



The Circle

Women's Centre for Spirituality, Activism and the Earth

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at Brescia University College - London, Ontario, Canada

Turning the Earth

The Circle Theme 2012-2013

“There was only this perfect sympathy of movement, of turning this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods... “

-Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*

Since time immemorial, humankind has been “turning the earth” - both literally and metaphorically. We have dug, tilled and toiled; we have excavated, mined and quarried. At the same time, we have “turned the earth” in that we have transformed it on large and small scales. We have turned trees into houses or currency or books; ore has become pots or weapons or bridges. We have turned swaths of forest, plains or desert into complex cities; and sadly, we have turned balanced ecosystems into toxic landscapes. We are earth-chemists, changing parts of the earth - the physical, the cultural, the existential - from one thing into another. Like the alchemists of yore, in conjunction with physical transformation, we have sought (and in part, discovered) intellectual and spiritual illumination. Humanity's evolving collection knowledge and data has turned our understanding of the earth (and the subsequent universe within which we are situated) from the mysterious to the magnificent, from the superstitious to the sublime.

Throughout it all, earth has been the eternal giver. It is the burial ground of the ages, it is the playground of the present and it is the foreground for all dreams and visions to which we aspire. As our burial ground, the earth has not only become a repository of items—from buildings to bones— but also of emotion and energy. The hearts of our ancestors and of all living beings are buried in the earth. The earth is full of hearts; hearts that had beaten with joy, sorrow, passion, compassion, anger and love. It is the vault that holds the residue from the myriad experiences of sentiment and sentience that turned the earth into its current expression today: an earth that includes religion and cultures, borders and battlegrounds, pollution and disease, art and architecture.

However, we now find ourselves in an unprecedented historical era that is demanding we change our ways of being, doing and believing. We have come to a place where

we have turned away from the wisdom inherent in the earth: the wisdom of balance and sustainability, of co-existence and co-operation, of abundance and diversity. Humanity, in the form of patriarchy, turned from the path of harmony and relationship with the earth and its creatures, and instead chose domination and dominion. It is time for women to rise up and turn the world upside down; or more accurately, in our opinion, to turn it right side up again. It is time for us to realign with the rhythm of the heart, a rhythm shared by all creatures and re-turn humanity to our rightful relationship as a part of the earth and not behave as though we are separate from it.

Many will cling to the old paradigms and processes. Turning the earth, embracing change through the act of letting go, is essential for health and vitality, whether we are talking about our ecosystem, our bodies, our communities, our spiritualities, our policies, our laws, our world. Actively participating in and mirroring the earth's cycles of life is the only way we can continue to maintain balance within a reality of constant change. Continuing to behave as though we are separate from the earth creates devolution. Devolution involves the delusion that we can stop the turning of the earth by petrifying our ways of doing, organizing, and believing. Moreover, maintaining a world that is static is like waiting for a dead plant to grow fruit. The old must give way to the new and must do so in balanced relationship with everything around it. Which way do you want our world to go?

The turning has already begun. Living amid this time that Joanna Macy calls “The Great Turning,” requires a renewed commitment to sustainable change and collaboration and it's exciting how everyday, it seems like more women are stepping forward to lead the way. From elected officials and policy makers, to organic farming and conscious mothering, to social enterprise and microloans, women are re- turning to the earth and to each other to recalibrate our systems from the unbalance within which we find ourselves. We need to re-turn to seeing humans as the landscape, as a part of the earth; to re-member and re-turn to our roots in the earth, where our bones live and our hearts lie.





Down to Earth

🌱 Let it Grow! Join us in creating a new garden at Brescia!

In the Spring of 2001, members of The Circle created a stone Santa Rosa labyrinth on Brescia's grounds. Built around a beautiful sycamore tree within a small copse of tamarack, pine and other trees, The Circle Labyrinth has become a cherished and frequently used feature on our university's campus. It has enriched and enlivened our experience of the incredible grounds at Brescia and awakened a desire to further contribute to our green space.

