is now suspended in the sky over the bay. A tall three-mast schooner is docked at a wharf beneath the full moon. This scene is so beautiful I wish I had a camera to take a picture.

Next, I'm walking carefully along a narrow-exposed path at the edge of a cliff overlooking this same bay. One side of the path is bordered by low shrubs. At the other side is a sheer drop

down to the water. I crawl along the path. Suddenly in front of me is the rainbow sphere. It flows onto the rocks in front of me. I'm surprised and happy, recognizing the gift of Grandmother Moon. Reaching out I take handfuls and bath my face and heart in the milky liquid light.

Recognizing this series of synchronistic events as a heads up from my higher guidance, I return to the inn and pack my bags. By nightfall I'm settled into a cozy loft in Woody Point.

This first visit to Woody Point feeds my soul with wonder, magic and connection. At the Writers Festival, I am reminded of my love of the spoken word and songs, of resilient seafaring people, my people. I'm amazed by the serendipitous events that brought me here. The last-minute introductions and changes in plans that provided me entry to literary and musical events normally sold out months in advance.

There are other highlights, such as a boat trip on the bay, a beach boil-up, a celebrity-studded house party, and a boat-naming ceremony, complete with fervent invocations to the spirits of water and the four winds. It is as though the universe conspired, with a cast of many characters, to make this visit the most memorable ever.

There is a strong sense of belonging, even though I have no memories of having been here before. I can imagine living in this community that offers the best of both worlds—those with generational ties as well as the newly arrived with unique stories of connection to this place. I realize Woody Point was a beloved haunt of Al Pittman—a teacher who'd awakened my love of poetry when I began university. Lines from his poem, "Song Also," resonated within me like an invitation. *Take me to your island. ...I'll come in the blackest night of the year and walk with you through the twisted trees to the sea. And we'll collect whatever jewelled creatures you want to dream up out of the onyx ocean.*

I recognize places without knowing how I know, and reconnect with cousins. I discover a white saltbox house with bright blue trim, my great Aunt Jane's home where my grandmother, mother and aunts had often visited. Here too, I felt at home.

There are many reasons why this place stirs my soul, the beauty of the landscapes not being the least of them. I was born at the hospital across the bay, and had visited with my parents as a young child. Others were yet to be revealed. I check out homes for sale in the area, but nothing feels right. For now, work commitments call me back to Ontario where I will wait for my next steps to clarify.

As my shamanic practice had unfolded over several years, the community of clients and friends had grown in the Guelph area. The Peruvian wisdom teachings awakened a thirst within people and in response, I offered more workshops and ceremonies. And as 2012 drew closer, many people expressed interest in the end of time prophecies. I'd been studying the Mayan calendar. The Mayans were a Mesoamerican civilization (2,000 BC to AD 900) noted for developing one of the earliest written languages, as well as for art, architecture, astronomical and calendar systems. The Mayans' measurement of time was based on observations of the movement of our solar system around the galactic centre.

I was fascinated to learn how the grand cycles of time they describe corresponded with recent scientific knowledge of significant evolutionary markers. So, I offered talks and was invited to present to community and church groups. People's response to this information was wonderful to witness. It shifted them from states of fear and uncertainty to being informed and empowered. One attendee was inspired to write a song which she then performed at other presentations.

After one of these talks, a tall, grey-haired woman with a commanding presence introduced herself. We chatted for a few minutes before she asked, "Are you aware that Merlin walks with you?" motioning towards my right side. I confess that no, I was not, though I have knowledge of the wizard of Arthurian legend. Her words registered, reminding me of dreams of ancient texts and white-haired male teachers. I'm becoming accustomed to extrasensory perceptions of my own, though I remain cautious in accepting others' observations of the invisible realms. My inner sceptic is alive and well.

Manifestations in the outer world are another matter. I notice how often the numbers nine, thirteen, and twenty-one appear. These numbers describe cycles of galactic time and the plan of creation as revealed by Mayan scholars. Frequently these same numbers of people show up for my events and classes. Now feeling called to expand the work in Newfoundland, I plan a Sacred Earth Journey there for the following September (2010). The next year will prove to be pivotal for building relationships with the ancestors in Newfoundland, and another initiation experience is to come that I could never have anticipated.

PART THREE

❧ Ancestor Connections ❧

Walking, I am listening in a deeper way. Suddenly all my Ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are a result of the love of thousands.

—Linda Hogan

Deep Family Roots

MY AWAKENING TO THE REALITY of ancestor spirits and their role in our lives formed long before my introduction to shamanism and helped pave the path ahead. As time passed, signs and dream messages fit together like pieces of a puzzle, with the bigger mosaic slowly emerging. At a certain point, it became clear that ancestors were calling me back to the place of my birth, and as it will be revealed, the home of more generations than I knew at the time. There is much I still do not know. But I have learned ancestors are greatly invested in the lives of their living descendants. What I will share is how and what I know.

In the same intuitive reading related to the bridge of icy tears, my partner ended with the following:

There's a churchyard, old and ornate; you are looking for a gravestone—an ancestral or reincarnation search. There's a name on a gravestone. A young woman wants to know as much as you do. There will be a journey to tie up loose ends, bringing to fruition, dangling threads that seem unrelated with an urgent need to bring them together. You will see how they connect like a chain, intertwining in a way that makes perfect sense and brings you back to the first step.

I was curious about my family history because what I knew was limited to a few stories and random bits of information. Like many Newfoundlanders, my genetic lineage is mixed. My grandfathers emigrated from Europe. They sailed here from the Channel Islands, England, Germany, and France. I knew less about my grandmothers' origins. I eventually learned that certain of my family members had healing gifts and knowledge such as an ability to cure toothaches or stop bleeding.

There was shame associated with native ancestry in my parent's lifetime as well as generations before. Beliefs perpetuated by Europeans who came to Newfoundland in the 1500s and 1600s. My mother loved the sun and her skin tanned. "It's my Indian blood," she'd quip.

After returning to Newfoundland in 2012, my cousins shared information they had collected relating to our indigenous lineage through my maternal grandparents. One uncle commented: "If your grandmother knew she had native blood, she would turn over in her grave." I don't know what she knew, but the past had already been revealing itself to me in dreams and unexpected disclosures.

The political climate has changed dramatically from my grandmother's time, especially in Newfoundland. Now people say, "Everyone wants to be an Indian." But knowing my native Newfoundland heritage helped explain my attraction to indigenous wisdom practices that began a number of years before in Ontario. Still, parts of my family tree remained shrouded in mystery, especially our more ancient history. Over the years, I'd searched a few graveyards in ancestral lands on the island and at Ship Harbour, Nova Scotia, where one branch of my maternal European ancestors had first settled in Canada. There is much more I don't, and will never know.

On the Verge

BEFORE THE SACRED SITE TOUR to Newfoundland in 2010, I planned a vision quest ceremony in Guelph. I wanted more information on why I felt called to return to the land of my birth and what I was to do there. There were many messages from the spirits that night, but one message came in a vision of my body overlaid with a gold Celtic knot pattern that for me, confirmed my European lineage. Celtic interwoven symbols hold the sacred mysteries of life and eternity. So, this vision also spoke to me of other lifetimes spent studying mystical traditions.

It also reminded me of my first visit to the Viking settlement at the northern tip of Newfoundland a few years before. At that time, I sensed what anthropologists and archaeologists had already recognized, that Newfoundland is a place of reconnection. This most easterly point on the continent is where people long separated by time, history, and culture came together again, completing the circle of human migration out of Africa. Having ancestors from both Europe and North America, I believed there was a role for me to play in healing and reconciliation of those two lineages. It is a role many are called to participate in at this time of spiritual awakening and reunification on the planet.

A few weeks before moving back to Newfoundland, on a morning in the zone between waking and sleeping, I have a vision of a young man in uniform. He is standing in a field in France. At his feet is a shallow hole in the ground in which there is a pile of oval metal pellets. While I know something of our family's French connection, this vision prompted me to find out more about my great-great grandfather, James Guinchard.

Later I investigated family records and discovered that James was a soldier in the Crimean War. After being injured and discharged, he lived in St. Père on the coast of Normandy. The metal pellets were

clearly significant. Additional research revealed the French army used newly developed ammunition that gave soldiers better accuracy in battle, and it is said, helped them win the war. A picture from the internet showed the pellet-like shapes of the new ammunition, the same as those in my vision.

My great-great grandfather's full name was Gilles Pierre Jacques Guinchard. The records state he was wounded in battle. He was awarded the Queen Victoria Service Medal for saving the life of a British officer. The musket balls from his wounds have been kept in a metal container along with his military records, which are still in the possession of a family member in Nova Scotia. The story goes that James left a sweetheart behind in France, a woman his family disapproved of due to religious differences. I was told that the 160-year-old handkerchief he used to wipe away her tears on his departure from St. Malo, is also in the possession of a descendant. Gilles-Pierre sailed to Terra Neuve, and several years later James, as he was now called, married Hannah Biggin, my great-great grandmother.

By now I am aware that my ancestors exist in another dimension of space and time, and are able to communicate with me. There is a thin veil that separates the living and the dead. On my way back to ancestral lands, this dream vision is a direct communication from Gilles Pierre Jacques Guinchard. While I feel trepidation about what lays ahead, I'm excited with the confirmation, sensing their pleasure at my return. There is work to be done.

Dream Grandmothers

IN MY MEMORY, and especially after I began to meditate and record my dreams, there were several elderly women who appeared in my inner vision and dreamscapes. Many of them had dark skin, though I did not know who they were, or why they were appearing to me. It was a fascinating mystery. I wondered, too, about the significance of the snowy landscapes that featured regularly in my visions and dreams.

Ice and snow are a fact of life in Canada, especially Newfoundland. But the vast white landscapes of my dreams were often without landmarks or distinguishing features. Sometimes I moved through time—though the direction was unclear. Later, I learned that ice and snow can be symbols for frozen emotions, suppressed feelings that are unable to be expressed at the time. A journal entry from 1998:

I'm spinning through a tunnel into a snowy landscape, then over water to arrive at a decrepit grey wooden shed. I explore inside its two small rooms. They're empty except for several old amber-coloured bottles on rotting shelves. I imagine they once contained medicine. I know this was my grandmother's place.

My maternal grandmother has a special place in my heart. Myra Myrtle Eisan was born in 1909 in Daniel's Harbour. Nan was tall and slim with dark wavy hair and eyes, always neat, conservative and stylishly dressed. A reserved woman with a regal sense of bearing, she commanded respect, and to my child's eyes she looked like a queen. Not one to waste words, hers always seemed carefully chosen, and deliberately spoken. She was not prone to warm grandmotherly hugs, yet I knew she loved me without question. Nan died when I was twenty-eight, and attending university in St. John's. The year before, her lower leg had been amputated and she was at the Miller Centre waiting to be

fitted with a prosthetic. She was taken to emergency one morning after an angina attack.

The last time I saw her at the hospital she gave me a task, to buy a new overnight bag. When I prodded her for details, she replied confidently, "Oh, you'll know what I'd like." My grandmother rarely shared her deepest feelings with me, and if her life had lost its purpose, I failed to notice. It was the fall semester while I was studying for midterm exams when the phone rang. It was my cousin calling to say Nan had died that morning.

I went to class as usual but something had changed. A bubble formed around me that no-one could penetrate, an unfamiliar in-between space of being somewhere but nowhere. The way our wise psyche shields us from the full shock of loss. Later, alone at home, sitting at the kitchen table with books and notes spread in front of me, I struggled to study. My world had shifted. Never to be the same. Finally, I allowed the tight pain in the centre of my chest to surface, and the tears began to flow.

And as I sobbed, Nan's presence was suddenly in the room. I felt the largeness of it. Her presence hovered near the ceiling to the right of where I was sitting with my mind and emotions in chaos. Nan's silent yet insistent words surprised me. 'Everything is okay. You will be okay. All is well.' A feeling of profound peace enveloped me. My mind settled. My emotions calmed. And then she was gone. From that moment on, I never doubted that Nan still exists. She knows exactly where I am, and is never far away. I didn't go to her funeral. I wanted to hold this visitation close to my heart. I wrote this poem:

Last Rites

I've put off this chore too long.

Duty and urgency and my grandmother's voice
brings me to the Sears luggage department.

Travel cases, hinting of destinations exotic and far away.

Small compact bags, large roomy suitcases with wheels,
tow straps with matching suit bags: leather, vinyl, cloth,
black, brown, green. Too many choices.

Her words echo in my ear—"You know what I like."

A spacious overnight bag with deep side pockets,
zippered openings, wide handle a good grip for now-seized
arthritic hands long past crocheting fine lace doilies.

A sturdy strap, light enough to hang on frail
but still-erect shoulders.
The deep night-blue fabric speaks quietly of refinement
and good taste,
like the transparent china from which she eats her
solitary breakfast.
At the cash register the salesclerk waits patiently as I make my
final selection.
Day dawns and the wind blows through suddenly
bare-leaved trees, snow threatens.
The forlorn carry-on sits heavily, useless and accusing
on my sunken living room floor.
I sit vacantly sipping tea staring at Nan's Cancer horoscope—
You will take a long trip. Too late luggage.
My heart suspended in mid-station with nowhere to go.
From the platform I whisper, praying the winds to
carry my words—Goodbye Nan. Thank you for stopping by,
for showing me that Love always knows the way home.

Nan's continual presence after her death was her legacy. That and her name. I was given the names of both my grandmothers. Over the years, Nan had also given me a few pieces of jewellery: a cross of blue glass, a matching set of gold-plated brooches in the shape of male and female dancers, and a tiny hematite pendant on a fine silver chain. Their significance grows with time.

A matching set of brass candle holders came with a story. She'd bought them for the church when her first granddaughter, my cousin Rosemary, died of leukemia at eight years old. This tragedy was a lingering family loss, like Nan's younger brother, Cornelius. Poor Neil had drowned trying to cross a swollen river one spring day shortly after his tenth birthday. The church did not want the candlesticks so Nan had given them to me, her oldest living granddaughter. Since Nan died, I often sense her presence and talk to her.

A long time ago, at the start of my spiritual journey, I went to see a medium, someone who supposedly contacted a person's spirit guides. At the time, I was still searching for evidence that I even had guides.

The first spirits to show up were my fiancé's recently deceased family members with messages for him. I was annoyed when they monopolized my time, but the messages were important and brought healing for his family. I was beginning to learn that ancestor spirits

took advantage of any opportunity to get messages to their loved ones still living.

Nan “came through” eventually. “She sees you working with a pile of rocks, building something,” the medium said. We’d been collecting stones from construction sites and using them to edge flower beds and walkways in the garden. I asked what she thought of my fiancé, if we would marry. The medium said Nan not only liked the man I was engaged to, but showed her a date for the wedding. She wrote it down on a piece of paper and sealed it in an envelope with instructions to not look at it until after the wedding.

However, our relationship ended a number of years later, so we never married. I found the envelope in a drawer and thought, ‘so much for knowing the future Nan.’ This incident also gave me cause to contemplate the ideas of fate and free will. While certain things in life appear predetermined, life also provides choices that are ours to make.

One weekend I travelled to Lilydale, New York with friends for a workshop. Lilydale is a spiritualist community founded in 1879 where many psychics and mediums live, teach and carry on their work communicating with the spirit realms. People gather at a clearing in the forest called Inspiration Stump on weekend afternoons in the summer. One by one, several mediums deliver messages from loved ones to individuals in the group. I’d been there before, but this time I was hoping for a message from Nan.

My friend and I arrived early and sat in the front row. There was a short talk and opening prayer, and then the mediums took turns in front of the group. Sometimes they provided identifying information such as “There’s a man in his seventies who recently passed, his name is John, and he has a message for his wife. Is she here?” Or they pointed to a person in the crowd: “The woman in the green dress, are you open to a message from a little girl who is around three years old?” The messages were always positive and the process respectful.

I waited expectantly until the last medium addressed us. I concentrated on my grandmother and silently communicated my desire to hear from her. Three people received messages and still nothing for me. I felt disappointed and doubted the authenticity of the readings. The woman medium appeared to be finished, but hesitated. “Wait, there is a grandmother insisting on a message for her granddaughter. Her name begins with A, is she here?”

“Yes, Nan I am!”

Her message that day was sage grandmotherly advice related to a recent personal crisis. But I received what I needed most—confirmation that she was always watching out for me from the other side.

My dreams also brought messages from Nan, especially when I was in need of guidance and support. Most dreams have layers of meaning but I also detected what I came to know as Nan's signature, a wry sense of humour. An entry on January 2, 2009 reads:

I'm visiting someone in a big old-fashioned saltbox house. There's a wood fire burning in the living room. The door is opened to let the warmth spread throughout the house. My grandmother is there. She has come a long way to visit. I'm surprised that she likes this old house. Parked outside is her classic sapphire-blue vintage car with long tail wings. She has driven up over a high curving bank so that the front end sticks up in the air.

The saltbox is a two-storied house with a low-rise peak, a distinctive style of Newfoundland outport homes. Many houses in Newfoundland's fishing villages are heated with woodstoves, traditionally located in the kitchen and also used for cooking. My grandmother lived in a saltbox house in Port Saunders with my grandfather, their family of eight children, and occasional boarders. Like many rural Newfoundland women, Nan was known for her excellent housekeeping and cooking.

Unlike most other local women, my grandmother came of age in New York City. As a teenager, Nan and her two older sisters, Helen and Marie, left their outport village to live in New York with the Edgar family. My great-grandfather guided Mr. Edgar on hunting and fishing expeditions into the back country of the Northern Peninsula for many years. Mr. Edgar took a personal interest in the family and offered to take my aunts back to New York. It was an opportunity to travel and acquire an education, both highly valued in the family. Aunt Helen became an accountant and Aunt Marie, a nurse. My grandmother, the youngest of the three, became their housekeeper. Of the three sisters, my grandmother was the only one who came back home to live.

In addition to raising a big family and running a boarding house, my grandmother managed a general store for many years and also started other businesses. I'm told by family members that my grandmother didn't drive because my grandfather refused to teach her and made disparaging comments about her ability to learn. Since there were

RETURN TO PANGAEA

other dreams of my grandmother and a vintage blue car, it occurred to me she might be making light of this from the other side. I wondered if the car with wings was also her way of telling me I could fly, if only I could get off the ground. I knew Nan would urge me to follow and express what was in my heart and to be true to myself. There was much she continued to teach me from the other side.

Death and Time

CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE as they transitioned from this life to the next became a theme. Knowledge of an approaching death sometimes comes from intuitive knowing, or in dreams and synchronistic events. For no apparent reason, I had a sudden urge to take a trip back to Newfoundland as I was in the final stages of finishing my doctorate and settling with my fiancé into a new home in Guelph. I told him he was welcome to come, but I had to go home as soon as possible.

Approaching the St. John's airport evoked the usual response—my heart leapt with happiness at the sight of the barren rock and windswept land emerging from the ocean. My entire body sighed with relief. Driving from the airport, I switched on the radio of the rental car to hear a top local news story of the death of the well-known Newfoundland poet and playwright, Al Pittman. I knew that was the reason for my visit. Ten years prior, he'd been my university literature professor and an important mentor. Although we'd had no contact for many years, I knew his spirit had connected with me at his time of transition. It was another strong spiritual connection to the island.

I was increasingly aware of my intuitive abilities, of knowing things without knowing *how* I know, particularly when a death was imminent. During a play therapy session with a child client, I sensed something was wrong and advised the mother to take her daughter to a doctor as soon as possible. Privately, I confided to my supervisor that I wondered if she had a brain tumour. A week later, test results confirmed the presence of an inoperable brain stem tumour and tragically, the child died within the year. I continued to offer support to the family, sure that my presence helped ease the pain of their loss.

There was another child on my caseload who I made repeated efforts to meet, without success. Not long after finishing my placement, I was stunned to hear of this child's tragic death. I couldn't help

but wonder if things might have turned out differently if we'd been able to connect.

Sometimes I dream of a person and later receive confirmation of their death. I had a vivid dream of my ex-father-in-law's house, glowing white, before he dies. It was a lovely affirmation of our connection, his way of saying goodbye. In another dream, I saw details portending the death of a man I didn't recognize. I dream this days before a cousin's unexpected and tragic death. In real life we scarcely knew each other, but the dream showed a deep loving bond between us as I greeted him in the spirit realms. He was happy and free, in spite of the circumstances of his death. This dream confirmed that family ties are deeper and more enduring than we may realize.

Preparation for death and assistance in the spiritual realms is a core element of shamanic work. Early in my training, during my first practice outside the classroom, I was searching for the spirit of a young girl on behalf of a client. I worried that what I perceived was my imagination so, I asked the spirit for an unmistakable sign to confirm she was the right one. The girl showed me a heart necklace. It is the birthday gift my client had given her before she died.

I'm amazed to be able to communicate with spirits so easily and clearly. Asking the person in spirit for information to confirm their identity becomes regular practice. It reassures me that I'm in contact with the correct individual, and also provides my client with confirmation of the connection.

Late one night there is a fatal car crash involving two vehicles on the road leading to my workplace. The lone occupants of the cars, two unrelated young men, are both found dead at the scene. It happens that I met both men, separately, for the first and only time days before this accident. I also had a dream showing details of the accident.

One of the men was a staff member at the place I worked part-time. Usually, I've left the office by the time the evening staff arrive, but this day I'm still at work. As we stood together next to the telephone, this young man and I exchanged a few words. I took particular notice of his eyes, thinking they were an unusually bright colour. The next morning everyone arrives to work to the shocking news of his death on the way home from work. I had been introduced to the driver of the second car at a friend's house a few weeks before. It was a brief encounter, but I remembered also making eye contact with this young man. Only after the accident did I register these coincidental meetings.

Shamanic work had me delving deep into my beliefs about reality, and specifically the concepts of space and time. “Linear time,” the Four Winds founder, Alberto, said, “flies like an eagle. There is a past and a future that stretches forward and backward in a straight line. Shamanic time, on the other hand, is a spiral. We can access the past and the future because in the spiritual realm, all time is now. In infinity time circles and cycles, synchronicities are the evidence of cycles of time intersecting, folding back into itself.”

Many cultures have a deeper understanding of the different levels or dimensions of time. The ancient Greeks differentiated between *chronos* or sequential chronological time, and *kairos*, a qualitative measurement, or the time in between the past and future, the now. Brain science confirms linear time is mediated by the left, logical part of the brain, while the right intuitive side of our brain perceives the present and the gestalt or whole.

In my journal, I write: This other space of timelessness is intimate, it draws and seduces me like a lover. In its embrace, I feel whole and complete. It stretches and expands like toffee candy and is as sweet. That space is wide and high and endless. If I can leave my mind at the door and enter fully into it, I feast like someone famished. Inside that kind of time I feel most at home. It is a space I remembered from childhood when many days were spent outside in nature, daydreaming, lost in other worlds. Long known to mystics, yogis, and shamans, this non-linear time connects us with higher dimensions of consciousness, truly another reality.

My experiences of multi-dimensionality and non-ordinary states of consciousness burst open my mental boxes. I learn the brain wave frequencies associated with these altered states are cultivated by meditation practices and by spending time in nature. Shamanic journeying requires the ability to access these states for information and healing assistance for clients. These journeys are the same as purposeful waking dreams. I love navigating in these other dimensions and mythological landscapes. I observe how my body and mind responds to non-ordinary states. My metabolism slows down, and my heart rate and breath become deep and steady. I often lose track of time and am continually amazed at the information and healing that comes from these forays.

The practice of journeying challenges me to trust the process and information that comes. I regularly question the source of this knowledge, wondering if I’m simply making it up. My rational mind

struggles to understand how I can know. With practice and as evidence from clients confirms the validity of what is accessed this way, I get better at holding the knowing mind and the judging mind in balance. A note from my journal after one such experience reads:

A part of me is observing and commenting on what's happening and another part of me is there. It would be neat to be able to be more there than here (in critical analytical mind), but it is still vivid enough. Sometimes I notice I'm fading or drifting away and have to bring myself back to that place and observe what is happening. Parts of the scene seem more faint and vague, others are detailed and real.

When I speak of my lack of faith and constant questioning of journey experiences, a teacher reassures me: "Your critical mind is a valuable tool. It keeps you grounded and honest." This path cultivates wider and deeper levels of inner awareness, of countering the cultural conditioning that the only world that can be real is the one out there, objectively perceived with the five senses. Developing and using the extra-sensory perceptual abilities also helps sharpen my observations with the ordinary senses. Both are important sources of data.

It is a whole new world. I feel like Alice in Wonderland who has fallen down the rabbit hole. In this world, the power of imagination is not only important, it's necessary. A love of and an ability to play had drawn me to work with children, partly because play is therapeutic. Over and over I witness the healing power of play. One of my first teachers, a medical intuition trainer, coached, "If you think you don't know, make it up." It was amazing how often the answers we thought we made up were right on the mark. It was giving another part of our mind permission to express what it knew. For many of us it had been silenced for so long and needed practice.

I'm told that there is no word for imagination in the Quechua language. The Peruvians explain that there is the visible world and the invisible world. Both are real; they're simply different. "We are always dreaming our world into being. What kind of world do you want to live in?" my teacher, Alberto, reminds us. I was learning to use my imaginal mind to perceive and give form and meaning to the invisible realms, to trust its knowing.

The Man from Hell

IN THE SPIRIT REALMS, time is fluid versus static, and everything is irrelevant, meaningful and interconnected. There is an ongoing spiritual journey that continues beyond death, and connects the living to the dead across space and time. This was also confirmed for me by the appearance of a spirit man who kept showing up until I figured out who he was and why he was appearing to me. True to my nature, which is often slow and plodding, this process took ten years to figure out. I remember again how this “other time” loops back onto itself in infinite spiralling circles.

It is Christmas, 2005. My first night in a remote cottage on Eagle Lake several hours north of home. Finding myself in a state of exhaustion, desperate for time and space from work and everyday distractions, I sprint towards this haven. Once there, I delight in being alone in the woods with only birds and squirrels, the sound of wind in the trees, and water lapping at the shore a few feet away. This is as close to heaven as I can imagine. It is not my first visit to the lake. The last time I stayed in a rustic cabin next door. This place is new, palatial in comparison, like the cover of *Cottage Life* complete with state-of-the-art appliances, cedar decks, and a hot tub. It is late and I'm tired after the long drive. With a choice of cathedral ceilinged bedrooms, I settle on the largest overlooking the lake, open the wide casement windows to invigorating fresh air and the sounds of nature.

I fall asleep and wake to the sight of people walking up the hallway to my bedroom. I'm in that in-between state where my inner eyes can see clearly through the veil. The first spirits are people who once lived here and have perhaps passed. One man I recognize is currently in physical form. Mostly annoyed at this intrusion, I project the thought 'I'm here now and do not want to be disturbed.' I drift off again

only to become aware of a short, bronze-faced man with cropped dark curly hair sitting in a wing-back chair to the right of my bed. This one I ask telepathically, with perhaps a hint of hostility, ‘and where did *you* come from?’ His answer is immediate and matter of fact. ‘From hell.’

My response is instinctual—‘Then you can go right back where you came from!’ No sooner do I have this thought than I reconsider. ‘No, you need to go far away where you can’t bother me or anybody else.’ And I redirect him to the far reaches of the galaxy. That should be a safe distance from my retreat on the lake, I think, feeling rather pleased with myself. Then I came slowly into full wakefulness, feeling unsettled now about all the visitors and especially the one from hell. Had I inadvertently chosen a bedroom on a busy inter-dimensional highway?

I gather up my bedclothes and retreat to the room across the hall. With determination, I snuggle down and recite my prayers and invocations for spiritual protection, chiding myself for not doing it earlier. If there was a time I seriously questioned my decision to follow this path, it was now.

In the clear light of morning I recount all this to paper and reflect on the night’s events. The man from hell piqued my interest, particularly as I ponder who he could be and whether he is simply a projection of fears and beliefs I hadn’t yet shed. This path requires the willingness to go deep into my past and unconscious. Otherwise, I’m told, it will sneak up on me when I least expect it. It’s been a while since the idea of hell felt like part of my personal belief system, though in the middle of the night clearly some part of me believed it, or so my thinking went. I conclude I’d reacted like a scared rabbit.

The rabbit analogy was no accident. As a child and well into adulthood, I was afraid of all kinds of things: ghosts, monsters lurking under my bed, the dark, and bad things happening to people I loved. While I had mastered many of those fears, and no longer checked under my bed for monsters, I still jumped at shadows and unexpected noises. I recall the reaction of one of my spiritual teachers when I told her I was studying shamanism. “That path is for the truly fearless,” she said. Fearlessness was definitely not a quality I attributed to myself. I was drawn to this work by forces greater than my own and for reasons I could not fully understand. At this moment, I’m more curious than afraid.

Later I wish back the time to have a different conversation with the stranger sitting next to my bed. Like, ‘Oh, that’s interesting, I can’t

say I've been there. Where is hell exactly? And why are you there?' The kind of chat you have with spirits when they show up in your bedroom in the middle of the night on a lake in the middle of nowhere. Sarcasm helped me feel a little better, but I obviously wasn't ready to delve into that conversation yet.

This unusual experience gets recorded in my journal with all the other strange events that happen and which reveal their meaning in their own sweet time. For the rest of my week at the lake I sleep soundly, and it appears at least, in solitude.

It was the following year that the unwanted visitor made another appearance. Perhaps the trip back from wherever I'd sent him took a while, I thought to myself, with not a small amount of self-satisfaction. This time he appeared standing to my right during a guided journey in a room with a large group of people. We were participating in a ceremony led by Barbara Hand Clow, a Cherokee elder, to connect with the multiple dimensions of space and time that coexist with our physical reality. I was in a deeply relaxed and altered meditative state but fully conscious. This time there was no communication or message. Simply a split-second registering of his appearance and then he vanished.

He had my attention, but I still wasn't ready to learn his story, or hear what he wanted from me. In the meantime, I had reflected on my understanding of hell, at least the Christian version of a burning inferno where bad people went after they died—a place of torment and eternal damnation. The threat of hell, deep within the bowels of the Earth, had hung over my head like a hungry noose for much of my early life. So, I could understand my dismissal of the stranger and the notion of hell as a real place.

It was almost ten years after the first visit when I awoke in an in-between state to see his familiar figure striding into my bedroom. Clearly, he knows where to find me. I wonder once more who he is and the reason for his persistence. I remember my deal with the spirit realm. He's shown himself three times, so I need to take action. Strangely, although I asked others who they thought this man could be, it had never occurred to me to ask him. Another *duh* moment.

I prepare to journey, set my intention, and call on my guides to enter the nether realms that have grown familiar yet always manage to surprise me. This time is no exception. The story that unfolds is a familiar archetypal story of teacher and student, of lessons in the use of power. I'm able to see details of this relationship as it would have occurred in a different place and time, not that far away. I easily connect

with my eagerness to learn and to please my teacher, my attraction to power, and reaction to rejection and betrayal. And I also understand the motivation for the curse with which I sent this teacher to hell for my version of forever.

