

An American flag is shown waving on a pole against a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and casting long, soft shadows. The clouds are scattered and catch the low light of the sun. The flag's stars and stripes are clearly visible as it billows in the wind.

A Nation That Shines

twelve

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“Dreaming the future can create the future.”

Everything has a weight to it. Even the smallest molecule is defined by the balance of weight of its component parts. So, what is the weight of a nation that is fully realizing its highest potential? Of a nation that has reached a critical mass and is wholeheartedly dedicated to peace, equality and stewardship?

The principles of liberty, opportunity, peace and justice are **rooted into the fabric of our identity** as a country. In many ways, we are indeed a bright light when it comes to these virtues. But we also fall short—sometimes stuck in the muck of greed, indifference and closed-mindedness.

Kenny Ausubel, one of the authors in this chapter, plainly states that “dreaming the future can create the future.” Indeed the dream of this nation is not some far off ideal. It is a dream that has been unfolding for over 230 years and **is unfolding right now.** It is unfolding in the hearts and minds of women, men and children across the land.

Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” There is great power in the simplicity of this truth. **It calls us, whoever we are, to be a part of the creative process.** To be active participants. To get informed, to build hope, to paint beauty, to serve. To dream.

The luminaries who share their voices in this closing chapter echo the message that is found in the pages throughout this book. Their words weave a vision for the present and the future that reminds us to **remember our purpose and our potential.**



Dreaming the Future Can Create the Future

⋮ Kenny Ausubel
⋮ Bioneers

Dreaming the future can create the future. We stand at the threshold of a singular opportunity in the human experiment: To re-imagine how to live on Earth in ways that honor the web of life, each other and future generations. It's a revolution from the heart of nature—and the human heart.

Then again, in the immortal words of Yogi Berra, “The future ain’t what it used to be.”

We’re entering an age of nature. It calls for a new social contract of interdependence. Taking care of nature means taking care of people, and taking care of people means taking care of nature.

The ecological debt we’ve incurred is dire. We’ve precipitated climate change that’s within one degree centigrade of the maximum temperature in the past million years. Leading scientists say we have ten years at best to make a massive global shift, an extreme carbon makeover. It’s show-time.

We’re entering a drastic period of creative destruction. We’ve already begun to trigger what some ecologists call “regime shift,” irreversible tipping points. Global warming is getting all the ink, but other intimately interdependent issues equal its magnitude: the mass extinction of 30 to 50 percent of Earth’s biological and cultural diversity—freshwater shortages that will lead to wars, the universal poisoning of the biosphere, and the greatest extremes of inequality in modern history, a world that’s 77 percent poor.

We’re going to be busier than a cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

Periods of creative destruction also present transformative opportunities to make the world anew. These tectonic shocks are evolutionary exclamation points. They release vast amounts of energy and resources for renewal and reorganization. Novelty emerges, and small changes can have big influences. It’s a time of creativity, innovation, freedom and transformation.

The grail is resilience—strengthening the capacity of natural and human systems to rebound—or to transform when the regime shifts. As Charles Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.”

The driving force behind this unprecedented globalized collapse is financial. Author, economist and futurist Hazel Henderson has characterized conventional economics as “a form of brain damage.” We’re experiencing its devastating effects right now. It rationalizes the insatiable predation of nature and people, while disappearing environmental and social costs from the balance sheet. It concentrates wealth and distributes poverty. It exalts greed and self-interest. It conflates free markets with democracy. It merges corporations and the state. Its foreign policy is empire. It has been a catastrophic success.

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The mass extinction of **30–50%** of Earth’s biological and cultural diversity *

FRESHWATER SHORTAGES that will cause wars **

The universal **POISONING** of the biosphere

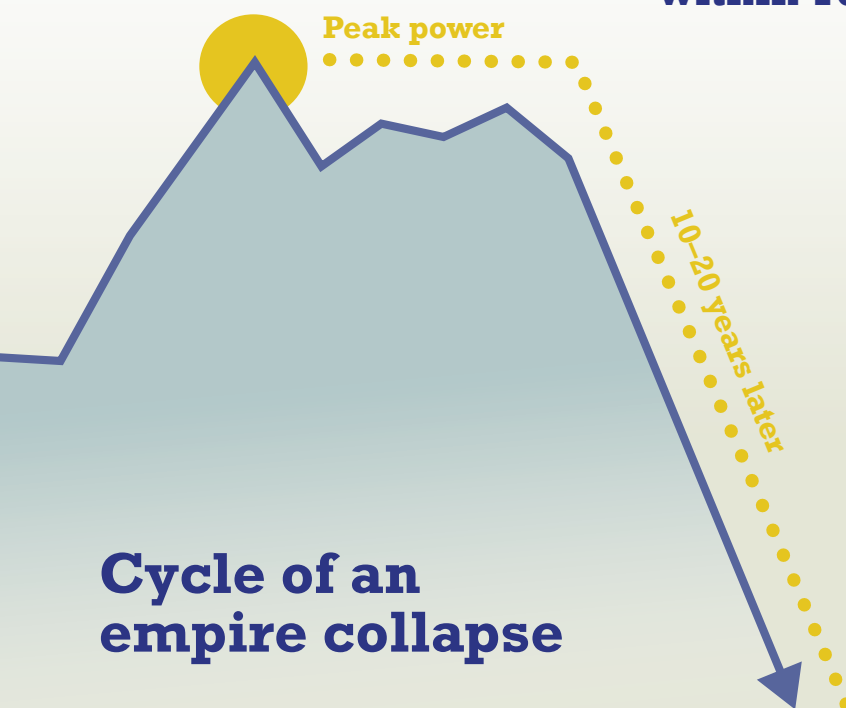
The greatest extremes of inequality in modern history, a world that’s **77% POOR**

We’re going to be busier than a cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

*Photo courtesy Dove Kimble **Photo courtesy Pierre Holtz, UNICEF



Every major empire over the past several hundred years has undergone a depressingly **predictable cycle of collapse**, usually **within 10 to 20 years** of its peak power.



