

7 SEASONS



"By studying the organic patterns of heaven and earth a fool can become a sage; and so by watching the times and seasons of the natural phenomena we can become true philosophers."

8th century T'ang philosopher,
quoted in Chung Wah Nan, **The Art of Chinese Gardens**

"I think that to restore our personal and collective sanity we need to get back on track, to rediscover a universe of living beings intimately related: the biosphere as our family. This family has values: respect for life, harmony with nature's cycles, gratitude, balance, and above all reciprocity—don't take anything without giving something back.

Leslie Gray, in **Ecological Medicine**

Cycles

Takao Matsushima:

Three weeks after we'd finished making the Sanctuary, it was Fall Equinox, and Alicia felt this was a special day, a marker of the natural cycle of seasons. So we agreed to go to the Sanctuary again as a group. Roger and Steve were away then, but we invited a few other people who we'd told about the Sanctuary, and several of them came along too. We didn't have any special plans. We thought we'd just go and sit the way we'd done before.

We aimed to be there at sunrise, although the day was cloudy, so we didn't actually see the sunrise. And it was cold, too. We were all bundled up in big jackets and gloves. We hadn't sat in cold weather like that before, and Ned advised us all to carry plenty of warm gear. We didn't need it on the way up so much, but we really needed it once we were sitting still. We couldn't all sit in the pavilion at once so we sat in two groups, each one crowded together for warmth, more or less how we'd sat together when we finished the Sanctuary. It created a great sense of togetherness again.

The other thing that was different that day—well, that was the day we found the Sanctuary had been discovered before we could announce it—but the other important thing was that Sandy had carried up two white rocks, very pale grey-white rocks. She'd found them in the Hawk River when she'd gone rafting, and they were special rocks for her. She asked us if it was OK to place them on the edge of the trail beside the Entry Arch as a small “offering” to the Sanctuary and to the natural environment. She thought it would be good to have light-coloured rocks marking the last part of the trail to the pavilion on the rock shelf, and it was a simple thing that anyone could do. Bring one or two small rocks and line the trail with them. They were perfectly natural. They weren't an exotic species that would disturb the native vegetation. It was a small ritual that we could do on special days like the equinoxes and the solstices.

Everyone agreed it was a great idea. We couldn't think of anything that symbolized silence and stillness better than small rocks like that. That was the very first ritual that we developed. And it led to more discussions about rituals and ceremonies later on. Now, many people do it. A lot of the rocks have a special meaning for the person who brings them. They come from a home or garden, or from a river or from a rocky shore. They're a small burden you carry to the Sanctuary, representing your cares and concerns. You carry them up to the Sanctuary, place them on the path, and immediately your load is lighter. You're ready to sit and enjoy being there.

Rebecca Watson:

Once the Sanctuary was discovered and everything closed down through the winter, we didn't talk much about rituals until the next Spring Equinox. A small group of us went to the Sanctuary and sat in the same way as we did before. But this time, we all brought rocks. Sandy was really happy about that!

That got us started again thinking about other things we could do, and when we started building the MindBody Space, other people were talking and asking about the Summer Solstice. There was a definite feeling we wanted to celebrate our place in nature. People wanted to have some sort of ceremony. The problem was, the Sanctuary was a place of stillness and silence. Sandy's stones fitted very well with that, but it wasn't easy to think of other rituals that would work in the same way. The Sanctuary experience was also very personal, with a focus on each person's own personal connection to nature. Our experiences in the MindBody Space were more social in the sense we often went there with friends, even if we each did our own kind of yoga or tai chi. And of course we did most of our hiking and climbing or running in the mountains with friends. With all of that, we had a community now. And we wanted to reinforce the idea of a wider community, beyond the co-op and the local area to the whole world. What could we do to recognize, or reflect our human presence, our emotions and characteristics? We tried to identify what we thought were the best features of humanity: peacefulness, tolerance, compassion, generosity, concern for other people and for the natural environment. That's what we wanted to express in our ceremonies at the Sanctuary.

Alice Tyndall:

I believe we all agreed on the value of ritual as an expression of our commitment to the natural environment. We all understood the importance of traditional values. The difficulty lay in trying to find universal elements that we could include in our rituals. We knew of many examples of rituals from indigenous peoples and from many different cultures that were still very closely linked to the natural world. I wanted to develop new rituals for modern city dwellers, people who are removed from nature in most of their lives. If we had to use traditional symbols and rituals that marked the cycle of the seasons, or reflected the stages in our lives: the progression from birth to growth and maturity and death, I wanted to find new meanings, new significance for them. Meanings related to the lives we live today.

It is not an easy task! Anything new seems artificial and shallow at first, but I think we can find meaning in new rituals that will come with experience. We'll just learn as we go along. I think a good starting point is to become more aware of the cycles of nature, of the changing seasons. They provide a moderating rhythm to our lives, so we are not continually focussed on our selves, our problems, our concerns, our expectations. They remind us of other notions of time – the life spans of plants and animals, of ancient trees, of giant turtles. And the timeless, yet ever-changing nature of mountains and rivers. It gives us a context for

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

better understanding our place in the natural world. We short-lived organisms may seem to be the masters of all we survey. But future events may show how unrealistic that view is.

