

Rite of Passage Journeys

as told by Edith Kusnic and Darcy Otty

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN: The Journeys Story

HISTORY AND LEGACIES

Rite of Passage Journeys became an independent, mission-driven organization in Fall 2006 when it incorporated in Washington State as a non-profit corporation and hired Darcy Otty as its first full-time paid staff person and as Executive Director to succeed its Founder and Director, Stan Crow. We were granted federal tax-exempt status under IRS Code Section 501(c)(3) in early 2007.

Highlights

1950s - 60s	Ground prepared and roots established
1968 – 1987	Our Origins: Sixth Grade Trip
1987-90	ICA Journeys is Born
1990 - 99	ICA Journeys Goes Public
1999 – 05	The Stakeholder Years
2006	Incorporation as Independent Non-Profit. The Torch Passes to Darcy Otty
2007 - 08	Strategic Planning
2009 – 10	A Year of Challenge
2010 - 11	A Year of Self-Reflection
2011	Stabilization of Operations and Planning for Growth

Establishing Roots: The Early Years

The social impulse that led to Journeys 2011 took root much, much earlier—in the post-war years of the 1950s. The history of Journeys coming into being and coming to be what it is today is a history of learning through experience, guided by a process of deep and engaged inquiry and discernment into the broad question of how to nurture and grow mature, capable and committed human beings and healthy human communities. The answers to these questions currently embodied in Journeys were informed by practical experience in the real world, study of relevant knowledge areas, and the intellectual and imaginative contributions of a number of individuals. An important legacy derived from this history still central to our work today is that process itself—the organization itself engaged in the process of experiential learning to continue to grow and develop its capacity and relevance in changing times.

Journeys' roots lie with a faith-based, ecumenical movement that began to coalesce in the mid-1950s under the name The Ecumenical Institute (EI). In a post-

war world learning to cope with the new reality of the atomic bomb with memories of the horrors and deprivations of the war still fresh, and a culture beginning to extol the virtues of consumerism as Madison Avenue's advertising efforts gained a new power to shape culture. Through the new medium of television, people of many faiths began to come together to ask themselves to forge a path for people of faith to respond to these conditions and the deep human questions they raised.

The EI explored deeply questions relating to creating healthy communities on many different levels. It experimented with collaborative and participatory methods of self-governance and extended these toward working with communities to help them develop the processes effective for their own self-development. Eventually, the EI began to work under the name of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), the name chosen when the group became an international NGO, extending its community development work to many other countries.

Early Sprouts: The Sixth Grade Trip

The branch of this original enterprise that grew to become Journeys today sprouted in 1968 with the development of a stand-alone initiatory program for the 6th grade youth of the North American community of the ICA. Having discovered through their work cross-culturally that the healthiest communities had intact rites of passage for their youth,, ICA members determined that they needed to provide such an experience for their own youth. This first initiation program was called The Sixth Grade Trip.

Over the next nineteen years, the Sixth Grade Trip became an institution for ICA youth and developed under the guidance of committed ICA staff members. ICA youth were initiated in a multitude of remote North American locales over the years, including backcountry terrain in Colorado, Montana, Northern Labrador and Boundary Waters and Mexico. In the Eighties, Stan Crow took leadership of the program, bringing to it his experience of the native practice of vision quests; his knowledge of rites of passage cross-culturally; a love of ritual; a background in drama; a love of nature and understanding of the power of nature to both heal and teach; deep commitments to empowering others, bringing meaning and purpose to human life, and building community; and tireless work,

Journeys Transplanted to New Soil

In 1987, Stan and Carol Crow brought the program to the Northwest, settling in Bothell, Washington where, with others, he founded Songaia on whose land he established a base camp from which to operate Journeys and began to build a Pacific Northwest-based wilderness rite of passage curriculum to serve youth aged 11-18. By 1990 Stan brought the program to the public under the auspices of the ICA and under the name, ICA Journeys. During the 1990s, Stan built a national reputation for his work with youth rites of passage and developed a

number of collaborative relationships with individuals and groups committed to restoring rites of passage to the culture and developing contemporary practices to deepen connections with the self, community, nature and the Sacred.

By 1999, programs had grown as had the work of producing them. Additionally, a number of young people who, having served as program mentors, began to express interest in growing and developing Journeys. Finally, the operation of Journeys had begun to exceed Stan's capacity and, entering his elder years, he knew he had to plan for the future. Additionally, the ties to the ICA had begun to weaken as the ICA moved in different directions and was distant geographically.

Raising Young Plants

During Fall 1999, Stan convened a Stakeholder's Group to begin to share leadership for Journeys and plan for its long-term sustainability. Although this team began as a network of about 25 staff, alumni, and other interested stakeholders who shared Stan's devotion and dedication towards organizational sustainability, over time it settled into a core group of about eight people who worked with Stan to guide and nurture Journeys.

In an attempt to re-strengthen the ties to Journeys, the ICA subsidized part-time salaries for staff associates to work with Stan from 2001 to 2004. Darcy Ottey worked in this capacity in 2001-02, Amara Oden 2002-03 and Edith Kusnic 2003-04. When that subsidy ended in late 2004, Stan and Edith carried Journeys without pay for another year. By mid-2005 we had to face the question of whether the time for Journeys had passed or whether we had the energy to reinvigorate it.

