



January, 2007

Volume 7, No. 1

A LOVE AFFAIR WITH NATURE

Field notes from a flower essence producer

Part I: Stepping Stones on My Path

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Abstract

Part I of this three-part article includes some pivotal moments in my journey, followed by a Short Primer on Flower Essences and the unique properties of the Raven Essences.

Part I includes a story about my trip to Ireland and the process of creating essences at some of the sacred sites. Two other articles complete this section. Janice Hall, a bioenergetic therapist, outlines her use of essences with her psychotherapy clients and Heather Thoma compares Goethe's contemplative approach to nature to the Raven Essence project.

Part II explains how I create essences from meditative inspiration. Created in this manner, the Destiny kit explores our personal purpose and our relationship with Gaia, the sacred earth.

Part III shares more writings from the Destiny Kit including the four aspects of joy and its role in shaping our lives.

Beginnings

It is the summer of 1995 and I am holding a small box of flower essences made from my garden. I am preparing to ship these to thirty practitioners to test them with their clients. I look at the name, Raven Essences, and remember my dwarf baby, Talulah Raven, born several years ago with only a heart in her chest and no lungs to breathe. She was my raven, my messenger between the worlds. This small box is my tribute to her memory and the dark journey that she took me on in her brief life.

Two years later I have a dream. I am in a dark green wooded area. Near a stream, two men and two women are seated at a square wooden table in an image of perfect symmetry. As I stand nearby, I hear them say, one after the other, "Precious is my garden, and my garden is me." The phrase becomes a mantra inviting me to delve into the mysteries of my garden and to see it as a mirror, for I am made of the same stuff as the green leaves and the stone. Returning to this dream over many years, I know it is a formula for my work with Nature, with the dynamic balance between masculine and feminine, and the fluid dance between my power and the forces of Nature.

Six years later, I am dancing with a mask ornamented with stones, leaves, fish bones and feathers at a Body-Soul Intensive with Marion Woodman, the renowned Jungian analyst. The women with me are calling up the restless parts of our unconscious. It is nearing the end of our time and we are to name our masks and reveal ourselves by saying "I am...." Moving under the spell of the mask, I hold my belly as though as I am in labor. "I am Gaia's..." for by now I know my mask is an image of the earth. I try again. "I am Gaia's..." The last word does not come easily though my arms still grip my belly as I writhe. "I can't be Gaia's belly," I think. Then the words pour out of me. "I am Gaia's Bell!" The two women dancing with me burst into tears. With a deep inner certainty, I know I am destined to let Gaia's voice sing again on this green earth.

It is several days after September 11th, and I am wandering in my garden feeling grief-stricken and helpless. Though I am safely distant from the drama I am caught in the global convulsions, and wonder what I can do. With the call to arms ringing everywhere, I calm myself and reach for nature's wisdom. "There is value in mobilizing the warrior," I hear, "not as a reaction to fear, but as a response to love." As I keep listening, gradually I begin to feel the land making a quiet yet specific gesture of offering. The sense of what I might do begins to shape within me. Over the next days, I gather the last fall wildflowers as ingredients to make four essences honoring the way of the Peaceful Warrior. *Standing our Ground, Calling Forth the Vital Life Force, Sounding the Blessing of Liberation, and the Messenger of Forgiveness* now help people ground their visions, strengthen their relationships, and heal wounds from the past.

On a winter morning in 2006 I am sitting in my warm bed with several bottles of essences and a notebook on my lap. I am on a semi-sabbatical from my client work, taking several months to communicate directly with Gaia, the living earth. By now I know the essences are subtle,

alchemical healers but I want to listen directly to Gaia's voice through them. I take a few drops of the Zinnia essence, one that supports our full creativity but I am using it now as a prism to hear what Mother Earth might say through this flower. Preparing myself to approach Her, I chant, letting my sound be a bridge to this magnificent entity. Poised to receive, I feel the familiar wave of otherness as Her presence starts the flow of words deep within my body:

*When all you taste is bitterness
be still and let your grief dissolve
into the ocean of my song.
When you are weary
from bearing great sadness
let go into the gentle rocking
within my numerous arms.*

And the words stop. Mesmerized, I pause in the afterglow of this message. Then remembering mere mortals must not linger with the Gods, I give silent thanks and step back to reclaim the separate bones of my life within the Great Earth Mother.



Queen of the Night

From the most astonishing corner of the plant kingdom, Queen of the Night applauds the restoration of self-love and acknowledges significant victories in our personal evolution.

(Personally, I always take note of when this remarkable plant blooms, only for a few hours at night, once a year! It always corresponds with something equally significant in my life.)



