Lee McRae (1923–2016)

Helping Others Discover Early Music

by Jonathan Harris of the San Francisco Early Music Society on June 3, 2016

The death of Lee McRae on June 1, a few weeks before her 93rd birthday, adds a bittersweet touch to the San Francisco Early Music Society’s 40th anniversary and to this year’s Berkeley Festival, just two of the many institutions to which she contributed, but it also gives us a chance to review and reflect on the career of a remarkable woman whose work and advocacy for early music had a profound effect in ways probably few readers may appreciate.

A founding member of our Early Music Society, Lee also founded or co-founded the SFEMS Music Discovery Workshop and the Singers’ Retreat, and she was a driving force in bringing early music not only to the Bay Area but to the whole of America. Her work, which spanned more than five decades, was instrumental in bringing music to thousands of children in California, Nevada, and Arizona, through her own teaching, demonstration-lectures, publications, and the education committees she helped set up through Early Music America, the Viola da Gamba Society of America, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, and the Berkeley Festival.

Lee taught at Walden for 15 years, and it was that experience which helped shape her ideas about early music. She was almost as influential behind the scenes as an artist’s representative for many of the pioneering European figures in early music, giving audiences across America the chance to hear these great artists in live performance.

Lee traced her own interest in early music to a music teacher in a Nebraska high school, who introduced her to madrigal singing and Elizabethan music. When she moved to the Bay Area with her husband and four children in the mid-1950s, they were dismayed to find the public schools here had no art, dance, or music programs, which they thought were crucial to children’s education. So, with a number of interested families they founded the Walden School, a private, alternative elementary school in Berkeley, which continues to this day as the Walden Center and School.

Lee taught at Walden for 15 years, and it was that experience which helped shape her ideas about early music. In order for children to learn music, or about music, she decided, they need not only to hear it; they need to sing it, to see it, and even to dance to it. Getting the whole person, the whole body involved was crucial.

Helping Others Discover Early Music

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It was also during those early years that she became involved with the beginnings of the Bay Area’s early music community, continuing to sing madrigals and play in a broken consort with friends. She also was a founding member of the San Francisco Early Music Society and wrote our first successful grant proposal.

Around 1975, she organized a week-long seminar at UC Berkeley, in which Alan Curtis and Frans Brüggen did a series of lectures and master classes, ending with a concert in Oakland. That day, Alan Curtis asked her to be their agent. At first the prospect seemed daunting but she relented and soon found herself representing the biggest names in European early music, including Brüggen, Anner Bylsma, Gustav Leonhardt, the Kuijken brothers, and more. “I booked them all over the country,” she recalled.

In 1978, Lee was part of the founding Board of Philharmonia, a baroque orchestra in the bay area. Lee had decided by this time that early music education issues were of interest to adults as well as children, so she wrote and was awarded several National Endowment for the Humanities grants, as well as California Council for the Humanities, Nevada Humanities Committee, and Arizona Humanities Committee grants, for adult education outreach featuring early music.

These programs also led Lee to write a Handbook of the Renaissance, which has gone through at least four editions. “When I wrote the NEH Renaissance grant,” she said, “I emphasized how important it is to get all of the humanities — the whole context, not only of history, but of literature and art and music, which are all disciplines of the humanities — into the ears and bodies of children; and I said, I’ll write a handbook of the Renaissance, and they funded us; they funded 300 copies to go to the Claremont Middle School in Oakland. My idea was that each student should get a copy to keep. But when the unit was over, the teachers wanted to keep them.

Lee continued to write resource guides and classroom units for elementary and middle-school teachers, some on her own, others under the auspices of the Early Music America Education Committee: “I donated one unit to two important educational institutions: Arts Edge at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), which is the largest educational resource in the world, both of which put it out for teachers. And I also donated it to EMA, which made it available.”

Lee wrote a series of little papers called “Bringing History Alive in the Classroom,” on medieval, Renaissance, and early American music. Another two papers concerned holidays — one on Halloween, the second on the winter solstice.

