



**A Celebration of
50 Years in
Waldorf Education**

BETTY STALEY

In Gratitude to . . .

- my colleagues, students, and staff at Sacramento Waldorf School;
- my colleagues, students, and staff at Rudolf Steiner College;
- my colleagues at Alice Birney Public Waldorf School;
- my colleagues at the Waldorf High School of the Peninsula, San Francisco Waldorf School, San Diego Waldorf School, and Pasadena Waldorf School in the establishing of the high schools;
- Allegra Alessandri and the colleagues at George Washington Carver High School of Arts and Sciences;
- my colleagues in AWSNA during the years I served on the Coordinating Committee;
- my colleagues in the Pedagogical Section Council of North America;
- my colleagues in the founding of Urban Waldorf School, Milwaukee;
- my colleagues in the Alliance for Public Waldorf Schools;
- and the many schools who have invited me to consult, work in professional development, and parent education;
- and behind the scenes the love and support of my family and friends.



A Celebration of 50 Years in Waldorf Education



BETTY STALEY

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Sacramento Waldorf School, Fair Oaks, CA

BETTY STALEY | ROOTS

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE (AUGUST 8, 1938 - 1958)

My life between birth and twenty-one has three distinct periods: Birth–12 in the Bronx, New York City, 12–16 in Hollywood, Florida, and 16–21 back in the Bronx.

CHILDHOOD IN THE POST-WAR BRONX

Two great fears loomed over my early childhood in the Bronx of the 1940s: the distant ogre, Hitler, with his vast Nazi army, and the everyday threats posed by drunks and thugs who inhabited our poor and densely packed neighborhood.

Against those dark and evil forces stood two beacons of good and light.

One was our religion. Not Judaism itself, which for my parents was more ethnic and cultural than spiritual. Instead our religion was social justice, exemplified by the Jewish concept Tikkun Olam, “acts of kindness performed to repair the world.” These teachings of my childhood were embodied for me by my father, Israel Kletsky. He took me to peace rallies, Paul Robeson concerts, and Brooklyn Dodger baseball games featuring Jackie Robinson, the first black player in the major leagues.

The other beacon of light was school and the teachers who I saw as heroes fighting for the Light as they expanded our understanding of the world. From early on, I had a special connection with my teachers. A thread connected me to each one, and over the years they valued me and gave me ideals to live by. Of course, they also disciplined me when I misbehaved. In fourth grade, I was given the responsibility (and honor) to wash dishes in the teachers’ dining room. Despite instructions not to pile the dishes when carrying them, I ignored them, tripped, and broke every cup and saucer. When I confessed to my beloved teacher, Mrs. Keyes, she said without anger, “Well, Betty, you will have to replace them.” Every week I used my ten cents allowance to purchase a new dish for the dining room. It took me all year and all my allowance to replace every dish.

School was paradise, and through it I began to experience the richness of the world. While other neighborhood children looked up to saints or God for protection, I had “Teacher-God,” a being who hovered at the door of our

apartment. Socrates had a daimon on his shoulder telling him what not to do, and I felt Teacher-God guiding my actions through the day. My hymns were songs such as “Whenever I feel afraid, I whistle a happy tune” from the musical South Pacific. I hummed it as I walked dangerous streets or braved the stairwells of P.S.57 where the older kids could be violent and cruel. My family offered no religious guidance, so I created my own.

A reprieve came when we spent summers in the countryside in a tiny cottage my grandfather had built. There, with my cousins, I learned to swim, sing in the operetta Hansel and Gretel, hike, and breathe clean country air.

Two additional events influenced my childhood experience. My brother Joey died, accidentally falling out of a car (he was ten, and I was five years old). From then on I had intense nightmares picturing his body rotting in the grave. I never shared my experiences of waking up with chills and sweating. Two months after Joey’s death, my sister Janet was born. My sweet little sister struggled with developmental issues, and concerns for her well-being became a part of my life from then on.

Through my childhood, my father saved money so that I would be able to attend college. After working in a garment factory by day, he peddled wallets and other “notions” on the street. He said that my job was to do my best in school, and he sacrificed himself for that to happen.

