

Preparing People for Climate Change in the Pacific Northwest

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Portland, Oregon

Presenter: Jennifer Gordon, Ph.D., Jungian analyst

Panel Discussion on How Climate and Environmental Organizations in the PNW Can Integrate Building Human Resilience into their Internal Operations and External Activities

1. How 350 Eugene helps members build resilience for the emotional distress of our work
2. How I help the people I work with build personal, psycho-social-spiritual resilience

I decided to become active in 350 Eugene after I attended their first public event held at the University of Oregon campus on Earth Day, 2014. The event featured nature writer and philosopher, Kathleen Dean Moore. Kathleen invoked the image of a rapidly flowing river whose force cannot be held back to describe the inevitable environmental devastation that is happening due to global warming. The river can, however, change its course if we begin to throw stones and tree branches into its bed to create eddies and side channels. In other words, we can mitigate the damage of climate destruction when we become active and begin to do something about it. There is reason for hope.

As I walked home from her lecture, I struggled with my own feelings of fear and despair and helplessness. A part of me wanted to deny that I was feeling any of these 'dark emotions'. At the same time, I felt an uprising in myself. I had to admit that, if I continued to keep my head in the sand, I would be among those who are maintaining the problem. I remembered the words of Swiss psychiatrist, C.G. Jung, who said: "What the world hangs on is a thin thread and that is the psyche of man". I knew I had to wake up and take a stand even at the risk of it not making a difference. I decided – then and there– to simply show up. One thing led to the next and here I am.

Thank you, Bob, for the invitation to be on this panel and for being a catalyst for transformational resilience through your leadership.

As I was walking home, with Kathleen's words still lingering in my mind and on my heart, I wondered if the methods of my trade, as a Jungian analyst, might help us find a way out of this mess. These methods include dream interpretation and active imagination. Both methods give us access to the creative unconscious and to its rich source of symbols. During times of great need, dreams offer us guidance. They are a tremendous resource for healing emotional, social, and spiritual distress.

When someone comes to me for psychotherapy, I typically ask myself three questions. We can apply these same questions to our common dilemma.

One, is there an image or story that reflects our emotional situation?

Stories act as a container for our own personal and collective experiences, and often provide clues for how to deal with impossible situations.

Two, is there a dream that might come to our aid?

"Big dreams", sometimes called "tribal dreams", come through individuals yet are meant for a larger audience. When we take them to heart, they, too, can guide us through impossible situations.

Three, what value, or purpose, might this experience hold for us personally and as a community.

During the summer of 2014, I led a fairytale seminar in which we drew parallels between the images in the story and contemporary life. I chose the tale of Hansel and Gretel. As you might recall, the point of greatest tension in the story is when the witch asks our heroine Gretel to check the oven to see if it is hot enough. Gretel perceives the witch's intention to cook her first before her brother, Hansel, who is looking on from behind the bars of the cage he sits in.

Gretel plays naïve and asks the witch to show her how to check the oven. Clever Gretel uses the moment to push the witch into the fire and bolt the iron door shut.

As we sat with this imagery, everyone in the group felt the stark truth that we are facing a similar moment: indeed, we are experiencing a shared GRETTEL MOMENT.

In that moment, Gretel is saying NO to being devoured by an insatiable witch and she is saying YES to saving her brother's life as well as her own.

Similarly, in this moment, we must say NO to that which threatens to kill us. For instance, we must say NO to insatiable greed, NO to a culture of white supremacy, NO to denial, and we need to say YES to an ethic of caring for each other and to life itself. And so on.

Gretel shows us how to act decisively and with courage when the moment presents itself. We can likewise feel emboldened to do the same.

So, yes, there are stories that reflect our circumstances, showing us how to navigate critical junctions.

To the second question, is there a dream that might come to our aid?

