

Glenn's Words Honoring Nancy's Time With Oasis

November 12, 2017

Oasis Celebration Banquet--Kenbrook

In the fall of 1996:

- Bill Clinton was re-elected for his second term.
- The Yankees won the world series.
- Gas prices were \$1.23 a gallon.
- Henri Nouwen had just died.
- The first flip phone had come on the market.
- Kent was 54 years old and had only written one book.
- I was 43 and was teaching for the first time with SDSG.



And that same year Kent made a phone call to Nancy Bieber on a non-flip phone and invited her to begin teaching with Oasis. All of us in this room Kent, thank you for making that call.

That beginning in 1996 unfolded into 21 years of leadership with Oasis. Nancy led a group every year with SDSG until Sandy Alwine stepped back from teaching in 2005 and then Nancy lead Year I and Year II groups every year following until retiring this spring. Over these years Nancy and I became partners in teaching and leadership--the right and the left hand, back and forth, and most days rather seamlessly. Nancy also went on to create our Contemplative Living in Daily Life program and ran it with Marc Oehler and others for six years. And throughout the years a number of single day retreats that focused on every thing from dealing with all our accumulated stuff, to the gardening she loves, to the discernment process she wrote the book on. I did just a bit of rough math and figured out the number of days of her teaching with Oasis adds up to something around one year and two months! For giving us this much of your sweet life Nancy, we are indeed blessed and most grateful.

Back to that first fall in 1996, I can remember the setting in the lunchroom of the Trinity Center where Nancy and I had our first conversation. We quickly discovered that we shared Church of the Brethren roots, we both were PKs, and then I remember the delight we shared when we got around to the fact that we both loved poetry and shortly we were sending favorites back and forth.

Some of those we shared were poems of our own and one of Nancy's caught my eye as I recently looked through the folder full. It is entitled "The Prophet" and it was written in 1997.

THE PROPHET

*There's longing in my soul
to hear the soft call
of the secret still place
where peace
floats light as a flower
distilling the scent of silence,
where tranquil petals unfold
as I breath with them
on an inland sea.*

*But I have found instead
a place of flame
that claws at me
and drives my wild yes
'til I am dancer
with rags that shimmer and explode
in God's own prophetic company.
--Nancy Bieber, 1997*



I think this poem holds something of the dynamism Nancy has so artfully embodied among us these many years. There is foundationally in her spirit the draw toward stillness and quiet. Her years with the Quakers, her years longing for and teaching the ways of Contemplative Living, her years of prayer and retreat, have anchored that stillness deep in her being. It adds the depth dimension to all she says and does. But there is also in Nancy this *wild yes*, this inner connection between Light and Truth, that flares back out into the world in movement, in action, in a dance that embodies the inner experience into the heart of the world.

Being able to be quiet is not to be confused with quietism.

Being able to be still is not to be confused with inactivity.

Being able to be silent has nothing to do with being silenced.

Integrity is a word that rises from the way Nancy held together this dance. Integrity is the passion for holding the whole. It is rooted I think in this refusal to lop off either end of this inner/outer equation or any equation. It all matters and Nancy would apply the corrective, like a good dancer, whenever she sensed balance was lost or some dimension or someone was being under-represented. For all the ways your integrity challenged us Nancy to be more, in ourselves and in our world, we thank you.

Steady is another word that comes to mind and says something of the felt experience that I and others encounter in Nancy's presence. It is a quality that has made working with her all these years so doable and so enjoyable. When we made a plan and laid out our responsibilities I knew I could release it and trust it and know that all the parts of it would be honored and tended and delivered with care, lots of attention, good thought and significant insight. For the steadiness that helped embody your teaching Nancy, we thank you.

What so strikes me Nancy, is that through all these years you taught what you loved--you taught what you lived: ways of coming to prayer, ways of working discernment, passion for the world and delight in the art of spiritual direction. It all was well loved and lived in you before it came to us, which kept it alive and vibrant as you made your offering. Your passion for listening to and loving your directees, your tender love of God, infused what you brought to us time and again. Thank you for joining in love your living and your teaching.

Nancy we all thank you for your response to Kent's call back in 1996. We thank you for your honoring both the great silence and the claw of flame. We thank you for your wild yes and for your dancing among us these many years.



Presenting of Gifts: Book, *Mother of God: Similar to Fire*; Icons by Willam Hart McNichols, Reflections and Prayers by Mirabai Starr

Icon: William Hart McNichols: Mary Most Holy Mother of All Nations