In the twelve years I've been working with this project, I have created over three hundred essences. One hundred and twenty are from single flowers or trees and the rest are complex combinations. The Raven Essence system includes fifteen kits of essences with different themes for inner work with meditation and journaling. Most of my essences are created from plants in my garden though when I travel I am drawn occasionally to make essences from the local plants.



Though I was inspired by Machaelle Smalle Wright's work in creating the Perelandra essences, my approach has been mostly in isolation, listening directly to nature for guidance about the essences and how to work with them. While I listened to the plants, I did not realize I was also fine-tuning my intuitive skills for my counselling work. Listening to the stories of the plants made it easier to hear the whispers of the human heart. Beyond this, the greatest gift in making Raven Essences has been my reconnection with Nature. This has brought me an abiding appreciation for the wisdom, rhythms, and healing power of the natural world. I encourage everyone I work with to develop their own intuitive relationship with nature in the landscapes they love. Deep intuitive listening to Nature is an ability we all have and have largely forgotten. When we listen this way, we fall in love again with the sacred earth and that is the most radical healing we can do for ourselves and for this beautiful earth.

A Short Primer on Flower Essences

What are the essences?

Flower essences are liquid extracts made from the life force of plants.

How are they made?

On a sunny day when plants are in full bloom, flower petals are placed in a bowl of pure water. Water holds the memory of whatever it is exposed to, whether these are actual substances, emotions, or thought forms. As the plant's energy transfers into the water, the sun fuses the vibrational imprint over a few hours. Preserved with brandy, this becomes the mother tincture that can be diluted several times. Unlike homeopathic remedies, flower essences do not become more potent when they are diluted. Flower essence producers may include prayer, chant, or other rituals as part of the alchemy of creating the essences.

How do you use the essences?

The general application is to take 2-3 drops once or twice a day for several weeks. Essences can be used topically, and with trained practitioners, transmitted energetically over any distance.

A brief history:

In the 1500's, Paracelsus encouraged his patients to drink the dew from plants to help balance their emotional states. Dew is Nature's rudimentary flower essence. Believing Nature had a cure for every ailment known to man, Edward Bach, an English physician, developed his method for creating essences in the 1930s. Inspired by his work, Richard Katz began developing essences in California in the early 1980's, and Patricia Kaminski joined him to create the Flower Essence Services. Around the same time, Ian Bush began developing the Bush essences in Australia, followed by Steven Johnson with his Alaskan Essences and Machaelle Small Wright with the Perelandra Essences. There are now hundreds of essence producers worldwide, thousands of essences, and thousands of practitioners. These producers and practitioners have amassed thousands of case

records. Although most of this evidence is anecdotal, it is clear that essences have proven useful in almost every field of healing and spiritual/emotional development. As well as their usefulness in healing, flower essence research is reintroducing an alchemical approach to healing through the development of a heart-centered intimacy with the natural world.

How do they work?

Essences work with the body's electrical system, the system that links our bodies with our souls. They influence us gently and deeply at the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels.

Who uses flower essences?

Just about anybody! Essences are effective with children and animals without the aggravated reactions that tend to occur with homeopathic remedies. A wide range of practitioners including naturopaths, chiropractors, psychotherapists, energy-healers, and massage therapists integrate flower essences into their practices in highly individual and creative ways. Used as preventive medicine, laypeople find essences effective in dealing with minor illnesses and the stress of life-challenges. The essences also provide people a safe means for taking care of their own emotional wellbeing, creative expression, and spiritual expansion.

Why should we use flower essences?

Gentle on the environment (it only takes a few flowers to make an essence that can last for many years) and utterly safe to use, flower essences are one of the most adaptable and cost-effective natural remedies on the market. As healers and teachers, they link us to Nature's wisdom and healing energies, helping reconnect us with the sacred earth and our own wise body. Having forgotten our integral part in the web of life, we are destroying the earth. Flower essences help us remember our deep instinctual connection with the natural world. Working with them heals our human ailments while helping restore our dynamic relationship with the environment.

What makes Raven Essences unique?

Before I began creating flower essences, I earned my living as a music teacher. As a classically trained pianist I performed, composed, and taught for twenty years. During this time, I developed a small-group program for young people called Musical Me! integrating drumming, movement, and singing with their private piano lessons. When I began making the essences, I knew I must include some aspect of music. Therefore, along with the flowers, all three hundred essences have been created with my voice, crystal or brass bowls, or toning bars to strengthen, stabilize, and amplify the frequencies.

As an energy-pharmacy, the Raven Essence system provides infinite possibilities for creating specialized combinations for clients and practitioners. A vast library of information and energies, the system also works as a divinatory tool. Many people find the definitions a source for guidance and daily inspiration. Through intuitive testing, practitioners find the definitions that offer insights into their clients' health, career, and relationship issues. This process helps people see where they are, where they are going, and the deepening of wisdom they need in the moment.