A TEENAGER IN FLORIDA

My grandfather urged us to move to Florida, where we could have a better life. We boarded a Greyhound with our belongings packed in cardboard boxes and moved to Hollywood, just north of but very separate from Miami. And so, just like that, at the age of 12, I entered an entirely new world. I lived the next four years as a typical small-town American adolescent. We rented a little house, I had a bicycle, and teachers I admired. This was a time of girlfriends, Girl Scouts, slumber parties, boyfriends, dating, and football games.

It was also a time of awakening to discrimination. Bus-stop benches and water fountains were labeled “For Whites Only” and “For Colored Only,” and black and Seminole Indian children were not enrolled in our school. I desperately wanted a word balloon over my head that read, “I do not agree with this.”

My father’s modeling of Tikkun Olam took a new turn. On Saturdays, after I

finished the \$5 weekly food shopping and laid the bags on the kitchen table for my mother to sort out, Dad handed me a \$1 bill and an empty envelope. Then, I addressed the envelope, and sent it anonymously to the ailing father who worked with my father at the Food Fair Market. It was a good deed, repeated weekly, but never discussed.

As an adolescent, I found a new connection to my body. I climbed trees and ran track, played volleyball, softball, and basketball. I joined the swim team, and became a confident athlete. At the same time I encountered physical limitations. I developed asthma, and I began to wear glasses.

When I was 16, my father had a heart attack and could no longer work at Food Fair or get another job. We moved back to the Bronx so I could finish high school and attend City College (CCNY), which was free. After my parents and sister left, I completed the semester in Hollywood, and then I rode back alone on Greyhound, and enrolled myself in Theodore Roosevelt High School.

BACK IN THE BRONX: 16 TO AGE 21

Back in the Bronx, but now in 11th grade at Roosevelt High School, teachers were again there to guide me. While I had grown up enough that I no longer felt the presence of “Teacher-God,” I still had loving high school teachers who singled me out, recognized my intellect, and helped me settle in. This was clearly not going to be like Florida. Life was tough here and I saw it more clearly now, less through good vs. evil and more through cold hard realities. My mother was hired and fired from factory jobs, and my dad’s health suffered in the cold. I had to get a job to help the family. They were hiring at Woolworth’s department store in Manhattan. Every Monday and Thursday after school and on Saturdays I took a bus to the subway and rode an hour to 34th Street, where I worked for 75 cents an hour, selling wallets or candy and nuts. One night, walking home from the bus, a man grabbed me and put a switchblade to my throat. I stammered, “Get out of here, you stupid fool.” To my surprise, he ran off.

After Florida, my life contracted to a tiny apartment and scary streets. At school I joined the Statesmen Society and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. I gave talks, participated in workshops on world issues and racial equality, and entered essay contests. Just as the Florida classmates had made fun of my New York accent, my Bronx classmates made fun of my new Southern accent.

My social life was very different. Instead of high school clubs and dances, girls went to parties at university frat houses. It took a few times to realize that this was a “pick-up scene.” Time to grow up, be careful, and know when to take the train home alone.

I began to go on a spiritual search. My friend Diana and I visited various synagogues, even the Ethical Culture Society, to see if any of them touched us. None did.

After my senior year, I worked at a Settlement Camp in upstate New York, helping poor children much like myself experience a bit of childhood outside the city. Having regular sing-along sessions with Pete Seeger accentuated the social justice themes I had embraced earlier. When I came home to register for classes at CCNY, our apartment was filled with packed boxes. I went to the College and asked what happens if my parents live out of state? “You will have to pay out-of-state tuition.” Shocked and in despair, I rode the trains for hours trying to figure out what to do. Finally, I told my father, and I will never forget his words to my mother: “Ethel, unpack the boxes.”

In sociology class I met Franklin Kane. He, a few other students, and I signed up to do an internship at Hawthorne-Cedar Knolls Institution, a home for children with psychiatric problems. Franklin and I became good friends, driving to school every Saturday morning. Our relationship grew into a romantic one. That winter he helped me drive my parents and sister back to Florida.

Here, too, my relationship with some of my professors deepened. I developed a close friendship with a psychology professor, Dr. Lawrence Plotkin, and a history professor, Dr. Stewart Easton. We remained friends until their deaths.