Therefore The Circle Council (the group of women that "holds the vision of" or "governs" The Circle) decided to move forward with our wish to donate a garden to Brescia. But to do this, **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** The Circle is calling for gardeners, artists, eco-enthusiasts—anyone who would like to give their time—to vision the elements and features of this garden. This new "Garden Circle" will meet once a month, **beginning in January 2013**, and explore and research options for its design, its content (type of plants/flowers/trees) and its non-organic components (eg. sculptures, benches, etc.). After this, we will move into the implementation stage by hiring a landscaper and overseeing the build. We hope to have the garden ready for our members, our campus and our community to enjoy for The Circle's 25th anniversary in the spring/summer of 2015!

One coinciding element that will be needed are volunteers who wish to fundraise for this special project. If you feel that this would be your area of strength and would like to volunteer in this capacity, please let us know. **All volunteers—please indicate your interest by emailing us at circle.uwo.ca**

🌱 **No longer Old MacDonald's Farm** - The classic image of an overall wearing (often aging) farmer is rapidly getting a makeover according to FarmStart, a not-for-profit initiative that works with new farmers and the agricultural sector to think about agriculture in new and innovative ways. A survey of their interns revealed that they were dominantly raised in the suburbs, 71% were university educated and most interestingly, the majority of them are women. Speaking to the Toronto Star, FarmStart's Program Director Melissa Watkins stated "the most successful farms I know are run by young women. Many of them are very entrepreneurial and business minded." This shift in demographics not only marks a significant difference from the often male inherited or multi-generational farm practices of the past but also veers away from the agri-business model that has come to dominate the North America. Young women are going local and organic, while often employing a community-supported agriculture model where people buy in at the start of the season and receive farm-fresh fruits and vegetables every week. Christie Young, FarmStart's founder, believes that this new generation of farmers have the potential to radically change how food is produced in Canada because of the ecological consciousness that they bring with them. She told Canadian Living magazine "Ecological agriculture is thinking about the farm as a whole system, basing it on soil health and looking at it differently...I've seen farms turned around by someone who is concerned with building their soil." Young's sentiments are directly confirmed by vegetable farmer Leslie Moskovits, who owns 32 hectares outside of Neustadt, Ontario. "When you work on a farm that respects the environment, you see your impact on the earth in a very real way," she said, further adding that she feels she is saving the earth from the ground up. We think that is worth a big e-i-e-i-OH-YEAH!

Earth

by Jennifer Chesnut

Earth is our air, our water, our shelter
Our recreational pleasure
The substance of all economy
Earth is the eternal giver
She's the hope of the children
The descendants singing proud
The dreams of the ancestors flying around
Through the trees swaying, the pond
rippling, the rough and tough of the sea
She's the burial ground of the ages
and the heart of every beat.
She's most intimate relation
We eat with her, breathe with her, dream
with her under astral blankets
She's sister, mother, sometimes lover
And the fabric of our living seeds
All that we experience in the body comes
from thee
Our regency, our royalty, to you we bow.
Call the singers!
Blow the horns!
For Earth is among us,
The fairest redeemer
of all in the land of sound.

Remembering Mary Ann Shanahan



This past July, longtime Circle member Mary Ann Shanahan passed away after a long struggle with cancer. The Circle and many of our members will miss her dearly. Mary Ann was an extraordinary woman - a teacher, counselor, scholar and activist - who was passionately engaged with creating social and environmental change. Ever the seeker, her keen mind and open heart observed and absorbed everything around her. Any given conversation with Mary Ann was punctuated with quotes that inspired her, news that often alarmed her or statistics that supported her theories or opinions; but most of all, the conversation would reflect her deep wisdom, gained through her continual engagement with the world and with others and her deep caring to leave the world a better place. We mourn her loss and celebrate her legacy in this community. We would also like to thank Mary Ann's family for choosing The Circle's "Let it Grow" Fund, a fund that will support the creation of a spiritual garden at Brescia, to receive the donations given in her memory.



