

Grower of Souls

BY LILY MYERS KAPLAN

My first career was born from my love for the earth. Working in a greenhouse, I tended to nature. Planting, propagating and pruning. Feeding and watering. Back then (*long* before marijuana farms) I was called a Grower. Tending to the soul of nature was foundational to my service. Forty years—and several careers—later, I still tend to nature—the inner nature of humans and the essential nature of all beings.

A unifying thread winds through my subsequent careers—from horticulture-therapist to program director, from workshop leader to hospice volunteer manager, and finally, to minister and soul-coach. Death is that thread, a necessary force for transformation.

Transformation is expressed when leaves fallen from trees decay into nutrient-rich compost, feeding seedlings-to-come. It is in the organic flow of seasons—the vitality of summer dying into autumn, then winter, followed by new forms sprouting in spring.

So, too, death-as-transformation is expressed through cycles of human development. Teens die to adolescence in order to become adults. Old patterns of behavior give way to new, healthier ones as we grow. Graduating from college and leaving a job or home requires a death of the old life in order for a new one to be born.

For me it was the actual, real deaths of my family, one right after the other, which stunned, then catalyzed transformation in life-as-I-knew-it. I'd sat beside the deathbed of my father, followed two years later by my mom. Three months after that I ushered my sister across the threshold, then, in nine months, her husband, in a gestational symbolism. I underwent a death of my own after all that loss. Confronting my own mortality, I knew—with the kind of *knowing* that is far more than understanding—how precious it is to be alive. I vowed not to squander my life-force.

The very idea of living more deeply in tandem with nature—honoring its cycles and caring for what I most deeply value—became an urgent call. Putting to rest a life in the vibrant Bay Area, I moved to the equally, yet differently,

vibrant Applegate, where I have mapped these cycles in a Medicine Wheel crafted on my land.

Medicine Wheels are symbolic structures found in native and indigenous cultures world-wide. From the monolithic rock circles of Stonehenge to simpler, non-intrusive footprints left by native peoples in North America, Medicine Wheels often look much like wagon wheels lying on their sides—spokes marking each of the four cardinal directions. Built with natural objects gathered from the lands upon which they rest, they symbolize wholeness.

The wheel on our land has, at its center, a pole reaching to the sky, surrounded by a single circle creating a center-place filled with objects—simple offerings from friends who recognize the potency that has gathered there. They recognize it as a place that honors all life—human and other-than-human—and its inherent cycles.

Walking the trail to this wheel, this place here in the Applegate, I know that no matter what is stirring in me or in the hearts of those who join me, we will remember that in the east there is always and forevermore a new beginning—a sunrise, spring, and birth or rebirth. I take solace in recounting that, in the south, the place of high noon, heat, summer, and adolescence, there will always be new ones to bring renewal and a fresh perspective to the world. In the west, the place of sunset, and the maturation of autumn, I find acceptance of death and its necessity for growth or change. I often stand in the north, the place of deepest night, winter, and rest—where the reflective quality of budding elderhood soothes my 60-something self amid a culture which celebrates youth.

My life no longer centers on careers—more importantly it centers upon purpose—mine and others'—and the renewal of seeds that are hidden below the surface. I take my place in the circle, carrying my personal mission and supporting others to honor theirs. Looking back to my beginning as a Grower, I recognize this truth: that I am a Grower still—a Grower of Souls.

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Unexpected visitor

BY BARBARA ELLIS

One spring day I was on the deck, soaking in the exhilarating energies of renewed life. Enjoying the relaxation, I stretched forward as I remained seated and, for a brief moment, my gaze angled downward. Just then, a small winged creature alit on the strap of my sandal.

My first impression—admittedly, a very telling one of my human perspective—was that this critter was ugly. Knowing better, I immediately redirected my thoughts to the beauty that had to be the true essence of this visitor. While welcoming it, I also thanked it for respectfully avoiding direct contact with my skin!

When I engaged in intuitive communication, my guest seemed mildly surprised, but not so startled as to beat a hasty retreat. I was in no hurry and neither, evidently, was it. We lounged peacefully while absorbing and becoming acquainted with one another's energy. Once I sensed an adequate level of comfort, I asked for permission to view it more closely—unless that would be received as a disrespectful intrusion. With its consent, I gently raised my still-sandaled foot. Closer inspection confirmed the creature's six legs and two antennae. Perhaps an inch long, its back looked like that of a flat-shelled water turtle; it was dark green, speckled with black, and fringed uniformly around the edges. Now I was genuinely able to admire its physical beauty, in addition to its profound inner beauty. Yet I still expressed gratitude for its courtesy of remaining perched exclusively on the fabric of my shoe.