The hallmarks are always the same:

- The financialization of the economy, moving from manufacturing to speculation
- Very high levels of debt
- Extreme economic inequality
- Costly military overreaching

The Dutch, Spanish and British empires followed this pattern.
The US is repeating it.

As political commentator Kevin Phillips has chronicled, every major empire over the past several hundred years has undergone a depressingly predictable cycle of collapse, usually within 10 to 20 years of its peak power.

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The Dutch, Spanish and British empires followed this pattern. The US is repeating it. But as J. Paul Getty said, “Every time history repeats itself, the price goes up.”

Yet there’s an even deeper story behind empire crash.

Energy is a nation’s master resource. Each empire has had an idiosyncratic ability to exploit a particular energy source that propelled its rise to economic power. The Dutch learned how to tap wood, wind and water. The British Empire fueled its ascendancy on coal. The American empire has dominated with oil.

The cautionary tale is this: No empire has been able to manage the transition to the next energy source. The joker in the deck this time around is the climate imperative to transition off fossil fuels worldwide. It requires the most complex and fiercely urgent passage in the history of human civilization. Nothing like it has ever been done.

Just as economics is driving the destruction, it needs to power the restoration. The charge is to transform the global economy from a vicious cycle to a virtuous cycle.

Real wealth creation is based on replenishing natural systems and restoring the built environment, especially our infrastructure and cities. It’s based on investing in our communities and workforce. It’s been shown to work best when done all at once. Restoration is an estimated \$100 trillion market. There’s plenty of work to do, plenty of people to do it and abundant financial incentive. And every dollar we spend on pre-disaster risk management will prevent seven dollars in later losses.

The question is: Will we change our old bad habits fast enough to beat forbidding odds?

Real Wealth Creation:

Replenishing
natural
systems



Restoring our
infrastructure
and cities



Investing in our
communities
and workforce

Restoration is an estimated
\$100 TRILLION
MARKET

Go to dreamnation
to get the book

Many of the solutions are already present. Where we don't know what to do, we have a good idea what directions to head in. Game-changing technological and social innovations are surfacing constantly.

A big bang of brilliant, effective work is meeting with unprecedented receptivity. Yet still the pace of destruction outstrips our response. Real success will require a giant leap across the abyss on visionary currents of bold action. It will take skillful means. It will take a big heart. And in times like these, as Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Many of the solutions are already present. Where we don't know what to do, we have a good idea what directions to head in. Game-changing technological and social innovations are surfacing constantly. Global digital media can spread them at the speed of text messaging.

At the forefront is biomimicry, the art and science of mimicking nature's design genius. As Janine Benyus observes, nature has already done everything we want to do, without mining the past or mortgaging the future. There's nothing like having four billion years of R&D at your back.

A riptide of capital is mainstreaming biomimicry and clean tech, now the third-largest domain of venture capital investment. In Silicon Valley, the "watt-com" era has dawned. Compared with hundreds of billions for the

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entire Internet market, the worldwide energy market is \$6 trillion. Google just put forth a \$4.4 trillion Clean Energy plan. By 2030, it proposes to slash fossil fuel use by 88 percent and CO2 emissions by 95 percent.

The smart money is hot on the trail of the next industrial revolution. There's mounting pressure on Uncle Sam because government policies make or break markets.

But for now, the real action is happening at local and regional levels.

