



From Luxury into the Forrest

I love exploring other cultures. It interests me to observe how people live and choose to spend their time and money. I like to see how they decorate their homes and how they relate to others and life in general. I am as intrigued exploring how people live with a bare minimum such as in a ti-pi, or in a luxury home.

Eliane and I were fortunate to have been invited into Jane Pauli's prestigious and meticulously kept home. Her house even had a private beach on the Willamette river! This home was the complete opposite of my little brick 1800's rental home in Belgium.

I had never entered a home with snow white carpets before. Many large windows invited nature's bountiful beauty into the home. The living and dining rooms had

several curio cabinets containing beautiful crystal figurines reflecting rainbows when exposed to the sunlight. Everything was clean and neat. This felt very refreshing to me! It gave me a feeling of inner peace and abundance. Jane offered us complete use of all of the house and grounds.

A home with air conditioning? This was another first for me. I do not remember any home that had air-conditioning in Belgium. The homes are build of brick and keep cool in the summer. When the sun finally arrived in Belgium, I welcomed the warmth with open arms and wanted to feel the sun rays before they disappeared again. I preferred opening all windows and let as much warm wind and sunlight come in. Now, living in America for more then 20 years, I understand why air conditioning can be such a life saver in some places and as valuable as having heat in the winter.

Because of Jane's air conditioned home, I preferred sitting outside in the sun on the large terrace, overseeing the garden and the Willamette river, feeling the heat of the sun on my skin.



The large wooden staircase invited us down to the little private beach. On the other side of the river was a wooded island. We enjoyed watching people with boats, canoe's and jet-ski's being free out in the sun on the water and having lots fun. Also the squirrels, which we do not often encounter in Belgium were bountiful and right there with us. They were not intimidated by us humans sharing this space in nature.

Eliane and I discovered and enjoyed the large relax-reclining chairs with handle and rotating options. Gosh, so many amazing gadgets in this house. One of my favorite things was checking out those large American fridges. One side with freezer and ice maker and on the other side was the fridge with two big open doors. Amazingly, those huge fridges were mostly filled completely. In Belgium we had smaller fridges, the containers of the items were smaller and you only buy a few things because the shops are close by, for most people even in walking distance. We bought smaller quantities and never really added ice to our drinks, except maybe in the summer when it was really hot. I loved taking pictures of those large fridges.

On our first day at the house, Jane was giving us a tour and was offering us options for bedrooms. Unexpectedly, she introduced us to the gun room. I felt strongly intimidated walking into this room. I did not know what to think or feel in that moment. I had never seen so many guns together, and that in a home! Rifles, shotguns, revolvers and pistols were displayed behind safety glass cases on the wall. This collection of firearms were all

owned by her previous husband. Jane explained some history of the guns and where they were coming from and what they were used for. In my Belgian upbringing and conditioning, I was told that guns had only one purpose which was to wage wars, kill and generate fear. Which is logical because of the experiences my parents and grandparents had in World War I and World War II. The Belgian people and country were severally ravished in both wars. When I was a child even toy guns were prohibited in our home. Hearing Jane's stories and her own perceptions and experiences with guns opened up something in my awareness. It raised some questions in my mind. Her relationship with guns was totally different, not based in fear and trauma.

Now I was introduced to a different kind of perception and experiences with guns. I didn't make any of it wrong or right. It surprised me that there was another way of relating to guns. What I did decide in that moment was that I was not going to sleep in a room full of firearms. I am too sensitive to energies and guns was not something I wanted to go to bed with and wake up to. I told Jane my preference and I was granted a different bedroom.



Jane invited us to a unique musical concert experience in the park and we visited the Multnomah Falls in the Columbia gorge. It was fun to have Eliane to share these experiences with. Our relationship was open and fun and full of adventure. We still cherish our beautiful and loving bond to this day. I had no idea at that time that the Multnomah Falls would become a very regular staple in my future life!

The day arrived! We were ready to leave our luxury home behind and spend a week in the forest. We would be emerged in a rustic lifestyle in nature. I loved the contrast!

BREITENBUSH, HERE WE COME!



Jane was a working nurse and was not able to join us at the retreat. Also Tommy and Leslie were not able to attend but gracefully offered to drive Eliane and I to and from Breitenbush. During this beautiful two hour drive through the forests and mountains, the four of us, were getting to know each other better. We discussed the differences and similarities between our cultures. We explored and contrasted our habits and belief systems.