Lee’s story is a testament to what has built the early music community, especially in the Bay Area, but also as a national and international movement. It shows what just one dedicated amateur — in the most noble sense of that word — can accomplish on the principle that if no one else will do what needs to be done, do it yourself. To paraphrase a statement she and Judith Davidoff drafted for the Education Committee of EMA a quarter century ago,

“Early music is a living link to history. Sing it, dance to it, chant it, and you participate in the social ritual of the period — and you never forget it.”
WHY I GO TO CRONES COUNSEL
by Sandy Eno

I remember reading about the first Crones Counsel in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and feeling an immediate connection without knowing why. Perhaps because the area was my old stomping grounds since childhood, it attracted me almost as much as the idea of mature women sharing their abundant knowledge and experience with their peers.

I followed Crones Counsel’s progress for a few years. I wanted to go but I guess my insecurities held me back. When I saw the gathering was to be held at Asilomar, I knew the time had come. An easy drive, on the beach, perfect! I had recently been Croned and thought Crones Counsel would be a great place to learn more about my newly accepted role. I mentioned it to my friend, Pat, and my excitement must have been contagious, as I don’t think it took too much to persuade her to sign up with me.

That gathering is a blurred memory now: of great women, some pretty intimidating, but always friendly and helpful to us newbies. I’m a shy person but I felt welcomed and included right away. Pat and I were given a job to do, something with circles, can’t remember what exactly, except running around in the dark looking for things before the opening ceremony. Hmm … things haven’t changed all that much. Three things are still clear in my mind from that weekend: Listening to a woman at Storytelling as she spoke about having to give up her beloved car. I was surprised to find tears wetting my cheeks. Singing — really singing for the first time in years — and hearing the elegant woman next to me say, “You harmonize beautifully.” I grinned like the Cheshire Cat. Sharing our room with a fantastic woman named Love Angel. She was kind, eccentric, and quite a delight to get to know. Unforgettable! I was hooked!

Now when I talk about Crones Counsel I get the usual questions: What is it? (After some ask about Crohn’s disease.) What do we do? Where do we go? How many belong? Then a few will want to know why I go, what do I get from Crones Counsel, is it educational, spiritual, pagan, or something more? That’s the toughest one to answer. What does keep me coming back year after year?

Because for a few days I become CRONE! Bathed in the energy of a hundred or more unique women, I can do anything. I am home. Hugs, laughing, non-stop talking, problem-solving with friends new and old, I am with my tribe!

There are many reasons Crones Counsel is so important to me but, Oh Joy! The rush I feel when I spot that first familiar Sister across a crowded airport is beyond belief. I’m ready to Party!

President’s Message
By Janet Morrissey

In March I moved from the Vice President position to the Presidency as Susan Ann resigned due to personal reasons. The Mother Board wishes her the best of everything as she moves on with her life. We are grateful for all the ideas, motivational strategies, and success she brought to Crones Counsel. Her magic will always be remembered and valued.

The Mother Board continues to have the yearly Gathering as its main focus and to maintain all the essential requirements of a successful conference. Suzanne Gruba will continue to be the Web Mother and also Vice President. Kathy Puffer is Secretary, and Kay Marie Bouma is Treasurer. Carol Friedrich will be leaving the Board in September as her term is completed. The Board thanks her for her service, which has been indispensable. Kaye Chatterton will join the Board in September. I am grateful to be part of this dedicated Board and view it as an honor.

At the Mt. Shasta closing I left you with three letters to help you remember the wonderful time we had there. The letters were P, M, S. Remember? No, they did not represent the usual understanding of women’s premenstrual syndrome, but ideas associated with what we experience at the Gathering. P was to help you remember all the wonderful People you met; M was to bring to mind the surprising Magic that was present; and S was for all the Stories you heard from the Crones during Storytelling.

The Denver Gathering will be filled with PMS. Take a moment to remember some incident or Crone that touched you deeply. What magic came to you, and did it change you in some way? If you have not registered yet, I invite you to fill out the registration form and begin planning for a wonderful time in Denver, and bring a friend. Blessings to you all.
An Elder’s Thoughts on Crones Counsel and Beyond

By Joan Forest

I have lost count of the number of times I have attended Crones Counsel, but Counsel is one of the highlights of my year. Through attending Counsel, I have gained a greater appreciation of the aging process. I have cherished the sharing of life experiences and the sharing of our wisdom. I appreciate the attendance by younger women. Most of us did not have mentoring as we became elders, and one advantage of having crones-in-training attend is providing exposure to what lies ahead for them. Most important, we enjoy connecting with all the wonderful women who attend.