It is the continuation of a story that emerged in my first year of training when I learned the importance of owning and excavating my unconscious motivations. It reminds me of the cycles of the soul's learning that brings each of us the opportunities to illuminate the dark corners of our psyches—to walk through the darkness of our being and come out the other side with wisdom and compassion. As my teacher and I continue to converse over a few weeks, I'm able to own my anger and desire for revenge and control, and to see the bigger picture. As I recognize in myself both the student and the teacher, I discover the path of forgiveness.

This is yet another opportunity to explore more deeply the power of love to transform pain, and to free myself and others. As I contemplate those concepts, I make the intention to keep the lessons and to release the judgments of myself and my teacher. I allow my wounded self and my healed self to meet in the most important time there is, the now.

Over the years, I have many opportunities to be of service for people who are passing or have already passed over to the spirit realms. At times I sense the presence of spirits with messages during private sessions. Certain clients have unfinished business with loved ones and it keeps them stuck, unable to move forward in a particular area of their lives. Other clients come on behalf of others who are lost between the worlds due to traumatic deaths.

An emergency room nurse was referred to me because she was unable to return to work after the birth of her son and her father's death, which occurred within a few days of each other. For almost a year, this nurse exhibited symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: flashbacks, insomnia and high levels of anxiety. During our session, it was apparent there was unfinished business with her deceased father. I facilitated the necessary conversation and she was able to return to work shortly afterwards. While it is easier to heal life's traumas and resolve karma before leaving this physical plane, there is much healing possible after death.

I'm often called into service when family members, friends, or clients pass. Those near death come to me around the time of their imminent passing for help in crossing over, or to hang out while they

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figure out what has happened. “You have died,” I tell them. “You are free of your body now. Go to the light. There are angels to show you the way, and your family is waiting to welcome you home.” This work feels natural to me.

Frieda's Spirit Flight

FRIEDA WAS A BRIGHT-EYED TINY WOMAN in her late 70's who was referred to me by a colleague. She possessed a great childlike curiosity and a vast knowledge of the spiritual realms from years of study. Frieda came regularly for private sessions and signed up for every workshop and presentation. She especially loved ceremony. Most of my advertising is through email and Frieda didn't have computer skills, so she brought self-addressed stamped envelopes to our next appointment. "Make sure you send me notices," she instructed. "I don't want to miss anything."

One day, Frieda arrived for a scheduled appointment wearing an unusually grave expression. She took a seat next to my desk and told me her news. "I have cancer; it's advanced," she says, surprisingly matter of fact. "I was shocked at first, but I've had time to think about it, and I'm ready to die. I want to see what comes next and I want you to help me."

We began to prepare for what the shamanic traditions call the greatest journey. Frieda's health and energy declined rapidly. I'd since become a Four Winds certified Dying Consciously Trainer, and over a number of home visits, she and her daughter complete the Dying Consciously Program with me. Frieda laid down or was propped up with cushions but she insisted on doing as much as she could. She planned her death and funeral in detail. Her final weeks were spent in a hospice until one day she passed peacefully with her daughter at her side.

In accordance with her wishes, Frieda was waked at home for three days. On the last evening before the service and cremation, according to her plan, I held a special ceremony for family and friends. In the Peruvian tradition, we created an *aya despacho* (*aya* means death), a bundle of flowers and sweets infused with prayers to help Frieda on her way through the spirit realms.

Once the layered rainbow-coloured bundle was complete, we headed to the backyard to offer it on a fire. It was then I saw that the fire pit was actually a barbeque designed for roasting. A despacho needs hot flames, but it was late and everyone was tired, so I placed the bundle over the red-hot coals, closed the cover, and hoped for the best.

At the service the next afternoon, I sensed Frieda's presence, which was not unusual. Most deceased attend their own funerals. We watched as Frieda's body was lowered to the crematorium below. As the service was finishing, I registered a change in Frieda's presence, an agitation, and asked her daughter if she checked the bundle. She had not so sent me and a friend to look. Sure enough, the bundle was in the barbeque, badly charred but still intact.

Frieda's presence was palpable now and infused with urgency. We gingerly retrieved the fragile bundle and placed it in a box. Since there was nowhere to build a proper fire, we decide to use the sacred fire site at my office, an hour's drive away.

We drive as fast as we can. It is a beautiful early summer's day and we are still wearing our funeral clothes. We'd like to change into something more comfortable, but we sense Frieda urging us to finish her ceremony. We drive over the dirt farm track as close to the site as possible and walk the rest of the way carrying a large bag of wood, ceremony supplies, and the half-burnt bundle. We build a big fire. And as soon as it is good and hot, we place Frieda's bundle in the centre of the flames. The slow roast must have dried it out because it burns quickly. As the last of the bundle disintegrates into ashes, Frieda's energy coalesces, rises, and disappears. A stillness surrounds us as we look at each other in relief. "She's gone." We have no doubt that Frieda rode the energy of those prayers up to the spirit worlds.

A few weeks later, a group is gathered for a Monday night meditation at my home. We sit in a circle in front of the altar. Near the end of the meditation a great ball of energy sweeps into and around the circle, and with a great flourish leaves again. I opened my eyes to see others looking wide-eyed. "What was that?!" Then, in unison, we said "Frieda! She dropped in to say hello and goodbye." We shared happy Frieda stories, remembering her beautiful and unique presence, knowing she was now truly free.

The Invitation

SHORTLY AFTER TAKING A SACRED SITE TOUR to Palenque, Mexico in 2008, I have a dream that I interpret as an invitation to bring my shamanic work to Newfoundland. At the beginning, I see an opportunity arising from my initiation into the Peruvian wisdomkeeper traditions. Eventually, the possibility occurs to me that the connection may be even more personal.

The tour over, most people had departed except for a small group waiting for later flights. At breakfast the conversation turned homeward and to the topic of ancient ancestral places in our respective homelands. My thoughts focus on Newfoundland and its sacred places. I imagine discovering where they are and holding ceremonies to honor the ancestors. This conversation turned out to be a portent of what happened later. The following dream, around two months after the Mexican trip, on May 8, 2008, sets things in motion:

I'm tightly packed into the back seat of a car with a group of people. We are on our way to a meeting. I vaguely know some of them, others not at all. We are from different offices, but we all work for the same agency. The training and preparation has already begun. The back window is piled with large binders—background documents. We're being debriefed and have been given new folders. I'm shown a sheet of paper with symbols and letters in an outlined box. These codes will be downloaded to our computers if we decide to take on this project.

Next, we are driven down a long road paved with smooth beach rocks. Our driver has been here before and knows the way. The landscape is wide open and barren with low shrubs. No trees can be seen in any direction, only mountains and sky. This is a special place and I'm invited to take it all in. As we make a turn in the road it is like entering another world. In the distance loom

high, gently rounded mountains. The landscape is vivid and stark, the air is crystal clear.

We arrive at a small village where people are walking around dressed in brightly coloured parkas. Everything is vibrant in reds and oranges, blues, and greens. The colors glow. I'm overcome with emotion; tears fill my eyes. I am honoured to be one of few people here to witness this. We are brought to a long rectangular-shaped structure, like a bunkhouse—a special place for our work.

Then it's early morning and the light is growing bright outside. The group wakes up; women prepare our breakfast. Alberto, my Four Winds teacher, tells me the women have been instructed to give me sugar. I'm touched he is thinking of my well-being. I talk with three other native-looking women. Alberto shares his long-time personal interest in the Dorset people. He's visited them a long time ago on the most northerly tip of Newfoundland. This is shown to me on an old map.

The Dorset Mystery

IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME since high-school so I take to the internet to learn about the Paleo Eskimo Dorset people. They were the most numerous aboriginal people to occupy Newfoundland. There are 199 documented habitation sites around the island, and their disappearance is a mystery still. They first appeared in archaeological records approximately 2,500 years ago, and by 700 A.D. had disappeared from Newfoundland entirely. The Dorset rarely hunted land animals and instead relied mainly on harp seals which they hunted from the shore and holes in the ice. They also hunted walrus and narwhals. The harp seals drifted down the Straits of Belle Isle from the north. It is theorized that the departure of the Dorset peoples is connected to climate warming and the vanishing of the seals that happened around the same time.

According to Inuit legend, the original name of this distinct cultural group was *Tunit* or *Tuniq* (plural) or *Sivullirmuit*, meaning First Inhabitants. Archaeologists named them Dorset after the place where the first artifacts were found at Cape Dorset by anthropologist Diamond Jenness in 1925. As reported by Inuit historians and reported by Robert McGhee, “The *Tunit* were strong and tall like giants, but timid and easily put to flight and nothing is told of their lust to kill.”

The evidence left of the Dorset people sets them apart from other cultures that occupied this area, specifically their sophisticated art, tools, and hunting technology. They were the first people to build snow houses or igloos. They left behind a plethora of bright jewel-like chert tools, soapstone oil lamps, sleds, kayak-like boats, and an abundance of carved objects made from ivory, bone, wood, crystals, and soapstone.

Chert is a fine-grained crystalline rock that forms sharp edges when it is broken, similar to flint. The Dorset sourced chert from Cow

Head on the Northern Peninsula. They also crafted replicas of animals, fish, birds, human faces, masks, and other refined carvings, leaving a body of art that archaeologists describe as unique, unexpected, and remarkable. Scholars say their representations of the natural and supernatural worlds indicate an active shamanistic tradition.

Archaeologists also note another defining characteristic: their long-term commitment to place. Being more oriented towards hunting seals, they tended to set up homes on exposed headlands and outer islands around the coasts of Newfoundland. Over seven centuries, the Dorset made Port aux Choix a home base. More than fifty houses spread over two hectares have been found there. Human Dorset remains have been found in rock caves on the island suggesting this location was spiritually significant to them. All the evidence points to the Dorset people engaging actively in communication with the spirit realms of nature, and to their connection with this particular place.

I'm excited about the possibilities of learning more of this earlier shamanic lineage in the land of my birth, and the dream outlines a clear direction for my work in Newfoundland. A friend encourages me to send an invitation to a few people to join us for an exploration of the Northern Peninsula. I will be visiting certain of these places for the first time, others I barely remember from childhood. In keeping with the directions in the dream, top on the list are the Dorset sites at Port aux Choix and the Viking Settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows at the northernmost part of the island.

Meeting the Ancestors

THE LAST FLIGHT WITH TWO OF OUR GROUP is delayed and it is dark by the time the six women of our group arrive in Deer Lake. We begin the two-hour drive north along the Viking Trail through the mountains to our beachfront inn in Portland Creek. I'm nervous about the moose, especially driving through Gros Morne National Park where it is said there are more moose than people. Moose-car collisions have claimed many lives over the years. Silently, I ask for protection, surround our van in white light, alert the moose to our presence, asking them to stay well back. It appears to work. The only creature we see is a lone long-tailed red fox running along the shoulder of the road.

We make it safely to Entente Cordiale Inn (named for the 1904 diplomatic agreement between Great Britain and France) and wake the next morning to the sound of seagulls squawking and waves breaking on the sandy beach a few steps below us and the smell of invigorating salt air. During breakfast, we watch a bald eagle swoop down to the ocean and fly away with a fish in its beak. All of us are captivated by the spacious vistas—the sentinel Long Range mountains rising majestically in the distance to the east and the gleaming blue sea to the west.

As we speak of what brought each of us here, I realize that our group represents Celtic, European, and North American native heritages. The women have come from California, Montana, Pennsylvania, Chicago and Ontario. We share a spiritual connection with nature and indigenous traditions, and a strong call to be here. One of the women, an artist, shares an image that she received in a vision and painted for this trip. We pray and ask for guidance, and set intentions for the week.

The first day we hike to Western Brook Pond, a landlocked freshwater fjord, the largest lake in Gros Morne National Park. Though I was born not far from here, this is my first visit and I'm as excited as everyone else. We learn that the Long Range Mountains are the most

northern extent of the Appalachian Mountain Range stretching along the eastern seaboard of North America. We walk the easy three kilometres across the marshy bogs separating the mountains from the now distant sea. At the wharf, we board a boat that will take us into a fjord of pristine lake water, which the tour guide says is the freshest water in the world.

As we enter the glacier-carved fjord, billion-year-old mountains tower above us like ancient grandfathers, and my heart opens in a sense of welcome and wonder. We cruise the sixteen kilometres long lake, taking in the presence and power of the mountains rising majestically above us. Waterfalls cascade over 2,000-foot-high cliffs as tears of happiness stream down my face. At the far eastern end, the fjord is fed by Stag Brook. It is a mystical place of elemental energy, light beams, and rainbows. The photos we take here are filled with orbs and magnificent sunlight effects.

We are high on crisp salt air, mountains, spectacular views—green vegetable gardens growing in luscious dark soil along the sides of the road, expanses of golden coastal barrens, emerald black ridges of trees bowed by salt sprayed wind. At dinner that evening, a rainbow arcs across the sky. As the sun sets on the Gulf of St. Lawrence we build a fire on the beach and gaze up at the Milky Way. It is a brilliant swirling spiral of twinkling stars and galaxies like I'd never seen before. This is a surreal land of magic in the most unexpected place and I can hardly believe I'm here to witness it.

The next day we make our way north along the coast to the top of the Northern Peninsula. As we drive along a paved side road, we see a baby rabbit hopping erratically down the centre of the otherwise empty road in front of us. We stop to corral it back down into the ditch and the woods, more hospitable territory.

Farther along we find Quoyles House, a century-old saltbox located down a steep lane on the shore of a quiet cove. Without realizing it, I had booked the house where E. Annie Proulx wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Shipping News* about a man's return to his ancestral home in Newfoundland. There is little wind under the overcast sky; the water of the bay has a slight ripple. We settle in excitedly and find a charming restaurant in the village to have dinner.

My last and only visit to this most northern part of the island was over forty years before. At that time, I was hospitalized at the Grenfell Mission Hospital, newly diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. This will be my first visit to L'Anse aux Meadows, an archaeological site, south of

here, discovered the year of my birth in 1960. In preparation for this trip, I've learned this is the only authenticated Norse village in North America, dated at approximately 1,000 years old. The site served as an exploration base and winter camp for Norse expeditions heading southward to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Archaeological evidence shows the L'Anse aux Meadows area was originally inhabited by indigenous peoples and that the Dorset people predated the Norse by 200 years. In addition to the European settlement, evidence of at least five or six separate native occupations has been identified here, the oldest roughly 6,000 years ago. The area was popular due to the abundance of marine life and its close proximity to Labrador.

The next day, we make our way to L'Anse aux Meadows. After watching a documentary about the discovery and development of the area, we explore the site. I am drawn to a bronze sculpture on the path between the visitor center and the recreated buildings. The sign says it was commissioned to commemorate the first known contact between Europeans and the indigenous people of North America. Its title *Meeting of Two Worlds* seems fitting.

Drawn to explore the cove to the left of the Norse settlement, we sense an energetic doorway to another place and time. The photos we took show a mist in this spot. Not far from the thatched houses of the Norse the indigenous people can be sensed still—fishing and tending the children as they always have, waiting for the time when they will be seen and acknowledged. I feel their desire to do it right this time, to come together with their white-skinned brothers in a more harmonious and respectful way than before.

Back at our house in the cove, we prepare for a ceremony. Filled with our day's experience at L'Anse aux Meadows, we engage in the ancient dance of ritual. We invoke the spirits of the four sacred directions, Earth and sky. We acknowledge the elemental spirits and ancestors who walked this land before us, and all those who caretake it still. We infuse prayers into the offerings. We ask that balance be restored between the living descendants, the ancestors, and all the spirit realms.

Smoke fills the room. Bells and rattles unite our voices as we give thanks for the gift of life, and of all creation. Laughter intersperses our prayers and songs. A sudden knock on the door startles us into silence. It's our hostess, checking that we're all right. We can only speculate

what she may think of our unusual activities, the scent and sight of the table covered with ceremonial items, but we carry on.

Later that evening as the sun sets, we prepare for a fire on the beach. It begins to drizzle. On the way down the steep incline to the beach, Sharon, a medical doctor, slips and falls on the freshly wet grass. Her ankle begins to swell. "I think it's broken," she announces. An emergency number is located and within minutes volunteer paramedics arrive. With great care and a cheerful sense of humour, they carry her up the hill on a stretcher. We decide two of us should stay behind to complete the ceremony. The rest of the group follow the ambulance to the hospital. X-rays confirm the ankle is broken. Sharon is kept overnight and we drive back to the house in the cove.

The women who stayed behind report strong elemental spirits showing up at the fire. They describe how the wind blew in and carried off the prayers. The volunteer paramedics told us it had been an exceptionally dry summer, last night was the first rain in many weeks. The next morning, while we wait at the hospital for a temporary cast so Sharon can fly home, a tropical storm hits the coast. Rain and wind rage for a couple of hours and the power goes out, creating a dramatic background for our exit. We had booked a whale-watching tour that day, and were hoping we could still go. But because of the weather, the tour is cancelled, for the first time that season.

On our way out of town we stop at a local restaurant for take-out pizza. One of the overnight doctors is there. He asks, with genuine curiosity, "Who are you women anyway?" People seem to sense we are not the usual tourists.

By noon, the weather calms. We drive to a lookout spot at the entrance of the harbour to eat our pizza, hoping to catch a glimpse of whales. There is still wind and the water is choppy, and no whales are in sight. Sharon makes plans for an earlier flight home. But she'd like to see a moose at least before leaving. Clearly, I had scared them off. I promise to relax my guard a little and as we leave the town, standing at the edge of a gravel pit is a moose cow in full view. She obliges us with plenty of time for pictures. A few hours later as we approach our beachside inn at Portland Creek, two more moose stand at the edge of the road munching on balsam fir. The mother stands protectively next to her calf.

Once Sharon is delivered to the airport, the remaining five of us head back up the coast again to Port aux Choix the next day. It's the

longest and most important habitation site of the Dorset and Maritime Archaic people. Driving from Hawke's Bay to the turnoff into Port aux Choix, we pass Big East River and get our first glimpse of Port Saunders, still a popular port for fishermen.

Port Saunders is where my mother was born and my parents met, and my grandparents and great-grandparents settled to raise their families. It was also my first home. My parents were married and I was baptized in the Anglican church. A few months later we moved to the east coast of the island for my father's work, returning to live here during my early school-age years. My ancestral connections to this area are well-cemented in childhood memory.

Being here brings back images of twisted tuckamore hideaways, familiar forest pathways, fishing boats in the harbour, the sound of a foghorn on a nearby island, deep echoes of wind, waves crashing on the shore, and snow and ice filling the harbour. Seeing the landscapes through new eyes now, we travel along the coastal road between Port Saunders and Port aux Choix. The sky is clear bright blue, with a bank of white fluffy clouds hugging the western horizon. I remember Saturday mornings walking the long stony beach with my father, finding messages in bottles carried by tides from faraway places.

Nearing Port aux Choix, a pile of feathers blowing on the road's yellow line turns out to be a dead seagull. When we stop to investigate, one of the women notices a bald eagle perched atop a piece of driftwood on the beach a short distance away. In indigenous traditions, the eagle represents the east direction of the medicine wheel. It's the place of birth and initiation, of new beginnings, and brings clear vision for the path ahead. For us today, it is another beautiful sign from the spirits of the natural world.

Port aux Choix was named by the French who occupied this coast for four hundred years, because of its many good ports for seafaring vessels. The town is designated a National Historic Site of Canada by virtue of containing one of the richest archaeological finds in North America. Maritime Archaic and Dorset burial sites uncovered in the town in the 1960s and 1970s confirm it has had continuous human habitation for at least 5,500 years.

At the park visitor centre, we watch a film related to the local history and view the artifact exhibits. On display are examples of the Dorset's beautifully hand-crafted stone tools and quartz crystals. Delighted to discover we are in time to hear the aboriginal artist in residence, we are captivated by the young Inuit throat singer. It's her

last performance of the season. The songs are haunting. Her presence is a direct connection with and a gift from the ancestors of this land.

The Point Riche Lighthouse is at the end of the road where we are drawn to the limestone beach terraces on the north facing shore. A couple of the women have visions of earlier peoples arriving in boats, of a gathering taking place across the veils of time and space, and a sense of anticipation and welcome. Despite my physical fatigue from little sleep and a long drive, a sense of excitement comes over me that I'm sure is not mine. Three of us leave to walk the perimeter of the island to Phillip's Garden, where the remains of many homesteads have been excavated.

I'm drawn to the remains of a building in the center of the excavation area where I sense a large group of people waiting. As I tune in, I feel an air of expectancy and a quiet solemn celebration. I entertain an inner vision of spirit people honouring our presence and accepting the offerings we bring—crystals, beads, sweets, and tobacco.

Heather is drawn to a spot on higher ground by the sight of a large crow feather on the path away from the settlement. She places a heart-shaped stone from our earlier ceremony, buffalo hair, and sage under the thick moss near a grouping of black spruce trees. In her pack, she carries a whalebone carving of an Eskimo woman carrying a baby in a papoose which she had purchased at a gift shop in St. Anthony. Later Heather tells us that at the moment it felt right to leave it for the ancestors, and she followed her inner guidance. When she stands up, she sees a caribou mother and calf grazing across the barrens. Heather accepts this manifestation as the ancestors' acknowledgement of her offering.

Each time I return here to make offerings, alone or with groups, I feel a warm welcome and connection with the spirits as well as the local people. While this place always felt familiar, the feeling is now different—like coming home to a place where I truly belong. There are layers yet to be revealed and more surprises to come.

Bridge of Icy Tears

TWO YEARS LATER in April, 2010, the weekend of my fiftieth birthday, I offer the first shamanic workshop in Bonne Bay. The retreat location at the old Cottage Hospital, now repurposed as the Julia Ann Walsh Centre, is where I was born. During the workshop, Russell Boulding, a geologist and Earth energy healer from Bloomington, Indiana, emails to say he and his wife will join me for a Sacred Earth Journey here in September. I sense that my work in Newfoundland is about to shift.

When I get back home to Ontario, I feel the need for personal energy work. My usual go-to person is not available and suggests I contact Steve Omilinsky, another shamanic practitioner. He is a classmate with whom I'd had a powerful healing experience during our training six years ago. Since then, he's been periodically in my dreams. Steve is also known as a skilled craftsman in our community because of his metal art and sacred talismans which are part of my medicine bundle.

Steve and I have our first conversation in many years. After our phone session I sleep soundly and peacefully for the first time in a long while. He asks me to check back with him so the next morning I send him an email report. In closing I write: "I can't explain it, but the sound of your voice made me feel as if I'd come home. I'd love to chat again soon."

Steve writes back: "Yeah, it was easy to talk yesterday, so comforting to share. Hadn't thought of it as a 'homecoming,' but I know what you mean and that does describe it. I'd also like to talk again soon." I have never felt a connection with a man this intensely, and my heart is excited.

Within a week, we are talking every day and late into the night. Our relationship is quickly evolving into a full-blown long-distance

romance. Steve lives in Oregon and the four-hour time difference with Ontario means I wake up to a goodnight message *from* him and I respond with a good morning message *for* him.

From the beginning we share a deep familiarity and easy intimacy, as if we've known each other forever. Contagious laughter erupts easily between us. We have led different lives in many respects, but we also share a lot in common, including our spiritual work. We are aware there are no accidents and marvel at the way we've been brought together again when we are both ready for a new relationship.

Steve accepts my invitation to join the Sacred Earth Journey in Newfoundland in September. The possibilities ahead for our lives together are exciting to contemplate and share. In June, I fly out to visit him in Oregon for a weekend of reconnection. He introduces me to his adopted home and takes me to his special places in nature. One day we drive a couple hours to an old growth forest where I see, for the first time, the luminous field around a towering redwood tree. It feels like we're catching up after a long time apart. We talk of where we'll live and joke about the continental divide. He likes the west coast; I'm definitely an east coast girl. The following poem is inspired by this ongoing discussion:

One Love

There's no point in debating One or the Other.
 Simply mind muddled matter we forget our hearts soar.
 A point oh so finely made on a never-ending line
 Containing the entire universe.
 We are particles of stardust colliding in an ocean of eternity.
 For this brief breath
 Let us sing the magic songs of timeless lovers.
 Whisper sweet nothings and dance the night away in dreamland.
 Set our faerie-dusted bodies free to play
 In the space between worlds
 Before continents shifted and created the divide
 We cannot yet imagine ourselves across.
 So here I sit, my shiny knight, in the still-faint light of morning.
 I slept surprisingly well alone in my un-empty bed.
 Your love wrapped magic around me
 Till I remembered the only point worth making—
 There is only One.

In late August, Steve flew to Ontario and a few days later we pack up the car to begin our road trip to Newfoundland. I have made this trip dozens of times, but I love seeing everything anew through Steve's eyes. We take the 401 Highway eastward through Toronto and towards the Quebec border, arriving in downtown Montreal mid-afternoon. This is always the most stressful part of the trip for me, due to the traffic and the inevitable construction and detours. Once past this busy urban centre, the highway carries us towards Quebec City. At this point in the journey, the view of the Saint Lawrence River and the Laurentian Mountains in the distance lifts my spirits and I begin to relax. The landscape becomes more mountainous and forested as we continue north towards Rivière-du-Loup. Darkness descends for the last leg of the day's drive to Edmundston at the northern tip of New Brunswick.

The next morning, we drive southeast through New Brunswick. This part of the trip is always a pleasure. There is less traffic and a constant panorama of rivers, green forests and hills, giving way to agricultural and coastal landscapes as we draw nearer to Nova Scotia. Once I smell the salty Maritime air, I get excited. We make good time arriving the evening of the second day in North Sydney. There our overnight ferry waits at the dock to take us the 140 kilometres across the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Once on the ferry, Steve is more animated. For the first time, he uses his camera, taking advantage of the remaining light. In the morning as we approach Port aux Basques, he is on deck for the first sight of land. We watch together as it emerges from the pale blue mists hugging the shores. Craggy ledges and rocky islands mark the entrance to this natural harbour at the southwest corner. We sail smoothly past stone break washes lining the channel to the dock.

That first night in Newfoundland we camp at a provincial park a few kilometres outside Corner Brook. We put up our tent close to the shore of a small lake, light a fire, and enjoy a simple meal of tea, bread, and cheese. The next day we hike the park trail, take photos of the resident squirrels and silver birch trees, and stop to listen to the gurgling brooks. We drive the two-and-a-half hours to Bonne Bay to begin our preparations for the Sacred Earth Journey. Over the next few days we visit the sites where we plan to take the group, making offerings to the spirits of each place.

With each ceremony, the magic builds. Our nine-member Sacred Earth Journey group has travelled from afar to be here—Indiana,

Oregon, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. We visit the best-known places in the park together—Western Brook Pond, Trout River, Bonne Bay, Tablelands Mountain, and also Port aux Choix. The evening after the opening fire ceremony in Rocky Harbour, during dinner in the back of the restaurant, people get up to look out the windows overlooking the harbour, taking their cameras. When we ask what's going on, our waitress points to the sky. The sun is setting across the water against a spectacular brilliant display of deep orange-reds, blues, and violet hues. The locals say they've never seen anything like it. We take this sign as an acknowledgement of our offerings from the elemental spirits.

Two days later our group heads to Port aux Choix. We walk the land of Phillips Garden to connect with the spirits and gather wild-flowers for our offering. Five of us leave to walk to the base of Crow Hill for a short ceremony where the Dorset buried their dead. The rest of the group stay near the beach and settlement site. In shamanic work we have learned to follow our inner guidance as to what is needed and honor what each of us is called to do.

I'm with the group heading to the base of the hill, but partway a sudden feeling of fatigue sweeps over me. My eyelids feel heavy, and I have the strong impulse to lie down. I tell the others to go ahead and find a cozy spot on the spongy bog next to the boardwalk trail. As I put my head down, I have the sensation of falling down a deep tunnel and that's all I remember.

Not long after, the others walk past me, not seeing me lying on the open marsh a few feet away from the trail, in spite of my wearing a bright lime green jacket. When I wake up, the sun is lower in the sky, and I hurriedly make my way back to the parking lot where I meet up with concerned friends who have been looking for me. I have no explanation for what occurred, although there is a folklore tradition in Newfoundland of people being taken by fairies and changed before being brought back. And given my Celtic lineage, I cannot discount that possibility.

Regardless of what happened, I feel wonderfully refreshed and we make our way to the park's visitor centre for a ceremony. A local reporter and the park staff join us. Steve and I spread our blanket and ceremony materials on the floor and begin to explain the purpose and process of a despacho. I feel many spirits gathering with us. As the ritual unfolds, everyone is invited to add their prayers and offerings to the bundle. In the space of gratitude for life and the ancestors who came before us, the deep peace of the sacred descends. Looking around

the circle, I see faces aglow with the beauty of the ceremony. Everyone leans in, absorbing the sweetness of the energy.

Once the bundle is complete, we drive out to Point Riche Lighthouse, walk down newly constructed wooden steps to a shiny galvanized steel fire pit perched on the rocky beach in the shelter of the bank. We stand in a circle to open sacred space, singing and rattling as the fire builds, and place the offering into the dancing flames. A shout comes from the parking lot above. "Look!" People are pointing out over the water. "Whales!" We watch as several minke whales surface and swim back and forth in the area adjacent to where we are standing on the beach. An occasional spray of water erupts when they surface for air. I dig my camera out of my knapsack and manage to capture video with one hand as I keep singing and rattling with the other.

I wait until the bundle has almost disintegrated before sprinting over the slippery limestone rocks to the water's edge. Waves crash over the ledge but I kneel and put my hands in the water, letting the waves splash over me. I say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you, whales. Thank you, ancestors. Thank you, spirits of this place. Thank you, mother of the waters." I'm overwhelmed with gratitude and wonder. A few minutes later, one of women joins me on the wet rocks. She is grinning from ear to ear. "You took off and left us all at the fire," she says. We laugh and hug, staying at the waters edge a while longer scanning the ocean, but the whales have moved on. The ceremony is complete. Our prayers have been heard.

Another day we have a fire ceremony at Lomond beach, on the east side of Bonne Bay. Lomond is the site of an old logging town and mill, now a favourite camping area of Gros Morne National Park. A few local people and a park staff person join us. After a interpretative walk to learn about boreal forest trees and plants, we gather around the fire in a large circle on the beach. I remember thinking that people are spread too far apart. Before long, we realize the tide is rising. Every few minutes we need to step away from the advancing waters and closer to the fire. The circle gets smaller and smaller until we are scrunched in together, laughing. In perfect timing, the flames flicker and die and the ceremony is over. A few more minutes and the waters of Bonne Bay completely cover the glowing coals. It is a perfect ending.

Steve is thoroughly enjoying his immersion into Newfoundland culture. He needed a little encouragement to try the local delicacy of cod tongues for the first time, but one taste and he is hooked. I knew he

would fall in love with Newfoundland—the wild landscapes, the maritime culture and music, and especially the warmth and openness of the people. The question of where we will live appears to no longer be an issue.

Steve's body, on the other hand, is having challenges. While he is fit and an avid hiker, for a number of months Steve has been experiencing unusual bouts of fatigue. He consulted his health care providers and they'd been exploring causes and treatments. During this trip he keeps up with the group but sometimes runs out of steam by day's end. Having been a diabetic for more than forty years, I can relate to fluctuating energy levels, and I often also experience vertigo during intense ceremonial work.