Noteworthy

- ♪ This one is literally NOTE-worthy! As the Bank of Canada converts our currency to the new polymer banknotes in an effort to reduce counterfeiting, they have also reduced the visibility of women, aboriginals and people of colour. The first incident occurred last August during the testing phase of the new \$100 bill, when the bank replaced the depiction of a woman scientist that appeared Asian with one who looked Caucasian and therefore, in their opinion, achieving “neutral ethnicity” (?!). Furthermore, the beautiful Aboriginal art appearing on the back of the \$20 bill has been replaced by an image of the French monument commemorating the soldiers at Vimy Ridge, while the Famous Five get the boot from the \$50 bill in favour of an icebreaker.
- ♪ Brescia celebrated the first ever International Day of the Girl on Thursday 11 October by hosting 250 grade 7 & 8 girls from across London. The girls participated in leadership and empowerment workshops, watched a short play about the Famous Five and got to listen to keynote speakers Jane Roy, co-director of the London Food Bank and *Harry Potter* actress Evanna Lynch share their stories and wisdom. It was an amazing inaugural event!
- ♪ Lordy, lordy look who’s 40! This December wraps the year long celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the publication of the groundbreaking feminist magazine *MS*. Originally published as a “one shot insert” for *New York Magazine* in 1971, the 300 000 test copies sold out in just 8 days! “*Ms.* was the first national magazine to make feminist voices audible, feminist journalism tenable, and a feminist worldview available to the public.” Happy birthday *MS*.- here’s to 40 more!
- ♪ Congratulations to Brescia’s Chaplain, Catherinanne George and Circle member Penn Kemp who were awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal! This award recognizes individuals who have made a significant contribution to their fellow citizens, their community, or to Canada.



On Our Shelves...

The following books are now available for loan to our members. Loan period: 2 months

***The Western Light* by Susan Swan**

“A girl without a father is like a town without streetlights. She can find her way but a lot of the time, she’ll be groping in the dark.” (p. 91)

This quote from Susan Swan’s latest offering, *The Western Light*, eloquently captures the emotional tone of the novel as experienced through her protagonist Mary “Mouse” Bradford. In this prequel to Swan’s 1993 bestseller, *The Wives of Bath*, the reader is transported to 1950s small-town, northern Ontario (the fictional Madoc’s Landing) and the beautifully evoked landscape of the Georgian Bay. It is here that 12-year old Mouse seeks to gain her father Morley’s usually unavailable attention. As a small-town doctor in the era before universal health care, Morley was the community’s GP, surgeon, psychiatrist and paramedic and was called upon to serve his patients at all hours of the day and night. As such, there is a forgiveness that Mouse, and subsequently the reader, grants to Morley due to his professional circumstances. At the same time however, Mouse experiences insecurity and frustration at having her needs being continually placed second to those around her. With her mother dead, Mouse is essentially alone in navigating that precarious time in a young girl’s life when she is on the cusp of puberty .

“I wasn’t making a mountain out of a molehill...I was recognizing that mountains exist, and if we go up them and down the other side, we are never the same again.” - Susan Swan, *The Western Light*

Cormorant Books, 2012

Because of her need for acknowledgement and attention, Mouse becomes fascinated with Gentleman John Pilkie, a former NHL star who has been committed to Madoc Landing’s mental hospital to serve out a life sentence for the murder of his wife and child, an act he claims was due to the brain injury suffered from multiple concussions. Pilkie is kind to Mouse, but her innocence somewhat misinterprets the nature of his attention leading to the novel’s exciting climax and ending.

The Western Light, a novel that Swan admitted during her Circle event here at Brescia is her most autobiographical to date, is a novel that evokes the universal experience of that tenuous time between girlhood and womanhood, while being firmly planted on Canadian soil and within a Canadian context. A truly excellent read.

Other new editions to our shelves:

- 📖 *The Sweet Girl* by Annabel Lyon
- 📖 *The Midwife of Venice* by Roberta Rich
- 📖 *Writing the Revolution* by Michelle Landsberg
- 📖 *How to Be a Woman* by Caitlin Moran
- 📖 *Vagina: A New Biography* by Naomi Wolf
- 📖 *A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship and Survival in World War II* by Caroline Moorehead

Upcoming Events at The Circle...