We also need to find the universal themes that would reflect a spirit of community. A ritual that would express our commitment to protecting the natural environment, and our commitment to one another. It does not have to be serious and somber. It should be lively and joyful! It should be simple and easy to understand. Something that everyone could join in and be a part of. If we could find the right type of music or song, that would be wonderful.

Sandy Colborne:

We had a hard time agreeing on what type of rituals or ceremonies we should have in the Sanctuary, but we did agree on when to have some sort of ceremony. We picked the obvious choices: the seasonal markers, the solstices and the equinoxes. These are natural events that everyone can celebrate without religious or cultural or social divisions. We also felt we should celebrate Earth Day. That was unanimous. We knew that there were many other events on those days, but they were the most logical times for any sort of ceremony at the Sanctuary. We didn't come up with anything particularly new. Sitting at sunrise and sunset if possible? We all agreed on that. Full day hike somewhere? Possibly, if the weather was OK.

Ned pointed out that we might not be able to reach the Sanctuary in the middle of winter, or even in the early spring around the time of the Spring Equinox and Earth Day. Bad weather, too much snow, icy conditions on the trail could make it hard to get there. We'd need to think about safety procedures for the trail and the sanctuary. That didn't mean we couldn't do something at the Base, in the MindBody Space or in the Seven Stones Garden, although that could be under snow, too. In winter, the Skyline Highway might not be in good condition either, and with that, and the normal winter cold, and the closeness to Christmas and other holidays, we probably shouldn't expect a big turnout at that time of year.

The best suggestion was to consider a particular theme for each event so they didn't all blend together into the same sort of thing each time. For example, at the Spring Equinox, we could celebrate new life, new growth, new hopes, new plans for the future. A sunrise ceremony would be good for that. We mightn't be able to do much at the Sanctuary if it was snowy and icy, but perhaps we could plant trees and flowers at the Base, around the MindBody Space and the Seven Stones Garden. We all agreed on Earth Day. We could focus on community activities at the Base, not at the Sanctuary, where it could still be icy or snowy. The Summer Solstice would be the best time to celebrate the good life. The time for singing and dancing, or whatever we decided to do. Celebrate humanity. Being human. At the Fall Equinox, we could celebrate the abundance and bounty of the earth. We had lots of ideas for that. I liked the idea of having a feast at the Base. Maybe a potluck where everyone brings organic foods and dishes. For the Winter Solstice we thought about light and darkness. Lanterns, maybe.

Celebrations

Rebecca Watson:

We held the first real ceremony at the Sanctuary—a very simple one—on the Summer Solstice not long after we had started to build the MindBody Space. The new trail was finished and a good number of volunteers had signed up for the third weekend of work. The weather had been great and the forecast was good for the weekend. We'd been posting information about the weekend work on the Shelter, the MindBody Space, on the co-op Website, and so we added a notice about an early morning sunrise sitting at the Sanctuary for anyone who was able to make it.

It was a beautiful morning. We sat wherever we could along the ridge and waited for the sun to appear over the horizon, and the instant it did, we all took a deep breath and said "Oooooooooohhhhm!" Tak had a big bell, and he organized a team of guys to carry it to the Sanctuary. He rang the bell seven or eight times, letting the sound of each ring echo against the mountains. One of the volunteers had brought a flute with him, and he asked if he could play a short tune. Everyone agreed, and he played for a few minutes. It was all spontaneous, and it worked wonderfully. Then we went down again, into Grenville for breakfast and then back to the worksite.

At lunch time, we had a longer break. There were people who couldn't go to the sunrise sitting, so we walked up to Sanctuary at midday. Tak rang the bell again. We sat for ten minutes, scattered along the ridge like before, and then joined hands and said another long "Oooooooooommm!" Then we went down for lunch.

At the end of the day, some people wanted to go back to the Sanctuary at sunset, but most of us went into Grenville and had a drink in the pub there. Ned and Roger had decided we could celebrate in a different way by then, and they bought drinks for Dan Hedin and his crew who had done so much to help us.

Mid-summer. Cold beer. Nachos. Ned felt that was another good way to celebrate the solstice. And for anyone who didn't want to drink liquor, he bought a crate of organic juices. We all sat in the beer garden outside the pub and had a lovely evening. Ned claimed it was the proper combination of spiritual and pagan rituals to represent our true humanity.

Sandy Colborne:

The first big celebration, the first really organized event we had, was on the Fall Equinox. We'd posted a notice on the Website, asking for ideas for an appropriate celebration of the Equinox. We especially wanted to hear from environmental groups, Zen groups, and anyone else with experience from other solstice celebrations. We'd finished the MindBody Space only a few weeks earlier, and we knew a lot of people wanted to celebrate it at the Sanctuary.

Out of a lot of suggestions, we chose the theme of gratitude for the bounty of the Earth and we divided the day of the Equinox—luckily it was a Sunday—into three parts. In the

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

morning and afternoon we had the usual sitting at the Sanctuary and in the Seven Stones Garden, and yoga or tai chi and chi gong at the MindBody Space. I think more people than usual came to the Sanctuary to sit early in the morning. The weather was cool, and a bit cloudy, but the sun came out a few times during the day.

