

THE THINKING OF THE WAY

Tonight I want to talk about the thinking of the Way. I will focus on four arenas. First, the Way is available to everyone, but not all choose it. Second, the thinking of the Way comes out of raw creation and unlimited resources. Third, when you are on the Way it will cost you your life and there is nothing more that you would want to do than to give your life. Fourth, being on the Way is an adventure that never grows old and it never grows dull.

We come from a year of radical expenditure, a year of radical doing. Therefore as I thought about the category of thinking of the Way, I decided I liked the word "thinking" a lot better than I liked the words "The Knowings of the Way," or "The Learnings of the Way." The word "thinking" relates to opinion. It comes out of my experience. It is not any astute intellectual argument that I might conjure up about any given topic. It is no set of polished phrases I might have on some lucid insight that I come upon from sitting in my chair. It is totally based on my experience and it is not totally rational. However, it is based on my gut response to life and therefore it is true for me. This is the way it has been throughout history. In every culture there have been individuals or groups who because of their experiences have recognized themselves to be on the Way. That is what we are here to talk about tonight.

The thinking of the Way is not abstract, it is grounded in experience. In the Bananeiras Project, I have a friend, whose name is Dorca. Dorca is twenty-two years old and the oldest of eleven children. She and I have traveled around together this year. We did everything together. I can remember when we were starting the preschool, we did a lot of walking around Bananeiras and we did a lot of talking. One of her comments that rings in my ears is, "For example." When I would say some truth about life, she would always push me with, "For example, what do you mean about that? Where can I see that going on in Bananeiras that I can say, 'Yes, that is true about life?'" In working with villagers, you get very clear that ideas, in particular abstract ideas, are not helpful. My life has been changed, shaped and formed by my experiences this past year. When that group from Fifth City gave their presentation the other day, they sang "The Marching Song of the Iron Man." I have sung that for years, and we sang it in the preschool in Bananeiras. Then all of a sudden, I was here and the Fifth Citizens were singing that song, and when we came to that line, "from Brazil to France to China, from the Congo to Iran," it was suddenly a different song for me because of my experience this past year.

Being on the Way is just being on the Way. We have talked at breakfast this week about being on the Way and we have wondered about how one knows where he is on the Way. Am I working to be on the Way; am I getting to be on the Way; am I off the Way; am I half way off the Way, am I sort of on the Way? I want to say, you are either on the Way or you are off. If you have not been to Bananeiras, you have not seen the kind of bridges that we have there. The bridges are made of logs and you do not see them before you get to them. They are flush with the land, very narrow, and the river is down below. When you get to a bridge, you are either on that bridge walking across it or you are in the water. There is not any halfway on it or striving to be on it; you are either on it

or you are off it. That is like the Way. I was all year in this sleepy little banana town in the interior of Brazil, and I wondered what it was going to be like when I returned to Chicago for the summer. Am I going to be like Rip Van Winkle just waking up from this consciousness dream and finding that everything has suddenly changed? Will I find that I have been here in this isolated part of the universe and they are on a different wave length than I am? I do not feel that I missed one thing. I feel, as a matter of fact, that we were on the edge of history in Bananeiras, that we were creating history.

Richard Critchfield in his article "Revolution of The Village" talks about the universality of the village; the village is the creative edge. Life abounds there. There is no gap. There is no gap in our consciousness. The common experience to all of us is that we are all on the Way no matter where we have been located. It is like participating in corporate creativity. I experienced corporate creativity during the consult in Bananeiras. So many people flooded into this tiny little place from all over the world and were swept up in the dynamics of the Consult and in the model by which that community would create its future. I remember Aristides, the 79 year old poet philosopher of our village, standing up at the closing of the consult. He said, "All my life, I never thought I would see a group of people that thought and felt and were ready to do what I have always wanted to do in Bananeiras. I feel that I have to do something to show my deep, deep appreciation for this, so I am going to give you my son." That is what he did! He gave us his twenty-two year old son for the year! The son's name is José Luiz and in the hot sun, day in and day out, he worked in our agriculture experimental station all year. He is now in Sol de Septiembre, in Chile, and is working in that project. We have felt the utter and glorious delight of being part of a creation that was not because of us, but a corporate creation that was going somewhere, that was changing history.

