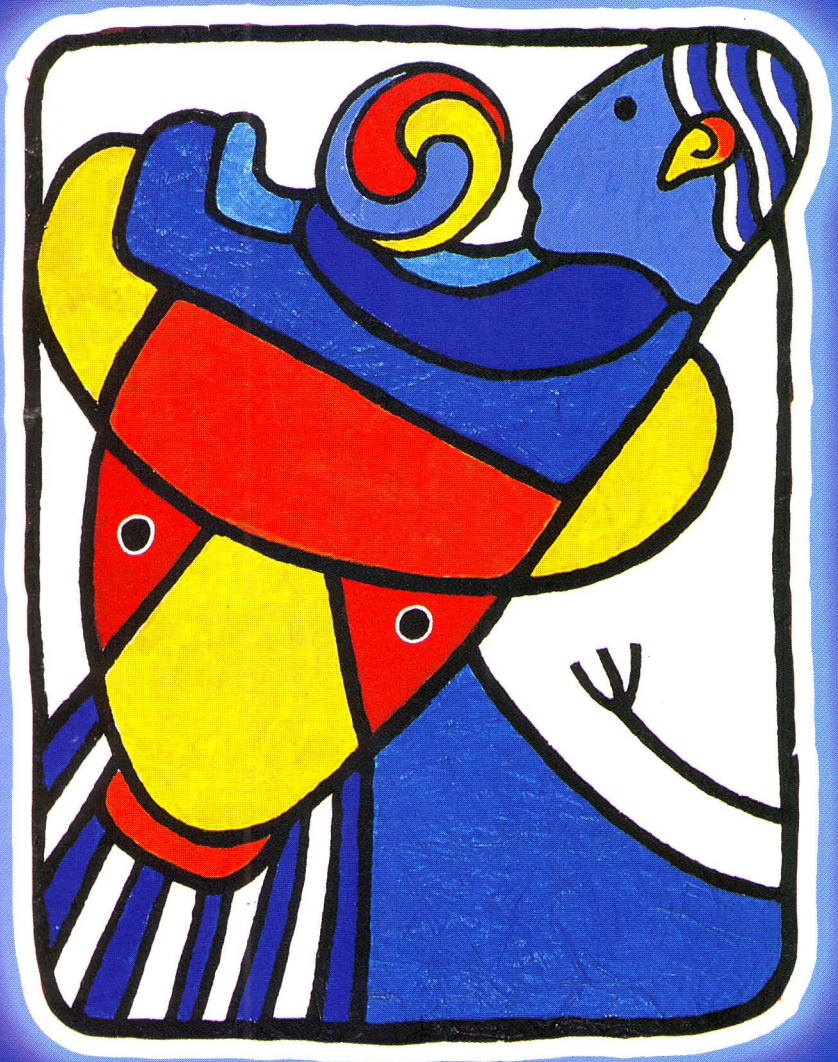
The Ocean of Stories:
Children's Imagination, Creativity, and Reconciliation in Eastern Sri Lanka



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Introduction

In the space of the Butterfly Peace Garden (*vanathithipoochchi samathana pongka*), the idea of ground is basic. Stories arise out of the ground of the Garden, and these story treasures form the flowing, creative structure of the Garden. The Butterfly Peace Garden has generated a culture deeply engaged in creativity, arising out of its own earth. The Garden's healing and sustainability is rooted in continuous interpersonal and intrapersonal story-making through forms of artistic expression in clay, paint, sculpture, song, poetry, dance and theatre springing from the imagination of children in eastern Sri Lanka. It is a culture that is always in process, always emerging, based upon the relationship of imagination and the inner person to basic ground. The healing spoken of in the Garden is discovered within.

The Garden is a space reclaimed from brutalizing social catastrophe of almost two decades of war. It offers children of this war-devastated region a place to be children, a place to play, to laugh, to be expressive, to heal and to be healers. The experience inside its gate is an offering to children born in communities on the eastern coastal plain that have endured devastating injury and loss, namely Savukaddi, Eravur, Ariyampathy, Kangkeyanodai, Periyaporathivu, Kokkadichcholai, Thalankudah, Mylampavely, Vakarai, and dozens of other war-torn villages. Now that the Garden is entering its seventh year, thousands of children from Tamil and Muslim villages in the eastern region of the island have been participants in the creative experiences in the Garden that nourish children's imagination.

The methodology found in the Garden is 'presence in poiesis as the practice of peace' where peace is viewed as the balance of inner and outer forces. From the outside the consequences of war press upon the Garden: poverty, political violence, psychological insecurities, malnourishment, disease, communal schisms and polarizations, unemployment, displacement, domestic violence, the spectre of renewed deadly conflict, pessimisms, distrust and pervasive fear. Children are so open; they are easily wounded in settings of adult violence. Because they are so open, they also quickly perceive that the Garden is a different space, where the experience of both outer and inner war zones is understood and where, amidst struggle, a dream of a just world is nourished.

'Presence in poiesis as the practice of peace' is connected to the belief that the dream of the earth needs to be attended to, awakened, given birth and cared for. Given form, the dream becomes poetry in the larger sense of the word: the poiesis of the Garden, its poems, stories, myths, paintings, songs, dance and drama. This poiesis subtly instructs and heals, engendering confidence in the on-going healing process. The healing is self-regulating. It is discovered within, not imported from elsewhere.

The only way to connect with the moving elements of the garden out of which spring its poiesis and healing, is to empty oneself before the mystery and attend to its revelation moment by moment from the ground itself. Children are more adept at living creatively with transitional moments and chaos than are adults. Artists or animators on the Garden staff are skilled at following the lead of the children in play. The artist-in-tuition whose work might help catalyze the garden process develops awareness about witnessing, emptying, loosening inner conditions that impede the signs, messages of the soul. S(he) must always work from the edge of simplicity, chaos, ambiguity, emptiness and struggle with paradox. The edge is all this person has. What all persons who enter the Garden have in common is their unity, the tenderness of their humanity. What they do not have in common is their diversity, the particularity of their stories. This

is the edge — the chasm out of which the poiesis of the Garden arises, surprises and surpasses expectation.

Violence produces an erosion of the way people engage with the world. People in need of protection withdraw from social interaction, impose self-censorship and other silencing strategies for survival. Silence may also be viewed as a state policy, and political silencing has become endemic in the unstable eastern region. Although this is the case, in the Garden we find a redeeming space for the creative language of children's story-making. The language of the Garden does not impose order, but accepts human vulnerability imaginatively as it invents or re-crafts ritual, and listens to children's spontaneous stories.

On the other hand, in Georgio Agumben's analysis[1], the language of order that is used by the state responds to perceived threats from within by criminals and from without by savagery and wilderness. An assumed need for containment and expulsion of violence under-girds the language of the state. In Sri Lanka we can observe a similar language of order employed in the military apparatus, in the peace process, and in some discourse of international non-governmental organizations. As Veena Das has pointed out, not only does this logic lead the state's production of killable bodies, but states do so with increasing frequency. She suggests that we will have to live with a view of the body politic as more vulnerable than this language of order suggests[2].

The children who come to the Garden have lived their short lives in an asymmetrical war in which civilians and combatants were not differentiated. After eighty percent of the population of Batticaloa was displaced in 1990, the citizenry that remained was forced into strategies of survival, and made to live with constant fear and strong ambivalence. Living in everyday war, civilians were made to comply with the government security forces, paramilitaries, and the LTTE in turn. Batticaloa civilians have been immersed in a struggle for survival while they were coerced into shifting subject positions of exploitation or victimization by one or another gun-carrying group. The Garden is a space for redeeming life in circumstances where people have grown used to survival strategies.

For some readers, it may be beneficial to consider how the processes and practices in the Garden that I describe on these pages engage the lives of children who live in terrain strongly marked by violence, state power, militarism, and ethnic divisiveness. The Garden allows children's expressiveness to take the lead in ways that narrowly-mandated non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, or militaristic organizations may not. My project was primarily to listen to people who are participants in the Garden's activities, and to attempt to translate into English language what they wanted me to understand about the Garden's cultural practices. More than anything else, the words of these pages are a conversation with the people who were in the Garden during the months that I was there in 2002. These pages are an attempt to affirm what they say the Garden is and what they want the Garden to be, and to mirror the Garden's dedication to a particular ethos.

The lifting of the military checkpoints' scrutiny and control on movement was a crucial change in everyday life in Batticaloa in 2002. For twelve years, since the state security forces established a configuration of military camps along the main coastal road through the eastern region in 1990, dozens of military checkpoints cordoned off the eastern coastal plain from the rest of the island. During the 1990s, journalists and writers often described the security forces checkpoints in the eastern region that immobilized the trapped population within the area as a counter-insurgency strategy to "contain the Tamil problem". In some places the checkpoints were so close one could see the next upcoming checkpoint from the checkpoint where one was being searched. I was questioned many times at military checkpoints during my research in the 1990s. The checkpoint soldiers exposed film in my camera, took batteries from my recorder, examined my notebooks, interrupted my movement, and worse, questioned my traveling companions who were at greater risk that I was as a person with a foreign passport. I observed mistreatment of local people at checkpoints, and listened to survivors of torture who were arrested at checkpoints and ill-treated during interrogation and

detention. National identity cards were required to pass through them. Sometimes the checkpoint soldiers made Tamil travellers tear their identity cards into pieces, chew them and spit the pieces on the roadside. Travelling the roads in the 90s, we passed informers at checkpoints wearing black bags over their heads with holes cut out for their eyes. I met a man who had been used in this way and survived to be released. As he related his story, his body trembled uncontrollably. Friends taught me to seal my lips while we waited in long lines for our bags to be searched - and for my Tamil companions, the real possibility of body searches, interrogations and arbitrary arrest. There was palpable fear at checkpoints following events of violence, times when the whole terrain would seize up in anticipation of further violence. People would warn me before my turn with the checkpoint soldiers, "Don't ask anything or say anything you don't have to."

During the initial stages of the peace process in 2002, checkpoints were opened and searches ceased, and everyday life began to flow through the streets and roads in a healthier manner. We now turn to the first descriptive passage at the outset of this recovered flow of movement in Batticaloa — a passage on the Butterfly Peace Garden's parade.

The provider of much of the Butterfly Peace Garden's creative inspiration — Paul Hogan — has given without limit his time, thoughts, and total presence in Batticaloa and Toronto during the shaping of these reflections on the creative process of healing in the Garden. While I accept full responsibility for this rendering of the Garden's world, I would like to acknowledge that Paul Hogan's thoughts are in many places interwoven with my own[3] I have also presented a range of voices from the Garden on these pages, including narratives from discussions with Father Paul Satkunanayagam, the animators, other staff members, and the children. I would like to thank each and every one for their kindness, generosity, humor, and patience with my inquisitiveness.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Agumben, Georgio. "Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life". Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1998.

2 Das, Veena. "Forms, Life, and Killable Bodies". Keynote address presented at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, at a conference entitled "Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence and Agency in South Asia," April 11-12, 2003.

3 All quotes in the text not otherwise referenced are taken from conversations with Paul Hogan in Batticaloa and Toronto, early summer and late fall, 2002.

The Parade

"If it doesn't have all the elements of a big fiasco, it will never be a success."
—Professor Trolldust, Chong Storyteller, The Spiral Garden, Archaic Period.

In the month of July, 2002, the children of the Butterfly Peace Garden made history in Batticaloa town. Instead of an opera or story-theatre, it was decided to have a big parade through the streets of the town. It was the first time in their young lives that the military checkpoints were open. People were allowed free movement without being subjected to constant National Identity Card checks, body searches, and scrutiny of their belongings at the plethora of military barriers. Although a truce had been declared, people were uncertain about how long this freedom of movement would last, so everyone decided it was indeed a good time for a parade. For weeks, the children, the animators, and everyone around concentrated intensely on preparations for the first-ever children's parade. There were several nights when the animators stayed awake in the Garden all night working on creations for the parade, like the large paper mache animals that would be propelled by children's legs or carried on top of wooden ox-carts. During the days the children painted masks, painted and decorated the props, worked on their costumes, and made all sorts of colorful standards to carry. Under the instruction of the Garden Annaviar, or traditional Tamil drama and dance master, the children learned a number of dances to be performed at specific intervals during the parade to the accompaniment of drummers. Wheelbarrows were transformed into hilarious frogs that could be pushed by the bigger children and carry the smaller children inside them. Some children became expert stilt-walkers during the weeks of preparation.