Our days are filled with activity and ceremony from morning to night, so by day's end we are both exhilarated and exhausted, and fall into bed midst gales of laughter. I have niggling worries about what may be wrong with Steve, but he rarely complains and mostly my heart is full and glad.

The group's closing ceremony takes place in a sheltered alcove on the beach below Lobster Head Cove Lighthouse, at the entrance to Bonne Bay. In a ritual of letting go, we throw stones into the bay, and then gather in a tight circle with our arms enfolding one another. The group photographer takes a picture of nine feet meeting in a circle on the rocks beneath us. In a clear strong voice, Russell sings his favourite Pete Seeger song: *One blue sky above us, one ocean lapping at our shore. One Earth so green and round, who could ask for more. And because I love you, I'll give it one more try, to show my rainbow race. It's too soon to die.*

The tour over, the group disperses with hugs, teary smiles, and promises to return. Steve and I pack up our car for the drive back to Ontario. A few hours after disembarking from the ferry in Nova Scotia, we turn off the highway and find our way to an old farmhouse. Steve had arranged to meet with a healer colleague from California who he has been working with for more than a year, but has never met in person. She happens to be visiting a friend in Nova Scotia this same week in a town we have to pass on our way. It is an amazing synchronicity and opportunity. We have a short visit and they spend time talking in private before we resume our journey.

Back on the highway and not too far ahead, we stop for takeout lunch at a roadside restaurant called the Dragonfly Café. We get local wild blueberry juice and sandwiches. There is a dragonfly wisdom

quote on the wall which I write down in a piece of paper to copy into my journal later. Steve is unusually quiet. As we get back on the road, a flash of intuitive knowing and deep sadness engulfs me. Since I'm driving, my eyes are on the road, but tears well up and run down my face. When I manage to answer Steve's query about what is wrong, words tumble out. "You are going to leave me... I don't know how or when. But I will be okay." He doesn't contradict my oddly timed pronouncement. His hand reaches across to find mine. The long moments pass in silence as an enormous ache and a sense of surrender fills the centre of my chest. There is nothing more to say.

By unspoken agreement, we do not speak of this again. For the rest of the drive back to Ontario, I talk determinedly of the future, the work we will do together. When Steve is driving, I take notes.

It is a drizzly dark early morning in late September when we leave my house in Guelph to drive to Buffalo airport for Steve's return flight to Oregon. He is still preoccupied and withdrawn despite my efforts to span the distance that has opened between us. I know he has pressing worries and sense his unhappiness about leaving. It has been a magical and powerful time. So much has happened, and we are still processing it all. I attempt to keep my tone light and reassuring, although I feel sad and helpless.

Construction signs and detours appear about an hour along the highway and with the added stress of driving in the rain and dark on unfamiliar roads, I miss a couple of turns and have to find my way back. The tension between us increases with the possibility of not making the flight. When we arrive at the airport, Steve insists I drop him at the departure doors. Our goodbye and last embrace is hurried. I feel abandoned.

Our telephone chats resume after Steve's return to Oregon, but things have changed. We talk less frequently, and our conversations focus increasingly on his health challenges. More doctors' appointments and tests are scheduled. As his physical symptoms worsen, his spirit falters. He is despondent when he doesn't have the energy to work at his usual pace, and especially, when he can't hike to his favourite mountain. When he is feeling better, we talk about where we will go for Christmas. Somewhere romantic, sunny and warm, and relaxing. The two of us alone, no group this time, we remind each other, and laugh.

We plan the next trip to teach in Newfoundland in February and discuss where we will live. Perhaps near St. John's, within sight of the ocean. Steve considers the kind and size of trailer he'll need to

transport his workshop across the continent. I hang on to every plan and promise.

It is a cool sunny day in early November when Steve calls from his car after leaving the doctor's office. With my mind as still and neutral as I can muster, I listen to the diagnosis. It is the worst-case scenario—advanced pancreatic and liver cancer. “I don’t know what to do,” he admits. My response is instinctual and firm, “Go to your mountain.” His favourite pine-covered hill is a place where he feels most at peace, and although he no longer has the strength to climb, I know that simply being near it will help.

The continental divide opens and closes between us as Steve informs his family and friends and deals with the reality of his terminal illness. He makes a valiant effort to heal his body and spirit by meditating, drinking herbal teas, and seeking spiritual counselling and support. I perform distance healing sessions for Steve and gather people together for ceremonies on his behalf. I know I need to stay neutral, but can't. So much is at stake. We hope against all odds for a miracle. He knows he is facing a difficult journey, and to protect me, he pushes me away. I understand why, but it hurts.

When Steve's faith waivers, I sense the futility of it all and feel angry with him for giving up. At other times, he feels scared and desperately clings to me, and I pull away, scared too. Eventually, I realize Steve must take this journey alone, but letting go is hard. I struggle to keep myself and my life together, starting a series of Roling sessions, deep often painful body work to release tension. It helps to ground me.

In early December, I retreat to the cottage on Eagle Lake for a few days. It is a place I've found peace and insight before, but this time it is elusive. My attempt to escape the inevitable is not going to work. On December 8, 2010, I have this dream:

I'm travelling along a road in contact with a man who is travelling in another vehicle. I come to the end of the road and turn around to go back. I stop at a lookout and see a spectacular red sky—it is covered with red oak leaves and there's a luminous white full moon in the midst of them. The other vehicle is parked nearby.

The dream spoke to me of the need for courage and strength, and of the ending we were both facing, the separation between us. The finality is hard to accept. I feel angry and sad for myself and guilty for being selfish—all my big dreams doomed, disappearing. My heart is

breaking, torn between my living and his dying. During the final weeks of Steve's life, I keep myself distracted, going through the motions of normal life. My housemate and I plan a Christmas party, the first in our new house. Because I cannot see him, I do not realize the extent of physical deterioration of his body, nor how close he is to death.

Before Christmas Steve finally accepts the inevitability of his transition and begins to prepare. He asks me to be there to perform his death rites, a prospect I can barely fathom, let alone accept. This is the most sacred of tasks and I must find the strength to do it. His friends and I speculate how much time he may have left, and I book a flight. Steve asks friends and colleagues to hold a ceremony for him the day before I arrive. In the dark early morning of January seventh, I'm driving to the airport when my cell phone rings. It is Steve's daughter. "You may be on your way," she says, "Dad passed in the night."

I feel numb but keep going because I don't know what else to do. My thoughts are a jumble. Figuring out how to turn around is too formidable a task. All I can think is that Steve wanted me to be there and I'm going. I can at least say goodbye, see him one last time, and perform the death rites. This is not how I imagined it would be.

I arrive at Steve's house in Eugene, Oregon after lunch. A collection of Steve's family and friends, most of whom I had never met, are milling around. I expected to greet a house in mourning, but the one I walk into is hardly recognizable. The rooms are in complete disarray. Steve's belongings are scattered over the floors, in garbage bags and packing boxes. Family members and friends are sorting, deciding what to keep, what to throw out and what to give away.

Steve's body has been taken away for cremation. I'm surprised to learn there will be no memorial service and no opportunity to see him one last time. At Steve's request, a celebration of life will be held back in Chicago where his family live and he'd spent most of his life. His family are kind, but I'm an outsider by virtue of my absence. And I'm not sure I even have a right to be here. So, I try to make myself useful, packing boxes with things I think his daughters may treasure someday, old pictures and books Steve had valued enough to keep. On the floor of his meditation room there are stones and bells that I recognize as part of his medicine bundle. I silently slip them into my pockets.

Shortly after my arrival, a young girl with straight shoulder length blonde hair wanders into the house looking bewildered, her face mirroring my own. I introduce myself and ask her name. Her face relaxes a little as she tells me, "I'm Lydia, I live next door." Steve had spoken of

this young neighbour who'd come by his shop after school to hang out and talk. They'd become friends. He'd also told me of the kindness of her family, how her mother had brought him pots of food when he first moved here. In the fall when he was too ill to manage by himself, they'd helped him set up his booth at the local market. Lydia had tied red ribbons on Christmas ornaments he had made, his last labour of love. Her mother visited him regularly the past few weeks.

I want to meet the rest of the family and tell them how much their friendship and support meant to Steve. Later that day I sit in their kitchen and we share our feelings of shock and sadness. Before leaving, I pull out the stones from Steve's medicine bundle. Explaining that they are healing stones he brought from Lake Titicaca, Peru, I ask Lydia to pick one, adding "Steve would want you to have it." Lydia took her time selecting one of the stones. Grasping it tightly in both hands, she brought it to her heart, and a big smile spread across her pale face. She checked with her mother first, and then got a basket of stones her family had collected from different places. "Pick one." she instructs. I choose a deep pink stone that looked like quartzite. In this moment, I think this may be one of the reasons I needed to be here.

I can only imagine what the past few weeks had been like for those who were caretaking and holding space as Steve slipped from this world. Their loss seemed that much greater than mine. And I was not yet fully aware of the breadth and depth of my own. At Steve's house, I make a point of speaking with each of his family members and friends as they show up.

I gratefully accept the invitation to take some of Steve's talismans and metal creations from his workshop. There are garden stakes, animal archetypes, Christmas ornaments, and the dragonfly pendant he'd crafted for me. Alone, I'm often in a daze, driving confusedly around the streets, not sure where I am, or where I'm going.

On my last night in Eugene, a small group gathers at the home of one of Steve's friends for a ceremony. We create an *aya despacho* and offer our bundle to the fire. There is comfort in the familiarity of ritual after the most intense few days I have ever experienced.

Back home in Guelph I throw myself into more ceremony and plan a gathering of friends to celebrate Steve's life. During the last conversation I had with him, when he needed help to communicate, he'd reminded me how much he enjoyed the cod tongues. So, I buy them from the Newfoundland store in Cambridge to prepare in the

traditional style, pan fried in pork scrunchions (rendered pork fat), for the party. I want to keep all our memories close to my heart.

In those first days after Steve's death I wake to a feeling that something is wrong. A light has gone from my world. I go through the motions of living, putting one foot in front of the other, but my body moves slowly and heavily. At work, a ten-year-old client I've known a long time looks at me and says in his usual direct fashion, "You're sad."

"Yes," I confirm, explaining, "My good friend died and I'm missing him and feeling sad because I'll never see him again."

He nods knowingly, having experienced unimaginable loss himself. I feel a little guilty accepting comfort from a child, but he is wise in spite of his years.

In the days following Steve's death, I keep as busy as possible yet grief and regret stalk me. I wish I'd gone to see him earlier, even when he'd discouraged it. I wish I'd spent more time with him, to at least hold his hand one more time. Driving to and from work there is time to remember our road trip together, and I weep and wail.

There are two dream communications from Steve during the weeks after his death, the first was one week after he passed. From my journal on January 14, 2011:

I'm in a world of pure golden light and Steve's body is lying here on a table. It looks whole and perfect. It is being healed. I see his beautiful strong sculptor hands up close, so perfect I think he must be wearing skin-coloured plastic gloves. But then I notice they are luminous and filled with light, unblemished, unscarred, unlike they were in the physical. I'm so happy to see him and glad he is alive, even though he is still asleep and cannot communicate with me.

This golden world is completely lucid and real. I am surprised to find myself waking up. I leave that blissful light-filled realm slowly and reluctantly...the most profound peace and lightness of being I can imagine. In comparison, this physical world is dense and heavy. It's like moving through mud. I don't want to come back but know I have no choice. My work here is unfinished. At times I feel angry and disappointed, robbed because the wind has been taken from my sails when I'd glimpsed a glorious destination.

Comfort comes from friends, my work and ceremony, and the elemental spirits of Newfoundland. In a morning meditation I connect with Gros Morne Mountain and feel a warm presence envelop me. I

remember hiking to its base with Steve to make offerings, and now I ask the mountain to please take care of him. A feeling of deep peace stays with me all day.

In keeping with the sense of fun and laughter that infused our short time together, the second dream is humorous. It confirms that Steve was thinking of me at the end of his time here and that he wanted to see me before he left. This thought comforts and warms my heart. From my journal two weeks after his death on January 21, 2011:

Steve is riding a bicycle on a road that leads up a steep hill. He's really struggling to get up this hill but not moving anywhere. Then he's next to me attempting to stay balanced on the bike, but he keeps falling off. I know he's not well and doesn't have the energy for this, and ask why is he doing it? He communicates telepathically that if he expends enough energy he can hasten his death and thus time it so that he'll die when I'm there for the weekend.

I wake up laughing out loud. In spite of his careful planning, he goofed it up anyway. This strikes me as funny, a reminder of how much we laughed together. Once our funny bones were tickled, we couldn't stop laughing, sometimes going into hysterics at the tiniest thing. Throughout the trip to Newfoundland, humour lightened any stressful parts. We had a lot of fun together, but there'd been few light moments since his return to Oregon. I sensed he was laughing with me now, helping shift my perspective, to see the humour in the situation. This dream message lightens my heart and lifts my spirits.

With the help of friends, I create a slide show from photos and videos of the Newfoundland trip. This brings a lot of pleasure and consolation. A nature photographer had accompanied us on the journey, and along with a talented media specialist friend, we spend many hours creating a tribute to Steve. I share it with Steve's family and friends and watch it often, taking solace in the beautiful memories and the peace and enjoyment evident on Steve's face. It was, when all was said and done, a wonderful last journey together. I was glad to have shared it with him.

I decide to go to Newfoundland in February on my own. The first night there I wake to the presence of a Peruvian medicine man cleansing me with spirit water. I don't recognize him, but feel safe and taken care of on this trip back home to share the healing wisdom that had brought Steve and I together. There is a full agenda: a Mayan Calendar presentation, ceremonies, and a retreat on Peruvian wisdom

traditions. It is, as expected, cold and snowy in St. John's in early February. Regardless, a group of eight people gather on a windy cliff in Pouch Cove for a weekend of ceremony and initiation. Sharing this work is always sweet and deeply nourishing. In the company of friends who knew Steve, tears flow easily and often.

During these months I remember through dreams and visions that Steve and I have been together in many lifetimes, that we share a desire to advance planetary consciousness, and that has led us to pursue healing wisdom paths. We have incarnated together in order to help each other learn and grow, lifetime after lifetime. This is true of everyone's significant relationships.

Steve died almost nine months from the day we reconnected. We were together only a short time, but his death affects me more profoundly. The significance of our relationship will continue to reveal itself in the coming years through dreams and synchronistic events. My understanding will expand. In the meantime, less than a month after Steve's death, I have a sweet dream connection with an animal known for its intelligence, sociability, and joyful nature. From my journal on February 2011:

There's a large yacht my father has purchased. It's tied up at the dock. My two fishermen uncles are there and many children and adults are milling around. Next, we're on the boat, moving out into the little harbour. I see there's not much room to manoeuvre the boat, but my favourite uncle is piloting it, and he knows what he is doing. I'm on deck and spot a dolphin in the water. I call to it excitedly, and it swims alongside, close enough to kiss me. No one else sees it but me. I look into the dolphin's eyes and see they radiate pure love.

Deepening Ancestral Connections

THE WINTER AFTER STEVE'S DEATH I begin planning, somewhat tentatively at first, another Sacred Earth Journey to the Great Northern Peninsula. In late spring unexpected news arrives—a group of Peruvian healers are able to join us. Steve and I had talked of this possibility, and it happens with such ease that it appears meant to be.

I'd met Martin Pinedo Acuna, a traditional medicine man from Cusco, Peru, in Ontario a few years before. Don Martin, the respectful way to address him, had healing gifts said to come through the eyes, wings, and energy of a condor. He was ten years old when he was first visited by the condor, a bird associated with the spirit of the Andes, and El Condor became his spiritual name. He is known for his work with the Earth-honouring despacho ceremony and divination with coca leaves, and is a Keeper of the sacred mountain Pachatusan, near Cusco.

This will be Bernadina Catary Alvarrez's first visit to Canada. Dona Berna is from Puna, on Lake Titicaca, and started training as a healer at nine years old. She, too, was chosen by nature as a communicator for Mother Earth and the sacred mountains. She is gifted in plant medicine, a skilled tracker of energies, and as I will soon discover, a beautiful singer of *icaros* or medicine songs. Both Don Martin and Dona Berna are known as *Alto Mesayoc*, the highest shamanic rank.

Without any contriving on my part, come September we are a group of twenty-one, the Mayan sacred number again. Half of the gathering are Newfoundlanders, the others come from the United States, Ontario, and Peru. A few of the group were with us the year before and knew Steve. When Russell Boulding, the Earth energy healer from Indiana, arrives in Bonne Bay for his second visit, he says it feels like coming home.

The visit to the place of the ancestors, Port aux Choix, is one of several memorable highlights of that tour. It is, as everything during

the ten days, a wonderful blend of planning and spontaneity. After the visitor centre our first stop is the Point Riche Lighthouse. People jump off the bus to wander and explore the limestone terraces and beaches. It is a spectacular sunny day and a perfect place to commune with the elemental spirits. Dona Berna, tiny and petite with dark hair and intense dancing brown eyes, is dressed in the traditional multi-coloured dress and slim leather sandals of her mountain culture. She scampers over the rough limestone rocks, already talking to the spirits of the place in her native Quechua, the language of the mountain people. She places offerings into the seams of the limestone as waves crash against the rocks. Happy to share her offerings with others, she demonstrates speaking her prayers into sacred coca leaves and placing them between two pieces of chocolate. "*Pachamama* loves chocolate," she says with a wide grin. Dona Berna loves sweets and any gift of candy is accepted with many smiles and hand motions that communicate clearly—"half for me, half for *Pachamama*."

Point Riche has a magnetic power. Getting folks back on the bus is a struggle. As one of the participants quips, "It's like herding cats." Eventually, everyone returns to the bus and we drive back to the visitor centre. We walk north along a trail that crosses the island through coastal barrens. Don Martin insists I lead the way, although I have not walked these trails before and aren't sure where they lead. We follow the left turning path through a stand of black spruce and tamarack trees, along a marshy pond and up a small hill to emerge at the highest point on the island, Crow Head. From here we have a view of the ocean and the north side of the island. Below, down a long set of stairs, are caves where the Dorset placed the bodies of their dead. We instinctively gravitate to a mossy mound. It is a perfect place for our ceremony.

Dona Berna lays out her brightly patterned llama wool blanket and begins to prepare the offering. Each of us finds a place in the circle around her. I observe the eager faces. One woman unwraps her prayer scarf while others open their medicine bundles. Each prepares to enter the space of sacred connection, where time stands still. I'm overcome with love and thankfulness for this day and each person here, plus something immense and unspeakable. I lay my face on the ground next to Don Martin and allow my tears to fall into the dense spongy moss, spreading partridgeberry, and lichen.

What I feel here is too immense to articulate in a string of sound, too rich to be captured in a photo. I know the ancestors are gathered

around, witnessing and participating with us. As we feel their presence, they see us and are thankful we have come so far to be here, from lifetimes and continents away. I'm amazed at how this event has come to pass, this possibility that has manifested out of the ethers in ways I could never have imagined.

In a flash, I sense the beauty and perfection of our time here, the cycles of life that take me away from this land and bring me back again. I feel grateful for those who walked this land for thousands of years before us, whose love and presence continues to keep this place and allows us to connect with the sacred here. My body and soul feel at home in the timeless space of the ineffable, and I know the spirits of this place are nourished by our presence and ceremony. Wordlessly, Don Martin pats my back, and gets up to gather wood for the fire.

The bundle burns more quickly than most I have witnessed, second only to the first one I offered here several years prior. After it is consumed and there are only a few black coals left on the stones, someone discovers a rocky cavern below the high mound where we sat earlier. The sound of water emerges from the bottom of the crevice. It is deep and curiously constructed. Laughing like children, we take turns lying on the boggy Earth holding each other's legs to look as we throw offerings into the watery cave.

The spontaneous playful feminine ceremony with the cave is a perfect counterpart to the masculine mound we'd sat upon and the fire that carried our prayers to the heavens. Everyone understands the momentous significance of the balancing of elemental energies, yin and yang, that has transpired with a shared sense of wonder and amazement. We embrace with long warm hugs as happy and grateful tears flow. Our work complete, we head back to town for dinner, and other even more powerful ceremonies yet to come.

As I reflect on this day a few years later, I recall the north medicine wheel training in March 2005 where we participated in an exercise to find our original face. My partner saw me as a native girl living in the far north, as one who knew the spirit realms. It made me think again of my childhood fascination with igloos, and how I spent countless hours playing in the snow and building snow houses.

Several years later, on a winter night in January 2009, I was called to do a journey. The moon was beaming round and bright through my living room window in a clear indigo sky as I sat with my rattle and medicine bundle. I asked Grandmother Moon to guide me where I needed to go in the spirit realms. Notes from my journal:

It takes a while to focus and settle, but before long I feel myself entering a long spiralling tunnel and emerge inside an igloo. Light radiates through the ice walls as if lit from the outside. The light inside is unexpectedly bright. There is a group of women with golden-brown skin gathered around a small fire in the center. They are wearing fur-trimmed parkas and skin pants and boots with fur around the top. They give me clothes to wear and welcome me to the circle. I feel honoured to be there but not sure I belong.

They pass a pipe around the circle, offering it to me. There is singing, which surprisingly I can do, even though it's not my language. After that, there's conversation and laughter. I connect with a short, tiny, walnut-faced woman with bright eyes across the circle. She is important to me and I sense her death may be imminent. She intends to pass her place to me. That's why I'm here.

There's a ceremony with dancing and singing. At first, I seem to be on the outside, then I'm taken into the heart of the circle. It feels like an initiation ceremony. It's fuzzy. After a while I'm back with the women gathered around the fire. There's an ivory carved bone pipe in someone's hands. Is it being gifted to me? It's difficult to separate myself from the others in the group. Then we hug, and its time to leave and return to the present.

In true spiritual journey fashion, this is a story that's significance I did not fully grasp at the time. However, this same dark wrinkle-faced grandmother had shown up in other dreams, including one which foretold my cousin's death. Even though I know my spiritual connection with shamanic cultures, the possibility of a genetic connection to northern peoples will arise through this and other visionary experiences.

Each trip to the island affirms and deepens my longing to be there. Towards the end of the ten days with the Peruvians in Bonne Bay, I see the date, December 28, in my inner vision one morning in a meditative state. Wondering about the significance of that day, I ask Don Martin to give a reading for me. His face breaks readily into a wide mischievous smile showing several gold-capped teeth. He is of stocky build, with shiny brown hair and dark brown eyes. Sitting comfortably on the floor with his legs spread, he holds up a handful of coca leaves and allows them to fall onto the bright-patterned cloth.

Gazing at the way the leaves have fallen, he speaks of my move back to the island. He sees the establishment of Bonne Bay as a centre

of healing. When I ask when this could happen, he repeats the process and says, "The leaves say the timing is good for your move to Newfoundland within one year." I nod in agreement, thinking to myself, 'I don't think I can wait a whole year.'

Once back in Ontario, living takes more energy than I can muster most days. The community of people drawn to this work has grown beyond my wildest expectations. Yet my life there no longer makes sense because my heart is in Newfoundland. I make plans to move by looking for jobs and a place to live. A number of issues need to be resolved first. I must ready the house I share with my friend to sell. It involves fixing a long-standing foundation leak that has caused a great deal of stress the last six months. The leak feels like a metaphor for my life.

A synchronistic meeting with a colleague from my early years in Guelph led to a catch-up lunch. When I share my plans to move to Bonne Bay she says, to my surprise, "I see you living in Woody Point." I'd been looking on the opposite side of Bonne Bay, and so I take this as direct guidance. Of course, it turns out to be perfect advice. I receive additional reassurance through the dreamtime:

I'm with my sister in Newfoundland. We meet our other sister at a large old-fashioned, two-storey house into which she has moved. She is recently returned after a long-time way. She looks and says she's feeling great. I reflect, "Well, you are here in Newfoundland with the salt air and water, you are here with all this love, no wonder you are feeling good!"

The end of 2011 is fast approaching and despite many inquiries and applications, neither a place to live nor a job has manifested. However, the house in Guelph sells quickly, thanks to my fairy real estate friend, with a closing date of December 28, the date from my Newfoundland vision. "January is a terrible time to move to Newfoundland, April will be much better," she says. Trusting her sage advice, I pack and unpack once again over the Christmas holidays and move to yet another temporary home in Guelph.

With each move, my pile of belongings gets smaller. Surely by now I must have shed enough. In the two years since my decision to move back to Newfoundland, I moved six times. For a Taurus like myself, a stable home life is essential to a sense of well-being. This much change is extremely stressful.

I'd been relying on a team of health practitioners to help keep my body and soul together. In addition to medical and naturopathic doctors, a therapist and dream analyst, I also regularly availed myself of osteopathy, acupuncture, homeopathy, massage therapy, and reflexology. I have an appointment with a gentle Chinese medicine doctor who is aware of my upcoming move. He rarely offers advice without solicitation, but today he quietly asks, "How soon can you get home?" In that moment, I realize my health is compromised by staying there, in spite of all the support at my disposal.

In early December I participate in a ceremony with a group of indigenous grandmothers in a village of the Six Nations on the Grand River First Nation Indian Reserve. The grandmothers have come from North and South America, including northern Canada. I receive a vision:

I'm in a place that feels like Port aux Choix but in another time. I'm sitting in a round skin-covered hut with other women. It is hazy with sacred smoke. We are praying, calling on the spirits of the seals and other animals we depend on for survival. We are concerned we have offended the spirits of the animals, the great spirit. I'm the one in the village with knowledge of the spirit realms and we are here now on behalf of our dwindling community. The feeling is of immense sadness, fear, and confusion. Few seals have come this year and we have little food. Many people have died. The men who left to search for food have not returned. We are hungry and worried. There are few of us left now. I too, will leave soon. The vision fades.

But now, in the centre of this ceremony circle, a polar bear appears. He stands tall on hind legs directly facing me, looming over us at this end of the room. There is no message, only the largeness and certainty of his presence.

The next morning as I prepare to leave, one of the women from the north gifts me my first eagle feather.

At work, a few weeks later in January, I have a severe hypoglycaemic reaction and fall unconscious while in session with a child client. One moment we are playing a card game, and the next thing I know paramedics are reviving me. This medical crisis brings the realization that once again I'm at an advanced stage of burnout—physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion.

There are still no job prospects or a place to live in Bonne Bay but the universe conspires through the unexpected generosity of a friend who steps in with a loan. "Consider this an investment in your dream," she says.

While searching for a place to rent, I find a bungalow for sale in Woody Point, and my banking and real estate friends help me put together an offer. The purchase is conditional on a viewing and a quick trip is planned.

It is cold and the snow is deep in Woody Point the middle of February. Still, the spectacular view of the Tablelands Mountain out the frosty dining room window and the ring of nine mature white spruce trees surrounding the house cinches the decision. It feels right. In the process of clearing the property title, I discover distant cousins have lived in the house before me. Ancestors, I should not have been surprised. I can finally pack to leave. By early April, a number of boxes are shipped ahead to Woody Point.

Moving day arrives. Heather had offered to drive me and my two cats to Newfoundland in her van. My real estate friend's husband shows up to help load the van with the rest of my belongings, accomplishing what appears impossible. My brother and his girlfriend are also there to help. A shamanic practitioner friend arrives to offer prayers for a safe journey. "It's like all the stars have lined up for you," one person says. I manage a wry grin. "It took them long enough."

A native elder colleague and her daughter come to wish me well and to gift me another eagle feather—"Hold the east gate," the elder directs. All I can visualize is getting my feet on solid ground again. It is a beautiful send-off, and I feel immense gratitude for all the people and support that has conspired to help me go home.

Coming Full Circle

WOODY POINT IS A PICTURESQUE VILLAGE and registered heritage district of approximately 250 full time residents that swells to double that number in the summer. Across the bay is Norris Point, where I was born one spring afternoon more than fifty years before. During my first weeks in Woody Point I meet relatives who help fill in the many blanks in our family tree.

The first is a bit of a surprise. I learn that my great-great grandfather, John Michael Eisan, was an original settler of Bonne Bay. He arrived on a fishing boat from Ship Harbour, Nova Scotia, with three of his cousins in 1863. Here he met his future wife, Jane Mudge, and stayed in Bonne Bay. They were the first settlers of Curzon Village. On its return voyage, the fishing boat along with his cousins on board, was lost at sea. It is said that John's family remained unaware of his survival until many years later when they heard the news of his death in 1898.

Though I'd grown up hearing of this grandfather, parts of the story were new and answered a particular family mystery. I'd been told the Eisans were from Holland, which accounted for the blond hair and blue eyes that runs in our family. But now it's clear that they actually hailed from west Germany. The discrepancy made sense because they may have needed to hide the truth of their heritage at the time. And it made me wonder what other facts still lay hidden.

I learn that my great-great aunt, Elizabeth, the oldest daughter of John, was known in the community as a healer. She concocted medicines and treated people with plants from her garden. Not surprisingly, there is also archaeological evidence of Maritime Archaic and Dorset Eskimo people living in Bonne Bay. In fact, my living room window looks out over a field where their tools have been excavated, a few of which are on display in the town museum. The synchronicities that brought me back to this place begin to make sense. Information

revealed in dreams over a number of years connect, although I suspect there are more pieces of the puzzle yet to be revealed.

During those early days, I become aware of my direct lineage to indigenous peoples of the island, though it is unclear which—Beothuck, Mi'kmaq, or another of the several groups that occupied Labrador. My maternal lineage can be traced back six generations to Mary—a woman the records state was “born with an Indian name.”

Mary married John Charles Payne, a fisherman from England. They fished in the waters around Newfoundland from Burin to the Bay of Islands. It is said she also accompanied him to the south of England where it's purported they were married, however this cannot be verified.

When Mary and John's first child is born in 1808, they built a home and became Cow Head's original settlers. Cow Head (or Tête de Vache) was named by French fishermen from a large rock in the shape of a cow's head that can be seen from the sea. It's approximately 120 kilometres north of Deer Lake along the west coast of the Northern Peninsula, bordering the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Although mostly exposed to the strong winds that blow, the “head” has a tiny sheltered inlet on the south side of its craggy outcrop. The surrounding area is best known for its long sandy beach called Shallow Bay, and it has been inhabited by early indigenous people, including the Dorset and pre-Dorset people for at least 3,000 years. Cow Head was where the Dorset found the chert (stone) they favoured for crafting the very fine knives and tools they used for hunting and carving.

On my first visit to the head of Cow Head, I hike around the perimeter of the rock, and upon arriving at the south side of the promontory, I have a distinctive physical reaction—one way my body registers the presence of spirit people. It's a shift in frequency similar to the sensation of a sudden drop of blood glucose.

After more than forty years of living with diabetes, this light-headedness was familiar. As I tune in to my other ways of knowing, I feel the excitement of people greeting me warmly who want to show me around. I walk down the rock-strewn hill, along a narrow-worn path through the tall grass of an empty meadow. There I can easily imagine a house filled with cooking smells and the labour that wove the lives of men, women, and children together. Along the rocky shore, I see an inner vision of wharfs and stages with boats tied up in the sheltered inlet around the point. I see clothes drying on a wooden fence, seagulls soaring in the blue cloudless sky, mounded earthen vegetable gardens,

and fish drying on a wooden flake. The air is filled with sounds of birds, the chopping of wood, motor boats, children, and animals.

