

# Gitche M'Qua Newsletter



August 28, Sarana Springs

## Following the pause is an exhalation and another breath of unfolding...

In times of great tumult are opportunities to begin again. Like in the gulf, Haiti, the flood plains of Pakistan, earth and human causes bring us devastation by seemingly destructive conditions: how we respond to those changes is a sign of engaged living. At one glance the forest fires ravaging the west coast destroy life; look again, and see that blackened landscape renewed with nitrogen as new forests are reborn. We cannot control the course of life and death, but how do we touch its power without collapsing? How do we courageously let go without clinging to the past and meet a new day with renewed vigor, commitment and joy? So many of us are faced with changing circumstances. Some, like our “heart” daughter, Andrea, hold new life within their wombs as they prepare to birth a new generation, others, like those of us in End-of-Life, usher our ancestors across the threshold.



The path to graduation took a toll, and as the bell tolled that March morning, two more chaplains committed to the path of service. Andrew finally finished his thesis--Mindful Listening at End-of-Life--with the literary and/literal help of Jenny Huynh. Jenny thank you so much. Andrew is happy to share

his insights gathered while researching mindfulness, empathy, and compassion through the lens of End-of-Life, Neuroscience, and Buddhist Psychology. [www.upaya.org/chaplains](http://www.upaya.org/chaplains) will take you to the 12 final papers of the first cohort of Buddhist Chaplains at Upaya, including Angie’s narrative essay, Bearing Witness to the Earthquake in L’Aquila, Italy.

## Trauma Resiliency, Transition, and Land as Teacher: A Message from Angie (Ejo)



As I graduated the chaplaincy program, my thought was: where do I go now? All I knew was that I was traveling to Kenya

in August with Elaine Karas and Laurie Leitch, founders of the Trauma Resource Institute ([www.tri.org](http://www.tri.org)). There I would be interning and offering resources to children and adults traumatized by extreme violence in another country seized by political instability. As we readied to leave, more unrest ensued that escalated to several bombings. The trip, now postponed until 2011, has left me with disappointment and a feeling of being adrift. While I know that my deep wish to serve the international community will arrive soon, another space emerged that allows me to care for my health and to prepare my home for the late September market.

Like many of life transitions, they are accompanied by grief and the need for non attachment. The one about leaving a home so close to my heart carries



years of joy and a sadness as I prepare to let go relinquishment of an old identity. In my heart I always knew this home would serve community. It would serve as a meeting place for many, so I am ending a twenty-year stay. I also carry the memories of a home that I designed and built with my first husband. Along with his ashes, I, the space that carried him into his healing death. So much living and dying under one roof! Now, in the surrender, I am moving into a new space of the “not knowing,” where moments are lived and uncertainty prevails. Here, I believe my life can align itself more with the natural order of things, with my path of service and with the land that calls me. I see myself cultivating the chaplain’s cloak in my private practice, in the next steps of developing the trauma resiliency work, both abroad and in my community, and in my first aspiration in chaplaincy training which was environmental

ministry.



While I let go of one garden, another is becoming. In the coming years, by spending

more time at our land near Owen Sound, and by living more intimately with the land and its beings, I intend to practice deep listening, which involves letting my own agenda go. I also hope by studying the permaculture way to be guided by sustainable ways of living, like growing my own food, planting trees as wind blocks for tender trees and learning how to harness the elements for energy.

This work plants seeds in another way that was inspired by a fellow chaplain who works with street youth and where they learn to cook. Another hope in my path of service is to work with cooking as way of serving others. I see this happening in people like Jamie Oliver who, like myself see cooking as a creative passions. While I remain connected to our work in the city and with the End-of-Life community, my heart and my body’s healing are being called to be revitalized by the community in the natural world. Here, the different species of trees and plant life, the waterfowl and winged ones, the fish, insects, animals, and waterways present at Sarana Springs teach



me. Each shares an interaction, a pattern, a web or relationship that I believe is important to understand. An important question for

all of us today whether we live in the city or the country : how do we live a sustainable life?