Dr. Easton invited me to join his wife and him at their island cottage in New Hampshire, and Franklin accompanied me. While washing the dinner dishes, I asked Dr. Easton’s wife why he was so special. She said, “Ask him about Anthroposophy.” That evening I posed the question. Being an historian, Dr. Easton proceeded to give a full lecture that included spiritual beings and epochs of historical development. Franklin and I looked at each other questioningly. This seemed very strange. That night I did not have the nightmare I had had since Joey’s death, and I never had it again. This was the beginning of study groups at the Easton’s apartment, summer visits to their island, and reading the works of Rudolf Steiner.

In the summer of 1959, Franklin and I faced a dilemma. He had enrolled at

Fordham University law school, but didn't want to go. I had a few credits left before graduating. I stood in front of bulletin boards brimming with brochures of graduate work in European universities, and wished magically I could attend. Friends told me, "Betty, stop dreaming. Poor girls don't get to do that.

One day, Dr. Easton showed me a main lesson book from the Rudolf Steiner School in Manhattan. I looked at the pages, written artistically in colored pencil, and read the 7th grade student's words, and something stirred in my soul.

With the help of the Eastons, I interviewed with Francis Edmunds for the Waldorf Teacher Education Program at Michael Hall School in England. Everything he talked about resonated with me: mythology, literature, history, art, class teaching, and child development. But at that time I definitely didn't want to be a teacher. I asked Mr. Edmunds to promise that if I took the program I would not have to be a teacher. He promised. Unknown to me, Dr. Easton had arranged a full scholarship for Franklin and me, funded by a friend.

Franklin and I married in New York, said goodbye to our families, and set sail for England on the SS United States. Finally, I was going to experience Europe, and we set out on a great adventure.

MY TWENTIES: TRAVEL, TEACHER TRAINING, AND FAMILY

My experience at Michael Hall Teacher Training Course (a forerunner to Emerson College) has been the fulcrum of my life and guides me to this day. This includes the understanding of child and adolescent development, the immersion in the arts, the guidance in inner development, the understanding of art history, and most of all, on freedom of thought. I have always been a skeptic, and did not take up Rudolf Steiner's thoughts easily. The margins of my books were filled with comments such as, "Who says?" and "I don't think so." Cecil Harwood, one of my teachers, suggested that we have three pockets when we work with Rudolf Steiner's breadth of research. The first pocket: "I have had this experience, and I know it is true." The second pocket: "I don't know. Maybe." And the third pocket: "I have no idea at all." With new experiences and understandings, some of the thoughts have changed pockets.

Franklin and I were able to spend holidays on the European continent, traveling in a little green Renault bought with a \$1,000 wedding gift. We stayed

in hostels and soaked up the culture, geography, and history of western Europe. It was the beginning of what would be a passion for travel.

I had previously said that I didn't want to be a teacher. Despite the fact that teachers had been significant in my life, I was not drawn to the way education was being practiced. When I saw the potential in Waldorf education, I was excited to be able to expand my capacities and offer future students the fruits of what I had found so stimulating in my training.

After finishing the teacher training, we spent a year at Peredur Home School, an anthroposophically guided program working with children in need of special care. I taught the third grade, Franklin taught both first and eighth grade main lessons. We also were house parents for fifteen children, and the emphasis on rhythms of the day and week, the festivals, gardening, and study formed our future family life. When I became pregnant, we returned to the United States.

We spent four years in Pennsylvania where Franklin taught at the Kimber-ton Waldorf School in rural Chester County. Here I entered what I call my "hibernation years." Being home with Andrea, and three years later with George, was the center of my life. To supplement our meager income, I tutored many hours each week while little Andrea sat next to me with her own notebook scribbling on the pages while the student worked on math. I loved living in Kimberton, with the beauty of the seasons, the contemplative mood, and the simplicity of life.

