

In 2008, Graduate and ex Tutor Roe Woodroffe wrote this piece which was published by Re-Vision as part of the 20 year anniversary celebrations. It is reproduced here in Re-Vision's 30th anniversary year.

dreaming re•vision

roe woodroffe psychotherapy graduate 1990, tutor 1994-2004

I was amongst the first batch of students to qualify at therapy level at Re•Vision. That was in 1990. This group had collected the name The Coven from our days with the Institute of Psychosynthesis where we had completed the counselling part of the training.

In 1994 I returned to Re•Vision as a Tutor and spent ten fulfilling years in this position, not just taking deep pleasure in my work but also in the growing Re•Vision community. I regard the relationships I made as some of the most valuable in my life, and barely a day passes without my thinking of these, and feeling joy.

The article below begins at a summer school in which there was a profound sense of there being a chasm opening up within the Institute of Psychosynthesis. One outcome of this was the decision Chris and Ewa made to separate themselves, and their working and personal lives from it.

I brought my new toy to this summer school, a camcorder which, in those days were bulky, and weighed a fair bit. Unlike contemporary models which are more like an arm extension, the sheer bulk of this machine formed a block between me, and what I saw through its lens, heightening the feeling of being the observer. But because I was looking through a lens, my view was also intensely focused on the scenes I describe below. This mix served to both alienate me from, and to draw me in to the proceedings. The resulting images were sufficiently intense to have burnt themselves onto my inner retina.

The dream of the community with the bird cage, and the ants was a sleeping dream I actually did have. Other dream like sequences are just a form of narration.

The rest – as they say, is history.

I am in an old country mansion, used as a boys' school since the early 1920's, and opening its doors to girls in 1973. It is approached through an archway, and up a long drive. Lawns, lakes and trees stretch out on either side, gardens redesigned by Capability Brown. I am standing here now some time in the late 1980's.

My video camera lens follows the arching contours of a glass and metal dome up towards the sky, and as it does so the image reverses to its negative, the white metal framework turning to black. The intricate structure, a split second before a magnificent vaulted birdcage has become a black spiders web, the blue sky, pure white.

Now we are gathered in the building's stone clad hall to a patient drum beat. It is summer but it is dark outside and the room is lit only by candles. Their light throws long shadows on the walls, and a warm glow on the faces of the 100 or so who are us, the candle bearers. Most I recognize, many I have come to know, and five, six including myself

– named The Coven – have travelled together, undivided for 2 years. Together we wait in the circle. The drum beat quickens. Others join in. My heart beat quickens. The drums rise to a crescendo. And my eyes search for the face of a woman I have come to respect as our leader, and mentor. Perhaps, she is absent, has no heart for this celebration tonight. What do I know? I am a student, not permitted into the inner sanctum of the leaders' minds, their struggles, and plans, for us, for me.

The camera lens scans the throng who are singing now. But what we sing I can't recall. Then I see her. This woman who I know holds herself proud, upright, looks strangely vulnerable, diminished. The image shocks me. She is being supported, led slowly forward into the centre of the circle. Her blonde hair frames her face, a strand clings wet to her cheek. She has been crying. The singing, the drums cease and the woman begins to speak. No-one breathes. Her voice has lost its power. Her words echo around the room, and fall away. The singing and the drums start up again but it is a funeral dirge. For what, or for whom is uncertain.

I climb some narrow stairs somewhere in Kilburn, North London. The house is red brick, Victorian and terraced. At the top of the stairs I am greeted by Ewa. She welcomes me with a kiss. I can hear the familiar voices inside, The Coven. Chris. We discuss what is to be now that Chris and Ewa have finalised their move from the Institute.

Back in that same room, maybe a year later, Re•Vision has been born. Myself, the rest of the Coven, and a few others are its first students. There is Helen Carroll, Marian Kearney, Carole Bruce, Polly Plowman, Mark DuBerry, and I think a woman called Gayle. I look out of the window and I hear Ewa say there is another baby on its way, hers and Chris's own. It will be a girl child.

