

PeerSpirit Newsletter

The Owl and the Tree - November 2018



Dear Friends of PeerSpirit,

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of Christina's father, Leo Baldwin. In this newsletter, Christina touches on the last 12 years of Leo's life, as he made his way to the village of Langley on Whidbey Island. She reflects on his journey by looking at village life as a means of connection, community and healing.

It Takes a Village by Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea

[Leo E. Baldwin 1920 - 2018](#)

It is a commonly said, "It takes a village to raise a child." It also takes a village to hold an elder, support a busy family, carry one another's griefs and joys, and tend to collective well-being.

As we are confronted with the terrors of these times, remembering and practicing "village life" becomes an essential skill. This sense of "re-villaging" emerges spontaneously as we are called together to reaffirm the values of human decency when that same decency is shattered by hatred, violence, racism, and misogyny. In challenging moments, we remember ourselves as villagers and head to the village square to stand together in vigil, or dancing, or weeping. We demand the birthright of our common-unity.

The village is our social DNA. Across time and cultures, the organizational structures of village life are the most stable social unit humanity has ever devised. For tens of thousands of years, whenever a group of people wanders into the same valley and settles down, they make a village. It's not always rosy; the shadow and the light have always been neighbors, but over time, the village sustains itself.



One of the profound aspects of living on Whidbey Island, is watching people (including ourselves 25 years ago) remember how to be villagers. Village structure is designed to care for the needs of both the individual *and* the collective. Villages carry out tasks of governance, social welfare, protection, trade, education, employment, ceremony and kinship.

We immigrants to Whidbey, who are now an overwhelming majority of the folks who live here, often arrive from bigger cities, bigger organizations, grander work or professional aspiration or influence, with a vague longing for something "different." We think we come for the mountain views, the seashore, and a pace stepped back from the relentless bustle of the mainland. Soon, we realize we have landed in a "village" and are invited to re-learn the ways of this foundational community pattern.

In 2006, at the age of 86, Christina's father, Leo, newly widowed from his second marriage, drove cross-country from Silver Spring, Maryland to South Whidbey Island to find home again in the village. It was a good choice for him: we were already established here, and he could return to the Pacific Northwest where he had lived during his college years and wartime service as a conscientious objector; and Whidbey, especially Langley, was reminiscent of the town and valley in western Montana where he'd grown up. Though he had spent most of his life focused on issues in metropolitan areas - hospital funding, social services, senior housing - he was formed by his experience growing up in village life, and settled into twelve years of legacy presence.



Leo Baldwin (Photo by Becky Baldwin)

Watching him reminded many of us how to live in community. Here are the “Essentials according to Leo”:

- Find your place and fully inhabit it.
- Greet and meet and pause for story.
- Invite diversity of acquaintance and friendship.
- Come to the table: eat in companionship, savor and linger.
- Contribute generously from what you have learned along life's way.
- Practice your values and your moral code.
- Live so that you die in the arms of community.



Leo and his dear friend, Helen, in Langley

"Village" is the interconnectedness we intentionally practice day by day by day. It can be found, created, and sustained everywhere. In the village we reach out to one another, practice kindness, choose to accept, find ways to accommodate, even forgive. In the village we hold one another accountable, call one another to our better selves, and renounce the festering of isolation, hatred, and violence. In the village, we define what is tolerable and what is not. We take care of the vulnerable, the children dashing home from school, and the old man tottering downhill to eat lunch among friends, to savor, to linger.

These are precarious and precious times. Find your village. Come home. Be well. And trust the continuity of life.



Memorial to Leo at his favorite local coffee shop