The thinking of the Way comes out of raw, utter creation. It is creation that is tension filled with unlimited possibility. When I was on my way to Brazil, the pilot said, "We are now crossing over the border into Brazil." I got onto the edge of my seat and I thought, "This is it." Six hours later, after flying over this gigantic mammoth country, we set down in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil has one hundred and twenty million people, and it is geographically larger than the continental United States. Then we were getting on a bus, getting off that bus, getting on a ferry, getting on three more buses, and six and a half hours later, coming to the edge of the highway. Then we were boarding another bus and driving an hour and fifteen minutes on a winding dirt road up into the mountains, crossing six bridges and six rivers, finally arriving at Bananeiras - the end of the road. I thought, "Here is the international office of the Institute of Cultural Affairs about to launch its awakenment and engagement campaigns simultaneously in this giant of a country that is half of South America in size." In a situation like that, you realize that this is sheer creativity. You look at all the possibility and see that this is part of the inclusive design of renewing the earth right here in Bananeiras. That is raw creation. That is being on the Way.

Once you are on this path of raw creation, there is no one to bail you out. That creativity is yours. Do you know the Global Women's Forum brochure with all the faces on it? We decided for the sake of the women of Bananeiras that we needed to have a Global Women's Forum in the village. The women get

married when they are fourteen or fifteen and are tied to the house, the chores and the cooking. They have never had meetings before and have never had the profound experience of corporateness in that community. In visiting the women we took the brochure because we had heard that a Global Women's Forum team was coming to Bananeiras. As we showed the brochure to the women, we told them that we are part of a global network and two women from this brochure, our global staff, were going to come to Bananeiras and tell us about being women in the 20th century. The women were very excited. We planned and planned, sewed table clothes and made decor. The day before the Forum, we were a little nervous and thought we should find out who was coming to lead it. We called our colleagues in Rio and asked, "What is the news? Who is coming to do the Forum?" Their reply was, "We just received a telex from Chicago and it reads, 'Cathy Bayer and Lela Campbell are globally assigned to teach the Global Women's Forum in Bananeiras.'" I thought, "They mean me! Where is this international, global staff that is going to come in and save our necks? We have told these women that a global staff is coming." I remember hanging up the phone saying to myself, "What are we going to do? Are we going to cancel?" However, the contradiction in the village had not changed. Those women still needed an event to awaken their consciousness to their sociality and their globality. So we decided, "There is good news: we are going to have the Forum, and we are it." With fear and trembling, we held the first Global Women's Forum in Portuguese, in Bananeiras. We had to drag the women out of their houses (some of them came when their husbands' backs were turned), but we had the Forum. No one was there to bail us out, but it did not matter after a while.

I talked to one of the people who has been on the road with Town Meeting this year and asked, "Now that you've done all these forums this year in Mississippi and every other state, does it ever change? You know when it is 6:49 and the group is scheduled to come in at 7:00 at night and you are sitting there all alone with the mayor and the clock is ticking and nobody is there, do you ever get over that feeling of, 'I wish they would not show up. Or maybe only five will show up, then we could have a short Town Meeting and we could do it really quick.' Do you ever get over that feeling?" And he said, "No, you don't, even if you have done a 1000 Town Meetings." That is the point where creativity enters in. Dag Hammarskjöld has said:

You wake from dreams of doom
and for a moment
you know,
Beyond all the noise and the gesture,
the only real thing,
Love's calm unwavering flame
in the half light of an early dawn.

Creativity just happens. And it is not because you were there or you were not there. Creativity bubbles up.

We have one really nice general store in Bananeiras. It has a platform built around it and at the end of the day when it is 11⁰ and it is starting to cool off, everybody gathers at this store because they sell beer - they have the only refrigerator in town. I remember going to the store, and day after day thinking, "What are we going to do in this community to break loose social gatherings?" I did not have a model at all. Day after day, we would

gather and wonder what social gatherings would look like. One day, we came to the store and we heard music. We looked around and there was a man playing a tamborine and another man with an oil can with a spring stretched across it, a scratcher, and a man with a guitar. They were all singing. I turned to the musician of the town and I asked, "Where did we get all these instruments?" He said, "Oh, they belong to the store." "What do you mean, 'they belong to the store?'" We never had instruments or music here before." "Oh, we went out and bought them." That was the answer to what we were going to do with sociality in that village. It was creativity bubbling forth. This happens over and over again. I would submit to you that the model for authentic life is being created. It is being created at every moment, and it happens because of and in spite of your being there.

