

Commencement Ceremony Speech at The Graduate Institute
By Gwen croft
August 14, 2004

Thank you Dr. Longo
Good afternoon, members of the faculty,
Members of The Graduate Institute Cohorts and invited guest.
It is an honor to be invited to speak at our Commencement Ceremony today.

(Quote)
Margaret Mead has often been quoted as saying
"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
Committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

In the last two years there have been two significant groups of concerned citizens
that has made a substantial change in my life and the lives of others.
They are The Graduate Institute and the ReGenesis Farm in Australia.

(The Moment of Crises)
Before enrolling in the Graduate Institute, I was grappling with what to do with my life.
As it has been with so many other people around me, our lives and our world have
changed and I began to question my beliefs and the meaning of my life. I felt
disconnected to nature, an important part of my early life. And although I had traveled
some, I really wanted to have a larger worldview, to be a citizen of the earth, not just my
own country.

This struggle was a familiar to me, since I had this experience before. At the age of 32,
when faced with similar discomforts, I decided to finish my undergraduate degree. That
turned out to be life changing. In returning to school, I gained knowledge in a field that I
could apply to making a better income. Since I was a full time mother and worked full
time, it also gave me confidence, just in completing it. The experience gave me
professional and personal contacts. Equipped with knowledge and self-assurance, I was
able to receive a serendipitous moment, which eventually lead me from Chattanooga,
Tennessee to Manhattan, where I have lived for the past 11 years.

Since returning to school had been so successful in my 30's, I felt that a Masters degree
could be a possible path for another life changing experience. I attended a few
informational sessions at the New School and New York University for a Masters of Arts
in Communications. In one session, a potential student stood and asked the professor
what the degree would actually do for him. The answer was "you would be qualified to
work at a large corporation like HBO, or Conde Nast." I was already doing design work
for HBO and Conde Nast. It provided me an income but was no longer personally
fulfilling. When I heard the answer, I knew that I needed something vastly different from
what most universities offer.

(Serendipity - The Universe Provides)

In one of those marvelous moments of coincidence, I picked up a magazine called “Parabola.” On the back page was an ad for The Graduate Institute, offering a Masters in Conscious Evolution. I found this compelling, so I investigated further.

(The Definition of CE)

What is conscious evolution? My professor, Dr. Allan Combs, says in his book, *The Radiance of Being*, that consciousness is the essence of experience. It is subjectivity through which the phenomenal world shines. Without it, knowledge is only information. Consciousness aligns our minds into patterns with direction and purpose. It is said to be intentional. Dr. Combs says that consciousness is the democratic pragmatism of reality itself, so that if one pays attention things will usually make sense.

I was intrigued with what this course of study offered: an opportunity to learn in a cohort community about consciousness studies, the new sciences, spiritual practices, and the new structure of consciousness that is being birth from the crises in the world today.

I was extremely pleased to find this so near to Manhattan, so I enrolled.

During my two years at The Graduate Institute, I have been exposed to world thinkers, philosophers, mystics, scientists, and others who have a different perspective than most people in the world today. It is a perspective, I think, that we all eventually will come to if we are truly interested in living meaningful lives and creating a better world. As Ervin Laszlo warns us in his book “*You Can Change The World*,” we are now facing our planet’s limit in energy, raw material resources, and resilience. Our earth is reaching its limit to feed our ever-growing population, and our atmosphere is facing intolerable levels of pollution.

He advises, as a solution to the crisis, for us to live with each other – among other cultures and within – and not against each other. He calls for a “new spirit: a more evolved consciousness” that will create empathy and solidarity with our fellow humans and with nature. I felt compelled to respond to this call. Indeed I felt it answered my desire to become a citizen of world and I responded with an intention to make happen.

(UNCERTAINTY)

Later, in planning my Culminating Project I realized that this was my opportunity to do so. I made a choice that I didn’t want to do a culminating project. The point of enrolling in Conscious Evolution was to change my life. I wanted to be the culminating project. When I made that choice in February, I had no idea what that meant, or what that might look like in my everyday, physical life.

In the “Sevens Life Lessons of Chaos,” David Peat suggests that instead of resisting life’s uncertainties, we should embrace them because that is where creativity steps in. It is the small and seemingly insignificant things that often end up playing a major role in our lives. I stayed open and flexible to the possibilities. And it did.

(Synchronicity)

Last March Ervin Laszlo came to The Institute for lectures and dialogue with our Conscious Evolution cohort. That weekend, I stayed with a friend who was interested in my studies. As we talked about Laszlo’s ideas, she mentioned a friend who works and lives part time in Australia. Her friend, Elaine Seiler, believes that in order to achieve the greatest results for positive change in the world, commercial ventures should feature a transformative quality with the ability to turn the business bottom line into a triple bottom line of ecological, economic and ethical sustainability. She owns land near Byron Bay, Australia, and has two different entrepreneurial ventures: the ReGenesis Farm and the Main Arm Eco-village.

