



Interfaith Inspirer

An Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth News Publication



I attended my second annual Interfaith retreat and feel compelled to process some of the experience through this writing. Here are some of my thoughts.

First is my deep gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of 24 hours immersed in an experience that provided me with so much support, connection, and reflective opportunity. Brett, Carol, and Jennifer are all superb at creating this type of retreat, and their planning and effort were so evident. The exquisite keyboard music of Alaura added a very gentle background to the retreat this year. From start to finish, an atmosphere of love, generosity, and acceptance surrounded our group. A community was created that nurtured each of us exactly where and how we were. Bonds were strengthened around and between each of us, and I left knowing each person a bit more deeply.

Second, choosing this time to do something for myself that welcomed, nurtured, and accepted me was exactly what I needed. I attended this retreat with the full awareness that who I am right now is enough and always is enough. I did not

need to have a more focused meditation practice, nor a greater flexibility in moving my body, nor be gifted with a perfectly in-tune voice in order to attend and participate. I just showed up as myself.

Third, for exactly one day, I shed the rest of my life, which includes a long to-do list and endless chatter in my brain about so many worldly things. Somehow, I left that all behind in Ann Arbor and immersed myself in the warmth and energy of Triple Crane in Chelsea. Part of that warmth and energy came from the facility, but most of it came through and around our speakers and all of the attendees. I am still feeling the place and the people in my heart and soul as I continue to embody all that I felt. What a gift it was!

If you have a chance to attend the next retreat, I hope that you will consider it. You may be surprised how much of a spiritual lift a 24-hour retreat can add to your life,

Thank you Brett, Carol, Jennifer, Alaura, and all attendees for your presence in my life.



Board of Trustees
Submitted by Rev. Delyth Balmer

The Board held their annual post-election retreat on May 30, 2026 at the home of Paul Jurgensen. We welcomed Ryan O'Reilly who is the only newcomer to the board this year. Along with re-appers Lance Clark, Dawn Swartz, and Don Digirolamo, Peggy Lubahn and Marian Orihel are continuing in the second year of their 2-year term. Also in attendance were Revs. Delyth Balmer and Annie Kopko.

The focus of the retreat was for the Board to set goals for the coming year and to get to know one another better. One of our 'ice breakers' was to tell us something about yourself that no one else here knows. (Did you know...Someone was once a cheerleader!)

- The first five goals described how board members see themselves working together as a group in the coming year with words such as fun, gelled, openly contributing, engaging, and communicating, concluding with "Our openness has served the community."
- 'Nuts and Bolts' goals included being familiar with Board Policies, reviewing those that need to be updated, and ensuring the policies reflect the needs of the community and support the function of the board.
- To address financial viability, goals for understanding the finances, ensuring we are meeting the budget, and increasing fund raising opportunities were listed.
- To know the needs of the community, both in-person and zoom attendees, and identify better ways to collect community feedback.
- Board members need input from community members. They are here to serve YOU...and to do that they need to hear from you. Please grab a Board Member on Sunday morning and tell them what you think about Interfaith. What do you love? What could be improved? OR...send them an email at board@interfaithspirit.org. OR jot down a note to them and put it in the Suggestion Box! By the time this is published you may have missed the June QCC (Quarterly Conversation in Community)...the next one will be September 27th from 1-3 pm.

In This Issue:

—◆—

Meditation Retreat by Marian Orihel.....1
Board Retreat by Delyth Balmer.....2
Ministerial Miscellany by Annie Kopko.....3
Meet Scott Alf by Beth Wheland4
Ernestly Speaking by Janet Somalinog5
Conversation with Harambe the Gorilla
 by Peggy River Singer.....6
"Extra" Special Events in July and Announcements
 by Gretchen Leonhardt & the NL Team.....7
 July Events.....8



Ministerial Miscellany

Be the Listener

by Rev. Annie Kopko

Everyone of us wants and needs to be heard. We like the attention, it makes us feel good; expressing ourselves stimulates and awakens the physical body. There is a lot of mileage in being a good listener. We go further and we go higher into awareness of the Spirit inside us, but it takes more attention and more conscious awareness by the listener. And it takes choice to relax in less ego and less reactivity. When young, we get educated in speaking properly, but no teacher at any level mentioned the importance of listening. I think it is a very important skill.