Open Circle

...ritual, spirituality, activism & the mystical experience of women gathered to reflect on the sacred in our lives.
Last Wednesday of the month, Merici Lounge, Brescia, 7:30 p.m. Members: free, Non-members: \$2. **All Women Welcome!**

28 November Clay Works playshop - Clay has been used as a medium to heal, de-stress, ground, and enliven people. Join us for an evening of clay creativity! Facilitated by Gillian Vellet

Stay tuned for our 2013 line up of Open Circles that will focus on women, spirituality and the earth!

MORE Than a Book Sale

Books, Art, Crafts, Farmer's Market, Live Music & more!

Saturday 24 November, 10am—3pm

Brescia Auditorium, Free Parking

Books to donate? Give us a call for arrangements

Ritual of Re-Membering

Commemorating the Montreal massacre and all victims of gender violence.

Thursday 6 December, Noon

Brescia Auditorium, Free Parking

Red Tent Series - Crone

Sunday 13 January 2013, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Merici Lounge, Brescia

Free Parking, By Donation

We will discuss the aspect of the crone while working to create a "crown" that symbolically represents their experience and women's wisdom.

Brigid Festival - Refreshed & Revamped!

Wisdom, Wildness & Wonder:

The Rhythms of Brigid

Friday 15 February - Sunday 17 February 2013

A magical weekend of women's ritual, lecture, music, workshops, dance/movement, and connection.

Register Today!

Sophia Series Lecture

Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Writer, Director & Producer of the documentary

Miss Representation

Thursday 7 March 2013, 7:30 pm

Brescia Auditorium, Free Parking

For full details visit www.thecircle.ca

Also connect with us on

Facebook, Twitter & Pinterest!

...and beyond

Sacred Circle Dancing - every Wed., 7:30 to 9:00 pm,
Christ Anglican Church, 138 Wellington St. at Hill St.,
\$5. No previous dance experience necessary. More info:
Caroll at 519-433-7792 or redshawlwoman@rogers.com

Wed. 21 Nov. - iWIL TALKS - Lecture & Conversation
Café Series. **Getting Heard: Young and Female Voices
at the Polls** with Prof. Laura Stephenson. 7:00-8:30pm,
Merici Lounge, Brescia, Free Parking, by donation. Info:
www.iwil.bresciauc.ca

Fri. 21 Dec. - Winter Solstice Celebration, 7:30 pm,

Christ Anglican Church. A celebration of the longest night in word, song and dance.

Sat. 22 Dec. - Visioning a New Era: Re-Imagining Our Lives in the Age of Nature. On 22 Dec., millions of people will focus energy on what many believe to be the beginning of a new era, marked by the Winter Solstice on the 21st. We invite you to re-imagine our lives & future, & be a part of a powerful planetary shift that can move us through the inevitable environmental, economic and social changes needed. 10am - 9pm, The Living Centre. Cost: Sliding scale, plus a vegan dish for potluck supper. www.thelivingcentre.com or 519-652-9109

Be a part of The Circle's Fall membership drive! Join or renew today!

The Circle is a centre, a space, a collective that is entirely unique. We are where women of all faiths or no particular faith can gather to explore spirituality through our own experiences, longings, visions and perspectives. At a time when religion is often the cause of such discord in our world, The Circle embraces differences rather than using them to separate us, we bridge rather than divide. The Circle is also where the spiritual and the secular can meet, shifting the personal to the political and back again. As our vision statement expresses, The Circle creates "power for transformation and change."

The Circle is co-creative and therefore we need your support to continue providing this important space, our programming and our resources to our community.

Please fill out the enclosed slip and become or renew your membership today!

By doing so, not only will you help to ensure the ongoing existence of The Circle, but you will receive: a subscription to *The Circle Newsletter*, free Open Circles, a discount on all other programs and access to The Circle Resource Library.

For more info: www.thecircle.ca & click "Membership"