

Winter 2008

The Liberal Religious Educators Association

Volume 59 Issue 1

# LREDA Newsletter



## *From the President, Anne Bancroft*



Remember the Chinese fable about the old farmer whose horse escapes to the hills? Bad luck; except that the horse returns with a herd behind it!

Good luck; until the farmer's son falls off the horse and breaks his leg. Bad luck; except that when the army marched through to take the able-bodied with them, he was left behind.

Life might feel a bit like this fable these days, with all the changes around us: a new national President-elect that many of us are feeling very excited and hopeful about, but huge challenges in our economic environments - which we know will mean difficult times for many of us, not to mention members of the congregations we serve.

To add insult to injury - though hopefully in only a small and temporary way - there are changes afoot in the way LREDA is coming to you. (Ah, you've noticed!?) We are in the process of re-structuring the web-site, (as Cindy Leitner mentions in her column) with plans to have a password-protected environment that allows us to have the Membership Directory on-line, as well as membership and conference registration! We are planning to add

Chapter pages as well, so that we can access our regional activities more consistently and easily, and also know what is going on in Chapters other than our own.

With all of this in mind, we will not be sending new directories this winter, but plan to have them on-line by early spring. If you need a copy of an existing directory, please e-mail Cindy, our Acting Administrator, and we'll get one sent off.

It's all very exciting, but the transition time can feel a bit tentative, so we appreciate your patience. We're hoping that by the time it's up and running, it will all feel like very good luck!

Meanwhile, I was delighted to see the number of long-term educators whose congregational recognitions are included in this newsletter. The work we do as Religious Educators is so important to the future of Unitarian Universalism. I am delighted to see more of us continuing in the profession for longer and longer tenures.

In this season of holidays and light, I wish you calm and joy.

Be well, all. - Anne

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## PARKER GIVES US A GLIMPSE OF PARADISE

*Michelle Richards, CRE, Elkhart, Indiana*

The 2008 LREDA conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, featured keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, Starr King Theological School's President and Professor of Theology. During her presentations, she offered the premise that multigenerational and multicultural ministries create and sustain communities of wholeness. By creating this community of wholeness, Parker says, we are creating an atmosphere which encourages the nurturing of ourselves balanced with service to others --which is actually what was taught and practiced during the first 1,000 years of Christianity.

Although our perception today is that the death of Jesus is central to Christianity, Parker informed us that the death of Jesus was not depicted in art in any form until the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until 1,000 years after his death and long after the founding of Christianity that Christians ever saw any image of Jesus suffering on the cross. According to Parker, this was because early Christianity did not focus upon the death of Jesus, but upon the resurrection – and this focus made for a very different religious tradition.

With this focus upon Jesus' transformation rather than his death, early Christianity did not revolve around obtaining a reward in the afterlife and regaining a lost paradise long denied. Instead, Parker told us that all theologians at time who wrote commentaries on Genesis had the belief that what was in the Garden of Paradise is now scattered all over the Earth.

Likewise, the purpose of Christian life involved study and ritual to resist evil and see the beauty of Paradise – not in life after death, but here in this world. She also believes that this was connected to struggles against injustice, and that being Christ-like meant not enduring suffering and sacrifice, but working to actively change the world through social justice.

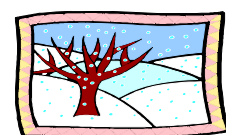
Even the rituals associated with Christianity took on a different tone, according to Parker. Baptism

was not performed on babies for the purpose of cleansing away original sin but instead on adults who had freely chosen to devote their lives to the study and work of perfecting themselves – to become a spark of the divine. To be baptized in this early Christian tradition took much preparation and years of study – it was actually a coming of age ceremony which marked a remarkable transformation. A person (man or woman) had to apply, offer references, be interviewed by the Bishop, and may have even had to give up their employment or change their life if he or she was in the wrong line of work.

After being accepted, to be worthy of the rebirth ritual a person had to engage in period of fasting and of not bathing, which were considered physical austerities necessary to learn self-control. The purpose of this training for baptism was to help people perceive Paradise here on Earth and so they could live their lives as divine beings – as “saviors” of the world.