Even though the joyful mood of preparation for the parade was wonderful in the Garden, I felt apprehensive about moving through the streets for several hours in the midday sun during the hot season and wondered if it would be too much for some of the

young children. A large water tank was procured that would be carried on a cart in the parade for the children, and it was ingeniously transformed into the appearance of a red clown head with a spout in its mouth.

Then there were Tamil-Muslim clashes in Valaichchenai, an hour's drive to the north. Eleven lives were lost, sixty-one Muslim and thirty-five Tamil shops were burned on a street that divides the Tamil and Muslim areas of the town, and several thousand people were displaced. The roads were closed throughout the region for a number of days, including the day the children's parade was scheduled to take place.

When the curfew was lifted, the Garden's beautiful main gate with its colorful lotus design with circling butterflies was opened to the public for a two-week long art exhibition. Many visitors came into the premises where paintings and other forms of art created in the Garden were exhibited. Muslim and Tamil families of the children in the current program were invited for the gala that opened the show. This included musical performances of the dances the children had learned, along with hilarious and spontaneous clown theatre. A new date was set for the parade.

Early on the morning of the parade, pandemonium reigned as six hundred Tamil and Muslim children arrived at the Garden to put on costumes. The oxen arrived and were hitched to the ox-carts. Animators lined up the sequence of musicians, dancers, standard-bearers and banner-bearers, stilt-walkers, clowns, peacocks, crocodiles, fish, frogs, birds and others. Then the ox-carts with their cargo of large paper mache props and art were creakily and jerkily positioned in their places. About a dozen children got into a long, painted cloth snake with a head at each end and began to move in a well-practiced zigzag manner. I saw Subeshan in a wig, dressed as a snake charmer with the Garden's large, live python around his shoulders. Professor Kungilliyam (Naguleshwaran), was wearing a bushy wig and wild clown clothes. His huge red shoes stuck way out as he pedaled his bicycle while making announcements through a megaphone in an effort to organize everyone. There was one child

inside a bloated pink paper mache head who bounced up and down as he emitted hysterical screeching sounds.

Sarathadevi helped me get into my costume by tying on my large blue wings. I had already slathered electric-blue body paint on my arms and legs, and put on my blue paper mache mask with blue antennae. Marliya tied a white Muslim headscarf over my hair. It was hard to see through the mask's eye holes, but Paul, who had also transformed his white skin to bright blue, found a little boy to walk next to me and carry my big shoulder bag of toffees and toys to give out as the parade made its way through town. As *Vannaththipoochchi ammama* ("Grandmother Butterfly"), I was swept up in the stream of excited children, and emerged through the Garden's lotus gate out into the street with the leading segment of the parade.

Batticaloa town had never had a children's parade, or even imagined a children's parade, and the first ordinary civilians we encountered out on the street looked at the on-coming children streaming toward them with expressions of fear and uncertainty as though something terrible was happening. People in Batticaloa are accustomed to interpreting large numbers of moving people as the consequence of events of violence, or Hindu processions, and the start of the children's parade didn't look or act at all like a Hindu procession. We stopped then, and waited for the drummers and dancers, and some clowns to reach the front, as it was the earlier intention to have musicians in the front – though the parade had suddenly taken on an unmapped, spontaneous intention of its own. Musicians had reached the front when we wound around the corner onto the next street, and there the people who happened to be in the street had less fearful faces. Instead they looked incredulous – and gradually more delighted. Then some of the children among the bystanders began to walk along with us. As we proceeded people's faces generally opened and smiled happily. I think the news must have been spreading down the streets ahead faster than the parade was moving, because soon there were whole households of people at the edge of the road in front of their gates waiting to see a spectacle that was coming.

I began to enjoy reactions to my blue "Grandmother Butterfly" costume. A number of the children had clustered near me with smiling faces. I dug into the blue sack that my helper was carrying, and began to give out toffees to the children and to the human grandmothers on the sides of the road. They were extremely pleased. So I reached in again and found a jump rope and gave it to a little girl. Then I found a rubber frog for a little boy standing near a cashew stand with a slightly mischievous look about his eyes. I gave some toffees to a row of serious men and they began to smile.

I was enjoying my blue hybrid identity, though I couldn't see the rest of the parade very well through my mask's eye holes, and I bumped into people and ox-carts and crocodiles with my wings, and the mask made it impossible to apologize. It was liberating to have my *vellikari* ("white woman") identity erased in the streets of Batticaloa for once. When I next looked into Grandmother Butterfly's sack and I saw the packages of metallic confetti: sparkly flecks of gold, silver, blue, green, and red: butterfly peace dust, I thought. I reached in with my blue arm and took a large handful of it and began lightly sprinkling the sparkles over the heads of the children, one-by-one, about a hundred heads in the front segment of the parade. They were all beginning to really enjoy being in the parade too.

I paused and peered out at the scene through the eye holes in my mask. A stream of children, color, music, was winding its way through the streets of the war-weary town of Batticaloa. I remembered that in 1991 a helicopter flew low over the rooftops in the middle of the night, strafing the center of the street with gunfire, right where all of the children were walking. I remembered watching a soldier poke a metal rod through a plastic bag carried by a little girl who looked about five years old at a military checkpoint on the road. She was only carrying *prasadam* — blessed fruits, flowers and coconut rice offerings from a temple festival. Even though families often carry *prasadam* home from Hindu temples, soldiers were under orders to suspect that any bag potentially contained grenades or explosives or weaponry. People have so many memories of violence in the streets of Batticaloa: of troops moving through the streets on house-to-house searches; of trucks full of Tamil men in black blindfolds

headed to the prison; of buried mines triggered by vehicles; of grenades thrown; of soldiers' random gunfire; of repeated bomb blasts under electrical transformers; of the detonation of explosives worn by suicide bombers; and of the corpses of many who died in the streets. A sea of children was now flowing through these same narrow streets that had never been safe for them in their lives – children with colorful costumes and artwork, accompanied by drummers and dancing. Father Paul Satkunanayagam, who was guiding the children along on the parade route, called to me with a sweeping gesture toward the spectators, "We're encouraging them to laugh and have fun." It was clear from the faces along the sides of the street that people had never before seen anything like this. I began giving out toffees and toys to the people along the sides of the street and then sprinkling them with sparkly confetti too.

In a collective mood that was becoming more relaxed and festive, we approached the first military checkpoint on our parade route. The checkpoints were open, but the soldiers and police were lined up along the sides of each end of the Puliantivu Bridge that we were about to cross over. Paul Hogan had earlier promised, "When you're in a parade, you just know what to do." I gave the government military personnel toffees and then reached into my big bag with my blue hand and sprinkled them with confetti just as I was doing for everyone else. (This was the inverse of the hundreds of times the military security personnel had, under orders, reached into my bags at checkpoints to search for weapons, explosives, or items banned from the Tamil-speaking region.) When we had wound through the town and back into the Garden several hours later, the shoulders of many military uniforms had been "blessed" with sparkly confetti and many toffees had been received with smiles. The blue body paint gradually washed off as I perspired in the midday heat, and my *vellikari* identity reappeared, but I was just as happy. The unexpected experience of what I would feel while walking in the colorful, energetic midst of hundreds of Tamil and Muslim children through narrow streets so stained with terrible violence for many years up until the present moment — and my unforeseen experience of touching those who work at the war's checkpoints in a uniquely

intimate way — was cathartic. It was all part of the "mystery" regularly referred to in the Garden. The checkpoint bunkers now looked like they had sprouted bright red, yellow, and blue handmade paper flowers – the very ones the children had carried in the parade and had given them. During the following days, when we drove by the checkpoints in the Butterfly Peace Garden's van or the Butterfly Bus, the soldiers dropped their tired, serious expressions and smiled as they waved enthusiastically to us.

In the Garden the next morning after the parade, we sat in a circle and shared our different personal perceptions of the parade experience. In the discussion the idea was put forth that it was healing for people to see a parade of children in Batticaloa town. The observation was offered, "There had never been anything like this before – ever." There had never been dancing in the junctions. The town saw the creative artwork made in the Garden. It was agreed that now more people know that the Garden is encouraging the children to have fun. Chandra recalled, "One old lady caught my hand and asked in a happy, excited voice, 'Who are you? What is this?'" We talked about how some children just joined the parade as it came along, and how it was a public honoring of children. The discussion led to a consensus that the parade was a positive, history-making occasion, chaos and all. At the end the children were hot and tired, so the midday meal and drinks waiting for them when they got back to the Garden was excellent foresight. Finally, the idea that a parade is very complicated, moving theatre, was discussed. The Garden's second and next parade would, ideally, have months of planning and preparation beforehand.

Butterflies

My reflections begin with the first word in the Butterfly Peace Garden's name, about which Paul Hogan has said, "The treasure of the Garden is already within – the children, the animators, the place itself – but this reality is hard to grasp, thus it is said to be a butterfly or, a dream." The butterfly is ephemeral, it graces us momentarily

by hovering here, then touches lightly there, and before we know it, in a streak of iridescence it's gone. Its dance is elusive, unexpected, and ethereal— an iridescence that comes to us on a breeze only momentarily and then dances away with the wind. We are left marveling at such beauty though it has already sailed away. The Butterfly Peace Garden in Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka, protects and nurtures the sense of wonder and openness that the butterfly stirs in us. It accomplishes this in the unexpected setting of community and family relationships shattered by war, with its attention focused upon the children of the region. The question the Butterfly Peace Garden is continuously seeking to answer is how to care for and listen to the imagination of the child.

What happens in the Garden is ethereal and impermanent. The children who create there are engaged in the creation of impermanent offerings, and this experience offers, in turn, a re-entry into healing creative process. A report from the Garden's archives about its early development similarly muses on the theme of the butterfly:

> Butterflies are delicate and beautiful creatures. They come in many sizes, colors and shapes —specks of iridescent dream fragments blowing and drifting through our turbulent lives like leaves fallen from a forgotten world. They combine their delicacy with a certain rare intelligence and toughness for it is known that many species migrate thousands of miles each year and, despite vicissitudes of weather and drastic changes to their natural habitat, they return home year after year, though their numbers are dwindling in these precarious times.
>
> Butterflies represent qualities of vulnerability, beauty, ephemerality, transformation, whimsy, imagination and a particular kind of ungraspability and insouciance. A butterfly will land on the open palm of a child's hand, in the cup of a moist morning flower and on the barrel of a sleeping soldier's gun with the

same lightness of touch, curiosity and fearlessness. It moves through the world haphazardly in a pattern of wild dance no human mind can configure or guess at. They are like pieces of a continually interrupted dream that drift through the bleak and busy mindscape we moderns inhabit – there to remind us of the passing of beauty, the passing of time, the passing of life. If we attach our imagination for a moment to the wings of the butterfly we can share intimately in their dream: a dream that is quintessentially one of beauty and gentleness.
(Paul Hogan, March – May, 1996 Report of the Butterfly Garden)

At the heart of the Butterfly Garden, is the intention of keeping fresh and alive children's imagination, playfulness, and sensitivity to beauty. While the war of the adult world continues, children come from farming and fishing villages in the surrounding warscape into a container of nurturance — a garden — where the preciousness of children's imagination is encouraged to flourish in many sorts of ways, and where the effects of war made by adults are unmade. The world is transformed as children's imaginations are nourished with child-centered creative processes: painting, poetry, sculpture, singing and song-writing, story-telling, ceramics, collage, cooking, clowning, ceremony, dancing, percussion, puppetry, finger puppets and finger painting, mask-making, mythography, movement, gardening, and the care of animals. As we shall see, creative activities are approached with gentleness, openness, inquisitiveness and a good relationship with one's heart.