This is a time of life when we have the opportunity to integrate the many pieces of our lives. I have thought about the themes in my life. I’ve had the challenge of overcoming the patriarchy in my family: my younger brothers had much more freedom and privileges than I as we grew up. I think that made me a feminist early on, and I must have been quite a handful for my parents. I realize now that over the years we are gradually overcoming the reign of patriarchy. When I was young, that was just the way things were, and patriarchy was enforced not only by our fathers but also often by our mothers.

For me there were positive consequences to the dominance of patriarchy. I kept trying to achieve, as much to get recognition from my parents as to accomplish what was important to me. As early as six when a friend of my father’s asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I told him I wanted to go to the school my father had attended, Stanford, and to achieve this goal I concentrated more on studies in school rather than being part of the “in group.” It was a big day when I received my letter of admission. Then when I applied for a Rotary Fellowship at the end of my college experience, I received it, and spent a year at the Free University of Berlin after World War II and learned what it was like to live under a totalitarian regime. That year was a life-changing experience.

After a couple of years teaching high school, I married and raised three sons. I lost my marriage due to my husband’s involvement in some of the drug-related experiences of that time. I went back to school for training to become a psychotherapist, during which time I attended two summer sessions at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, an experience which significantly influenced my practice.

During the last forty years I have traveled throughout the world, often with members of my family. My spirit has been driven by curiosity to learn all I can about the planet we live on and its inhabitants from experience rather than solely from the printed word. The different approaches to spirituality have been central in this quest. I have much gratitude for all those experiences, especially now when I no longer have as much energy to venture out. I am now living at Friends House, a Quaker continuing-care facility for elders in Santa Rosa, California, where I am given the opportunity to use my diminishing energy in different ways. Now I am looking forward to Denver, and being with all of you again. See you there!

MUSINGS OF AN ARTIST

By Tricia Layden

I have been a regular in the Artisans’ Bazaar since the third Crones Counsel, my first CC being the second one, held in Silverdale, Washington. I find the Crones Counsel Bazaar magical: so many different wares; so many different talents! I love it! I’m a bit shy, but during the Counsel, nearly everyone comes through the room, which gives me a chance to chat with people one on one when they pause at my table. We talk about my work, but also about what we are interested in or wonder about, how the Counsel is going, what we like best. I also enjoy hanging out and chatting with the other artists, particularly when some of us stay at our tables during one or another of the workshop times. Occasionally we will negotiate a trade — something of mine for something of yours. That’s gravy! During my shift at the cashier’s table, I get to hang out with mARTa, too, and to meet some of the women who bring their purchases up. I enjoy seeing what people choose.

I’ve had a chance to give away some of my work also, or to negotiate a price for someone who falls in love with a particular piece. One time a woman who was going to Africa to present a workshop bought one of my totem dolls to take with her as a way to talk about spirits. Then, too, sometimes I think a piece will never sell — it’s been offered too many times, but someone comes along and is delighted with it. What fun! It gives me great joy when my work gives someone else joy too! That’s what creativity is all about for me.

I’ve been to nearly all the Counsels, though sadly, not the first one. I’ve seen a lot of changes, and many different venues. Crones Counsel has been a place of encouragement and growth for me. I’ve come to believe in my ability to create
A Spiritual Journey

By Maggie Fenton

We are not spiritual beings on a human journey. We are human beings on a spiritual journey.

— PIERRE TIELHARD DE CHARDIN

Chardin wrote this decades ago, echoing the sentiments of mystics (and scientists) before him. At the next Crones Counsel in Denver, you will have an opportunity to explore your own spiritual journey in one of the workshops.

Looking backward can be very revealing, telling us what brought us to this point in our belief system, how our understanding has evolved, and how it can help define what is sacred to us. Each sacred journey is unique and, in my opinion, well worth exploring.

My own spiritual journey began in the First Presbyterian Church in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, the church of my parents and grandparents. Although this particular expression of spirituality chose me, not the other way around, I have good memories of that experience. Miss Mary McClellan, our Sunday School Supervisor, told each of her charges every Sunday without fail: “God loves you and so do I!” This was a delightful and needed message for a child who was rebellious from the get-go. When the time came for communicants’ class, I was the only member and Reverend Akers never blinked at my questions other clergy would have considered blasphemous. He responded by giving me reading material beyond my years (and often my understanding), including poets and theologians who pondered bigger questions. Looking back, his forbearance amazes me. He opened me to spiritual exploration and introduced me to the larger “Mystery” in which we all live.

