

Globe-trotting artist Anna Elkins teaches hope

BY DIANA COOGLE

Anna Elkins is a blending of pairs: an “empathetic introvert” (her self-description), an artist of both image and word, a teacher and a practitioner of her art, which looks for the good but acknowledges the dark. She enjoys the simplicity of the poet’s life in Jacksonville, where she lives, but is a world traveler and has been to every continent except Antarctica.

This October she heads for Morocco as co-leader of a story-telling workshop arranged by Deep Travel. She is excited about the trip because she enjoys the Moroccan culture (this will be her second trip there), with its gracious hosts and good food, and because the story-telling tradition in Morocco is one of the strongest in the world. She is excited to be giving people this opportunity to learn how to communicate and to listen—to “get at the heart of the human story,” as she puts it. “There are so many misunderstood narratives,” she says, “and understanding narrative is vital to understanding each other.”

The narrative of Anna’s life begins in Montana, a landscape “carved on her heart,” though her family moved to Oregon when she was ten. When she was 18 she had an internship in New York City. Later she lived in a theological commune in the Swiss Alps, where she met a couple for whom she worked as a ghost writer and who took

her to their home in Spain. She has lived in Jacksonville off and on since 2002, “with lots of continents in between.” She finds the Applegate community’s support of the arts and the spaciousness here (as opposed to the urban density of New York) conducive to her life as a poet and artist. Here she can pitch her easel on the porch and paint outside, as she loves to do.

Literary and visual art is at the center of Anna’s narrative. Her BA is in both art and English; her MFA is in creative writing. For her, painting and writing have long been coequal. Painting is a way for the analytical self to take a break. “It’s the one thing I do where I truly lose track of time,” she says, “and it gives me a chance to play.” Writing uses the language side of the brain, the analytical mode. Both painting and writing give her a chance to work with her favorite thing—the line: the way the leaves are blowing, the shape of a leaf, the perfect line that really sings both in the poem and in the painting.

Anna wants her writing to be a gift of encouragement. She doesn’t write about politics but about the state of the world she lives in as she would like it to be. She would like readers and viewers to find in her art encouragement, hope, redemption. She would like the experience of her art to be “as though you went on a journey and came to a



Anna Elkins (pictured above) will return to Morocco in October for a story-telling workshop.

beautiful destination, not sentimental and saccharine, but something bright and beautiful at the end.”

So it’s not surprising to learn that Anna enjoys teaching—informally, not to give a grade but to pull out of students something they didn’t know they had. She likes to teach “prophetic art,” art that calls out the good in a person or circumstance, a way for people to acknowledge, get in touch with, and use creativity. Her purpose as a teacher is to encourage, exhort, and build up.

When Anna was in Chile last spring, she wrote a poem called “Cielo: Heaven, Sky, Air,” about a ride in a funicular up a mountain to the Museo a Cielo Abierto in Valparaiso. “Choose your translation,” she says in the poem:

“The museum of open air? open sky? open heaven?” (She chooses heaven.) She says she felt like she went to Chile to write that poem (which you can read at wordbody.blogspot.com). “That’s what’s beautiful about travel,” she says. “You think you go for one reason and end up writing a funicular poem.”

Anna’s future narrative includes more direct work with writing and art, and less editing. Beyond that, she says, she doesn’t know what it will look like, but she is excited to find out.

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If you would like more information about Anna’s Moroccan workshop in October, please visit www.annaelkins.com/etc/events-and-classes.

‘Inner Revolution’ workshop in Williams

On September 12 and 13, Beth Green will lead a weekend workshop in Williams called “Recipe for the Inner Revolution!” —available in person or online.

“The Inner Revolution is much greater than me, my community, and my personal work,” Beth says. “Before, the revolution was about forcing ‘them’ to change. Now it’s about ‘us,’ realizing that we are co-creating within ourselves, our lives and our societies, the very world that we oppose. Some people think the Inner Revolution is focused only on our inner beings and evolution. But that’s a misunderstanding of the word ‘inner.’ Whether we are looking at our personal ego-based, fear-based behaviors, or confronting the ego-based, fear-based structures, paradigms and actions of our race, religion, gender, social or geographic group, it’s all inner. It’s all about us.”

According to Beth, the Inner Revolution focuses on three ways that we are transforming: (1) Letting go of the paradigms of separation and competition and realizing that we are fundamentally connected. (2) Acknowledging our accountability and taking responsibility for our impact on ourselves, one another, and the earth. (3) Understanding that we need to embrace mutual support, basing our behavior on the

premise that we cannot thrive if the whole is not thriving.

Beth sees the Inner Revolution happening everywhere: kids documenting racism with cell phones, women standing up to guns in Egypt, Americans questioning the way we use prisons and deliver healthcare, and the Pope calling upon us to start focusing less on doctrine and more on caring for people and the earth. To Beth, these actions are not coincidental. They are part and parcel of the Inner Revolution, which requires us to stand up to the tyranny of everything we think we already know.

Workshop participants will spend much of the weekend working in small teams, discussing and creating visions around four primary questions: (1) What needs to be revolutionized in my sphere? (2) What do I have to revolutionize in myself to do it? (3) What do we need to confront in our world for this revolution to occur? (4) How do we do it?

More information about the workshop is available at <http://theinnerrevolution.org/events-calendar/>. Beth is the founder of TheInnerRevolution.org and host of InsideOut: The InnerRevolution on VoiceAmerica.com, Variety Channel.

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