Parker says that even today we have an acute need to have people trained in how to think and how to determine what is true and to be without prejudice, and the religious community is the place where the Spirit of Life works in us. This is part of the beauty that is created – a place where you can continue to grow in divinity and to help all of humankind.

The spirit of any religion is much different if the core idea is about working for justice to achieve Paradise instead of considering how things ought to be and stretching for a future not yet here. Parker says that it can be exhausting and disappointing to focus upon how things ought to be when the distance between where we are and where we should be is like an always receding horizon. By reorienting the idea of social justice to working toward being grounded in the sacred soil of our Earth and working out of gratitude for what we already have, then we are doing it from a place of abundance, not a place of lacking.



## FALL CONFERENCE A TIME OF MANY FIRSTS

*Lara Douglass DRE, First UU Church of Austin, TX*

The 2008 LREDA Fall Conference was an epiphany for me. Since this is the first time I attended and I am a relatively new DRE, being in the company of people who are experienced in the professional practice of religious education was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. Even though we have a great cluster group in Central Texas and we meet on a regular basis, the exposure to the totality of religious educators was invaluable to me. I met MREs, DREs, Lifespan Educators and Explorers from all over the US and Canada. Regardless of our job titles, it was obvious our mission and goals are in sync.

I was inspired by the great ideas and the theological heights of Rev. Rebecca Parker. Rev. Robert Latham challenged me with his recommendations for large churches. Meeting the candidates for UUA president was a treat.

Some of the educators from my district and I rode the tram to the top of Sandia Peak. We took that trip in the afternoon, after Rev. Parker had referred to paradise as like the top of the mountain. Sandia was both a geological thrill and an affirmation of the concept of paradise.

Jennifer Nichols treated all the SW District Educators to a Saturday evening dinner in Old Town. For me, it was the first time meeting many of the educators in my own District.

It was obvious to me that the planners of the conference had put a great deal of thought, planning and hard work into this event. The conference was an absolute delight for me. The Conference site, the Hotel Albuquerque, was lovely and very accommodating. I enjoyed being in the heart of "Old Town." I only hope, come budget time, I will be able to join you in Providence next year.



### REMINDER

Your friendly LREDA website is a valuable resource for you! Among many things, you can find information about upcoming events, a listing of Good Officers, Chapter contacts, merchandise, grant information, how we govern ourselves, this newsletter, mentoring for the Credentialing process, and job postings from churches seeking religious educators. Remember to check it out frequently!

### TREASURER'S NOTE\$

*Jennifer Halperin, LREDA Treasurer*

I am pleased to report that our LREDA funds are in excellent shape thanks to the prudent money management decisions of the previous LREDA Board and to the stewardship of prior LREDA Boards. The funds are in cash, Money Market accounts and in CD's so we have lost nothing in the past two years.

Thank you to everyone who has paid their 2008 - 2009 dues, it will help us continue to serve the membership with high quality programming, Credentialing mentors and educational materials.

Bookstore sales at Fall Conference were terrific, \$13,900 worth! Thanks again to Kevin Drewery who brought in an extensive inventory, and who has served as LREDA Bookstore manager for five years. Many of us purchased Rev. Rebecca Parker's book, *Saving Paradise*, and are looking forward to the DVD of her presentations at Fall Conference. The DVD should be coming out in mid-March, 2009.

### **DISCOUNTS!**

*Church of the Larger Fellowship is extending a 20% discount to LREDA members through January, 2009. Remember, the magic word is 'LREDA.'*

*Beacon Press offers LREDA members a 10% discount on all purchases made on [www.beacon.org](http://www.beacon.org). Just enter code LREDA at checkout to receive the discount and free shipping, and a portion of the proceeds will rebate back to LREDA.*

## MEMBERSHIP NOTES

*Cindy Leitner, LREDA Acting Administrator*

As the Acting Administrator, I'm excited to be helping LREDA evolve into an even more effective organization. We are assessing how to be more environmentally-friendly in providing timely information to our members, how to be more efficient in our administration and stewardship, and what kinds of services are most useful to our members. To this end, we are looking at restructuring our webpage so we can possibly do online event registration and membership renewal. We are temporarily suspending the packet mailings three times a year (and therefore not accepting ads to be mailed anymore) and consequently putting more information on the web, like this newsletter. We are also unable to supply address labels during this transition phase.