As I was absorbing all these new impressions and experiences, I was still aware of my habitual internal uneasiness. I could feel where in my body and mind I felt restricted. It felt like an inner prison not able to fully feel free. The ultimate purpose of this journey and my greatest desire was to become more conscious and more comfortable in my own being. And to brake free from this inner prison.

We arrived at the parking lot! Breitenbush Hot Springs is a remote forest sanctuary on 154 acres surrounded by a national forest on the western flanks of Mount Jefferson. This pristine natural and beautiful mountain setting is blessed with abundant hot springs, a glacier-fed river and ancient old growth forest.

It is a place unencumbered by digital distractions. There was only one telephone available on the property for emergencies. The ideal environment to heighten a deeper connection with the natural world and with myself.

Perfect! That is exactly why I singed up!

Tommy and Leslie were familiar with Breitenbush and we were grateful for their guidance. At the office we received all the details of our stay. Eliane had a private room in the lodge. I was sharing a cabin with three women I did not know yet. The rustic cabins were nestled among towering Douglas firs and were originally constructed around 1930. All of the buildings were heated by the geo-thermal waters piped through them to keep them warm and cozy year-round.

Some cabins provided sinks and toilets. I was informed we didn't have a toilet in our cabin, but would be shown where the communal bathhouses were. Hmm, I thought. I will have to walk in the woods by myself in the night to go to use the bathhouse toilet! I quickly flashed back to my fearful Totem Initiation in the girl scouts. Fortunately, here the toilets were close by and the pathways were lighted. I had heard about bears being present in the area. Having a buddy to team up with didn't sound like a bad idea to me! I quickly concluded that a flashlight and a room mate buddy would be the best way to brave the forest in the middle of the night.



Tommy and Leslie hugged us good bye, promising us they would be back at the end of the retreat to give us a ride back to Jane's home. At the office we received a map over-viewing the whole terrain. A guide offered to show us around, starting with the historic lodge which is the center of activity at Breitenbush, also built around 1930. I noticed the large wooden decks with wooden tables and launching chairs where people were enjoying reading their books or soaking up the sun. We were shown the dining room, the large event space and the two libraries for relaxing and reading. The lobby was obvious a popular gathering place and I noticed a chalk board listing the daily well-being activities.



Our guide opened the doors of the dining room and we walked in. Bountiful, organic, vegetarian meals are served in buffet style three times daily, she said. You may also request egg-free, dairy-free and gluten-free meals. A first

bell will ring throughout the grounds to inform you the food will be served shortly followed by the second bell to which you can enter the dining hall and enjoy your meal. I was getting hungry and was looking forward to my first highly reputable Breitenbush meal. I was so happy to be there!

Our guide went on explaining that the Breitenbush community was off-grid. They had their own hydroelectric power plant and generate their own electricity from the Breitenbush river. Because they have limited capacity, they asked us not to bring devices that consume high amounts of electricity, such as electric teapots, hair dryers or hot plates. They also managed domestic water and waste water requirements.

Let me guide you now to the hot springs, our guide suggested. That was what I really wanted to see and experience! Frank had mentioned that the hot springs, with their hot, soothing mineral waters, have been a place of gathering, rejuvenation, healing and relaxation for centuries. It's another highlight that motivated me to experience this trip to America.

Silently we walked towards the three natural pools lined with smooth river rocks. Our guide explained that the one in the far distance was designated as a "silent" pool for quiet, contemplative soaking. It overlooked the river below. The other two allowed for conversation. All were overlooking a meadow and provided views of the surrounding mountains.



The pools were held in a spirit of respect and sanctuary and were for clothing optional soaking. Please go in whichever way you feel most comfortable, our guide suggested, the clothing optional policy does not extend beyond the pools. We quietly approached the first pool, keeping some distance as to respect the privacy. I noticed that all people were naked. A bench next to the pool provided a dry place to place your clothes and towel. It all felt very natural, relaxing and respectful.

On our walk back towards the lodge, we were shown the steam sauna. No one was in there at the moment, which gave us the opportunity to take a quick peak inside. The cedar cabin perched above steaming waters with steam rising through slots in the floor. Very interesting and cleverly designed I thought! Outside on the deck was a tub flowing with cold river water for plunging.



