



Hot Springs and Sweat Lodge

Many powerful activities were in store for us that week in Breitenbush. Besides the many groups activities and processes we were going to do, Frank assured us, there would be plenty of time to relax. Soaking in the hot springs, making walks in the forest, be with the river, taking naps. Doing those things which makes us feel good in the moment was part of the agenda.

My first free time I headed straight towards the hot springs. Soaking in open air, relaxing in the soothing warm waters of mother nature herself sounded so powerful and healing. The

idea of exposing my naked body to the sun and the moonlight and feeling the wind brushing against my skin sounded like heaven to me.

With my towel around my neck I approached the three hot pools and noticed several naked bodies emerged in the warm waters. Which pool shall I go in first, I wondered? I chose to approach the pool with the least people in it. My body felt very excited for the experience and at the same time my mind felt discomfort and nervousness. My common sense said, It's wonderful to be out here naked in nature. We are all born with a beautiful and miraculous body in which to experience life. I could feel my mind was conditioned otherwise. Instead I felt the entrained shame, fear, worry and insecurities bubbling up. Why am I feeling that, I wondered? Why are we taught to be ashamed of our body, to fear being naked and judge it? I realized I wasn't as relaxed taking my clothes off in the open.

I felt the sacredness of the place and the invitation of mother earth to enjoy all she has to offer. I quickly took off my clothes and allowed my body to emerge in the soothing warm waters. AHHHHH, that felt so good! I felt the tension in my body and the worry in my thoughts soften gently. I closed my eyes and sank my whole body into the warm soothing water. I was nurtured by the earth, welcomed by the forest and acknowledged by the deer grazing around us. I felt free and connected with nature and with myself.

During that week, being naked in the waters became very natural. Each of us with our unique and beautiful body shape, color and form. My mind relaxed. It felt good, safe and very sacred.

Free time and groups sessions were alternating in a very supportive way. Els and Joost, the Belgian teachers and Frank and Marilyn, the American teachers provided a safe and relaxed space for our inner processes and journeys to occur. Powerful group-work provided a way for us all to open up, to heal and expand our awareness about ourselves and each other.



Forest Shelter groups picture

In this picture you see me sitting at the bottom. Paul is sitting above me in his white shirt, Christopher sits on his lap and Angela is standing up. Eliane sits behind Paul. At the time this picture was taken, Paul and I had not yet had significant interactions with each other.

The group had gathered in the Forest Shelter. Each of us were about to receive a unique name. Our teachers received in meditation a unique name for each person in the group. I was very curious what my name would be! I opened my envelope I was given and read in big letters “Starshower”. Which to this day I still use as my email address. Paul and the Children also received their names. From the three children,

only Andrew remembers his name, “Wizards of the Seven Sacred Pools”, “Sound of the Divine” was Paul’s name. In retrospect I realized that the class I followed in Centrum Gea “The Power of Sound” would powerfully guide me to my soul mate and future partner “Sound of the Divine”. Beautiful isn’t it!



Picture Paul receiving his name

Before our Breitenbush retreat I had never heard about a sweat lodge. I was honored to be able to participate in this sacred Native American ceremony. I was curious and a bit nervous, but the excitement and intrigue overpowered my anxiety. Our group gathered in front of the already set up lodge which was made out of tree branches and covered with lots of blankets, so that no light could penetrate and the heat stayed inside. The door was facing East, as is traditional. Every detail and action involved in the ceremony had a sacred

meaning and intent. With our group, we discussed the basic etiquette and rituals of the ceremony.



Sandra (Belgian) and Margie Carlson (American) were the fire keepers and were holding the space outside of the sweat lodge. They prepared, built and tended the fire for hours until the many stones were so hot it looked like they just cooled from magma.



Group preparing for the Sweat Lodge

While we were gathered in front of the sweat lodge, we were told that the fire keepers would incrementally bring hot glowing rocks into the sweat lodge over the course of four rounds. Each round honoring a cardinal direction (North, South, East, West) which has its spiritual meaning, well known in the Native American tradition. Prayers for ourselves, for our families and friends, for the earth, for Breitenbush and for the native ancestors who had a sacred connection to the place were included in the ceremony.