Our membership database includes nearly 500 current members and 120 members who need to renew for the 08-09 membership year. Email renewal reminders went out to the most current email addresses I have, so you should know who you are! Please send your dues post haste (72 cents postage from the US) to:

Cindy Leitner  
LREDA Acting Administrator  
6670 Lochdale St.  
Burnaby, BC  
Canada V5B 2M8

We are hoping to put a password-protected Membership Directory on our revamped website in the future, and your name won't appear unless we have your dues. Be sure to affix enough postage for Canada when sending your membership renewal, and if your church mails the check, please ask them to include your form with it.

We can celebrate at least 75 new members this year. And we had fifty-eight first-timers at Fall Con in Albuquerque!

We appreciate the grace everyone has exhibited during this transition time after our Administrator resigned in September. We are committed to providing the best service possible to our members. Let us know how we can serve you!

## *Presentations and notes from Fall Con are now up on the web!*



### RE EDUCATION FUTURES COMMITTEE NEWS

*Robin Pugh, DRE, Buxmont UU Fellowship, Warrington, PA*

Thank you to everyone who participated in the online survey of professional development and education needs for the RE Education Futures Committee. Your input is greatly appreciated.

The RE Education Futures Committee, appointed by the LREDA Board, is charged with creating a strategic action plan to address the future of RE education for religious professionals. The final plan will have identified participants and partners as well as a suggested time-line with specific measurable objectives. The RE Education Futures Committee has already created a vision of opportunities for religious professionals and goals that support that vision.

At our third meeting in November, we revised draft objectives that meet these goals. The committee hopes to finalize its goals and objectives at the March meeting. In March, we also plan to begin discussions with participants and potential partners, including the UUA and the theological schools, about working together to create better opportunities in RE education.

Additionally, committee members Barry Andrews and Susan Archer, and Anne Bancroft, President of LREDA, will be attending the Panel on Theological Education's Summit on Excellence in Ministry in December. They will bring to the table the survey results and the Committee's views on RE education.

It's a great team (Marge Corletti, Betsy Darr, Pat Ellenwood, Dick Gilbert, Robin Pugh, Susan Archer, Board liaison, and Barry Andrews, Chair) that is very committed to improving opportunities for education in religious education for UU religious educators and all ministers. If you have input please contact the Chair, Barry (RevBMA@aol.com) or me [Robinpugh@comcast.net](mailto:Robinpugh@comcast.net).

### CHAPTER CHATS

*Patti Withers, CRE/ML, LREDA Board for Member Concerns*

Chapter Chairs' Breakfast at Fall Conference: Most of the chapters sent representatives to the breakfast. The discussion ranged from what is happening in the chapters to a new initiative by the LREDA Board to provide grants for chapters to develop programs that all chapters can use to grow in programming as well as numbers. And here's what's happening in individual chapters.

**Central Midwest Chapter:** Kathy Underwood, DRE for the UU Church of Elgin, IL, is the new Chapter Chair.

**Heartland Chapter:** The chapter held its annual retreat in June. The theme was self-care, led by Karen Brown. It was very successful. Mary Darner is the chapter's new Good Officer.

**North Atlantic Chapter:** The chapter, which is comprised of the districts in New England, has spent a lot of time and energy in an ongoing process of clarifying its relationship with the UUA districts (and staff) that are within the chapter boundaries.

**Pacific Northwest Chapter:** The Puget Sound cluster sponsored the largest Middle School Con ever—the 12th annual—at Camp Sealth, Vashon Island, WA. With more than 95 campers and 20+ adults managing the challenge course, archery, various workshops and worship, a good time was had by all! For details contact Lori Fernholz-Hartman, Tahoma UU Congregation, who took over the directorship of the Con from long-time dedicated Director, Cathy Tauscher, DRE, Woodinville UUC.

The PNW chapter will host RE Leadership School this summer from July 26-August 1 in Vernonia, OR, with Dr. Helen Bishop.

**Pacific Southwest Chapter:** Barbara Braswell, DRE for the Granite Peak UU Congregation in Prescott, AZ, is the new Chapter President.