Many of the essences definitions include poems or poetic metaphors. This is the language I felt and heard when I listened to the plants. I think the romantic poets were listening in a similar way to nature though they weren't focused on making essences. My concern is to bring the plant kingdom into as full a resonance with the human heart as possible and poetry often accomplishes this better than prose.

Alchemically responsive, the essences adapt to the skills and intentions of the people who use them. Though I have taught many people how to work with flower essences, I am impressed with the original and innovative ways different practitioners use them, all with excellent effects.

The following section is an excerpt from a meditation I did with one of my guides in the summer of 2006. It offers an expansive vision for the capabilities of the essences.

“There are two elements to Raven Essences – the product and a living philosophy. A living philosophy works through individual body-minds, awakening levels of deep inner knowing that are intuitive and grounded. The living philosophy (encouraged by Raven Essences) emerges out of the interactions between people and their own connections with nature. This is the ‘teacher’ role of the essences... As healers, the essences are designed to transform flesh. By helping our bodies vibrate with the living earth, the essences open our hearts and minds to respond to the changes occurring in Gaia and they help our souls to manifest fully and accurately through our bodies... Collectively, humanity is moving through thresholds of transformation and the purpose of essences is to support, guide, encourage, soothe, and occasionally to irritate or vibrate the areas of numbness and resistance. A competent essence practitioner working with the Raven Essences needs to have the ability to genuinely observe the range of alchemical shifts happening during an essence process.

“The shape of this work is so variable and you cannot control the outcomes. Characteristics you will observe in those who touch the heart of this (Raven Essence) project are: an awakening of intuitive capacities, an increased ability to hear and feel Nature’s energies, an increasingly grounded autonomy, and a steadily growing passion for their own manifesting destiny. Let the interplay between the alchemical nature of the product and the ongoing emergence of the living philosophy be a cause for celebration as you greet the radiance of new flesh emerging everywhere. Your attention to this and your ability to hold space as people go through the sometimes disorienting process of awakening is critical to the emergence of the living philosophy. The essences have always had the inherent potential to affect the many layers of change required. They are increasingly able to do what they are designed to do. Your role is to be lovingly open to their full potential and to welcome the philosophy as it lives and expresses through others.”

Janice Hall is a Core Energetic Psychotherapist, former R.N., B.A., and Clinical Member of OSP with a private practice in Toronto. Janice reports:

For the last 14 years, I have had my own practice as a holistic psychotherapist. I was trained in Core Energetics, which incorporates mind, body, emotions and spirit. Throughout my work with various clients I have found that certain other alternative kinds of therapy work very well in conjunction with my work to speed up the process of healing. I was very pleased in this last year to meet and work with Andrea Mathieson who founded Raven Essences. I find the best clients for me to send to Andrea are those with good ego strength who have done some therapy and are in a “stuck” place. Andrea uses her deep intuitive guidance to “read” the person and then divines just the right combination of essences that will help move the client in the direction their soul wants to go. What I love about the essences is that they work in such a subtle, gentle but powerful way to reach right in like a magnet to the soul’s longing to create transformation. Here is one example of transformation.

Donna has been struggling for a long time with anxiety around relationships with herself and others in her life. The anxiety would actually ‘freeze’ her ability to communicate and function. I have been working with this client for five years, getting closer and closer very slowly to develop her ability to function well in relationship. Although I tried many techniques, including body work based in Core Energetics and Relational work, she remained stuck in the same pattern of anxiety.

Donna had a session with Andrea and started taking an essence that Andrea made up for her. I was astounded at how she had shifted the next time I saw her. She was open to her own intuition as never before and able to ask and receive the guidance she needed within herself in order to relieve her anxiety. Donna was calmer and able to be in relationships with others more profoundly. I do believe that this client would have got to the point she is now eventually but I believe the essence sped up the process in a safe and deep way.

After my clients have had a session with Andrea, and with their permission, I discuss with Andrea what she picked up in her assessment and then I can use that information in my work with that client. I find the essences work in speeding up the healing process so that we can get at and move more quickly through the issues without so much fear being present for the client. Even if I do not get permission to speak with Andrea from my clients, I still find remarkable shifts happening that the client and I can integrate into their lives.

Gathering Irish essences: A Journey into the mysteries of Ireland

I visited Ireland in 2004, where I was deeply moved by the remarkable energies of the land. The four essences in the Irish Kit assist people to work in co-creative intimacy with the earth-energies of any landscape. This story will give you a sense of my communication with Nature.

The Irish Essences honor the Irish landscape's unique spirit, generated through many centuries of conscious interaction between the people and their land. While we are acutely aware of the devastating effects of our greedy materialism on the natural world, Ireland remains the emerald green jewel of its Celtic name, Eire. Celtic practices are based on an awareness of the innate aliveness in everything. Echoes of ancient conversations with the spirits of the land can still be heard, whispering through the island. When I visited in 2004, I sensed this living sacredness in many places — in the stones, in the waters, and particularly in the trees.

