

*I would like to beg you to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. ... And the point is to live everything. Live the question now. Perhaps then, someday ... you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.*  
~Rainer Maria Rilke

## **Roots & Wings – Our Journey**

*Catherine:*

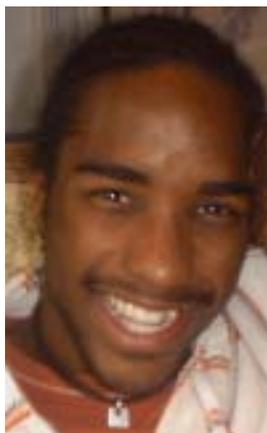
I arrive at the Women's Theological Center for Group Process Training: **Roots & Wings for Community Builders**. The workshop promises to “*focus on expanding our abilities and skills as awareness facilitators for personal, organizational and community transformation. Creating sustainable communities requires that we deal with outer issues, use of power and rank, and the subtle feelings and dreams of all participants and community members. In this workshop we will explore and practice how to interact with each other and facilitate community processes while living close to our deepest vision and respecting all types of human experience.*”



I have just arrived back from a 6 week Leadership forum held in Santiago, Chile with 70 people from 15 countries. I am again in my own process of understanding, sitting with, and indeed, living the questions – How do we bridge across differences? How do we truly and deeply honor what each one brings? What is the magic formula that makes a group of people into a community? What are the elements that allow for me and others to reach out, connect, learn and grow together? What are solutions for this world going mad?

Sitting beside me is Josh. He is a 21 year old black man, a student at Wheelock College, studying social work, about to graduate and interestingly enough asking many of the same questions as I. I am a 54 year old white woman, a consultant, trainer and coach in the field of leadership and organizational development, exploring and actively looking for answers to many complex questions.

During our first paired sharing I discover his commitment, his passion, his journey, and his unique qualities of directness and engagement. This is the beginning of a shared journey of discovery. What bridges, what connections are possible? What can we learn from one another?



*Josh:*

I arrive at the Women's Theological Center for Group Process Training: **Roots & Wings for Community Builders**. I feel so positive, so held by just being in the space. I feel community. The way I am feeling is not just dictated by my past experience with WTC, but also by the fact that my community actively supported my coming financially. The week before, I asked my community for financial assistance for the training and to contribute to WTC. I explained how WTC gives me a feeling of community and that **Roots & Wings** is an experience I was meant to have. And my community gave me unwavering support. I am a bridge for two communities to which I belong, in essence, building community.

Recently, I was asked by the one I wish to be my life's partner, “What are your (life's) motivations?” and I responded by stating, “My motivation...because I only have one...is LOVE. I strive to make my every action in the world out of the profound love I feel in my heart.” Love is what delivers me into WTC's nest and to be fed with mothers' love.

I trust in this love to place me where I need to be when I need to be there. I excitedly wait to meet the one I am meant to partner with for this new area of my journey...and then comes Catherine. I see Catherine and immediately think, "Wow, she is beautiful... her light is pure...and she has great hair." Over the course of the weekend I learn that Catherine is one who lives out her love and through her willingness to take risks demonstrates faith in that love.

*Catherine:*

On Saturday the group decides to process issues of racism. There are many riveting and moving moments. There is a large antiwar rally going on that day just outside at the Boston Common. There are estimates that 25,000 people march through the city. Inside, I find that I am rallying in a different manner. I am truly struggling to understand rank and power. How does privilege and rank show itself? How do I do this? In what ways do I marginalize others? How am I marginalized? In what ways do I deny racism?

Raul, my very dear friend from the Leadership forum in South America, lives in Caracas, Venezuela. It is an environment that is constantly agitated with problems of imbalance and violence in its struggle over power. When we speak earlier that week, he coaches me in skills to stay centered while still connecting to what is happening, to allow the media hype to pass by. How can I stay focused on peace when I want to stop war? How can I make a difference? I am so painfully aware of the differences of race, class, age and all of the "isms" that tumble around me.

The most poignant moment during the group process for me is when I hear Josh crying out: "You are killing me!" I feel this wound, this separation exploding in the process. These are deep explorations and deeper interactions. Many more questions than answers arise.

*Josh*

I think that every member of our community knows that we are going to process racism when the topic is raised, especially when it is presented as "the denial of racism." Initially, I become excited by the prospect of having this discussion within our group. I know that there will be conflict and want to experience it, and really put this group process stuff to work.