Connecting with my imagination, I feel the hard work and stamina it took to survive here—enduring long days of constant bone-tired weariness, and the freezing of dark winter nights, and of children, sick and dying. These coastal people's survival revolved around the land and animals that sustained them, and the seas to be navigated in all seasons. Later I explore the town of Cow Head looking for the graves of my ancestors.

In the tidy colourful graveyards, almost every tombstone is decorated with flowers. In this town residents still honour their dead. There are many deserted outport communities around the coasts of Newfoundland where graveyards are overgrown and hidden, lost to memory. I've visited certain ones of these, and suspect there are many more ancestors of mine who still linger here, waiting to be remembered.

Across cultures and time is the belief that bones, the last element of the physical body to decompose, holds the essence of those who have died. As decomposing bodies feed the soil, the spiritual energy of those who have loved and cared for the land feeds and protects the life upon it. This is part of the necessity for grave-tending. Ancestral connections maintain the integrity of families across generations. As the young tend and protect the graves of the dead, the spirits of the dead care for and sustain the living. This practice also reinforces one's spiritual connection to the Earth, and the caretaking of the environment, and the creatures that co-exist here.

The first summer back home on The Rock, a couple of Ontario friends visit with the specific intention of hiking the Long Range Traverse. This unmarked trail is an intense three-day hike across arctic-alpine bogs and barrens and through the mountains along the Atlantic coast, known for its challenges and wild beauty. It was something Steve and I had planned to do, and I had the thought that my friends were making the journey in our stead. We spend time studying the area on a map and I shared my ideas about the energetic connections between Gros Morne Mountain and the Tablelands Mountain. My friends report that despite the challenges, their trek was marked by synchronistic encounters and their photos show luminous orbs and rainbow light effects. The day they left I was surprised by this vivid dream:

I'm in an office sitting at a desk. I answer a phone to hear Steve's voice, clear and distinct. He's calling for his wife, knowing he'll be connected with me. In the dream, I'm lucid enough to ask how it's possible for him to be on the phone, since I know he has died. I am happy and honored that he thinks of me as his wife. It's amazing to hear his voice as if he is still here in the physical; he sounds like himself.

The happiness stays with me as I awake. This dream contains a clue I needed to explain our brief yet intense and many layered relationship. I slowly realize that Steve is what is known in esoteric traditions as a twin flame.

A twin flame is someone's spiritual twin. Someone who shares an identical soul nature, or frequency with the other. Twin flames enter life together for a singular purpose: to help each other awaken spiritually. These special relationships are known to bring powerful, sometimes painful transformations. And there was yet more to unfold. Steve will continue to teach and support me from the other side.

I was developing a deeper connection with my new home, the people, and the landscapes. They were each becoming more consciously woven into my sense of self with every passing day.

I began to collect drinking water from underground springs around Bonne Bay, feeling fed by the wild water and nourished by the land. I used this naturally sourced spring water to make flower and tree essences. Direct communications from the plants and trees came through dreams and visions while in deep meditative states. I felt the plants' desire to be of service to humanity. All of life is evolving together during this period of expanding feminine consciousness on the planet.

On my first visit to this area three years before, I'd become attuned to an energy vortex formed by the mountains and bay. Later, I discovered the spiritual connection with Peru, which was confirmed by the Peruvians' visit to Gros Morne in 2011. The vibratory signature of these connections came together in a remedy called Emergence.

Steve's stones from Lake Titicaca were used to make this particular essence. Over the next two years, I created a series of nine natural remedies, each a unique blend of plant, mineral, and environmental essences, designed to harmonize body, mind, and spirit. These essences help raise an individual's vibratory frequency, and the capacity to ground higher dimensions of consciousness during this current planetary shift.

Harvest Moon

IT IS SIX MONTHS after arriving in Woody Point, the time of the full moon, a sunny cloudless not too cold day at the end of September. An idea has been building all day and late afternoon I decide that tonight I will sleep outside under the moon. I know exactly where. A once well-used camping area at the end of a small lake, Bonne Bay Little Pond, has been calling me. It drew me the first time I'd stopped there to walk and wade in the shallow water at the lake's edge.

I throw things in the back of my old car: a Canadian Tire pup tent, a sleeping bag and pillow, some food, utensils, and a bag of firewood. On the way out of town, in case anyone was wondering, I text a neighbour: "Gone camping, be back tomorrow." Because in this tiny town someone was bound to notice my absence. I never thought I'd find that fact so comforting.

I make a right turn off the highway, reminding myself that no one will mind me being there, and may even encourage me to make myself at home. I drive past a decrepit looking trailer with a slack empty clothesline held in place by a single grey tilting stick and an old yellow school bus with flat tires and a sliding door that hangs permanently open. I turn down a path to the beach. I walk to the water's edge and dip my hand into the cool water with an offering and prayer to the water spirits.

Sitting sentinel to my right are three hills stacked vertically against one another. I call them the Three Sisters because they remind me I'm one of three, as is my mother. I acknowledge the spirits of the hills, trees and creatures. And because I have seen a bear not far from here, I ask the wild creatures to keep a respectful distance. I will also make sure all my food is locked up in the car tonight. And because I'm still a scaredy-cat when out in the woods, for a few brief moments I question if camping alone was such a good idea after all. I make extra

offerings and prayers for protection. Then I resolutely shift my attention to the beauty and stillness of the place and settle in for the night.

Across this sandy end of the beach and cascading from the bottom of the hills, is a small waterfall that makes a comforting sound from across the narrow neck of the lake. The sounds of water are broken only by the rumble of an occasional vehicle driving along the main road to the east of me. The sun disappears behind the hills to the west as I set up the tent in the dimming light. I gather dry leaves and sticks to start a fire in a well-used blackened stone pit. When the fire is steady and hot, I fill a kettle with water and prop it snugly between two rocks. An open can of beans takes its place close enough to warm slowly by the fire. I butter multigrain bread I purchased en-route from the local baker. My stomach growls with anticipation of this simple feast.

I sit back to wait for the water to boil and gaze up at the luminous white moon as she makes a slow steady ascent from the opposite end of the lake up and over me. Her reflection is mirrored on the flat surface of the lake. Who knew this spot was a perfect place to track the moon on her pathway across a clear indigo sky? I thank the guidance that brought me there. It feels like a spectacular show nature arranged just for me. In the end, it was easy. I know that everything preceding prepared me to be right here, right now. I sense my grandmother and all my ancestors watching and smiling under this Harvest Moon, also called the Corn Moon.

Transition Time

BEFORE CHRISTMAS, THIS FIRST YEAR back home, I'm excited and happy to have a friend and colleague pay a visit. Janet had been part of the Sacred Earth Journey with the Peruvians in 2011. I wanted a real tree, so on the way from the airport, we stop at a tree farm. We walk a few yards into the field and pick out a young balsam fir, which the owner proceeds to cut down. Unexpectedly, this triggers sadness at the death of this perfect tree in its prime, and tears spring to my eyes. Janet reminds me to make an offering.

At home, we stand the tree in the corner of the living room and decorate it with the ornaments that survived the moves and purges. At the bottom of the box are the cast metal Christmas ornaments Steve created in the weeks before he died—perfect replicas of robin, dolphin, holly, sun, and a dragonfly. Each hung on a red ribbon. It is the first time they have been used, and this, too, causes an outburst of sad and grateful tears.

Several months later, in early spring, the melting snow reveals something unexpected lying on the peeling deck outside. It is one of Steve's decorations from the discarded Christmas tree, a butterfly. Miraculously, it did not fall through the boards.

I see a message from Steve in this discovery, reminding me of the enduring cycles and beauty of life, and that I can move through these changes with grace, and lightness of spirit. It gives me hope for what is yet to emerge. My path of healing is to release the disappointment and pain of loss, and move forward to create my life anew. With every goodbye I grow in strength and compassion.

Recovery takes a while. I'm impatient as my energy and mental focus waxes and wanes during the first months and years back in Newfoundland. There are times of confusion, doubt, and deep forgetfulness. I spend countless hours searching and applying for what

I think of as “real” jobs, acquiring interviews, but no job materializes. When I’m being honest, a job is not what I really want. My efforts are motivated by fear and resistance to my real work, which is to deepen my spiritual connections with the mountains and the ancestors, and to tell this story. Yet I regularly question this calling and the guidance around and within me.

Many nights find me awake with a pounding heart, my mind spinning with negative thoughts concerning my lack of progress and inability to do what I need to do. I refer to this as my Jonah period—time spent in the belly of a whale resisting my calling.

Eventually, I’d recall the practices for stilling my mind and connecting with my heart, and settled to sleep. As always, powerful guidance comes through the dreamtime. From my journal, January 14, 2013:

I travel, swimming under a layer of ice, then find myself standing wearing a fur-ringed parka with a hood; there’s a man next to me. We walk over ice and snow to an igloo-like place with skins lining the inside. It’s high enough to stand up in the center. We sit across from each other around the fire. He pushes a stick with red, possibly raw, warm meat on it towards me. “Keep it simple,” he says. “The shaman’s path is simple. Just be. Sleep and eat.”

I feel sleepy, and lie down on furs beneath me. I become cozy warm and have visions: a symbol that looks like dark-green seahorses with curved tails that meet at the bottom. There’s a diamond shape in the middle. It’s the shape of a green goddess. I see a woman’s face, Celtic looking, with marks on her skin, freckle-like tattoos, and short curly red-gold hair. I wake every now and then to see the man still sitting at the fire.

A cup is held to my mouth. It’s time to wake up and go back. Several times throughout the journey I hear the sound of water below me, to my right.

The message from the dream journey is clear—I’ve been making things more complicated than I need to, but just *being* is difficult. There are bills to pay. I have to establish myself and my work in order to build my business. Living in rural Newfoundland is a far cry from southern Ontario. So, I start travelling across the island to give workshops, presentations, and ceremonies.

While I loved teaching and making new connections, it was stressful to be away from home and I wanted to find a different way of

working. I experiment with teleconference classes. In the fall of 2014, I offer moon ceremonies by teleconference. This brought the rhythm and continuity of the moon cycles and spiritual community. During these virtual ceremonies, we connect with Grandmother Moon and I receive messages that are nurturing, serious, and playful. The following message comes through in August 2015.

Grandmother Moon is showing me an image of coloured swirling light, watery Piscean energy, a pool of rainbow water. The colors of orange and pink are strong. I see bright creamy sand. She's inviting us to this special beach, to play like children in the sand, to sit on the edge of a pool, and let our feet dangle in the water. There's an otherworldly mist rising off the water in this strange place.

Her message is related to using our imaginations, to release our ideas of how things are supposed to be, and what can be. Let go of those mind constructs, because they cannot make sense of this imaginal dream world. It's time to turn reality upside down and inside out. This can only happen when we give our imaginations free rein and permission to step outside our definitions of what is true, real, and possible.

Grandmother Moon says "Now is the time to expand beyond the boxes you have created for yourself that limit your expression and what you can manifest in your world. There are many possible solutions to every quandary, obstacle, and situation that you face. You have not yet tapped the potential of your imaginations and ability to create."

The pool of pink orange water flips to become the sky above the sandy beach. She's turned the landscape upside down and the mist is now falling instead of rising. There's an expanding bowl of light surrounding us. She invites us to feel the colours of the swirling light and allow it to embrace us and move through our luminous body. Feel the glowing light moving through the cells and tissues of our physical body. She reminds us our physical form is mostly an illusion. That we are actually more space than matter. Let the light move through the spaces between the atoms of every cell and organ from the tips of our toes and fingers. Let it cleanse us from the inside out, and the outside in, completely bathing us in beautiful light.

As we look around the sand itself has been transformed into rainbow colours, sparkling and glittering. Multicolored tropical

ANCESTOR CONNECTIONS

trees are growing out of the sand. She invites us to see what else may appear in front of our eyes, to dream it into being, to play and have fun, and practice using our imaginations. We can always change it and create something different. Add people, animals, and plants. Yes, it will look like a fantasyland, a park, a carnival or even a tropical deserted island. Design a new world.

As she withdraws, I see Grandmother Moon's luminous face in the night sky and feel her love for us and all life on Earth. She shines her blessings upon us and all the creatures and plants and waters. She's loved us forever and will continue to love us as we learn to be free, to live in peace and harmony with the whole family of life.

Taking Action

DURING THE FIRST MONTHS of living back in Newfoundland, I have a prophetic dream showing the possibility of oil development activities in the heart of Gros Morne Park. It is a prospect that is deeply disturbing. In the dream, I'm standing together with other women in protest. In the fall of 2012, this scenario becomes real and imminent, and I sign petitions and write letters to express my concerns. There is sufficient public protest that a temporary moratorium is declared until further consultation can be done.

A Review Panel is appointed and a request for public presentations goes out. Encouraged by others to make a submission, I do this for my ancestors, feeling I mustn't let them down. Still, I felt nervous about the prospect of speaking to a large group. Fears still rise to the surface. At times like this I implore my ancestors for support, guidance, and mostly for courage.

The day of the meeting, I stop in to visit my younger sister at work. She is facilitating a seniors' writing group and they are curious to hear my presentation. Reading it to them was the best thing I could have done. The elders, all women, were supportive and urged my sister to accompany me to the presentation. The public meeting takes place in a large hotel meeting room with the all-male panel sitting at the front. There are video cameras and the press are in attendance. It's intimidating and I'm glad for the comfort of my sister next to me. The presentations will take place in alphabetical order by surname, so mine is in the middle.

One of the earlier presenters is a man of indigenous ancestry, and his presentation powerfully sets the stage for me and for that, too, I am grateful. Nine of the eleven presenters are women, and I feel honoured and proud to be among them. No matter their age, in my eyes, they're all strong, wise women. When it's my time to speak, I follow my

sister's advice to speak loudly and with confidence. I take a deep breath and read. These are selected excerpts:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak my concerns related to the proposed oil and gas development here on this west coast of Newfoundland. I have a long ancestral and spiritual connection to this place. I'm descended from indigenous people of this province and European settlers who migrated here. We have lived along this coast for at least nine continuous generations. With this I invoke with respect and gratitude the spirits of all my ancestors who walk with me.

I also speak on behalf of the living land, waters, plants, and animals that sustain me and allowed my ancestors to survive so that I can stand here today. There is a quality of life here that is hard to find anywhere. That which I feel called to protect and preserve—fresh air, clean water, a sense of community, and connection to nature, but most of all, a sense of belonging and responsibility to this land, the waters, and all its people and creatures.

Oil and gas development and its serious long-term destruction of natural habitats is part of a deeper issue that afflicts us all by our disconnect from nature. Unprecedented and unchecked industrialization and commoditization of the natural world for profit is a symptom of this disconnect. When we abuse and use the Earth who sustains us without regard for her well-being, we compromise her ability to continue to take care of us. Our ancestors would advise us to be diligent, to take our stewardship of the planet and its resources seriously, to clarify our values and priorities. My seafaring grandfathers sailed across the Atlantic and up and down the eastern seaboard from Labrador to Jamaica. They would warn us that it's time to change tack.

Our grandmothers would counsel that our relationships with each other and with our Mother the Earth are far more important to our long-term happiness and well-being than profits and convenience. Our grandchildren's legacy and survival is at risk and we must work together to preserve their future. It's up to us to do what is necessary to protect and safeguard precious natural areas on the Earth, like those here on the west coast of Newfoundland. If not us, then who?

In the truest evolutionary sense, we humans and all life emerged from the oceans. Humans neither own the water nor the land, we can only take care of it for the short time we are here.

In that sense, we, and all our relations belong to the Earth. As coastal people, we are intimately aware of our dependence on the natural world, and it behooves us to respect the oceans and all of nature and the life they both create and sustain. We must take care, for ourselves and for those who will come after us. Thank you.

The Review Panel received more than 600 letters and submissions from concerned citizens and community groups and heard many other oral submissions in other towns that week. The Panel submitted a report in June 2016, and its recommendations included banning fracking within Gros Morne National Park. At the time of publication the Government of Newfoundland continues the pre-review 'pause' in accepting new hydraulic fracking applications. While the report was greeted with a profound sense of relief, there is awareness of the need to continue to be vigilant stewards of this place.

PART FOUR

❧ Mountain Views ❧

The *Apus* (mountain spirits) see us
and know who we *really* are.

—Bernadina Catary Alvarrez

Protectors of the Land

IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING of the landscape and geology of Newfoundland, you know it would have been impossible to escape the deep imprinting of rock on my psyche. Still, this aspect of my homeland didn't fully register until I moved to the flat fertile farmlands of southern Ontario. That was when I truly missed the comforting solid presence of mountains against my horizons. And in the truly ancient and mythic landscape of my new home in Bonne Bay I experience the mystical power of the stone people in a more personal and spiritual sense than I could ever have imagined—in the ways of indigenous wisdom from around the world. It is said everyone has a mountain to climb and my seafaring blue-eyed grandfather left a lasting legacy in that regard.

When I was seven years old my grandfather came to visit us in Springdale. It was late spring and on a clear day, you could see in the near distance a perfectly shaped sugarloaf hill across eight kilometres of bogs and ponds from our living room window. "See that mountain?" he asked with a twinkle in his eyes, "That's Poppy's Mountain. Some day I'm going to climb it."

My story-telling grandfather was, in my eyes at least, quite the adventurer. He had stories about long sea journeys and pirates along the eastern seaboard to Jamaica. He had built a motel a few kilometres along the highway from his mountain, what I will eventually see is actually a small hill. I don't know if he ever got to climb it, yet I think of him every time I drive past that familiar landmark and what will always be Poppy's Mountain. In the meantime, I discovered I had my own mountain to climb.

In 1990 I spent a few months in England on a teaching internship. One weekend I visited Stonehenge, the prehistoric stone circle in Wiltshire. The impressive circle of stones was roped off at the time and

could only be viewed from a distance. As I walked down the pathway to the visitor centre, I experienced what I could only describe then as *déjà vu*—an inner physical jolt that informed me my body recognized this place. The sensation was similar to what I will much later experience when I return to my body after astral travelling. But at the time, it was a strange event stored in memory as miscellaneous unexplained phenomena.

Eight years later, during my first Christmas with my fiancé in a new home in Guelph; it's a time of endings and beginnings. I'd recently defended my doctoral dissertation and returned from a celebratory holiday in Europe. Under the brightly decorated Norway spruce tree on Christmas morning is a gift from my fiancé, a small heavy box. In it is a soapstone sculpture, a seal woman with a long heavy braid down her back and a mermaid tail. The tiny card declared this was Sedna, Goddess of the Sea.

To the northern peoples, Sedna is the great provider and protector of the oceans and marine life. She is known by many names, including Mother of the Deep and Goddess of Abundance. The northern creation stories vary as to the reasons why, but in most versions Sedna has angered her father who throws her into the sea and chops off her fingers when she tries to climb back into the boat. Her fingers turn into seals, walruses, and other sea animals. Falling to the bottom of the ocean, she becomes the feminine creator goddess, revered and respected by hunters who depend on her goodwill to release the animals from her realms. In one telling of the tale, Sedna can be soothed only by those brave enough to plumb the depths of stormy waters and comb the tangles from her hair.

I study the sculpture's striking impassive face with wide open eyes and lips parted as if to speak, wondering what she may want me to know. I feel a kinship with her somehow, and place her on a shelf with other sacred things that had yet to unveil their mysteries.

The Stones Talk

SIX YEARS LATER, MY IMMERSION into the ways of indigenous wisdom begins. The idea that stones hold consciousness and healing power is a basic assumption in ancient cultures. When our teacher asks “Who has conversations with rocks?” almost all of the eighty or so adults sitting in the circle in the Park City, Utah, meeting room raised their hands.

As a child, I had a collection of favourite stones. I kept them in a varnished pine box covered with shells. The box was a gift from my parents, crafted by a local carpenter in Carmenville where we lived for a year.

Wherever I travelled, stones inevitably found their way back to grace my home and garden. The idea that a particular stone was communicating with me and asking to be picked up was new, but to the child in me, it made perfect sense. Why, out of the infinite number of stones on any beach was I drawn to a particular one?

The consciousness of every thing has its basis in quantum physics. Each organic and inorganic object is, in fact, a vibrating field of energy that responds to other energy fields. As science verifies, everything responds to human thought. As children, we know this instinctively. The cross-cultural phenomena of worry stones indicate that knowledge of the power of the mineral kingdom is deep within us. The revival and popularity of crystal therapy is a result of a worldwide remembering of this ancient wisdom. But my childhood ways of knowing are buried deep under many years of formal academic training, among other more adult preoccupations. Remembering takes a while.

Secret Friends from Eden

Earth-hugging feet nudging flat stones into hopscotch squares
scratched into grey gravel.
Skimming water-worn flying saucers swallowed by hungry waves.
Perfect egg ovals and pointy rock carrots for mud-puddle soup
in chipped china cups.
Playing springtime copy-house in Phronie's backyard woodshed.
My clenched fist gripping a shiny red lucky gem, pleadingly plunking
it into the garden well, wishing for god knows what.
Caressing worn white pebbles in a varnished wooden box
covered with brown whirled snail and blue mussel shells.
Jumping slippery beach boulders, heart fluttering,
teeter tottering to sandy shore—home safe!
Childhood touchstones, old secret friends from Eden.

The Peruvian mesa carrier tradition I was learning at shaman school centred on the use of stones, *kuyas* in Quechua, as tools for healing. They forged the healer's direct connection to the power and wisdom of the mineral world. Historically, *kuyas* were carried in a strong cloth made of natural fibre. The word mesa means altar, and the mesa bundle is a movable altar.

Opening and closing your mesa is in itself a ceremony, a sacred ritual. The way you pack your stones, sometimes in separate bags or with an inner cloth, the way you fold and unfold the fabric, the symbols on the cloth, the kind of tie you use and how you wrap it, even how you carry your mesa, each has meaning and intention.

In a healing mesa, each stone is connected with an aspect of your own life story. The stones can be used for divination and as healing tools. Over the course of our initiation and training, we gather twelve stones, three for each of the four directions of the medicine wheel. A thirteenth stone is gifted by a teacher and completes our healer's mesa. This mesa evolves and changes, as we do. It is a reflection of who we are, our unique skills and work as healers. It is a connection to Earth wisdom held by the mineral kingdom and the lineage of healers before us.

The *Apukunas* of Peru

DURING MY TRIP TO PERU in 2004 I was directly immersed in mountain traditions while spending time with local *paqos* or healers at sacred sites in the Sacred Valley.

After a short stop in Lima, our plane landed in Cusco, 3,400 meters above sea level and surrounded by mountains. From the first moment, I was completely at ease, even though it was my first time in the Andes. The coca plant is sacred medicine for those who live high in the mountains. They chew coca leaves to counteract hunger and fatigue and the effects of altitude. I obediently drink coca leaf tea and am surprised to find it quite pleasant.

Coca leaves are used by traditional healers for divination and in ceremony. Three coca leaves placed together make a *kintu*, a mini prayer bundle. They demonstrate putting in your prayers and tucking the bundle into a crack in one of the many stone walls at sacred sites.

Cusco was filled and surrounded by Incan stone walls. The stunning masonry featured large stones set into walls without mortar and with incredible precision. The temples in the hills were a mix of human-constructed, massive stone-wall architecture and natural stone features. We visit Saqsayhuaman, an impressive terraced citadel on the outskirts of Cusco built around a solar calendar. It is part of the Incan House of the Sun. The energy of this place is heady. As we touch the stones and lie on the grass in the centre, we sense strong vibrations or receive visions of events as if the stones were transmitting information.

The centre of the Incan world and the most sacred site is the temple complex in Cusco, which was mostly destroyed by the Spanish invaders in the 1500s. The remains of the original Sun Temple now form part of the Santo Domingo Monastery and Church. As I walk around the original stone walls, I have a strong sense of having been there before. Into my inner vision come multiple images loaded with

sensory information. I feel an inner jolt as if I'd suddenly fallen into a distant time/space continuum.

The trip to Machu Picchu is one of the highlights of my visit. From the Sacred Valley, we take a train to Aguas Calientes, a small touristy town at the base of the mountain. A bus takes us up the winding snake-like road to the top. It is a pleasantly warm day and the sun shone in a hazy blue sky scattered with white clouds. We enter the site through the main gate, a stone doorway at the bottom of a narrow stone stairway which frames a perfect view of the adjoining peak of Waynua Picchu. We are told the gate separates the agricultural section of the city from the living and ceremonial centre of the site. I wander the ruins, letting myself be drawn to specific places. The Temple of the Condor, a natural rock forming the shape of a bird with extended wings, draws me in. As I sit on a stone wall, I tap into the energy of the condor, a part of the medicine lineage into which I had been adopted.

At an Incan sun dial stone called the *Inti Watana*, or Hitching Post of the Sun, our group comes together in a spontaneous circle of other people who have gathered there. A sense of power permeates the area and it feels natural to slip into prayerful quietness.

At the far side of the mountaintop near the entrance to Wayna Picchu is Sacred Rock, a large mountain-shaped vertical stone set on a pedestal. We are told that ritual offerings for the Earth were carried out there. Leaning back against its smooth weathered surface, I sense a lifting, an out-of-space-time sensation in my body. It is known to be a good place for meditation and absorbing positive energy, thus I stay here for a while gazing out over the terraced slopes, and llamas and alpacas grazing in the central plaza.

Below us the Urubamba River meanders snakelike around the base of the mountain. It is easy to imagine the peaceful orderly lives of the people who lived here hundreds of years before. While the altitude is lower than Cusco at only 2,430 metres, I still feel the effects of the height. Without coca tea, I have to pace myself on the climb towards the Watchman's Hut, a perfect lookout place for photos atop a hillside of terraces. Next to the hut is Funerary Rock, a large stone carved with three steps, a wide ledge and a flat platform where the Incan nobility were mummified before being buried in the gravesite below.

There is so much to be seen and absorbed here and in the late afternoon my friend and I find a tiny cave around the corner from the Temple of the Condor where we sit quietly with our eyes closed basking in the energy of the place.

During this trip, our Peruvian guides impart to us their knowledge of the living spirits of the mountains, referred to as *apukunas*. Although Machu Picchu is the most well-known mountain with important historical and ceremonial significance, the most sacred mountains to the Peruvian people are Ausangate and Salkantay. The Andean people cultivate their connection with the mountains where they live with regular festivals and ceremonies. They believe the *apukunas* are guardians and protectors of the lands and people surrounding them. Because mountains are energetically connected to the stars, a person's destiny can be imprinted by the nearby mountain at the time of birth, in much the same way that the positions of the sun, moon, and planets have an energetic archetypal influence on one's personality and life path.

Our last day in Peru is Boxing Day, the same day as the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The evening before, I'd tripped on stone steps in the hotel and became ill, unable to eat much at our Christmas dinner in a local restaurant, our last meal together. At six the following morning I make my way, determinedly, to the hotel lobby. Our final ceremony was not on the itinerary, but I had requested it on behalf of our group. It was too important to miss.

A local shaman who I first met during my Four Winds training, Don Francisco, accompanies us to the Vitcos Yurak Rumi ruins on the hills outside Cusco. Still too nauseated to stand, I place my medicine bundle in the circle of people and sit on the grass a short distance from the group. It is a ceremony to express our gratitude for all we received and learned on what has been an incredible journey in Peru.

Our flight home left Cusco mid-day and by evening I was back in Toronto. It was on the airport shuttle that I learned of the devastating tsunami. Since it took a few weeks to recover from the trip to Peru, I assumed my body and spirit were processing the change in food and water, and the powerful ceremonies there. I was also aware of my body's sensitivity to specific landscapes, and it occurred to me that my discomfort may also be related to the massive earthquake in the Indian Ocean that day. A prolonged period of integration followed my experience in the Andes.

I continued my research into sacred mountain traditions, intrigued to learn they predate recorded history and are clearly articulated in legends and sacred texts of the most ancient civilizations. In the Korean Buddhist tradition, mountain spirits are believed to serve as guardians of the sacred teachings and as protectors of the temples

and communities of monks who live there, as well as the nation as a whole. Millions of people the world over make pilgrimages to mountains every year to express respect to the mountain spirits and ask for their help. I was reminded of another, more spiritually connected way to live on the Earth. That not too long ago, we humans knew we were not separate from nature, but an integral part of it.

Throughout these early days, mountains, stones, and the mineral elements of Earth permeated my dreamscapes as they did my waking life. On March 13, 2005, around the time of the class where I received the rite of the wisdomkeeper, called the *Alto Mesayok* or Mountain Rite, I had a dream.

It's night and I'm walking alone through deep snow up a mountain road. It's clear and bright from the snow and perhaps also the moon, though I can't see it. I'm walking next to the guard rail at the side of the road. There's a white expanse of snow everywhere, unbroken by footprints or evidence of any others. It's a wide road but no one has been able to travel it because the snow has not yet been cleared. There's a moment of fear. I feel vulnerable and exposed here on this mountain road, but as I look around, I can see up and down the mountainside and there's no one else in sight. I decide to keep going, though the walking is laborious in the deep snow and I have no sense of my destination.

This dream speaks to me of the dawning realization that the path I have chosen is not an easy one. However, it's one for which there's tremendous spiritual support and guidance, yet ultimately, one I will have to travel alone. And while I feel much fear and uncertainty, I also know a part of me is ready for the challenge and the adventure. And the mountains of my homeland have their own mysteries to reveal.

The Mountains Call

A PARTICULAR RITUAL AT SHAMAN SCHOOL is called an *Itu Apu*, meaning mountain offering. We were to make this offering to the mountain of our birth so it will remember us and help us in our work. Consequently, I begin to think of the mountains near my birthplace, Norris Point.

The Long Range Mountains dominate the landscape and now form part of the protected area of Gros Morne National Park. Although I'd never lived in Norris Point, I was drawn to it and held my first workshops there in 2010. The area of Bonne Bay and north to Cow Head had been designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986 because of its unique geological features and exceptional natural beauty. According to UNESCO, "the park is an outstanding wilderness environment of spectacular landlocked, freshwater fjords and glacier-scoured headlands in an ocean setting; the rocks provide a rare example of the process of continental drift, plate tectonics and evolution of mountain belts where deep ocean crust and the rocks of the Earth's mantle lie exposed."

My mother once told me how she'd travelled by coastal boat from Port Saunders to the cottage hospital in Norris Point, a distance of 165 kilometres. It was, she said, five long weeks of waiting until I made my appearance one spring day in late April, a quarter of a century before the area was a national park. She remembers the time because the nurses were ready to change their shift at four o'clock in the afternoon, and my arrival delayed their departure. Five days later, my mother and I make the return trip by boat.

My most vivid memories of this part of the northwestern coast were the long hot dusty car rides on winding gravel roads that inevitably resulted in carsickness. A mountain spring of cool refreshing water pouring out of a chiselled rock face at the side of the road was

a welcome respite. It was a lifetime later and on newly-paved and straighter roads that I noticed and appreciated the spectacular vistas that beckoned around every bend—clear crystalline ponds and lakes, sweeping rocky shorelines with crashing foaming waves, and low twisted tuckamore trees spreading to the sea. There were creamy sandy beaches and grassy sand dunes, spruce, tamarack and balsam fir forests sprinkled with birch, poplar and aspen, and green-cloaked mountains rising majestically to the sky. But I did not yet remember any of this.