The rich Celtic mythology and folklore linger still in the hearts of the Irish people today. Meeting them in their homeland, I had the humorous impression of them breathing with the earth through their feet. One Irish woman said her countrymen simply 'know' things, and since they may not have the words to name what they know, they tend to hire foreign experts to teach them what they innately feel in their bones.

Listening to Nature is the core of my work, yet I was completely unprepared for Ireland's whispering magic. The trees and stones are animated in ways I rarely experience on my native Canadian soil.

Dunderry Park

When I participated in a Body-Soul Intensive held by Marion Woodman in Ontario, I felt an immediate kinship with Paula Reeves. I said her first book, *Women's Intuition, Unlocking the Wisdom of the Body*, was a dog-eared favorite in my library. Acknowledging my love-affair with nature, she invited me to attend her workshop in Ireland in the spring of 2004.

The week-long intensive was held at Dunderry Park, a beautifully restored Georgian manor an hour north of Dublin. Developed by a woman with a vision of a spiritual center, Dunderry has become a home for shamanic studies for people from all over the globe.

As I walked the beautiful property and touched its old stately trees, I felt I was on a parallel retreat, listening not just for the messages to my body-soul, but also to the messages from the land. The earth, stones, and trees vibrated so strongly I could almost hear them singing. At first I didn't know whether this was due to my heightened receptivity, being away from home and on retreat, or if it was a genuine perception about Ireland. I decided simply to be open and to listen with my entire body to everything that called me.

Initiation at New Grange

During the course, the twenty participants visited two sacred sites, New Grange and the Hill of Tara. Older than the Giza Pyramids in Egypt, New Grange is a passage-tomb constructed around 3200 BC. Sometimes it is called the Womb of the Moon, perhaps because its narrow window-box at

the entry orients to the light of the winter solstice. For 17 minutes on that day, sunlight streams down the 65-foot stone passageway, illuminating the back chamber.

Sensing the power of this place, I took time to be alone before entering the passage with the others. A deep sense of awe came over me as we passed the huge stones at the entrance, carved with triple spirals and other strange markings. Squeezing through the stone passageway, I felt like I was entering the womb of the Great Mother. Then the familiarity struck me. I'd encountered this same energy in my meditations when I created the Great Mother essences. Here was the physical setting I experienced in my meditations – the stone womb, the deep listening silence, the sense of being viscerally held in dark feminine mystery. The carvings felt familiar, like a vague, forgotten language of spirals and whorls depicting the movement of universal energies. To build such a remarkable space, the creators of this site must have known things about nature that we no longer comprehend or entertain. Dismissing the rather simplistic theories offered by our tour guides, I opened myself to the mysteries in this remarkable place.

Deeply moved by what I experienced in this womb, I stumbled out of the passageway and went to the back of the hill to be alone. A rabbit hopped up to me, clearly unafraid; and I squatted near him for a few moments of quiet communion. In the midst of such ancient mystery, even the simplest encounter with a rabbit felt numinous. I thought I'd regained my composure but when I made my way back down the hill to our bus, an enormous rush of energy swept in from behind me, buckling my knees. Overcome with the sensation of a blessing and a wash of recognition, the knowledge rose within me, "I will never be the same again." Meeting these deep, ancient energies at New Grange made me feel that until now I had been only dabbling with the forces of Nature. In deep humility for the centuries of Celtic exploration of the earth's mysteries, I stumbled down the hill to the bus. It took several hours before I could converse freely again with my classmates.

The Hill of Tara

A few days later, on a beautiful spring evening we toured the ancient Hill of Tara. Even though the countryside was green and peaceful, I felt agitated, on-alert for something I could not see or name. Paula Reeves, the facilitator of the Intensive, came up to me and asked what I felt. I stood still, tuning into the land. "Abuse of power," I said, almost shuddering. "A huge abuse of power..." Standing with her back to me she also listened, and her quiet comment was "Blood, lots of blood." Later I learned that in 222 A.D. when the men were away from the Hill of Tara, King Dunlaing of Leinster massacred all the women in their compound, leaving their bodies for the men to find when they returned.

Situated on a high point of land overlooking forty percent of the island, Tara is the home of Ireland's ancient kings and chieftains. In the great banquet hall, kings and queens, doctors, poets, and judges would meet to establish law, handle disputes, and recite the stories of the land. Tara's history dates back 5000 years, and for much of this time, it was the heart of the kingdom. With five roads radiating from the hill, Tara was a meeting place of power, both secular and sacred. The notion of an invisible vertical center is integral to Ireland's mythology. Through an axis mundi or world tree, the people felt Tara was both a dwelling place for the gods and an entry into the underworld.