At five o'clock we organized a program of live music at the Base. A number of people had suggested live music and three groups and three other musicians volunteered to play for two hours. At the same time, we set up what we called An Exchange of Blessings. We were a few weeks ahead of Thanksgiving, and we didn't want to duplicate the idea of that exactly, so we asked everyone to come to the Base with two things: a contribution for a food bank and a small organic snack. It had to be finger food, something you could eat with your fingers. That made it so much simpler for cleanup. People brought wraps and nachos and salad veggies and fruit, things like that. We put all the snacks on a big, long table and everyone walked around and tried the different offerings. It was a lot of fun. I tried a couple of things, I don't know what they were, but they were, well, very interesting! But there were so many other snacks that were just wonderful. A group of us also made two large pots of soup, two kinds. In case it was a cold evening, we thought it would be good to have something like hot soup. You can't eat it with your fingers, but we asked everyone to bring their own cup, and we had some extra recyclable cups if they were needed. It wasn't meant to be a feast. That was for Thanksgiving. We wanted this to be a "meal of moderation," with the emphasis on giving to others, not feasting ourselves.

Then, at about half past six, we began the Walk of Candles and Lanterns to the Sanctuary. It wasn't a very new idea, I know, but we decided that it would be easier to do at Fall Equinox than at the Winter Solstice, and when you were walking up the trail, you saw this line of lanterns flickering through the trees up ahead of you and behind you as well.

When we got to the Sanctuary, we spread out along the ridge and found places to sit. There was a bit of wind, and it was a bit hard to keep all the lanterns alight. After the Summer Solstice, we realized we could use more platforms, and we'd built two more on ridge. Just platforms the same size as the one in the pavilion. Uncovered. So some people sat on those, and everyone else found places to sit on the rock. There must have been forty or fifty people.

The sky was cloudy by then, but after we'd all arrived and were getting settled and ready to sit, we suddenly saw a light on top of Mount Buchan. It got bigger and we could see it was a bonfire. Ned and a bunch of others had collected firewood and taken it to the top of Mount Buchan where it was rocky and dry—no trees or bushes up there—and they lit the bonfire at the official sunset time. Tak had brought the big bell—it took two people to carry it on poles—and he rang it and we all sat for ten minutes. You could focus on the bonfire across the valley, on your lantern. It was lovely to sit among so many people. Even though it was getting cold, I felt warm inside.

Then Tak rang the bell again, four times—once for each season. We all held hands with the people near us, and when everyone was joined, on a count of three, we all took a deep

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

breath and said a long “Ommm,” as long as we could. Just like we’d done before at the Summer Solstice.

That was it! A lot of people didn’t want to leave right away. There were some young children there, and I think they wanted to stay as long as the bonfire was still burning. I thought the fire was pushing back the night and the darkness. I didn’t want to leave, either.

But we all walked down again. We’d made sure that everyone had flashlights—we’d strongly suggested that on the Web notice—and there were no problems. Roger stayed on the ridge until the bonfire went out and asked the last people to come down. People could stay up there as late as they liked at any other time, but we felt responsibility for the safety of everyone at the celebration, so we wanted to make sure everyone got down safely. We’d explained that on the Web notice as well, and there were no problems.

Karen:

If you saw something like that in a movie, you'd see the line of people on the trail with their lanterns and the drummers and chanting and then they'd get to the top and the drumming would be relentless, and it would reach a crescendo, and then all at once, the drumming would stop. And there'd be perfect silence. And the stars would come out, millions of them. And there'd be collective "Aaaaah!" It would get you right here, in the heart.

Well, we tried to have that happen, but it doesn't work that way in real life. It was just beginning to get dark. You could just see the dark shapes of people and a bit of light from the lanterns on their faces every now and then. A vague line of people moving through the trees. Some people had bells, bear bells I suppose, and you could hear them in the forest. It was spooky in a way. But people were so happy. There was such a good feeling. We straggled onto the ridge, and it was just dark enough with the clouds, the lanterns helped a bit. Roger and Tak and others were watching and keeping people away from the edges, and we all found places to sit safely. The only stars you could see were far away to the east. Still, it was great to sit there, with the lanterns and the bonfire and a few distant stars low in the sky where it was getting darker.

I loved the bonfire on the top of Mount Buchan. It had a lovely pagan feel to it, especially with the lanterns as well. It took us back to ancient times. An ancient connection to the earth and sky, when everything was mysterious. So I think the celebration was a great success, even if it wasn't a movie moment.

Alicia Tyndall:

On the last Summer Solstice, we tried something different: a Festival of Flags. It was sparked by the pictures we’d seen of Tibetan prayer flags streaming in the wind on mountain passes. With his memories of the Himalayas, Roger thought it was a wonderful idea. Everyone made their own flags. We preferred not to have national flags, not even the Canadian flag. We were celebrating the Earth, not any one nation. People made flags of all colours, out of pieces of material and paper with all kinds of patterns and designs. Young people had flags

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

with birds and animals on them. There were ribbons and streamers, and kites. Brightly coloured kites that they flew on the ridge. The air was full of colour! I remember, someone had a string of nautical flags. They each had a meaning—the only one I can remember now was the yellow flag for quarantine. I do not know if that meant we had an infectious disease or not. I hoped we had an infectious cause, to conserve and protect and celebrate the natural world, a cause that would spread around the world!

