

Walking History

A Conversation with Anneli Twan and Don Beacham

...Oral Traditions...

*"Tell it in words and I will remember. Show me, and I will believe. Let me experience and I will understand."*¹

In May 2011, Anneli Twan and her husband Don Beacham came to England to share the teachings of Wanja Twan and her Reiki master Hawayo Takata. They talked to Louisa Booth about their understanding of Oral Tradition.

Anneli: Oral traditions are passed on from person to person, and in that way life cycles are connected. The gathering we have just completed was a natural progression from the gathering in Kaslo last October, where we honoured Mrs Takata with my mother, Wanja, and Wanja had a message for this gathering. She wanted the people to remember to expect miracles in their lives, and that magic exists. This gathering was a continuation of Wanja's teachings.

Don: You are now emerging into the role your mother once carried.

Anneli: I've known for years that I would be stepping into this role. I've always had that feeling, but now the timing's right. I knew I had time to have kids and work and have a normal life, while at the same time working and teaching and travelling with my mother, and now the time has come. I've arrived at the beginning of the future.

Don: There's a certain amount of grief, because of losing that part of your mother. We honour what she did, we respect how she carried herself and see from people's reactions how much they learned from her and what she inspired, and we respect that process in them, so what we have to do now is not infringe on that but enhance what she created in them and as much as possible transcend into the next level. In certain ways Wanja is still speaking in Anneli.



Anneli: I carry her name, Anneli Wanja Twan. Don is Wapun Muskwa, which means 'White Bear'.

Don: Anneli's Cree name, given to her in a Cree ceremony, is Asau Apu Esquewew, 'The woman who sits in brightness'. She also has the name Uklawsit, which was given to her by a West Coast elder, and which means 'clearing' or 'cleanser' on a spiritual level.

Anneli: In my travels with my mother in 1981 we stayed with Muktananda in India. He gave me the name of Shrividyia, meaning 'the power behind the words'. His translator, Malti, is now Swami Chidvilasanada, the head of Siddha Yoga. There's a parallel there, because Malti took over from Muktananda after years of translating and travelling and being helper, and in the same way, after thirty years of travelling with my mother, helping with suitcases and doing the helper role in numerous countries, I've taken over.

Above:
Anneli
Twan &
Don
Beacham

“If it's in a book it doesn't change because it's written. With oral tradition you can change your stories to fit the audience, to make it relevant.”

Louisa: How does it feel?

Anneli: It feels natural. It feels that the time I was waiting for has arrived. It's now. But it also feels sad that my mother won't be there. It's been the two of us for a lot of years. So many memories and places we've been. She's my mother but she's also my Reiki master. And she's always come up with different ideas. The way we travel you just take things up as they come along, you have a vague plan and then things happen.

Louisa: Are you doing that now?

Anneli: Now that's just how I live. I carry on what we've been doing. It's just that my mother is not in same room; she's not physically with us. I feel sad but she's done her work, her travelling, she's earned her place to just be at home.

Louisa: And that fits with oral tradition. What you have learned from so many years with your master and mother you can now pass on.

Anneli: And oral tradition is perfect for Reiki, because Reiki evolves, it's not stagnant. You couldn't teach it through book learning because there would be no room for evolution. If it's in a book it doesn't change because it's written. With oral tradition you can change your stories to fit the audience, to make it relevant. People argue over differences in Takata's story. They say Takata taught this way or she taught that way. My interpretation is that she needed to adjust the stories for the audience to make it relevant for the people she was with, so it had more meaning for them.

Louisa: Nevertheless, some things stay the same.

Anneli: Exactly. There are things that always stay the same: the initiations, the principles, and the hand positions.

Louisa: I've heard several versions of the principles.

Anneli: And that's OK, so long as the overall meaning doesn't change. The overall meaning is clear in the basic version we've learned from Wanja.² When you're in a circle oral tradition allows whatever is needed to happen. There isn't a formal structure ahead of time, because you learn from the people who are there what their need is, but at the same time there are things I want to do, like showing the hand positions and giving the blessing.

Louisa: Blessings seem to be special to this lineage.

Anneli: Takata said they were like an instant Reiki treatment. She told my mother they were good to do if you just have a short amount of time, so Wanja has carried on doing them and we have as well now. They're only for people who have been initiated; they're a special ceremony between masters and their students. For me it was special time where I got to connect with each person there on a deeper level – deeper than just sitting and having a conversation. I could feel the presence of Usui, Hayashi, Takata and my mother, in a different way because she's still alive, and I felt the importance of the lineage. And that touch is a closer link for the students.

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Louisa: Have the hand positions remained constant?

Anneli: I took my first degree Reiki with Mrs. Takata in 1979 when I was 10 years old, so I learned the hand positions first from Takata. I learned core positions and extra positions to be added when needed. For years we did just the core positions, and somewhere along the line we noticed we were adding those extra positions more frequently, over the ears, the front of the throat and the back of neck/top of spine. Those extra hand positions are needed now, because of differences in climate and pollution, and because we all sit at computers for hours.