Thank you, Reverend Akers.

In addition to the organized message, Nature informed me. Lucky enough to grow up on a large farm with animals, fields, woods, and streams, I was given free rein to roam. Sometimes I went with my brother who taught me how to swing on grape vines or with my mother who taught me to forage and how to watch and listen. As I grew into adolescence, I was accompanied by Johnny Rae, my dog and faithful companion. Non-school days after chores, I would pack lunch,

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beautiful things. I’ve been challenged to put myself on the line, to volunteer for the board, to help plan the Counsel in Seattle with the Skagit Valley Crones (after which I naged us into planning one of the opening and closing ceremonies, and an Honoring of the Elders). On my own, I’ve found the courage to give workshops on beading, the Enneagram and Non-violent Communication, and been privileged to facilitate Wisdom Circles. I’ve had a lot of fun with the Follies too, even singing, either alone or with the chorus Jackie Gentry used to direct. I would encourage anyone to jump in with all their energy. Being part of Crones Counsel is the most fun when one is involved in some particular way.

For me, it is the Bazaar that is my most particular way. I like the stability of belonging in one special area. I love the traffic of people through the room, how they stop here and there to touch, to try something on, to pick up a book or gaze at an amazing creation. There is so much there: music, books, drums, soaps and lotions, wood and pottery, jewelry and garments. The spirit of each vendor shines through her creation, each one unique and precious. As are we all.
Transitions
by Virginia Small, Denver Crone

I learned about Crones Counsel in 2009, just after the gathering in Boulder, Colorado. When I introduced myself to the local Denver group for the first time I was asked if I wanted to be recognized as Maiden, Mother, Matriarch, or Crone. I was the newest and youngest member, not yet 50, but I knew I was well past Maiden — if I ever was Maiden; and nowhere close to Crone. I was used to being “Earth Mother” to many I met along my life journey. My own mother used to call me an old woman, so I was accustomed to that role.

As I sat in circle I realized that my Mother role had evolved, and I was well into the transition to Matriarch. The “children” I had met in my life were gone. Old jobs, groups, and friends were changing and leaving my life. I was not saddened by this; it was my choice and part of a universal shift. I was making room for new people and experiences to come in. So I happily accepted the title of Matriarch. That was years ago.

There are many books on my shelf about growing into the Wise Woman. There are writers like Berta Parish, Julia Cameron, Jan Phillips, Louise Hay, Barbara Sher, and Pema Chodron. Even Wayne Dyer and Michael Beckwith are there. After all, the masculine line is as sacred as the feminine.

These teachers are helping introduce and initiate me into the purpose and passion of being an elder or a Wise Woman. They are helping me rid myself of old myths — those tricksters we call routine, society, and expectations. They invite me to create my own new myths.

When I identified as the naive and vulnerable Snow White, I let myself be fooled by pretty things like combs, corsets, and poisoned apples. I allowed things into my life that choked off my voice and restricted my movement. As long as I was still, quiet, and sat up straight I was everyone’s good girl. I permed, burned, and killed my own natural hair with a comb filled of acid. I swallowed and tried to digest other people’s ideas of who I should be, what I should do, and how I should act. I was never very successful at any of these. So, neither I nor the people around me were very happy.

During my transition to Matriarch I began to identify with the elder Queen. Unlike her, I have no resentment toward younger women. I’ve been there in that unsure place. Why would I ever want to be there again? Rather than spend my energies on trying to regain something that is gone, I began to walk my own road. I stopped putting hot and acid-filled combs in my hair. I stopped wearing shoes that hurt my feet. I wore loud mismatched socks and lots of jewelry. I stopped looking “professional.” I spoke in my normal voice, which I consider rich and resonant.

Very recently I informed my group that I will allow myself to be addressed as Crone. Even so, I still have trepidation. I don’t feel that the Matriarch title fits as well as it once did, but I still don’t feel qualified to be a Crone. As I enter my 61st year, I am again feeling a shift. There are thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that don’t suit me anymore. Yet the knowledge of what to replace them with is still forming. No, I still feel I am not really Crone, but I am hoping I will grow into her.