We carried the flags up to the Sanctuary and when we reached the ridge, what did we see? Flags on the peaks along the ridge across the valley! Roger had arranged with some of his climber friends to place them there. At first there was not much wind, but in the afternoon, it was stronger and then you could see them flying against the sky.

We had music and singing as before—another delightfully noisy, rambling pagan parade! We spread out along the ridge and with our flags, it was hard to hold hands, so we put one hand on the next person's shoulder, and that way we all touching. We were all connected. We all took a deep breath, and said a long "Oooooomm." It comes from Eastern religion, of course, but it seems to fit very well as a universal sound that we can all say and understand. Our oneness, our unity with the world.

But then a group of people started chanting "Om mani padme hum." I did not expect that. No one had asked for it. It is a Tibetan Buddhist prayer, and while we do not want to introduce particular religious practices into our ceremonies, other people along the ridge joined in. Everyone joined in as best they could. It was rather chaotic, but it was enjoyable. It was a happy chant. We lifted our arms to the sky and chanted—I do not know how long. Only a few minutes I think, before arms got tired, and voices faded. Then Tak, who has become a wonderful master of ceremonies for these occasions, rang the big bell that had been carried up to the Sanctuary. Then we sat in silence for twenty minutes as we have done before. After that, a small group of people started to laugh. Not at anything in particular. Just laughing. And they got everyone else to laugh, too. It felt a little silly, but it was another way of celebrating our humanity. And another way of not taking ourselves too seriously. That is often very useful.

The combination of celebration and silence seems to work quite well so far. We do not feel particularly pagan and we are certainly not going back to some ancient practice of worshipping specific trees or rocks or sacred springs. We are celebrating our human presence in the natural world with our voices and music and our flags. And then we sit to listen to the world around us. The world as it is.

Ned Kinloch:

Earth Day in April was the most obvious choice of all to have some sort of event related to the Sanctuary. Essentially, the Sanctuary was a statement in favour of the planet Earth. In favour of conservation and protection of the earth. What we came up with was an event based on a practical relationship with the natural environment, not a spiritual one. Roger and

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

Alicia and I had spent a lot of time discussing a range of practical environmental issues that very quickly expanded into political and social justice issues as well.

Alicia had worked for years with UNESCO and the World Health Organization on projects all over the world. Wherever there was poverty and hunger and disease, she'd been involved in a whole range of activities from things like international disaster relief to local health issues in African villages.

I'd recently joined a group of scientists from all over the world discussing the possible impact of climate changes on food production and examining adjustments that farmers and other food producers could make to remain productive. I'm working with climate researchers and meteorologists on possible improvements to long-range weather forecasting for South America. Along with agronomists, economists, and other government officials, we're trying to help food producers—farmers, ranchers, fishermen—to maintain or increase production, maintain or increase their incomes, and generally improve their standard of living. Other groups focussed on other parts of the world.

Roger, I found out, was involved in a smaller project, but one with more immediate benefits. It was concerned with low cost and low tech ways of getting electricity and clean water to mountain villages in the foothills of the Himalayas from Pakistan to eastern Nepal. Simple small-scale improvements that made people's lives a bit easier and better.

The key factor in Roger's and my involvement with these groups was our climbing. We'd climbed in Pakistan and India and Nepal and in Peru and Chile and Argentina. We'd gotten to know people who lived in those mountain areas, and gotten a glimpse of their lives. And that gave us the idea for an Earth Day activity. One that ultimately became pretty well the entire activity.

Roger Maltenby:

Ned and I had discussed a specific question: What should every person know about the world they live in? Especially city dwellers, since more than half the world's population now lives in cities or large urban areas. We weren't talking about a romantic view of nature—lovely scenery, cuddly animals, that sort of thing. We were thinking about the basic, direct connection between city people and the food they ate, their drinking water, and the air they breathed. Where did their food, water, and air come from? We decided that was the sort of information that everyone should know. It might be useful if they knew something of climate zones and watersheds and natural resources, but we didn't see any point in getting technical. There were many other things we could add, but we figured that was enough for a start. It was a lot for a start.

So we developed an event based on the concept of region. There's no one absolute definition of a region. We defined our local region on the basis of geographical factors—watersheds, mountain barriers, climate zone—and a small number of economic and political factors.

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

We talked about this with everyone else and we agreed on a theme for an Earth Day event at the Base: Our Place in the World. We wanted to get people thinking about the natural environment in very practical ways. Where they lived. Where they got their water from. Where their food came from. We wanted them to see beyond roads and buildings and shopping centres. We wanted them to think about the idea of a geographical, climatic, economic, and political region.

But just as importantly, we wanted them to see beyond this local region. To see, and think about, the ways the local region was connected to the rest of the world. How their work, their leisure, how their lives were connected to the rest of the world. It's very easy, especially in our generally affluent and open Canadian society, to think we don't need anyone else, or anything more than what we have right around us. It's easy not to be concerned with the condition or problems of people in other parts of the world. But so much of what we have around us is connected to the rest of the world.