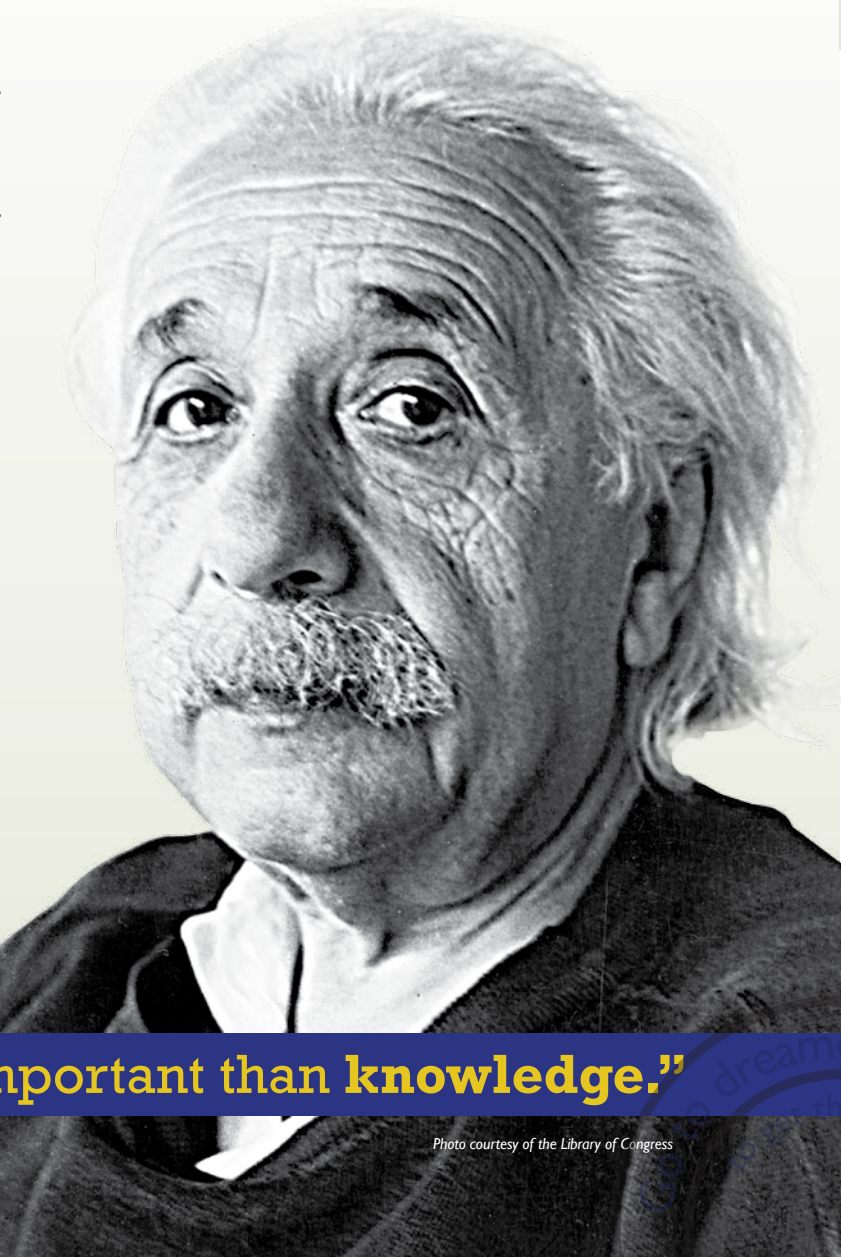


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress



California:
Passed the world's first comprehensive climate change legislation, and is gearing up to install 12.5 sq. mi. of solar panels.



Massachusetts:
Passed the nation's most far-reaching package of renewables and green jobs legislation.



Texas:
Is about to build the biggest wind installation ever, surpassing Germany as the world leader.

California, the world's sixth-largest economy, passed the world's first comprehensive climate change legislation and is gearing up to install 12.5 square miles of solar panels—12 times the previous largest.¹ In 2008, Massachusetts passed the nation's most far-reaching package of renewables and green jobs legislation.² Texas just finished building the biggest wind installation ever,³ surpassing Germany as the world leader, and California already has plans to build an installation double its capacity.⁴

Breakthrough technological innovations have to spread rapidly, as do the government policies that drive these markets. Of equal importance are social innovations and political regime change.

Michael Kinsley of Rocky Mountain Institute has said, "We've got to go from success stories to systemic change." It's going to take epic cooperation among

Kenny Ausubel is an award-winning social entrepreneur, author, journalist and filmmaker. For 25 years, his work has been at the forefront of environmental, health and progressive social-change movements. Ausubel is co-CEO and founder of Bioneers (www.bioneers.org), a globally acclaimed non-profit that highlights breakthrough solutions for restoring people and planet. Ausubel co-founded the biodiversity organic company Seeds of Change in 1989 and served as CEO until 1994. His films include Hoxsey: When Healing Becomes a Crime (Best Censored Stories journalistic award), which played in theaters and on HBO and international TV, and helped influence national policy. He wrote the acclaimed companion book When Healing Becomes a Crime.



business, government and civil society, and among nations. We need to play big and aim high. It begins with a dream. In the words of Janine Benyus, "The criterion of success is that you keep yourself alive, and you keep your offspring alive. But it's not your offspring—it's your offspring's offsprings' offspring ten thousand years from now. Because you can't be there to take care of that offspring, the only thing you can do is to take care of the place that takes care of your offspring."

I'd like to close with the words of David Oates from an essay called "Imagine" in *High Country News*.⁵

A vision predicates an imaginative leap: that we are—after all—fundamentally connected to each other—that my fate and happiness are not private matters only, but a shared project. A tax cut takes no imagination: It's a few more bucks in your pocket. But seeing one's ownership in a community, one's own face in someone else's child, that takes imagination.

Imagine—combining our resources to relieve suffering and to open up dead-ends of poverty and hopelessness. Imagine knowing that our fate is each other.

Imagine: knowing that our fate also swims with the salmon and grows with the trees.

Imagine living beyond yourself—finding the thing you're good at and in love with, even if it doesn't pay so well. That would be like coming back to life, wouldn't it? It would be like grace.

Imagine.

.....

dream of anation.org
the book!

Everyone a Changemaker

• Diana Wells
• Roshan Paul
• Ashoka

Mark Hanis grew up as the grandchild of four Holocaust survivors. Living and working in Ecuador, Sierra Leone and New York City, he came to acutely experience how we so often “otherize” and alienate those who are not like us. He also saw how the lessons of the Holocaust had not been learned—we’ve allowed genocide to happen again and again despite the world’s “Never Again” pledge after World War II.

As a senior at Swarthmore College, he was disturbed that there weren’t any events planned to mark the tenth year of the Rwandan genocide. So Mark went about organizing a commemoration event, which turned out to be a success. From that modest beginning, Mark, along with his colleagues, has gone on to build one of the foremost and most innovative anti-genocide organizations in the world, the Genocide Intervention Network (GI-NET). One of the cornerstones of GI-NET’s approach has been the realization that the world’s failure to stop genocide was due not to lack of awareness so much as to lack of political will. The best way to galvanize this was to ensure there were effective ways for citizens to take political action. So GI-NET created effective new techniques for enabling citizens to communicate their opposition to genocide. For instance, they came up with the first-ever anti-genocide hotline that connects callers directly to their elected officials for free, provides talking

Mark Hanis has built one of the foremost and most innovative anti-genocide organizations in the world: the Genocide Intervention Network (GI-NET). He is 28 years old.



Members of the Ashoka Globalizer community are focused on spreading social impact.

What is a Social Entrepreneur?

- An individual with **innovative solutions** to society’s most pressing social problems.
- Ambitious and persistent, **endlessly creative** in coming up with solutions to daily obstacles and frustrations
- Possessed by an idea that they are convinced can **change the world**. Determined to work on making this idea successful for as long as it takes.

points related to current legislation, suggests other actions elected officials can take to help end genocide and even enables citizens to listen to genocide discussions taking place in Congress. GI-NET also leverages the idealism, energy and tech savviness of youth; there are over 800 anti-genocide chapters in high schools and colleges across America. Mark will soon be transitioning out of a full-time staff role and onto the board of the organization in search of his next big idea. He is 28 years old.

What makes Mark a social entrepreneur? Of all the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors who went to college in America, why was it he that went on to become president of the world’s largest organization dedicated to preventing genocide a mere six years after graduating? At Ashoka, we’ve elected nearly 3,000 such people as Fellows from over 65 countries, and we see the same qualities shine brightly within each of them. They are possessed by an idea they are convinced can change the world, they are determined to work on making this idea successful for as long as it takes, they are endlessly creative in coming up with solutions to daily

obstacles and frustrations, and they possess a strong ethical streak that makes people, society, instinctively trust them. These leaders, or social entrepreneurs, are changing the world.