Unable to take time from work to deliver the mountain offering myself, I enlist the help of a long-time friend back home. The tiny bundle is carefully packaged and entrusted to the postal service. Annie leaves my offering in the water on a beach in Norris Point. I later find out this particular place is a Dorset site. It is one of my favorite places to visit as I become increasingly aware of a deep connection to this place.

The next year on my birthday in late April, 2006, feeling particularly homesick, my friend Heather suggests we drive north to Lake Huron for the day. It is what I need. Living on the sandy delta of the Grand River, I often crave the sight of big water. On a cool and overcast spring day, we gain access to the beach. It's tonic enough to sit on the rocks and look out over the blue grey water and listen to the waves caress the shore in that timeless rhythm that never fails to sooth my spirit.

The stones call to us in that old familiar way, and excitedly we pile a fair quantity of them into the back of Heather's car to take home. The Lake Huron beach rocks bring new energy into my tiny townhouse garden, the grounding presence of mountains, and the energy of big water. One of my cats is often found lying on a specific etched white stone I place at the base of blue delphiniums alongside the fence. And when I move, Taffy's rock comes with us.

My inner dreamscapes are also littered with images of hills and mountains, rocky watery landscapes, all manner of paths and cobblestone roads, semi-precious stones and crystals. There are images of sacred texts, monasteries, and symbols of spiritual places. From my journal, September 24, 2006:

I see tall stately windows in a large hall. There's a big gold book, similar to the old family Bible we had. The binding is coming apart but I open the pages and find different stones and carved figures throughout the book, hidden deep between the pages. I

take them out; I'm leaving the book but taking the stones. There is a silvery black stone I recognize as a blood stone.

During the summer of 2006, after a class in which we explore the ways we use our power for beneficial as well as harmful ways, I feel fatigued and strangely unmotivated. I schedule a session with one of my teachers in the hope of discovering the cause. Several weeks later we have our telephone appointment. A shamanic practitioner doesn't need much background story, so I cite my symptoms and questions, quiet my mind, and wait.

Familiar with the process of tracking information in the spiritual realms, I hear rattling, a rustling of objects, and the occasional deep exhale. It takes an unusually long time. Meanwhile, I pay close attention to my internal state, but my thoughts begin to wander. 'It must be something complex,' I muse, 'that's why it's taking so long.'

Eventually, his voice comes through the phone. "There are mountains calling you." His pronouncement catches me off guard, it is not at all what I expected. He wants to know if I know these mountains, and adds for clarification that there is powerful water energy associated with them. The mountains around Bonne Bay come to mind. He recommends I travel there, at least for a visit.

I cannot see how to make even a short trip at this time. I have too many financial and work commitments. No, it is out of the question. He gives me instructions on how to bring the energy of the mountains and ocean into my living space. I'm disappointed in his findings. My rational, sceptical mind is not ready to accept that separation from mountains may be the cause of my current state.

The connection with my mountain offering doesn't register at this point either. The mountains will have to find other ways to get through to me, and they will. One of the things I learn is that mountains have a lot to teach we humans, and one of them is patience.

Mayaland Stones

IN THE FALL OF 2007, I RECEIVE NOTICE of a guided sacred site tour to the Mayalands in Mexico. The words and pictures of the advertisement glow, light dances off the page, and I want to go. An unexpected monetary gift makes it possible, and with two other shaman school friends we plan our trip for the following spring.

I have been attending workshops and studying the Mayan calendar and the 2012 prophecies, but this will be my first time to a Mayan site. I'm excited about visiting the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, one of three nine-storied pyramids in the Mayalands. Around a week before leaving on the trip I have this dream:

I'm travelling and exploring a slightly familiar mountainous landscape with friends. The sun is setting and the sky is beautiful, deep pink hues, but the mountains and trees rise so high it is hard to get a good view. We are trying to find our way because the path we were on has disappeared. Since we have travelled this road only a few times, I begin to ask local people for directions. Only one woman knows how to get to the village. There is something special that happens when you walk on this road. In the village a dark-haired woman is selling wares and has posters showing a woman we recognize; her name is Adomo di. We've been looking for this woman for a while.

This dream speaks to me of new horizons on the spiritual journey that I share with my colleagues, of new opportunities that will open up in the Mayalands. Curious about the woman's name, I find out that *Adom* is an old word of Hebrew and African origins, meaning gift or help from God.

Later that month I'm in the middle of a rainforest jungle surrounding the lost Mayan city dating from 200 AD. As we approach

the entrance to the archaeological site, our Mexican guide gathers us together in prayer. He addresses the ancestral spirits and caretakers of the land and asks for permission to enter. As we walk through the doorway in a tall stone wall I'm struck by the spaciousness of the area, the enormous and impressive buildings forming the central plaza of the city.

I will learn that this ancient city is designated a UNESCO World Heritage site because of its unique architectural design and the richness of its art and sculpture. The buildings include details and alignments with astrological events such as solstices, a testament to the creative genius of the Mayans.

Looming in front of us is the Palace, a tall, complex structure of buildings and courtyards with a four-storied Observation Tower rising from its centre. Off to the right is the Temple of Inscriptions. I'm disappointed to see that it's closed to tourists at this time. We are met by an engaging archaeologist who will give us an introduction to the site. A few minutes later I'm climbing the many layered stone steps of the Palace building, struggling to focus on what is being said. A brain fog has suddenly afflicted me, and his words swirl around my head landing nowhere.

I lag behind the others and find myself with another member of our group, who I learned the night before is a doctor from Sweden. We stop and quietly survey the stately columned rooms and inner courtyards of the Palace and the Temple of the Sun off to our right at the edge of the jungle.

Suddenly an eerie deep hooting and screeching sound fills the air. It appears to originate in the canopy of jungle trees surrounding us. The barrage continues for several long minutes and I begin to tremble inside as inexplicable emotions arise. My throat tightens and tears gather at the back of my eyes. The noise stops as suddenly as it began, and I glance at my companion to see that he appears similarly affected. This gives me courage to voice the thoughts that had sprung unbidden from somewhere. "They're speaking to us, reminding us of a promise we made a long time ago to come back here at this time, to remember what we once knew." He nods in agreement as we stand staring off into the lush jungle past the moss-covered greying worn stone walls.

I will hear howler monkeys again throughout this trip, but none will affect me as profoundly as this first time. I begin to wander the site, noticing and following the strong sensations that arise in my body. Curious, I explore small rooms on the rooftop and in the tombs

beneath the crumbling structure. In one of the inner courtyards of the Palace, there are large inscribed stone slabs arrayed vertically around the outer walls. I walk around this grassy garden area peering at the worn figures on the weathered surfaces.

A particular stone slab at the far outside corner draws me like a magnet. The closer I get, the stronger the vibrating sensation in my body becomes. At this point, I'm scarcely aware of people around me and instinctively reach out to touch the stone. A woman's voice reminds me that we're not allowed to touch the stones, that the guards will come. So, I move back to stand a few feet away, closing my eyes and bathing in the strong current of energy connecting me to this old grey stone with indecipherable symbols.

When I open my eyes, I notice the Swedish man standing nearby who appears to be experiencing something, too. Walking directly up to the stone he places his forehead against it, staying there a few minutes until a security guard approaches and asks him to step away. I wish I'd done the same and watch for an opportunity but the guards now hover protectively.

Later that week, our group gathers around a stone statue in the Palenque Museum courtyard. Certain people had visited this site before and knew of the statue. Others say they are receiving messages from the stone. I take my turn standing in front of it and feel a vibration but it is slight compared with what I felt with the stone slab in the Palace courtyard.

A couple days later, while the rest of the group takes an outing to a waterfall, I stay behind at the hotel. In the afternoon, I take a bus back to the Palenque site, entering a different way that takes me through partially excavated ruins of buildings and dwellings scattered throughout the jungle. Interpretive signs say this is where most of the people lived.

Straight away I feel discomfort in my body and have a strong desire to turn and leave. But as I pay attention and ask my body what it's responding to, it occurs to me it's the spirits of ancestors at the site. So, I acknowledge their presence and sprinkle dried corn kernels on the ground which I brought with me for offerings.

In many cultures, corn is the traditional offering for the spirits. As I do this the physical sensations ease. I continue my explorations of the ruins offering corn and thanking the ancestors who linger whenever my body alerts me. This was a powerful learning I shared with others in the group who had similar experiences.

During 2008, I jumped into a new role of teaching and sharing the medicine wisdom and practices of the shamanic path. I created a website and wrote monthly newsletters. In August of that year I also begin to work with a Jungian analyst, ready to delve into my dreamscapes and deepen my understanding of their messages. Life is full and once again I find myself struggling to balance work and a social life with study, spiritual practice, and creative projects. The truth is I never fully recovered from an earlier burnout and while spiritual work and studies nourished me deeply, there was still far too much *doing* and not enough *being*. I wanted to spend more time in Newfoundland, but didn't know how to organize my life to make that happen.

For Christmas that year I planned a week-long solitary retreat to recharge my batteries and reflect. Unexpectedly, the cottage at Eagle Lake became available. On December 14, 2008, around ten days before leaving for the lake, I have this dream:

I'm climbing on top of a high mountain. The terrain is icy and steep and I carefully choose the best route up the incline. There are places where ice goes straight down with no way to climb back up. I'm holding tenaciously to small outcroppings of rock and ice. As I make it around to the other side, I see that brown water has risen far up the side of the mountain. I realize there's no chance of going down that way either. As I wonder what to do next, I see an opening in the mountain that leads to a cabin. There's cupboards and it looks safe and comfortable. As I wonder about food and water I remember seeing fruits and vegetables growing on water plants. Perhaps I can get back there.

That year was pivotal—one of tremendous learning, healing, and change. The dream spoke of the work it takes to reach the top of a mountain, and also of the effort it had taken for me to hang on. It confirmed my need for retreat and self-care at that time.

Newfoundland *Apukunas*

IN MARCH 2009, A FEW MONTHS LATER, an opportunity presents itself to meet and have a private session with Don Martin. I'd heard he was a master shaman, and a great seer, and an *Alto Misayoc*, or Wisdomkeeper in the Peruvian lineage, as well. One of the things I wanted to ask him is which of the many mountains near my birthplace was *my* mountain. "Is it Gros Morne?" I ask through our interpreter. I'm surprised to see his head shake "no." He wants to know the name of the place I was born. "Norris Point?" Again, Don Martin shakes his head. The bigger place, the translator probes—Newfoundland? With that answer, Don Martin's face breaks into a big smile and he nods his head in confirmation. "That's it, that's your *apu*," the translator confirms. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. The connection Newfoundlanders have with The Rock is legendary.

In a workshop later, Don Martin leads us in a ritual to connect sacred places of power across the planet. The Peruvians believe the city of Cusco, which translates as belly, is the energetic power centre of the Earth. Their Incan ancestors mapped the lines of energy that extend through and from the city to encircle the globe, like a web. Similar to energy meridians in the human body, the lines connect naturally occurring Earth formations, stones, and springs, and align with prehistoric ceremonial pathways in the landscape. They call the places where lines intersect *huacas*. These are access points to spiritual knowledge and powerful Earth energy. Ceremonies conducted at these sites help re-establish the original balance of humans with the natural world, and awaken and strengthen our connection to our spiritual ancestors as well as sacred landscapes.

The idea of trackways that energetically connect natural and human-constructed forms on the Earth is a concept found in all

ancient civilizations. The North American native cultures call them spirit lines. In the East they are referred to as dragon lines. The Australian aboriginals call them dream lines, and also speak of the song lines in the oceans that are followed by the whales on their migrations.

Science has studied the grids created by mapping stone monuments and megaliths across the globe, theorizing that the ancestors, who had well-developed intuition and instinctive knowledge, were aware of these energetic connections. It also accounts for many of the human-made constructions in various locations around the Earth, such as the pyramids in Egypt and in the Mayalands that align with star constellations. Animals, birds and fish instinctively follow the magnetic lines in their migrations. Living that much closer to nature than we modern people, our ancestors were likewise attuned to these energies.

Led by Don Martin, we use our bodies and medicine bundles to recreate a web and he guides us on a journey to follow the lines outward from the energetic centre of Cusco. During this ceremony, I connect with locations I do not recognize, including a tropical rainforest waterfall, an expansive grassy plain, a white snow-covered land, and also the area of Bonne Bay in Newfoundland. This information fills in a piece of what I had puzzled over, the connection and role of the island in sacred planetary landscape.

For the first time, I contemplate the possibility that shamanic cultures originating in Siberia followed these energetic lines on their migrations across the Bering Straits.

Archaeological evidence confirms the oral history of indigenous cultures' descriptions of their journeys across the Bering Straits to the most southerly parts of America. I can imagine how the Dorset Paleo-Eskimos, who were especially sensitive to the energy of place, could have crossed the Arctic and travelled down the eastern seaboard to Newfoundland following magnetic pathways. The idea of a connection between the north and south shamanic lineages begins to make sense, as does my calling to reconnect these lineages in Newfoundland.

The Tall *Sidhes*

DURING THAT FIRST VISIT TO WOODY POINT in August 2009 when I attend my first Writers Festival, I sleep in a comfortable loft of an old barn down near the bay. Below me are wharfs and sheds where local fisherman store their boats and gear. One morning I wake to the sound of people preparing for the day's fishing. As I lie in that space between sleep and waking, an image appears on my inner vision. It looks like an old treasure map on yellowed parchment with frayed edges. There are a few squiggly black lines and two Xs. The words 'tall shes' echo in the open space of my mind, which responds with the clarifying question, 'tall trees?' To which I hear clearly and distinctly, the repeated words 'tall shes.' Followed by the words 'connect the dots.'

I'm puzzled by this. Hearing the words was unusual, and the phrase is meaningless to me, but I dutifully record it in my journal. An hour later when I join my host for breakfast, he shares a passage from a book he is reading. It's a fiction book by one of the featured authors at this year's festival. In the passage are the words "connect the dots."

In the following days and weeks, I hear this phrase repeatedly, in overheard conversations, and as I turn on the radio or tv. It is even on the cover of a magazine I pick up at the doctor's office. It is eerie. I feel like the slow one in the class who is not getting it. What are the dots I'm supposed to connect?

That same week I take my first hike on the Tablelands Mountain. The "bronze plateau" is how local singer-songwriter Shirley Montague describes the red iron oxidized flat-top mountain that dominates the horizon on the south side of Bonne Bay. Composed of mantle rock that once lay beneath the early Iapetus ocean, it was pushed to the surface by tectonic forces approximately 500 million years ago. The heavy metal content of the peridotite stone of the mantle means that little can grow on it. I'm curious to discover that several of the minerals in

peridotite are ones in which my body has been chronically deficient for several years—iron, chromium, and cobalt.

The park interpreter's description of the mantle's caramel-like liquid state kilometres deep beneath the ocean floor is fascinating. At one place on the trail, I feel a current of energy cross my body, as if I'm wading through deep water. I walk back and forth along the path, noticing where the sensation starts and ends. From this vantage point, I can see the bald round top of Gros Morne Mountain directly across Bonne Bay.

During my remaining time in Bonne Bay, I hike the Tablelands Mountain trail twice more and each time I feel the same sensation in the same area. By now I know my body is attuned to terrestrial energies. It occurs to me that I'm picking up an energetic line of connection between Gros Morne Mountain and the Tablelands Mountain. I'd learned from the Peruvians that mountains have their counterparts, holding distinct and opposite energies like male and female or negative and positive poles on a magnet, and I wonder if that may be what is happening there.

In *The Good and Beautiful Bay* local historian and geologist Antony Berger details the history of Bonne Bay. The book documents that people have been living in the Bay for thousands of years. Europeans, the newcomers, began settling here in the seventeenth century.

By 1767, James Cook had completed a detailed map of the waters of the northwestern coast. Woody Point was a hub for commerce and trade on Newfoundland's west coast until earlier this century. The area is presently sustained by a declining fishery industry and increasingly booming tourism.

Many people have strong reactions to the Tablelands Mountain and the Bonne Bay area in general. Over the coming days and years, I hear stories of unusual connections and synchronistic events that draw people here—artists, geologists, nature lovers, poets, and musicians among them. People talk of the “magic of Gros Morne.” The place evokes strong feelings of connection and a sense of home to many people, as does the island of Newfoundland in general.

While living in Ontario, a woman who heard me give a presentation on the Mayan Calendar, called to share what had happened on her first visit to Newfoundland. She described an inexplicable emotional and spiritual response to the landscapes and people, including a personal magical event. I heard many such stories over my years on the Mainland.

RETURN TO PANGAEA

Shortly after moving back home to Newfoundland I was introduced to a retired school administrator from Pennsylvania who had a profound spiritual experience as he drove through the hills and arrived in Bonne Bay for the first time. He told me that when he saw the Tablelands Mountain, he knew God was here.

Discovering the Sacred

IRONICALLY, THE “NEW-FOUND-LAND,” as it was named upon John Cabot’s discovery in 1497, has an ancient geological story. It is almost unique in the Earth’s evolution and is one of separation and reunification on mythic proportions. The landscapes open like the pages of a book to reveal the Earth’s earliest complex life, immortalized in stone. The landscapes speak of dramatic changes since the breakup of the supercontinent Pangaea almost 200 million years ago.

When all of the landmasses of Earth were joined together, what is now the island of Newfoundland was located near the middle of that continent. Long ago, it was covered in tropical forests and surrounded by warm seas abundant with animals. A geological map of the current island delights the eye with its brightly coloured mosaic, an impressively wide array of rock types and formations. In spite of centuries of hunting, fishing, mining, and deforestation, and the extinction of indigenous peoples, I suspect there is still much treasure to be found here.

To describe the vast ages and stages of the Earth’s changing body over its four-and-a-half billion-year-history, geologists talk in terms of deep time. That brings us back a mere 550 million years ago, when tectonic forces split apart the supercontinent Gondwana.

The Iapetus Ocean formed in the split, but was then destroyed as continents collided again to form the supercontinent Pangaea. Pangaea itself tore apart 180 million years ago as Europe and Africa pulled away to create the Atlantic Ocean.

Today the island of Newfoundland is formed of three distinct zones. The mountainous west coast was once part of the eastern North America continent. The central portion of the island is what remains of the Iapetus Ocean floor that lay between North America and Africa approximately 500 million years ago. The eastern part of the island was

once attached to southwestern Europe and North Africa and a piece of that plate was left behind as the Avalon Peninsula when Pangaea tore apart.

In Celtic mythology, Avalon, the isle of apples, is where King Arthur's Excalibur sword was forged, and where he died and lays still, guarded by nine Celtic fairy queens. I suspect that in the intersections of myth and science, in this land that holds the memory of unity and togetherness, there are places where we can more easily access the wisdom of our ancient past.

The shape of the island was a familiar one etched in my mind, in a different way perhaps than for early navigators who sailed the surrounding seas, and in the psyches of those who traversed the land generations before me. During grade school, I sat at the kitchen table with pencil and paper to draw my home and native land for a geography assignment. With scrunched brow, I attempted to trace the endless raggedy coastline, tattered inlets and bays, and more than 7,000 islands hugging its shores.

I think the shape of the island is interesting, and expressive. The great finger pointing northward, the Burin boot drags its heel in the south, the Avalon holding on by a tendril reaching for the motherland across the Atlantic. If this assignment was not required homework, I may have missed the fact that the land forms, from tip to toe, an almost perfect equilateral triangle.

The greatest minds have understood the structure and order of the universe as expressed in sacred geometry, the mathematics of form. Triangles and the number three are significant in both religion and science as demonstrated by the impressive stone pyramids found across the planet. In esoteric traditions, the number three represents the sacred trinity, and a doorway to higher knowledge. There are three primary colours, three main keys in music, three phases of the moon, and the family unit comprised of mother, father and child. Three represents what is solid, balanced, and complete.

Yet another Newfoundland number curiously relates to the total landmass of the island, which covers 108,860 square kilometres. In Eastern religions, the number 108 (containing many constellations of three) refers to spiritual completion and represents the whole of existence. The Mother Goddess has 108 names. There are said to be 108 energy lines in the human body that converge to form the heart chakra—the centre of the luminous energy field that surrounds and creates the physical body. 108 is also significant in astrology and astronomy. The

number 108 is a recurring factor in the planetary constellations of our solar system and can be observed in ancient and medieval architecture over the entire planet.

Across the mists of time, I contemplate the original height and form of the island before three million years of advancing and retreating glaciers. The unimaginable weight compressing and shaping the land, creating the innumerable lakes, river valleys, and fjords that crisscross and continue to sculpt the landscapes. Today the Appalachians sit smoothed and subdued, their craggy peaks a youthful memory. Billions of years of Earth's evolution created the perfect conditions for emergent life.

I was curious what else I could discover in this new-found-land. What this place could share from its memory of a time when the Earth was young. When there was only one land and one ocean, before humans appeared to begin their grand adventure of exploration and discovery out of the Rift Valley of Africa. Hope was rekindled that I could find a way back to this place I was beginning to know and truly appreciate for the first time.

Celtic Connections

IN THE MEANTIME, it was 2009. My magical summer visit to Woody Point comes to an end, and I return reluctantly to Ontario. I learn of a workshop in upstate New York on Celtic shamanism. Friends are going and I tag along. As the group of twenty introduce themselves, my ears perk up to hear the word “shes” in reference to a hill one of the participants had visited. It turns out that *sidhe*, pronounced “she,” is a Gaelic word referring to a supernatural race of nature spirits. The word also refers to the dwelling place of these spirits.

In Ireland, the *sidhe* are called “people of the mounds” or the “good people.” They are believed to offer protection, healing, and teaching to humans. Different from elves and fairies, the *sidhe* are described as tall, strong beings usually richly attired and living in castles and grand places.

According to folklore, this race once lived on the Earth until it was no longer safe to stay here. Instead of returning to their home in the heavens, they chose to stay and be of service to humanity. It is said the presence of these beings can be heard as the humming of thousands of bees or through the appearance of a whirlwind. There are many well-known mounds and burial sites in Ireland connected with the *sidhes*.

I was amazed at the connection with my meditation experience back in Woody Point. My next question was where are the tall *sidhes* shown on the map in my vision? My memory and drawing of the map was not exactly precise or detailed. Though I continue to contemplate this question, as yet, I still have no definitive answer.

The tallest mountain in the Bonne Bay area is Gros Morne, the namesake of the park, which draws many thousands of people to its summit each year. Shirley Montague calls Gros Morne “the Queen of the Long Range.” It has a definitive mystique, standing out by virtue of its shape and mineral composition, distinct from the surrounding

mountains. First viewed by boat, Gros Morne was named by the French, and translates as “large mountain standing alone,” or literally, “great sombre.” The other mountain in Bonne Bay with a special aura that captivates people is, of course, the Tablelands Mountain. For now, those two mountains—the most accessible in the area—become the focus of my attention and ceremony.

My research into the *sidhe* leads to other myths and lore about the hidden folk, beings said to live in or on the Earth, in other dimensions of reality that are invisible to ordinary perception. There are surprising similarities across cultures in this regard. Stone circles and dolmens, for example, are found around the planet. Dolmens are another name for megalithic tombs, usually consisting of three or more upright stones supporting a large flat horizontal capstone. These human-constructed structures date back as far as 7,000 years and are found throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Dolmens were usually covered with Earth or smaller stones to form a barrow, though in many cases those coverings have weathered away, leaving only the stone skeletons of the burial mounds intact. The most widely accepted theory is that they are tombs or burial chambers but archaeologists still do not know for certain who erected them or why.

However, many people are drawn to visit such places and commonly report visions or other inexplicable experiences near them. Thus, there is support for the idea that these stone cairns are actual repositories for spiritual energy or information that can be accessed by those open to perceive it. Peruvian lore, for example, proclaims that when we die, our physical bodies return to the Earth, our spirits return to God or the heavens, and the wisdom and power we have attained during our lifetime stays with the mountains.

North American indigenous creation stories refer to the stone people as memory keepers. The mineral kingdoms are believed to be the depositories for the collective knowledge of all Earth’s inhabitants and elemental realms. This includes all the plants and creatures from the beginning of life on this planet. I was learning to access this perennial wisdom with the ordinary and non-ordinary perceptual abilities with which all humans are endowed as our birthright.

Dancing with Gros Morne

IN FOLLOWING YEARS, I CONTINUE to build relationships with the mountains while still living in Ontario, connecting regularly through meditation. It was the year following the tall *sidhes* incident in Bonne Bay, that Steve and I led the Sacred Earth Journey to the area. Peruvian elders had taught him how to build relationships with mountain spirits. “The first offering is like knocking on a door,” he explained. “We introduce ourselves and ask permission to approach them.”

In a vision quest ceremony, Steve is shown a small body of water at the southwestern edge of a mountain with a flat top. Once we arrive to the park, the existence of this pond is confirmed by park interpreters who show us the pond’s location on a map. After the “door knock” ceremony to introduce ourselves, we climb to the mountaintop and leave an offering in the pond.

We carry out a similar ritual with Gros Morne Mountain. After an introduction offering, we climb to the base of Gros Morne. We sit on the grass in the centre of streams that flow from the forested valley between Gros Morne and Old Crow. At that time, Steve senses the spirit of Gros Morne is not yet ready for us to approach it. More work is needed.

During this period, I’m given a painting by a local Ontario mural artist and spiritual teacher to whom I’d not yet been introduced. “I think this was intended for you,” my colleague says. The drawing shows Sedna of the north and Sachamama, the feminine goddess of the Amazon, holding hands across the equator. It is another confirmation of what I’m beginning to see as the direction and focus of my spiritual work in Newfoundland—to connect the wisdom lineages of the northern and southern hemispheres.

I was aware of the condor and eagle prophecy handed down through many South American cultures, which speaks of the

domination of the condor people of the south by the eagle people of the north. The prophecy predicts that during the following epoch, which commenced in the twentieth century, the condor and the eagle will fly together to restore and regenerate the Earth community.

Many scholars believe this prophecy speaks of what we are now witnessing—the unification of indigenous peoples and traditions, and the reconciliation of our ways of knowing that will allow the intellect and the heart to be joined in service to Earth and humanity. Referred to by the Mayans and other ancient cultures as the great shift, this is an awakening of consciousness to our spiritual nature and our sacred relationship with the Earth and its larger, non-human family of minerals, plants, and animals.

Which is why the Peruvians first visit to Newfoundland felt like a direct fulfillment of the eagle and condor prophecy, and the natural evolution of the spiritual healing and reconnection work I had begun here. As I had experienced first hand with the sweet grounded wisdom and love of the medicine men and women of the Andes, I imagined it would be a magical time.

Don Martin, Dona Berna, and Marco Nunez Zamalloa, their interpreter and a teacher of Andean wisdom, landed at the Deer Lake airport on a warm and cloudy afternoon in September. All were excited to be here. After lunch and food shopping, we drove north along the Viking Trail through the Long Range mountains.

Marco sat in front with me, and Don Martin and Dona Berna sat in the back seats of our rented minivan. As soon as we came within sight of Bonne Bay, Don Martin and Dona Berna started speaking quietly and animatedly in their native Quechua. “They’re talking to the spirits of the land, the mountains and to *Mamacocha*, Mother of the Waters, greeting them,” Marco said.

After a few days of private sessions and a workshop to share their cosmology and healing practices, the Peruvians led us in ceremony at Port aux Choix, Western Brook Pond, and the Tablelands Mountain. Our visit to the mountain began on an especially high note as we boarded a water taxi at nine in the morning for the twenty-minute boat ride across Bonne Bay. Delighted to be regaled with traditional music by the Bon Tour musicians, we danced right to the dock in Woody Point.

Our bus dropped us at the Tablelands Mountain parking lot and we walked up the trail to Winterhouse Brook Canyon. We had a calm fall day under overcast skies to explore the red rocks and had the

mountain all to ourselves. At the raised wooden platform at the end of the trail, the Peruvians performed a ceremony they explain connected us to the stars. The river cascaded noisily over the rocks next to us as we lay in a star formation on the platform, with our medicine bundles in the center and our heads together. The Peruvians prayed, invoking the spirits of heaven and Earth, asking them to bless the land and all its inhabitants.

After those invocations, a strong cold wind filled the canyon, and those of us on the platform had sensations of being lifted into the heavens, a truly out of time and space experience. When the ceremony was complete, we stood, some of us lightheaded and unsteady, and walked back down the hill. The wind whipped around, practically pushing us. It was a clear sign from the elemental spirits, an unmistakable response to our presence and prayers.

As a result of his experience on the Tablelands Mountain, Russell begins the Upper Mantle Project. In his words: "The purpose of this project is to provide stabilizing support to Mother Earth for the necessary geophysical changes and the dimensional shift that is underway, which in turn helps to minimize harm to living beings on the planet who are also experiencing a dimensional shift."

The culmination of the week with the Peruvians was the climb to the top of Gros Morne Mountain. It was a foggy day with low-lying clouds hiding the summit from view. There were experienced hikers among us, but most were not, and the majority of the group had never climbed a mountain, let alone Gros Morne. Nevertheless, the group assembled in the parking lot. We formed a circle, and set our intentions, and prayed for support on the journey ahead.

Experienced mountain people, the Peruvians advised us to set our own steady pace and keep moving. Dona Berna, her sturdy petite figure in full ceremonial dress, her feet clad in thin leather sandals, started up the trail carrying the huge bundle she took whenever ceremony may be required. I take my place with the last ones to ensure no one is left behind. Russell also takes the tail, feeling the call to hold space for the group.

From the parking lot, the first four kilometres of the trail ascends gradually to an elevation of 320 metres through rocky boreal forest and marshlands to the base of the mountain. From here we see only a short way up the mountain—the rest is shrouded in fog. After a discussion, we decided to keep climbing in spite of the poor visibility because the ground was dry and no rain was forecast.

The most challenging part of the trail for most of us was the steep ascent in a ravine over loose boulders to the summit. In small groups of two or three, we ascend into the bank of mist that is somehow always ahead of us.

Don Martin played his flute, while others sang or performed their own personal rituals. The climb brings up deep vulnerabilities and strengths we hadn't been aware of but there are many opportunities to support one another. Others are stretched to their limits, physically and emotionally, yet somehow find what is needed to move forward.

Heather had travelled from Ontario, drawn to Newfoundland for a second time. She reflected later:

Had I seen to the top of that mountain before climbing up the rocky portion, I would not have climbed it. Had I not had a new friend say he planned to be the last person on the mountain and off the mountain, I do not know what I would have done. Had I not heard the call of the flute and Russell sounding his voice, I may not have climbed the mountain. Had I not seen two diamond and triangle-shaped stones beckoning me forward, had I not seen the turtle's head on the path reminding me to keep my slow pace, had I not observed how the most dangerous path was also the long way down, and though the mountain top was shrouded in fog, the path down was clear sailing when the fog lifted. I worked through a lot of fear that day but I was aware of the nature spirits and the mountain supporting me.