What I found with a little research is very interesting, because although I consider myself a good listener, I couldn't explain it to anyone very



Haiku from Dexter

by Barb Fisher, Sandy Hill,
Cooper Holland

Staring match
No movement
Tail twitches

Happy Birthday
July

9 Paulette Stenzel	25 Maureen McMahon
9 Diane McPharlin	30 Randall Rouse
11 Randall Counts	31 Margie Hough
19 Dan Ramsey	31 Don Digirolamo
22 Scott McWhinney	

well. Why is listening important? Listening is a kind service to another person. Listening opens your heart. It develops your inner strength, your resilience, your curiosity about and appreciation of the uniqueness of other people. It seems like listening is a lot more than just a "chore in interpersonal relationships"; it is a self-development tool.

Being a good listener is not always easy because our egos often get in the way, causing us to crave the same attention we are offering someone else. And also because our egos are little machines of never-ending desire, poised on the edge of dissatisfaction with anything, everything, and everyone.

Receive from others, respond to others, never judge: it gets in the way. Resist the urge to comment early and often. Do not solve any problems—it is not your job. Listen wholeheartedly. Make eye contact. Use nonverbal responses. And, the most important thing: you will be remembered as a safe place for others to be at peace.

Blessings to all, everywhere, all the time!

Annie



Meet Scott Alf

by Beth Wheland

Scott Alf is a man whose spirituality is closely tied to his love for our natural environment. He is currently focused on a project he calls the

'Expedition Education Institute.' It involves a large bus he recently purchased in Maine. He bought the bus for the purpose of converting it into a traveling classroom for experiential environmental education. Scott plans to drive his bus to Michigan once he conquers a licensing obstacle or two, plus related costs.

The idea for this traveling classroom started with Scott's desire to encourage others to get more passionate about protecting our bountiful and beautiful planet Earth. A firm believer in experiential education, Scott majored in environmental studies at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, a north woods location where environmental education is the sort of 'up close and personal' experience Scott relishes and wants to share with others.

Scott originally planned to continue formal studies beyond U Maine, in a graduate program in Washington, DC, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. When this idea fell through due to the defunding of the program, Scott switched tracks. He worked in various jobs having to do with the environment. These included approximately seven years as a laborer and environmental designer at Oak Arbor Landscaping Company and working as a naturalist and teacher at the Leslie Science Center. He was also a residential naturalist at Camp Tamarack, a Jewish camp for children.

Scott sees his path as pre-destined. He has always been a lucid dreamer and a person who is interested in indigenous cultures. He spent time with the Hopi nation in Arizona where he, a white man, was accepted into the community. This is a rare occurrence. Scott was allowed to participate in the Hopi's sacred spring plaza dance as his initiation into the tribe. His mentor told him it was time for the red-skinned and white-skinned people to come together for the survival of the planet.

A recurring dream that started when Scott was six and went through his teen years gave him the insight that he was most recently from another planet. The dream relayed the knowledge that Scott had chosen to return to Earth to help save the planet and its inhabitants. His task was to learn new things about the connectedness of all living things and then teach these discoveries to younger people. "Our survival depends on our relationship with the environment around us," said Scott. He came here, at this transitional time, to help succeeding generations understand how to steward and protect their environment. "Children would be more attuned to the needs of an evolving planet," he said.

Scott was waylaid in the fulfilment of his current vision when, in 2010, he fell from a scaffold onto a concrete floor and suffered a brain injury. His plans were interrupted. He was confused and disoriented. He now, however, sees the accident as part of his path. "My life is full of coincidences I cannot explain," said Scott. He sees his injury as something that gave him new challenges, challenges he perhaps needed to experience before he could fulfill his destiny. He sees his recovery process as an additional aspect of himself that he is supposed to share, along with his passion for the environment.



ERNESTLY SPEAKING

A New Thought View of Our American Flag

by Janet Somalinog

I stumbled upon an essay I wrote years ago about our nation's flag. As a collection of states and religions, communities and individuals, all gathered together on this adventure of trying to sustain a democratic republic, I offer an alternative view of the flag that came forth in 1776. It continues to hold a particular energetic idea from those times when the collective consciousness was rooted in white male European dominance and the independence, freedom, and sovereignty for those individuals and that collective only. I invite us to rethink this through and usher in a new consciousness around our flag and country.