But alone, even they are not enough. We live in a world where problems seem to be breeding faster than we can count them. Our economy is being transformed, painfully so for millions of Americans. Climate change continues to loom over our heads. The gap between the richest and the poor widens every year. The House and Senate seem to be caught in a perpetual cycle of implacable hostility between both major parties. What is the solution to this juggernaut of multiplying problems?

We need a world where every individual is a changemaker.

We need to create a world that multiplies changemakers who can attack these problems, or prevent them from happening in the first place. By this, we don’t mean that everyone should turn off their lights when they leave a room, though that is of course important, and we should.

They are endlessly creative in coming up with solutions to daily obstacles and frustrations, and they possess a strong ethical streak that make people, society, instinctively trust them. These leaders, or social entrepreneurs as we call them, are changing the world.

We need to enable individuals to feel like they have the confidence, creativity, and empathy to address the problems they see around them.



The Ashoka Changemaker Campus Fellows.

By this, we mean that we need to enable individuals to feel like they have the confidence, creativity and empathy to address the problems they see around them, whether it is to create a conflict resolution process in the family or a neighborhood recycling program or prevent the sale of toxic mortgages.

And here's the good news: The world will conspire to let you be a changemaker. If you are a young person, there have never been as many opportunities or resources to help you come up with a plan to solve a problem and walk you through implementing this plan. If you are a college student, look around you: Is your campus joining the Changemaker Campus movement? If you are a business owner, you should know that the levels of collaboration between companies and citizen groups have never been as high as they are today (and are only getting higher). Companies are partnering with citizen sector organizations to extend their reach to underserved populations with products that are essential and affordable. If you are a budding social entrepreneur, there is a plethora of start-up funding organizations waiting to help you.

We could go on. But we'd rather show you some more people who are walking this path. At Ashoka, we work with many of America's best social entrepreneurs: Wendy Kopp who founded Teach for America, Jimmy Wales who founded Wikipedia, J.B. Schramm of College Summit and over a hundred more. Yet, to truly illustrate the point that everyone can be a changemaker, let us tell you two stories of youth who are transforming the world we live in.

First, let's meet Heather Wilder, 17 years old, from Las Vegas. She is a passionate advocate for the rights of foster care children in the United States, with a clarity of conviction that can only come from having lived the experience herself. Heather was removed from an abusive situation as a young child. After several years in the foster care system, she was adopted into a loving and supportive family at age 12. To help foster kids who are still in the system, Heather wrote a series of booklets that address issues faced by foster children on a daily basis, like moving homes frequently, not being adopted or dealing with previous and sometimes ongoing abusive situations. Today, social workers give Heather's booklets to children as they come into the foster care system. She acknowledges that it can be difficult to speak up about the abuse she endured, but she's driven by her determination to be a voice for other children who haven't left the system: "Being brave helps me feel better, because I pretend that I am being brave for someone else who can't share their stories yet."

And now let's meet Talia. Fifteen years old, Talia is the CEO and a founder of RandomKid, a nonprofit organization that leverages the power of youth to solve real problems in the world. To date she has leveraged the power of 12 million youth from 20 countries to bring aid on four continents, ranking the giving power of youth with the top US corporations. Talia is the winner of numerous national and international awards for her philanthropic work—including World of Children's Founder Youth Award, which is considered to be the Nobel prize for efforts that serve the world's children. Nicholas Kristof wrote of Talia in his column in the New

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York Times: "If your image of a philanthropist is a stout, gray geezer, then meet Talia Leman, an eighth grader in Iowa who loves soccer and swimming, and whose favorite subject is science. I'm supporting her for president in 2044." Talia travels across the world speaking about "The Power of ANYone."

This is what a world in which everyone is a change-maker can look like. A world where people who grew up with the memories of the Holocaust can design solutions for those affected by other genocides in far-away lands because we pledged that this would never happen again, where children who have had disturbed childhoods come up with concrete solutions so that those that follow them don't have to suffer the same experiences, and where someone with a bright idea can have a global impact before her 15th birthday.

President Obama's creation of the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation is an important, proactive step. It is an attempt to harness the power of innovation and entrepreneurship to drive systems-changing solutions to our nation's most pressing problems. This shows that the administration recognizes something that many do not. It is not simply about

building institutions, but more important, it is about creating an enabling environment—one that surfaces a variety of innovative solutions and helps them spread. With the ever-increasing rate of change around us, it is now more critical than ever to ensure more individuals are mastering the skills of empathy, teamwork and leadership to be effective changemakers. The only answer to more problems is more problem-solvers. For this reason, we believe the only answer is to build a world where all citizens are playing roles to solve the world's most pressing needs—an *Everyone a Changemaker* world.

When you see the front page of the newspaper or switch on cable news, this world may seem a very long way away. And it is. We do have a long way to go. But every day there are events unfolding that are reshaping the very contours of our world. We know so many other Marks and Talias and Heathers, and together they prove, incontrovertibly and emphatically, the power of the individual to change the world. We're excited about our future.

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Diana Wells first joined Ashoka (www.ashoka.org) in the 1980s after graduating from Brown University. She completed a PhD in anthropology from New York University as a Fulbright and Woodrow Wilson scholar. Post-PhD, Wells returned to Ashoka to provide leadership for Ashoka's process of finding and supporting the world's leading social entrepreneurs, including managing Ashoka's geographic and portfolio growth. Wells was named president of Ashoka in November of 2005. She is on the advisory board for Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, and has taught anthropology and development at Georgetown University.