I was familiar with a number of projects in which ordinary people got together to create a "community map." A map of the distinctive and special features of their communities. The ones I saw were done on the Gulf Islands in British Columbia. I'd seen others of English villages and the surrounding countryside. We wanted to have a similar sort of activity, but with a wider viewpoint. The distinctive features of a region were important, but equally or more important were the links to the rest of the world. We all know we're linked to the rest of the world in a hundred ways, probably more, but we don't often think of them.

Out of that came our ideas about making people aware of how much their lives were shaped by the local environment *and* by environmental, economic, cultural, and political factors far beyond the local region.

Ned Kinloch:

For the main activity, we set up three display areas: Land, Water, and Air. In each area we had a map of the region with several features marked so everyone could see where particular places were on the map. We had a second large panel with a small map of the region in the centre, and a number of external connections marked on it.

Basically, we asked people to add whatever information they could to each map. We had volunteers to help and guide people at each map by asking questions and answering questions. Reb recruited several university profs and grad students to spend some time at the event. We approached local natural history clubs and environmental groups, too, so we had an hourly rotation of volunteer "experts" throughout the afternoon. That made it a truly interactive process. It took a while to get going, but once it did, the maps were covered with new information. Around the maps we had smaller displays about specific environmental issues and campaigns. We listed local, national, and international groups concerned with environmental issues, and asked for information about local issues, things like possible pollution sources. We asked people to list social justice issues, like homelessness and

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

poverty, and someone suggested marking the location of charity work and aid programs in other countries. Programs that local people have supported or been part of.

We weren't testing anyone. We didn't check to see if everything was correct. If someone said something was wrong, we asked them to add what they thought was correct. It really got people talking to one another. That was important because that was another connection we were interested in. Connections between people, here in this community, and with other people hundreds or thousands of miles away. Towards the end of the afternoon, we suggested that people circulate around the maps again to see how much had been added. I think people were doing that anyway, but we hoped that would help them see the extent and variety of the links between the land and air and water, and the connections to other parts of the country and the world. We found people, collectively, knew a lot about their region. And they came up with all sorts of connections that we hadn't thought of. That was great.

It wasn't all terribly serious. We asked people to mark where they or their family originally came from—somewhere else in Canada or anywhere else in the world. We asked about where they studied, if they went away to college or university. Where they'd been posted to work. We asked about local recreation areas and distant vacation spots. We had to keep adding sheets for that one.

Roger Maltenby:

That Earth Day event worked so well we've taken all the information and we're now assembling what we call an Atlas of Regional Connections. It's not definitive, it's not totally scientific, and it's not academic. The important thing is to make it all meaningful to ordinary people. The goal, the basic thrust, as I've said before, is to make people aware of how humans impact the land, water, and air around us, and how we depend on clean air, clean water, and fertile land for our very existence. And when it comes to drinking water and food and the air we breathe, they often come from other parts of the world. We have to protect our local resources, and we have to help protect those resources elsewhere. That's what environmental action is all about: quality of life—and absolute survival.

As you can imagine, there are a huge number of elements, and a large part of the work is concerned with organizing the material. That's both a challenge and one of the points we want to make: that everything is connected to everything else. A group of us meet regularly to add and assess new information and decide where to fit it in. I'd like to be able to put together a display for next Earth Day. And then we could start adding more information.

Takao Matsushima:

We've also built on the Atlas of Regional Connections, or extended it, you might say, into different small events in the city. From the Earth Day activity, we learned there were all sorts of local people who were willing to talk about their experience and expertise in many of the areas we were interested in, for example, farmers and ranchers and orchardists. Some of

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

them produce organic crops; others are part of the regular system. It doesn't matter which. It's useful to know about everything connected to the food we eat.

So we organized a number of events in the city in which farmers talked about the work they do. They talked about the weather and the soil and water issues. When they got rain, when they needed rain and when they needed sunshine. Not about beautiful sunrises and the smell of fresh-cut hay—although someone asked about that once. Mainly, they talked out the hard facts of everyday work. About seasonal routines and long hours of work at different times of the year. About the economics of farming and ranching—the cost of inputs, the price of seed and fertilizer and farm equipment. About the market—grain prices, transportation costs, crop insurance. About government policies and imports.

All of that told us a lot about our region, but it also took us way beyond it. And we're planning more meetings—more than one a month now—on other topics. We've had someone from the local energy authority talk about the supply of electricity and natural gas and how demand can be moderated through conservation and new technology. We're trying to get someone from the local water authority give a similar sort of talk on how we use water in this region. And we got a hundred ideas for other speakers and panel discussions.

Those are all about the practical links to land, water and air. Alicia has extended the Sanctuary experience in other, more spiritual ways.

Alicia Tyndall:

Because it takes nearly an hour to drive to the Sanctuary, and there is no bus service or any other way of getting there, it is obvious that encouraging people to go to the Sanctuary means more driving. It means more expense with high gas prices, and more pollution. We encourage people to go as a group—four people fit in one car, and four people can sit together at the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary is a special place, and it is necessary. It is where we make a conscious connection to the natural world. It focuses the mind. We have to make an effort to get there. To spend the time there and in the nearby mountains.

