

## Activism

*A talk by Wytske Visser at a COE workshop in England in 2009*

If you are a leader in RC, you are an activist. You are trying to change things for the better. Every session you have changes things. I am proud of what we are doing in RC, in this movement started by Harvey Jackins. I'm proud of the way we use the discharge process to become ever more intelligent. When I started to do this work in RC, there were many activists who were not RC leaders. I have encouraged them to teach fundamentals classes and lead in RC. They have taken this on, and now we are beginning to be more effective.

If you are an activist, you may be the only one in your RC Community. Activists tend to carry particular sorts of early distress. Almost all of us had hard struggles and fights early in our lives

with the adults around us. We could not figure out how to trust them; so finally we totally gave up and decided to do everything on our own. We've done well; but if we can't fight our way out of this isolation, we won't get far.

The most important thing for activists is to fight back to close contact with other humans. We need to be able to fight outside the desperation. We need each other. It's important that all oppression be ended, and we have to do it together, whatever background we come from. Doesn't this make Care of the Environment work attractive?

We have to figure out as humankind how to cooperate. We can't afford to leave anyone out. We all have been hurt in places where we have been left out. We remain hooked by old discouragements and defeats from those experiences long ago. We know what it takes to fight back to connection, how brave we need to be. We have worked on not feeling bad about ourselves and can't afford to keep feeling bad any longer. We still need to keep working on fighting for that inner child and reclaim the deep connection that is naturally ours.

When you connect with a tree, the ocean, the seasons, it's a mystery how it all works. We are just as fantastic as every complex species! Try to imagine that. We need to understand that everything on this planet is

important. Any feeling about not being important is distress. Every feeling you have about being better or worse is distress. We have to treat everyone and everything with full respect and deep love. We have the discharge process to get us there.

Most of the time we don't feel connected to nature around us because we feel disconnected from one another and from ourselves. I invite those who work on the environment to take time to rest. There's not that much attention or appreciation for the work activists

do. This means they feel a greater urgency because they believe other people don't understand how urgent the situation is. It is important for environmentalists to take time off, or they will become

exhausted. I am a good example. Between 2003 and 2004, I had to stay in bed because of burn-out and other physical challenges. I learned the importance of resting and of doing pleasurable activities. I also learned that fighting for yourself always has to be part of the liberation work one does. We are used to fighting for everything but ourselves. I can assure you that your work will pay off so much more if you do not leave yourself out when you stand up for a cause worth fighting for. You are worth fighting for. You have to come first, or be at least part of the project. I will never again do a job that will cause me to "burn out," even if it means choosing to have little money. I know this is good and important experience for the job that I have in RC

RC can be used to support other activists. Activists are quite often dismissive of Co-Counselling and of the idea of discharge, but we can share the tools of Co-Counselling by listening in one-to-one relationships. We are so used to isolation. When considering activities to "go public," like RC's United to End Racism project, we need to think about when listening is effective and when it is not. You can't talk someone into changing the world, but you can listen them into it, as Harvey Jackins once said.

In our regular COE support group in the Netherlands, some members have been in RC for a long time, and

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KARL LAM

## THINKING ABOUT ACTION IN THE WIDE WORLD

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yet we did not know about each other. One member said to me, "The longer I am in this support group and the more we have each other, the more I enjoy my wide-world work. I had thought it was just something I had to do. The wide-world work felt like a duty; but now it's fun and gives me more energy than it takes." What has made the difference is understanding that we need each other. To share where we get stuck and celebrate successes is key.

In April 2009 I was at Greenpeace's thirty-year anniversary celebration. The organization had a beautiful plan for getting people into groups, but the person in charge couldn't get make it happen because people were so full of needing to speak and discharge, they had no attention. We activists are often so full of fear and of our own stories when we are together that we often have little attention for each other,

When I was working in Greenpeace, I openly stood up for the environment, and that confused people. As an activist, I had to deal with criticism and ridicule and being left alone. When I had discharged, I understood that it was because people were feeling bad. In the Netherlands everyone knows about pollution and climate change and global warming, the oceans, the

fish, how food is produced, how everything gets out of balance. But the system makes people scared and makes people think that the government will take care of everything. When someone fights for the truth, it confuses a lot of people. People thought that they just needed to donate money and organizations like Greenpeace would take care of everything. This is a frozen need, needing someone to take care of us. Everyone is responsible for their own footprint. We activists are aware of that. Sometimes others around us think that since you are a COE leader, you must know everything about the degradation of the environment. To them it may look like we must have discharged everything to do with COE. This can be confusing. All the activists around us need just as much support as everyone else. We are just as scared and worried, and have the the same struggles as everyone does.

Personally I want to thank you for all the good work. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We are used to fighting, working, and not looking back. As each other's counselors we should thank each other for all we try and all we achieve. Thank you for all the good work. Thank you for all you have done.

Ljouwert, Fryslân, Netherlands

## **Taking Action in the Wide World**

I am someone who has not particularly identified as an environmentalist or wide-world changer. I am trained as a scientist. I also see myself as an artist and creative person. I am an immigrant to the United States, and my scientific training happened here. (My undergraduate projects involved various creative setups and photography. After being in the biomedical field as an undergraduate, in graduate school I chose plant molecular biology as my main course of study.) Although I attended prestigious academic institutions and performed cutting-edge work, many experiences as a woman in science left me feeling humiliated.

I lived in an area known for advanced thinking regarding

sustainability and environmental studies, as well as for a culture of hikers and backpackers. Rugged white middle-class persons, whether male or female, were heavily "male" in culture, and white and liberal. Outdoor gear, gadgets, bikes, and technology were a big part of being environmentally aware, along with a sense of superiority for being "better," being "of substance." People placed importance on specific brand names of clothing and footwear that had appropriate plastics for cushioning, support, warmth, and coolness when one headed out into isolation from other people. The messages I got were that one needed to be learned (know many terms and labels) and intelligent, have access to funds, and be athletic

and technical. My typical experience around environmentalism was again that of humiliation.

Many years after graduate school and after I left research science, my involvement in a romantic relationship with an environmentalist helped me find environmental work more appealing. Our connection, his approachability, my exposure to RC, and our many discussions on RC and on the environment led to my considering discharging on the environment.

When I was part of the initial COE topic tables and support group and later COE workshop, I continued to struggle with not feeling smart enough. It was a combination of being with Julian Weissglass and