

United States of America – Part I

8. - 25.4. 2009



Before we entered the airport in Mexico DF we had a last Quesadilla and Salsa Verde from a street vendor outside the bus terminal. We enjoyed the food in Mexico so much! The prospect to leave this and enter into a zone where street vendors only sell highly processed industrialized food (if they exist at all), where “restaurants”, even in posh banking districts, sell fast food on plastic dishes

with plastic cups and cutlery, was sad but true.

But we were looking forward to our many friends in the USA who incessantly are working for a sustainable world.



San Diego, Ca., Tantra Connection



We visited Kamala Devi, a Tantra teacher and author in San Diego whom we got to know due to the crazy film from Dawn Porter that “portrait” both of our projects last year. She had organized two evenings with us, one on “Community and Free Love” and the other one on “A taste of ZEGG Forum” experience. Both times about 25 to 30 people – many of her peer group - turned up and we had inspiring two evenings at her fairly conventional home in Pacific Beach. Kamala wrote a detailed report of our talk on Free Love which can be found here:

<http://uninhibitedbliss.blogspot.com/2009/04/free-love-community-talk-with-zegg.html>

She lives with her husband Michael and her son Devin, who grows up bilingual with a Chiapanecan aupair in Spanish and in English.

We learned that Kamala and other initiatives see their start with Kelly B. returning from ZEGG Summercamp about 15 years ago when he still was living and active in SD. So indirectly they see themselves standing on the shoulders of ZEGG. We learned that many people see hope in the existence of ZEGG, even when we (at ZEGG) do not know them. For many it is like a star in the sky for new forms of relating in love and sexuality, for daring to move beyond nuclear family and for high transparency and trust within the community. May we know and remember each time when we think bad about ourselves.

For those who are familiar with *spiral dynamics*, the US seems deeply rooted within the blue meme. "Law and Order" seems to be the highest concept and **the** way to organize the society. So we saw militarized behaviour in daily affairs even down to a ticket clerk or a bus conductor. Whoever wears an uniform has a lot of authority over those who don't. Uniforms demand and require obedience. For me again and again it was surprising to see patterns of this law and order and obedience behaviour in many unexpected situations.

Los Angeles Ecovillage EV (www.laev.org)

At LA we were met by a lovely resilient lady of 72, Lois Arkin, who picked us up at the Greyhound bus terminal with public transport and took us to the LAEV which was started by her in her neighbourhood in 1993. On her way to the station she made lots of notes on her note pad of what she would like to see changed in the streets of LA and in the Greyhound station. She wants to talk to the officials about it. That is what kind of person she is. She has moved a lot in her neighbourhood and probably is a nuisance in the eyes of state representatives. Also she is a radiant star in the network of hope that I see spreading underneath the crumbling facade of post industrial life.



They started in 1993 after the racial riots in LA. They took the decision to buy and retrofit houses in the neighbourhood where Lois lived. It was a poor area, with gang violence and much fear in the people. So one of the goals was to get neighbours feel safe and a sense of community. They organized meetings with "positive gossip" and created opportunities for people to meet. They shared about strengths and weaknesses of the neighbourhood. After some time of meetings crime was not the mayor focus anymore like in the beginning of these reunions.



Gate from bicycle parts

LAEV is a community with about 50% of colored people. It became famous for their Street Dinners, where they meet for a potluck dinner on the street in front of their houses at a small intersection and partially block or impede the traffic. Their goal is to reeducate the drivers and to reclaim the streets.

They pressed for a permeable sidewalk cover in a country where normally every inch is plastered with a thick layer of concrete; they managed to have Macademia nut trees planted on this sidewalk in contradiction to state policy to not plant fruit trees in the city; they had cork oak planted on a mayor through street; they ripped the pavement in front and around of their houses,



Concrete removal work

letting the earth underneath breath for the first time in 100 years and let rain filter in instead of running off into the ocean, and many other things.

GMO less

The morning we left by train for Salinas to go to Santa Cruz we received the news on the German news chanel, that German Environmental Minister from the most conservative Christian Social Union has prohibited MON 810. MON 810 was the only GMO (corn) that so far was permitted to be planted in Germany for commercial purposes. 3400 ha were planned to be planted.

What a relieve! Two years ago I was arrested for destroying a GMO field in East Germany. More than 80% of the population are against GMO's in Germany since years. So Germany joins the 4 other countries in Europe who prohibited it. And I hope it is the beginning of this insane attack of the Multinationals to destroy and control our food resources. The German Farmers Union, by far not known for being progressive, are against GMO's because: "they have very little or no advantage for the farmers". They undoubtedly do not have an advantage for the consumers. So the only ones they have one for are the Pharmaceuticals. How good to hear in a country whos inhabitants seem very unaware of GMO's, a country where GMO's are in almost everything today and it would be very hard and increasingly impossible to avoid them.