The children of Mattakalappu who have come into the Garden's creative world of poiesis are fondly referred to as "Butterflies" and when their lives touch outside the Garden, in the surrounding landscape of war, the children affectionately call one another "Butterflies." On these pages I offer reflections on their inspirational, healing world and bear witness to the growing culture of peace nurtured in the Butterfly Peace Garden. As I watch the kaleidoscope of color, laughter, singing, clowning, ritual and play

each day in the Garden, I wonder at the miracle of it. I was engaged in ethnographic research in the villages of Mattakalappu during a violent decade of civil war. During those earlier years of research I came to understand how war injures, scars, deforms us, and how enduring and bearing suffering are the impossible tasks left to those who survive in a prolonged war. Now the children of this war, the Butterflies of the Garden, have invited me to absorb a different possibility, a different way of being in the world here, and to learn about healing and the practice of peace. With inquisitiveness I walk to the Garden gate. A board there reads:

IF YOU CONSIDER THE WORLD OF GOD IT IS THE WORLD OF CHILDREN.
IF YOU CONSIDER THE GARDEN OF GOD IT IS THE GARDEN OF CHILDREN.
IF YOU CONSIDER HOW IN THE WORLD WE OUGHT TO LIVE THEN PAY A VISIT TO THE PLACE WHERE PLAYING ARE THE CHILDREN.

"The Apocryphon of Mother Ralphe," an early Chong inspirational text

Blessing Way

Blessing and offering is the way of the Garden. It is a basic kind of prayer common and acceptable to all traditions. Every practice in the Garden's sanctuary, every song sung, story told, and ritual enacted, every expression of creativity, is a blessing and an offering. When I offer something in the Garden, a part of me is in the offering. In that part there is openness and presence. For the Gardeners, "Blessing Way" is a way of life. Just as each morning this week the Garden hen has laid her egg inside the big toe of a giant paper mache foot constructed for the upcoming parade, the Garden is blessed daily with offerings from all the plants, animals and people in the garden. It is blessed by the dream of peace shared by all its human constituents.

The paper mache foot now containing the hen's clutch of eggs is a three-dimensional blow-up of one of the garden's celebrated mystery paintings entitled "The Next Step." In Andrew's original

painting of "The Next Step," a bird has landed on a foot, and the foot is so enchanted it turns a beautiful color of green. Perhaps the hen got the idea from Andrew's mystery painting to fly up onto the foot, and from there got the idea to jump down inside the open top into the straw-filled toes to lay her eggs in "The Next Step." It's a mystery why the hen chose to make her nest in the foot, yet we can say with some confidence that in every corner of the Garden there are places where imagination and dreams incubate.

As Paul Hogan says, "Central to the idea of the Blessing Way is ephemerality, impermanence, and a kind of questioning that goes along with it. Why be unheard to one another; why hurt one another in this fragile, fleeting butterfly world? Better to bless, to open, to love and enjoy love. Something wonderful happened when each of us was born. Our human consciousness introduces the possibility not only of seeing the mystery of our being but of seeing directly with the eyes of the great mystery itself – for this is a living, palpable, intelligent mystery which is always communicating with us. In order to allow the communication to occur, we must get out of our own way and onto the Great Way of Tao, or the Garden Path. This is the path of replacing self with other, of giving and taking. Letting go and letting be helps us to see more clearly."

Il s'agit de voir
Tellement plus claire
De faire avec les choses
Comme la lumiere

It is necessary
to see more clearly;
to do to things
what light does to them.

Eugene Guillevic

The Butterfly Bus

As in any war zone, travel on roads can be dangerous and difficult in eastern Sri Lanka. For several decades civilian lives have been lost while traveling on roads throughout the war-torn region of the island's east coast where the Butterfly Peace Garden is located. As is the case in most of the world's on-going violent conflicts, the greatest

number of casualties are from the most impoverished sector of civilians. In the early period of designing the Garden's programs, it was crucial to overcome problems of restrictions on the mobility of people through a landscape of active violent conflict. The Garden's ingenious solution to the problem of mobility is the "Butterfly Bus." The bus goes out to Tamil and Muslim villages and collects the "Butterflies" and then transports the children home to their villages and hamlets at the end of the day. There have been no casualties connected to the coming and going of the Butterfly Bus in its steadfast service of transporting children through the war zone to the Butterfly Peace Garden. Throughout Batticaloa District, the Garden's programs are known for care and safety given to the children.

However, risks are ever present in war zones. There have been occasional frightening moments when the Butterfly Bus has been caught between gun-carrying groups engaged in ambushes. For example, one evening every seat in the bus was full of Muslim children from Eravur and Tamil children from Savukkadi, villages where families have suffered the extreme violence of killings, disappearances, kidnappings, and other acts meant to terrorize them — for fear is used by all of the different armed groups as a tactic to subdue and control people in eastern Sri Lanka's communities. Like other sets of villages participating in the Butterfly Peace Garden, these two contiguous Muslim and Tamil villages have experienced wounds of retaliation massacres instigated by forces outside their communities. As the Butterfly Bus drove along through scrub jungle on the isolated sandy road and approached the vicinity of the first village, Savukkadi, a Sri Lankan soldier suddenly jumped onto the road waving his gun. The driver stopped the bus and then the travelers on the bus saw many more soldiers with guns and black cloths around their heads hiding in the *panaimaram* and *echchamaram* next to the road. The soldiers were new to the area so they didn't recognize the Butterfly Bus and they demanded that the bus stop there and go no further. The driver and Butterfly Garden staff accompanying the children explained that they were on their way to return the children to their families, and then explained where the children were coming from and where they lived, stressing that their parents would worry

if the children didn't come home. After a long period of negotiation the children began to cry. The soldiers ordered the bus to proceed and to drive as fast as possible out of the area. They warned them not to return on the same road because at any moment they would be engaged in a confrontation with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The bus resumed its journey. The children witnessed the LTTE fighters moving toward the road from the beach, and a few minutes later sounds of gunfire reached the travelers on the bus. They then realized how narrowly they had escaped driving into crossfire. When they arrived at Savukkadi, the houses were all vacant because everyone had run to the church for protection. So the bus drove the children to the Savukkadi church where they stayed throughout that tense night with aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings or cousins if their mothers and fathers were not there. The close kinship nexus in Savukkadi strengthens the village's coping mechanisms in vulnerable circumstances.

The Butterfly Bus carries written permission from military authorities to ensure passage through security forces' checkpoints. Official letters permitting passage are necessary when soldiers are new transfers and are not familiar with the Butterfly Bus. However, encounters with military offensives or ambushes remain a possibility. As is true with all endeavors of the Garden, mindfulness is cultivated around the transportation of the children by the exceptional bus driver, Ravi, and the Garden animators on bus duty who accompany the children on the roads.

When the children on the bus are frightened by gunfire, they of course turn to the Garden animators traveling with them for security. The animators are then cast in roles as the protectors of the children, and in such circumstances there are deeply poignant moments. A Tamil animator has a story about a small Muslim boy's question to him inside the bus in fearful circumstances. The boy asked, "Uncle, why are the Tamil Tigers shooting at people?" The shooting was happening near the bus in the small boy's Muslim neighborhood. This Tamil animator, Shanthiepan, was left searching for words to a question asked in complete innocence, of a Tamil by

a Muslim, addressing him with the respectful term, "Uncle." For Shanthiepan, it was a moment of overcoming difference, in which their separate Tamil and Muslim identities were irrelevant. The polarization of Tamil and Muslim villages has a recent history of extreme violence, and the small boy's question left Shanthiepan open to the rawness of his experiences of violence. Several years after the event, when Shanthiepan shared the story with me about the small Muslim boy's trust and question on the bus amidst gunfire, he made another comment that was tucked into the middle of a quiet conversation. It was a comment spoken with such ease, "I don't know if I've healed anyone in the garden, but I know I have experienced healing myself."

At the end of the day, when the Butterfly Bus returns to the villages, the children don't want to get off the bus. It's as though they want to have the experience of the Butterfly Peace Garden to the very last possible moment. Out in Savukkadi, bicycles are the sole mode of transportation, and the households there are a 30- minute bicycle ride from the closest telephones in Thannamunai. Families there rely upon deep-sea fishing, net fishing (*karaivalai*) from the shore, and transportation of sea fish by bicycle from the Savukkadi shore to seafood market in Batticaloa town.

Riding the bus out to Savukkadi, children lay on my lap, and held onto my hands and shoulders during the hour long ride along the coast on sandy back roads through scrub jungle and occasional cashew plantings. The Savukkadi children reach eagerly and affectionately for touch. The Butterfly Bus drives by the army camp out there and a cluster of soldiers stop washing at their well and wave with delight at the children, as they obviously have done many times before. All of the children wave back with the colorful paper flowers and paper banners they made in the Garden that day. Some of them press their artwork on the windows of the bus so the soldiers can see their new artistic creations. The soldiers look to me as though they have been pierced to their hearts. My eyes have tears seeing this. They must wish the war would end as much as anyone does.

At Savukkadi, some of the children convince the animators to let them stay on the bus with their Muslim friends from the next

village of Eravur, because the bus will turn around there and drive back through Savukkadi again. I am witnessing the beginning of peace building between these communities. I have the thought that I am sitting amidst healing – the healing of deep wounds caused by bloodshed in terrible retaliation massacres between Savukkadi and Eravur. The children have their arms around one another. They are laughing together. Most of the children in the back of the bus are singing. The wind is blowing their hair. We're traveling through the scrub jungle on the lonely sandy road past a house destroyed in one of a decade of uncountable violent events. We reach Eravur, where handfuls of small oval yellow berries (*palapalam*) are passed through the bus windows by other children who have come to meet us. Some of these children are Butterflies from earlier programs. As we continue on our way the children feed the deliciously sweet sticky berries to me until my lips have a strange feeling like they have been painted with glue. Smacking our lips together, we are delighted with our collective sticky-lipped feeling. We are all laughing on the Butterfly Bus. Children are so astonishingly resilient. I look out the window of the bus at the cashew trees with their rose-colored fruits and breathe the feeling of healing.

We made a circle of mats on the sand and talked into the night with parents and grandparents of the Savukkadi children. They said they feel appreciation for the Butterfly Peace Garden and the happiness it brings into their children's lives. One mother said her daughter used to be extremely quiet and withdrawn, and now she has become talkative and energetic. Their houses are clustered near a temple for the Hindu God Pillaiyar, the God of Beginnings and the Remover of Obstacles. They believe their daily devotion and prayers in the temple have given them the good luck to survive. Gesturing toward the temple, they attribute protection of their families to Pillaiyar, and then share stories about tragic times of displacement, of burning houses, of fleeing through the scrub jungle, of loss of many lives and continuing concern for their children in the present context of violence. The telling of these stories confers an immediate intimacy upon us, for I was also witness to the violence of the years the circle summons from their collective memory. Now there is

increased conscription of children into local fighting forces. They are grateful for their children's experiences in the Butterfly Peace Garden, and say otherwise they are isolated and live without any outside assistance.

The Butterfly Bus navigates between the culture of peace that has been seeded in the Garden and the culture of razor wire and guns surrounding it. With mindfulness about including both girls and boys and Tamil and Muslim children equally, the travels of the bus have carried children to the Garden's immersion programs from twenty villages in the last year. Groups of fifty children visit the Garden one day each week during nine-month programs. Dependably, when the bus turns the last corner and the children on the bus can see that the gorgeous, colorful gate to the Butterfly Peace Garden awaits them at the end of the street, an exuberant collective cheer of children's voices rises from the Butterfly Bus.

Some Early Garden History

> "The Garden begins and ends, like everything else, in mystery."
> —*Paul Hogan*

In the first decade of the 1900s, the area surrounded by high walls in the center of the island of Puliantivu that is now the Butterfly Peace Garden was the French Jesuits' mango garden. Just before the cultivation of the Butterfly Peace Garden began there, in 1995, the area was a grassy empty space around which stood many species of trees: Tamarind, Margosa, Ashok, Jack, Mango, Guava, Jam, and Mahogany. The Jesuits referred to the area as "the Mango Garden." Within the old, high walls there were also several derelict buildings and jumble of small cages that held wounded wild animals. As I recall, there were several raptors, a python named Monty that lived on a diet of unwanted puppies, kittens, and crows from the local neighborhood, an incessantly pacing mongoose, a monkey with a mournful expression that clutched a kitten adopted from the python's

food supply, an unpredictable, wild stag and a mellow sambhar. One of the first tasks of the Gardeners was to tear down the broken buildings and to decide what to do with the ragtag pre-existent zoo.