Saint Patrick confronted the ancient Celtic religion with his Christian message at this powerful site. Attempting to squelch the pagan rituals, legend says he banished all the snakes from Ireland. The snake is one of the most powerful symbols of pure sexual life-energy. In reality, Ireland never had any snakes, but St. Patrick's presence challenged the pagan lifestyle and drove the Celtic mysteries underground. Tara's secrets still call out to traveling seekers. A group of Israelites, convinced the Arc of the Covenant was buried on the hill, excavated in the early 20th century only to find a few Roman coins.

While our guide chatted about Tara's history, I found myself drawn to the trees in the graveyard. Standing by a large beech, I heard, "The (ancient) energy is shifting from the stones to the trees..." I took this as a cue to look beyond the obvious, to not be focused solely on the historic monuments.

One of Tara's main attractions is a tall phallic stone called the Lia Fail or Stone of Destiny. Located on the highest hill, it is ringed with deep circular mounds. My colleagues touched the stone with fascination, but I felt so viscerally disturbed I could approach it only briefly. Realizing I was having a very different experience from my colleagues, I left the group and walked alone to the fairy tree, an ancient hawthorn near the forest at the base of the hill. There I heard, "Come back (to Tara). You have more work to do here. Make every effort to return." I had not planned to return but in that moment I resolved to follow this guidance. The last message from the land that evening was, "A great sadness hangs about this place. We are doing what we can to rectify this. Some (human) celebrations assist; others set us back. Simplicity is key."

Making the first Essences at Dunderry

After the intensive, I stayed on at Dunderry for a few days. I wanted to make some flower essences to capture the energies in several special locations on the property. One of my favorite settings was a beautiful woodland sanctuary near a small pond. I chose the white Rhododendrons blooming in the moist greenness to represent the pond's fecund energy.

In a field at the back, a womb-like cairn was being constructed for shamanic rituals. I went into the underground dome every morning to sound and to spontaneously move. A Horsechestnut tree bloomed nearby, attracting swarms of bees. As I stood beneath it, I realized the magnificent tree was acting like a quiet sentinel for the farmers' fields and the sacred cairn. The Horsechestnut essence would represent the stabilizing presence of Ireland's majestic trees.

Touching the Stone of Destiny

Returning to Tara, I prepared myself to face its intimidating energies with a backpack of supplies: my journal, paper for making a map, music manuscript paper, an empty bottle for water, a basket to gather flowers for the essence, and a light picnic. I was directed to the woman at the giftshop for she understood the sacred energies on Tara's Hill. When I told her about wanting to make a flower essence, she said, "Go first to the well. It's just down the road."

I walked down the road expecting to find an ancient stone structure. Instead I saw a small herd of cows drinking from a rather disheveled concrete trough. This could hardly be the sacred well! After going back and forth a few times, I realized this must be the place and I dipped my bottle into the fresh water spilling over the rocks just above the trough.

Then a grisly red-bearded groundskeeper approached me and we chatted about where I was from. (Did I know his cousin in Toronto?) As he turned to leave, he wished me well, kissed my cheek, and offered me a simple blessing. Having girded myself to face the lingering energies of patriarchal abuse, this man's simple kindness completely disarmed me. Our meeting was a reminder to stay open to the fullness of the mysteries.

Still, I approached the Stone of Destiny like a spiritual warrior, ready to introduce myself and announce my intention. In a rare private moment when no tourists were around, I put my hand upon the four-foot pillar, stated my spirit name and announced my desire to let the energies of this place evolve. "I come with respect, to listen to and sing this land." Then chanting briefly, I held my hand on top of the stone. A tremendous burning sensation like a shot of hot wind, roared up through my palm. I deepened my grounding, held my hand steady, and let some ancient, powerful energy rise in and through me as I affirmed my right to be there and do my work. Later I remembered the legend about how this stone would audibly roar when touched by a rightful king.

Then I moved quickly, sensing I had little time to complete the work. I had determined through muscle-testing that I needed five elements for the essence, and I was to find them by following my body's instincts. The first, Gorse and Pine were easily found. When I came upon the Oak tree, I took time to listen for its melody, jotting down the song I heard while sitting with my back against its broad trunk. Meanwhile, some Druids were gathering in the woods nearby for their own rituals. Scrambling over fences and crawling through thickets over foxholes lined with animal bones, I

sought the flowers of Cottonwood tree. I was nearly finished but I couldn't find the last tree which I knew must be a Beech. I was not to gather flowers from the beeches in the graveyard but the Beech tree in the woods where I was guided to search was nowhere to be found. Trekking back and forth through the dense thickets, I began to panic. What if I could not find the tree? Would my mission fail? Finally I stopped, forced myself to calm down, and immediately knew what was happening. The Beech tree *was* missing — that was the point! The ancient energies *had* shifted; what had been here was now gone. I must take the gathered flowers and complete the essence under Dunderry's huge Beech tree.