This sacred ceremony was intended to elicit a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual purification. Drumming and chanting would also be part of the experience. We connected this ceremony to the rest of our work we would be doing later in the week such as a rebirthing session in the healing waters.

They explained to us that the door of the sweat lodge would be opened long enough to bring in new hot stones but not allow the heat to escape. The water pourer was sitting inside the lodge next to the door and would be pouring water onto the rocks, which creates the steam. The medicine person would be throwing medicinal herbs on the rocks as well. They would be calling and praying to the spirits who then speak to us with their wisdom.

Every participant was cleansed in a smudging ceremony before entering the lodge. We were asked to enter in silence. Most people went in naked, so did I. Many brought a towel. We sat down closely together in an inner and outer circle around the central pit where the hot stones would be deposited.

We were ready. Everyone was in place. The fire keepers brought in the first hot red glowing stones and closed the flaps of the door. In no time we were sitting in the dark. I could hear the breath of others and the crackling of the stones. I felt the bare arms of the people sitting next to me touching mine. As the water hit the stones, a loud sizzling sound filled the lodge followed with a penetrating heat of the steam. I was getting really hot and short of breath. I did not feel relaxed. My mind got anxious and didn't know what to expect.

As the ceremony went on, I felt more and more uncomfortable. The heat was hitting me hard. Because of my discomfort I was not able to feel the sacredness in the moment. I did my best to talk myself into relaxation which didn't work very well. I held myself strong.

We were told If anyone wanted to leave the sweat lodge they could do so in between the rounds when the door opened. I didn't want to give into my minds fears and uneasiness. I wanted to experience the ceremony fully. The doors opened. With every round, I braved myself into staying inside the lodge. Into the fourth round I really had a hard time. Bigger and bigger stones were brought in and more and more steam burned into my skin and lungs. Also the chanting was increasing. I really wanted to get out. I was fighting my own mind. My heart was beating very heavily. I decided to move towards the edges of the lodge and lay down on the ground. I pushed my nose towards the edges where the blankets that were covering the lodge touched the ground. A tiny bit of cooler air was touching my nose. This gave me some relieve. I lay there for a while.

Finally the door opened for the last time, cold air rushed in. Finally it was over!!! I waited my turn and rapidly exited. It was such a relieve to feel the cold air on my skin and the fresh air penetrating my lungs. I had no idea what to expect going into the sweat lodge experience. I for sure did not count on suffering! (*)



Breitenbush River and Forest

The following days I spend my free time alternating between the hot springs, walking the labyrinth, venturing into the woods and relaxing at the river. I love the sound of rivers and waterfalls. It always brings me inner peace and relaxation. Many people had built rock sculptures and we added a few ourselves. The connection I felt there with nature was real and welcomed. The weather was amazing and many new friendships were made! My experience in Breitenbush had been very powerful so far. I wondered what else they had in store for us this week!



Eliane making a rock sculpture

Paul's experience:

When my children and I arrived at Breitenbush, which was our first time there, we were oriented and shown to our cabin which had four beds and a bathroom.

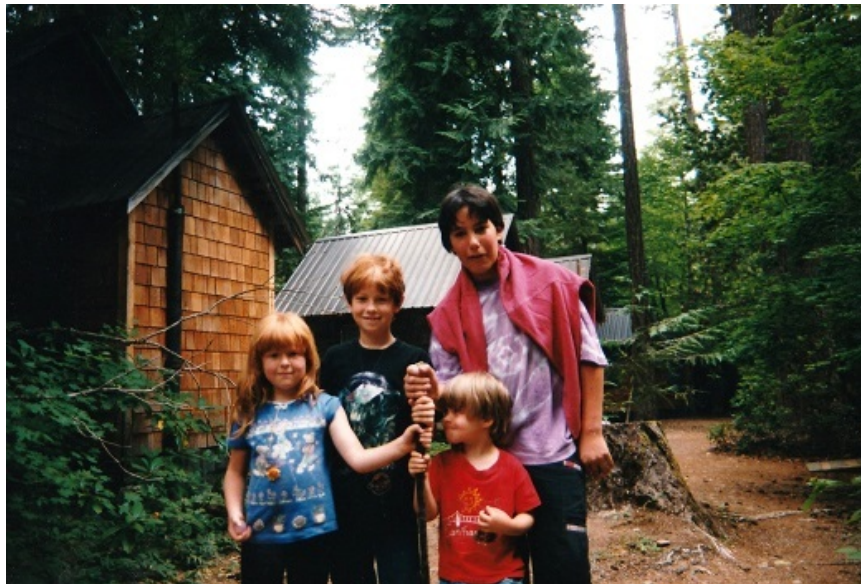
I have always enjoyed soaking in hot springs and took advantage anytime I had free time by myself and without the children.