Our plan is to build and/or develop a sustainable way to live at Sarana Springs for part of the year. Back in the city, while the sale of our home frees us from

great responsibility of homeownership, it calls Andrew, myself, and Gitche M'Qua towards each of you and towards new possibilities of shared living and community. Embracing the "not knowing" is a term coined by Roshi Bernie Glassman. In his Peacemaker Order he suggests holding a big sky view of "beginner's mind" where we stand without answers and open to the unexpected. What the future holds I trust will give rise to our deepest values, which holds the true appreciation of our interconnection of all beings, human and non human alike, as a family we must tend, or else we have no family at all.

## A Young Artist's Canvas: A Full Circle Story



Years ago now when Angie's late husband, Alido, was facing brain cancer, he made some radical choices. Leaving behind a career as a land developer and builder, he followed an inner vision of building a healing centre. Gitche M'Qua, as he was also named, dreamt of a place surrounded by nature, a place where anyone in need or facing a life transition would be supported and held by the land.

Now a rich legacy for many, his vision became a reality, when a client Andrew was visiting continued Gitche M'Qua's dream. Dreams, however, become reality with a lot of help from others. Like one friend, Onalayah, that we met during a Buddhist meditation retreat. Help comes from unexpected places. She had known of our work for years and had always wanted to support us. Her generosity built our first retreat cabin. The finishing touches were added late this spring and our first guest.

As many of you know, in addition to Andrew's work as program director creating End-of-Life educational programs, he visits one or two families facing End-of-Life. His support acts as a ballast in the stormy

waves of dying. This is how he met Matthew, a 30-something, year-old man living with the debilitating challenges of A.L.S. (Arterial Lateral Sclerosis). During one visit, he learned about a young man's longing for the land.

As an artist who maps three-dimensional images on canvas, like a master shape-shifter, Matthew lives within restrictions imposed by his illness. However, he refuses to become prisoner. As a man seeking truth, he stalks his inner world, where inner states can be doors to freedom or pools of tears. Gitche M'Qua lived the same way. It's a rare quality to meet someone in this engaged state..

One day, I asked him what he really wanted, and he



said, "A room with a view." The view he meant was one coloured by nature. One day as we were planning his visit to Sarana Springs

I asked him what he would do there. He replied: "I want to fill my heart with the Mother Earth." With his caregiver and two brothers Matthew received what he longed for.

After several moving councils, a fire ceremony and a couple of buckets of lake water that blessed him, Matthew unmasked his true voice. He demonstrated what few of us can--a capacity to speak deliberately and without hesitation from a place of truth. Here, the raw honesty of our words are mixed with joy and pain. Here, his loss of mobility and ability guides us, as his spirit strives to be present, like a falcon descending into a pine forest in preparation for a vision quest.



Our dreams are shared; one man's dream is lived by another man. How pre-

cious this human life is; how rare it is to live it and find meaning.



## What's New at Gitche M'Qua?

During the past two years as Angie and I completed chaplaincy training, priorities shifted from program development to study and practice. Now with the imminent sale of our home, office and centre, another directive is leading the way. Programming, development and activity remain at a turtle's pace, but we are still going! Change allows space for reflection; reflection brings forth chaos and confusion, confusion leads to clarity and the next steps...we hope.

What do any of us know for sure? Some say, we only know this moment for sure, everything else is past or future. Perceiving this moment with clarity is a skill best served by spiritual practice and to engaging life with an ethical compass towards purpose. As this next stage reveals itself, we reach out to our teachers for inspiration and guidance. I travelled to Ver-

mont this summer to attend the Native Elders at the Sunray Peace Village, Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo's annual gathering of Indigenous teachings from around the world. The message of planting positive seeds through our thoughts, deeds, and actions was a common theme, as well the message of appreciation for all of life's gifts resounded in their teachings. Seeds were planted with several Elder's at the gathering that one day they will come to Sarana Springs to share their wisdom teachings.

At the gathering, I participated in healing, baby blessing, coming of age, Elder, and end-of-life ceremonies, reminding me of the wonder in all the stages of life.

During one ceremony, where two young women shared the meaning woven into their prayer shawls, a traditional, Cherokee, coming-of-age practice, a rainbow appeared in a nearly, clear blue sky. The astrophysicist, I was sitting with, explained it was a "sundog"; the Elders believed it was confirmation from the 'spiritworld' and a sign of the strength of two young women.