I remember the Bishop's visit. When we were preparing to hold an International Training Institute for training churchmen, we visited the Bishop. Since Latin America is 99% Catholic, we hoped to build a collegial network to do Town Meeting. We called on the Bishop of Niteroi which is the district of the State of Rio de Janeiro where Bananeiras is located. We said to the Bishop, "We want your endorsement for the ITI." He inquired about what else we were doing, and we told him, "Bananeiras Human Development Project." "Bananeiras! That is in my district. I haven't been out there for twelve years. I will give you my endorsement after I visit the community, and I will be out in two weeks at 10:00 in the morning," was his reply. We decided that this was the time for the community to really shine. We had had other site visits, but this one needed to go very well. We went to every house and announced, "The Bishop is coming, the Bishop is coming." It was like saying, "The Pope." The Bishop is an important figure in Bananeiras. The people were awe struck. They had never seen a Bishop. We did an intensive campaign to hang a sign here, clean the plazas there, tie the burros to posts, and make the village look rational, ordered, and pretty. We had uniforms made for all the preschool children and prepared them so that the minute the Bishop walked in, they would spring into an intentional, futuristic medley of songs and activities for him. We had many activities planned to happen from the moment he came into the community so that it would be a great event. The community saw us getting nervous, and they became a little nervous too.

One day, the owner of the store knocked at our door and said he needed the four high school boys who are on the project staff. He had bought the paint, and was going to paint the Catholic Church before the Bishop came. They had sky blue paint for the outside of the church and rose pink for the inside. So off trudged the villagers and the four boys to begin the painting. The next morning, the store owner said that they needed everybody from our house so that they could get it done. He said, "The Bishop is coming tomorrow, this is our last chance." We all tramped over to the Catholic Church and it seemed as if the whole world was there. Although we painted and painted, we did not quite get done.

The next day was the great day. It is a big hassle to cross the bridge by car and it takes a lot of time. Therefore, we stationed a man by the bridge so that he would have time to run back and tell us that the Bishop was on his way. We had the preschool waiting for this signal so they could spring into action. There were several false starts because the runner came back and said

work on it. She got her cards, her passport and the permission to leave the country. The day that the bus came in, José Luiz got on it, but Dorca was not there. It is the sniff of "this is going to take all of my life and this is the risk that I do not know if I'm ready to make." It is like the first time you were on a diving board and you decided that you were going to dive in. You go up there and you stand around on the board. Sometimes you go down the ladder, and you come back up. Sometimes you jump in with your feet first; then you go back up again. The day you decide to go in head first is a big decision. That is one of the costs of being on the Way.

Since I have been in Chicago, I have received a letter from the Project saying that they had their first year-end celebration with 350 people. That is more people than there are in the whole village. Dorca had persuaded villagers to make a new set of school uniforms. She led a marching session around the plaza, performing with the preschool. She had organized the regular primary school for the marching celebration, also for the first time, the preschool performed a play and sang songs at the celebration. Her adult literacy class gave a report and Dorca spoke for the education guild. What a step for that woman! And what a miracle it was.

Sometimes, you feel like you do not want to care anymore, that you would rather go to bed. There is no way you can do all that must be done. How do you get off stage in the middle of this fish bowl that you are in in Bananeiras? You do not just go to bed. People come and get you out. "There is somebody bleeding on the back porch. Would you please go out and take care of them?"

We have one of the three vehicles in town so we are always called upon to take people places in extreme emergencies. There is this girl who we call the fainter. She is always fainting and falling into deep comas. It is usually just as we are sitting down to eat that someone comes in and says, "The Fainter has just fainted again and will have to go to the hospital." It is the endlessness; there is no escaping. You would think that you could put up the village welcome sign once, but not in Bananeiras. We put up a welcome sign made of bamboo letters and they blew off. We made another one, a real fortress of a welcome sign. Then there was an avalanche and a mountain of mud fell down on top of it. We had to unbury it, and soon it was standing just as fine as could be. The road crew came along to fix the avalanche on the other side of the hill, and decided that this was the sturdiest thing around, so they tied their tent to it. The sign became their tent for a long time, so you could not see it as you approached the village. All you saw was this tent! Then, the bridge into town fell down! I mean, it just disappeared one day in a big storm. The road on which we entered the village was no longer a road. We now entered on another road. So, we moved the welcome sign again. The villagers did not like where it was put, so it was moved again to another point. A task you do not think is going to take up any time or demand any part of your life at all can be so pain filled and endless. That is one of the costs of being on the Way.