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY, con’t. from Page 5

The word “spiritual” can be defined as, “of or relating to religion or religious belief” or “of, relating to, or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.” For the purposes of our workshop, we will be exploring the later definition although I believe it is very difficult to completely expunge our childhood religious training. What are your earliest memories of religion or spirituality? Did you have a Bat Mitzvah? A first communion? A ceremony that introduced you to adulthood? How has your understanding of what is spiritual or sacred or holy changed over your life? Do you have pictures of significant religious or spiritual events in your life? What other rituals or ceremonies have been sacred to you? Have you consciously explored your spirituality? (This may be a silly question since you are reading a crone publication!) How do you feed your spiritual nature? Was your crowning ceremony, if you’ve done one, sacred to you? How?

Marriage, motherhood, and career put most of my own exploration on hold for a few years but I came back to it, pursuing both formal and informal training. At this point, I find labels unappealing. I’ll end with this internet jewel, author unknown:

Do you know who I am?
I say “Namasté” because I like what it means, not because I am Hindu.

A lot of people think I am a Christian because they think I talk about Christian values, but the truth is I am really talking about human values.

I have been asked if I am a Buddhist just because I have discovered inner peace.

A lot of my friends are Pagans and they think I am one too because I say that being in Nature is my idea of church.

Do you want to know what I really am? It’s very simple. I don’t need a label to define me. I am a piece of the Universe, sentient and manifested, and … I am AWAKE! …

at least, some days …
CRONES COUNSEL XXIV
DENVER, COLORADO
September 21–25, 2016
“Seasons of Our Lives”

In the sacred space of Mt. Shasta, California, we experienced “the Eternal Spiral.” Let us take that experience and look forward to this next time when we will gather for another shared “mountaintop” experience.

Crones Counsel XXIV is planned for September 21-25, 2016, in Denver, Colorado, to coincide with the Fall Equinox on September 22.

The theme is Seasons of Our Lives, reflecting on those seasons we as women experience — Maiden, Mother, Matriarch, Crone. And so our lives evolve.

For more info and to register for the Gathering, go to www.cronescounsel.org

To consider doing a Workshop: Contact Carol Friedrich cronecarol@earthlink.net, 303-373-5135.

To reserve an Artisan Space: Contact mARTa Quest at RRandArt12@gmail.com, 541-816-1158.

We look forward to seeing you in Denver this fall.
GETTING TO KNOW YOU

MY TRIP ACROSS THE U.S. & CANADA

by Betty Brown

How many of us have attended Crones Counsel, met many interesting women and thought, “Wouldn’t it be lovely to get to know each other better?”

For sure — several of you have picked out others during the Gathering and become friends over the years but what about randomly selecting Crones that were spread over the country and paying them a visit? If this idea seems a little on the wild side of your thinking, I’m here to tell you it works.

The obvious reason it works is because the women of Crones Counsel are wonderful. We can truly gift ourselves and them by getting to know each other better.

On this 4th of January, I left home and three cats in a little, purple, eye-lashed PT Cruiser convertible to drive 66 days and over 9,000 miles through 13 states. During that time I visited with 26 people, 16 of whom were from Crones Counsel, which included 11 Elders. (Due to the generosity of many visited I spent about the same money as staying home.) In addition to having many unexpected adventures I was on a bit of a quest doing research for a new book idea. Elders were the total inspiration and focus.

Why? Three years into my 70s I am becoming more and more curious about (if health and luck hold) what the 80 and 90 decades might offer. Accepting a long, slow demise until the grim reaper arrives is not in my psyche and I knew this is not true for our Elders. After all, when attending that first CC 15 years ago and experiencing the first Honoring the Elders Ceremony, my ideas and hopes increased exponentially from a prior few family models. I’ll never forget thinking, “So, aging could look like this, or this, or even this.” My head spun from that first gathering and has been a large part of what brings me back year after year after year. By the way, peer groups and sisters coming up behind are no slouchers either. Anyhow, what better group to continue the exploration of this crazy thing we call aging. What better group to use to discover what choices one can make, how to spend later days and know if joy and happiness stop with an aging body? Obviously the scope of these questions goes way beyond a short article. I tried to hang out with each of the 11 elders for two days. We usually ate and talked and did whatever activities were on their agendas. Every woman made me feel instantly at home and was so very generous in both hospitality and stories. We laughed and talked and shared much. Those visited were Enid Williams, Marilyn Sackariason, Alice Yee, Lee McRae, Joan Forest, Connie Dawson, Rita Bresnahan, Gay Barker, Donna Love, Marilyn Thompson, and Betty Rockwell.