Then my reality sets in. Here I am a twenty-one year old, black male, the only black man in the room, and we are going to talk racism. I am a member of the most criminalized and most sexualized species on the entire face of the earth. White supremacy dictates that as long as I do not labor for whites that I am to be scourged from the human experience, with my women and children left to be colonized. Simply put: My initial excitement leaves me and I begin to feel so tired.

I do not know how I am going to participate in the discussion. I fear that if I express my deep anger and depression that I will be received as violent and need to be suppressed. I also fear that I will injure the feelings of those whites daring to be honest about the impact of whiteness on their lives. Finally, I choose to act on my love for myself and others. I speak my truth regardless of how hard it is to say and how hard it may be to hear. I refuse to further educate those who oppress me. I refuse to justify my right to the purports of the earth. The only statement I remember making during the group process is: "You're killing me!" It is not enough to be aware of racism and its impact - that is only the beginning - we must live our lives in challenge of it.

*Catherine:*

A quote from the flyer states that "*Process Work is based on the assumption that the solution to a problem is contained within the disturbance itself. What appears as an obstacle, when approached with curiosity, openness and awareness skills, becomes an opening for personal and organizational development.*" We are living in the disturbance at this point. I wonder where and when the opening will come. The following day we are scheduled to have an open forum.

## HUMANITY AT THE PRECIPICE: WHAT IS OUR WORK FOR THIS TIME?



We choose the open forum topic offered by Donna Bivens, co-director of WTC . There is clarity and certainty about the question for me. During the process of choosing a facilitator, much like the adolescent game of “spin-the-bottle”, the pen points in my direction. I, or more appropriately some higher awareness part of me steps into the role of facilitator. Perhaps there is something emerging that can answer some of my questions.

I am thrilled when Josh steps forward and generously offers to co-facilitate with me. We continue this journey together as partners.

### *Josh*

As I witness Catherine take the role of facilitator, I feel proud of her for being so brave, especially since I am not feeling so brave. Catherine asks for a co-facilitator and I act on my first reaction to assist my partner, to not allow her to go it alone, and I volunteer to co-facilitate a forum on a topic that I am not sure I fully understand. I decide to act on my instinct to support Catherine, despite my uncertainties. I trust my feeling of connection to her and in *the master plan*.

### *Catherine & Josh:*

We are able to quickly establish an easy way to work together. We experience the connection and trust in this partnership. Somehow the differences between us allow us to have unique perspectives and the process itself becomes a dance – seemingly choreographed. We are in this dance of honoring ourselves, one another and each person in this process. There is space for each and every voice. The group discussion deepens:

- Practice truly honoring each other
- Personal contributions to the war
- Denial – what we are denying?
- Precipice – really being at the edge
- Awareness of what we know
- What are we doing?
- Undoing shame
- 9/11
- Hope for a new order
- Upheaval
- Chaos
- Tension/holding on – letting go
- Emotional aspects of being at the precipice
- Addressing the wounded male
- Inner work/outer action
- Understanding each other’s truths

At one point, one of the participants enacts the precipice and falls over. There is a heavy silence. No-one really expected that. The very real possibility enters the room, we could tumble into extinction. Again, during the process more questions than answers. By the end of the process we are left with this visible and overarching question – **What is MY work for this time?**

*Josh*

Once again for me, reality sets in. Being in front of the group makes me more aware of my difference, particularly in contrast to Catherine. I am being who I am and she being who she is. Between us we establish that I will assist Catherine in her facilitation of the group process. I became very conscious of how we might be perceived by the group. My intention is to be perceived as equal in the process.

I am completely comfortable in the roles we establish together and find us working well together. We are only vessels for the work that needed to occur. Through our co-facilitation, Catherine and I effectively address many of the seminar's intended core learning values, particularly, *"exploring the roles we play in transforming power and rank issues."*

*Catherine*

In a profound way I find one of my answers weeks later during a phone call with Ellen, a process facilitator from Oregon, when she quietly asks me "What does it mean to take care of yourself?" It's the question I have been living for a while. I realize that my answer to "**What is my work for this time?**" is just that. When I take care of myself, I become available for all the rest of the work that presents itself.

### **Roots & Wings – Living the Questions**

In retrospect, we are struck by the experience that we both continue to live. WTC's Mission becomes real for us in this process. *To engage and support women's spiritual leadership, using the power of our deepest values and hopes as a creative force, to strengthen communities, bridge differences, and work for justice throughout society*

We have been supported in deepening spiritual leadership within ourselves, our relationships and our communities. Our process together has been a continuing discovery of how to bridge our differences, find commonality and share it with others.

We have learned much from one another. And THAT continues to lay the foundation for this ongoing work for justice and equity.

By Catherine Seo & Josh Gambrell