The event that paved the way for us to connect with the Sacramento Waldorf School happened in November of 1964. Four of the teachers, including Franklin, who were unhappy with decisions and compromises at Kimberton, met on Saturday night after Thanksgiving to discuss the future. Each teacher planned to pursue separate jobs. The next Monday, a letter arrived from Dr. Easton. He had been in Sacramento trying to help the Waldorf school which would close unless it could find five trained Waldorf teachers. We were stunned by this statement, but felt this was a call for our future. I telephoned Dr. Easton with the news we were interested in pursuing this. We flew to Sacramento over the New Year's weekend and met the Board members. The Board member who picked us up asked whether I thought a Waldorf school without a high school was like a chicken with its head cut off. I thought it an odd comment, having no idea years later I would pioneer the high school. The Sacramento school had grown quickly from 2 to 60 children, but there were problems, and enrollment had dropped significantly. After returning to Pennsylvania and discussing the situation, we all decided

to accept the offer to re-found the school. All of us moved in the summer of 1965. Two years later Sonya was born.

The first task was to build enrollment. Franklin, Richard and Jean Atkinson, and Lexie Ahrens gave numerous talks at parent teas and at libraries. When enrollment reached 100, we celebrated. In those early years I substitute taught in several areas with infant George in the playpen. I especially recall teaching knitting to a first grade class that would later become my seventh grade as well as the pioneer class in the high school. I can still see Sally, Margie, Noel, and Ava unwinding balls of yarn to find the crystal hiding inside.

MY THIRTIES: TEACHING AT SWS, FOUNDING RUDOLF STEINER COLLEGE, ACTIVE IN CIVIL RIGHTS, (1968-1977)

The year 1968 was a challenging time. With the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and a few months later of Robert Kennedy, society was in chaos. A group of white middle-class people formed Understanding Each Other with the goal of advancing integration in Sacramento. There were few black people employed in food markets, hotels, etc., but when we tried to convince the owners to hire, they were not interested. We organized pickets, and after much effort we were successful. The Senator Hotel, for example, hired its first black assistant manager. Our efforts stalled when the sheriff planted an infiltrator into our group who tried to get us to commit illegal actions like filling grocery carts and jamming up the check-out aisles. We didn't have finances to hire lawyers to protect our group, and UEO dissolved after a year. Still, we were happy that our efforts results in change.

In 1972, the school attempted to begin a 9th grade. Unfortunately, the lead teacher stepped back three days before school started and the effort failed. Two years later, my 8th grade students and parents again wanted to create a high school. The Board asked, "If you start this high school, will you stay with it?" I said I would, and stayed for 18 years. The high school was launched by a majority vote, and the Board Chairman, who had voted against it, very graciously brought champagne to celebrate.

A strong group of 20 students started the 9th grade. We all had a lot to learn. For example, the students were so enthusiastic in the art history block that when I wrote the final exam, it was clear that it was too long. The students insisted on completing it, which took eleven hours over several days! The students were convinced that they were the ones pioneering the high school, and I could not do it without them. Of course, they were correct. At the end of the first year they presented me with a list of questions about the future

10th, 11th, and 12th grades. I sat before them, and little did they know my knees were knocking in nervousness. Their very last question was, “Do you know what you are doing?” They were 100% with me, excited about what we were building, proud to be the pioneers, and consciously putting in the energy for the school they loved.

During the third year of the high school, we took the tenth and eleventh grades on a cross-country trip by Greyhound. We visited nine Waldorf schools, sang in Washington Cathedral, and ate a lot of lasagna with host families. It was an unforgettable trip for these California kids who were new to the East coast and its culture and history.

In 1976, I was part of a group, which included Richard Lewis, Nancy Poer and Franklin Kane, and Carl and Christine Stegmann who founded Rudolf Steiner College. At that time, it was called The Sacramento Center for Anthroposophical Studies. We were inspired by the words of Rev. Carl Stegmann, a Christian Community priest, and his call for a Spiritual America. Rene Querido joined after a year, and over the forty years of Rudolf Steiner College’s existence, thousands of Waldorf teachers were inspired and trained.

MY FORTIES: TEACHING, TRAVELING, AND A SECOND MARRIAGE (1978-88)

In 1978, the SWS High School graduated its first senior class, and I spent the next decade fully immersed in high school teaching. During these years the students were as much my teachers as I was theirs.