Weather kept me on a southern route to the West but I’m hoping to visit a few more Elders this fall to continue the research throughout this year.

Elders weren’t the only Crones I got to know better. Even though the trip was about visiting and not sightseeing I did manage to get in a few additional adventures with and without fella Cronites. Julie Horst put me in the Ninth District’s Supreme Court judge’s seat, Maggie Dickson regaled with stories of hiking the Spanish Camino at her “Harvey the RV” campground near the Yuma, Arizona, Military Proving Ground, which punctuated points periodically with loud “Bangs;” Marsha Scarbrough hosted me at an old silver-mining B&B in New Mexico, Simone LaDrumma invited me to a first-ever live “Rumba” party, and I had a shortened time for a quick dinner with mARTa Quest.

Non-Crone people included a fabulous Santa Fe 81-year-old whom I hope to get to CC this year, a 94-year-old retired school teacher who was a great interviewee, and a few days hanging out with a new friend met in Nepal five years ago who will be in Denver in September.

So, whether you put some new tires on the vehicle or turn off the TV to figure out other ways to get to know each other, the Gathering is your threshold for exciting discovery. I keep reminding myself that life and engagement are always choices.

And, please accept a blanket invitation for any of “you all” to come to Georgia for a two-day visit anytime you can catch
A DELIGHTFUL OPPORTUNITY

On my recent January trip, I had the delightful opportunity to spend two days with Lee McRae, as well as being hosted at her home in Berkeley, California. I was traveling, doing some research on elders, their lifestyle choices, and looking to see how they did or did not display youthful energy in aging. I needed to look no farther than initially arriving when Lee asked, “Do you like Downton Abbey?” To an affirmative reply this almost 92-year old, virtual stranger said, “Good. Throw your bag in here; we’re being picked up in 10 minutes.” Imagine my surprise when we arrived at a couple’s house who were in their early 30s, to be joined by three others of the same age for that week’s update on Lady Mary Crawley and the others’ (mis)adventures.

The next morning we left the ... lived in for 60 years and “no intention of ever moving” ... house to attend a yoga-jazz exercise class for one-and-a-half hours that I found a little challenging but my hostess did not. As we toured the streets of Berkeley, Lee graciously revealed aspects of her life filled not only with past accomplishments through the love of music but of current involvement with her Viola de Gamba (sixteenth-century-instrument) musical group which met weekly at her home and their upcoming performances. Her schedule revealed three exercise commitments a week and the landline phone always had two to three messages each time we re-entered her home. Clearly this was a lady engaged in and enjoying life whom others loved and supported.

Before leaving the next morning we made a visit to the Walden School, which she and her husband helped found and where, after teaching there 15 years, only recently retired. When we went to leave and on finding I had locked my keys in my car, I put Lee in Uber transport so she could get home in time to catch her ride for San Francisco to see her “male” friend for the rest of the day.

I don’t know how many remember Lee as she hasn’t been to CC for a few years but I know she was at Portland, Asilomar, and my hometown — Atlanta. I will remember her always as a spirited, engaging woman with a distinguishable twinkle in her eye. Thanks, Lee, for all you gave to others throughout your life.

Happy trails.

P.S. Be sure to look for a new book in the next few years potentially titled, “Racing Toward Youthful Joy” featuring many of the elders from Crones Counsel sharing their lives to provide insights for 50-, 60-, and 70-year olds to ... what’s next?

One Crone’s Egypt Adventure

By Karuna Chapman

I was making a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of Ancient Egypt as described by my teacher and mentor, Drunvalo Melchizedek, author of two volumes called the Ancient Secret of the Flower of Life. The wonderful guides on this journey were Lu Ka Klancnick, fellow teacher of the Awakening the Illuminated Heart Workshop, and his beautiful wife Mateya. They did a brilliant job.

We visited over 25 temples, pyramids, tombs, and ruins, as well as the Cairo Museum, the central Mosque of Cairo, and the Khan Khalili Bazaar. We flew to Aswan and travelled by bus up to Luxor visiting sites as we went.