Louisa: You do them as standard?

Anneli: I sometimes go through them quicker, but now I usually have them as standard because so many people have issues in those areas.

Louisa: But Mrs Takata didn't do them as standard?

Anneli: They were optional at the time – she said use them when necessary. As the years have gone by we've realised that there's a need for those positions.

Louisa: Do you think that Mrs Takata saw that need in the future?

Anneli: I think so. That's exactly what I think. The hand positions are important. They cover the vital areas of the body and like my mother always said, you train your hands with repetition. Once you've trained your hands to feel, they will go to where they're needed and stay for as long as they're needed, but it is the initial training of your hands that is the key.

Louisa: Don brought Native teachings to this gathering.

Anneli: Don has been practising Native spirituality for as long as I've been practising Reiki and when we met ten years ago, I taught him Reiki and he taught me Native teachings, sweat lodge and fasting, and I earned the pipe. I find they fit. They work well at a gathering, but if I'm teaching Reiki I teach Reiki. I wouldn't have the drumming. That would be a separate workshop. We

would teach Reiki just as Mrs Takata and my mother taught Reiki, but in the gatherings I find our teaching is complementary, it works well together and we work best together. Don's singing brings the people out of their heads into their heart space. The drum is the heartbeat; it's a fast way in the circle to get everybody into that space. The songs are actually prayers, or prayer songs, calling songs. And I focus on my mother's teachings.

Don: The calling songs bring people in for landing. They're so scattered in their thoughts, but the songs bring you together spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically, they return you to a balance.

Louisa: And the Native teachings work through oral tradition?

Don: In all aboriginal cultures all over the world oral tradition is paramount. When the storyteller is present physically the storyteller is a walking piece of history. It's paramount that the storyteller is present physically. There's no spirit in a video or a computer. That's why the oral tradition is so vital. If we don't bring that walking piece of history forward we've lost that connection. We say that when you write something down you're going to forget it. But by talking and listening it stays there, in the heart.

A live person can convey so much more; the person is a walking piece of history and the stories that have been handed down to them are the result of the people that came before them. This resonates in their voice. Anneli's

voice is like her mother speaking through her, and that's strong because she grew up with her, but at the same time Anneli is adding her own essence into the role. Wanja was talking through Anneli. Mrs Takata was talking through Wanja. Anneli will be speaking through Celia³. It goes outwards from there. It's important that people all realise that they are part of that process.

Anneli: That's why it's important to know your lineage and history, so you know who you are. It gives a solid foundation.

Don: In Reiki there is a source for our lineage, Mrs Takata, and the conscious choice they made in Japan to give Mrs Takata Reiki. It's

Right:
Anneli showing the hand positions on Celia



important to retain the essence of Mrs Takata in the way she taught, as taught to Wanja and Anneli Twan.

Anneli: Mrs Takata made a promise to Hayashi to keep the Reiki pure, and it stayed that way in her lifetime. It's important that things don't get corrupted and watered down.

Don: It means us being able to stay true to ourselves. I believe each one of us has a belief within about maintaining that integrity. It's more than a calling. It's about staying true to the original focus.

Anneli: It's imperative that the students have that connection, so that they are able to speak their own truth. They are equal value.

Don: They are more valuable, because they take it to the next level. They're the ones carrying the ball into the future. As Reiki spreads out further, and the students are two or three generations removed, the responsibility of the individual Reiki practitioner to what they are carrying is more important than it's ever been.

In this circle, I was struck by how valued each person felt in their Reiki lineage, and by their reverence for Reiki. When I sing the songs, the calling songs, my voice goes to a different place. It's a result of the individuals sitting

in the circle and what they bring that takes us to that place. I'm constantly amazed at what the individual brings into the circle. It takes you to such a vulnerable place. Your greatest strength is to be open in that vulnerable thing which the Reiki circle brings. The clarity of the white light that we know as Reiki comes through, like a crescendo of emotion coming from everybody. The circle is made of the sum of its people. Everyone knows without a shadow of doubt that they are meant to be there at that moment. We know what will come of that circle. The question for the individual is how does Reiki connect to their essence and to the people that practiced Reiki before them? We're all sacred, and Reiki fine-tunes that sacredness.

We all have it. Reiki flicks the switch that's within. However we perceive it, however it expresses itself in us, all we have to do is follow it.

Louisa: But at the same time honouring our elders?

Don: In oral traditions that's a big part of it. You pay respect to your teachers and their teachers. You say the name, where it comes from and who gave it. You bring those names forward so they're recognised. That does get you in contact with the responsibility of what you carry. You carry that from time immemorial. You're in a circle with a million people, with no beginning and no end. That's the responsibility you carry.

Anneli: And it gives you strength, because you're not carrying it alone, you're carrying it with those who went before you, and all those yet to come. □

Louisa Booth, June 2011

¹ 'Early days of Reiki', *Memories of Hawayo Takata, Interviews compiled by Anneli Twan*

² For the 'basic version' of the principles see back cover of *Touch*

³ *Celia Spiers was made a master in the Twan lineage in October 2010*