A delightful Detour

Back at the gift-shop, I warmed myself with a pot of tea and wrote some notes in my journal. A young American couple were asking the shopkeeper for directions to Lough Crew. I introduced myself and asked about their journey. The woman told me of her strange dreams in which she saw Ireland's shape and distinctly heard place-names she did not know in real life such as Sligo and Boyne. They were on a pilgrimage to explore the dreams, following their inner compass from place to place.

"We're off to Lough Crew this afternoon," she said. "First we're stopping at Kells, the home of the ancient manuscripts, then to Dunderry Park tonight for a drumming circle." This was uncanny. I had wanted to visit Lough Crew and having no easy access to transport, dismissed it as impossible. They invited me to join them, and I delightedly agreed. Together, we climbed the hill at Lough Crew and sat on the Hag's chair in the sunset. I sensed a gentle peacefulness and deep feminine wisdom in this place, quite a different energy than those of New Grange and Tara. We were too late to enter the locked passageway, but I probably did not have the stamina to engage with the fullness of its mystery. We returned to Dunderry just as the drumming circle was gathering in the great hall. During our trip, I realized our shared commonality: all three of us were musicians on a spiritual quest, listening to our hearts and the magic in this remarkable landscape.

Returning to Dunderry

That evening, I took the tree-flowers and placed them in a bowl with the water from Tara's well beneath the ancient Beech tree on Dunderry's entranceway. It was a simple ritual to assist the energies that I felt wanted to shift from Tara's Hill to other settings like Dunderry where the ancient wisdom could flourish anew. In the morning, I moved the bowl onto a stone table in the sunlight and then gathered the flowers for the final essence.

My intention for this essence was to honor and support the energies building at Dunderry Park. With this focus, I strolled the property sensing the trees that should be in the combination. Oak (also in Tara's essence), Holly, Mountain Ash, Willow, and Hawthorn were needed. I assumed the Beech tree would be part of the combination, but no, its energy was not to be gathered in the usual manner. Instead, I was to listen to and write down its song! This felt like strong encouragement from the tree to move into a new phase of my work.

Later, I invited the two women who cleaned the mansion to sample the four essences. We had grown friendly over my private stay after the retreat. Puffing on their cigarettes on the back step, they took a sip of each essence and commented with their frank, no-nonsense intuition. "This one's got a real kick to it... Ah, now this one feels like a mother's lullaby." I would never ask a complete stranger to do this at home, but proving or testing the essences with these Irish women felt totally natural.

Learning to Listen to Nature's Songs

To complete my time at Dunderry, I sat at the base of the giant Beech tree, the grandfather of the property, and listened for its song. Like all the songs I'd gathered during this time, it was simple and short. During my visit, I received a number of tunes from the trees and land. I had virtually abandoned my music, a central part of my creativity when I starting making flower essences. Now

it was alive in me again. I was beginning to hear the plants not just through poetic words but in their musical voices!

On my return to Canada, I continued tuning into Sheenanowah, the sound-priestess guide who had awakened in me on the trip. I had been introduced to her in meditation long before this trip and I had received her wisdom and honored her in different ways, but the experience in Ireland was a total immersion into this aspect of myself. Back home, I continued tuning in to this energy each morning for several months and I received a series of exercises for deep listening and sound-healing — the foundation of a whole new phase of my work. Then I got busy with other things, set this work aside and for a time, and forgot Ireland's compelling whispers.

Two years later, I revisited this experience when I went to write the definitions for the essences sitting on my shelf and this story of my time in Ireland. My busy life had forced music underground again, but my dreams wouldn't let me forget. Repeatedly I dreamt about being late for a performance I was to give. The audience was assembled and waiting but I wasn't prepared or dressed appropriately.

Gathering Nature's Songs

My garden is my sanctuary and laboratory. Though it is not as numinous as the sacred sites of Ireland, I am slowly building a setting of gentle power, beauty, and tranquility. This summer I turned myself to the task of listening this garden into beauty, walking the paths each morning, letting my body open to the ground beneath my feet, my senses taking in the beauty of the plants, the tiny details of serrated leaf, fading flower, snail and tiny frog that go unnoticed most of the time. I listened to the humming around me and the song rising within my own heart. Tuning myself through the slowed walking, a musical phrase would bubble gradually to the surface and I would hum this, over and over, memorizing it to the rhythm of my steps. I felt like the land was patiently teaching me, encouraging me with every step to listen and remember its songs.