**Seaway Chapter:** Chapter successes include growing LREDA and chapter membership, increased participation at LREDA Fall Conference, and growing interest in the credentialing program. There are concerns around keeping the Chapter bi-national and better serving DRE's from smaller congregations. Last fall they sent a letter to all congregation Board Presidents briefly explaining the purpose and goals of LREDA, and encouraging them to support their religious educator's participation in both LREDA and the Seaway chapter.

**Southwest Chapter:** The chapter is in the process of reorganizing into a true support body for professional religious educators in the Southwest. They have three main goals around which to structure their work: 1) Support each other through increased communication and stronger clusters; 2) Be visible and engaged in the larger movement by offering workshops at district events and honoring long-serving Religious Educators and congregations that are fairly compensating and providing benefits to their Religious Educators; and 3) Grow our faith by providing upper-level programming for Religious Educators in the chapter who wish to further their education and spiritual development. An 8-week, 2-semester study of Jewish and Christian heritage, theology, and Biblical history will pilot in the North Texas Cluster with the intention of later being made available for other clusters.



### Revive Your Spirit in Salt Lake City This Summer

*Cindy Leitner, LREDA Board at-large for GA*  
There's a revival coming to town and you won't want to miss it! *REvive Yourself* is the theme of our 2009 Professional Day, Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, in Salt Lake City. Our keynote speaker is The Rev. Dr. Nancy Jay Crumbine, a Unitarian Universalist min-

ister, professor at Dartmouth College, writer, actor, and public speaker who is well known as a UU revivalist and religious education advocate. Her talk is entitled "Religious Education: The Heartbeat of Our Movement or How To Keep Dancing When They Keep Stepping on Our Feet," and it will explore how spirituality and creativity abound within the anxieties of our lives as educators. To nurture ourselves in ways that keep us centered and healthy

## GA (cont)

in a troubled and broken world, we can manage our difficulties so that we remember what really matters. Bring your spirit, enthusiasm and your voices, as music and humor will permeate her talk.

The afternoon workshops on June 24 will include Nancy Crumbine's follow-up "Writing and Singing as Spiritual Practice." She says: "Words—written, spoken, sung—can enliven us, pull us together, remind us what matters, be a kind of prayer." The workshop includes short writing exercises, learning songs and chants, sharing, laughing, and celebrating our good work. No experience necessary and nothing required.

Another workshop will cover information on how to jump-start or enhance your local LREDA Chapter. With an eye to potentially providing more regional programming, we need strong and effective

chapter and cluster groups. Share what is good about your chapter and pick up ideas from others.

We will have an update on the RE Credentialing process from the RECC and the UUA, and also offer a Good Offices training on Wednesday afternoon—open only to those who have been nominated by their Chapters.

Our Booth at GA this year may have a new look, but the same good information and merchandise will be available. We'll have our annual luncheon and meeting, date TBA, as well as an incredible Sophia Lyon Fahs lecture with the Rabbi Sandy Sasso, author of wonderful children's books. Her theme is "Nurturing the Spiritual Imagination of Children." What a richly engaging topic!

*See you there!*



## LREDA MILESTONES



### Transitions:

*Patti Withers, CRE-ML* is DRE at Henry David Thoreau UU Congregation, Stafford, TX. She was formerly at the First UU Church of Houston.

*Margaret Sequeira* is Director of Lifespan Faith Development for the Williamsburg (VA) Unitarian Universalists. Previously she served as the Education Assistant at the UU Church of Berkeley and as acting DRE for that congregation last fall while their MRE was on family leave.

*V. Layne Richard-Hammock, CRE* is now DLRE for the Edmonds (WA) UU Church. She was formerly DRE at St. John's UU Church in Cincinnati, OH. Layne wants her colleagues to know that "having been a Credentialed Religious Educator was a primary factor in landing this position." In other words, credentialing really does make a difference.

*Jolinda Stephens* now serves as DLRE at the First UU Church of Columbus (OH). She had been Acting Director for Lifespan Religious Programming at the UU Church of the Monterey Peninsula (CA).