Roshan Paul has been involved in creating several new Ashoka programs, most recently Ashoka Peace (launching entrepreneurs in conflict zones) and Ashoka Globalizer (helping social entrepreneurs accelerate their impact globally). He has also managed Ashoka's Fellow Security and Senior Fellows programs. In an earlier stint, he co-launched Ashoka's Youth Venture program in India. Paul has degrees from Davidson College and the Harvard Kennedy School, and currently serves on the advisory boards of Lifting Voices, TechChange and Peace Direct US. He juggles passions for social entrepreneurship in conflict-stricken areas, and for the use of storytelling as a critical leadership skill.



Photo courtesy Talia Leman, RandomKid

Realizing Our Roots and the Power of Interconnectedness

I embrace you as “beautiful relatives of the world.” This is the Hopi way of greeting those from other nations with an open hand to show that I come in peace. As an indigenous person, I come from a culture that has been on this continent for thousands of years, surviving and thriving despite many hardships and challenges. Over the ages, simple and fundamental truths have supported our survival that I think are relevant for society at large today more than ever. The principles of interconnectedness, humility and making decisions with the consideration of seven generations might seem basic and easy to take for granted. But it is precisely these principles that need to be integrated into our lives, institutions and our structures of government in a deeper way.

⋮ Mona Polacca
⋮ Native American Elder

In my upbringing, I was taught that everyone is my relative. That we are all relatives. My parents and grandparents instilled this value since I was a child and I notice that, without question, it helps me to see the value in each person and living thing.

An Inter-Connected Family

In my upbringing, I was taught that everyone is my relative, that we are all relatives. My parents and grandparents instilled this value since I was a child, and I notice that, without question, it helps to me to see the value in each person and living thing. Looking back at Earth from 200 miles up in space, divisions don't exist, and it is abundantly clear that we are one family on one Earth. But, in our political dealings, in our relationship with our Mother Earth, in the media world and in our relationships with those inside and outside our country, how often do we remember that we are all related? That we are all one family? This simple realization, as basic as it is, has profound implications. If we recognize that all people, plants, animals and even the forests and fish are our relations, then we are guided to act in a way that is life-sustaining and our worldview is more open and inclusive. We listen more and have

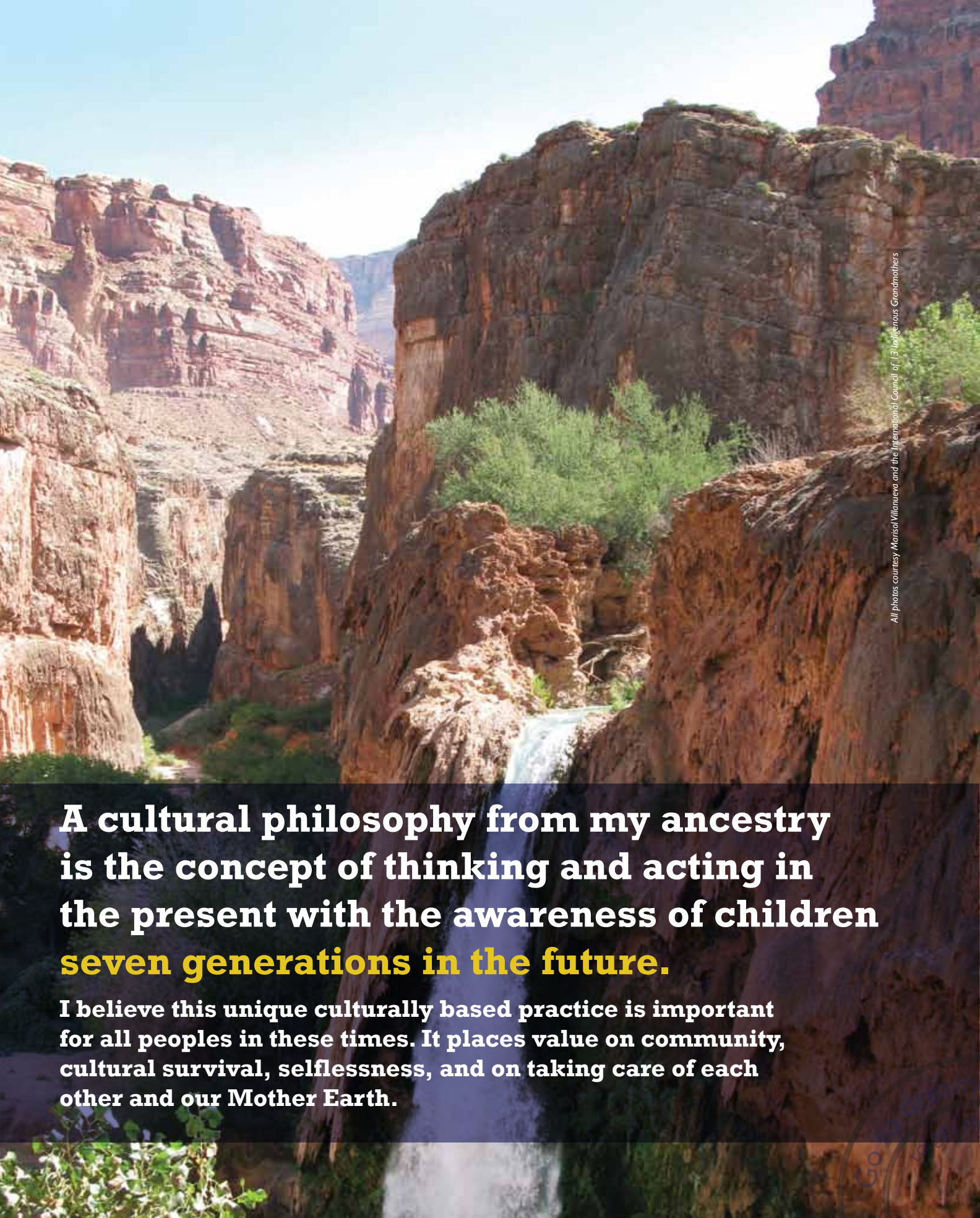
greater patience, finding solutions more readily instead of keeping the fight alive. The fact of the matter is that we don't exist independently. The honor of one is the honor of all, and the hurt of one is the hurt of all.