The process of clearing space, of emptying, is elemental in Garden practice from beginning to end. It is both an emptying and filling and occurs in balance internally and externally; individually and collectively. Much debris had accumulated in the area of the old Mango Garden, therefore, an elaborate process of clearing ensued. Throughout these weeks of physical labor, bonds of friendship were formed among those who cleared the space. My youngest son, Darren, was part of the group, and I remember the blisters on his hands from their hard labor of clearing ground. After the final clearing and raking of the area, a number of spacious, humane dwelling areas were built for the animals, and the gate to the Butterfly Garden was constructed. It was considered of utmost importance to enter through a new gate into a ground newly consecrated for play and poeisis, dreaming and healing. A basic awareness of the process of emptying and then filling, de-creating and creating was initiated as part of garden practice. The interweaving of the Butterfly Garden's earthwork, heartwork, and artwork began. But this is not the whole story of how the Garden began, really, because the history of the Garden's living, teaching theatre has still earlier roots.

If we think of the Butterfly Peace Garden as a painting, a metaphor often selected by Paul Hogan whose artistic vision inspired the founding of the Garden, we must appreciate the many sources of colors and images found there. The Garden's creators come from many cultures and geographic locations, from different races, ethnic groups and religious orientations. They speak different languages and join together across cultural difference, age difference, and gender difference. This is important because in the surrounding landscape outside the Garden's walls, violence is meted out on the basis of difference alone. To this empty canvas that was the Garden in it's beginning, we clearly recognize the historical influence of the Chong. In order to understand the principles of play and poiesis in the Butterfly Peace Garden, it is important to trace the roots of the Garden

at least as far back as empowerment from Chong culture and the certain state of mind held by the members of the Chong.

Chong Roots

In the late 1960s through early-1990s, Toronto, Canada, was the site of gatherings of the Chong poets, artists, musicians, healers, and sages. They are described as living according to "an unwritten Code of Amazement, the central dictum of which was, 'All for naught or not at all.' The name Chong derived from the Taoist maxim: 'ping-ping chong-chong' or 'doing the ordinary in a marvelous way, doing the marvelous in an ordinary way.' In other words, "if the mission was not impossible, they were not interested" (P. Hogan). The Chong was comprised of several dozen individuals from various walks of life. They were artists and artisans, city sanitation workers, writers and poets, housewives, taxi drivers, single mothers, dancers, acrobats, musicians, and a French chef. These "chongalongs" were all painfully aware of the growing malaise of urban alienation and corporate culture. They were committed to lives of voluntary simplicity. Although the Chong became well known for their performances in the Toronto underground of the day, they avoided the media and cultivated an "aesthetic of unknown-ness." In their view, interpretation of their ceremonies, rituals, and performances were reserved only for the Chong members. Their performances were considered a mirror of their collective consciousness and a practice helpful in understanding and healing themselves from the alienation they felt in the toxic culture that dominated their warren. Before they had a garden to play in, they played with story, song, and dance in the back alleyways of downtown Toronto. Their spontaneous performances, which were known as "Apparitional Theatre," followed the covenant that, (1) Each performance was offered only once; (2) It was performed with no gaining motive; and (3) It was performed for those who saw it by happenstance.

The Chong danced and painted and sang to "unmake the violence of urban speed, superficiality, sterility and corporate greed

that destroys the environment, human imagination, and human relationships". To give but one example of an exercise of dramatic mimesis, Chong members sometimes practiced clothing themselves in large black garbage bags and sitting down on the sidewalk like humps of refuse. They would choose a place to sit down early in the morning before the city was awake, and once the downtown bustle began, they would stand up inside the big black bags chanting a migration song:

> If all the sorrows in the world your heart besiege
> then don't be grieved —
> just say it will all pass away

While making music and dancing around they then disappeared down the maze of back alleyways. The "Night Migration" is an example of one of the Chong's larger ceremonial events. The "Night Migration" was a response, in part, to people losing the places where they lived due to gentrification and development in the early 1980's around Toronto's Spadina Avenue and in Cabbage Town, an Irish area, where the east Chong lived. Three months of work and lots of fights preceded this event, but it was successfully achieved. The back alleyways behind the Chong Queen Marie Isabella Kataragama's residence on Amelia Street were even measured as part of the preparation. Among the characters in this event, were a number of Millionaire Sardines, Mermaids, the Blue-Fingered KaChong Kachina, a Wolf, a Dog, the Mayor of the Chong, Queen Kataragama herself, and Lama Namse who was paid in Chong gold and silver coins hand minted by Bishop Chong himself. The women who were the Sardines taped their knees together so they could move like a school of Sardines. They sang and danced — "Mmm boom diddam daddam waddam shoo" — around a pole where the Dog threw all his things off and transformed into a Pig, an act influenced by the end of the "year of the dog" in the Chinese calendar. The Chong spent many, many hours creating this event, and creating an experience in which everyone was brought into a collective flow of poiesis.

The Chong held the belief that one could go out in meeting another only as far as they themselves had journeyed inward, and to try to do otherwise would cause hurt to oneself or to the other. They understood the importance of a balance and connection between "active outer work of ceremony and art, and quiet non-active inner work of letting go – a surrendering to contemplative, creative process".

Chong culture always placed great emphasis on play, and Chong processes are about peace, not war. Peace, however, is understood as a dream and a practice. It exists in no time or as an absolute reality. It is a matter of balance, mindfulness, and the disciplined but playful engagement with the impermanent quality of all phenomenon. Today we find the Chong emphasis on play at the very heart of the Butterfly Peace Garden in Sri Lanka's war zone. This serious playfulness that characterizes the Chong allows for creation to unfold in all directions. It is at the root of the all-inclusive creativity of the Garden Path and results in an "outpouring of beauty." The art created in this outpouring cannot be possessed or commercialized without risking its healing efficacy. Chong thoughts about artwork are also center stage in the Butterfly Peace Garden. Their culture sought to create a collective sanctuary where people could slow down and "work with their brokenness without embarrassment and in friendliness with others".

The Spiral Garden

The circumstances in which Chong members found their way into a garden next to Toronto's Hugh MacMillan Rehabilitation Center (now the Bloorview MacMillan Center) in 1983 must be touched on here as an example of the mystery in new beginnings seeded on alien ground – for the first step on the garden path had a certain magic in it. The MacMillan Center cares for children suffering with severe asthma, neuromuscular disorders, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and amputations, among other conditions. One member of the Chong was asked to work in the Center's Creative Arts Department when the art teacher, Nancy Brown, fell ill. The hullabaloo he created

there in the course of a few weeks led to some unusually humbling, creative, healing experiences. Nancy had a background in early childhood and art, and Paul Hogan, the Chong artist who replaced her during her illness, had never worked with children before, though he was an accomplished artist and knew street theatre. Since the children were coping with extreme disabilities and terminal illnesses, the first thing Paul had to do was to slow way down, establish rapport with the children, and observe what they were able to do. In Paul Hogan's words,

> As I think back, two things made a great impression on me at that time. As well as their disability, the children who came to the Intravenous Rainbow sessions also had a wide range of abilities. Like kids anywhere, most were still well connected through their imaginations with a universal wellspring of images and stories. They still possessed the child's enthusiasm and spontaneity. Wonder was still pouring through them. If I was going to do anything with them by way of an artistic collaboration, the disability would have to become a starting point, indeed, some kind of asset. The journey of healing inevitably begins with a wounding of some kind.

Paul asked all of the children for their ideas about how they could help Nancy get well. After much discussion and sharing of ideas, the children put together a wonderfully creative plan for helping Nancy to recover her health. This was to sneak a rainbow into the hospital and hook it up to her intravenous drip. When asked how they would manage this feat the children described the Mango Boatmen, two wiley adventurers who would help them with their mission. The complex story that emerged was illustrated in a series of six panels by a collective of child artists using paint, art-board, collaged paper and bundles of colored pencils and crayons. Nancy went home to convalesce while the children created the rainbow story. When she heard about what was happening in the Creative

Arts Department she was astonished and shared that upon her return home she was sitting outside and a rainbow came right into the backyard. She told Paul that he mustn't stop his work with the children. When the children's six-panel rainbow mural was completed, the hospital asked Paul to stay on and work there.

Paul and Nancy joined Michael Jennings, a teacher from the hospital school, in walking around the large children's hospital's grounds with thoughts about planting a garden with the children and introducing them to a healing experience of creative process, of poeisis. Paul wanted to call this the "Spiral Garden" because he was inspired by the way the children created stories that never seemed to end. Their stories just spiraled endlessly into one vortex after another, which Paul supported, in his words, "because the spiral embodies the essential nature or shape of imaginative process." He believes that walking the spiral with awareness can bring one back to oneself. It is rehabilitative in as much as it brings the alienated person home to the heart. The garden held the possibility of freeing the children by offering their imaginations a space, an outdoor sanctuary, where they could play away from the incessant regimen of prescribed medical therapy and monitoring inside the hospital building. The founders of the Spiral Garden believed that a garden would help physically challenged children connect with the source of healing through playing in an earth-positive environment. As a corollary to this premise they believed there could be no better way to ground the imaginative energy released in play than through engagement with the simple routines of seasonal earthwork in the garden.

One day Paul encountered a fox sitting right where he envisioned the center of the spiral in the garden. He perceived this as an auspicious sign, although the funding for the garden project was not yet forthcoming. As he tells it,

> When I walked out to the ground where I was to begin work, I was greeted there by a beautiful red fox who didn't move when I entered the grounds. She just sat and looked directly, kindly, calmly, into me. I realized that where she was sitting was the exact center of the

spiral pathway called for in our preliminary drawings. I looked at the fox and her steady and penetrating gaze spoke to me. She said, "Go get your roto-tiller and begin today. Don't let silly details stump you." I went and got the roto-tiller and sliced a spiral path into the ground. A few days later the money came through. We carved the spiral into the ground and followed it as the days unfolded for many years after that.

And so the Spiral Garden was planted and welcomed the children from their hospital rooms into the fresh air and onto ground where they could care for each other and for the earth. The children's imagination blossomed as they immersed themselves in artistic expressiveness. As the Spiral Garden culture further unfolded, story-telling became story-theatre and began to weave through all of the children's creative activities. As the children's inventive tales were listened to, they were recorded in a pivotal process of the Garden Path, a living mythography. The tales spiraled into more and more creative stories that were represented in form and imagery through wooden sculpture, paint, and clay. Gradually the ground became a map of the children's imaginative stories as characters from their stories took their places in the landscape. Areas of the grounds were identified by being imagined as places for dance, for dreaming, for water play and clay, for music, for percussion, for silliness and clowning, for silk-screening, for telling oracles, for painting, for speaking from the heart, and for cooking and baking. Professor Trolldust (Norman Perrin, the first story teller /mythographer of the garden) mapped yet unknown worlds in the geography of the imagination in the Spiral Garden with maps made out of paper used to soak up paint spilled by accident. Imaginary names of places were written on them and their edges were carefully burnt and with much seriousness it was pretended that they were very sacred. The whole site was envisioned as a person as ancient as the earth itself that both needed and provided immense healing if she was only cared for with love, gentleness, and good humor. The stories were a common thread that wove everything together and this was especially

evident in the Spiral Garden's many parades, an art form highly articulated by the Chong in its archaic period. In Paul Hogan's words, "The ability to respond spontaneously and creatively to a constantly shifting storyground: that is the essential praxis of the arts for anyone following the Garden Path. It is the hidden structure for all Garden programming."

One summer after the next the Spiral Garden continued as healing ground where it nurtured a healing culture of caring both playful and profound. Then the time came when the children of Toronto's Spiral Garden tucked written wishes for healing and peace into scallop shells and placed their wishes and other gifts into a wicker boat that sailed in their imaginations to Sri Lanka to begin the Butterfly Garden.

The Butterfly Peace Garden opened its gate on September 11, 1996, in Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka with a ceremony that started with entry into emptiness. It was a simple ceremony offering symbolism of emptiness, beauty, and rebirth. In its fragile fledgling state it was a dream of a just world in the midst of a war zone, nourished by gifts from its connections to the Chong and the Spiral Garden.

Dream, Play, and Poiesis

"The dream never dies as long as the dreamer is awake." — Poho

As I write, the Butterfly Peace Garden has nurtured the dream of a just world, a dream of being happy, for six years. Though surrounded by war's injury and terrible personal tragedy, within its walls, the Garden has blossomed as a sanctuary for the original nature of the child — for children's imagination – for wonderment, silliness, play, spontaneity, creativity, and openness. Many hearts have opened here, and it is now possible to say that thousands of Muslim and Tamil children from the east coast villages have sung together, played together, and danced together here.

