

North Conway, N. H.:

October 24, 2008

Thank You:

- It seems that the world is changing around us this autumn. I know that some of my feistier friends have been hoping for big social and political changes – for a revolution of some sort – to get us on a new path to a better future ~~on~~<sup>end</sup> a healthier Earth. I do not think they imagined that the revolution might take the form of strange torpedoes called credit default or swap derivatives, exploding our banks and bankrupting our governments, but revolutions rarely arrive or turn out the way you expect. This society has run its course. We the people have long been ready for fresh

growth, greener growth, scaled more to the needs of human beings and their communities.

- Yes, the walls have crumbled, but now we are free from all that anxiety about losing all our money. There is not much left to worry about. The treasure of America isn't in our banks anyway. It is in our families and friendships, in our brotherhood and sisterhood as a free and creative people.
- Sticking together, none of us will starve. We can always grow enough zucchini for everyone can't we?
- We need not fear FEAR itself this time around, for fear is a humbug. If have learned anything

in all the Aquarian splendor of the last few generations, it is that fear for the loss of material things is but the jitters of an addict, and the jitters go away once we relax into whatever new world we find ourselves come into.

- You will hear people on television worrying about the return of the Great Depression. I have heard that several times during the last week or so.
- I am old enough to have memories of that time, are any of you? Maybe we were hungry sometimes, but did we starve? No, because we had our friends and family and the earth to sustain us. The earth may have been

reluctant to feed us in some of those years, but never our friends nor our families.

- If you lived through that time, and if now you hear some young expert on television saying the term ‘great depression’ as if it were a great monster who might return, let me ask you – you who remember the last time – if your memories of that time are not more round and golden than sharp-edged?
- My husband, Jim, made an ice rink and maintained it for the city making a few dollars those winters of the Depression. I put on one-woman plays, performing in women’s clubs here and there. We were fountains of

creativity We were fountains of friendship to our neighbors As a nation, we were a mighty river of mutual support.

- That same Great Depression made some people in other countries ready for violence, genocide and war.
- But, somehow, through the exceptional miracle that is America itself, the hard times only made us more willing to help the world when our help was needed.
- I am not advocating hardship, and I am not cheerleading for poverty. Indeed, prosperity is the green wreath we cherish the most. We used our imaginations! Let me suggest that a

generation raised on books and storytelling,  
where one's

- Own imagination had to fill in the colors and details, made us a generation quite able to imagine marvelous ways to fill our family dinner table in those years. Let me suggest that the power of imagination was essential to the rise of all the grand improvements we achieved for each other and called our New Deal. Imagination allows the citizen and the politician to connect with people of every situation and condition

✍ STOP

- I have often heard it said that the more right-wing members of our present political order

will not bend on a difficult issue – say stem cell research – until someone they love needs that bit of medical magic. Well, I think that suggests that the foundation of right-wing politics is a grand absence of imagination. If you cannot imagine what people need until it happens to you, then I suggest you have never read a mystery book under your covers by flashlight. I do not mean to pick on my more conservative friends, but imagination and its product, empathy, are necessary in a democracy. If it is to survive and prosper as a just and happy system of life. Imagination, empathy, education and moral leadership are

the essentials of a good and humane  
democracy.)



- Nine years ago, at the age of 90, I walked 3,200 miles across the United States. I was promoting a specific political reform that did in fact pass Congress later. I was also cleaning out my heart after the death of my husband, Jim, and my best friend, Elizabeth.
- I met the old America along that road – the America I hadn't seen since the 1930's and which I had almost forgotten. Let me tell you about a small town. It's name is
- Toyah, Texas. It is an old railroad town just west of the Pecos, river, where the ruins of a

once-beautiful main street stand like a crumbling movie set. Berta Begay offered shelter to me on the night I walked into Toyah. She didn't know me but was glad to greet me on her porch and welcomed me to stay in a little extra tiny house she had across the road, if I would please give her time to clean it up and put some fresh linens on the bed.

- It was a little yellow bungalow near the railroad tracks. The kitchen floor had linoleum creatively held down in strips to the wavy wood beneath by upholstery tacks. The house was cooled by the open doors and a few fans. The yard was dirt with a little grass, and

everything about the house was well-ordered and clean. She said I was welcome to stay for as long as I needed.

- Berta is a beautiful Native American and Hispanic woman who, each evening prepared a beautiful basket of bread and a casserole dinner. She told me about her family. Her daughter, whose name is Misty Moon, was about to graduate from a local public college as an agriculture scientist. Her son, whose name is Dearheart, was a medical assistant at a community hospital. Her husband, Steve, was an expert machinist. Berta was the postmistress of a nearby town. She was

rightfully very proud of her family, as they had come a long way in one generation, thanks to their hard work and their imagination in a land of opportunity. You must understand that this town is a dusty place on a great stretch of dusty desert. They had made it their Garden of Eden.

STOP

- There was a collection of lavender antique bottles in the little house. Berta collected them in the desert as her mother had done before her. The pharmacy in Pecos, thirty miles away, has a nice collection of them also, left over from the days when Berta's mother traded bottles for medicine for her children. That's

how far and how fast they have come, and how even glass strewn on the desert had been swept up into prosperity by the force of their imagination and love for one another. The pharmacist, too, was in that circle of love, as one can see by the bottles still in his window.

*Begins*

- Berta helped introduce me around at Toyah's tiny city hall, which also serves as a church for the town. The two women clerks invited me to speak the next evening. The next morning, they had already created and installed hand-made posters at the gas station and in the general store out on the highway, beautifully promoting my talk on political reform.

- Townspeople brought food to the evening event. Bera brought delicious cold snacks made from prickly pear cactus paddles. I saved some for breakfast the next morning. If I ever doubt that I am a tough old nut, I can remember that I had cactus for breakfast in Toyah, Texas west of the Pecos. Very tart and tasty, by the way.
- In the back of the hall during my talk, there were a few patient children trying to make sense of what we were saying. It made me remember when I was a child in Laconia, New Hampshire – I was that child in the back of the room. Visiting speakers came to town all in a

summer crowd of experts and entertainers called the Chautauqua meeting. A big tent was erected on the Pearl Street playgrounds, the largest open space in town.

Speeches,entertainment, and pot luck dinners were planned for the whole week.

- I went for two reasons: The fun reason was that there were dramas performed – like the villain foreclosing on a mortgage and putting the farmer's pure daughter in harm's way. I loved drama, and got myself a part in any play put on by the Women's club, the Elks, or the Grange of Laconia. I'm talking about before radio and TV, you understand, The play acting

would later serve me well when we had to survive by our wits.

- The adults listened to the political speakers.

They learned how the railroad monopolies & Progressiv-Populist Movement had begun at such meetings in the early 1890s. Great fist-waving speeches at these meetings kept people informed, interested and fired up.

- My Mama didn't know if her children would ever be able to afford proper educations, so she saved money to buy tickets and took us to the lectures so we would at least have a few thoughts in our heads. Well, those Progressive thoughts are still rattling around in my head

today. I thank my Mama's imaginative University.

- After my talk at the Toyah city hall, which was about the undue influence of lobbyists and large donors on the political system and what we might do about it, there were heartfelt comments from the townspeople about how they could no longer defend their own town and how it was suffering. At the end of the evening, Berta folded a letter into my hand. It was a long and beautifully written letter about her spiritual beliefs and about her town. The letter detailed how political corruption was literally dismantling the town, selling off the