*Pat Infante* is the new Program Consultant for Lifespan Faith Development in the Joseph Priestley District. She was serving as the Director for Growth in the JPD for the past two years and served as DRE at the UU Church in Cherry Hill for nearly a decade before that.

*Jeffrey Bauer* is DRE at the UU Church in West Lafayette, IN. This is his first DRE position. Welcome!

*Bob Fox* will be starting a two year position as interim DRE at the UU Church in Ithaca, NY. He has been DRE at Unity Temple in Oak Park, IL.

*Coleen Murphy* has resigned from the First UU Church of New Orleans, after 6 ½ years of service. She will continue to be active in UU youth work on the local, district, and national levels, but her primary work will be in her neighborhood free clinic.

### Credentialed:

*Nathan A Ryan, CRE*, Director of Lay Ministry, First Unitarian Church of Dallas (TX) was awarded Credentialed status in October.

*Sheri Phillabaum, CRE-AL*, DRE at the UU Church of Corpus Christi (TX) was awarded Credentialed status at the associate level in December.

#### Awards and Recognitions:

*Sara Cloe*, DRE, completed a decade of service to the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Washington County in Hillsboro, Oregon on July 1, 2008. She was recognized by her congregation with a beautiful plaque at the congregational meeting held in May.

*Peggy Dickson*, DRE at Manatee ULU Fellowship in Bradenton, FL earned her BA in Human Development from Eckerd College, in St. Pete, Florida, with Honors.

*Greta Porter, CRE*, is this year's recipient of the the Veridan Fund for Religious Education Excellence. Greta is using her award as she works towards the master's level of credentialing. As she prepares to celebrate her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the UU Church of North Hills, Pittsburgh, PA, her position has changed from DRE to Director of Lifespan Faith Development.

*Renee Cogil* is celebrating 10 years as DRE of the Urbana, IL congregation. This is her first fulltime year.

#### Sabbaticals:

*Jan Devor, CRE-ML* and DRE at the First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis, will be using her January – February 2009 sabbatical for travel and renewal. Also, with three co-authors, she has written a book called *Raising Free Thinkers*, a practical follow up to Dale McGowen's *Parenting Beyond Belief*.

*Lynn Hunt, CRE*, DRE at First Unitarian Church in St. Louis, MO, will be on sabbatical from January-March.

*Leia Durland-Jones, CRE*, DRE of Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church UU in Charlottesville, VA will be taking the first three months of her 6 month sabbatical in March-May of 2009.

#### Other News:

*Tracy Sprowls Jenks*, Religious Education Minister at the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, NJ, has started work on her Doctor of Ministry degree at New York Theological Seminary. She anticipates at May, 2011 graduation.

*Sandra Greenfield*, Director of Lifespan Faith Development at South Church Unitarian Universalist, Portsmouth, NH, has been accepted into the Doctoral program at Widener University in their Human Sexuality Education program. She hopes to have her EdD in five years.



### UUA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES INTRODUCE THEMSELVES



Following Fall Conference, where members were able to attend a forum featuring the two candidates for President of the UUA, one of the candidates contacted me to find out if it would be possible to submit something for our newsletter. Since LREDA does not endorse candidates, the other candidate was invited to also submit an article. The articles appear below without editing. Further information about each candidate is available on their campaign websites. -- Gaia Brown, Newsletter Editor

#### Statement from Peter Morales, Candidate for President of the UUA:

Every Sunday thousands of seekers come to our churches for the first time. Many of them are parents coming with their children, searching for a spiritual community that will help them raise children who are compassionate, tolerant, joyful, and spiritually mature. They seek the proverbial village that it takes to raise a child. They seek a loving spiritual home. I see these families come to my own church week after week.

Religious educators are essential if we are to make our congregations into loving villages that nurture families with children. We UU's have done much to create places where children, youth, and their families

## Candidates (cont.)

thrive. Where we have excellence, it is because a dedicated religious educator has made it happen. Further, as we move into a new, multi-racial and multi-cultural America, religious educators will be at the front lines. We must become a multi-cultural movement. That change will come as diverse young people and young families come into our congregations.