There is no education in Bananeiras past the fourth grade. We tried all year to get a fifth grade into town. Finally, we were promised that next year we would have a fifth grade. But what about all of those kids that would have been in the fifth grade this year? That is where the pain is. That is one of

the Bishop was coming but it turned out to be other people coming. The Bishop finally came and there were fourteen people with him. He said that they were from a favela in Rio de Janeiro which is a high rise slum. He wanted to bring them to see the village and had decided that if they believed in the project, then he would know it was true and would give his endorsement. The Bishop looked just like you would want a Bishop to look, old and wearing a great cassock, down to his toes. The temperature was 110°. As he stood in the village with his entourage of people, the whole community gathered around to kiss his ring, not quite believing he was really here. As we toured the village, we discovered everyone had put up signs. We had said, "No, no, there is only one demonstration garden in every stake, you do not put up 25,000 signs saying 'Demonstration Garden.' It is not a demonstration if everybody has one."

During the site visit, the Bishop said, "I want to talk to the people." The people were so excited by the great visit and all their preparation that they over acted. As they talked with him, they were the most awakened, intentional people you would ever want to see. The Bishop kept saying right in front of them, "I don't believe these people, they just aren't like this." The people would hear that and think, "Ha, ha, ha, we are fooling the Bishop!"

The Catholic Church is located on a big banana plantation, back from the road. As we walked out there, the people scurried around, because they remembered that the Bishop must walk to get to the Church. So they carved out a path through the banana field. They had not finished painting the Church, but they were up in the belfry painting, trying to finish. When the Bishop came they all stood at attention. He went in the Church and gave the blessing while everybody in the world just happened to drop by the Church. Then the Bishop walked back to town and left. We all gathered at the store again and reflected. The villagers laughingly said, "Did we put it over on him!" But we put it over on ourselves. The model for authentic life is being created as life is lived in Bananeiras.

Being on the Way costs your life. It costs your whole life and you are glad to give it. I remember the first time we talked to Dorca about being the preschool teacher. She said, "Why me? I only have a fourth grade education. I am responsible for eleven children in my family; why me?" "Because you are the most educated person available. Also Dorca, we need your house for the preschool." "Why my house? We have eleven children there now." "Because no one else has a front room they are not using right now." So Dorca's front room became the preschool and she became our preschool teacher. Some time later, we approached her, "Dorca, we would like you to go into Rio for a training session that we are going to have on imaginal education." "Why me? I have never been to Rio in my life." We might as well have said, "We want you to go to the moon." That is what Rio de Janeiro is to that village. Their experience tells them that once you go to Rio, you do not come back to Bananeiras. She said, "Okay," and packed up her things. The day the bus rolled in to take the villagers off to the training session, she did not get on it. But she was in the preschool the next day, so we said, "Dorca, what you really need to do is go to Chile to the human development project in Sol de Septiembre. José Luiz is going and we would like to have two people go." Again she said, "Why me?" "Because we want a woman, we want a single woman there, and we want you." She said, "I will work on it." It takes months to

the costs of caring and being on the Way. Yet there is no other Way and it is a glorious Way.

We heard a story the other night about the man who was transformed by the doctor. The man looked into the mirror and discovered he was utterly changed. I began wondering what the other side of that is? As the man looked into the mirror and saw that he was changed, what if he said, "This is the way it is and it is okay? I can live this way. I am not trapped by my situation, by my altered reality. The way I am does not place any confines, barriers or limits on who I am or what I can accomplish. I can decide to engage creatively in the renewal of society. I am not trapped by my situation. I have certain limits and certain costs that are asked of my life, but this is not in any way to limit my care."

Finally, being on the Way is the adventure of a lifetime, a covenant with all of Being. In Bananeiras, we felt the victory from all over the globe. One of our colleagues came through and told us all about what was happening in India. Hooray for India - we are a part of that too! Then, another colleague visited and she led five Global Women's Forums and we said, "Hooray for the women. Look at what the women are doing; that is us, we are part of that." Two villagers from Sol de Septiembre Human Development Project lived with us for a while and we said, "Hooray for that project, hooray for Latin America." We are all on the move here. We not only said hooray for the men and the women in the villages in India and Latin America, but hooray, hooray for those cultures of the past like the Incas. There are such terrific people in the village of Azipitia in Peru. Being on the Way is laying down your life day after day in mundane events which are glorious.