I had been involved in various women’s groups over the years, and in 1977, I helped to create a women’s conference. Called “Women and the Challenge of Consciousness” it explored a spiritual view of the feminine. Not everyone was ready for such a theme, and some people scolded me and told me this would cause trouble. Social justice and human rights were always important to me right alongside education, and the conference was very well attended.

In 1980, Franklin and I divorced, and two years later I married fellow teacher, Jim Staley in 1982. Our wedding was a celebration that included many Sacramento Waldorf School students, faculty, and friends.

Starting in 1978, I lead several travel-study trips. The first was a summer trip to Europe with 25+ students, and family as well. In 1980, I led a group of high school students through Egypt, Israel, Greece, Italy, and France. This was followed by a summer experience in the Lake Country of England, studying the Romantics. Later, I led two trips to the Soviet Union, one just as Perestroika

came and the old Soviet system collapsed. Most of these trips included high school students from SWS, as well as students from other Waldorf schools. The first-hand experience of seeing cathedrals, castles, museums, and other sites, helped enrich the classes I taught back at SWS. I took countless photos which I turned into slides. Few students today know what the clicking of a slide carousel sounds like, but my students got to know it well.

MY FIFTIES: LIVING AND TRAVELING IN EASTERN EUROPE, TEACHING IN RUDOLF STEINER COLLEGE, AND EXPANDING WALDORF EDUCATION INTO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (1988-1998)

In 1992-93, Jim and I spent a year in Eastern Europe, giving Waldorf workshops and lectures in Latvia, Russia, and Poland. It was also a time when I worked on my book *Tapestries*, interviewing people in various countries about their life experiences. When the year was over, Jim returned to SWS, and I moved to a full-time role at Rudolf Steiner College. Over the years there, I directed the Foundation Year, the Waldorf High School Teacher Education Program, and the Public School Institute.

From the time I first encountered Waldorf education, I was inspired by the fact that Rudolf Steiner began the Waldorf school for factory workers' children. Coming from a poor and working class background, this was meaningful for me. While I loved the students and parents at the Sacramento Waldorf School, I was deeply concerned about children and parents who longed for this education, but could not afford it. In 1991, I was asked to chair a committee to establish the first public Waldorf school in inner-city Milwaukee. When this school opened as the Urban Waldorf School, it was a door that had been tightly shut, had opened. Suddenly, poor and predominantly African American students had access to Waldorf education. Over time, more and more public Waldorf schools opened, some in urban settings and others suburban. I worked for many years with what is now called Alice Birney Public Waldorf School, in downtown Sacramento, helping train teachers, stand up against critics, and help strengthen the school. Today this public Waldorf-based school has 550 students.

Not everyone in the Waldorf movement agrees with the formation of public schools adopting a Waldorf approach. There were some rough times when I was singled out and criticized. I am proud that the faculty at SWS, as well as that of Rudolf Steiner College, has supported this work. Today, in 2017, there are six public charter Waldorf schools and five independent Waldorf schools within an hour of Sacramento, serving many more students, and a more diverse population, that could ever have happened with the private-

only model. The students of all these schools come together in friendly competition in Greek and Medieval games, basketball tournaments, and also in purely social events. Sacramento is a hub of Waldorf activity and a model for the country. My partner in this work, Arline Monks, passed away in 2013. I could not have done this work without her untiring enthusiasm and devotion.

MY SIXTIES: TRAVEL TO ASIA, FOUNDING WALDORF HIGH SCHOOLS, AND WRITING (1988-2008)

I have always been fascinated by Europe and for most of my life less interested in Asia. But when one of the Japanese students at Rudolf Steiner College planned a month's lecture tour, I could not refuse. I also felt the need to stand on the ground in Hiroshima to acknowledge the pain and suffering caused by the atomic bomb. The warmth and generosity of Japanese Waldorf teachers, the intriguing cultural differences, and the beauty of the land quickly made me glad I had come, and made me eager to travel further in Asia. The next year I visited China and Tibet, including the newly formed Chengdu Waldorf School. Next I journeyed to Viet Nam, where I wanted to experience the people who had been our enemies in the 1960s and 70s. As with my visits to the Soviet Union, I found that direct conversations with real people cast political and historical events in a very different light. I also visited Cambodia, and gave talks at the Waldorf school in Thailand in the drenching monsoon season. Like the European trips, the Asian travels deepened my history course at Rudolf Steiner College and helped me develop a course on "Evolution of Consciousness, West and East."