Here is my revised New Thought interpretation of our flag for July 4, 2026, our 250th Birthday as we try to move our stories and energies towards a healing for our country and the world. The red stripes are a reflection of the ground that receives the blood being spilled onto it. It holds the energy of our foremothers and forefathers who gave of their blood and our current serving soldiers and citizens who continue to give of themselves for the ideals of their time, which change with the era and the threats that exist. But the life force of our blood is still staining the earth and we are reminded of this every time we read the news today. Our blood and the earth are one, made up of the same life force. The white stripes represent to me the Infinite Light, healing/Wholeness, white, the combination of

all the colors. This creates a curious mystery of Infinite potential residing right next to the red blood soaked earth. The human experience of violence, pain, heat and death juxtaposed, tangent and extremely accessible to the Infinite Good, the Supreme Intelligence, Abundant and Beautiful Life. The nature of this duality is highly volatile right now. We are called to quell the red and uplift the white light in our lives and the lives of others. Can we rid the cosmos of dualism? Maybe it's time to design a new flag for the whole of Humanity.

Now we have 50 stars on the blue background. I envision each state bursting forth in their Light, their Power, like their own Big Bang of creative potential. 50 stars placed on a blue backdrop that reminds me of the depths of the oceans, the soft infinite nature of the skies and heaven beyond, the throat chakra of story-telling, speaking and listening, self-expression and truth-telling. When we put all these ideas together, I invite us to reflect on new ways of moving the concept of our Nation forward in a loving, healing way. Every time we look at our flag we can shift the energy from a defensive, protective, exclusionary state to an all-inclusive, highly creative, and powerful loving state. It's time we see the stars and stripes as free from past destructive paradigms to a vision of what truly free expression for all unique human beings looks like. Our first 250 years have taught us much and we are still getting lessons about how to do better for all beings. Working on an energetic, consciousness level is available to us all and will evolve more slowly than forced change which is never sustainable. May our visioning be clear and intentional. I hope this new way of viewing our flag can help with all that.



A Conversation with Harambe the Gorilla

by Peggy River Singer

Background: Harambe was a 17-year-old 450-pound male gorilla at the Cincinnati Zoo. On May 28, 2016, a three-year-old boy climbed through a fence and fell into the gorilla enclosure's moat. Overwhelmed and distressed by the uproar from panicking humans, Harambe tried to move the boy to a more protected part of the enclosure. Because of Harambe's size and strength and the potential for accidental harm, he was shot and killed by zoo officials. The incident was caught on camera and became a major viral meme and cultural phenomenon. It also sparked intense international debate over zookeeping, animal rights, and parental responsibility in public spaces.

Harambe: This is the way it's supposed to be. Everything turned out as I hoped it would.

Peggy: So, you chose that experience for this lifetime?

Harambe: Not exactly. I was born in captivity and I had been feeling a desire to somehow make a big thunder-and-crash-of-lightning statement to humans that would shake up complacent minds focused on "They're just dumb animals." When the child fell into the water I was startled, but I recognized the opportunity; and of course I wanted to try to help the boy.

Peggy: How do you think you would have reacted if one of your attendants had come into your enclosure to take the child away?

Harambe: My gorilla mind might have been offended by this trespass. Would I have attacked? I don't think so. I know those people quite well, and I knew from the beginning the child could not stay with me. I could hear his parents screaming and their frantic fear. I thought my head would explode from all the noise! I had to go deep within to endure the hurricane of emotions from the humans while I tried to decide what to do.

[Peggy: I see a vision of Harambe standing in the middle of a Roman amphitheater, looking up at thousands of screaming humans while the child plays in the sand at his feet.]

Harambe continues: Other animals (including my mates Mara and Chewie) quickly understood the situation and offered advice. Many sensed what the end would be, and they warned me. The energy of this event rolled out across the land even as it was being played out, scene by scene. It's a shame Shakespeare wasn't alive to write a play about it!

Everything seemed to happen in slow motion at the end. I had already left my still-functioning body; I had no desire to experience the bullets, but I stayed so my energy could continue to be part of the whole story. In spirit form I extended my hands in blessing over those who made the difficult decision to end my life. They, too, chose this life experience to help them develop a greater level of compassion.

Peggy: Where are you today?