In December, 2014, my colleague, Tess Castleman, and I led an urban dream group retreat in Eugene. 18 Oregonians sat in a dream circle, holding the space for a tribal dream: one that is meant for the group to hear. Sure enough, one person's dream held the healing symbol of THE GREEN MAN that spoke to all of us. How many of you are familiar with the image of a man's face appearing through bushes and other vegetation? It is an image that appears across cultures, over centuries, symbolizing rebirth, oneness with the Earth, the light in nature (or, *lumen naturae*), the principle of regeneration and hope. As a symbol, it invokes emotion and energy that can be used to transform darkness into light and apathy into movement. In fact, climate change is forcing us to relate to nature in a different way. The Green Man invites an attitude of reverence and play. It personifies a new value to guide our way.

Dream circles provide a valuable resource we can rely upon to grow our resilience. Community organizing is another.

I feel privileged to be representing 350 Eugene at this conference and I am eager to share with you some of the ways this organization has provided, and continues to provide, emotional support to its membership.

"What can one person do about climate change? Stop being one person and join the movement!" I first heard these words from Patty Hine, one of the co-founders of 350 Eugene. Together with Deb McGee and Mary DeMocker, their amazing and persistent leadership has helped to create a safe and welcoming organization. We have many campaigns and activities

that individuals can jump into according to their interests and talents. By becoming a contributing member of a larger community the emotional needs we have for connection and belonging are met. By simply showing up at quarterly meetings to learn about the campaigns, our feelings of vulnerability and distress find channels for constructive expression. We find common ground as participants in a huge cultural shift and gain strength in our relationships with each other.

Here are three ways 350 Eugene promotes emotional and social resilience:

1. First, we hold quarterly meetings. As one who jumped in to help with hospitality, I can tell you that we moved from providing simple beverages and snacks to offering full-scale potlucks. Sitting down and sharing good food together promotes feelings of well-being, kinship and equality. Alongside literal nourishment, we celebrate our accomplishments and review upcoming events. From there, we break out into smaller groups to work on projects together. Projects like making art for parades, or planning trips to Southern Oregon to stop the LNG pipeline, or working on the divestment campaign, or preparing testimony to give at the next City Council meeting about implementing the Climate Recovery Ordinance. At the end of the evening, we return to the larger group, stand in a circle, hold hands and sing songs. Sometimes we go around the circle and each state a feeling word as a way to close. All of this builds an atmosphere of inclusion, safety, and respect.
2. Second, we create 'Affinity Groups' for people who are engaging in non-violent direction action projects like "Break Free" in Anacortes, Washington, held in May of 2016. Members in "Affinity Groups" provide support for those who take the risk of being arrested.

In Anacortes, this coordination of effort and teamwork buffered some of the fear and hardship that resulted from taking such action.

When our members returned, it was important to recognize that the action was

really difficult. As one woman began to describe her experience, she got a terrible migraine headache and needed to go to urgent care. Another's experience spilled over into creating tension within her primary relationship at home.

We learned that people need to know what the trauma response looks like and so, in February of this year, 350 Eugene sponsored a day-long Non-Violent Direct Action training that addressed a variety of concerns, roles and skillsets needed for successful outcomes.

One of the break-out sessions was specifically on 'Emotional Support'. I volunteered to lead this hour-long group, twice during the day, and I think it's significant that 80 of the 300 participants chose to attend.

3. Third, 350 Eugene values and brings in the arts. We make art for parades and protests – The Raging Grannies sing, and we bring in poets, musicians and film makers for fundraisers. These provide great ways to honor emotions, raise consciousness and deliver symbolic political messages. They are also fun and bring joy!

Most of us are learning as we go. We are all volunteers. Our primary leaders abide by a shared-leadership model, so each of us feels empowered to pitch in and help with whatever we see as useful when the timing feels right.

It's truly kind of amazing to me that through 'showing up', the chaos that comes with climate change is simultaneously producing a group of activists who are creating significant and desirable results.

The dark emotions we all share and bring to this situation have a chance to stand alongside lighter ones like: satisfaction, gratitude and hope.