Amtrak trains

We chose to ride a train to the Bay Area. Maybe because we are from Germany and it is the best public transport, or because we were romantic as the USA were built on rails. What we found at Union Station in LA is a posh and huge station and only very few trains. They are

MUCH slower than cars and busses, even though they do not get into traffic jams.

The train we boarded was a double decker train, with antique looking interior (seats, toilets, etc). The fastest it goes is maybe 80km/h. And it stops as frequently as the German regional trains but it is much slower! Freight trains have priority in the USA, because the tracks are owned by the freighter companies! It has a story to tell about what is more important: economy or people. So delays for many hours (up to 8 or even 10h) behind schedule are not rare.

Amtrak, the US train operator, is more than twice as expensive as flying or busses. Of course it is much more comfortable and scenic. People take trains for a holiday and sightseeing. It is not seen so much as a means of transportation, but as a sport or as a compassion for fans. So we decided also to take a train from West to East in May. It takes us 4 days to cross the continent at a comfortable speed. We paid a Roomlet, which is like a sleeping compartment. We have already flown so much on this beautiful journey!

Poverty and unemployment

Some analysts said late 2008, that the US government might crash and have to declare bankruptcy by summer 2009. Yes, there are signs for recession, but not much noticing of it. The USA is the Nr. 1 country with the highest dept and pays astronomical sums in interest to the banks without the perspective to ever repay the loans. But this is what banks want. The constant influx of interest payment and the continuous dependency. The “developing” (where to?) nations pay many times more in interest as they receive in so-called development aid. 11% of the US population currently live on food stamps. In a recent article in “HopeDance” headlined: “The present of presence” by Daniel Pinchback he analyses the present situation and comes to the conclusion that soon a high inflation will kick in and that the US Government will have to declare bankruptcy by summer.

*And again and again, for whatever we do and whatever is,
the astounding fact of how beautiful this earth still remains, still is.
Even though we ripped her apart to access her minerals,
desnuded her burning her trees, exposed her soil to wind and erosion,
sealed the soil and dried her up -- she still is beautiful,
she still knows how to heal herself.*

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In Oakland we had an evening potluck and Forum with a bunch of Network for a New Culture folks.

It was Inas birthday and I had spend all day to find the ingredients for a “Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte” during an all day electricity cut in Soquel.



Matter?

In the US a real connection with things does not seem to exist. Things are used and discarded. A constant flow of matter passes through or by me without leaving much connection. Goods, food, houses and cars. Ecological awareness here means to recycle this flow. The concept of consuming less seems far away.

Mexico City banned all plastic bags from now on. From now on only biodegradable bags from corn starch are allowed within City limits. For more information see: <http://www.plasticsnews.com/headlines2.html?cat=1&id=1238093003>



We are still enjoying our travel. Very much and astounding enough we have not been homesick yet nor sick of traveling after those first 5 months where we did not stay longer than 1 week in one place. Many people offered us to use their apartment, house etc where we could relax and enjoy and sleep and digest. A big THANKS to all of them.

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Santa Cruz, California

We had a long 3 ½ day workshop near Santa Cruz with about 40 people participating. We had another day and an evening and two presentations of ZEGG in Santa Cruz. During the first Workshop we spiraled down (or up) in intensity to reach new levels of directness and sharing from our hearts. Again and again I could witness the magic unrevel that authentic communication will create high values. If people feel free and invited to share an a deep level about their longings and wishes, a deep set of high human values is created. I do not need to pre-describe what I think life is about or give my convictions or ideologies of community and free love. If the space is there the longing for these values will emerge in people.

Many thanks to Kelly Bryson, who had initiated this event and his longing for community has carried all of us through.

The workshop venue was a nudist center called Lupin. It was started by German men who came in the 20s or 30s to find a place where they could exercise and live healthy close to nature naked. So nudity is comon there, like in a German FKK camping site. Here it is called “clothing optional”. So sometimes, when you could see a cook in the kitchen from behind, you could see that he was not wearing anything under his apron. Unfortunately fotos were not allowed, so we could not catch some of the exquisite szenes. Today it is about nakedness, and not about exercise anymore. This is easy to tell by the body size and fat issues of many people walking around there.



Poisen Oak

I knew it, I knew how it affected me 26 years ago, when a dog walked in between my naked legs in short trowsers. Then, when we went on a hike in Northern California with my dear friend Ann I saw it and avoided to touch it with my naked legs in shorts. But there was a young dog with us, he



liked to play when we rested. Two days later it started to burn, itch, blister. Poison Oak in my body, bringing it to a feverish sensation, making me endure and enjoy hot showers in painful extasy. It lasted more than two weeks, and finally I had to take Cortisone.