I want to tell a story about some chickens in Bananeiras. We had this category on the project program chart called, "Small Animal Industry." We thought about it and thought about it. How are we going to do it? Christopher Foya from Africa, our agriculturist crossed it out and said, "No way, chickens are too expensive. We can't do them. Pigs are too expensive too. We can't do them." "Rabbits?" He said, "No, Brazilians do not eat them." So we decided against any small animals for Bananeiras. One day, I was in town with one of the villagers and saw a man selling baby chicks on the street. I thought, "What if... Maybe he is wrong," and I bought a dozen baby chickens. Nobody told me that it was the wrong time of year to buy baby chicks because it was terribly cold at night and they would freeze. So I put them in a box and kept them in my room for a while. At night I would put a kerosene lantern in the box to keep them warm. The lantern kept them awake, and they would cheep and cheep and cheep all night. My husband did not think I ought to keep chickens in our room, especially when this stretched on week after week. So he built a cage of asbestos tile propped up like cards in a deck outside for them. He put chicken wire over the top. These were some chickens! They grew and grew and thrived. And they were smart! They learned to jump so that they hit their heads on the roof of the chicken wire and knock off the wire and come flying through the collegium room in the morning. We had a meeting to decide what we were going to do about the chickens. Jim assigned the boys to go up the mountain and cut tons of bamboo and come back and build this fortress-like bamboo house for the chickens. It was now the rainy season. We stuck pieces of bamboo in the ground and tied them with chicken wire. The chickens were very smart because they could dig in the mud and get out between the bamboo

slats and fly into the collegium room again. Not only that, they flew around the whole village. The whole village knew the chickens. These were the super chickens that the staff owned. The villagers would return the chickens. All the other chickens in the neighborhood knew that we had super chickens and super food and they would fly into the pen and would not be able to get out. Our chickens could get out but the village chickens could not. The villagers would come and claim their chickens. It became a gathering node. Villagers would be coming to reclaim their chickens, and return our chickens. Then we had another House Meeting. Something had to be done. The chickens were no longer a sign of possibility. They were a negative sign, as a matter of fact. I was away from the village for the weekend and when I returned I found the chickens were on the menu. You just do not let chickens that have been living in your room since they were little chicks be put on the menu. I said, "These are laying hens. They are meant for eggs, we do not eat these chickens." Our small animal expert did a test and proved that they were all male chickens. I didn't know what to do then. I said, "We can not kill those chickens." He said, "You are going to Peru and you are going to be gone for three weeks. We will not kill the chickens while you are gone." I thought that was a reprieve, and the chickens would have three weeks. While I was in Peru, I got a phone call from Brazil saying, "There has been a change of plans, you are not coming back to Brazil, you are going to the United States for the summer." My whole universe was turned upside down. The first thing I thought of was, "Those chickens are not going to die." I know that those chickens are going to..... but at least they have some more time.

Laying down your life day after day in the mundane is a glorious experience. When you are in a situation like that, the Way cares for you. In other words, when you give your life, you receive life back, and receive life back in abundance. I remember the pain that it was to hold that Global Women's Forum. From that forum, we have health caretakers, we have sewing, cooking and nutrition classes, we have a doctor and a dentist visiting that village on a regular basis. Those women at the first Forum decided that they were going to participate in the on-going life of that village and change that village. When you give your life, life comes back to you in abundance. A life of caring and expenditure is the only adventure, the only authentic adventure that there is. In Bananeiras when we gather at the end of the day to have a beer at the general store, the men come back from the banana fields and they sit down and chat for a while. The children coming from school stop and play a futbol game right in front of us, in the plaza. The town musician comes; we sit singing songs and watch the sun set in the Brazilian highlands. We sing and sing! We sing a lot in Bananeiras. That is the life! I mean, that is the life. I just would not want to trade that life with anybody. For all of the frustration and the risks, the disappointment, the endlessness and the expenditure, there is finally no other way to live. That is the adventure of being on the way.