We are getting close to lunch hour, there is so much more to see and experience here, our guide informed us while displaying the map in front of us. After lunch feel free to explore the grounds at your own leisure.

When you go down this path, pointing her finger on the map, you will find the medicine wheel with the four direction tubs for more soaking options. Each tub is aligned in the four cardinal directions, North, East, West, South and vary in temperature from warm to very hot. Adjoining them is a deep cedar tub brimming with cold water for a brisk plunge. I wasn't too excited about those cold plunge options. I love to heat up my body and stay warm. Shocking my body with a cold plunge doesn't sound much fun to me. But who knows, I might try it. It's probably good for the body and feels refreshing.

Pointing her finger on the map again she said, when you pass the four tubs, you will walk towards the labyrinth. A meditative walk to the center of the labyrinth is a journey to

one's own center, enhanced by the song of the nearby river. The Breitenbush labyrinth, outlined in river rocks, is modeled after the nave at the famous Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France.



And you can walk the miles of trails that radiate from Breitenbush into the surrounding forests. Our trails, “The Gorge,” “Spotted Owl,” “Emerald Forest,” “Devils Peak” and “Inner Path” lead through ancient forest cathedrals, past river cascades and on to magnificent mountain vistas. If you do walk deeper into the woods, I suggest you do not go by yourself. Have a buddy with you, or even better go in group. There are occasionally bears seen in the woods. The bears are usually not a problem because they are more afraid of humans than humans are of them. The one exception to this rule of thumb is to never go between a mother bear and her cub. Enjoy your time here at Breitenbush!

The first meal bell rang. I was hungry and so excited to experience my first Breitenbush meal! Frank and many others had promised me, the meals were part of the incredible experience! I hurried to the main lodge and found the end of the line that was forming in front of the closed dining hall doors. I recognized many people from our group and started conversations. We were all excited for this adventure. The second bell rang. The doors were opened and we all filed in.



Mieke's Voice 2020©Mieke Benton
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(Sharing permitted with my name and email included)
(With a simple email let me know if you like
to be added or removed from this list).

Mieke's Voice - Part 1

- Week 1 - Introduction - My early life
- Week 2 - A Rough Start
- Week 3 - Vision
- Week 4 - History Lesson
- Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia
- Week 6 - Invisible Hand
- Week 7 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 1 - My parents Anny & Hugo
- Week 8 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 2 - My brother Jeroen
- Week 9 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 3 - My sister Kathleen
- Week 10 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 4 - Something about myself, Mieke
- Week 11 - Encounters with extraterrestrials
- Week 12 - The Movie E.T. - The Extra -Terrestrial
- Week 13 - What happens after the body dies?

Mieke's Voice - Part 2

- Week 14 - Introduction - Relationships
- Week 15 - Expressing my authentic nature
- Week 16 - Sexuality - part 1 - Unity
- Week 17 - Sexuality - part 2 - Separation
- Week 18 - Sexuality - part 3 - Menstruation
- Week 19 - Intimate Relationships
- Week 20 - America - part 1 - Newspaper Article
- Week 21 - America - part 2 - Stepping into a movie
- Week 22 - Another taste of freedom as a college student
- Week 23 - Riding the waves, both high and low
- Week 24 - A Holistic approach to healing
- Week 25 - Overnight resident counselor in a high school
- Week 26 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 1
- Week 27 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 2
- Week 28 - Totem Initiation
- Week 29 - Extra Freedom and Independence
- Week 30 - First Wake-up call
- Week 31 - Second Wake-up call
- Week 32 - Home Ter Linde

Mieke's Voice - Part 3

- Week 33 - Introduction - Learning to Love myself

Week 34 - My last cigarette!
Week 35 - I know there is somebody out there!
Week 36 - Center Gea - The Power of Sound
Week 37 - Moroccan Flavors
Week 38 - Nightly Procedure

Mieke's Voice - Part 4

Week 39 - Introduction - Our paths coming together
Week 40 - Special Announcement in Center Gea
Week 41 - Meeting Frank Coppieters
Week 42 - Portland Bridges and Dinner
Week 43 - Belgians and Americans meet
Week 44 - From Luxury into the Forest