Our answer was a resounding "Yes!"; and we began to make plans to form a non-profit organization independent of the ICA. When Rite of Passages Journeys officially separated from ICA in 2006 under the visionary guidance of its founding Board, it was with the clear intent that the organization needed to develop a broader image of the organization's mission and mandate, create a stronger presence in the world, grow into a year-round operation and carry the torch forth into a new era of rite of passage programming.

Growing toward Maturity: Independence and Professional Competence

This intent and decision was made possible by Darcy Ottey, an original member of the Stakeholder's Group, agreeing to take on the new role of Executive Director for Journeys. This allowed Stan to step back from the operations of Journeys and move into an *emeritus* role. In 2006 Journeys incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the State of Washington and thus began the years of developing Journeys into an organization that can exist independent of any particular person.

Journeys' accomplishments since 2006 are impressive as Darcy guided Journeys along this path. Through these years she gathered a small staff and together with

them built an administrative infrastructure; strengthened program quality, consistency and safety; created professional marketing, fund-raising and outreach materials; and cultivated an expanding community of support, including a strong donor base.

She also worked with the Board and several advisors to engage iterative conversations that have evolved the vision of Journeys' future and guided Journeys' organizational development. The first of these, the strategic planning process in 2007-08, identified four broad areas of strategic development required of that vision that have continued to guide us:

- Broaden Curriculum and Programs
- Grow a Professional Infrastructure
- Deepen and Articulate Knowledge
- Widen Circles of Influence

This process also resulted in the following Seven-Year Vision adopted by the Board in 2008:

Rite of Passage Journeys will have a well-developed, in-depth, teaching/training program of rite of passage methods. Strategically using our energy and resources, we will respond to the life span initiatory needs and opportunities with innovative program offerings while keeping our youth programs vital and core. We will educate ourselves and others about the cultural importance and nature of rite of passage experiences and their role in revitalizing culture. We will tell our story of who we are and what we do in such a way that others understand and see value in what we do. We will find our place and role in the larger communities of cultural transformation to heal our planet. We will nurture a strong community of Journeys students, alumni, staff, parents, and supporters. We will have the resources we need to do quality work. We will attract, train, and retain high-quality mentors and teachers who embody our values to deliver our mission.

Darcy's work at Journeys also helped begin to build the foundations of intellectual clarity and the ability to transfer and expand our knowledge to new arenas. Working with others, she was instrumental in helping Journeys articulate its Theory of Change and to clarify and articulate program outcomes (with Emily Pease); to develop a comprehensive "Coming of Age for Communities" manual (with Edith Kusnic); and to develop two new adult programs -- Stepping into Elderhood (with Stan Crow, Fred Lanphear and Edith Kusnic) and The Art of Ritual Leadership (with Randy Morris).

Stormy Weather

Our smooth pathway forward was interrupted in 2009 when Journeys experienced two important setbacks, one economic and one emotional. The

effects of the national economic recession reached us and we had to make budget cutbacks in response, causing us to reconsider our growth trajectory. We also suffered the loss of our founder and mentor, Stan Crow, whose sudden death in November 2009 soon taught us we were in the midst of our own rite of passage.

Each of these events was instrumental in fostering a deep level of organizational reflection and strategic thinking and challenged us to develop a more realistic approach to moving toward the future. The events and conditions encountered in 2009 precipitated an intensive short-term self-study, the Future Journeys Project, during the spring and summer of 2010. Its task was to begin to make the course correction needed.

Even as we struggled with these new realities, another factor drove us during this time of transition – a growing sense of urgency for bringing our work to greater fruition as we began to see more clearly the global and cultural rite of passage of a world in great distress.

Several key conclusions arose through the deliberations of the Future Journeys Task Force and the Board:

- We need a fundamental change in business strategy. Although we had grown larger and more professional in many ways, the continued lack of adequate resources had put too great a burden on staff.
- We possess a huge legacy of intellectual property and the key to future growth is translating that intellectual property into revenue-generating products, i.e., curriculum and written materials.
- Adult programs, both experiences for individuals and training in our methods and knowledge, represent the direction for growth at Journeys.

Taken together, these conclusions led us to new clarity about our way forward -- that future choices should be guided by a new principle: that Journeys must be **“healthy, viable and sustainable.”**

To begin applying that principle, we devised an interim year strategy including an interim staffing plan, a modified governance structure, and a “no-growth” budget for 2010-11 to carry through operations and lay the foundation for growth in adult programming. We also committed to on-going self-assessment analysis, and business planning to find the long-term strategy for becoming healthy, viable and sustainable.

Today we stand with greater clarity and self-understanding to move into the future. We remain passionate in believing that delivering transformative personal and cultural rite of passage experiences and teaching others to do the same is vital work needed to renew, strengthen and reintegrate the relationship between the self, the sacred, nature and the community in the world and is work that the

world is calling for with greater and greater urgency. We also have a better picture of what that means.

LEGACIES TO CARRY FORWARD

Through our history and the contributions of many people along the way, we strive to carry forward the important legacies that inform our curricula and our practices. These include:

- Nature as Teacher
- Deep Mentoring
- Intergeneration
- Succession planning embedded: Co-facilitation
- ICA Methods
 - Collaborative & Experiential Learning
 - Participation
 - Building Community
- Creating a Safe Container
- Ritual, ceremony and drama
- Process, not Product
- Telling the New Story
- The Great Turning: Toward Earth Community