Once I met a small Muslim girl in an east coast village who was startlingly beautiful, at a time of intense violence in the course

of the civil war – and I have always remembered this small girl's experience. She was so exquisitely beautiful, I walked over to the large shady Banyan tree where she was with her mother and father, and spoke to her parents. After introductions, I asked the girl's name but she only looked deeply into my eyes, and I felt, into me. Her father and mother explained that she had survived a massacre in which all of the people in the room around her were killed before her eyes, and since that day she had never spoken a word. Her trauma left her without speech. There are uncountable stories of trauma in this region. In Paul Hogan's thinking, "a person is traumatized when his dream dies; or when it is removed, taken away, trampled or denied. The dream never dies as long as the dreamer remains fully aware." The dream still exists, but it is obscured, and it is possible to rediscover it. He believes if such a child could spend time in the Butterfly Peace Garden, in time she would find expression and she would speak again. He would say one way to explore the Garden is to see it as an asclepion, or a sanctuary dedicated to dream healing. One of the moods of the Garden is that of a sanctuary of wounded dreamers. The war is not allowed in the Garden, as the "no guns" symbol next to it's lotus gate states, even though the gun culture thrives around it. Military tanks rumble by on the roads outside its walls, but the Garden exists in liminal space.

The Garden is in-between, in a transforming space that is always in transition, and is not really anywhere at all. As a cultural anthropologist who conducted her doctoral research in this specific region of South Asia it is very hard to wring this out of me: metaphysically, the Garden is not located in eastern Sri Lanka's Tamil and Muslim cultures which I have studied in such detail. However, the children who come into the Garden do take some of the Garden with them back out into the local culture. The Garden is in a sort of in-between space, and I don't mean in-between Tamil and Muslim culture. What I mean is that the Garden is purposely in another cultural space that endows it with its healing capacity. It's on that stair that is somewhere in the middle of that stairway which accesses escape into one's original child's imagination. Because you are in-between and not anywhere, the usual rules do not apply there, and it

is a place so free and open even a grown up might be able to relax there. So the Garden is a place like that: you pass through the gate and you have a feeling like you have come home. You pass into a free, refreshing space, and this space opens into a community of dreamers who are together to restore the broken dream all around them. The dream and deeply healing sense of wonder is recovered through being present to one another in the practice of poiesis, creative process.

It takes some time to establish a community of dreamers who follow Garden Paths confidently – particularly in the context of broken trust that war produces. The transformative process begins with relaxing, surrendering – and with emptiness. The process of making a space sacred is also part of the Garden's poiesis, and this is accomplished in many ways in the Butterfly Peace Garden. The children enter the space through the threshold of its colorful lotus gate. The environment inside the garden presents imaginative imagery, forms, colors, as well as animals and plants. Flocks of peace doves circle in the air inside the Garden's walls before they land in the trees and shrubs. The sound of rhythmic drumming on a *mirdangam* played by Myilvakanam is heard. There are large cranes made of woven cane, and round woven cane hen houses big enough for children to play in, placed here and there on the raked sand. Bright paints are ready at one of the cabanas where masks will be painted. The clay at Mud Mountain is moistened and kneaded, waiting for children's fingers. All of the structures for creative activities are constructed in unusual ways. Some are designed in the shapes of circles, stars, or are up in the air in tall trees, so that one must climb up steps, ladders, or a spiral staircase to enter these spaces. A boat large enough to go on the sea is at anchor in the air upon stilts in the middle of the Garden. Under the lush blooming vines around the Cuckoo's Nest, the rabbits are having breakfast with a tortoise as the ducks waddle through. A mindful attitude is created through a rhythm in the daily round of changing activities from group dancing or singing accompanied by a tambourine and drum to selected forms of artwork. The children and animators share a midday meal together. Familiar sounds invite each activity — the long, clear note blown from the

conch, the resonating sound of the Tibetan singing bowl, and the hollow "tock,tock,tock" of the slot drum made from jackfruit wood called a *dongediya.*

The Garden draws from earth-centered rituals, arts, and body movement practices as far flung as the First Nation cultures in North America, Aboriginal culture in Australia, and from South Asia and Southeast Asia. Many of the Garden's rituals, practices, and art forms have originated within the Garden. Drawing from diverse creative resources, the Garden overcomes the surrounding context of broken trust, and offers an environment where there is openness to the flow of each day's rhythm and openness to the flow of life. The Garden offers a spiraling pattern of poiesis, which I will describe in more detail below. This consecrated ground is where the children and animators rediscover imagination together; it is where relatedness and relationship engage in generative moments of spiraling poiesis. One feels a sense of equanimity immediately upon entering the Garden, where the children, and wounded dreamers of any age, are found together in an environment of respect, friendliness, and nurturance.

A wounded dreamer can recover her or his dream power in the Butterfly Peace Garden. Openness to dream power comes easily to children. With children who live in the context of war, the "Three Spirals of Animation" unfold a path that the children explore collectively, and in continuously strengthening relationships, in the Butterfly Peace Garden. In the First Spiral very simple creative processes are introduced to the children by the animators. This spiral is viewed as a period when the children will become familiar with the friendliness of the Garden surroundings, with the animators, and the other children they will be with in the Garden for one day a week. The animators don't know the children yet, so getting to know one another begins with singing, meeting the Garden animals, and making things together out of clay, shells, leaves, or paper and paint in a relaxed way that feels comfortable and builds confidence. In this gentle way, the animators encourage the creation of art forms that connect the child to her own creative process, so that when the child has finished a picture, a puppet, or a toy, they can say, "I made

this." The children have fun making things that are an expression of their ability and they take their artistic creations home with them on the Butterfly Bus. Soon the children are enjoying the large swing under the garden tree, or show eagerness to help Subeshan feed the baby pelican. In the First Spiral the children also learn to make up songs, and these original compositions receive much applause. The First Spiral affirms and invites the child's imagination. The Second Spiral begins opening to the limitless imagination of the children collectively to the dreaming.

In the Second Spiral, stories invented by the children are interwoven with increasingly complex artistic forms, often created collectively, like large sculptures, banners, or props for story-theatre. Second Spiral creations often become part of the Garden's storyscape. As the children and animators become deeply engaged in these collaborative creations, cooperative bonds between the Muslim and Tamil children deepen along with their group imagination. This process of creativity and imagination culminates in a performance of some sort – a parade or a theatrical performance that goes out into the world of the adults, or brings adults in from Muslim and Tamil villages. The imaginative final month of preparation is a time of good humor, spontaneous silliness, increased random collaboration of Tamil-Muslim children in creative work, and, to be sure, pure nonsense.

The First and Second Spirals of the Garden Path are part of every regular nine-month program with groups of fifty children in the Butterfly Peace Garden. The Third Spiral of Animation moves out into the larger world, in the form of traveling theatre, or brings the community into the Garden for exhibitions, operas, or parent-child art-making days. The Third Spiral is about connections between outside communities and the inner world of the Garden, and is a sharing of the joy and poeisis of the Garden. Third Spiral activities have taken the form of story-theatre, story-parade, workshops for trainers, parent-child art classes, or a grand art exhibition inside the Garden premises featuring music, song and dance performances, and hilarious clowning events. For example, when the Garden opens its

doors and invites the public in for a two-week-long art exhibit, the Garden's clowns will not miss the chance to suddenly appear out of nowhere from time to time during the exhibition. In one apparitional performance this week, they appeared as *pey* and *pisasu* clowns, or ghosts and demons, at nightfall, dancing wildly with torches around a fire to the sound of an *udukai* drum, flutes, and tambourine, and many larger drums on the edge of the circle of firelight. Every so often they threw *sambarani* (frankincense) powder on the torches to create a burst of sparks in the night. The occasional child was caught by the *pey*, as they searched among the onlookers for a child to sacrifice to the fire, though each child caught somehow managed, just barely, to slip from the grip that dangled him close enough to the flames to feel their heat. Several children who escaped from the *pey* returned to the circle of light with gathered courage to taunt the *pey* again. Whether this theme is related to this year's rise in the conscription of child soldiers here is left to the speculation of adults. The children were so enchanted by this magical apparitional spectacle they were sad when the wild *pey* and *pisasu* jesters and their pranks suddenly vanished into the night's darkness.

"The Empty Cradle," a dance ritual performed by the "Butterfly Peace Garden Players" was presented in conjunction with the Blessing Way of the Painted Dove exhibition at the Barefoot Art Gallery in Colombo. This performance, imagined and practiced while war was raging in Batticaloa, was created by children and animators who were participating in the Garden program in April, 2002. It exemplifies what is meant by Third Spiral Animation.

The setting for "The Empty Cradle" is heaven and earth, with birds – cranes and crows – up in the sky where they are dancing. This musical production of dance and song in the bhajan tradition is opened by four children who enter the gallery courtyard scattering flowers on the ground to create space for the dance ritual. Following the flower children, the elephant, Koduvangoo, who represents "Giving and Taking" enters. Fourteen children accompanied by half as many musicians, then appear to perform the rite and sing the following song while rocking an empty cradle hanging from a tree branch:

The Empty Cradle

throughout our land the din of battle
blood in rivers running
the raucous ringing of alarms drowns out
the song of the immortals

agony is the lot of every human being
lives in ruin
along with the water, the crops, the weather
destruction is our daily fare

compulsion, control, regulation
untieable knots
in religion and politics

people trapped, families on the run
this is the struggle
breaking every bond of love

O
birds
of the forest
behold our fate
desperate ones are we
with none but our own to help

O
birds
so brilliant and free
fly!
sow seeds of peace
into the human heart

we are expecting a newborn
peace

we will rock the empty cradle in ceremonial welcome
expecting a future that will shine for our little ones

The children then summon the birds – children costumed as four cranes and four crows. When the birds descend from heaven the children tell them about the empty cradle. While the birds fly away in search of peace, the children continue to sing and rock the empty cradle. A ritual is then enacted which embraces the entire audience. The dove is passed from the children to a pre-arranged member of the audience who brings it forward to the cradle, places it within, and rocks it. She then passes the dove to another member of the audience who does the same. Even after the bhajan is completed and the child actors have left the performance area, the dove continues to be passed throughout the audience till all who wish to do so have participated.

Sarathadevi, one of the Garden's animators, believes that what happens through following the Garden Path along the Three Spirals of Animation eventually creates "goodwill, reconciliation between communities and dispels prejudice and racist biases." Like other animators she shares her insight that children do not have the problems of reconciliation that adults have. She observes that if the children squabble about something, a little later in the day they will offer to share their food, or they will make some gesture of reconciliation naturally. Speaking about the Muslim and Tamil children who have gone through programs at the Garden she tells us, " The children are fine. It's the parents that need education. When these children grow up maybe the adult generation will be different." The Third Spiral speaks to the belief that the connection between everyday life, the outer world, and the dreaming world, is healing. Sarathadevi tells us, "The Garden, as a place, is needed for the encounter with the children here, but the Garden must be taken outside too. The way of life in the Garden must be integrated with the outside world." This concept is very important. Not to build bridges to the communities from which children come is to risk further splitting them so they dream, but in the Garden only, and otherwise accommodate the violence, self-censorship, and silencing.

Animators

> *"The discipline of those who come there to play with the children is to stay open, aware, spontaneous. To learn to dance with the moment." (P. Hogan)*

On March 3, 1996, an advertisement was posted in the Tamil newspaper "Virakesary" seeking facilitators or animators for the Butterfly Garden. The programs of the Garden are designed for mixed groups of children from the Tamil and Muslim communities, and children who have Hindu, Muslim, and Christian backgrounds, this being so, the advertisement explained that applicants were sought from all communities. This in itself would have captured the interest of this newspaper's readership because Tamil-speakers understood, in deeply personal ways, about violent conflict couched in terms of ethnic difference. One can imagine how people must have been still more intrigued as they read the advertisement further:

> All positions on this team require compassionate and generous people who are primarily motivated by a strong will toward peace, in particular for the sake of the children and for healing of community and the earth. Understanding what Ghandi meant when he said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." They must be willing to change themselves in order to bring change into the world. Adaptability, spontaneity, a spirit of openness and co-operation – these are indispensable qualities in a Butterfly Garden animator.
>
> Cultivation of the imagination in oneself and others is a key objective of the Butterfly Garden. This requires that all the animators be in touch with their own imaginations; that as a regular practice, they cultivate the arts in one form or another. The dedication to their art should be open-hearted enough to include children and the creative processes of nature and other adults. This open-hearted, creative joyful spirit takes

precedence over official credentials as child care workers, teachers, or play program facilitators, be they ever so impressive. At the Butterfly Garden the child is the teacher. Her images and stories become the structure around which all Butterfly Garden programs will unfold. An animator in the Garden program must be willing to follow the child's lead. He/she should be a good listener and observer, skillfully interacting with the delicate and mysterious processes of the garden and the child.