Humility

Corn is vitally important for our people. It has been a source of sustenance for thousands of years and also carries a much deeper meaning representing our connection to the forces of nature and the unseen world. There is a story that, long ago, our people were given a choice regarding which seeds of corn to choose. We chose the humblest seeds, those that produce small stalks and ears of corn. But even though these kernels are small and humble, they are hearty, capable of growing in the desert, in extreme temperatures with little water. The humble nature of these seeds is also their strength. Humility is a key ingredient in life. There are

If we recognize that all people, plants, animals, and even the forests and fish are our relations, then we are guided to act in a way that is life-sustaining and our world view is more open and inclusive.





All photos courtesy Marisol Villanueva and the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers

A cultural philosophy from my ancestry is the concept of thinking and acting in the present with the awareness of children seven generations in the future.

I believe this unique culturally based practice is important for all peoples in these times. It places value on community, cultural survival, selflessness, and on taking care of each other and our Mother Earth.

certain challenges that we all face, and these challenges are a teaching of humility. No doubt, we are facing many challenges as a country. But it is important to acknowledge that whatever we are presented with is like a gift. How are our current struggles causing us to take pause, to reorganize, to commit to new and different priorities? To cast away old and habitual ways of being that don't serve us? How are our current challenges actually opportunities for renewal if we face them with a spirit of collaboration and creativity?

Seven Generations Ahead

A cultural philosophy from my ancestry and of many indigenous peoples in North America and across the world is the concept of thinking and acting in the present with the awareness of children seven generations in the future. I believe this unique culturally based practice is important for all peoples in these times. It places value on community, cultural survival, selflessness and taking care of each other and our Mother Earth. Its beauty and truth is in its simplicity and calls us to find common ground and work to leave the world a better place.

This principle plays out in many different ways. If we are thinking and acting with sensitivity to our future descendants seven generations ahead, how does this

inform our decisions now? Do we start to prioritize differently as a country? Perhaps in the coming generations we will turn the tables so that we spend eight times more on education than on our military instead of the other way around. Perhaps in the next generation, it will become a reality that every home will be powered by the sun and wind? Thinking ahead, perhaps we begin to measure our richness in terms of happiness and equality instead of Gross Domestic Product? This way of thinking is taking root more and more across this land and across the world. It is good to see, and it needs to keep growing.

The Grandmothers' Council

Looking at my grandchildren gives me hope. To have hope is to realize that there is going to be something more coming, like looking at the dawn before the sunrise. Being a member of the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers also gives me hope. We represent indigenous peoples and traditions from all over the world and have come together in unity to further education and healing for our Mother Earth, all Her inhabitants and for the next seven generations to come. We come together in prayer and ceremony to imagine a different vision for our future and serve as spokespeople on a wide range of social justice and environmental issues.

The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers represents indigenous people and traditions from all over the world that come together in unity to further education and healing for our Mother Earth and all Her inhabitants. Here, the Grandmothers gather in New York.



Go to [dreamofanation.com](#) to see the book!



In Italy, the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers fulfill a long-held intention to preform prayer ceremonies at the Vatican.



Mona Polacca offers prayers during an International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers gathering in the Southwest US.



**By stepping forward
between and within
cultures and languages
we can overcome
boundaries.
We can cross
borders not only
geographically but
also psychologically
and spiritually.**

As the great Lakota leader, Sitting Bull said, “Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children,” let us chart a course of peace and harmony.

In a sense, the Council is a microcosm for a way of being and working in partnership that is growing on a global scale. One of my sisters in the Council, Agnes Baker Pilgrim, is fond of saying, “The greatest distance in the world is the 14 inches from our minds to our hearts.” Facing a world in crisis, we believe solutions will come as people and institutions continue to come together in partnership, from a place of heart and compassion.

Indigenous people have come through a time of great struggle, a time of darkness. The way I look at it is like the nature of a butterfly. In the cocoon, a place of darkness, the creature breaks down into a fluid, and then a change, a transformation, takes place. When it is ready and in its own time, it begins to move and develop a form that stretches and breaks away from this cocoon and emerges into this world, into life, as a beautiful creature. We grandmothers, we have emerged from that darkness, see this beauty, see each other and reach out to the world with open arms, with love, hope, compassion, faith and charity. Finding strength and purpose in each other is a beautiful thing.

A Future Vision

We find ourselves in transition, in a place of uncertainty where all is not resolved, where there are great

questions and concerns, but also hopes. This state of transformation, movement and becoming is not final; it is not perfect. The key is to know and acknowledge that within us all exist the conditions for creativity and the conditions for grace to descend. We are living in a time of definitions and decisions. We are the generation with the responsibility and option to choose the path with a life for our children. Now is the time of awakening, where we become more aware of our connections and our fundamental relation to each other. Aware of our existence in this world. What it means to be human.

By stepping forward between and within cultures and languages, we can overcome boundaries. We can cross borders not only geographically but also psychologically and spiritually. This means that one is never finished, that one is always journeying onward. It is time to make a commitment to encourage the development of a new history and partnership among us. As the great Lakota leader Sitting Bull said, “Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children,” let us chart a course of peace and harmony. Let us have the courage, strength, the will and the wisdom to do this for the next seven generations.

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*Mona Polacca, M.S.W., is a Havasupai, Hopi and Tewa Native American whose tribal affiliation is of the Colorado River Indian Tribes of Parker, Arizona, where she has served as the treasurer and tribal council member. Today she is a self-employed human services consultant to tribal communities. She is committed to supporting initiatives that involve developing effective strategies and sensitive approaches and action towards addressing indigenous human rights and works towards improving the quality of life of global indigenous peoples. Currently, she is a member of a working group planning the Indigenous World Forum on Water and Peace. Polacca, a founding member of the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers (www.grandmotherscouncil.org), is featured in a collection of teachings and stories compiled in the Grandmothers' book, *Grandmothers Counsel the World: Women Elders Offer Their Vision for Our Planet*, and their documentary film, *For the Next 7 Generations*. She lives in Arizona and has a son, two daughters and nine grandchildren.*





All photos courtesy Barefoot Artists

Painting Hope in the World

... Lily Yeh
... Barefoot Artists

I was born in China and grew up in Taiwan. My parents nurtured me with firm guidance and support, and I came to the States in the '60s to study art at the University of Pennsylvania. Upon receiving my MFA, I began teaching and started a family, traveled, raised my son, exhibited my work and took care of my father when he got Alzheimer's. Although I faced my share of struggles, my life was sweet and blessed.