I felt slightly anxious to be naked in the hot springs with these people from a different culture, but that dissolved quickly. I had become comfortable with being naked in groups through my experiences with the Human Awareness Institute.

While I was facilitating the young children in our group I allowed each young person to choose their own level of

comfort. When we went to Devils Hole, which was a small stream and swimming hole on the property, most of the children chose to wear no clothes. They didn't seem to have the same body issues as the adults.

The child care duties were a lot of fun. There were nine children that made up the child care program. Five of the children made up the Belgian contingency and four were American. The presence of the Belgian twelve year old Angelo, who acted as Dutch-English interpreter, eased all of the communications between the American and Belgian children.



Angela, Andrew, Christopher and Angelo

We spend time playing games in the field. We created adventurous journeys into the woods and down by the river. By far their favorite place to hang out and swim was Devils Hole.

In the sweat lodge ceremony I managed to endure for the first three rounds. The hot steam burned my nostrils and lungs

and made my breathing extremely difficult. At one point I felt that if I stayed in I would not survive. When the door was opened for the fourth round, I chose to leave.

Except for the sweat lodge, my experience of Breitenbush was exceptional. The food which was grown and prepared on the premises was plentiful and delicious. The encounters with the Belgian contingent was incredibly enjoyable and fascinating.

I felt the whole groups energy becoming more and more cohesive as the week progressed. I was making new friends that continued to be a joyful part of my life even to this day.



Footnotes

(*) The year following Breitenbush I was invited to another sweat lodge. This time in Belgium. Thinking back on my first experience, I didn't want to repeat the suffering again. I

thought about it for a while and despite my first experience, I decided to accept the invitation. I knew now the basics of the ceremony and thought I would be more prepared. I hoped for a more tolerable experience the second time. Which was not the case. Again I suffered but this time I decided to get out sooner. I also decided in that moment that suffering is not what I want more of in my life. I decided to start doing more things that bring me joy and skip the suffering.

In preparation of writing this episode I sought counsel of two of my wise and experienced friends [Frank Coppieters](#) and [Lionel Kitpu'se Pinn](#). I asked for clarification around the native sweat lodge ceremony.

These are Lionel's words of wisdom:

Every man and woman are taught their ceremonies by the people they trust most. We all have our Teachers. As wishy-washy as it sounds, I do respect everyone's view point. I try my very best to stay as true as possible to my Teachers.

However, in all heart truth and with age, I have come to realize that life is way too short to overthink our heart. There is no doubt, you specifically were not given enough information to know what to think, feel or say about your ceremonies. I've been guilty of the same thing. Should be lots of Q&A before and after.

The ceremony itself (the now) is that "Teacher" part that needs to be heeded to as best as humanly and spiritually possible. This means putting your trust in the lodge leader, pourer, medicine person. Sometimes meeting them for the first time. This is really, really the most important part of the

ceremony. Trust!

There is a shadow and a light part of the lodge. An Inside-out, hot-cool, joy and pain. I am very familiar with the pain and suffering lodges. In fact, my Mik'maq sweat lodge ceremonies are the most difficult lodges I've ever snuggled up the earth with.

I've been so blessed to have sat with many brothers and sisters of the lodge in my life. We make family in those shadows. The lodge itself has cursed me, blessed me, surprised me and saved me. Your lodge experience is an important part of your life. I've heard the analogy, birthing or reborn kind of power and it is for some others less but both are part of the necessary shadow and light of our existence.

*Peace On the Journey!
Lionel*

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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
or like to receive an email will all
previous episodes on PDF

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

Week 45 - Hot Springs and Sweat Lodge