A journey of this magnitude cannot easily be expressed in words or even photos. How to describe the gauntlet of souvenir sellers at every stop; or the many temple “guards” who followed our every step and the moment we closed our eyes to tune in, tapped us on the arm and said, “No meditating, no praying,” or invited us to see a “special” feature and then held out palms with rubbing fingers, the universal request for payment; how magnificent the sound of the evening call to prayer filling the air over Cairo. Images of rural farming, all done by hand and the grains and cane carried to market on a donkey’s back or a horse-drawn wagon. How to tell my feelings in our huge bus escorted by three guards carrying semi-automatic machine guns, aimed from the back of a small pickup truck, or the ease of the men gathered in outdoor coffee gardens in the cool of the evening, or the women in pairs or small groups dressed head to foot in black when the temperature reads over 100 degrees F. And how about those camels? Finally, I would love you to taste the fellowship of 23 heart-centered human beings as we moved through this country of conflicting images, traveling between the past and the present.

The Great Pyramid and the Sphinx

Lu Ka had arranged some private meditation for our group in the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid. This pyramid, the oldest and grandest of all, was constructed by Thoth. It was never built as a tomb, but marked the male energetic pole of Mother Earth. It was a place of initiation. The initiate after years of training would enter the King’s Chamber and lie in the huge stone sarcophagus with the lid on for three days, to experience out-of-body travel. The sarcophagus is still there, it was too big to remove, which

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means the room was built around it. The lid is long gone.

So what is it like inside a pyramid? Comfortably cool, about 60–65 degrees F., dust free, and no musty smell. The building blocks are huge and so well fitted, there is only a hair crack between them. It is very still. The climb up to the entrance went smoothly and but we had to scrunch up and walk down a steeply inclined ramp about 200 feet through a passageway that was only four feet high. Then we climbed another steep ramp about 100 feet into the King’s Chamber. There was the sarcophagus, and the temple guard urged us to put our hands into it. It was like reaching into outer space! I had to lie in it. After a bit of urging I was permitted and in I went. My heart opened until there simply was no me. It was amazing. And then it was over. As I walked around the chamber, I noticed a strong beam of energy pouring into the room. I heard Lu Ka say that the sarcophagus had been moved and I guessed it used to be lined up with this beam striking the initiate at the third eye or the heart.

It was then time to leave so that hundreds more people could come and experience the space. We made our way back down and then up the ramps and out into the bright sunlight. I was very happy.

After lunch at a local restaurant (spaghetti for the vegetarians!) we paid our respects to the Sphinx. Did you know he is a she? Yes, the Sphinx is female. Apparently somebody added a beard centuries ago to make her look male, the beard fell off and there she is in all her lioness — definitely female — beauty. She is crumbling and constantly being “renewed” but strongly with us. I found her presence very comforting and somehow familiar.

We spent a total of three days taking in the sacred sites around Cairo and then took a short flight south to Aswan. We stayed in a beautiful hotel right on the Nile and at the end of our first day there, Lu Ka announced a surprise boat trip up the Nile to a Nubian village for dinner. This trip was high on my favorite experiences’ list.

We boarded a river boat right outside our hotel to travel the Nile at sunset; it was heavenly. Along the way we could see small villages, and one place where numerous camels were being bathed and watered. Just at dusk, we arrived at the Nubian village where life was still lived for the most part the way it has been for centuries. We walked the short distance to our restaurant, browsing the small shops along the way. The restaurant was a large room with benches and tables around the perimeter, our meal arrived quickly, and was a number of grains, vegetables, and meat dishes from which we could take our pick. It was delicious. I took my dinner up to the roof and enjoyed a quiet few moments watching the stars come out in the mild evening. Glancing around, I noticed local women gathered on their porches enjoying the same cool beauty. Here I sensed no fear, no rush, just life going on and on as always, easy.

On the way back to our boat we shopped and some people bought drums, which were a real bargain. They sounded good and cost $5 for a small one and $10 for a large. We bargained with the young boys of the village for scarab bracelets and haggled over prices for some prettily woven bags. Then it was time to go. We boarded our boat and sat on the flat roof singing and drumming as we headed downriver in the almost full moonlight. It was so sweet.
The next day we boarded our trusty giant bus and headed for Luxor. Along the way we visited numerous fabulous temples with amazing hieroglyphics and pillars and statues and beams of light and good energy; then on to the Valley of the Kings and the tombs. We finished on the second afternoon at the Temple of Karnak and then the grand finale, the Luxor Temple at night. But wait there was another surprise!

