



## A pearl contribution in support of 'inspiring women leaders... dare we?'

### INSPIRING WOMEN LEADERS... DARE WE? CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

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*'Movements grow when we breathe air onto sparks that become flames of passion for something that cannot be denied.'*

L. Gardiner, @potent6 tweet 28<sup>th</sup> May 2011

'Inspiring women leaders... dare we?' grew out of a profound personal and collaborative action-focused enquiry. Our journey so far is the achievement, not of one leader, but many. Together, we have travelled towards a moment in time, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Our intention is to co-create a gathering of women leaders – women who want to proactively contribute to transforming leadership in Scotland and beyond.

How did I come to be one of those leaders? For those of you familiar with Joseph Campbell's work on archetypes and 'The Hero's Journey', you will recognise something of this in the account that follows. It involves Crossing the Threshold.

A single spark of clarity ignited in me one day in Nova Scotia June 2010, amongst a circle of women from across the world, held by an elder, Barbara Cecil, who has dedicated nearly 20 years breathing life into the fires of countless women across the world.

#### My Journey to a Seat in the Circle: Stepping over the Threshold

As I entered the hall I saw a woman, sitting on the far side of the circle, look up at me. Her face burst into an enormous smile. She pointed at me and then beckoned me to come and sit next to her.

*'I saw you on the first day and knew we had to meet. At first I kept trying to make it happen and then I realised I must trust that if it was meant to be, you would come. And here you are, joining my circle.'*

This woman was Barbara Cecil.

In that large room of mostly women and a few men, I felt the pull to ask for the microphone that was slowly passing to those who felt they must speak. I told of the struggle I had had to join this circle, having heard my inner critic saying,

*'I'm not sure I qualify to be in there'.*

Those thoughts had stopped me in my tracks. And it was in that moment, I knew **that this** room was exactly where I needed to be.



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I shared two questions that were calling out in me to be answered:

*'Who am I to be?' and*

*'Where am I to play, to bring my most helpful, potent contribution to the world?'*

As I spoke those words into the microphone, my entire body was quivering and yet my voice, speaking slowly as I was, somehow felt strong and grounded. Through uttering those questions out loud I had a sense in my body that something had begun to release... my breath on the words was giving life to a deeper knowing that finally had permission to be expressed. I heard myself begin to answer:

*'It is something to support and inspire women; women leaders globally, starting with those of us in Scotland. And yet as I sit in this circle amongst women who have already been playing in this realm for years, I am thinking, 'Who the hell am I to presume this is mine to do?'*

Many women encouraged me to go forward; they spoke of what they had already experienced of me and affirmed that indeed, I must presume to do what I am called to do.

Towards the end of this circle gathering I had another extraordinary experience. I was amongst 8 others lying beneath a Grand Piano as Michael Jones played in improvised music, what he heard us express. As his fingers touched the keys, this question welled up in me and I began to weep:

*'How can I survive all this conflict in the world?'*

For some 15 minutes, Michael played exquisitely and yet that question tormented me. And then unbelievably, as he played the last few notes, my answer came and my tears gently ceased:

*'Heal the conflict within.'*

Listening deeply to that wise inner voice, I saw that conflict was going to be my repeating struggle as I moved forward in this work – and here I was being offered a gift of insight: the key to resolution would be found within myself. There was no turning back. Daring to vocalise my questions and have others bear witness to my answers, proved to be a moment of profound personal transformation. I had stepped beyond my terror, out into a bigger space and could never be the same again. In truth, my emergence into a new 'inner form' was less of 'a single moment' and more akin to an unveiling, following some 3 years of hiding in the shadows, living with uncertainty, struggling with some big life changes, questioning myself and what I was doing and not doing, aimlessness, wandering into blind alleys and cul-de-sacs.

I came away from Nova Scotia, with a renewed sense of purpose and not a clue about the 'destination', what needed to happen nor what I personally needed to do.... so I did the only thing I could do.... I spoke to women and to men. I shared my questions, my intention and an invitation to join in and contribute to growing something that hadn't yet been



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defined... other than it be a gathering for women leaders in Scotland to share how we could support each other and to talk about what we could do to differently to address the challenges of our organisations, communities and the world.... for some it was simply too vague; too scary.

### And now: a new and different Gathering

12 months later, almost to the day on 15<sup>th</sup> June, I will find myself sitting in another circle; one in which I have played one simple part. I have dared to stand up, speak out, welcome in and take action. I answered my call and shared this, over and over and over again – each time as passionately as the first. My call resonated with the call of others .... And together our combined courage, voices and acts of leadership have brought us to this place: the promise of what is to come:

*A growing number of us, supporting and inspiring women leaders to transform leadership in Scotland and beyond*

We believe women are the beginning and not the end of this movement. Our intention to support and inspire leaders, extends globally and locally; broadening diversity, growing integrity and sustainability; improving lives and businesses; indeed changing the way the world does business. We are starting with ourselves first because we know that until we truly take care of ourselves, we will not be fit to sustainably and effectively support the transformation of others, our organisations, communities and our world.

We asked ourselves: **'Inspiring women leaders... dare we?'**

And we said: **'Yes! We dare.'**

If your spark wants some life breathed into it and this feels like the place to be, then join us and find for yourself, what we ourselves have found: that in proactively contributing in support of others and this (ad)venture, we each are benefiting from the richness shared by everyone else.

**Follow the spark! Join the gathering: 'Inspiring women leaders... dare we?'**

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