Eventually, we all made it to the summit and pose jubilantly for a group picture. Enveloped in mist, we were amazed to have reached the top but truly had no sense of the view. The Peruvians decided the conditions weren't right for ceremony, so we continued on. We were thankful for the rocky path marked with stone cairns that circumvented the exposed treeless summit with fog-bound horizons. As the trail descended on the northeast flank of the mountain, the fog lifted and we could clearly see the way down. It wound around the mountain six kilometres through Ferry Gulch where we connected with the first part of the trail.

The descent had its challenges, too. The last group with Russell and I made the final leg of the pilgrimage in darkness. A few were limping and bruised, yet we were singing. In spite of sore feet and muscles, a few tumbles and falls into the spongy thick trees, in stories laughingly related later, there were no major injuries.

Even the Peruvians got lessons from the pilgrimage. In spite of her speed and agility on the mountain, once Dona Berna was down from the mountain she went straight to bed and slept for twelve hours. When I asked about her experience the next day, she stretched her arms wide to demonstrate and said, “A big *apukuna!*”

On the ascent, Don Martin lost his flute. “The mountain took it,” he said. In it he saw a reprimand for his misbehavior, which he sheepishly acknowledged. But later, his flute is returned by one of the women who found it along the path. A wide-grinned Don Martin thanked the woman for bringing it back and gifted her a condor feather.

It had been a mythic journey for each of us, a testament of strength in unity and intention. Heather summarized it beautifully in her letter:

I have absolutely no doubt that we were called to climb the mountain that day. For me the ceremony began when we were each drawn to the pilgrimage. It deepened when we gathered at the base in a circle and agreed that we would climb as one and return as one. The ceremony was the journey up and down; being present to the spirit within each moment and to the magnificent Gros Morne Mountain.

On the Peruvians’ last day, a warmish one for late September, what we call a mazy day, the sky was covered with low clouds and there was no wind. Before leaving for the airport, Dona Berna and I walked down the road to a nearby beach. Both she and Don Martin loved exploring beaches—they were like excited happy children, filling their pockets with stones and shells. We are kindred spirits in that respect, as language barriers and cultural differences disappear. Dona Berna is simultaneously playful and serious. Speaking in her native language, she acknowledges *Mamacocha* and the mountain spirits. Squatting down, she digs a small hole in the sand with a stick and places her offerings in it, covering them with the sand. She often made prayer bundles for clients in private sessions and directed them to bring them to the beach.

I find a blue mussel shell to hold my offerings, blow my prayers into it, and place it in a hole the way Dona Berna has done. She watches me, then finds a shell to make another offering like mine. Rituals complete, we stand together arm in arm on the beach, looking across Bonne Bay to Woody Point. The view from this cove always stirs something inside my heart. I do not want to leave.

This trip has been one of intense powerful presences and yet extraordinary harmony has reigned among the group. Even later stories will be shared of what was a highlight for most—the climb up Gros Morne Mountain. As we prepare to leave Gros Morne Park, I ask Don Martin his impression of the place. “It’s like Machu Picchu,” he says, “Machu Picchu of the north.” His pronouncement affirms what has been sensed by those in tune with the energies of place.

One of the stories that trickle back is from Janet. She described how the pilgrimage has been a transformative event in her life:

When Alison posted information about the Sacred Earth Journey, I knew I would go, even though the timing was not good. I was vaguely aware it included a short climb up a small mountain on the fall equinox. It sounded magical and I threw in my rain gear and hiking shoes in anticipation.

I carried a lot of baggage that day. It quickly became clear that this would be a difficult climb and I settled into a determined and slow but steady turtle’s pace. I remembered my teacher’s story of a difficult climb he led in Peru. While most participants prayed for assistance in getting to the top, the local guides simply prayed their gratitude for “getting this far.” The story was alive in me and I made it my mantra as I climbed, bringing up the rear of our small group. “Thank you, thank you, thank you for getting me this far.” Thank you for the companionship of Heather who was carrying her own large bundle, and for Alison and Russell who stayed close, and to the others in the group who inspired me to keep on trekking as they made their way to the top more quickly.

Within a few days of returning from Newfoundland, I had a personal session with West African Elder, Malidoma Patrice Somé of Dagara heritage. He began his reading with, “I don’t know what you were doing on that mountain but you have attracted the attention of the spirit of the mountain and it is in the process of fusing with you.” He assured me that this was a blessing to be cherished. He also cautioned that this would take time to complete. It took our small group eleven hours to climb Gros Morne. It’s taking me a lifetime to integrate it.

Within seven months, I moved back to Newfoundland without a clear sense of how my life would unfold or what the path ahead would look like. A week before I left Ontario, on March 21, 2012, I had this dream:

I'm in a desert red-rock plain visiting a woman who is connected with a powerful spiritual man. I leave to walk up the mountain and the woman's little caramel-coloured beagle dog follows me. Then I'm at the top and there are people performing and others gathered to watch. I stay at the back in a forested rocky place with a young boy and girl. There's a beautiful cherry tree with large white blossoms. It smells divine. I pull down the branches so the children can smell them, admonishing them to not damage the tree. I pick up a branch that's lying on the ground.

The dog runs off and disappears over the mountain edge and I follow concerned it has been hurt, and see it lying on a ledge far below. I climb down the mountain over stone steps and steep gravel slopes, even through snow in my attempt to reach the dog. I'm focused on reaching the ledge only to see that someone above me is now holding the dog in her arms. I can't see if it's injured or not. All I want is to take care of the dog and tend its wounds.

From this dream, I suspect there is an intense period of healing and integration ahead. This is confirmed when I look up the symbolism of the cherry tree. It is known as the tree of the phoenix which arises from the ashes. Its red juicy fruit is associated with the juices of life and new birth, insight, and awakenings. "One who aligns with the cherry tree," Ted Andrews writes in *Nature-Speak: Signs, Omens and Messages in Nature*, "will find the energy and ability to rise above the fires of their own life in a magnificent manner."

It is early spring with snow on the ground when I arrive in Woody Point. As the temperature warms and the plants come to life, I'm delighted to discover that the trees at the back of my house are wild cherry. They are soon covered with delicate white and pink blossoms. Late that summer I pick my first crop. And another chapter begins.

The Heart of the Mountain

THE FIRST SEPTEMBER BACK HOME I feel the call to repeat the equinox pilgrimage to the top of Gros Morne. September 21 is designated as the International Day of Peace, and this way of contributing to world peace feels right. The night before, a few people gather with me to create an offering for the mountain. The next day, my youngest sister and a few friends climb with me. It is a lovely morning with a few clouds in a clear blue sky. Several surprises await us. The first surprise is the ease of ascent compared to the previous year. The second surprise is the spectacular views from the top. I think ‘Wow! If only last year’s group could see this!’

The next year Heather returns with her mother for the equinox mountain pilgrimage. Once again, a group gathers the evening before to create an offering. During the night, my spirit self is awakened and called to the living room to a set of antique cow bells on a shelf. My Peruvian teachers had told me that mountain spirits particularly like bells. And flutes, actually music and song of all kinds is pleasing to the elemental spirits. Those cow bells had never been used for other purposes than decoration, but now the spirit of Gros Morne wanted me to bring those bells. The next day they go into my backpack along with Steve’s mountain bell.

It is another great climb. The ascent is usually challenging for me, but the views from the top and the people we meet along the way make it memorable. We are on the descent when I remember the string of cow bells in my backpack. They are heavy and loud—a little intimidating to my ears—and the sound reverberates down the mountainside.

We are almost at Ferry Lake, a pond in the valley between Gros Morne Mountain and Crow Head when a young man emerges from the trees at the end of the valley. He says he heard the bells. After his three-day solitary trek on the Long Range Traverse, he is happy to see

people again. He is visiting from Israel, having recently completed his military service. We hike the rest of the way down together, ending the day with a meal in a local restaurant. There are many points of connection between us. We discover that Heather's mother and the young man actually have a common acquaintance in Jerusalem. Given that it was World Peace Day, I sense many layers to our serendipitous meeting on the mountain.

In September 2014, a small group assembles to accompany me for what had now become an annual equinox climb. With friends planning to join me from out of town, I consider cancelling because of a stomach upset that has shown no sign of improvement all week. I ask for guidance. Two days before the equinox as I come into wakefulness, an image of a plant flashes onto the screen of my inner vision. By now I know that plants and trees communicate with me. This particular plant is familiar from my childhood, though I haven't noticed it much since, nor did I know its name or its medicine.

After a short walk down the street, I find the plant growing in the gravel at the side of the road. A Google search leads to its identification as pineapple weed, or wild chamomile. It grows in poor disturbed soils and happens to be a healing remedy for digestive upsets. That night before bed I make a strong tea with the pineapple weed and white rose petals I gathered earlier that week, and fall into a deep sleep. The next morning, I'm completely back to normal and that evening we prepare our offering for the mountain.

The climb proceeds almost as usual. Almost because the wind that day is unusually strong. It is blowing in a south-easterly direction which happens to be against the steep side of Gros Morne, in the direction of our ascent. During the most difficult part of our climb in the steep ravine strewn with large boulders, I'm lifted up the mountain by sudden gusts of wind. It is a little unnerving but I get the message and begin to laugh. The wind spirits literally help push me up the mountain that day.

In the fall of 2015, Russell feels compelled to return to Newfoundland to climb Gros Morne on the equinox. I'll let him give his account of that meeting and pilgrimage:

Little did I know when I came to Newfoundland this year that my visit there would be the culmination of a five-year journey that started in 2010 when Bonnie and I joined Alison at Gros Morne and I made my first connection with the Tablelands Mountain. On a personal level, I felt this latest journey was to

set the potentials for possible new directions in my life and anticipated that the first two days I would be hiking solo. As I often find, spirit had quite different things in store!

Alison had planned to climb Gros Morne a few days earlier, but the weather had not co-operated, so I heard from her that she and a friend would be climbing on the equinox as well. That was my first inkling something larger than a personal pilgrimage was in store.

As I began the first leg of the hike from the parking lot through black spruce and balsam fir forest, a flood of information started coming to me. Gros Morne has a heart of pink quartzite (metamorphosed sandstone) more than a billion years old, and has held the energies of love and joy for eons. For the past ten-thousand years this energy has been cloaked, as its name, which can be loosely translated from French as "Great Sadness," suggests. Though anyone who has climbed it can attest, the energy can't help but seep through.

The trail up the mountain follows a talus slope of pink quartzite. Around three-fifths of the way up the mountain its heart is exposed. I realized that this equinox, coming near the close of a remarkable series of solar and lunar alignments, was the time to release the joy and love that the mountain holds, and that everyone who hiked the mountain this day was there for a reason, whether they were consciously aware of it or not.

I stood on a rock in the middle of the heart of the mountain and toned to assist in the initial opening for the free flow of the energies. Alison, who had started later than me, stopped at this location and made an offering to the mountain.

There was an unusually celebratory atmosphere among the hikers that day. My sense that everyone on the mountain was there for a reason was confirmed as I learned where people had come from: provinces all across Canada, states across the U.S., Mexico, Brazil, England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Greece, creating energetic connections with continents in the eastern, western, northern, and southern hemispheres. I realized that my own travels in Africa and Asia allowed energetic connections to those continents, and a young world-travelling German who had joined us on the way up connected with other continents—Australia and New Zealand.

Another part of that equinox climb story involved Steve's mountain bell, of which I had become the keeper after his death. When Russell and I met on the mountain this time, I gave it to him to use but he forgot to give it back. The next day it went with him as he hiked into the southern side of the Tablelands Mountain.

On his return, Russell shared a powerful initiation experience with the mountain, and that he felt the bell needed to be left there. At his words, my heart sunk. I loved that bell but also knew this was right. Its offering to the Tablelands Mountain was part of the work Steve had begun five years before with me on his first trip to Newfoundland. Still, I mourned its loss.

A day later, we went to Winterhouse Brook Canyon at the Tablelands Mountain together in order to complete the connection between the two mountains. As he describes in his telling of the story (which is on his website), as we walk back to the parking lot, a wild wind blows up pelting us with rain and then sleet. We laugh and sing, leaning into the wind. And then we look behind us to see a full-colour iridescent rainbow shimmering in the mists and arcing across the gulch. We take this as an unmistakable sign from the elemental realms that our offerings have been accepted. At that moment the sun blessed us by peeking out from under the clouds covering the mountaintop.

When Russell and I got back from the Tablelands Mountain, I asked if he knew the Celtic myth about the Children of Lir. It is a classic tale, a fall from grace kind of story passed down from antiquity of the Tuatha De Danann or Tribe of the Water Goddess. Like the Sidhe, they are a supernatural race who live in the Otherworld but interact with humans and their world. In this Christianized version of the story, the four children of Lir are turned into swans and cursed to wander the Earth for hundreds of years. I thought he might find interesting parallels with our experiences with the mountains. This is a short excerpt:

"...The mountains are dead," said Conn. "The mountains are not dead," said Aibri the Wanderer. "They are dark and silent, but they are not dead. I know. I have cried to them in the night and laid my forehead against theirs and felt the beating of their mighty hearts. They are wiser than the wisest druid, more tender than the tenderest mother. It is they who keep the world alive." "O," said Fionnuala, "if the mountains are indeed alive let us go to them; let us tell them our sorrowful story. They will pity us and we shall not be utterly desolate."

Aibric and the swans journeyed together, and at dusk they came to a tall beautiful mountain—the mountain that is called Nephin, in the West. It looked dark and sombre against the fading sky, and the sight of it, discrowned and silent, struck chill to the hearts of our wild swans: they turned away their heads to hide the tears in their eyes. But Aibric stretched his hands to the mountain and cried out: “O beautiful glorious Comrade, pity us! Tir-nan-Oge is no more, and Moy-Mell is lost forever! Welcome the Children of Lir, for we have nothing left but you and the earth of Ireland!”

Then a wonder happened. The star-heart of Nephin shone out—magnificent—tremulous—coloured like a pale amethyst. The swans cried out to each other: “The mountain is alive! Beauty has come again to the earth! Aibric, you have given us back the Land of Youth!” A delicate faery music trembled and died away and was born again in the still evening air, and more and more the radiance deepened in the heart of Nephin. The swans began to sing most sweetly and joyously, and at the sound of that singing the star-heart showed in mountain after mountain till every mountain in Ireland pulsed and shone.

“Crown yourselves, mountains!” said Aodh, “that we may know the De Danaans are still alive and Lir’s house is builded now where old age cannot wither it!” The mountains sent up great jewelled rays of light so that each one was crowned with a rainbow; and when the Children of Lir saw that splendour they had no more thought of the years they had spent over dark troublous waters....

The story ends with a visit to a monk and the sound of a bell that breaks the spell and frees the children from their swan bodies so they can live on the Earth as humans again. The similarity of descriptions of the mountains, both dark and sombre, Russell’s experience with the opening of Gros Morne Mountain’s heart, the bell connections, and the resplendent and unexpected displays of rainbows were points of commonality with this old Irish myth.

Most importantly, the story reflects a deep human memory of the power and role of mountains, how they connect us to higher consciousness, to a sense of unconditional love and generosity that emanates from all of nature and from the heart of the great Mother Earth herself.

A Solo Climb

FALL EQUINOX COMES AROUND once again as I'm completing this chapter. After the last five years of climbing Gros Morne Mountain with others, this time I feel called to do the pilgrimage alone. Part of me is still looking for unequivocal proof there is something extraordinary happening on these yearly pilgrimages. A phrase from my childhood church-going days runs through my mind, 'Oh, ye of little faith.' I'm a doubting Thomas still.

In late August, I begin preparations for the equinox climb by taking several solo hikes to other mountains and a three-day pilgrimage to the tip of the Northern Peninsula. At each past ceremony site, I make offerings and visit new places that call me to explore and connect with the spirits. The excursion was purposefully spontaneous. I wanted to see how it felt to follow intuitive guidance and what happened when I didn't.

It would have been difficult to miss many of the ways nature conspired with signs and magical manifestations. The trip was marked by serendipities and unexpected discoveries: rainbows appearing in the east and rainless sky, unexpected plant discoveries, and animal sightings.

In the days before the equinox, I watched the weather forecast for the best day to make the climb, which appeared to be a day earlier than the actual equinox. I planned to leave early that morning, but slept in and had a late start. The way the day unfolded left me questioning the whole notion of intentionality—that maybe there are no accidents. That no matter what I think, I'm always exactly where I need to be.

After a few days of heavy rainfall, the first part of the trail is wet, muddy, and challenging to navigate. An hour into the hike, I'm overheated, my legs and back ache from the heavy pack, and I'm way out of my comfort zone. Silently I negotiate with the mountain to go

only to the base and make the full climb another day. A mottled brown arctic hare runs across the trail, a few feet in front of me, disrupting my ruinous thoughts, reminding me that I am reacting out of fear, and that I'm not alone.

At this moment, I realize my walking stick is back at the last bench. Backtracking takes almost half an hour, further delaying my progress. My resistance to making the pilgrimage has almost succeeded in drowning out deeper thoughts, such as 'Things are not as they appear. Something bigger is happening here. You are not alone on this equinox pilgrimage.' The time of balance of solar energy, of equal light and dark, is showing me where I'm out of balance, where fear and doubt still live in me. I remember that I undertook this solitary journey so I could pay attention, and notice what was going on within and also around me.

It is after one p.m. when I arrive at the base of the mountain where I meet several people on their way back down. A relaxed and well-outfitted middle-aged couple look surprised that I'm heading up but say nothing. When I ask a pair of fit millennial women about the condition of the trail ahead, they respond with a nonchalant, "Oh it's fine." No easy outs there. I evaluate the possibility of spending the night on the mountain if something happened to delay me, such as an injury. At this point in the day there are unlikely to be hikers behind me. It appears the only people in front of me are a young couple wearing shorts and T-shirts. They passed me earlier as I was retrieving my walking stick.

A cell phone and flashlight are in my backpack, but I'm otherwise unprepared for the cold night temperatures and the rocky exposed conditions at this elevation. Gratefully sinking to the bench on the raised wooden platform, I face the rocky southern crevice of Gros Morne, eat a sandwich and drink still hot tea, contemplating my choices. Remembering that several friends know where I am, and feeling rested and fed, I surrender my fears and decide to continue with inexplicable confidence that I will be okay.

By the time I get half way up the rock-strewn gully, the young people in shorts, having already reached the summit, are scrambling back down the ravine like carefree children. They are a cute couple, she is dark-haired and brown eyed, distinctly aboriginal, in contrast to her blond, blue-eyed friend. When I tell them this way down is shorter but much more challenging, they look disbelieving. We chat on the side of

the mountain at almost the exact spot Russell and I had performed a ceremony to open the heart of the mountain a year before.

They are on a three-month, cross-Canada adventure from Vancouver Island, and on the mountain that day by chance. Their vehicle, an old Volkswagen camper, needs repair necessitating a longer stay in the area, so the climb today was a last minute impulsive decision. Since they hadn't prepared for the long hike, they are hungry and on their way back down to get something to eat. Their spontaneity and enthusiasm is beautiful, a real-life manifestation of innocent love, perfect balance and harmony here at the heart of the mountain.

For the rest of the pilgrimage until I descend to the opposite side of the mountain, and for the first time ever, there is no one else up here but me. I contemplate being on the mountain all alone, and feel in particularly good hands.

I take my time and reach the summit by four o'clock that afternoon with a sense of elation and a lightness of being. I feel an abundance of what the Peruvians call *sami* energy—pure, refined coherent light. As I make offerings, a light mist gathers at the edges of the exposed rocky ledge and I'm assailed with sudden gusts of cold wind. These dissipate as I cross the top to the opposite side. Using my cell phone, I play at creating short videos with views of Bonne Bay, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and from the back of Gros Morne, of Ten Mile Pond. Addressing my tribe, people like me who feel the call of Mother Earth and the mountain spirits, I invite them to join me in Newfoundland. It is easy to dream lofty visions up here and only the threat of being stuck on the mountaintop all night makes me continue on.

The sun is heading towards the western horizon over the Bonne Bay hills as I descend past Ferry Pond and the camping area. A few minutes beyond the Pond, another couple appear in the deepening dusk, trudging up the trail carrying heavy packs with camping gear. The man has a buzz cut and is wearing army fatigues. He is walking slowly because of a back injury, his companion says. She is from central Newfoundland; he is visiting from Texas. We chat briefly of their plans to climb to the top the next morning. I wish them luck, saying silent prayers for the man's recovery and for enough light to ensure my own safe return.

It is rather late in the day to begin such a trek, and the similarity to my situation isn't lost on me. Their presence on the mountain also is serendipitous. It occurs to me the couple are taking my place on the mountain, so I can go home.

Dusk is fast approaching, and the rock-strewn trail winding through dense trees and shrubs is slippery and wet, requiring my full focus and attention. I've recognized this gift of the mountain before—the practice of mindful presence. Each pilgrimage brings faith in my strength and ability to stay attentive to my body and trust its place on the Earth. In the gathering dark there is no choice but to stay fully present to each and every step on the path. The light slowly fades and I walk the last fifteen minutes to the parking lot through dense boreal forest with the aid of my tiny flashlight.

I'm surprised to see the Vancouver couple's camper still parked in the lot. I don't want to disturb them, but with the other couple I imagine now tucked safely into their camp on Ferry Lake, my role in connecting us all and attending the mountain spirit on this equinox pilgrimage feels complete. It occurs to me that those I met here on the mountain today hail from east, west, north and south—all the directions. My body and feet hurt and I'm glad to go home to a hot Epsom salts bath and a comfortable bed.

The next evening's sunset over the northeastern sky framing Gros Morne Mountain is spectacular. It fills my front window with brilliant orange-reds and purples. Locals' Facebook pages are pasted with glowing sky photos. In spite of lingering body aches, I remember how it feels to live in harmonious communion with the spirits of nature. I wonder if they are amused by my doubts and tests, yet trust they know my deepest heart better than I know it myself.

Indigenous lore says stone people are the bones of Mother Earth. They carry the memories of all our ancestors in their crystalline structures in the same way minerals hold our flesh and bone bodies together. Sacred mountain traditions remind us we are all on a mythic journey from the stars for a grand adventure in physicality, and our hearts long for a place where we can feel truly at home.

I find wisdom in the words of Catholic mystic, farmer and writer, Thomas Berry, who described the cause of our modern woes as "spiritual autism." We have forgotten we are a part of a web of conscious intelligence that is the living essence of nature. Thomas says "We are talking only to ourselves. We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation. By breaking that conversation, we have shattered the universe." His sentiment affirmed what I was coming to know, that all of nature, including the stones, plants, animals, will help us remember our own

RETURN TO PANGAEA

spiritual nature which binds us to all of creation. Our collective awakening to the truth of who we are and why we are here brings hope to my heart and calls me to the mountain that knows my name.

PART FIVE

❧ Animal Relations ❧

In their innocence and wisdom, in their connection to the earth and its most ancient rhythms, animals show us a way back to a home they have never left.

—Susan Chernak McElroy

Plight of the Blue Whales

ON APRIL 21, 2014, the body of a large whale was sighted on the ice-packed harbour of Trout River, Newfoundland, a twenty-minute drive from my home. I saw a photo of its bloated mass embedded in the ragged frozen surface posted on Facebook, an image barely recognizable as a whale. A neighbour told me the news: it was a blue whale and eight more of them had been found frozen in the landlocked ice on the Straits of Belle Isle off the northwest coast. I listened with a sense of shock, I knew this was significant but couldn't remember why.

To conservationists, this was a tragic loss for the endangered whale species. A marine biologist, interviewed by the local media, reported that blue whales were usually solitary creatures that sometimes traveled in pairs, but nine together was uncommon.

Ice entrapment and collisions with ships are the usual causes of death for the largest mammals living on the planet. The blue whales have never recovered from the extensive whaling in the early half of this century that led them to the brink of extinction. This time, the experts theorized, death resulted from a change in wind direction. The pod was feeding on the krill that thrive in the frigid cold waters at the edges of sea ice. The nine whales were caught during an unusually long winter with record amounts of ice.

As a student of ancient wisdom traditions, I was struck by the number nine, a multiple of three, which in sacred mystery language is code for the Earth Goddess, and a signature of feminine divinity. Nine also signifies the completion of a major cycle, and the beginning of a new one. Three whale carcasses drifted ashore close to my home in Bonne Bay.

As the pack ice in Trout River harbour melted, the first whale beached next to a long stone breakwater arrayed with brightly painted fishing sheds near the river entrance. Another drifted ashore in Rocky

Harbour, north of my home, at the mouth of Bonne Bay. It lay on a shallow beach at the foot of a cemetery in the protected lull of a sloping hill. The third came ashore on a remote beach between Trout River and Bonne Bay and washed out to sea before people could retrieve it. I remembered a dream from two months earlier. My journal dated February 21, 2014 reads:

I'm standing on a high wharf where many people are gathered to look out over the water. I push forward to the edge to see whales swimming in the water below. They are extremely large and long. One surfaces at the edge of the wharf, its long wide mouth open, as if reaching for my hand. It singles me out and I'm amazed. I sense it wants to hold my hand. Nervously, I put my hand in its mouth, wondering if it will bite me. I'm relieved there are no teeth, and surprised it's gentle. "Thank you," I say and add, "I'm sorry." I feel sad and distressed about something, I don't know what.

The scene shifts to the harbour where flood lights and giant screens are set up out in the harbour to record the whales. It looks like a vast film set. The whales are playful, jumping out of the water. One has a baby that it balances on its nose, like a seal.

Almost instantly the harbour is filled with snow covered pack ice. People on large bikes and tall, strange-looking vehicles look like they are playing a game on the ice.

My memory of the majesty and gentle nature of the great whale that made contact gave me a personal sense of connection to the tragedy, the full significance of which I could not yet comprehend. That night it was difficult to sleep. My mind reeled and my body buzzed with unknown anxieties. As I dozed between sleeping and waking, I was visited by a presence that filled my bedroom with powerful all-encompassing love. I fell asleep as it enfolded me.

As I awakened, I saw on my inner vision a page of words. One word stood out—LOUD. During the next couple of days my perception of sound became acute. I was startled awake by what sounded like thunder. Although as I reached full consciousness it became apparent the roaring in my ears was simply the wind and rain falling on the roof. The normal sounds of tree frogs and the cawing of crows were amplified. Everything was extraordinarily loud. I made notes.

I registered these experiences but allowed myself to be distracted by an upcoming trip to Ontario. Preparing to leave gave me a new focus, and an excuse to be away from the small community where everyone

was talking about the whales. I felt overwhelmed and I needed space and time to process what had happened.

As I shared the tragic loss with friends in Ontario, sadness encompassed me in a dark dense cloud. I imagined the dying whales, the crushing inevitability within their ice prison as they slowly suffocated. I relived their last moments, painfully aware of their close bonds and extraordinary ability to communicate. I imagined their last precious breaths.

I awakened with a deep ache in the middle of my chest. I knew it was possible to die of heartache. The grief I felt was disproportionate to the event, logic said. I was over-reacting. Animals die all the time. Yet my heart swelled with the memory of that great whale holding my hand and I wondered what did it mean?

During a previously booked massage with an intuitive body-worker, she quickly tapped into the whales and relayed a message. "There's a baby whale here. She wants you to sing to her. She wants you to be happy, not sad."

Finally, I allowed my tears to flow and received the solace of the therapist's healing touch. I reflected on the tradition of keening, of vocalizing laments as a way to express grief. Quietly singing to myself helped untangle my feelings and soothed my spirit. I sang to thank the whales for their life and presence in this world and to express my sorrow for their suffering, and especially, to honour our connection with each other in the web of life.

Back home, I learned the blue whales story had made headlines around the world. People came from near and far to see and pay tribute to them. I made pilgrimages, too, joining the crowds on the waterfronts. The Trout River whale was twenty-five metres long and weighed a hundred tons. Her tongue was large enough for fifty people to stand on, her colour more black than blue, her magnificence subdued as she rested lifeless on the shore, her gas-swollen belly exposed to the elements and defenceless against the pokes and stares of the curious and opportunistic.

Squawking black-backed gulls and chatty seabirds hung out on the carcasses waiting for their next meal. When the tide went out, people ventured closer to the massive being: to touch and prod, to see the splitting skin, and smell the rotting flesh close up.

Onlookers hung about the shores at all hours of the day in a strange mix of wake and carnival, looking at and talking about the whales, retelling the story to new arrivals, their chatter a blend of

mystery and mundanity. One morning revealed a missing dorsal fin and a couple of neatly sawn out hunks of flesh from the whale's belly. The missing flesh was reported to be supper for some hungry dogs, and although the dorsal fin was recovered, a sense of indignity over such a violation prevailed. A local musician set up her harp and played a haunting melody—a fitting tribute to the gentle giants that inspired awe, even in death.

Locals wondered how much longer they'd have to put up with the stench on their doorsteps. And if there was something in it for them—more than the temporary notoriety, a job perhaps. Someone had to dispose of the bodies. The task turned out to be an onerous affair.

While locals expressed concern about the decomposing bodies, museums around the world clamoured to claim the bones. Dead they are more rare and precious than could have been imagined. Some residents expressed a desire to keep the bones close to home, where the whales lived and died and came ashore. A sense of local ownership grew. A sense of OUR whales was partly motivated by the opportunity a tourist attraction would bring to the area. Nevertheless, scientific expertise and official authorities prevailed and a deal was struck between the Royal Ontario Museum and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Experts arrived to undertake the task of separating flesh from the bones of Lollipop, as the ROM staff named her, the beginning of a lengthy preservation process. It took a team of local men more than two weeks to render two skeletons ready to transport to Toronto aboard several large trucks. It was announced that one whale would go to the ROM and the other would find a home in St. John's at Memorial University. The destiny of the blue whales—bones for research and education to raise awareness of the importance of protecting their ocean habitat, was a good cause. I hoped it wouldn't be in vain.

A few days after the Trout River whale bones were removed, a group gathered for a meeting in my home where we created an offering infused with prayers for the waters and the animals and placed it in the bay near where Lollipop was dissected.

In the following weeks, I learned blue whales feed off tiny ocean creatures or krill, which are filtered through baleen bristles—an explanation for the softness of the dream whale's mouth on my hand. My research revealed that blue whales are the loudest animals on the planet. The second loudest are the howler monkeys of Central and

South America that I first heard in Palenque, Mexico, precipitating a mystical experience and initiating my return to this coast.

Blue whales communicate across vast distances, up to more than 1,600 kilometres. Like other cetaceans that rely on sound, their future is greatly compromised by noise pollution in the oceans, as well as toxins such as mercury that accumulate in their brains and affects their functioning. The word **LOUD** that had appeared in my inner vision and the heightened sensitivity to sound I'd experienced was a consequence of my connection to the blue whales when my heart and mind had opened to them.

Despite having grown up in multiple rural outport communities around the island, I had little firsthand experience with whales. The first whale I encountered close-up was a dead one that had washed ashore on a beach near Daniel's Harbour, a small town on the Northern Peninsula. It was a warm summer day and my family had driven a couple of hours south for a doctor's visit.

