

Chicago, email from 28 Aug. 2009

Dear friends,

in my recent newsletter there was a brief note on my new project Altgeld Gardens, a Black suburban South Chicago community. I am here right now and I would be grateful for your support. First I will tell you a bit about place and people so please stay put.

Altgeld Gardens:

was built after World War II as one of the first housing projects of the US. It is situated on top of a landfill and in the middle of landfills, sewage treatment facilities, a poison-prone industry, a Calumet river that doesn't look healthy, and the main highway of the region with frequent spilling from truck accidents. There is thin infrastructure and little employment. Many in the community are below the poverty line, there is crime, and environment-related disease such as cancer, asthma and more. For several decades there has been an organization called People for Community Recovery (PCR), headed first by Hazel Johnson and now by her daughter Cheryl Johnson that addresses issues of environmental justice, cleaning up the sites, green jobs for the community, and economic and social improvement. Nothing is very easy and there is basically no payment for the work. PCR wouldn't be able to do the work if it wasn't for the support of their families and community. There also is a forest preserve close by with incredible plants and butterflies even though one wonders how it can survive next to the leaking landfill. There also is a strong sense of belonging within the community and families, and many people who don't want to leave or will come back after the current rehab of the buildings. People are extremely open and friendly, I have had wonderful conversations, and even have been watched over so no harm would happen to me.

Altgeld Gardens seems to stand for all the black suburbs of Chicago and the US, and it also seems to stand for all the suburbs or places in the world where the people live that the economically developed world don't want to see. In Germany the Turkish come to mind, in the UK the Indians, in France the people from Morocco. I am also thinking of the general forgetfulness of the developed world as to the Third World and all the trash we might stack in their areas without really being conscious of it. I remember my my own fears of the *others*, and all the things that I don't want to look at, because they might make me sad or sick. All of those seem to belike shadows, not integrated, not part of the cycle, which then cause problems under the surface. However, there is always a potential, discoveries of hidden treasures if one moves through the sadness and finds the gold behind it. Here in Altgeld is potential, power, ideas, skills, love, compassion, wisdom. The main reason why it cannot surface the way it could seems to me fear and prejudgment, seems oblivion.

What we want to do today:

In less than two hours, at 11:00 am local time (noon in Detroit and NYC, 5 pm in the UK) we will stand in a very wide and very empty crossroads at the entrance to Altgeld Gardens and do a prayer, a meditation, and a visualization of how we lift the cloud cover of forgetfulness off the place and all the other forgotten places in our lives. We want to remember our potential, our incredible power, our wisdom, our compassion. We want to remember that we are all human and all one. The attached verses came to me some time ago. The text has helped me in many ways, might have helped other people, and right now seems it is just made for this place, meant to be spoken out loud as a prayer right here, which I will do.

What you can do:

It is short notice to join us in your thoughts right now, though you can do it anyway. But time is relative and so you can help any time by reading the text out loud or in silence, by thinking of the people of Altgeld and by lifting the fog of oblivion off the place and your own forgotten places, by sending your mental support and your energy to these places so they can heal. Because it can only be helpful to know that there are people out there thinking of the people here you can also send a reply to this email saying that you're with us and with a CC to Cheryl at cheryl.johnson@peopleforcommunityrecovery.org. If you know someone who would also do so please

forward this email to them.

Here is the poem:

GOLD FOR ALTGELD GARDENS

The yellow fog drives us in spirals
Through the quicksand
Into the chasm of delusion
The watcher waits behind the door of glass
Reality is a transparent fabric,
The world a disc, and
Life a dream within a dream

See the weaver of the light
Sitting on our shoulders
She weaves the web,
She weaves the world
She drinks the poison from our veins
And turns it into life

We take the blindfolds off our eyes
And the cotton out of our ears
We take the fog cover off the land of sadness
We travel through the curtain of fluid metal
We fly into the sun
We enter the dome

We grieve our losses
And move on
We let go
So we can hold
We make the decision
And we'll know what to do

Mary sends a parcel
Gift-wrapped in silken paper
Filled with finest chocolates
Shimmering with light
We'll drink the abundance,
The overflowing fluid gold,
We can't contain it any longer
It comes around, it goes around
Back into the world
Wisdom forever, eternal compassion

Silke Schilling (original version 15 Sep 2008)

Thank you and lots of love
Silke