In the best of all possible gardens these artist-poet-facilitators should be multiply skilled or cross-skilled as, for example, textile artist/juggler; painter/clown; mask-maker/potter/drummer; story-teller/ritualist/snake-charmer. All facilitators should be blessed with a contemplative, respectful spirit, a fine sense of humor, a concentrated, yet open, aesthetic approach to life. Beauty, harmony, equanimity, detachment and an endless capacity to be awed by the mystery and sacredness of all life; these qualities are also indispensable.

Who answered this ad? Who are the animators? The Butterfly Peace Garden — *vanathithipoochchi samathana pongka* – is a zone for peace and the animators there have deep personal familiarity with war. The animators are local people who have grown up in Batticaloa District in Tamil or Muslim neighborhoods, towns, or villages during wartime. In Batticaloa the majority of the war's victims have been noncombatants or civilians, and that being the case, many of the animators have lost loved ones, have been forced to watch when family or community members were publicly tortured or killed, or have felt helplessness when loved ones were arrested and tortured under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in conjunction with the emergency regulations. Sri Lanka has been governed under a state of emergency since the 1983 pogrom in Colombo, with the exception of a period of five months. Long-term detention without

being brought before a judge, torture, deaths in custody, disappearances, and retaliation massacres began to be commonplace practices in the late 1970s and 1980s when the state's process of militarization was stepped up in response to Tamil groups taking up arms.

Several animator's families have been displaced a number of times as a consequence of the war. The violence that led to displacement of some of the animators' families goes back to the 1980s when armed Tamil separatist groups engaged the Sri Lankan state's military apparatus in a secessionist challenge. At that time in Batticaloa, the Tamil secessionist groups LTTE, TELO, PLOTE, EPRLF, ENDLF, and EPDP were fighting the Sri Lankan Army and Special Task Forces. Indian intervention contributed to violence felt on the local level in the eastern region in the 1980s, when the animators were children. The Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) employed counter insurgency strategies in Batticaloa from 1987-89. Just prior to the IPKF's return to India, a replacement group called the Tamil National Army was conscripted by force from Batticaloa youth. TELO and EPRLF assisted the IPKF in this forced recruitment of young Tamil men into the Tamil National Army. Young men were dragged out of their homes, taken from schools, and abducted from markets and, whereafter they were trucked to isolated training camps in the interior. Their hair and eyebrows were shaved off so that they could be identified if they tried to escape, and they were forced to watch painful executions of those caught attempting to escape. In this period of forced conscription, parents hid their sons, including some of those who now work as animators in the Garden.

In 1990 the worst period of the war in the eastern region began. When fighting resumed between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state's military apparatus, there was also violent combat between the LTTE and the abducted youth of the Tamil National Army — and between the LTTE and other armed Tamil groups including EPRLF, TELO, EPDP and PLOTE. This tragedy of young Tamils killing Tamils in Batticaloa is remembered as the most difficult period local families had to endure and bear. In 1990 the Sri Lankan Army set up large camps manned by thousands of Sinhalese speaking soldiers along

Batticaloa's main coastal road, adjacent to the villages and neighborhoods where the animators' families lived. One animator explained that her home happened to be positioned inside the perimeters of her village's army camp, so, along with hundreds of others from villages all along the coast, she decided to take her family members to live in the interior mountains near Pulipainchakal.

Even before they fled to Pulipainchakal, she was traumatized to the extent that she had frequent nightmares of shooting, running with many people, planes dropping bombs, and dead bodies. They lived in the mountains as a family group of twelve people: her four children, her elder and younger sisters and their five children, and herself. Her younger sister's husband had recently been shot, and they did not receive the news until a year later, but her elder sister was also widowed at the time they went into the mountains, for he was trapped in Tamil-Muslim riots in Polonnaruwa. On the coast, the violence was intense, constant, and communication was severed between the Tamil and Muslim communities. Paramilitary Muslim Homeguards were trained and armed by the Sri Lankan military. Active combat between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state's Army, Navy, Air Force, Special Task Forces, special units and paramilitary allies resulted in total displacement of a number of Tamil coastal villages in Batticaloa.

In the sequence of 1990 retaliation massacres, the Sathurukondan massacre was unforgettable, and unspeakable, for the ages and gender of 184 Tamils who were coaxed into the Sathurukondan Army camp and killed: Sixty-nine of those who were executed were children twelve years of age or younger. Sixteen elders, seventy years old or older, also walked to the army camp. Most of the victims at Sathurukondan were female. Men with guns came to the households in Kokuvil, Pillaiyaradi, Pannichchaiyadi, and Sathurukondan and told the people to come to the camp because the Officer in Charge of the camp had advice for them. Seven hours later their bodies were burning with tires in a pit inside the camp. A second massacre near Kokkadichcholai, in the hamlet of Mahiladitivu, went on for ten hours leaving many homes burned and many psychologically and physically violated or dead.

At Vantharumulai, where 45,000 Tamil refugees had gathered, the Sri Lankan Army entered the grounds and arrested people. In one instance they arrested 158 Tamil people, tied their arms behind their backs with their shirts and pushed them into buses. These victims remain classified as "disappearance cases" today. There was a retaliatory massacre on the seabeach at the Tamil fishing village of Puthukudiruppu a month after the Kattankudy massacre of Muslims at prayer. As the pattern of retaliation massacres developed, civilians were the targeted victims in the wake of each attack by trained military groups. There was the terrible massacre of Muslim people in their homes in Eravur. At different times, both Tamil and Muslim civilians were murdered at Unnichchai. There was a massacre at Udumpankulam, and Inspectoreththam Vannar families suffered many "disappearances" in this period. Other extrajudicial killings by various arms of the government forces and groups allied with them took place in Tirukovil, Komari, Karaitivu, Pandiruppu, Kalmunai, Maruthamunai, Thuraineelavanai, Kurumunveli, Mandur, Vellaveli, Thikkodai, Kakkachchiveddai, Palachcholai, Periyaporathivu, Kovilporativu, Palugamam, Kaluvanchikudy, Ampilanthurai, Nochchimunai, Punnacholai, Koddaimunai, Puliantivu, Karadiyanaru, Ayttiyamalai, Periyapulumalai, Pulipainchakal, Chenkalady, Kommaturai, Sittandy, Murakkaddanchchenai, Santhiveli, Valaichchenai, and Vakarai. This list is incomplete.

Returning to the animator's story about living in the jungle as a refugee during this period: there were no roads, only sandy paths, where displaced families constructed huts as shelters in the mountain jungles of Pulipainchakal. They lived there for the next year. As she tells it,

> We had no salt, oil, or coconuts, but we had rice and milk from cows. We had wild greens. There were fish in some of the ponds there. Sometimes we would shoot a cow and roast it over the fire. There were wild elephants and we were scared of them. In Pulipainchakal, all the people were sick with malaria,

> cholera, dengue fever, and typhoid. My daughter almost died from malaria. Some died from snakebites. While I was there I became a midwife and helped in the delivery of six children. All of the people had to run for their lives when the helicopters were strafing the area or planes were bombing. Some of the children were killed. Once when I was with my younger sister and our children, a helicopter began firing at us at close range. I could see the pilot's face while he was shooting at us. After that we were terrified of helicopters.

At this writing, this animator continues to care for her sisters and their children, and she additionally cares for two other siblings who have lost limbs in the course of the Eelam wars. All of the animators have stories of survival and near death that have affected their families. Several had siblings who were engaged as members of armed groups. A consequence of the violence was economic paralysis, so their families did not have enough food in the war years. One animator's father, who was a dedicated school teacher, died of a heart attack when he was approaching his school one morning and witnessed the Sri Lankan Army shooting and killing his students. The animators have survived personal experiences of trauma, grief, and loss that require healing, and they are willing to step across the divide that separates Tamils and Muslims in the eastern region in the aftermath of bloodshed. Along with an intimate understanding of the lived experience of the war in the local surroundings, each animator is motivated to engage in creating a more peaceful world, and to communicate with the inner world of the child.

For five years animators have been continuously training through art workshops, poiesis marathons, group meditation and body wisdom conducted by Paul Hogan, and group dynamic sessions and training in accompaniment skills led by Father Paul Satkunanayagam. Guests come into the Garden to teach many genres of artistic expressiveness with a singular focus on healing the heart, body and mind. Guest artists, psychologists, medical doctors, and anthropologists have conducted workshops.

As the garden grows, the depth of understanding shared between the Garden animators as a group has deepened and strengthened. Their commitment to their roles in the Garden has deepened. They are very open with one another. Cultural anthropologists have studied ways in which local people veil sentiments in many cultures. I perceive the openness and disclosure of inner feelings among the animators as one consequence of the transformative quality of their engagement with the Garden. Within their families and communities, they are often viewed as liberal in their behavior, yet they are supported because the value of their work with children is clear. Their awareness of inner and outer worlds has grown. They are confident individuals and they know they are instrumental in bringing health, laughter and joy to many children. They are a guiding presence, a learning presence, and they are jesters in a war zone. They are both the wounded dreamers and the wounded healers we have been speaking about. In the Garden, they are continuously training in healing processes that help them form intimate bonds with children who must navigate daily violation.

We may ask how do the animators become healers, and how do they perceive the Garden's creative process? First let's look at the animators' commentary on the Garden, at how they describe their experiences, and at what they have learned.

In her awareness, Chandra is sensitive to the transformative nature of the Garden. She tells us:

> This Garden has grown, changed, and it is continuing to change. Now it is reaching out to the most deprived children in oppressed areas. This is a blessing for us and this blessing will sustain this Garden. All of Sri Lanka and the larger world should discover the reality of the real spirit and inner dynamics of this Garden.

Chandra believes the animator gives the child a sense of recognition, appreciation, and an empowering experience. When Chandra plays with mixed groups of Tamil and Muslim children, making First Spiral creations, she asks them to help each other and encourages them to

become friendly with one another and to work together harmoniously. She is experienced in observing the development of cross-ethnic relationships, and she believes that when the children are participating in cooperative group activities, the group dynamics help the children form friendships across ethnic divides. Chandra says with conviction, "Peace has become very important in my life now. Experiencing real peace and harmony is my priority in the way I live out my life now." She is aware of changes that have taken place in her attitudes, feelings, and awareness and she attributes these changes to the Garden.

Marliya offers very clear statements about the children as teachers of adults, and how the creative processes in the Garden are designed to allow the child to take the lead. Deep listening is one of her many strong skills. She speaks confidently about guiding the children through the skills she has learned as an animator; yet in Marliya's interaction with them, she learns from the children. She has watched the alienation and suspicion between Muslim and Tamil children dissolve as they gradually accept one another, even though they from villages with memories of retaliation massacres. She knows from her personal experience that adults are socially discriminating and hurt people who are perceived as different. Marliya sees that the day-to-day creative processes in the Garden are revolutionary. In her understanding, "The children are teaching us in the Garden. The children are teaching the adults here that ethnic harmony is possible." She also demonstrates patience in saying, "Only years later will what we have seeded become a tree."

Chandra explains that when she interacts closely with the children, she is often reminded of her own childhood experiences, and in remembering her own pain, she has an experience of healing. Chandra lived through extreme Muslim-Tamil violence that left her with negative feelings, but now she is able to relate to people whether they are Muslim or Tamil without negative biases. She explains that she knows and accepts herself better as a result of a lot of inward work in the Garden, and she can reach out to others and understand their feelings now. It is easy to perceive that Chandra has cultivated kindheartedness through her Garden experiences.