I was intrigued with what Elaine was doing – demonstrating the ability to combine the spiritual aspects of human evolution with conscious intentions of creating a community and profitable business that thrive on the principles of holism. She, and her projects, seemed to be putting into action all that I had learned at the Institute in the past couple of years.

Soon after, I emailed her and spontaneously offered to volunteer two weeks with her on the ReGenesis farm. She responded that two weeks would not be enough time, that to really understand what was happening and to be useful to them, I would need to stay much longer. We tentatively agreed on two months, but I had much to consider so I wasn’t ready to commit.

At the end of our conversation, I thought I heard her say to me, although she doesn’t remember it, that I could “join some other volunteer program and have a wonderful experience that would stay with me for the rest of my life, or I could come to Australia, and change my life.”

(Learning to trust through evidence of synchronicity)

That touched me at a very deep level. I knew, in that moment, that uncertainty allowed something surprising and unique to enter into my life. As I started thinking about it, I realized the enormity of what two months out of the country required. What would I do with my car? My cat? How would I pay my mortgage, maintenance and other bills? The list went on.

I begin to experience synchronicity. For example, a friend offered to store my car in her garage. My mother, who had spoken many times about the burden of caring for pets, offered to care for my cat. A neighbor, who was living in Germany for the past two years, needed an apartment at exactly the time that I was planning to be in Australia. There were so many more marvelous moments of coincidences that made my commitment to Elaine and ReGenesis possible.

As everything fell smoothly into place, I knew that I had made the right decision.

(Intention)

From the moment that I actually made my choice and set the intention that I wanted to be my culminating project, I was on the path of change and transformation.

It didn't come overnight, and it didn't come without work and eventual surrender to a power much greater than myself. My intention led me to a place that fed my soul and nurtured my body. ReGenesis, as its name implies, is to restore and regenerate land that has been stripped of its rainforest. Not only was the land being replanted with new native growth, we created organic market gardens using the closed loop system in which nothing was wasted.

I found myself surrounded by people who had also made a conscious choice to spend their time in a way of life that does not succumb to the meaningless work and mindless activities that we use to deceive and distract us from our truths.

In fact, Andrew Johanson, The Waste Not Want Not project manager personified the love and care we felt when he would often stop in the middle of something he was doing and spontaneously say "I love this earth. I love this earth."

He and the others I worked with at ReGenesis actively live in alignment with Laszlo's view of responsibility to the earth and to each other. Every day, they worked toward the vision of a better, more sustainable world. I spent my two months totally involved in this new culture, during both my working and my social hours.

Universal Community – There is no "other"

I met and spent time with Elaine and others who understand and live in the subtle levels of energy, and how it manifests the world in which we have chosen to live. In this community, I was accepted as one of them. Indeed, I was one of them. When I marveled out loud about all the support I had received during my time there, Anne, one of my Australian friends said, "But, Gwen, I am you and you are me." At that moment, I remembered my desire to live in other cultures to help me re-connect with my global brothers and sisters. I understood, being among my new friends, on the other side of the world, that true family isn't one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's lives. I had the direct experience of feeling the connectedness of our global family and respect and appreciation for our earth. This was not just intellectual knowledge anymore. I felt it. Now, I know without any doubt, that I am changed.

(My TRUTHS)

My experience with The Graduate Institute has lead me from my mind - to my heart - and half around the world. Combined with my experience at ReGenesis Farm in Australia, I have come to recognize certain universal truths.

Value of Uncertainty

I experienced the value of uncertainty and the ability for all of us to exist in it so that the unique surprises can come into our lives for change and transformation.

(Synchronistic Events)

I experienced synchronistic events that happened to each of us constantly, but we are so often distracted and don't see them or appreciate them. I've learned, that if we choose to, we can become more aware these events and the more we will recognize them in our lives. In doing so, I've learned more trust in our universe.

(Imagination)

Most of all, I have learned that we must have imagination. It is the ability to think outside the confines of our own reality. To me, imagination is inspiration. It is the connection and the communication with the Source that is greater than ourselves.

I want to thank all those who work with The Graduate Institute for providing a program as unique as this one for myself and my fellow students who graduate today. I am grateful that they have the courage and imagination to step outside of the educational box and provided me with a foundation on which my ReGenesis experience was built. I am also very grateful to my wonderful friends, here and down under, who have been so encouraging and so supportive.

(Value of nature)

In Australia, I found the quiet space in nature where I learned more about hearing and listening to my inner voice and guides. And in working with Elaine and so many others there, I have come closer to trusting my inner voice, that part of me and all of us that is divine and joyous, and is one with all that Is.

Thank you.

(yahoo – I did it!)