When I was full and could retain no more, I went to my piano and wrote down what I'd heard, adding harmonies to the simple melodies. As a classically trained musician, this type of music-making sounded naïve and simplistic, but it also felt authentic.

And that is what I trusted. Having listened to the poetry of the plants for many years, I recognized their authority, their voice of simple beauty. Now I was to trust them as they dictated their songs to me. I must not let my overly-trained musicianship interfere. A small collection of songs is steadily growing but I am not ready to publish them yet. I am a student, delightedly in training!

Final Thoughts about Ireland

Since my trip, I have talked with others who have visited Ireland and their experiences were all different. Some were quite unmoved by New Grange, while feeling a tremendous energy at Lough Crew, a site I'd barely touched. It is impossible to predict or orchestrate a truly soulful experience. Far more than its sacred sites, Ireland is a living energy, speaking to each of us in our own language, whispering what we need to hear, moving us, if we are open, deeper into our destiny. This is Nature's sacred role, so richly alive still in Ireland – to support our fullest soul capacities and, with us, to sing the world into beauty.

THE IRISH ESSENCE DEFINITIONS

Beside the Pond

Rhododendron

*In the woodland's cool green shade
earth's dank and swampy perfume
bows to rare white blossoms.
The green arms hold their mysteries close,
while beckoning, 'Come near.'
In the hushed spring afternoon,
the darkened water becomes
a wishing well.*

Beside the Pond invites us into the heart of the forest to savor the steamy alchemy of wood, water, and earth. It is a call to linger by water in woodland settings — ponds, streams, or swampy areas, for inspiration and repose. Let the essence help you recall the full aliveness of woodland settings to feed and calm your body-soul.

In the Hedgerow

Horsechestnut

*The ancient tree stands,
a quiet sentinel,
between the farmers' fields
steadfastly witnessing the acts of men.
Hidden beneath its lush green canopy
its massive trunk has swallowed
part of the old wire fence.*

In the Hedgerow offers stature and stability over long periods of time. It encourages the rooted presence that weathers seasons of prosperity and scarcity. Let the essence give you a sense of perspective over the vista of your life so that you can regain your sense of purpose and inner certainty.

On Tara's Hill

Maple, Pine, Gorse, and Cottonwood

*On Tara's high round hill amid stone ruins —
some broken, some still proud,
linger echoes of banquet revelry and battlecries,
the stench of sour victories.
Haunted and embarrassed,
Tara's earth sings, "Not again, never again!"
while gorse and pine and oak
do their humble repair.*

On Tara's Hill invites us to remember and address sins committed through the abuse of power. It helps us to align with nature's healing energies so that ancient memories, held primarily in stone, can release the sadness and regret from the past. Let the essence assist you to face darkness of cruelty, excess, and loss of possibility that is our shared legacy from the past. While the essence can be used to address personal issues, its main function is to heal traumas held deep in the cellular matrix of the earth, memories that continue to resonate at subconscious levels within our bodies.

Dunderry's Call

Oak, Holly, Willow, Ash, Hawthorn

*With pounding drumbeats and voices united in song,
Dunderry summons the four winds,
the ancient and the new.
Along the spiral pathway
and down the pillar of light,
all the summoned forces
make their journey to the center.*

Dunderry's Call is an invitation to come home. Whether this is a physical gathering or an inner journey into the heart of stillness, the essence heightens the magnetic pull of attraction. Helping us honor and be drawn by the call vibrating in our hearts and bodies, the essence can help us find our kindred souls and the geographical settings that 'sing' with us. When we resist the constant yearning of our body-soul, Dunderry's Call helps us let go and surrender to the natural pulsations that would draw us homeward.

Stepping Stones for Others

I teach others how to use the Raven essences. As the essences are energetic aids to shifting our being on many levels, they are shaped by the spirit of the therapist as well as the heart of the recipient. To illustrate this alchemical phenomenon, we include reports from others' experiences with the Raven Essences, here and in the articles by Karin Cremasco and her colleagues in this issue of IJHC.

Goethe's approach to meeting nature

Heather Thoma obtained a Master's of Science in Holistic Science at Schumacher College in England. Her dissertation was on "A Goethean Approach to Landscape and Architectural Design: the Integration of Place, People, and Self." Heather worked for many years in community educational outreach and is working currently as an organic/biodynamic farmer in northern Ontario, Canada.

How do we shift beyond intellectual understanding of environmental issues, toward true transformational change for healing with people and the Earth? This question has motivated my work and personal exploration for many years. While we know that change can heal, and may even know the steps we must take both individually and as a society, we often continue in our old habits: not honoring Nature as our dynamic partner and source of all life. To deepen my embodied knowing and perception of the natural world, and then engage responsively with the land, I have pursued Goethe's approach to scientific practice.