Harambe: Visiting Mara and Chewie. The three of us are creating a new, powerful energy of love, compassion and forgiveness that we plan to share with other caged animals who have no choice or voice about their lives and deaths. Years have passed since my death, but the urgency of the need for humans to find new ways to view zoos and their unwilling captives grows stronger day by day. This conversation is complete, and I thank you.



EXTRA SPECIAL EVENTS IN JULY



John Stringer

Guest Speaker & Musician

Sunday, July 5 @ 10:45 am

**Freedom to Choose:
The Law of Choices & Liberation**

John is an award-winning, international bestselling author and top 10 Billboard charting singer/songwriter. He is visiting us from Atlanta, Georgia.

Advance registration encouraged on line at <https://interfaithspirit.org/special-events/> or text Delyth at 734-657-5384.

*Followed by a Workshop at 1:15 pm
after the potluck.*

Quantum Leaping VIA The Law Of Choices

Using music, toning, and more for
instant manifestation

\$20 in advance or at the door

Armand & Angelina

6:30–8:00pm

**Native Flute Playshop
Wednesday, July 15**

*Please join us for a fun,
magical day of music. We will
have flutes available, or you
may purchase one from us.*



\$20 suggested offering. Pay at the door or online at
<https://interfaithspirit.org/special-events/>

Armand & Angelina return for the
Age of Aquarius Musical Variety Concert

Friday, July 24• 7:00–9:00pm

International performers and recording artists, Armand and Angelina offer fantastic, uplifting performances, full of humor, passion for life and love for each other. Their music is a unique blend of rock and opera incorporating Native American flute.



\$20 suggested offering. Pay at the door or online at
<https://interfaithspirit.org/special-events/>

Announcements from the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth

Summer Clean-Up

By Gretchen Leonhardt

Throughout the month of July, in the interest of clearing out our spaces and returning lost, left-behind, and lent property and equipment, ICSG will be making available its sundry collection of shirts, coats, sweaters, beverage containers, food containers/serving trays/dishes, storage totes, and other, general, lost-and-found items (use your memory and imagination).

The owners are free to take, or to request the return of, any item known or believed to be in ICSG's possession. Also, if you're aware of any item that needs to be claimed, please let Gretchen Leonhardt know, so that it can be made available in the general collection. At the end of July, any uncollected items still in ICSG's possession will be retained, used, sold, or donated at it's discretion.

This also serves as a general reminder to collect your possessions before leaving any event at ICSG.



Submission Guidelines for the Interfaith Inspirer

Submission deadline for August is July 10

Please send your contribution to
newsletter@interfaithspirit.org.

We will confirm receipt once it has been received. Suggested article lengths are 150 words for a quarter page, 250 words for a half page, and 600 words for a full page.

All articles are subject to minor edits by the editorial team, including edits for length.

Please let us know if you would like to review the final version before it is printed.

Newsletter Team: Lyriel Claire, Karen Cogsdill, Annemarie Howse; Delyth Balmer, advisor; Associate Editors: Vicki Davinich, Gretchen Leonhardt

JULY EVENTS

Cafe 704

Interfaith Center for
Spiritual Growth
704 Airport Blvd, Ste.1
A2 48108
Tickets \$10-\$20
(sliding scale)
Doors open at 6:30 pm

Laz Slomovits & Jennifer Burd

with guests Eric & Mary Fithian

Saturday, July 11, 2026
7-9:00 pm

In person, pay at the door
To purchase Zoom tickets go to
<https://interfaithspirit.org/cafe-704-coffeehouse/>

Info contact Delyth: 734-657-5384



Interfaith OpenMic

Thursday, July 16
7-9pm
Doors Open
at 6:30 pm



Sign up in person the night of the event
Suggested donation for performers and
audience members is \$5.00

Questions? Contact
Don Digirolamo at dondidge@gmail.com

Drumcommunity Drum Circle with Lori Fithian

Saturday, July 18
7-8:30 pm

(Every 3rd Saturday,
August 15, Sept.18, etc.)



Donations to the Center are appreciated

Community Sing with Matt Watroba



Wednesday, July 29 • 7-8:30 pm

\$5-\$10 suggested donation

Your donations allow us to support this event

Curtis took a break, but he will be back!



Drum & Dance Jam

with

Curtis Glatter

Saturday, August 1 • 7:30-9 pm

\$5 Suggested Donation