Though my primary focus was on my new friend, I couldn't refrain from feeling awed by the vibrancy of color I had already been enjoying in the vicinity. It occurred to me to ask this being if it experienced comparable appreciation of such joyful displays of nature. Yes, it replied, but not in the same manner as people do. Rather than a predominantly visual affectation, its species takes in the exquisite emotion or feeling evoked from the bountiful colors of the natural world. Furthermore, it seems to compartmentalize the various feelings in different locations within its physical form. Wow! I paused to imagine

this type of experience. As foreign as it struck me, there would be some definite advantages. Beyond the poignancy of undiluted emotion, which could be almost incomprehensibly delightful, the separation of feelings could alleviate the debilitating chaos that results from tumultuous concurrent emotions.

I decided to ask my visitor if it would like to extend a message to a larger audience. Belying its steadfast stillness, this critter exuded elation at the prospect of the invitation. Might this be the purpose of the encounter? It reveled in the idea of sharing that which it had guided me to perceive experientially in a matter of mere seconds. Here's the challenge: how do I verbally express that which is so foreign to the common human experience as to not have words allocated for it within our languages? My best attempt will inevitably fall woefully short of an accurate portrayal. Nevertheless, here goes. Color, or light in general, is multidimensional to the extent that I literally stepped into it, as if into a whole new world. It surrounded me in relative closeness yet did not even begin to feel stifling. I found myself reaching out to touch that which I would not have recognized as light from my conventional experience. It was gorgeous. It was fluid, moving in graceful undulations, almost like breathing, although less rhythmically regimented. Its composition included changing contours. I gleaned an impression of texture, as well, but this surreal-seeming event came to a conclusion before I could get any idea of potentially apt similes. The world of light into which I momentarily entered felt intricate without being garish. Again, I wish that I possessed the ability to articulate the experience well enough for you to perceive it as your own.

Let me assure you that I am of entirely sound mind. I was under the influence of neither intoxicants nor mind-altering drugs. Such an "organic" high is provided from Nature itself and available for all. It is the feeling of pure connection with others' inspirational perceptions and wisdom.

Barbara Ellis
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Wilfred Louis Simendinger 1920 – 2015

Wilfred Louis Simendinger, who lived for more than 30 years on Upper Applegate Road in Jacksonville, passed away on Saturday, December 19, 2015, from natural causes.

Wil grew up in Summerhill, Pennsylvania, and served in the US Navy during World War II. He worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad before and after serving in the navy.

After moving to La Mirada, California, he was a city councilman and mayor for 11 years and worked for



Wilfred Louis Simendinger
on his 94th birthday on
September 10, 2015.

AT&T for over 30 years. He and his wife Rachel, one of the founders of Ruch Library, were avid Los Angeles Dodger fans. They also loved backpacking and fishing.

Wil collected, displayed and operated antique toy trains, and will be remembered by the local Applegate Train Club. He also will be remembered for his work as president of the McKee Bridge Historical Society to help save the

historic McKee Bridge. Wil is survived by daughter Terry and sons Mark and Tim Simendinger. Wil

left seven grandchildren: granddaughters Rachel Stull, Ellie Brink, Anna Baker, and Rebecca Bramnick, and grandsons Ben, Luke, and Chad Simendinger. He also left nine great-grandchildren: Peter and Isabella Stull; Addison, Emelia, Elliot, and Charlee Baker; Sydney and Maddox Brink; and Malia Simendinger.

Wil's ashes will be interred next to his wife of over 50 years, Rachel Sorrells Simendinger, at Eagle Point National Cemetery in Eagle Point, Oregon.

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— NOTICE —

The Community Calendar, usually found on this page, has been temporarily relocated to our website at www.applegater.org. We hope to return the calendar to this location in the near future.

ONLINE ARTICLE

Visit our website to read a timeless article, "Riparian ecosystems: At your service," by the late Tim Franklin, written while he was project manager at Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council.