Yet I felt that I was looking for something that I could not quite name, something that would anchor me and make my life more authentic.

I searched for it far and wide, in books, places, my work and relationships. It was in the broken land of North Philadelphia that I stepped into the purpose of my life.

Making art in a distressed community ravaged by violence, poverty and drugs, is like making a fire in the darkness of a winter's night.

A Simple Summer's Art Project

In the summer of 1986, I received an invitation from Arthur Hall, a tremendously talented African-American dancer and choreographer, who also headed the Ile-Ife Black Humanitarian Center in inner-city North Philadelphia. He asked me to create an art park on the abandoned lot next to his center. Everyone—friends, family, colleagues—advised me “No. Do not go into the badland. You are an outsider. Kids will destroy everything you build.” I was scared and wanted to withdraw from the project. But I summoned my courage and ventured into North Philadelphia.

Art alone cannot rebuild a community. But making art in a distressed community ravaged by violence, poverty and drugs is like making a fire in the darkness of a winter's night. Giving out light and warmth, it attracts people both from near and far. That was what happened on the vacant lot at the corner of Tenth Street and Germantown Avenue. Sensing new ideas and energy, children responded first. Joseph “JoJo” Williams who lived right next to the lot became my assistant and foreman of the park building project. Through JoJo and the children, the project became rooted in the community.

Working in a dilapidated neighborhood with a disenfranchised community impacted me so deeply that I eventually left my tenured professorship and threw myself whole-heartedly into my life's journey to find purpose and meaning.

The Village of Arts and Humanities (VAH)

During the first three summers, JoJo and I worked mainly with children. It was through them that we gained the trust of the adults in the neighborhood, who gradually joined us in restoring the neighborhood. Our effort also attracted professionals from the fields of construction, the arts, law and education. In 1989,



The first park was named after Arthur Hall's Ile-Ife Black Humanitarian Center. It is located at Germantown Avenue and 10th Street in North Philadelphia. Arthur Hall, the late renowned dancer and choreographer, invited Lily Yeh to build an art park on the abandoned lot next to his building in 1986. Drawn to their activities, many children from the area participated in their park building project.



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with the help of Stephen Sayer, lawyer/writer/builder, the summer park building project became a non-profit organization, which, as cofounders, we named the Village of Arts and Humanities. The mission of the Village is to “build community through its innovative arts, educational, social and construction programs.” In all that we do, we aim to do justice to the people we serve.

Working together with residents, Sayer renovated a three-story warehouse into our headquarters where we could hold classes and community meetings. From then on, the Village evolved into a complex entity that included programs and activities for the entire community. From 1986 to 2004, we created 17 art parks and gardens in the Village neighborhood and converted 200 abandoned lots into green spaces including the establishment of a two-acre tree farm.

Concurrently, we ran an extensive building program through which we renovated six dilapidated buildings into office spaces, studios and an apartment. We completed six new three-story homes for first-time low-in-

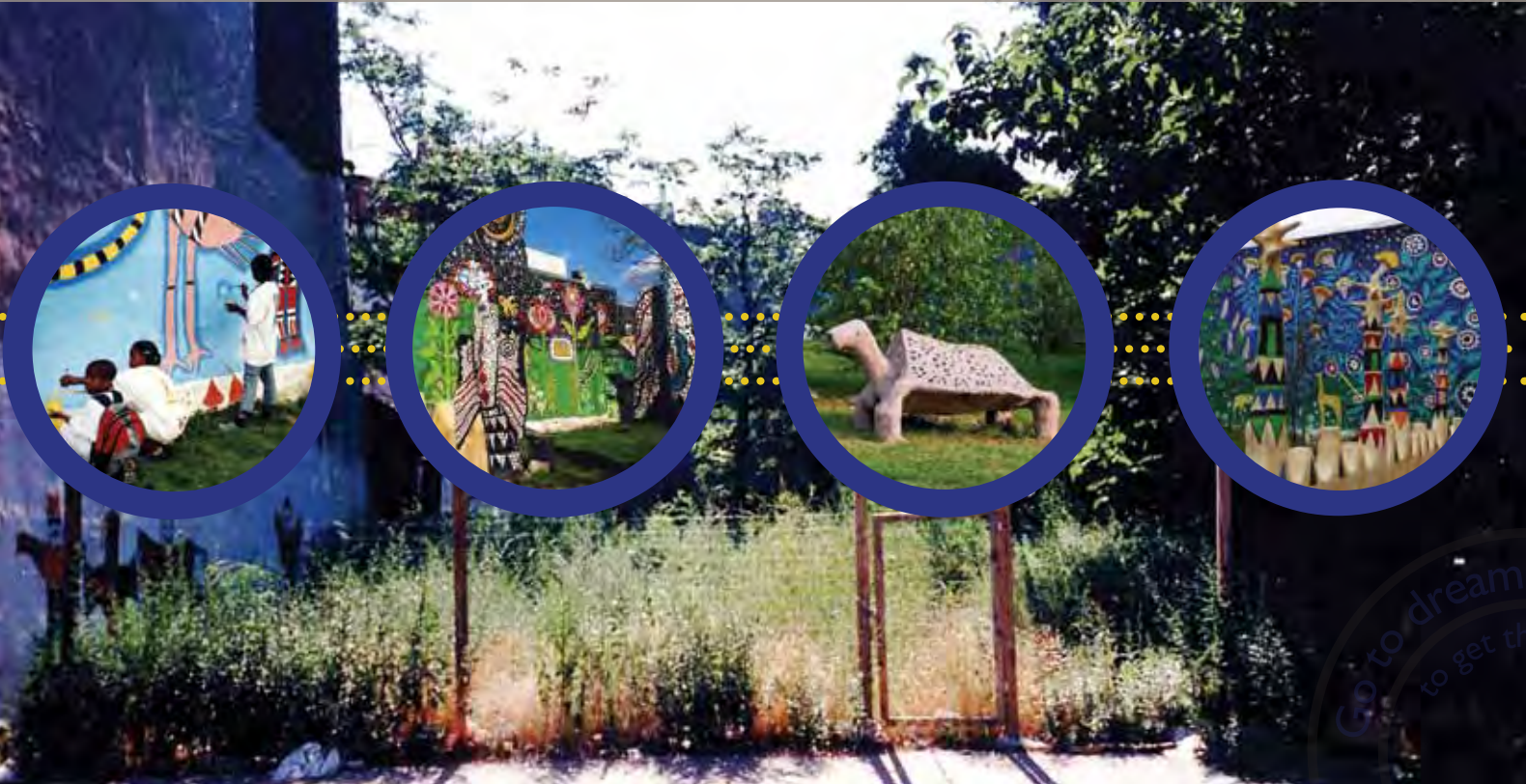
come homebuyers from the neighborhood. Collaborating with schools and public housing agencies in North Philadelphia, the Village on the Move program impacted neighborhoods and communities within the 260-square-block areas in North Philadelphia.