Portland, Ca. - City Repair Project - Communitecture

Portland is the ecologically most progressive and advanced city in the US. There we met the architect Marc Lakeman and his team of Communitecture.



He had started out as a conventional architect, discovering the fraud and cover up common in the established system and turning its back to it. In ??? he started the City Repair Project (www.cityrepair.org) and did a bunch of impressive changes

on the level of neighbourhoods and city council. They decided not to wait for permission but to take it for granted and to be the change they were waiting for. We were impressed with the work and liked Marc a lot.



Eugene workshop 1. - 3.5.

In Eugene we had a weekend workshop with 22 people (many of whom had known each other for years) from and around the Network for a new Culture (www.NFNC.org), which was started in 1994 inspired by ZEGG. It was a deepening experience making people look forward to meet again and practice Forum themselves. It created new enthusiasm and new joy to go on building more community together. Unfortunately there are zoning laws in the states that prohibit building more than one house on each property. This makes it difficult to realize a close knit community here.

Homesick?

Slowly we seem to be homesick, it is not the traveling I think, it is a feeling of being stuffed, coated or overlayed with some kind of energy that weighs us down. We thought it might be in the food, or in the attitudes of the people. I tried to find out more in the last and final box below.

So much clutter!

I felt uneasy, like something heavy sitting on my mind, weighing me down. It got worse and I wondered what it was. Ina felt short tempered and tight. I suddenly missed South or Latin America. I started missing ZEGG. And this was not the length of the travel that did that.

Then I started to understand. Almost all places we had been to in the US felt cramped, filled up, overloaded. Even when in South America rooms were smaller and houses poorer, there was much more air to breath and space to be. US homes – and spirits - often are cramped with stuff! Americans believe that they need lots of private space around them without other persons in it. Then they fill it up with stuff to which a personal history is tied.



I read – written by an American – that a whole generation never learned to clean up. And everything tells people here to consume. To buy more and more useless stuff. So the system soon clogs up. Maybe it is the idea of abundance when everything is full, cupboards, tables, enormous fridges. For me it is impossible to think freely and to find clarity and peace of mind in such a surrounding.

It is like food and eating mostly seems not to have much style. It often feels like Americans were made to believe that food and eating is just minerals, vitamins, proteins etc. As if it was quantities of certain substances and not connecting with life what we do when we eat. In the noble business district of LA we saw managers eating in restaurants which served everything on plastic throw away dishes. It just did not have style. We often ate with people together and yet not together.

Years ago I read a book about Feng Shui and getting rid of the clutter that is in our houses. Clutter was described as all the

things we do not need currently.



The other thing I noticed was that we meet so many people who live in the believe that they have some sort of serious psychological problem. Many US-Americans visit a therapist on a regular basis. I believed it was a joke, but it is not. They do have traumas to work through due to puritanist and deep, fundamentalist believes. They seem to identify themselves with these traumas. And by doing so, they cannot solve it because they always revolve around their problems as the center of the universe. Maybe it is a trick to keep from becoming active and fundamentally change their lives. So their spirits seem to be loaded with mental “stuff” as their houses are with physical stuff.

We had the impression that the undigested and repressed history of the conquest and genocide of the American Indians plays a direct role in the disconnectedness we find here. To connect would mean to go through the stuck feelings of that horrible history with so much pain and betrayal.

In South America I had discovered a deep connection to the land and to myself. A deep inner peace which was easy to find and a slow pulse of living. People do not run so fast in the attempt to find a happy and fulfilled life somewhere round the next corner. Abundance is found plenty of social contacts, interconnectedness and inter-dependendness which are valued highly. The social web is the provision and reliable. It was new and healing for myself. I was present and grounded and did not feel the need to meditate to connect myself.

Gandhi was asked once by a reporter what he thinks about Western Culture. His answer was:

“I think it would be a good idea!”



Snow at Crater Lake, Ca.



Greenhouse at Lost Valley Community

For an ending I found a quote from Krishnamurti, who expressed something I found especially true for the USA. A country that feels obliged to lead war for justice, human rights and democracy while lacking all of these at home and in its own doings. -- Achim

The world problem is the individual problem; if the individual is at peace, has happiness, has great tolerance, and has an intense desire to help, then the world problem as such ceases to exist. Before you have established peace and understanding in your own hearts and in your own minds you desire to establish peace and tranquility in the minds of others, in your nations and in your (and other) states; whereas peace and understanding will only come when there is understanding, certainty and strength in yourselves.
Krishnamurti