I cannot go to the Sanctuary as much as I would like, so I have looked around me for other ways to make a spiritual connection to the natural world, and to other people. There is a park not far from where I live, and I realized I had often seen Asian people, mainly, doing tai chi and chi gong on summer mornings. I always thought it was a lovely way to start the day, and that gave me the idea of getting a number of my friends together and going to the park in the early morning and sitting in silence for thirty minutes. There is a flat space on the grass where a small group of people—perhaps ten or twelve people—could sit facing towards the southeast. A perfect place to sit in the early morning. So I talked to my friends, and now, about ten of us sit there one day a week. Sometimes all of us are there, at other times only five or six. And sometimes other people have joined us. I always take two extra sitting benches and I put up a little sign saying "Please sit with us in silence and stillness for a few minutes. Take time to rest and enjoy the natural world around us." There are not many

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

people around at that time of the morning, but two Asian people joined us once. I was very happy with that.

Sandy Colborne:

The latest celebration we're planning is a Winter Walk in the City for next Winter Solstice. Last year, there was lots of snow at the Sanctuary, and the trail was closed for most of December. Roger and others checked it out in case anyone tried to get to the Sanctuary. They posted a notice at the trailhead saying hiking boots and hiking poles or ski poles were needed, as well as extra warm gear for sitting, especially for head, hands, and feet. They suggested taking a flashlight or headlamp for emergencies. We opened the MindBody Space for yoga and sitting, and a few hardy people did make it to the Sanctuary. But really, it's not a good time to drive out on the Skyline Highway, and most people have the Christmas season on their minds.

In fact, that's what led to the idea for an event in the city. We didn't want to take away the pleasure of the Christmas season, but a lot of us were concerned about all the commercialism and consumerism that's such a big part of it. We decided one day, or one hour, of "Not buying" wouldn't do much, and it would seem hypocritical if we'd done our shopping already. So what we're doing is planning an activity that will be a break from shopping, and for a short time at least, will help everyone think of the natural environment. It will get everyone out of their heated homes and cars and shops so they can experience the natural winter for an hour or so. Not the "Winter Wonderland" of Christmas lights and plastic snow and sleighs and Santas.

We know many families with children go out sledding and skating on frozen ponds, and that's great. That's a truly Canadian celebration of winter. But we hope that a simple walk in a natural setting, very low key, will encourage other people to get out as well. On the Sunday before Christmas, we're planning a walk around a city park. The route is a loop, only about three kilometres long, past several features of the park. There are lots of places for shortcuts and an easy return to the start area if the distance is too long or the weather is too bad. It would be great if it is snowy, but there's no guarantee of that.

Another thing we plan to do is call for small donations to environmental causes. It's not meant to be a major fund-raising event. We're suggesting loonies and toonies, maybe five dollars maximum. Just the idea of giving something for the environment, something for Earth, at a time when most people are spending an awful lot more on presents for each other. Like the Sanctuary, it's a symbolic thing. It's not a major environmental action or anything. Whatever we collect, we'll give it to an environmental group—not the Co-op, not for the Sanctuary. With any luck, it'll be a small reminder about how to moderate the usual lavish Christmas shopping sprees.

We want to do something like this in the city, because we'd like people to realize that even in the city, nature is there. In the parks and gardens, in the waters, in the skies. In many ways it's easier to appreciate nature at the Sanctuary—that's one of the reasons for it—but it's not

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

the only place you can appreciate nature. Most of the time, people don't see it. They're not really aware of it. It happens to me too. I've got a busy schedule, I've got things to do—a lot of the time I hardly notice the weather or the trees and flowers. Birds? What birds?

I don't know how well this plan will work, how many people will come out. We'll have to see.

Balance

Rebecca Watson:

When we created the Sanctuary, we felt that we were creating it for anyone and everyone. We ask that everyone act in a certain way, mainly by being silent, and not disturbing anyone else's silence. We want it to be a personal thing. Nobody says there is only one way to relate to nature or connect with nature. You are free to contemplate or to meditate. Eyes open or eyes shut. You come here and act in a way that shows respect for nature and for other people around you—the people that make up our community, if you like. All our wonderful volunteers.

We've been very lucky so far. People are generally great. There are a few careless ones, arrogant ones. Some people are noisier than others when they arrive and when they leave. We've heard a few complaints about people sitting for a long time and not making space for anyone else. With more people going there, it's really important that everyone try to cooperate. Most people do. They understand the purpose of the Sanctuary. They follow the example set by others.

We check the condition of the pavilion pretty regularly. It's been left open in the wind and rain a couple of times. One panel got damaged when the pavilion was open. It was left against the rock and it got blown down the hill. We had to take it down and repair it. But it wasn't too serious. We look out for litter around the Sanctuary and along the trail, but we haven't found any. Nothing's been mentioned that I know of. So far, we've had no vandalism or anything like that, and no damage to the trail or any of the trees and bushes along it.

We had a funny thing happen in the spring. We'd made two sitting benches for people who can't sit cross-legged very easily, and one of them disappeared. It wasn't up on the ridge or in the bushes, or anywhere we looked, so we concluded it must have been taken. When Ned heard about it, he made another one. He'd just finished it, when Karen discovered the bench back in the pavilion. Don't ask me where it went or how it got back. We were happy it was back, and now we have three of them.