Back in the US, I worked to help establish Waldorf high schools in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, San Diego, and Pasadena. Every teacher loves having a student to carry on her work. I have loved working with my former high school student Allegra Alessandri Pfeiffer, as she created and lead the first public Waldorf high school, George Washington Carver High School of Arts and sciences.

In addition to helping build up high schools, I did a great deal of public speaking during this time. This included keynotes at the International Waldorf Teachers Conference in Dornach, Switzerland and workshops on adolescence in Finland. I learned audiences in each country respond very differently to speakers, and have culturally specific ways of demonstrating their interest. Whereas Americans are quick to break the mood after a talk, Finns need time to absorb the information as a group before asking individual questions of the speaker.

Writing was a central focus during this period as I wrote second editions to several of my books and planned new ones. These include: *Between Form and Freedom, Being a Teenager; Adolescence, The Sacred Passage; Splinters of the Sun, Teaching Russian Literature to High School Students; Hear the Voice of the Griot! A Guide to African Geography, History, and Culture; Tapestries, Weaving Life's Journey; and Soul Weaving*. I chose to use contemporary language and references to make these topics accessible to those unfamiliar with Rudolf Steiner's writings.

MY SEVENTIES: CENTRAL AMERICA AND AFRICA; CONTINUING RESEARCH IN SPAIN, CONSULTING ACROSS THE CONTINENT (2008-PRESENT)

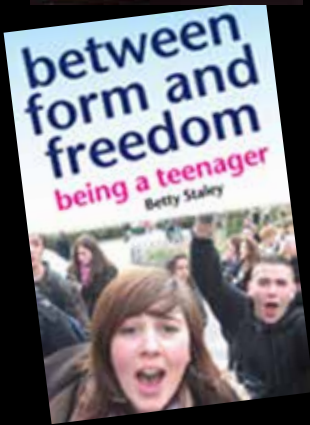
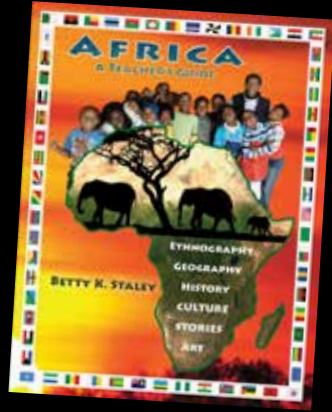
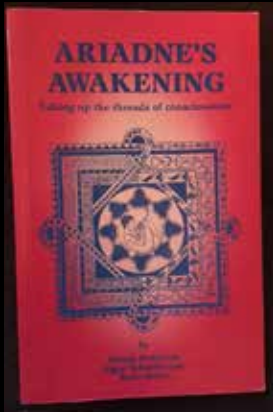
I continued my love for travel and research by following the route of the Maya in Central America, teaching and going on safari in East Africa, and continuing research into Medieval Spain. There were challenges and awakenings that helped me feel I am a citizen of the planet rather than of one country only. All of these encounters echo my early desire to understand the world through travel, to understand child and human development, and to work with the spiritual research of Rudolf Steiner.


Working through the challenge of breast cancer gave me a sense of deep gratitude for the many friends who supported me during those difficult times. Another challenge of this decade was as Interim President of Rudolf Steiner College at a very arduous time in its history. I have learned patience, forgiveness, and steadfastness.

As I reflect on the decades thus far, I marvel at the way my life has unfolded. There have been moments when I have connected with people of different cultures thousands of miles from home or have been backpacking in the mountains that the thought has come, "What's a poor girl from the Bronx doing here?" In those moments I am filled with gratitude for all the people who have helped make these experiences possible as well as for the seeds planted in my childhood which have guided my sense of purpose.

Through all the stages of my life, my greatest support has been the love of my family, my friends, and colleagues. I have had a glorious career, and although I am retiring from full-time work, I will continue to meet the questions that come.

Publications





Imbue yourself with the power of imagination,
Have courage for the truth,
Sharpen your feeling for responsibility of soul.

RUDOLF STEINER