The Garden Path requires constant and careful work from an animator, work in which the disparate elements of their beings are "brought home like lost sheep," nurtured, and enfolded into the fullness of their being. Self-forgiveness, self-acceptance and self-healing can arise spontaneously over time through the active engagement of one's originality in the ever-unfolding poiesis of the site. In keeping with Oscar Wilde's idea that anything worth knowing cannot be taught, the learning of the Garden does not depend on words, workshops, stylish syllabi, and state-of-the-art video productions so much as each animator being at home with herself, comfortable within her skin and in spite of the brokenness she has come through – or perhaps more accurately because of the brokenness unveiled through an engagement with poiesis – confident in the creative unfolding of her soul, her meaning and her purpose in life. This, more than words, more than the wonders of technology, communicates to the core of the child's experience.

Cultivating a personal awareness of the inner self, animators believe peace is found in the continual inner journey. Sarathadevi speaks of unfolding and opening to the inner self:

> Spiritual exercises that we do in the Garden give us inspiration; help us engage in life more effectively and meaningfully. Spiritual practices that I have learned in the Garden give me inner strength. Garden activities that are spiritual motivate me. Body wisdom, Reiki, meditation, and all forms of inward work are helpful. My own Hindu worship also gives me inner strength. I get energy and strength from inward work.

Marliya reminds us that during one of his workshops with the animators, Garden mentor and Jungian psychoanalyst John van Eenwyk once said that body, mind and spirit instrinsically know how to find balance. Andrew discusses how his experience in the Garden brings "balance" to his life, and a deepening realization and understanding of himself that is a process of cultivating friendship with himself. He explains:

> Reflection gives me realization. Realization leads me to freedom with many possibilities. The freedom of many possibilities helps me to realize a deeper harmony in myself and in my world.

Andrew also tells us that in his life there is sadness and happiness, while there is more balance, more confidence to relax with whatever arises, and deeper harmony that "is not a task to be achieved," but "a daily practice."

Paul Hogan amusingly shares his experience that, after years of practice, the need remains for vigilance and awareness of flashes of impatience and subsequent mortification. He muses, "All that has changed is that I now tolerate my impatience, impetuosity and fraudulence with a more highly developed sense of humor, and irony. I allow idiosyncrasy more space."

The daily challenge of living in a region where everyone struggles with violence leads the animators to believe in what they are doing. They possess an acute awareness of ways in which the culture of the Garden contrasts with the military culture that has seeped into every village, neighborhood, and house in the decades of war here. One of the animators, Shanthiepan, believes that increasing awareness or mindfulness is crucial. He says that:

> Being aware of our own cultural barriers is important. There is a lot of negativity, denial, and silence taking place. When energy is expressed in a negative way, we must be mindful or our energy will be directed in aggressive and unhelpful ways. It is important that energy is directed in positive ways, and also that there is not silencing of something so pure and good as energy.

The creative expressiveness of animation leads to an awareness of constraints on openness and of the silencing that is a consequence of years of military oppression. This silencing has made its way into close circles of kinship, and relations within and between neighborhoods. Shanthiepan's understanding offers profound insight

about the increased confidence and independence society must move toward if the Tamil minority is to experience equality and democracy in the wake of military oppression. In Shanthiepan's perception of the prevailing socio-cultural norms, "Non-silencing and non-denial is counter-cultural."

Habeeba believes it is very important that children are chosen from villages with histories of violence, and that the formation of groups invited to the Garden programs are constituted with both gender and ethnic balance. As a Muslim woman whose husband was killed by Tamils, Habeeba has been challenged in her relationships with mixed groups of Tamils and Muslims. She describes a relationship of love and acceptance between animators and children, and notes that the intimate bonds of animator-child relationships are energizing. She explains that when she came her personality changed through her new relationships, and also through painting. Of her relationship with painting she says, "In my painting I have discovered the quality of being able to love the children, and the experience of being loved by the children, especially the Tamil children from Savukkadi and Mylampavely."

> When I raised my first child, it was a time of emotional and economic difficulty. Now I am able to provide more. The children in the Garden have increased my awareness about the pain and suffering we have all been exposed to, so I have been able to develop compassion. Instead of being rigid and closed as I was before, I am now more open to life. I was always shy, reserved, and hesitant to speak about my life or work to other people. I was a silenced person. The Garden offers a unique experience. When people ask me about the Butterfly Peace Garden now, I explain about what happens in the Garden with enthusiasm. This experience is a personal gift.

According to Habeeba, the ingredients that make the Butterfly Garden what it is include relationship, openness, caring, compassion,

listening, enjoying, and providing space for all that to happen. She comments, "The children's happiness is a sign that we are giving them what they need." She also stresses the importance of the youth program in that it allows the children to return periodically so they can enjoy a continuing healing relationship with the Garden.

> Evidence of Tamil-Muslim reconciliation as a result of children's experiences in the Garden is also apparent to Habeeba. For example, she says, "When the children from Kankeyanodai and Arayampathi return, there is no divisiveness among them. Their attitude is that they are one family."
>
> In the beginning, as a Muslim, I was afraid of Tamils. I had a lot of fear and I didn't want anything to do with them. Now I know many Tamil people intimately, and most of my close friends are Tamils.
>
> Once I observed a Tamil child from Savukkadi and a Muslim child from Eravur meet by chance on a public bus. The boys had developed a friendship in the Garden. When they saw one another, they embraced. Later they saw me and sat near me so we could talk. This example shows that friendship has resulted from the experience in the Garden, even if we can't see the future.

Many of the children who come to the Garden programs see a lot of violence in their villages, neighborhoods, and homes. Nazeer observes that Muslim and Tamil children who become friends in the Garden visit one another's homes. He notices that the traditional sweets made at home for festive occasions (*palaharam*) are shared between them. His observations of friendships between Tamil and Muslim children are obviously important to him. Nazeer also absolutely delights in clay. He likes to work with its coolness. So Nazeer can often be found at Mud Mountain, where the children form images with clay. Soon a potter's wheel will be arriving in the Garden and he looks forward to that. As the children play with clay at Mud Mountain,

Nazeer observes that over time they use their imagination more creatively and begin to make up stories around their clay creations. A child will say, "There was a lion in the jungle," and another child will add to this from her or his imagination. Nazeer encourages them to continue developing the story. Sometimes he adds an idea, though the story that is made up really comes from the children. From the children's imaginative images, many detailed stories unfold at Mud Mountain.

Gobu has increasingly concentrated on the visual documentation of creative processes in the Garden through photographs and film. He is self-taught, and his work is impressive in the way he is able to capture the vibrancy of the Garden's poiesis. As a result of his efforts, the Garden's performances at the end of nine-month programs are documented on video, and also in still photography. Plans are afoot to arrange an apprenticeship for Gobu with a professional filmmaker and friend of the Garden in the capital. Gobu has also undertaken translation work and often acts as a spokesperson for the Garden with international organizations and the media.

When I encountered Jeyaganth's demeanor of openness and friendliness, I recognized a change because I remembered him being quite reticent and quiet when I first met him several years earlier. He was eager to tell me that he now has a child of his own. We talked about the level of trust in the garden. He describes his life in the present as an experience of feeling liberated. Between the ages of seventeen through twenty-six, Jeyaganth experienced much violence, including severe ill-treatment during his years in detention. As a result of the pain and torture of the past, he does not take his present freedoms for granted. He says, "Now when I am doing even ordinary things, like carrying a bucket across the garden, I feel great inside." With sincerity he states, "I cannot even compare my life before with my life in the present. I went from death to life; from being buried to being resurrected. My life has completely changed. I have a full, rewarding life now, and I owe it to the Garden."

One morning, when we were about to begin a workshop on Earthwork, Artwork, Heartwork, and Healing, and about fifteen of

us were sitting in a circle on mats, I made this note in a page margin: "Naguleshwaran is wearing a red metal bicycle license plate on a string around his neck. He says it's his *paittiyam* ('crazy') license." Naguleshwaran started out the day for all of us with a round of belly-laughter – something he is adept at. At the moment, people can travel without National Identity Cards and not fear arrest at military checkpoints because military personnel are not demanding to see them during the present cease-fire. For the first time in more than a decade, people are forgetting to carry their ID cards with them — and Naguleshwaran had a "paittiyam license" instead.

Naguleshwaran thinks about his role in the Butterfly Peace Garden in terms of making an "offering to the children." From Naguleshwaran's perspective, there is great spiritual energy in this. The genuiness of the offering determines the future of the Garden. For Naguleshwaran, the spiritual focus of the offering is central in his relationship with the Garden. He attributes who he is as a person to the Garden. He states, "Whatever I am now, it is the work of the Garden. The Garden is my life." He has discovered not only talents, but also a genuine way of being.

Naguleshwaran's commentary on story-telling exemplifies the way in which animators take the nurturance of children seriously and yet are playful about it. He says that telling stories for the children has taught him a lot. His intention is to make the children laugh and to make the children happy. They don't know how much of a struggle it is for him. Sometimes his wife asks him why he is so quiet at home, and he explains to her that he's thinking about the next story for the children. He humbly admits that he has learned from his anxiety. He has gained some story-telling skills. He sees that when he prepares, he doubts himself. The preparation is stressful, but once he is in front of the children, the story takes on a life of its own so that it is often different than he planned and much better. He says, "I have the seeds, but when it comes up, it can be quite different from what I expected." When I observe Naguleshwaran telling a story to the children gathered beneath the spreading limbs of the mango tree, his face is aglow and the children are attentive to each word, or laughing uproariously. He knows that the children can learn through listening to stories and he is a superb storyteller.

Nimalaraj points to painting in the Garden as one of his sources of increased confidence. I would like to underscore the fact that Habeeba, Jeyaganth, Nazeer, Shanthipan, Sarathadevi and Reuben also stated that their experiences of painting in the Garden have been of deep significance in their personal healing and growth. I will save Reuben's important sharing about what the painting process means to him for the separate section on ritual painting. Nimalaraj stresses that he never had the opportunity to paint before he became an animator. He also has an interesting point about how important sharing responsibilities and decision-making is for the animators as a group. When they are up against an unexpected crisis or difficulty, they must be able to listen to one another and cooperate in finding a resolution.

The Pedagogy of Poiesis

The Garden as a whole is a journey, a flow, or a process, with many unexpected, unannounced twists and surprises. Not knowing is more fun than knowing. It's important to be comfortable with not knowing and the ambiguity of a continually unfolding process. A day begins with emptying — with the sweeping of the sandy areas in the Garden each morning. Sweeping with the thought that breath sweeps the mind is a form of "earthwork." It begins with earthwork, basic ground, because this is strengthening amidst the discontinuity and chaotic situations of the war zone. There is a flow between earthwork, artwork, and heartwork, wherein we find the non-invasive, indirect, circuitous, healing praxis of the Butterfly Peace Garden. Earthwork is basic ground and artwork is air and imagination.

In the Garden, the animators do not work with children; they play with them. Some who come into the Garden will have been deprived of their ability to play. Children are more open to trusting than adults, but war teaches them not to trust, so that's why building trust and confidence through artwork activity is so important. Poiesis, creative process – or flowing imagination and play — is a bringing back into wholeness in a playful way – it is a natural healing modality.

Through poiesis the animators get in touch with the freshness, openness, and awareness of beginner's mind; they can learn to dream again and this is in turn passed on to the children. In the artwork activities the children are actively making, creating, all the time, and when you make, you see who you are. Making things carefully is more important than simply making them. The soul-making poiesis of the Garden involves awareness. Awareness fosters a sense of the sacred yielding insight into the interplay between self and soul. It encourages the confidence of the adult in the child and vice versa. The Garden doesn't ask the children to draw war memories. Instead, they are given artwork tasks that bring confidence. Heartwork balances earthwork and artwork. It is the inner ground for everything, so when the children or animators are distressed they always return to heartwork.

Heartwork is about cultivating inner ground and loving relationships with one's self and with others – the heart itself is the seed. Heartwork reconciles opposites, accepts contradiction, and melts paradox. Awareness of the breath and the heart creates an opening, or makes space, for being in a constant state of flux. It helps us go deeper into exploring the contradictory nature of our humanity. Heartwork helps reconcile opposites. Oscillating between the poles of differentiated consciousness, it allows new perceptions and possibilities to emerge from a previously impacted or stalemated situation. The Garden believes in an inner self, a soul that is always attempting to communicate with the ego. The Garden's exercises in heartwork respect all the religions of the children. Silent walking meditation around the Garden, mystery painting, body wisdom, listening and learning to be with the soundscape, and mindfulness within visualization exercises connect heartwork to the dreaming world. These exercises are rooted in the universality of human psycho-physical experience.