We've only had one major conflict, one case where people didn't understand the purpose of the Sanctuary, or didn't want to understand it. Silence, stillness, and simplicity. Those are the basic principles of the Sanctuary throughout the year. But we also want to celebrate a few special times of the year when we express our joy and gratitude for the wonderful world we

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

live in. At those times, we have music and singing and chanting and drumming—all ways to celebrate our happiness. But the rest of the year: silence. That's what special about the Sanctuary.

Well, there may have been some misunderstanding about that after the last Summer Solstice celebration. A group of people thought they could do what they liked there. The last thing we wanted to do then – and it still is now – is to say who can't come to the Sanctuary. But these people were really against the purpose of the Sanctuary. I think that was the problem. I guess we'd made the point that we weren't a religious group and we were opposed to religion in the Park. For some reason, they took that to mean we were opposed to all religion and they wanted to bring religion to the Sanctuary. They came and started singing hymns as they went up the trail, and they kept on singing when they got to the Sanctuary, and then started praying. It mightn't have mattered if no one else was there, but there were other people sitting in the pavilion, and eventually they had to leave. The group came back the next Sunday and we tried to explain why we didn't want singing and praying. But they wouldn't listen. They said we couldn't stop them, and we let them go. We felt bad about it, but there didn't seem to be any way to compromise, and there was no way we could legally stop them. The trail and the Park are open for everyone.

That's when Ned decided to take action to defend the Sanctuary.

Ned Kinloch:

I have to admit there was a certain contradiction in my thinking about the Sanctuary. On the one hand, I wanted people to enter it in much the same way they would enter a church. In this case, there's no set ritual to be followed. You didn't have to cross yourself or bow or remove your hat. On the other hand, I especially didn't want it to be a church. For me it was a spiritual place, not a religious place. A person could feel as relaxed or happy or solemn as they liked. They could even pray if they wanted to. I didn't mind that—as long as they did it silently and didn't make it difficult or impossible for anyone else to sit in silence at the same time.

When it came to that hymn-singing group, the more we learned about them, it was obvious they had no interest in the natural world and no respect for anyone else at all. It was the arrogance that I associated with religions: this is what we do; this is the right way, the only way. Somehow, they, or their leader was opposed to “nature worship” and their actions were designed specifically to disrupt regular use of the Sanctuary that they regarded as “heathen and pagan.” This represented a direct test of our philosophy that the Sanctuary was open to anyone.

Alicia and Sandy and a few other people decided to be at the trailhead again early the next weekend to try to dissuade them from continuing. I was skeptical. I just didn't think those people were willing to negotiate. I don't understand how people like that think. How they think they can come in and take over a place they didn't build or create themselves. The

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

arrogance! The total unconcern for anyone else! That's what gets me. I can't stand that sort of thing.

It's a tough issue. What do you do when someone is not interested in compromise or dialogue? Try to be sympathetic, empathetic? If nothing works, I think you have to stand up for yourself. I don't see any value in being a pushover. Even if you believe in *ahimsa*, in non-violence, eventually you have to stand up for your own principles. I figured we might need more direct action to get this sanctimonious and self-righteous bunch off the mountain. So I had a backup plan.

I contacted Roger and some of our climbing friends—a couple of them had been to the Sanctuary—and I explained the problem and my idea. So on Sunday morning, we got to the ridge early and waited among the last of the tall trees. It was a wet day and the clouds were down in the trees. We had a cellphone, and when Alicia called to say that the hymners—as I called them—had refused to listen to her, we got ready for action. There were about a dozen of them and six of us. Tak was a bit lower down, and when he saw the hymners coming up the trail, he gave the signal.

We started howling, trying to sound eerie and menacing, softly at first, as if we were far away. And when we could just see them on the trail below us, we started howling more loudly and then we moved down the mountain in a line. Two of the guys were wearing Tibetan masks they'd brought back from a climbing expedition there. The rest of us wore climbing helmets and balaclavas and sunglasses—which didn't make it particularly easy to see because the day was gloomy enough anyway. We carried ice axes and had crampons strapped on our arms. Crazy, really, but I thought it was a pretty good Terminator touch. We had racks of climbing gear—biners and chocks and pitons—that rattled and jingled as we stomped down the hillside, grunting and growling like bears—or how we thought bears might sound when they're angry. The whole exercise depended on noise and appearance doing the trick. We certainly weren't going to use any of that gear on anyone.

Takao Matsushima:

It did what it was supposed to do, all right! In a way, it was one of the funniest moments in the history of the Sanctuary. Well, I shouldn't say that. It wasn't funny, I suppose to those hymn singers. I wasn't sure what to expect, and when I heard the howling coming from the clouds, and saw the bushes shaking and then the masks and those fierce ice axes and spiky crampons, I would have taken off if I was one of the hymn singers.

And that's what they did! The leader stopped when they first heard the wailing, and he was peering up the hill trying to see what was going on. And when Ned and the others appeared, he was still trying to figure out what was going on. But the people behind him had already started backing up. Someone screamed, and then they began to run! When the leader looked around, he saw he was on his own. He shouted at them, and then he began to run too. Ned and the others never even got close to them!