The heart of all our activities laid with our year-round after-school and Saturday programs for children and youth in visual and performing arts, computer skills, spoken word, summer work, nutrition/health and homework help. The Village hosted a youth theater that produced an original play each year, which was performed in Philadelphia and other cities in the States.

Every year in early fall, we celebrated our talent and accomplishments through an art festival in which we paraded through our neighborhood, blessing the land, families and all our children. The pivotal event of the festival was the Rites of Passage designed to help our youth to root in the community. We passed on to them the torches of light, symbols of their own inner light and talent with encouragement and blessings.

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Formerly abandoned lots in north Philadelphia are now works of art and community gathering areas.



All photos courtesy Barefoot Artists

Through imagination and daring actions, we can create new spaces, into which people can enter on equal footing, each bringing his or her inspiration, talent, and voice.



This abandoned land once contained six dilapidated homes that eventually were demolished by the city and buried underground. It gradually became a dumping site for trash, debris and human waste. So when we succeeded in constructing a garden on this site, we named it Magical Garden because the transformation of the place felt truly magical and momentous.



All photos courtesy Barefoot Artists

Lily Yeh, Joseph Habineza (Rwandan Minister of Sport and Culture) and two local dignitaries attend the dedication of the new Rugerero Genocide Memorial.

This is how a simple summer art project evolved into a complex organization that has been impacting the lives of tens and thousands of people on different levels and became a celebratory model nationwide of successful community building through the arts.

Success demands its own price. The fast expansion of the Village gradually burdened me with more responsibility in fundraising and staff management. I felt the need to return to my original role as an artist to work directly with people. I understood that my canvas lay in the dilapidated places; my pigments are people's talent and stories. My mission is to bring the transformative power of art to

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broken communities to create with residents something that would honor their sensitivity and cultural heritage, something that would express our shared quest for freedom, equality, justice and compassion.

Barefoot Artists, Inc.

In 2004, I left the Village of Arts and Humanities and became the lead artist and founding director of Barefoot Artists, Inc. Inspired by the model of barefoot doctors in China during the 1950s, the goal of Barefoot Artists is simple: Go to places in need, practice one's art of healing and community building; jump-start projects through art making; pass on methodology in self-empowerment and innovative solutions; move on to other places in need.

Under the auspices of Barefoot Artists, I've been able to launch several projects in China and Africa. Working with and learning from the communities working to rebuild after genocide in West Rwanda has been profound and confirms that the journey of my life is still unfolding.

Whatever our talent & expertise, they are tools for action. When our action serves the public, it has the power to transform. Mother Theresa said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

Painting the Colors of Unity, Renewal and Hope

Sometimes the problems we are facing in the world seem so overwhelming because of the conflicting situations, vast scale and complexity. Twenty-four years of working with communities overwrought in negativity, poverty and hopelessness taught me that, through imagination and daring actions, we can create new spaces into which people can enter on equal footing, each bringing his/her inspiration, talent and voice. Through these long years of practices emerged a kind of living social art that was created for the people at the beginning, then with the people and by the people along the way and then, at the end, belonged to the people. This kind of art has no commercial value, yet it is valueless in its transformative impact on individual, family and communal life.

Because I am an artist, my vehicle is art. I define art not only by its literary, performing and visual expressions, but also and more importantly as creativity in thinking, methodology and implementation. Whatever our talent and expertise, they are our tools for action. When our action serves the public, it has the power to transform. Mother Teresa said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

In my quest for authenticity, my life's journey has unfolded in ways that I never could have dreamed. In



Yeh and children in Accra, Ghana. This project took place in an impoverished neighborhood in Jamestown, located in the old section of the city. The undertaking engaged hundreds of children and adults in transforming a bleak courtyard into a public space full of patterns and colors.

addition to making art, being an artist to me is a way of life, a life dedicated to the realization of one's vision, sharing one's talent and doing the right thing without sparing oneself.

We all are blessed with the innate illumination of creativity and imagination. When guided by our vision for a more compassionate, just and sustainable future, we have the power to imagine, create and take action together that will drive away the darkness of ignorance, neglect, bigotry and greed. I believe that here lies the hope for our future.

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Lily Yeh is an internationally celebrated artist whose work has taken her to communities throughout the world. As founder and executive director of the Village of Arts and Humanities in North Philadelphia from 1986 to 2004, she helped create a national model of community building through the arts. In 2004, Yeh pursued her work internationally, founding Barefoot Artists, Inc. (www.barefootartists.org) to bring the transformative power of art to impoverished communities around the globe through participatory, multifaceted projects that foster community empowerment, improve the physical environment, promote economic development and preserve indigenous art and culture.