We have come a long way. However, there is much, much more we can and should do. A vital religious community that embraces children and their families requires collaboration among religious educators, parish ministers and lay leaders. Unfortunately, our religious educators too often feel isolated, unsupported, and disrespected. In particular, I hear far too many painful stories of difficult and strained relationships between parish ministers and religious educators. We need a new culture of collaboration within our congregations and among our congregations. In my own church, our religious educator is an integral part of our ministry team. I cannot imagine excluding her!

There are several ways the Association can lead an effort to get our ministry to children, youth and their families to a new level. First, we must do more to foster a culture of collaboration that is an expression of our values. I will support programs for ministers and religious educators at the cluster, district and national level that promote a new culture of teamwork. The Ministry and Professional Leadership (MPL) staff group, along with district staff, should lead this effort.

Second, the UUA has new opportunities to support religious educators. The new *Tapestry of Faith* curriculum is a start. However, we can do much more to facilitate the sharing of the hundreds of excellent resources our creative religious educators are producing all over the country. We need to use the resources of LREDA and the UUA to identify resources. New technology makes this feasible in the way it has never been before.

I must add that I am especially proud to have two distinguished former LREDA presidents, Makaanah Morris and Pat Ellenwood, as enthusiastic supporters.

I believe we Unitarian Universalists are called to be something far more than we are today. We can grow our movement, change lives and change the world. To build such a faith, religious educators must play an essential part. I ask for your support and look forward to working with religious educators to build the faith we love.

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### Statement from Laurel Hallman, Candidate for President of the UUA:

What an honor it was to be with so many of you at the LREDA conference. My first career was as a fourth-grade teacher and curriculum developer (In a Title III, "Innovative Projects" Department of Education Grant). When I began attending Unity Church -Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota, I became a lay member of the religious education curriculum project there. Over four years, our writing team developed 266 lessons for *Images for Our Lives*, a comprehensive curriculum for grades 1 – 8, later distributed by the UUA. I count that experience as my first and best training in theology.

It was after I joined the staff at Unity Church-Unitarian as the Assistant to the Minister and the Religious Education Director, that I experienced the call to ministry. The context of that call has meant that I have seen all of my ministry as religious education.

In 1996 I joined with my mentor, Harry Scholefield, to create a video called *Living by Heart*. It was a conversa-

## Candidates (cont.)

tion about spiritual practice for UUs that centered on poetry as a meditative source. In 2003, I published a workbook for youth and adults by the same name, and have led workshops and retreats to teach these practices. I believe they strengthen the heart, and give us sustenance for our work for justice and peace.

I believe if a congregation is interested in growing its membership, it does well to provide the resources necessary to insure quality religious education.

If a congregation is interested in deepening spirituality, strengthening values, and offering an engaged social justice program, it does well to provide the resources necessary to insure quality religious education.

If we take seriously the future of our faith, we must invest in our religious education programs and in our religious educators.

You work at the heart of our faith. You are charged with carrying forward our history, teaching the pillars of our faith, and growing religiously strong people who can act with integrity in the world. I know this is not an easy task.

As UUA President I will make sure the RE credentialing office is returned to full time, RE salaries are fair and honorable, and the expectations that congregations have of their educators are reasonable.

Thank you for loving our children and youth and our religious tradition. Thank you for the imagination, compassion, hard work, and joy you bring to your work.

If elected, I will be the first UUA President to have led a Religious Education program in a church and developed curricula that changes lives. I ask for your support for my candidacy so that together we can make our shared vision for UU religious education a solid reality, not only for our time, but for the generations to come.

### **The Liberal Religious Educators Association**

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[www25.uua.org/LREDA/](http://www25.uua.org/LREDA/)

#### About LREDA...

LREDA is an anti-racist, welcoming, professional organization open to liberal religious educators and those supportive of religious education. LREDA promotes the religious growth and learning of people of all ages and advocates for and supports religious educators and the field of liberal religious education. LREDA does this by providing continuous education, networking and sharing resources, advocating for professional recognition, and providing assistance and encouragement for religious educators. We offer a common forum where we can learn from and share with one another the great variety of skills and depth of knowledge which we, together, possess.

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Please send your original submissions, letters, articles, and book, tape, DVD and video reviews to Gaia Brown, copy editor, at [gaiabrown@aol.com](mailto:gaiabrown@aol.com)