Downstairs at the bottom of this building there is a good sized room with access to a garden. There is a kitchen, a cloak room, and two other rooms sufficient for small group meetings. Some of us have been busy painting, choosing chairs, creating a nurturing space for the continuation of our learning. There are workshops, people come and they go. New trainers, and some old faces arrive. There to learn, there to guide. Some remain.

We are excited, we are tentative, and we are determined to find, and to embrace a new way of being with this thing called psychotherapy. A non hierarchical framework with a soulful content. But the ways of the patriarchy are deeply embedded, positively, and negatively, within us all. We know that in reaching for the light, any light, we must meet with its shadow, and stay long enough in its company to give it a name. We know also that the birthing of a more archetypal feminine way of being will be a long

dreaming re-vision

continued

and slow process, constantly in motion, a circular journey weaving back and forth in our minds, and in this small, tentative, fledgling community.

Will the moon take her rightful place in the skies alongside her brother the sun, getting to exert her pull on each of our lives as we attempt to walk in her silvery light? We struggle to stay vigilant, to find a language. We try on the words of others, like clothes, to see if they fit. James Hillman, Thomas Moore, Pinkola Estes. Time passes. The journey is now well underway. More people join us, not just for workshops, but to be trained, re-membered. We search within us. Our images, our dreams speak to us when we listen gently enough. And then, once heard, it is not enough to have her floating, nebulous in some rarefied air. This emerging Re•Visioning needs not merely a tangible form but a robust enough body to walk out beyond these walls, and into the market place. She needs to be able to converse with whoever she meets there. She needs strong shoes with her shadow stitched painstakingly to her sole.

It is autumn, and the year, 1995. I am at home and the phone rings. Chris asks that I and others due to attend a community meeting in a couple of days dream on the topic of community. My dream maker obliges...

In the middle of a large and well tended lawn, in the centre of a private walled garden stands a small conservatory. It is pagoda shaped. Its walls are not glass as I would expect for such a building but rather the thick plastic – difficult to see into, or out of – often used in nurseries and garden centres.

Inside the conservatory, placed on the ground is a beautiful, white metal bird cage that mirrors the shape of the conservatory itself, and, inside this cage is a tropical bird with salmon pink feathers and plumage. The cage needs cleaning, so I lift off its roof and let the bird out, into the larger confines of the conservatory. It flies to perch in the eaves.

Then I concern myself with the task of cleaning the cage. I lift out the straw, continuing to empty. As I get down to the bottom I notice a number of insects. They are ants, and ant-like creatures. I notice that some of the smallest have bodies of pure, old silver, each uniquely engraved. My attention is drawn then to a large, black ant that scuttles up and down my left forearm.

It seems I stay with my cleaning and observing for a long time, drawn in to the life of this little community. I feel a part of it, and particularly in relationship with this one, black ant. I name him. As I work I notice that the insects are travelling in and out of the conservatory, having their own road under the closed door. In contrast I see the

beautiful bird can only remain sitting, cleaning its feathers in the eaves of the pagoda.

When I look back at my arm, the black ant has gone. It has been replaced by a smaller brown one. At first I feel sad, but then I think, 'I can make a relationship with this one too, and indeed, with all of the others.' The thought pleases me and my sadness lifts. I wake.

Tonight I lie down and dream this dream on ... the community has moved to a place known as Queen's Park. The front door is at ground level. The garden is loved, enjoyed. Weeds grow amongst the flowers, and grass grows as it pleases. It is bordered by a wooden fence. Squirrels use it as a road between the trees. The rooms in the building have been changed around, the walls re-painted, the stories told, and re-told – oh what stories these walls have heard!

The child, Re•Vision has come of age. 20 this year. She sits quietly, unseen but highly attentive, observing, and listening to the people who sit in a circle around her. Many, if not all sense her presence. A window is open and sparrows gather on the sill, hopping freely in and out. The street on which Re•Vision stands has many different styles of architecture, some of the buildings are quite grand, others less so, and the road stretches out into the distance, meeting others as it goes, on and on....