A beached humpback whale was a rare occurrence and big local news, so we stopped and walked over the sand dunes to the shore. The large black carcass had washed up the way everything does on the beaches of fishing communities, with waterlogged timbers, old lobster pots, plastic buoys, fishing gear, and rusted metal.

The whale was outstanding by virtue of its enormity. It was easily the largest creature I'd ever encountered in my nine years of life. I remember thinking it must be like the whale that swallowed Jonah, who, the biblical story says, was thwarted in his attempt to escape God's calling. A great storm tossed him into the sea, and after three days and nights in the whale's belly, Jonah was ejected right where he needed to be. Little did I know this tale would resonate with my own life journey.

Nor did I know then of the twenty-one commercial whaling stations that had operated around Newfoundland and Labrador between 1898 and 1972. Together with global commercial hunting from the sixteenth-century onward, these contributed to the decimation of many species of whales, some of which never recovered. Neither was I aware of the hunting of whales and dolphins that continues to this day, for food and to supply entertainment facilities around the world. Or the consequences of human overfishing that results in diminishing food supplies for the cetaceans and other large species. One didn't need to be a marine biologist to realize the future was bleak for them, the human race, and the planet, if we don't soon change our ways and right the balance.

The work of restoring right relationships with the realms of nature is a deep calling. After becoming a shamanistic practitioner in Ontario ten years prior, Newfoundland and whales had begun to occupy much more of my dreams and waking life. My journals contained many references to whales, reflecting a growing conscious connection with the natural world in general. Indigenous teachings related to the origin and role of whales in the Earth's evolutionary history maintained that whales once walked on land but didn't like it, and returned to aquatic life in the oceans—a fact now confirmed by science.

Whales are said to have individuated souls, a quality shared uniquely with humans. I was fascinated to learn of cave drawings in Africa that show whale-like beings that the Dogon tribal elders declared came from the Sirius star system to bring knowledge to advance human civilization. Everything I knew confirmed the ancient knowledge that whales are highly evolved beings. Indigenous lore tells us they hold the memories of our star origins and lost civilizations. I loved the Australian aborigines' explanation that the whales follow song lines on their annual migrations between the north and south poles, communicating their knowledge through the conductive energy of water. The spiritual medicine of whales, urging us to find our unique voice and sing our own songs of creation, resonated deeply as guidance for my life and work.

Honouring the Whales

THE YEAR AFTER MY MOVE to Newfoundland and before the blue whales came ashore in 2014, I and two other women healers made a trip to Red Bay, Labrador. Red Bay had recently been designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its historical significance as a sixteenth-century Basque whaling station. It is estimated that 20,000 right and bowhead whales were killed for their oil which was shipped to Europe for oil lamps. The station operated during the summer months for approximately seventy years until the whale populations were depleted. I had never been there, and was drawn to go to honour the whales and also the mariners buried there.

Our journey north was along the rugged and spectacular coast of the Northern Peninsula to Port aux Choix, a sacred place where ancient peoples brought their dead for burial. There we made offerings at a beach near Point Riche Lighthouse—a limestone rock promontory where I had taken groups before and where whales had surfaced during our ceremony. The next day we drove north to St. Barbe to board a ferry for the ninety-minute ride to Blanc Sablon, Quebec. From the deck, we scanned the water expectantly for whales, seeing only drifting ice pans. I bundled up with the warmest clothes I had but still felt chilled to the bone.

Once off the ferry, we checked into our hotel and headed to the National Historical Site at L'Anse Amour. This area had once been a seal hunting camp of the Maritime Archaic peoples and is the earliest known funerary monument in North America. Discovered in a stone burial chamber was the skeleton of a twelve-year-old boy. The grave was estimated to be approximately 7,500 years old. The way in which the child was buried and the burial mound contents showed ceremony and offerings; the archaeologists noted it was a death marked with "elaborate reverence."

High on the open marsh within sight of the grass-fringed sandy beach we honoured the spirits of the ancestors and the child they buried facing east, the place of rebirth. The next morning, we drove sixty kilometres up the coast to Red Bay through windswept barrens, and arctic tundra landscapes. We drove past wide rushing rivers and through boreal forested hills until we approached the last turn of the road into the community of Red Bay.

It was a mystical scene. Above the white wooden houses scattered around the harbour, low clouds covered the horizon, wrapping the place in a light misty fog. The Hopi say the ancestors manifest in clouds, and I sensed their presence. The air was unusually quiet and still, and few people could be seen as we drove around the settlement looking for a place for our ceremony. Being early in the season, the park's visitor centre was closed, and the Saddle Island Museum deserted.

We stopped at the lone restaurant where huge weathered whale bones adorned the front of the building. We were the only customers and after a tasty lunch of soup and sandwiches, we browsed the gift shop, where I found a felt-lined slate-blue coat with "Labrador" embossed with black script. It reminded me of the colour of the winter ocean.

A few years later, this coat appeared in my inner vision and I recognized it as a call from the whales to take another journey of connection north. But now I was simply glad for the warmth of my purchase all the while aware of the pressing issue of finding the right place to create our offering. Our work demanded more privacy than the restaurant provided and it was far too windy to attempt to assemble a bundle of fragile ingredients outside.

Within moments of getting back into the car, the idea to go to the church perched at the crest of the hill came to the three of us simultaneously. The church doors were unlocked but despite a slight sense we may be intruding and the faint worry of being discovered, it felt like the perfect spot.

We welcomed the spirits of all ancestors into the sacred space sensing they were glad to be acknowledged and part of our ceremony. We sat in the back pews and quickly assembled our prayer bundle. Our heart-felt prayers of gratitude for all those who had come before were breathed into the offerings, including our whale brothers and sisters whose bodies and lives were sacrificed to light the world.

Once completed, we decorated the tiny bundle with the red carnations we had brought with us and made our way down to the rocky beach of Red Bay. After placing the offering into the water, we watched the tide carry the white tissue wrapped package out into the middle of the bay. Mission accomplished, we drove straight back to Blanc Sablon in time to catch the afternoon ferry to Newfoundland.

The following January, I invited people to join me for another Sacred Journey to Red Bay. After the invitation was sent out, I created an altar for the whales and began to listen to whale songs. It was late February when I had the prophetic whale dream and two months later the pod of nine blue whales were crushed in the ice.

People responded to my invitation, and early July a group of six women made the journey to Red Bay. A larger group had spent the weekend performing ceremony at Lomond, Bonne Bay, in preparation. Six of us said goodbye to the others, and that first evening gathered with local aboriginal women drummers near the Point Riche Lighthouse in Port aux Choix to drum and sing the Ancestor Honouring Song. Early the next morning we were on the road north to St. Barbe to cross the Straits of Belle Isle for the second time.

The seas that day were choppy with a strong wind blowing under a cloud-filled sky. Two hours later, we drove off the ferry in Blanc Sablon, already sensing the energy of a different time and space. We stopped at the first high point on the coast to acknowledge the spirits of the land and ask for their blessings.

When we arrived at the Maritime Archaic burial mound, a misty rain was falling. We circled the burial mound with prayers and offerings. After settling into our hotel, we gathered wild flowers that grew in abundance on a nearby beach: blue flag irises, beach pea, chutney pear, crackerberry, and buttercups. Our bouquets were radiant. We added sacred herbs, incense, and sweets we'd brought, creating a dazzling offering infused with our prayers and laughter.

The next morning, we drove sixty kilometres north along the brilliant gold and red rocky coastlines. Ten kilometres before Red Bay, we saw a dead raven on the side of the road. Ravens being holders of magic and creation signified a good omen for our work. As we drew closer to Red Bay, thick swirling mists draped the hills. And as Red Bay came into view, low lying mists hovered above the waters and completely shrouded Saddle Island, our destination at the entrance to the harbour. This spot was where the majority of the whales' fatty flesh

was rendered into oil, and where the Basque mariners who died during their work were laid to rest.

It was the middle of July—the height of the tourist season, and there were numerous people in the visitor centre that morning, but we were the only group waiting for the boat so we had the small sparsely-treed island to ourselves for two hours.

Each of us followed her inner guidance. A few of us walked the trail leading to the other side of the island, past the rusty skeleton of a ship, to a tiny nondescript graveyard where I made offerings to the mariners. The others walked the beaches or simply sat and gazed over the water, holding space for our work.

There was an expectant numinous quality to the atmosphere. Even the waters of the bay were empty and quiet. Interpretative park signs noted that few whales now frequented these waters.

The flat stone beach in a tiny sheltered inlet called to receive our prayer bundle. We gently placed the brilliant blue iris topped white tissue offering into the water. Mary described watching “the beautiful blue-and-white gift ‘dance its journey’ gracefully waltzing its long overdue prayer to the universe.” The currents carried the bundle out to sea. As we walked in solemn silence back to the dock, the mists unexpectedly cleared and the sun blazed brightly from a brilliant blue sky.

Once aboard the motorboat skimming back over the sparkling waters of Red Bay, I studied the light and peace reflected in the faces of the women. It felt as if our prayers had been heard and accepted.

It was much later than we realized, so we ordered takeout from the restaurant and hurried back to Blanc Sablon to catch the afternoon ferry. Back on the island, we retraced our route south to Cow Head, a final ancestral sacred site, where we spent our last day together integrating our experiences. At dinner, our dining table overlooked the Gulf of St. Lawrence and as we sat we saw minke whales breaching out of the water close to shore. Red Bay seemed a world away. Mary shared her experience in a poem:

Six-Pack Poem

The Northern Peninsula is where the six
of us stood in a sacred place.

It is everywhere and nowhere.

It has always been and will always be that place of love.

We all gained some wisdom in that place.

Yes! We women know something that few others do.

We are all mothers of a world not yet awake.
But stirring in its sleep.

—Mary Power

Writing this story enabled me to see a more encompassing picture than I was able to envisage when the bodies of the blue whales washed up on our shores. It took time for me to integrate and come to terms with what a personal connection with whales might mean. For a long time, I was afraid to ask the question, and even more frightened of receiving an answer.

But one day, later that fall, I remembered that answers always come when I ask. So, I sat with pen and paper and asked the blue whales, what do you want me to know about your deaths? This is what I heard:

Do not blame yourself. If our death helps you remember how intimately connected all of life is, and to live on the Earth with more awareness, it is enough. Climate change is a normal part of the warming and cooling cycles of Mother Earth. These cycles have nurtured all life forms that ever existed on this planet even before whales and humans appeared. These cycles will continue with or without us as the natural domain of Gaia. She alone holds the secret and power of life, death, and renewal of all her children. We are never lost to her. The great mother holds the memory of each of us, forever in her keeping and in her heart.

See in our death the precious gift of life. Pain and death are a necessary part of life, the price of admission to enter this realm. In spite of death, and perhaps because our demise is certain, the price is worth it.

Be willing to dive deep and plumb the depths of your humanity, life, your human experience. The best and sweetest of life's riches are to be found at its edges. There are grand adventures to be had, and risks to be taken. Be true to your own nature, listen to the primordial wisdom that lives within your bones. Live fully while you are here and taste all that life offers, yes, to the very last drop, to the very last breath. That is your gift back to life. All is well.

As I continue to reflect on this message and my experiences thus far, it is clear my presence in my ancestral lands has helped anchor a

spiritual connection with the whales. Perhaps Newfoundland is a portal between the worlds, a place where, as my friend Sharon described on her first visit to this coast several years before, the boundaries of Earth, sky, and humans disappear.

Here in the midst of ancient worn-down mountains, rugged coastlines, salty air, mists, and crashing ocean waves, not far from the press of people and shopping malls, yet distant enough, was the perfect place to hear and feel more easily Mother Nature's communion with us.

And whales were not the only creatures that had been knocking persistently on the doors of my mind and heart. There were many more stories yet to be told, and lived.

Dolphins and Stones

IN JULY, 2014, a group of nine bottlenose dolphins became stranded in St. George's Bay on the same beach where I had performed ceremony the year before. After facilitating a Sacred Water workshop nearby, I felt a strong call to visit this particular beach and connect with the water spirits.

It was an overcast but warmish late morning, with waves breaking on the shore of a quiet deserted beach. On a spot away from the nearby fishing shacks, I opened my medicine bundle and arranged my healing stones on the wet sand, well away from the water's edge, and sat on a driftwood log. Soon it occurred to me I was watching and worrying the ocean would take my stones.

This had happened to my friend Steve after he opened his bundle to the elements on a beach close to his home. A wave had swept away all but three of his stones. This event was a portent of things to come as he died less than a year later. I wasn't ready to die yet.

Believing that facing this fear may be part of the reason I was there, I took a deep breath, stood and walked slowly and deliberately away from the stones. I kept on walking even though I looked back a few times until I was out of sight, feeling more spacious and free. Into that space I became more aware of my feet on the sand, the salty odor of the living blue-grey sea, the sounds of soaring seagulls, and the waves caressing the shore. In ten minutes, feeling I'd practised trust sufficiently, I turned back. The tide was rising and I was ready to accept whatever awaited. I saw, with some relief, as I was close enough, my stones high and dry as I'd left them. The waves were still breaking a safe distance away. It was a brave practice of nonattachment. How much more did I need?

Then the unexpected happened. As I turned away from the water to pick up the cloth that held my stones, a rogue wave silently swept up

the beach and I turned back to see swirling foamy seawater covering them. I grabbed what I could in two hands in a desperate attempt to wrestle the stones from the retreating wave. Despite my futile digging in the watery sand, three stones disappeared, including a favourite large Herkimer diamond. So much for nonattachment.

However, disbelief and disappointment gave way to acceptance. The water spirits saw fit to take them and I hoped my time on Earth wasn't up. I drove home in a reflective state of mind. On two other occasions, I was forced to let go of favourite stones and crystals when they disappeared in strange ways. Although, one of them mysteriously manifested on the floor of my office several weeks later.

I was reminded of the mystifying workings of the supernatural world as I watched videos of local marine rescuers and residents coming to save the stranded dolphins. Again, the incident recalled the sacred number nine. Eight were saved, but the ninth one died. I felt gratitude to the people who saved them, and sad for the one who perished.

Dolphins are known for their intelligence and altruistic behaviour and it seemed appropriate that humans were stirred to help those in distress that day. These animals had shown up in dreams and always inspired me with their joyful playfulness and sociability. In indigenous wisdom, dolphins are the keeper of life's sacred breath. They remind us that prana or life force energy connects us with the source of all life and the rhythms of nature. The yoga of breath, pranayama, had been part of my spiritual practice for a while, and this was a timely reminder to reconnect with those deep rhythms.

Seal Culture

WATER, AND ESPECIALLY SEASCAPES and other sea creatures of the north, including fish and walruses, frequent my dreams and as this story recalls, also made appearances in my waking life.

Next to the cod fish, seals are the most iconic and controversial animal in recent Newfoundland history. The animal advocacy organization Greenpeace first targeted its public campaigns on the annual seal hunts that take place off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. While indigenous cultures such as the Dorset depended on seals for many generations to survive, commercial seal hunts began with the influx of Europeans in the 1600s and since that time the hunts have claimed countless animal lives as well as hundreds of human ones.

Cassie Brown's book *Death on the Ice*, about Newfoundland's most tragic sealing disaster, was required reading in my high school. Fishing and hunting were a traditional part of my family and cultural heritage. Aside from not particularly liking the taste of seal meat, which I found intense and oily, the role of seals in the local economies and cultural history of Newfoundland evoked irreconcilably mixed emotions for me. Many Newfoundlanders still resent the interference and blame Greenpeace for the decline in global markets for seal meat and pelts. But this was not what I gleaned in my dreams.

From my journal dated August 1998: "I'm on a large ship in the water...then I'm reclining on a bunk, surprised by the appearance of a large sea lion or seal that nudges my hand with its head. It wants me to rub its head, the same way my cats do."

Given my personal ambivalence around seals, it seemed odd to me they kept showing up in my outer world, too. My first Christmas away from Newfoundland more than twenty years before, a package arrived containing a small stuffed white seal pup—a reminder of home, my friend's note said. Thirteen years later, a fellow student from Buffalo

gave me a larger version of the same stuffed toy explaining that it reminded her of me.

By now I also had a growing collection of seal figurines that appeared as unexpected gifts and findings. As usual, writing this story highlights the salience of the seal and prompts me to research its mythical and metaphysical associations.

The seal represents the inner voice, a symbol for the feminine aspect of our psyche that rules creativity, emotions, imagination, and the dream world because it is predominantly at home in the water. And, of course, there is the *selkie* legend of how seals turn into human men and women to live on land but are compelled to go back to the sea, their original home.

Two months after returning from my first visit to Newfoundland in August 2008 to conduct ceremonies and connect with the spirits of the land, images of seals appeared in my inner vision during deeply relaxed states of meditation, as well as in dreams. On the morning of October 27, I recorded this vivid dream:

Drifting in and out of awareness I see a young seal pup with blood on its white-and-brown spotted fur. Then I see one of my sisters with a huge open gash on the back of her neck. I sense it's an old wound. Next, I see my sister's head actually off her body and lying on the pillow next to her.

These dream images were particularly disturbing. I sensed the dream was a prompt to remember an ancient memory related to the trip a couple months before. Our group had visited the habitation and burial site of the Dorset who were dependant on the annually migrating seals for food, clothing and shelter. At this time, I was still solidly in the grip of registering my ancestral connection to the land where the indigenous people had lived. The deeper spiritual relationship between the human and animal realms would become clearer with time. At first these events felt like coincidences, but there was enough of a pattern that I began to notice clear signs like those on an unmarked trail.

When I began looking for a new home back in Newfoundland, I was directed to a local man with a property for sale. As he gave me a tour around the land he shared a story with me of finding a seal pup on the beach in front of the house. It looked lost, he told me, so he'd picked it up and taken it home. He pointed to a large framed photo on the wall of his shed showing himself holding the fat white seal. He could not bring himself to kill it so released the seal back to the ocean.

Given the significance of seals to my spiritual path, this spontaneous sharing was yet another sign I was on the right track even though there were several stressful moves and transitions ahead of me before my return to Newfoundland. In the meantime, the following dream in July 2011 felt like a much-needed message of support from the animal realms:

I'm travelling in a car with other people and come to a place where the road winds around large red round rocks and veers down into a deep valley flooded with water. It looks impassable. As we figure out what to do, we see small seals and or walruses—I can't tell which—swimming in the water below. As we watch, they grow big enough to reach up to where we stand. Their giant pale pink faces loom directly in front of me, taking up all my view. They convey to us that we can ride on their backs. I ask the woman with me whether she's ever done this. I say with a touch of humour that it's better to be on top of them than underneath them! Soon a pickup truck makes its way across and through the water, which no longer is so deep.

One year later I'm living across the bay in Woody Point. On a sunny day in August a cruise ship is in the bay. I browse the stalls of local vendors along the waterfront market where a photographer is selling her framed prints. Some seal images catch my eye. She tells me they were taken in Port Saunders, a town with personal generational ancestral connections. Since I'd been renewing my family connections along this coast, I select several beautiful seal photos for my ancestor's altar. Over the next weeks, several live seals show up on the shores of Bonne Bay. Locals report this as unusual for the time of year.

Seals continued to appear in dreams and in my waking life over the next few years and always attracted my attention. In March that first year back in Newfoundland, the month of the annual seal hunt, I couldn't help thinking of the seals and wondering how they felt towards the humans who hunted them. As I held the question and opened my awareness to the seals, I was instantly flooded with a sense of deep love that spread from my heart and beyond. Expecting to hear words forming in my mind, this enveloping sense of profound love took me by surprise. I understood the creatures were showing me that beyond their physical bodies and instinctual natures, they are also spiritual beings connected to humans by pure love.

Four-Legged Creatures

AS A PRESCHOOLER, my favourite bedtime story was an English classic called the *Three Little Kittens*. When I was eight, my parents left my siblings and me with a babysitter to attend a family funeral in Springdale. As they were leaving, my father asked what they could bring me back, “A kitten from Nanny’s garden,” I announced. I’m sure my father regretted asking that question. The barn cats kept my grandparents’ vegetable garden rodent free and I’d been captivated by them when we lived there for several months. Sure enough, my parents returned with a tiny orange kitten wild enough to require careful handling with long leather gloves for many weeks. And even though the new family member became used to us, it spent most of its life outdoors until one long snowy winter it disappeared.

It was the beginning of my affection for felines. A few years later, my father caught a yellow-eyed lynx in a snare. He had it preserved and mounted on a piece of driftwood, which became part of our living room décor.

Like many children growing up in rural Newfoundland communities, a significant part of my family’s food came from nature. The wild creatures were a part of my everyday world and I saw them in the forests, brooks, and shores that were the playground of my youth. Like generations before him, my father supplemented our store-bought food with rabbit, moose, and the many varieties of wild fish and birds that populated the woods and waters around us. Wild berries, too, were staples of our family’s diet—partridgeberries, raspberries, chokecherries, blueberries, squash berries, and bake apples were some of the many fruits found in the marshes, barrens, and forests close to home. I grew up knowing where wild animals came from and the fact that they died so we could eat. I’d often watched fish flapping on the floor of our wooden dory, as my father removed the hook from their mouths, tossing them into a bucket to bring home for supper.

But before they could be eaten, the fish and animals had to be cleaned and prepared which was also my father's job. Sitting on the wooden stairs that led down to our basement, I watched as he skinned the rabbit he'd caught in a snare that day. Expertly, he'd cut and peel back the brownish fur from the red-brown flesh. The edible parts—legs, body, head, heart, liver—would be cut out, cleaned, and neatly dissected. The meat could be cooked in the oven with onion, herbs, salt, and pepper, or in a stovetop stew with vegetables. One rabbit provided dinner for our family of six. We took turns getting the rabbit's head, a real treat for me because the brains were especially sweet.

One summer day when I was seven or eight, I went with my father to check his rabbit snares. We pulled off to the side of the narrow gravel road and walked a few dozen yards down into the bushy woods. In the first wire loop was a dead grey-brown rabbit, which he carefully removed from the wire. A few more yards to the next snare and my heart skipped a beat to see a live rabbit, caught by its leg and struggling to escape. Every cell in my body felt its instinctual fear and desire to be free. "Please, can you let it go?" I pleaded. My father shook his head wordlessly and with a quick merciful blow from the blunt end of his axe, the little creature was still. Perhaps he saw the wounds that would lead to its inevitable death, or simply chose the practical necessity of feeding his family. It took a long time for that memory to fade and until it did, I couldn't eat rabbit.

Many years later in Ontario, while walking in local parks or driving to work along country roads or suburban streets, I often saw rabbits running through the low bushes to hide. Rabbits were also regular visitors to my garden. And when I visited the Findhorn Community in Scotland, where I received my unexpected official introduction to shamanism in April, 2000, there were rabbits everywhere. They scampered across the path in front of me as I walked through the beautiful grounds to my next class.

Four years later while on a twilight walk around a Guelph neighbourhood on the eve of my first training in shamanism, a larger than normal white rabbit hopped across a grassy suburban lawn, stopping every now and then to sniff the air. I remember thinking, 'That's very odd. It must be someone's pet that has escaped its pen.' I considered knocking on the front door of the house but the rabbit disappeared around a corner. The friend I was staying with didn't know of a neighbour who kept a pet rabbit. It was not the first time I'd observed larger-than-life animals or plants, although it usually happened in

particularly special places in nature. I registered these perceptions as strange, especially since I was sober and avoided any mind-altering substances.

The white rabbit sighting *did* portend my initiation into the shamanic world, a new mythological realm of discovery where nothing was as it first appeared. In my experiences, rabbits were quiet, gentle, and timid creatures, swift of foot and in the wild, masters of camouflage, their colours changing with the seasons to blend into their environment. I knew they fed off the rich damp undergrowth of forests, lived in burrows underground, and were prolific at reproducing, making them an important source of food for foxes, raptors, and human predators. In my childhood, I appreciated wild creatures as sources of food. But as I matured, I came to understand the connection of rabbits to my spiritual life, and to integrate what indigenous cultures recognize as their medicine or wisdom.

Near the end of my time in Ontario, while driving to work on a familiar country road I'd been travelling for ten years, I saw a rabbit at the roadside out of the corner of my eye too late to avoid the unmistakable thud of its body hitting my tire. My heart sank and tears sprung to my eyes. The death of wild creatures still pierced me to the core and I've never gotten used to it. But by now a death had become an unmistakable call for me to stop and listen for the message, appreciating that the spirits of nature could resort to extraordinary lengths to get my attention. And by now I'd connected more deeply with the wisdom of the rabbit, including its connections with the moon and creative cycles, and how it was at work in my life. I'd also learned that the symbol for my Mayan astrology sun sign was the rabbit.

Both the Mayans and Chinese connected rabbits to abundance and celestial energy, qualities associated with sensitive and artistic natures. Indigenous teachings also noted the importance of examining the predators of totem animals, in this case the fox, hawk, and eagle. Creatures with whom totem animals have cooperative or symbiotic relationships also have important messages to explore.

Other wild animals, including those of the Peruvian culture I was following such as snakes, big cats, and hummingbirds also showed up regularly in my dreams and waking life. The native understanding of humans' spiritual interconnectedness with all creatures made these experiences real, personal, and purposeful. The relevance of animals as teachers and guides for my work has always been a source of amazement and appreciation.

Back in 2002 when I'd requested guidance from an intuitive reader around a new career path, she had gifted me a deer totem animal stone. Over the coming years in Ontario, there were many opportunities to observe deer in their natural habitat. The quiet gentle energy of deer was often needed in my work with traumatized clients. And sometimes the timing and context of a deer sighting held a strong personal message to pay attention to my own needs, especially when the creature was dead. One night on my way back home along a dark back-country road, my headlights lit up a deer lying motionless in the middle of the road. There was time and space to swerve around the animal but I turned back. The road stayed dark and quiet as my headlights found the deer's still warm body. I dragged it from the pavement into the protected shelter of the ditch, where I left it with a prayer and offering of thanks for its life and message.

This happened during a particularly challenging period of learning and transition and though I always felt saddened when I found these beautiful graceful creatures dead, a feeling of loving support and connection with the animal realms that accompanied these encounters was perhaps even more profound.

During my more than thirty years growing up in Newfoundland, I'd seen many other wild animals, including moose, caribou, beavers, otters, and mink, but never a fox. Starting with the first visit to Newfoundland with a group of women in 2008 when we observed a fox running along the side of the road, I began to see foxes regularly. While driving with friends in Newfoundland the next summer to enjoy a day of hiking, a black-and-silver long-tailed fox stood in a narrow ditch next to a rocky mountain face. Before we saw it, my friends and I had been talking of my plans to return home and continue my work on the island. By now I'd learned to pay attention to my thoughts in the moments an unexpected message arrived from nature.

Back in Ontario, in the fall of 2010 before Steve's death that winter, a large red fox appeared on a grassy bank next to a cornfield in broad daylight. The fox was as bold and large as I could imagine. It didn't move as I drove by, but stared directly at me. Down the road I noticed a hawk flying in the adjoining field headed in the same direction as my car. Hawks were known as messengers of spirit and this felt like an omen that Steve would soon be making his journey back to the spirit realm. The next few months would prove to be some of the most challenging of my life, opening my heart wide and forcing me to dig deeper to find reserves of strength I didn't know I possessed.

Spring inevitability came and a friend and I planned a visit to the Hopi lands in Arizona. While driving between the mesas, I had a strong impulse to stop at a roadside craft shop. Inside, one of the first things my eyes fell upon were red fox pelts displayed on the wall, and I knew these had called me. I was ready to look more deeply into the qualities of the fox. As one of the major predators of rabbits, foxes are masters of camouflage and adaptation. They are stealthy and able to blend in with their environment. Though foxes are of the canine family, they are also associated with feminine energies of sensitivity, intuition, creation, and shape-shifting. Beautiful and fascinating creatures, foxes display an intelligent playfulness I could embrace.

A couple of years later in 2013, I was visiting Port aux Choix with a friend and her mother. We were hiking the path beside the limestone barrens below Crow Head, the place where twenty-one of us had conducted ceremony for the ancestors two years prior. This was the same place Steve and I had walked and where he had taken photos of me sitting in little tuckamore dens created by the salty wind.

My friend was walking in front of me and as she turned to ask something, she spotted a red fox following a few feet behind me. As I turned to look, I felt an initial moment of fear as the fox stopped and fixed its neutral gaze upon me. But I registered no sense of aggression, simply presence, and in the next moment a flood of gratitude filled me for this gift of connection.

I announced my intention to take photos, and managed to take a few shots before the fox lowered its head, turned, and disappeared noiselessly into the trees lining the path. This was another magical moment to hold and treasure. All these experiences deepened my understanding of animals as allies, yet it was the feathered ones who gave me the most beautiful gift of connection between heaven and Earth.

Winged Ones

BEFORE I MOVED AWAY from my island home in my early thirties, with the exception of seagulls and perhaps the red, red, robin that comes bob, bob, bobbing in spring, there were no other birds that captured my imagination. They were mostly in the background of my life and preoccupations.

I like to blame the crows for my burgeoning interest in the wild feathered ones, which was entirely in keeping with their role in ancient lore. During the first days in my new home in Ontario, a horde of crows invaded my early mornings with incessant cawing. They perched in an aging apple tree outside my upstairs bedroom window facing a busy street. Their morning appearance was predictable. I wondered if they had an agenda. And after I embarked upon my shamanic journey, crows invaded my dreams and took on a more personal significance, but at that time they were plain annoying.

Because they are at home in the air, birds have a natural connection to the spirit realms. Yet being equally at home on the ground, they are mediators of heaven and Earth. Metaphysically, they teach us about freedom—how to fly above the everyday world to higher perspectives, reminding us of our capacity for transcendence.

During these first years in Guelph, I began to spot feathers on the ground whenever I went for a walk out of doors. Feathers would show up in all kinds of places, in parks and forests, and also on city sidewalks and in parking lots next to my car. The feathers helped me feel as if I wasn't alone, that someone was looking out for me. A feather became a signal to remind me there was a bigger picture and to not get mired down in the details of my life—to lighten up. Soon I had quite a collection of feathers. They were like pennies from heaven, which I also found and picked up for luck.

My introduction to shamanic journeying had been at a weekend workshop on intuition and channelling with Lori Wilson, author of *De-Mystifying Medical Intuition*. Lori led us through an assortment of processes to connect with our higher wisdom and guidance. The first time I opened to the crow's messages beyond the intention of waking me up in the morning was during a drumming journey to connect with an animal spirit. It was a powerful experience of accessing the wisdom and perspective of animals in general, one that in retrospect, prepared me for the greater learning ahead.

My connection with eagles also began earlier in my adult life. After I finished graduate school, I won a contract that required me to occasionally travel. One fine early spring day I drove along a winding road between remote towns in northern Ontario. The air was fresh and the sky clear blue. Each new bend revealed a sparkling pond or brook. Green spruce and fir trees blanketed the surrounding hills. The landscape reminded me of home and I soaked up the colours and smells of nature, its spaciousness a welcome change of pace and scenery from my downtown Toronto office. On the almost deserted road my thoughts returned to an image that I'd envisioned during undergraduate days of my future self travelling with briefcase in hand as a program evaluator.