As we dressed for our evening visit to the Luxor Temple, Luxor means light, by the way, we learned we would travel in style in horse and carriage. Indeed, there were 10 horses and carriages awaiting us as we stepped from our hotel. Oh joy, what fun! I shared a carriage with my friends Suki and Frank. Suki sat up with the driver and Frank and I cuddled in the carriage, by moonlight, clip clopping along — shades of romance. And it was romantic! It was also a sweet gesture by our guides to address the plight of the horse and buggy operators who are hurting because of the drop in tourism in Egypt. Our dear white horse was so skinny we could see her hip bones and ribs.

The temple of Luxor, aka the temple of light, is artfully lit up at night by floodlights. Everything takes on a golden aura as the light bounces off the magnificent sandstone pillars and huge figures carved thousands of years ago. There are sacred sites all along the length of Egypt, which mark the various locations of her energetic chakras. Luxor is the heart chakra, and when we felt the energy in the heart of the heart, we danced and sang in the moonlight and ended with an ecstatic group hug. Energetically speaking, I enjoyed this temple the most. I don’t remember seeing any temple “guards” and we were like kids in a candy shop, tuning in as much as we wanted. When we were done we headed back to our carriages and clip clopped off to the Winter Palace.

The Winter Palace used to be the personal retreat of King Farouk in Luxor. Now it is an opulent restaurant with grand and beautiful gardens and very poshly decorated and preserved suites. The food was good, the mood happy, and laughter was flowing like the river herself. After eating we adjourned to the magnificent back garden and had our closing circle on manicured lawns under the clear sparkling sky. We had come a long way, shared much, and bonded deeply. So much gratitude. So much love.

Epilogue:

Well it wasn’t quite what I expected, no great flashbacks to Ancient Egypt, or thrilling insights to the culture we all learn about in school. In the end, we carried with us the picture of living in unity and love wherever we went, and I think that might have been the point. It is a hard time to travel. There is tension. Would I go again? You bet!

To see a video of this trip, here is a link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOclNKpIEEE Some of you may recognize the background music. The Santa Cruz Crones did a Candle Dance to this music a couple of years ago at Asilomar. Nice coincidence.
My Experience of a Death Café

by Kianna Bader

At a Death Café, people, often strangers, gather to eat, drink and discuss death! Pretty crazy — or is it? The objective is to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their lives. It is simply a discussion group held in an accessible, respectful, confidential space with no intention of leading people to any conclusion or course of action. Begun in England in 2011, these discussions have spread to more than 40 countries since then. A safe place to discuss death must be something many people hunger for.

In the last issue, I promised to tell you of my experience at a death café in Sacramento, CA. I read online that cake and tea or coffee would be served but my experience was a bit different. We met in the private back room of a pub and sat on bar stools around a high rectangular wooden table. Local beers and wine lined the shelves on both sides, floor to ceiling. However we all ordered coffee and stayed for lunch afterward.

My group was diverse, perhaps an unusual one. Our facilitator was a most welcoming, competent hospital chaplain while our group consisted of: a critical care doctor, two nurses (one female and one male), two marriage and family counselors, two chaplains, two of us who had counseled AIDS patients in the late 1980s when an AIDS diagnosis meant immediate death, plus a young man who fit none of those categories. I only knew two people. Some of the others had only passed each other in the hospital corridor while a few knew each other well. Even though death was a regular part of the job for most of these folks, they hadn’t had a chance to express their feelings to each other.

Our facilitator gradually tossed out some questions and we took turns answering them.

1. What brought you here today?

2. What are you feeling about death right now — in one word?

3. Tell us about your first memory of someone dying.

4. What have you thought about your own death?

5. What have you thought about the death of someone you love?

The critical care doctor spoke of how badly he felt that the medical profession is there at the end of life — both with the patient and the family — then when the patient passes, the family is left on its own and he never sees them again.

Yes, there was some serious talk but I was surprised at how much laughter we shared too. I came away feeling rather joyful (if I can use that word). Needless to say it left me with plenty to think about and I’m eager to attend the next one. My 28-year-old granddaughter wants to attend too.

CALLING ALL CRONE POETS AND POETRY LOVERS...

Once again Crones’ Counsel will be hosting an open poetry reading. Bring your poems to read or just come to listen to your sister crones’ amazing work. Join us in another unforgettable evening of Crone Poets Rising.

Contact Claudia Van Gerven at claudia.vangerven@colorado.edu or Kianna at kianna4064@gmail.com for more info.