Sanctuary of the Morning Light

I saw their faces as they went down. They were scared! Unfortunately, one of them tripped and fell, but the others ran right past her. They didn't stop for a second! I was concerned she might have hurt her foot, so I jumped out of the bushes and ran down to her. She didn't see me coming until I got to her, and when I asked her if she was all right, she nearly jumped out of her skin. I wasn't dressed up like Ned and the others, so I didn't look too scary, I guess—I hope. It took a couple of minutes to calm her down and assure her I wouldn't hurt her, and neither would anyone else. By that time, the guys had taken off their masks and helmets, and looked more or less normal by then—or as normal as climbers ever look.

Her foot was OK, but she'd scraped her arm and hand. Luckily, one of Ned's friends had some Band-aids. He thought he might need them if he stumbled and fell with all the fierce gear on him. So we cleaned her off and patched her up and we all escorted her down the trail to the Base. When we got to the parking lot, Alicia and Sandy told us how all the hymn singers had gone past them like rockets, jumped into their cars, and taken off. They didn't wait for the girl at all! So she went back to Grenville with Alicia and Sandy. That's where she was from. She was really young, and didn't know what she was doing in the mountains with those guys. She said her boyfriend had talked her into joining them.

Afterwards, Ned referred to it as the "Battle of Harmony Ridge." Until then, we never had a name for the ridge the Sanctuary was on, and we liked that, and that's what we call it now: Harmony Ridge. And the hymn singers have never come back.

Ned Kinloch:

I had visions of the Buddhist monks charging down on Kyoto from Mt. Hiei back in the 8th century, I think it was. They were deeply involved in the politics of the day and they didn't just sit around meditating all day every day.

I've often approached the mountains in what I think of as the spirit of the warrior. Not seeing them as the enemy, but as an adversary to be treated with respect. To overcome the adversary—to reach the summit—I need to have the qualities of a warrior: training, skill, strength, discipline. The ability to endure hardship and to persevere. The ability to assess the adversary and find the best way to exploit weaknesses and use my own strengths.

I remember something Don Gayton wrote about attitudes to the natural world. He said society generally regarded a connection with the natural world to be a feminine trait—unless you wanted to extract natural resources from it. Well, I've done a bit of fishing and hunting when I was young, but not being a logger or miner, I've wondered about an appropriate male attitude to the natural world, and I think the warrior role is appropriate. I think we need warriors to defend the natural environment against exploitation and destruction. Defenders, protectors. Of course, they can be men or women. The important thing is to have some of those qualities I mentioned, not just for small things like establishing the Sanctuary, but for learning more about the natural world, for enduring the long drawn-out process of meetings and meetings and meetings that are such a large part of all environmental battles these days. And I think that's what they are really—battles. We win some, we lose some. But we live to

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

fight another day. And don't forget. A lot of people have put their bodies on the line, and some have lost their lives, fighting to protect the natural world, defending the land they live on. Fighting big corporations, big governments, powerful forces for profit and greed, and destruction! Defending the Sanctuary? It's ridiculous to mention it in the same breath. Only the principle is the same.

As far as the Sanctuary is concerned, there's another role for people. Sometimes you're an explorer—of the land and of yourself. And now and then, you have to be a leader and a guide.

I don't believe that violence is anything more than the absolute last resort. I certainly didn't want to hurt anyone, and my biggest fear was that someone would hurt themselves running away from us. I thought those people—the leader in particular, from what Alicia said about their brief conversation at the trailhead—were pompous and immensely arrogant. They weren't going to listen to us at all. But I thought their "power" was all in their head—in place of brains—and I thought we could scare them off. Give them a good, old-fashioned fright. And that's what we did. Luckily it worked.

And it was a bit of fun, too. Nobody said any of this was going to be easy.

There was an ironic touch to that event. Later, when Alicia went to the Sanctuary one day, there was a young woman sitting there when she arrived. Alicia waited, and when the person got up, they recognized each other. She was one of the hymn singers—the one who had fallen. She remembered Alicia and the kindness of the guys who helped her up on the trail. She'd come back to sit on her own a couple of times. She had nothing more to do with the hymn singers and she wanted to see for herself what the Sanctuary was like when it was quiet and peaceful.

Alicia Tyndall:

Ned has always been very strong on one point, and that was never to take ourselves too seriously. We are human. Let us not be too puritanical or pretentious. He reminds us of impermanence, of transience, that anything could happen to us or the Sanctuary that was beyond our control.

Tak once expressed mock regret about past practices, about pagan rituals, bacchanalian revels, orgies, and things like that. He was joking I know, but I know what he means. I think we can dispense with the sacrifice of virgins, and eating the hearts of victims in the Aztec tradition. Perhaps we could gather once a year, in summer, to read poetry and drink wine in the moonlight. In the meantime, a few times each year, we celebrate our gratitude and delight.

In many respects, I think this is the hard part now. What we did – dreaming up the Sanctuary, creating it, fighting Samilkawen, building the MindBody Space and the garden—that was easy. Now, we have to work together to maintain them, to make them last. We have an environmental responsibility to see that the Sanctuary remains a useful part of the Park

S a n c t u a r y o f t h e M o r n i n g L i g h t

for years to come, and a political responsibility to Skyline Park and also to all the environmental groups, to show that this is a useful and necessary part of our culture.

The Sanctuary started as such a small idea. We have had so much support and enthusiasm, it has grown into something much bigger. Have we overextended ourselves? Are there more things that we should be doing? What can we do better? Can we make it last? The future is always uncertain, but I think we can.