Here I was ten years later with the realization that I was fulfilling that vision. I reflected on the power of the image. Had I foreseen my future, or had my idea, the image, led me in this direction? Whatever the mechanics or direction of causality, somehow what I'd imagined had come to pass. And so, in the solitude and quiet of the drive, I reflected on where I wanted to be in another ten years. 'If I could do anything, what would I most like to do?' Before I could compose an answer came the thought, unexpectedly, like a fastball zipped into home plate while the batter's attention is momentarily diverted, 'I'd be in business for myself.' As the thought hung there, I wondered where it sprang from. It was nothing I'd seriously considered before.

I continued to drive along with only trees and sky for company, waiting for more answers to arrive. What kind of a business would I have? Suddenly, a bald eagle fell out of the sky, a few feet away—a blurred expanse of wide feathered wings swooped over the bonnet of my rental car. One moment the eagle was there, the next moment it had flown away, with only my pounding heart to prove I hadn't imagined it. My downtown Toronto office seemed very far away.

Two years later, in 1998, I flew to Vancouver Island for training in therapeutic sand-play in preparation for my budding career as

a therapist. The landscapes reminded me of what I missed back in Ontario—forests, mountains, and especially, ocean. A longing for my east coast home is triggered by sandplay work as we plumb the depths of our unconscious.

At the end of the three days of intense but deeply transformative learning, I headed for a nearby hiking trail. The path wound through a lush old growth forest and along a rocky shore where a group of seals rested on flat beach rocks below. I stood and watched them a while before following the trail upwards to a lookout. Ascending the hill through a stand of tall conifers, I heard the high-pitched shrieks of three bald eagles flying in a circle high above me. This felt like confirmation that I was moving in a positive direction with my new career.

Once I'd begun the shamanic path I would have more eagle sightings in real as well as dream time. On May 5, 2006, I made notes in my journal of a dream in which eagles were flying in a circle above me, along with the comment: "They're keeping track of me." As a symbol of spiritual power and illumination, eagles are known as messengers from heaven and represent the embodiment of the sun's spirit. Eagles also carry the power of vision and the creative force.

Other birds flew into my life and captured my attention—seagulls, sparrows, hawks, and even a falcon. After I began my shamanic training when I'd moved into the townhouse at the edge of Fergus, I soon became aware of a flock of seagulls at the back of my tiny lot. Their high-pitched calls were difficult to ignore and provided a backdrop to my work in the garden.

I was always surprised to see the gulls here in Ontario. They seemed out of place, though I understood their adaption to fresh water and other habitats. But their presence where I now lived, completely landlocked with no garbage dump or water close by, seemed especially serendipitous. The gulls soared and swooped over a fallow cornfield that lay between a new high school and a shopping mall. I remained open to the possibility of a deeper reason for their appearance at a time of transition. For now, they were a strong connection and reminder of my island home.

Some of my encounters with wild birds left deep impressions, while others offered a sense of appreciation for their messages. I was also aware they helped me in tangible ways. My journal of October 2005 records:

Having too many negative thoughts concerning my life and why I can't seem to get motivated to do more. As I drive along

Victoria Road to Highway 24, a large flock of birds took flight right over me. I felt the heaviness of the energy around my head lift and fly away with them. It was neat. Thank you, birds! There is a great deal of heaviness around, and holding my own lightness of being is sometimes difficult.

My move to a rural setting meant seeing more wildlife than in the city. One route to work passed Guelph Lake, where several platforms had been built for osprey to nest. Come spring the nesting pairs took up residence in their large, untidy stick nests. It was exciting to see the fledging birds emerge a month later. Sometimes blue herons appeared in the marshy places along the backcountry roads. Red-tailed hawks were also plentiful and easy to spot from their high perches on poles and trees. One day a large turkey vulture landed on the road directly ahead forcing me to slow down. I was treated to a close-up look at massive wings and talons grabbing a meal from the pavement before it flew off in one great flurry of feathers in a display of powerful aerodynamics.

While driving along a country road in a snowstorm, more cautiously than usual, a sudden gust of wind blew a cloud of snow in my windshield. As I drove blindly through the white expanse, I saw a flock of birds take flight ahead of me, and felt thumps against the grill of my car. My heart missed a beat, and as soon as it could safely be done, I turned around and drove back. Sure enough, on the snow-covered road were two little brown redpolls. I took their still-warm bodies, light as feathers, and placed them on a blanket in the back of my vehicle, intending to bury them later in my backyard. While it may have been an unavoidable accident, their death touched me.

And afterwards, when a co-worker asked about my drive in the stormy conditions, I burst into tears. Thankfully, being an animal lover and empathic person herself, she commiserated with me. In a recent dream, I had seen the dismembered hands of a gorilla. The feeling of deep anguish at the senseless violence towards other sentient beings lingered still.

When I was in the midst of deciding whether to move from my downtown Guelph office to the spacious north end of the city, a hawk message helped me choose. Moving was a commitment to the expansion of my work. The new place offered more space for teaching, and the added bonus of a sacred fire site on the property. The first time I viewed the space a red-tailed hawk was perched on a hydro wire at the

end of the driveway. Knowing hawks are the messengers of the grandmothers and grandfathers in the spirit world, I asked, 'Hawk, is this new space a good choice for me?' The answer dropped into the emptiness of my mind in the form of another question: 'How high do you want to fly?' This answer was a reminder to hold a vision of the opportunities this new space would provide for my work to grow. Without further consultation, I signed the lease. It was time to start teaching and by September I had two new classes filled with excited students.

One evening as dusk fell, while driving to yoga with a friend, a wide expanse of light cream-coloured wings brushed my side of the car. It was an owl. I recalled how I was introduced to owl medicine in the reading that initiated my therapy work back in 2000. Now I appreciated the healing power and wisdom of silence and the ability to see, metaphorically, in the dark, in my trauma work with clients. After another personally challenging time that inspired me to step more fully into shamanic practice, I dreamt of geese and afterwards many sightings caught my attention.

Geese had a lot of relevant messages for me at the time: the call of spiritual quest and new travels, breaking free of old childhood restraints and coming into my own, communicating through the use of stories, and opening to new ideas and possibilities. Sometimes the relevance of animal encounters was immediately obvious. More often, they barely merited a cursory mention in my journal. But I was learning to pay closer attention to the signs of nature.

Some of my animal experiences were more mystical and inexplicable, perhaps making a greater impression on me because my rational mind was unable to explain them as easily as others more grounded in physical space and time. Like my early visionary experiences, these also opened me to the invisible spirit realms. The first happened during my first class in Park City, Utah in 2004. As the teacher outlined the journey around the medicine wheel, she said the north class was the direction of the ancestors, symbolized by the hummingbird, as one who takes the mythic journey. I felt an inner excitement, recognizing a calling without fully comprehending exactly what it would entail.

Later that week, a classmate and I took a hike into the hills behind our hotel, where a hummingbird flew around us in circles. I reached into my backpack for a camera, but the hummingbird took off before I could take a picture. I kept the camera around my neck in case another opportunity presented itself. I sent out the message to please

come back and within a few minutes the hummingbird (or a different one) was back. This time it hovered just a few feet in front of us, with plenty of time for pictures.

When the photos were developed (*this was before digital), one showed two brilliant white fingers of light at the spot where the hummingbird hovered. It was the only photo with any sort of light anomaly in the roll of film. That picture sits on a shelf as a reminder of life's mystery and magic. A even more profound experience happened a couple of years later. On May 18, 2006, I wrote in my journal:

I had a strange experience this morning as I lay in bed. On the inner screen of vision, I see a black hole in the sky, a space where the stars and the galaxy are visible. As I look, a black bird flies down into my heart (which is also a vast expanse like the sky). I connect with space and the bird takes me into the swirling cosmos, though I'm also aware of being physically here. I am slightly scared of the black bird, yet another part of me wants to let go and fly into that space, but my body is stuck here.

At this early point in my journey with the mystical realms of nature, I pondered my reaction of fear and suspicion and also what kind of a bird this could be. Condors were significant to the Peruvian wisdom path I was following. In this tradition, black raptors hold the energy of connection to the upper spiritual worlds and also the medicine of discernment, in the same way that eagles do in the north. Crows and ravens were more familiar but I had no clear understanding nor did I feel any personal connection to their medicine, yet... Two days later, I wrote the following:

The raven experience was the big news yesterday. There was a huge crow on the light pole at the front of the house as I left for work. It cawed loudly and got my attention. I acknowledged it and asked for a message, but no reply came. The crow simply wanted me to see it. Then at work today [my client] shared what she saw during the healing session. She saw "a woman with a raven; she becomes the raven and flies through the cosmos." Now that's awesome because it was almost exactly my experience! What's it all about?

At this point, I was in the midst of a steep learning curve, with many new and wondrous events occurring that took time to process.

This was another luminous experience from the dreamtime that I wondered about. I simply had to trust the meaning would reveal itself in time.

For the immediate present all I could do is look up the metaphysical significance of crows and ravens, which are closely related. The crow is considered the bringer of magic and knowledge of the spiritual laws of creation upon the physical plane. The raven is the messenger of the void, the night, the womb from which the new is born. It teaches us how to enter the darkness, transform it, and bring forth the light. The raven is also said to have the ability to become other animals and speak their languages.

Facilitating ceremony for groups was one of the ways I stepped into a leadership role. The first time I conducted ceremony with a group of my peers I was nervous from the responsibility of holding a space for others. The specific steps and significance of each part of the ceremony was still new and somewhat mysterious, and I was anxious to do it right. In fact, with the amazing good will and camaraderie among our group, the event went smoothly.

The next day, around noon, I was standing at my kitchen counter looking out over the backyard while talking on the phone when a large bird landed on a fence post close to my living room window. The conversation quickly turned to me describing the bird to my friend at the other end of the phone. It had a black-curved beak and large dark head, feathers creamy on the underside with brown stripes and spots that reminded me of an owl, long dark tail feathers trailing over the fence, and black taloned feet. It wasn't a red-tailed hawk nor an osprey. I'd seen those land on the back fence and in the trees adjacent to the house, though never this close.

The strange bird perched there on the post, its eyes surveying my garden while I moved around inside the house distracted by this creature that was in no hurry to go anywhere. Even when I moved within a couple feet of the window, it did not move. The bird finally flew away as the thought occurred to me it was connected to the ceremony the night before. My mind balked at such an explanation as I made a thorough examination of the yard, looking for evidence of rodents or bird nests that it might have been stalking, but I found nothing.

At work the following day, I told a child client that a large bird of prey had shown up in my backyard, and that I didn't know what species it was. Without a moment's hesitation, the seven-year-old boy stated with some authority and a mild reprimand, as if I ought to know, "It

was a peregrine falcon.” I’d mentioned the bird to the boy because of his strong intuitive connection to animals. I’d often been surprised at his uncanny insights. When I returned home that evening, I researched the peregrine falcon and confirmed the bird on my fence had been an immature one.

Given that peregrine falcons were not common to the area, I deliberated the significance of this particular messenger. The peregrine is known as the wandering falcon. It is the world’s most widespread raptor. It’s the fastest creature on Earth, and particularly renowned for its versatility, trainability, and a strong hunting ability. Soon afterwards, I began holding fire ceremonies on sacred land across the fields near my new office. I invited clients and friends to join me, which marked a new phase of accelerated learning and connection with the spirits of nature and the animal kingdom. And I noticed how often my thoughts turned to Newfoundland.

The power and prowess of raptors was intimidating, but on the other hand, songbirds were a delight. I entertained the idea of purchasing a pair of canaries as I found their songs mesmerizing. The certainty of inflicting stress given the predatory instinct of my cats was the only thing that prevented me.

During my twenty-plus years living away from Newfoundland, a particular bird song caught and held my attention. It reminded me of somewhere I knew well but couldn’t place. When I was distressed, I imagined it inside my head. Real or imagined, this song had the power to lift my spirits and connect me to something greater. Yet it took a few years before I learned its source.

On the first morning of a long overdue visit to Newfoundland, I awoke to birdsong from outside my window, and realized the sound connected me to this place. It was the chorus of my childhood, that of the white-throated sparrow. The bird’s slow clear song has been described as the anthem of the unspoiled wilderness of the boreal forest. These sparrows sing their songs frequently throughout the northeast of North America, even in winter. Sparrow medicine, I learned, is about awakening and remembering one’s self-worth and the assertion of will to intensify a person’s inherent dignity, so metaphorically, it can sing forth in your life.

There was much of the white-throated sparrow’s habitat and behaviour that resonated as teaching and guidance. The bird’s distinctive song transported me beyond everyday concerns to a clear space of

knowing. It opened a place of nearly forgotten childhood innocence and happiness.

The potential for healing and teaching abounded in everything around me, the gifts of each creature I encountered. This awareness and ongoing discovery expanded my way of being in the world. As my teacher would say, this was “the beauty way.” In this way of walking in the world, all of life conspires to bring me home to myself, to my deepest longings and my greatest potential. The white-throated sparrow, the symbol of the northern wilderness, was calling me back to my boreal forest home.

Dragonfly Messages

AS I BECAME MORE PUBLIC about my shamanic work in 2006, I was exploring the origins of the Grand River that flowed through town not far from my house, a major water source for southern Ontario. The river's headlands are Luther Marsh, a watershed and wildlife preserve a two-hour drive north.

My first visit to Luther Marsh was magical. It was an early summer day with a warm moist breeze. The trail through the lush marsh was alive with dragonflies—skimmers, blue green pondhawks, and marsh bluets. They flitted and darted around me, landing on the St. John's Wort and tall swamp grasses along the path where they perched for photos. The delicacy of their stained-glass wings and slim fluorescent bodies belied their tenacity.

In the days following my visit, dragonflies appeared on walks, in the garden, and one landed on the bumper of my car in a crowded parking lot. I was intrigued to discover dragonflies have survived since the time of the dinosaurs. Their watery beginnings and connection to the unconscious dreaming world seemed like a perfect fit for my healing work.

The power of the dragonfly lies in its ability to transform colours by reflecting and refracting light. I read that the dragonfly carries messages that deal with deep insight, showing that life, like light, can bend, shift, and adapt in various ways. Therefore, it was an appropriate totem for my new business, which I called "Wings of Light Consulting." Inspired by the transformative potential of the dragonfly and as a symbol of the healing and teaching path I had embarked upon, I wrote this poem:

Dragonfly Medicine

Jewelled faerie dragons performing
Dazzling aerobatics of mythological proportions.
Double-winged survivors of catastrophic extinction.
Destination, air. Goal, flight.
Birthed in the watery womb of creation,
Rising to cross a rainbow bridge to the sky.
Safe in sacred space, breathing open old wounds.
Illuminating the darkness,
Gliding on the winds of change.
Embarking on journeys,
Recovering lost treasures, new destinies—
Visioning new worlds into being.
Freedom to soar wing to wing with Great Spirit.
Instantaneous, split-second shifting,
Reflecting radiant spectacular colour.
Power fully brilliant, transforming
Into many splendored light.

While planning a Sacred Earth Journey to Newfoundland the summer after Steve's death, I met Mandaza, a traditional healer from Zimbabwe, for the first time. My private appointment was early one warm August morning. I sat in a wing-backed chair across from him and a female assistant who took notes. Mandaza was a gentle man with soft brown eyes, long dreadlocks, and a white beard. He asked why I had come.

"I'm here for whatever guidance the ancestors have to offer," I said. His kindly eyes gazed at me intently for a few moments before he spoke: "The ancestors are telling me, Mama, that you are exhausted. It's because dragonfly is bringing you messages through your dreams, not for you personally, but for everyone. You're not feeling well because you are tired from carrying so many messages by yourself. They need to be shared with the world."

There was more, all of it confirming my deepest knowing. I would be glad to have further opportunities to learn more from this elder who also carried water medicine, the intuitive, creative wisdom of the feminine and the dreamtime.

It was a couple years later when I was asked to coordinate Mandaza's visit to Newfoundland. Since the island had ancient geological connections to Africa, specifically the east coast of the island where

he would be, I sensed this visit would be important spiritual work for the island on multiple levels, and I was positive his connection to the ancestors was powerful and true.

A number of events were planned with the help of friends in the local community: a welcome drumming circle and fundraiser at City Hall, a sunrise ceremony at Cape Spear, water ceremony, and a number of private sessions. Every event unfolded perfectly with amazing participation. Many people stepped in to facilitate and support them. Mandaza's teachings centred on healing our relationships with one another and the elemental spirits of the land, understanding that all aspects of the natural world are our relatives, and helping to shift our consciousness from *me* to *we*.

While his private messages from the ancestors were unique to each person's situation and questions, they often included detailed instructions for healing rituals with some aspect of the natural world. During the week participants reported receiving guidance and powerful healing from him, including dream messages. One of the most significant events of the week for me was a meeting between him and a native medicine man. This elder had travelled from quite a distance at short notice because Mandaza had appeared to him in a dream.

As the universe would have it, an oversight on my part meant that a space had opened up in the fully booked schedule. Intuition told me to leave it open, that someone in need would show up at the last minute. Sure enough, on the way to pick up Mandaza at the airport, the phone rang with a request from this indigenous elder.

The two men met on the last evening. They exchanged gifts, shared dreams and medicine that transcended history and culture from opposite continents and hemispheres. The synchronistic timing and unfolding of that meeting was a powerful confirmation of the unseen and mysterious forces at work in our lives that call us together across space and time. It was yet another reminder for me that something else is always going on beneath the surface and to trust my deeper knowing and the wisdom of the unseen realms.

During my first months back in Newfoundland, I drove across the island to visit my cousin. She had documentation of our family ancestry showing our indigenous roots through our maternal grandparents eight generations back. I was excited to get this information and looked forward to seeing my cousin again for the first time in many years.

My cousin met me at the door with an apology, explaining that a big “horse stinger,” which is what large black dragonflies are called in Newfoundland, had got into her house. She was afraid of them, she said, so we would have to visit outside on the patio. Her mother was waiting there, another pleasant surprise since she was one of my favourite aunts since childhood.

After a lovely reunion with my aunt and cousin, I captured the dragonfly with a large bowl and piece of cardboard and released it outside with a silent prayer of thanks for the gift of connection. Dragonflies continued to show up in various guises and forms. Each time I was reminded of previous messages I’d been given and the need to share them.

Merlin and the Bluebird

IN THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER MOVING to Woody Point, there were a few notable synchronistic bird appearances that highlighted, for me, the spiritual inter-connectedness of the natural and supernatural realms as accessed through the dreamtime.

The first was through a human messenger who relayed details that had come to me in a dream some time before. As I chatted with a hydro employee who had shown up to confirm my account, he shared having discovered a dead Merlin hawk at the side of my neighbour's house. "Strange," he said, "it was in perfect shape." He planned to take it to a taxidermist for preservation.

Three years earlier, I had a detailed dream, including the layout and furnishings of the actual house in which I was now living. But it was the mention of Merlin that I remembered most distinctly.

I enter a house, take off my big parka and hang it up in the porch. It's winter outside. The house is spacious. There's a living room with plain walls and couches upholstered in blue patterned fabric. There are descending stairs and I can see an apartment that I understand is a rental unit. A man I recognize brings a large bag of food made from berries and things from the garden shaped into coloured pieces for the animals and birds.

He produces a book and starts leafing through it, pointing out various passages to me. I don't quite understand the story or what he is showing me, I think its like a trilogy. He shows me a section about Merlin on a page with a picture of a glowing blue stone. "Merlin is going to die," he says. The stone is blue phosphorous.

At the time of this dream, I had made a connection with Merlin, the legendary wizard of King Arthur's time and who Olivia Robertson

had identified as the patron of the new school that would evolve from the Goddess circle more than ten years before.

Now I researched the Merlin hawk, a species characteristically easy to train and known for their quick, magical manoeuvres sneaking up on unwary prey. It is said that their appearance may indicate new doors of opportunity opening and the best times to shapeshift one's life and self. It felt like timely guidance for a new chapter in my life. It also confirmed the natural cycles of life and death—within every ending lies a new beginning.

Within days of this event, a bright blue bird appeared at the bird-feeder I'd installed when I moved in. My sister first noticed it from the bathroom window and called for me to see. The bird's colouring was almost fluorescent, a stark contrast to the dull brown foliage of early spring and the rest of its companions.

An internet search revealed it was a male indigo bunting, and that this northeastern coast is far beyond its usual range. Nicknamed "blue canaries," these birds are known for their bouncy songs, singing with gusto as they literally follow the stars on their migrations. Local birdwatchers surmised it had strayed way off course across the 140 kilometres of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, perhaps with a flock of other migrants. My father said he saw a solitary indigo bunting only once, many years ago.

I decided to name the unexpected visitor Blueberry. It stayed around my feeder for a few days before leaving for destinations unknown. It was a good omen, the harbinger of happiness in this, the springtime of my return. The connection of events to the prophetic dream reminded me of the world beyond the physical where all time is now and destinies are written.

Messages from the animal realm did not always arrive as direct personal encounters. Sometimes other people conveyed stories of their recent unusual experience with animals, such as my father seeing a fox on his way to meet me for lunch. Or when the person who answered my call to the park before I moved back told me she had gone to the waterfront to watch the whales on her way to work that morning. Such synchronistic encounters were sometimes with complete strangers who had no awareness of my profession yet always brought a message for me.

While at the doctor's office for some routine bloodwork in Ontario, for example, the lab technician, newly immigrated to Canada, related to me that she'd sighted an eagle on her walk in the park that

morning. She was amazed because she'd never seen an eagle in the wild before. She described how it flew in a low circle overhead.

A neighbour in a grocery store shared her sighting of three humpback whales and an eagle in the bay while leaving her house, the same day I had spent inside preparing for a winter solstice ceremony. I came to understand that synchronistic encounters confirmed the interconnectedness of humans with all creatures, as well as the insight and awe such encounters can inspire when we are open to receive them.

My relationship with animals evolved as a result of my immersion in indigenous teachings that broadened my understanding of our kinship. It also awakened and strengthened my trust in the supernatural realms where every aspect of nature, including the animals, was communicating with me. The possibility that Mother Earth was speaking through them to me so I could remember our inter-relatedness in the web of life became stronger as a result.

Science confirms that humans share a common ancestry with the plants and animals through our DNA—thus this understanding was a logical progression. The appearance of an animal in dreamtime or in the physical world were gifts of guidance in my life. By studying their qualities, behaviours, and habitats, I discovered wisdom I didn't realize I needed. I eventually understood that every life form has a spiritual purpose beyond its physical presence and role on the planet.

My mind and heart were opened wider to the challenges and suffering of all creatures as a consequence of our unconscious behaviour. I was inspired to share what I know and to trust my deepest feelings and I grieved about how humans mistreat our animal relatives, both domesticated and wild. I resonated with kindred spirits who advocate on behalf of animals. Having evolved on this planet for longer than humans, animals have much to teach us about instinctual advancement and other ways of knowing.

The longer I contemplated the meaning of these experiences, the more obvious it became that since we share a biological lineage with all of the realms of nature, our spiritual destinies are also irrevocably intertwined. As the blue whale message conveyed, wherever this planet is headed, we are going there together. Becoming conscious of our interconnectedness and interdependence, and our shared evolutionary potential, is the compelling opportunity of our time.

Deepening Roots

*The end to all of our exploring will be to arrive where
we started, and know the place for the first time.*

—T.S. Eliot

IN 2015, I STARTED a new medicine wheel program to share what I had learned. It would be the first offering under the auspices of the Institute of Ancestral Wisdom which I founded to prepare modern day ancestral wisdomkeepers to be healers and leaders in their communities. In native teachings, ancestors include all those who have come before, human and other animals, as well as flora and fauna, and the elemental realms that make up our world, and without which none of us would be here. Its work focuses on sharing knowledge and developing the skills, stories, and rituals to restore our sacred relationship with each other and all of creation.

The times we live in—of escalating global environmental destruction, climate change, species depletion, and ecological crises—were foreseen by those who came before us. The Hopi, Zuni, and Cherokee people described a time when the Earth and her creatures will be ravaged and dying. Their prophecies say that when things seem hopeless, a new tribe will arise from all the races of Earth to help humanity remember the old ways and values. They speak of them as rainbow warriors—those who will help rebuild the Earth on principles of peace, justice, love, and respect for all of life.

The Christian Bible also speaks of the coming of a new Earth, when the old Earth shall pass away, and all things shall become new. The rainbow, representing spirit, or the supreme creator in all things, has spiritual significance to many cultures throughout history. For the

ancient Babylonians, the rainbow was the necklace of the Goddess, and for many ancient Europeans, the rainbow was a bridge between heaven and Earth. To Christians, the rainbow is a symbol of a new covenant between the divine and humanity. For the medicine people of the Andes, it symbolizes the light of the divine made manifest in all of creation.

The new medicine wheel program began with the north direction, the place of the ancestors. On the third day of the five-day workshop in May, 2015, as we were preparing for evening ceremony, a couple who had driven from Ontario, showed up at the conference centre asking for me. I had met the woman at a weekend training with Peruvian shamans five years before and she knew of my work. As we walked the grounds and talked, I invited them to join us for the ceremony that night.

Back at the car, they thanked me for the invitation and reaching into the trunk, pulled out a brightly coloured blanket, which she told me was made in the Andes by Don Francisco's wife, and had been given to her for a birthday gift. It was a spectacular Peruvian textile with a double rainbow down the centre. "It's for your ceremony tonight," she said.

I was astonished at the offering. What they couldn't have known was that I had worked with both Don Francisco and his wife during my training, and in Peru, and was in possession of some of their medicine. Their unexpected visit and gift was miraculous confirmation directly from the medicine lineage and mountain spirits of Peru—a true eagle-condor blessing on the work that had begun here in my ancestral land.

Three months later, during mid-August, in the thick of the annual writer's festival, I got a call that my sister who had severed family ties ten years before, had been located. We knew where they were and that they were well. The separation had been a constant worry and strain for my family. While the news brought up some lingering emotions around the stress and loss, it was now easier to forgive and let it go. Something inside me relaxed.

A few weeks after this news, as I was preparing for the east direction of the medicine wheel, a message arrived from Steve's sister, with whom I'd had a few communications since his death. She was moving, and had some of his jewellery to send me. I was overjoyed. The necklace Steve had given me had broken days before I moved back to Newfoundland, and it had recently been on my mind. The day the

class was due to start, a small box arrived in the mail. As soon as possible I responded:

Your package arrived Monday and I was excited to open it. Of all the jewellery, there was a particular necklace with matching earrings—the one of grey stones. I happened to be wearing a grey outfit that day so I wore it—a perfect accessory to compliment the work of the east direction, and honor the place of the rising sun and all new beginnings.

In this class, which Steve and I had planned to teach together, I offered a rite of initiation called the Seers' Rite. It connects the head and heart with a necklace of light. There were eight of us in all and there were exactly eight necklaces in your package. It seemed right to use them in the ritual and that everyone got to wear one. One of the students had met Steve when he was here in Newfoundland, and all were affected by the story. The necklaces were a direct confirmation and blessing from Steve and the spirit world, through you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this precious gift. It could not have come at a more perfect time.

The next week after the class as I was preparing my presentation to a government-appointed committee to express my opposition to oil and gas exploration in the area, I had this dream:

Steve is lying on a table in front of me, and waking up after being dead and buried. As I watch his body begins to move. He opens his eyes to look at me, and then reaches out. As I take his hand, I feel the solidity and strength of his body and presence. To my surprise, he gets up from the table and goes straight to work. We are helping set up and record an event together, though he has his work to do and I have mine. I feel glad and excited. It's a dream come true.

A little over a month later, an unexpected announcement arrives from Steve's family. His first grandchild has been born, a healthy, beautiful baby girl. Pictures reveal how much she looks like her grandfather. It has been almost five years since his death and I am feeling a renewed sense of possibility for my life.

For the first time in thirty-eight years, the moon will be full on Christmas day. Surely this must be a portent of good things to come. I no longer doubt the higher intelligence at play, watching and guiding

me and all life on the planet. My mind continues to expand with delight in the unfolding mystery of what may be perceived with the senses, but only truly known with a heart made wiser from an experience of connection with the spirit in all things. My heart and mind will forever listen to the soul of nature, the source of all life. Notes from my journal:

I am all my ancestors, returned. Mineral, plant, animal, Earth and sky, human and divine, come together in me and as me. Everything they know lives and breathes through me. I see with their eyes and share their skin. The lifeblood of Mother Earth flows through my veins, and our hearts beat as one in the place of the eternal where the source of all creation resides.

The hopes and dreams of those who came before me sleep, stir, and arise in my deepest heart. I embody the truths, memories, and knowing of all the ancestors since the beginning of time. Here and now is where the past and future meet and where I connect in the dreamtime with all my relations.

For myself and for them, I must break free and allow my heart to open wider, my vision to expand so together we can dream a new future for the Earth and all her creatures—a dream of beauty, harmony, and reverence for all of life.

This is the time we've waited for, awakening to our true nature, our star origins and destiny. This "New Found Land"—these ancient rocks, waters, and winds nurture me and remind me of my true place in the circle of life. In this place where time stands still, I can open to the timeless love, support, and guidance of my ancestors. When I listen, I can hear their voices whisper in the wind and the waves. I see messages of love and hope in the eagle circling overhead, the bear emerging from the woods, the whales frolicking in the bay, and the rainbow arcing across the sky. They call me to remember the miracle and sacredness of all life on this living, breathing blue-green Earth spiraling her way through the galaxies. Here, I am home.

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About the Author

Alison Normore, Ph.D., is a human development visionary, teacher, and author who earned her bachelor's degree in education from Memorial University in Newfoundland, and her master's and doctoral degrees in family relations and human development from the University of Guelph in Ontario. She worked in academic and community research settings before deepening her focus to holistic healing, spending the next ten years as a successful child and adult therapist. During this time, Alison embarked upon extensive shamanic studies with the Four Winds Society, becoming certified as a shamanic practitioner and Dying Consciously trainer by the Institute of Energy Medicine.

Alison's quest for healing wisdom and methods has schooled her in Eastern philosophy and practices, ancient mystery school teachings, and shamanic traditions. Her deeply rooted offerings are comprehensive, eclectic, and balanced with solid psychological, spiritual, and somatic foundations. Since 2004, Alison has offered presentations and workshops on the Mayan calendar, energy healing, soul retrieval, dying consciously, shamanic rites of initiation, and other ancient wisdom. Locally, nationally, and internationally she has offered new and full moon, solstice and equinox ceremonies, retreats, and most uniquely, Sacred Earth Journeys to places of power in Newfoundland and Labrador. Answering the call of her ancestors and the spirits of her birthplace, in 2012 she returned to Bonne Bay, Newfoundland, where she founded the Institute of Ancestral Wisdom and created New Earth Essences, natural healing remedies co-created with the elemental spirits of Gros Morne National Park.

Dedicated to the emerging consciousness of the sacredness of all life and our role as earth stewards and co-creators with spirit, Alison has a special calling to restore our instinctual wisdom and interspecies relatedness. Through newsletters and a Sacred Musings blog, Alison inspires and leads others to spiritual awakening, deeper connections with their soul's journey, and to nature. For Alison's retreat, courses and other offerings, visit her website at www.alisonnormore.com.