While best known for his poetic genius, Goethe himself felt that his work in botany and studies of color and light offered his most significant contributions to society. He practiced scientific "objectivity" not in abstract distancing from objects, but through a care-full discipline of allowing the phenomena themselves to be intimately revealed, each in their own way.

I was first introduced to the work of Raven Essences through a powerful consultation session with Andrea, and was immediately inspired by the multiplicity and depth of her approach. After speaking together at length, I sensed in her work an integration of precise discipline together with extreme inner receptivity to the wisdom of Nature: exactly the qualities I was glimpsing with Goethe's approach. The way she expressed her intent and process with the Raven Essence project reminded me of the value in my pursuits, and

encouraged me to continue to explore. Later, working with the essences in the *Destiny Kit* over a three-month period allowed me to let go of more inner resistances to engage more consistently with Goethean and other intuitive practices.

What was Goethe's scientific approach? Observing plants, people, or even a whole cityscape from this perspective reveals "things" as more dynamic beings in process, who like ourselves, are constantly becoming. The principle of becoming, or metamorphosis, is central to Goethean work: the tiny winged seed of a maple becomes the small sprout, then young sapling, then huge crimson-leafed tree, and within this enormous range of stretching growing change, still stands that same maple. An infant growing and living to adulthood, then experiencing the turns of old age, carries a seed of continuity of "self" throughout her diverse life. In all metamorphosis, there is transformation, yet a core essence or "Urphanomen" of the changing being remains on some level recognizable, if we learn to open to it.

To develop an embodied experience of these paradoxical truths, we must become like Goethe was: creative, open and receptive, and yet solidly grounded and disciplined in strong connection with Nature's patterns unfolding. Five different modes of perceiving can progressively reveal this dynamic inner nature of things. Use the example of a young maple tree. To start, we note and honor our first impressions when meeting this tree: even if we see it every day, or if there's a negative response, what does it say to us right now? For the next stage, make careful outward observations of the physical details of the tree. Goethe's term for this was "exact sense perception". Textures, smells, colors, height, number of leaves, location where it sits, etc. This stage can be endless, and is even better done in a group. Within the limits of the context, the more detail the better. In the third stage, inwardly picture these details changing over time. The timescale may be in hours, days, or years, but this part of the practice enhances the flexibility of our thinking, letting it move forward and backward, feeling the changing of the tree's form as an inner sensation in us, not just as an abstract idea. Goethe called this "exact sensorial imagination" (Exakte sinnliche Phantasie). We stay with the details observed, not get fanciful, but actively recreate the transformations in our "mind's eye". A fourth stage is "seeing in beholding" (Anschauende Urteilskraft): to open to the diverse qualities of facts and feelings we have gathered in relation to this small maple, and receptively perceive any patterns that reveal themselves. Over time with this stage, one can expect to see and experience Nature's patterns manifest in everything. A fifth stage may then be reached: "being at one with" the tree, not in its details, but in its wholeness. Goethe referred to this as experiencing the "Urphanomen", or archetypal phenomenon within the thing, that eventually makes it stunningly recognizable or resonant for us.

Taking up the task of a half hour a day in stillness with a tree, repeatedly returning to this care-full listening/feeling/observing space, can open, in Goethe's words, "new organs of perception" in us, shifting how we understand ourselves and our relation with the world. And yet, in this culture that demands conventional "accomplishments", I often feel pulled away from this grounded sensitive learning space.

Without avoiding intensity, my hope is to nonetheless discern an overall balance in life, where the voice of productivity and the deeper voices in Nature and my heart and soul are complementary. The listening time entailed in using Raven Essences prepares me more fully to work with Nature as a partner. My awareness of my soul's becoming deepens and transforms, and I experience healing in the land and healing in myself as intimately intertwined.

 For a selection of essays illuminating how a Goethean approach is used in a range of scientific work, see *Goethe's Way of Science*, edited by David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc, SUNY Press,

Albany NY, 1998. For a short biography incorporating his development as a scientist as well as artist, see *Goethe and the Power of Rhythm: A Biographical Essay*, by John Barnes, Adonis Press, Ghent, NY, 1999.

Andrea Mathieson trained as a classical musician before moving into her current work with flower essences in 1995. Andrea is developing the Raven Essence project, a practical co-creative philosophy for healing humanity and working with the earth. Her publications include the *Raven Essence Manual — A Love Affair with Nature*, and *Gaia's Invitation, Poems from the Sacred Earth*. In her roles as flower essence practitioner and counselor, she offers individual therapy as well as courses and workshops for people wishing to expand their intuition and deepen their sacred connection to the earth. Grey Heron, her heritage home and remarkable garden in Maple, Ontario, just north of Toronto, serves as a retreat space for women. Andrea's website: www.ravenessences.com features a meditative journey for contemplative inspiration.

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The International Journal of Healing and Caring – On Line

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