As we stand rooted between our life in the city and at Sarana Springs, wondering how it will all unfold, we pause to reflect on the landscape, on the callings, and on the needs of our varied communities. After returning home after graduating as fledgling chaplains, we lead a memorial gathering in May at Hart House for Hospice Toronto, Temmy Latner Centre for Palliative Care and Max and Beatrice Wolfe Centre for Children's Grief. In the ceremony families caregivers, hospice volunteers, and End-of-Life professionals alike each wove their memories into an Ancestor Tapestry. Friends Debbie Danbrook and Ann Marie Boudreau accompanied the gathering with haunting and healing sounds.

Also this spring, I led my first funeral for another family receiving support from the centre. Offering a meaningful service to mark the life of a beloved mother, mentor, and friend is another humbling action in the new role as a Buddhist Chaplain. This fall, I continue to reach out into the EOL field to share the Mindful Listening at End-of-Life curriculum.

At the other end of the spectrum (a lot of talk about death around here), here is some talk about birth. We are so happy to announce that Andrea,

(who we adopted) and her new partner, Emily, are about to pop!! Andrea's program, Talking to Kids About Death, is one of our most popular Being With Our Dying courses. As well as making us happy, soon-to-be grandparents, new life gives all of us reasons to celebrate...a Thanksgiving baby we think.



While our fall offerings are few, I believe that the work no matter how small furthers the goal of assisting all beings...one at a time.

Welcome home from your summer travels and Happy New Year to all our Jewish friends.

With Warmth and Caring, Andrew.

## Fall News, Programs and Plans:

The most exciting news is the **EYES WIDE OPEN** workshop with **FRANK OSTASESKI, Oct. 25-26**. This 2-day event will be all day Monday and Tuesday. Frank will be teaching at Multi Faith Centre at U of T. Recently teaching at



Upaya with Roshi Joan Halifax, Frank brings a unique and compassionate approach to caring for the dying and engaging the heart at end-of-life.

In making this workshop possible, we are very grateful for our friendship with Michael Kerman and all the support from Leading Edge Seminars. Without them this event would never have become a reality. While they carry the management responsibilities, they will provide a 15% contribution to Gitche M'Qua with each registration. Our job is promotion and to invite you to come.

Register today and Please attend! Join us in deepening our skills in the practice of mindful and compassionate care of the dying. Also help

us by letting others hear about Frank's visit and his acclaimed work with the dying. Learn more of Frank's work through the Metta Institute ([www.mettainstitute.org](http://www.mettainstitute.org)).

For full program details: [www.gitchemqua.org](http://www.gitchemqua.org)

At the time of this newsletter, we are still finalizing our fall programs. If you are interested in any of our programs please contact Sher, our office administrator at [info@gitchemqua.org](mailto:info@gitchemqua.org) or call her at 1-866-655-8548

## Ongoing:

### Wed, Qigong Classes: 10:50am-12:15



Following the Sheng Zhen style developed by Master Li, these classes led by Andrew guide us moving qigong and sitting meditation practices. Appropriate for all levels of ability, the movements are easily learned. Our intention, through these practices is to generate a healing field of love for the world. As practitioners, we benefit as well. If you would like to try a class, please contact Andrew directly at 416-654-8905. Suggested fee: \$20/class or \$180/10 sessions. Location and First September class TBA.

## Upcoming:

### MINDFUL LISTENING AT END-OF-LIFE TRAINING

Based on Andrew's recent study into the neural substrates of mindfulness, empathy and compassion and the core competencies in Joan Halifax's Compassionate Care of the Dying, Mindful Listening at End-of-Life imparts skills that can sus-



tain caregivers. This workshop offers lay or professional caregivers insights and tools in assessing and presencing the suffering and stress

that often accompanies this work. Working with mindfulness practice, mindful listening exercises as well as developing caregiver strategies rooted in compassion, we open our hearts into the uncertainty of the dying process. By resting into the abiding calmness of mindful awareness, caregivers can become resilient as well as loving.

Dates: **Sunday Nov. 28**

Time: **1:30-5:30pm**

Location: TBA

Suggested Fee: \$60

Planning is underway for a Mindful Listening workshop to be held in York Region in mid-November. Further details will be available shortly.

For details on all our programs call us at 416-651-1846 or email us [info@gitchemqua.org](mailto:info@gitchemqua.org)

Web updates will appear shortly, but Sher is happy to help you with questions or to register you for any programs.