

Transitioning & Blooming in Connection

A practice of mini-retreat within the AR+ Community

The invitation

“What about a flower power meet up,” asked Yvonne. Ilaria, Hilary and Yvonne had met as a trio in a coLAB on co-creativity. “Yea! What a great idea!” “Let’s get to know one another better!” Do we meet in Yvonne’s home in Florida? In San Diego with Ilaria? Or rainy Portland with Hilary. Turned out that Portland offered easiest logistics, tho’ not best weather. Our theme? We shared a love of flowers as teachers in the coLAB. Quickly we aligned around a theme of *Transitioning & Blooming*. It connected Ilaria’s baby girl on the way, Yvonne’s dissertation and Hilary’s rematriating to Ireland. We’d meet over Earth Day (April 22). Of course. We’d spend three days together, as a sacred pause, together.



Design

Each of us agreed to lead a block of time through which to open a window onto our lives. Without offering too much detail of what we’d do together, we finalized in a phone call that we’d use our time well. Easy peasy!

The Protainer

On April 20th, Hilary lit some candles at the supper table. Hey presto. Yvonne and Ilaria arrived. We had to remind ourselves that we’d never actually met before “in person”!



Morning has broken

Ilaria led a creative exploration of our personal intentions for our retreat together. We started with spreading colorful cards on the floor, which helped us speak to our longing, our truth, and the mystery in our current transitioning. We continued by invoking our council of resources through a visualization of all who help us. We received their inspiration, their love, and their support for this phase of our journey. We completed our morning exploration with an embodied inquiry into our blooming, which became a co-created choreography honoring our inquiries, our deepening connection, and the new awareness gained in just the first hours together.

72 labors brought us lunch

Hilary led lunch eaten Zen style. We ate silently using three bamboo bowls with salad, soup, tea and chocolate lava cake. All local & sustainable! We imagined the many labors of the whole system that brought us this bounty (sun, water, people, kitchen, us!) and ate the food with All. We then took a solo walk to experience more of how we each fit in the many overlapping systems around us. We came back together to show and tell, with sketches of system map highlighting one chosen element of our system.

In the listening we uncovered insights and new aspects of our theme.



Our Spiral narratives

Yvonne led a session based on Joanna Macy's *The Work that Reconnects*. This framework called us to the teachings of a flower from its roots, leaves, bloom and rebloom. We drew what came to mind as we reflected through *Gratitude*, *Pains*, *Seeing with ancient and new eyes*, and *Going forth*. A new drawing emerged as we each moved to a new space in the sitting room. We'd embodied a spiral form. We also learned more of our life stories, intentions, and passion for change through these flowers.

Fun Dinner with Friends!

We reached out to local AR+ people to invite twice our small number to meet at Gino's for (big!) portions of Italian food. Plus, surprise, Bill Torbert was in town. As dinner progressed we swapped seats so conversations could spiral. Already our exploring of Transitioning & Blooming was rippling out in conversation and connection.



On our final morning we walked in the local nature sanctuary - Oaks Bottom - a place where once the Indigenous people of the Willamette Valley gathered Wapato. Today it's host to Heron and Bald Eagle.

Hilary taught the art of zen walking ("kinhen"). In essence this becomes the practice of walking more slowly than usual, and, when you remember, also coordinating feet with breath (without getting stressed!). Bringing attention to the feet - because they're full of nerve endings - becomes a gentle moving meditation that is useful in everyday life. We also alternated walking solo, with talking as dyads and again as a trio. Yes, we saw a Great Bald Eagle before returning for a final lunch together.

Final reflections

Yvonne writes: The retreat was transformational! We learned a lot about each other as Action Research peers. Our intentions, passions, and actions for change forming through art and eco-centric practices. I enjoyed the inward journey of practicing meditation at times as well as delving into free fall writing and sharing our creative stories. Being able to walk through the neighborhoods of Portland connected us to the local community and the natural beauty of this Pacific Northwest town. The cherry blossoms were in full bloom reminding us of seasonal transitions and the peak of flourishing. Spending Earth Day walking the trails of Oak Bottoms Wild Refuge Park reminded me of the vital connection between nature and city. The bald eagle taking flight! A sign of synchronicity and connectivity. I am reenergized by our retreat and looking forward to planning future ones in my local community and afar.

Hilary writes: I'd love for more of us to take sacred - developmental - pauses together more regularly. It's a new configuration for coLABoratorship. Designed with (loose) intention and embracing the unexpected (e.g., a lengthy car alarm during Ilaria's lovely flower meditation!) I got, and we each got to offer and receive our gifts so that we may continue to offer and receive at a time of eco-social crisis that invites all our gifts to come together.

Ilaria writes: What a treat this retreat! This sacred pause in community around Earth Day became a joyous invitation to re-member my Self and our nature as One with each other and with our planet. Connecting in the beautiful, rich field we co-created, immersed in amazing Portland Spring nature, allowed me to see and embrace more of myself, of others, of Life! And to honor my/our current transitioning as part of broader, shared cycles. I was deeply touched by all the beauty we could reveal together, by the delight of connecting with each other in different landscapes of our human experience, and by the love infusing our space and wanting to ripple out of it, as we returned to our lives. I left with my heart filled with gratitude and appreciation for my developmental friends, and committed to co-create more spaces for growth and regeneration in community, at this moment in time in the world.