A primary way in which the animators come to contact their own sense of originality, their own encounter with poiesis, and with the dreaming world is through Mystery Painting. Based on the idea that creation is revelation or discovery, it offers a way of unfolding and becoming more open and available to parts of themselves that

were locked away in childhood. Being back in touch with that makes them more available to the children without being overwhelmed by either the seduction or coercion that too often marks adult relationships with kids. Habeeba described her personal experience with Mystery Painting with the words, "When I look at my own painting I am stunned and surprised by what I have done because I never had the opportunity to use a brush earlier in my life. The images that have evolved express my inner self." The guidance given during the process of Mystery Painting is very important. If the painters follow the inner process with clarity, something new arrives, and like a new birth, it is sacred. Mystery Painting is described in the section "Ritual Painting and Healing Ritual."

Accompaniment in Cuckoo's World

The Cuckoo bird lays her eggs in a Crow's nest and lets the Crow patiently incubate her eggs. The Crow doesn't know it is hatching Cuckoo eggs. Young Cuckoo birds are always orphans. Sometimes the child is like the Cuckoo's egg that is left needing care and nurturance. So in the Garden there is a special place where children receive extra care and love and that place is called the Cuckoo's World where the Cuckoo's Nest, the Cuckoo's Chariot and the Cuckoo's Cloud are found. This is the quietest, most protected corner of the Garden frequented by the Garden's rabbits and surrounded by flowering trees and vines. Next to the Cuckoo's Nest there is also the Dream Gazebo, a structure with a bird-shaped roof, where animators can retreat for a moment of quiet recollection or reverie. The Cuckoo's World is a place for respectful listening and deep awareness. It's one of the places in the Garden for cultivating friendship with another and with oneself.

It is important to note that all that I describe below about the Cuckoo's World is in an early developmental stage and, like everything else in the Garden, is changing. This is how the Cuckoo's World looks in the present and I feel confident that some of the features I describe will look different with another year of growth and experiences in the Garden.

Only after the first three months of play and creating artwork in groups with the animators, will some of the children spend time one-on-one with an animator in the Cuckoo's World. When the children enter the Cuckoo's World, they are encouraged to relax. The animators view the children's relaxation as an experience of diffusion of tension that is healing. Father Paul Satkunanayagam, in his role as "Cuckoo Daddy" (*Kuil tatta*) oversees the experiences and healing processes in the Cuckoo's World. In Father Paul's understanding, once the children relax they begin laughing and really enjoying what they are engaged in. In his words, "We consider in that very precious moment there is the presence of healing". It is quite possible that the child may become the teacher of relaxation for the animator also, as it is often easier for a child to relax amidst chaos than it is for adults.

It is considered important that the animators do not single out particular children and make them feel they are categorized as more severely traumatized or as having more severe problems than the others. To circumvent this possibility, which proved to be problematic in the Garden's earlier years, the animators have invented a way of inviting children into the Cuckoo's World in which the children are randomly selected. An animator impersonates the large, friendly bird known as, "Cuckoo Daddy." Wearing a blindfold over his/her flamboyant mask of many multicolored feathers, s/he chooses or "catches" children at random in a running and hiding game of tag. Similar games are played by children in Mattakkalappu called *kankattivilaiyadu* "blind play" and *olichchipitichchu villaiydtuvom* "hide-and-catch-play" so the Garden draws from these two favorite games that the children already know. The blind cuckoo doesn't know whom he is choosing and the children know that. Children who are the lucky chosen ones are then brought into the Cuckoo's Nest for an extended one-on-one session with an accompaniment animator.

The Cuckoo's World animation team is composed of experienced animators who have well-developed skills for tender, caring, intimate one-to-one relationships with children. The animators use a spectrum of activities in the Cuckoo's World that

are specific to the needs of the child. The spectrum of resources is flexible and open-ended. A palette of creative activities can be selected on the spot for each child according to the child's emotional state at that particular time. Animators skilled in painting, handicrafts, clay and other Garden activities, have an awareness about which activities will help the child go deeper into their own flow of life and get in touch with the images that the child has. The animators do not propose that the activities they engage in will immediately help the child to be with the pain that the child is experiencing. The activities in the tool-kit are used as a springboard so that once the animator and the child are engaged the animator makes every effort to be present with the child, to listen deeply to the child, and to select activities that are appropriate in the moment they are sharing together. In the Garden there is the understanding that if the animators are present, and present with tenderness and kindheartedness, over time in the Garden children will come into their own healthy flow of life and self-expression. In the animators' tool-kit of one-to-one rituals, games and activities appropriate for accompaniment are drawn from many sources and include the following:

Splash Paint Collage: Splash paint on paper and then cut out the shape of a favorite animal. Cut up the left-over paper into small pieces. The animal figures may then be arranged as a collage with the left-over bits of splash-painted paper. In this exercise, the children experience the emergence of surprising new forms and images out of the random pieces.

Alien Painting: By blowing through a straw paint is moved about on a page. An "alien" figure is isolated and identified. It is then drawn to scale in a bigger form on another page. The same process repeated produces several "aliens" who can then converse with one another and join in making "alien music."

Puppets: Puppets evoke creative expressiveness and give voice to feelings. Puppets, like clowns, say what they think. Puppet stories can develop into ritual theatre, such as the time when a ceremonial burial was held for a puppet, who represented a child's father.

Feeling Pictures: On a large white sheet of paper, an outline of the whole body is drawn. Then colors that represent the way the

body feels are painted onto the body. The animator and child imagine together how different colors symbolize different emotions.

Clay figures: The animator encourages the child to form images in clay, and then speak about the images, and to develop stories about them. As a medium, clay is elastic, watery, and the texture of clay helps the child get in touch with his/her imagination and dream world. It is the most unthreatening of materials to children. In the end, the images are destroyed, pressed back into the larger source, but the shared story remains with the child and the animator.

Collage: Flour containers with differently tinted glue are prepared. Two boards are painted in abstract patterns with it. Gold and silver dust is sprinkled onto it. When dry, the shapes of various figures are cut and rearranged as a collage. The collage may be pasted onto a portfolio cover in which the child can keep his/her artwork.

Mask: From clay molds made by the animator and the child two faces are formed. From these two molds paper mache masks are made. Then they are painted. The masks become characters in a story-theatre.

Sounding: The two masked characters go out into the Garden. They listen to sounds like snippets of conversations – animal, insect or plant talk. They return to the Dream Gazebo in the Cuckoo's World and make up a song together based on what they heard.

Story TV: The child creates a story and then draws pictures in a scroll for the story. The child may be encouraged to recall events. The pictures are shown through a TV made by the child using cardboard, cellophane, and wooden pieces of cane or bamboo.

Dream Catcher: The child and animator make a dream catcher. They catch dreams at home and when they return to the Garden they have dream sharing sessions together.

Worry and Inspiration Boxes: The child and animator make a box for the child's worries. Every day the child writes her worries and puts them inside the box. Together the animator and child write beautiful thoughts or inspirational quotations and put them inside another box. Then they have a session in which they randomly pick out worries; discuss them, and then pick out inspirations with which to recompense them

Other activities included in the one-on-one poesis exercise of the Cuckoo's World are Feeling Wheel, Feeling Grab Bag, Feeling Mirror, Scrabble, Sand Play, Greeting Cards, Family Dolls, Bubble Blowing Bingo, the Amma Appa Journey, the Kutti Amma Appa Game and the Blessing Way Ritual. Chandra offered a beautiful explanation of a Blessing Way Ritual, which I include below.

The process of the Cuckoo's World is four-fold. First, there is a random psychological profiling of the garden children using the Kutti Amma Appa Game. Second, there is a selection of children for the on-to-one accompaniment process of Cuckoo's World using Blind Cuckoo Tag games. Third, there is poiesis: the creation of art and the creation of ritual. The number of sessions the child and animator have together is flexible. Forms of Blessing Way Ritual are commonly chosen whenever the animator and child do not create an original ritual together. Fourth, the animator has a de-briefing with "Cuckoo Daddy," Father Paul Satkunanayagam, in a supervisory session.

The Amma Appa Journey helps the animator understand the child's family history and the nexus of relationships in the child's family. The animators have transformed and adapted this from what was earlier known as the Genogram, in an attempt to reduce intrusiveness. The Amma Appa Journey is made by means of travel around a game-board style mat. The mat is divided into three sections for the generation of the grandparents, parents, and siblings. Surrounding the mat there are images that remind the children of their own experiences within the family.

Remembering is a very important experience of healing as it is a process of integration that can transcend alienation, separation, and distance. The Amma Appa Journey helps children remember experiences through images that are placed all around the border of the mat. These images may speak to the child about how his/her father or the mother was killed. In a war zone family members meet death in unnatural ways, for example, being shot by the army or a militant group, being arrested or abducted and then disappearing. The images around the mat may also speak to the child about threatening forces in the child's life, like adults who may have

physically abused the child. The animator may gain insights into a child's history of being used as a child laborer, being sexually abused, or being taken as a child soldier. The images on the mat also speak to children's disabilities – whether they are emotionally or physically handicapped. The images help the animator understand a child from that perspective. Children may talk about the people closest to them. The use of the Amma Appa Journey must be approached with great care, for the very reason that in the way favored by the Garden, discovery of biographical detail is generally made according to child-defined protocols and by the child's choice. The Garden is still contemplating the form of the Amma Appa Journey. On a more positive note, the animators may learn about a child's most passionate interests through the Amma Appa Journey. As Father Paul Satkunanayagam says, "The Amma Appa Journey needs to be used in a very playful way to find out what influences are affecting a child's life in important ways."

The Kutti Amma Appa Game, has evolved from the Amma Appa as a round wooden disk with twelve key images from the Amma Appa Journey painted around the outer edge. A needle points to these images as it rotates and singles out one image when it stops spinning. If the needle stops on the image of a woman carrying a box on her head and running – an image of a person who is a refugee — the animator asks the child something like, "The place where you are living now, is this your real place?" The child might explain to the animator that s/he has lived in a number of places, so then the animator then understands that the child has lived through experiences of displacement. As with the Amma Appa Journey, the use of this game must be approached with sensitivity. Father Paul has suggested bringing closure to the game with a Blessing Way Ritual.

The Cuckoo's World animator may accompany the child to the Chariot house, a higher room in the Cuckoo's nest, if the child is attracted to climbing up the ladder to this more protected, elevated space. This is a good space for poiesis, though other activities could happen here as well. The child and the animator could dream up a ritual together in the Dream Gazebo and perform it in the Chariot house if the child selected this space. A ritual the animator and

child create together is like a "mudra," a seal for the understandings, realizations, or healings arrived upon in the poiesis of one-to-one sessions in the Chariot.

Cuckoo's World rituals are often earth-oriented and heighten sense-awareness of touch, scent, sound, and sight. The animator could ask the child to search in the garden for seeds that have fallen on the ground. Then when the child brings the seeds, the animator incorporates the seeds into the center of the ritual. The animator could ask the child to place positive feelings into one seed and negative feelings into another seed. Feelings for the child's father or mother could be placed in one seed. Once the seeds symbolize feelings of the heart and/or the child's relationships with her father or mother, then the ritual can strengthen the child through different kinds of blessings. Care is taken that the blessings are in harmony with the child's religious background. For example, in Buddhism, there is the Metta blessing of loving-kindness that says "May you be happy; May you be free from suffering in your body, mind, and spirit; May you look after yourself with care; May you be at peace." We can make use of the Metta blessing to bless the seed. Once the seed that is filled with negativity is blessed, the child could pray for its tranformation and plant it. The negativity could be the child's fear or anger. In the Garden there is the idea that our anger is part of our feelings and a part of us. We avoid violating ourselves by suppressing our feelings, and we try to find non-violent ways to express them. Both suppression of our feelings and expression of them can be painful, perhaps harmful. The Garden chooses a middle path of awareness and expression through cultivation of the arts. Instead we take time to look at the feelings that are a part of us. We can't make negative feelings of fear and anger disappear, but it is possible to transform them into other feelings through the practice of poeisis.

After blessing the seed with positive emotions, the child could take the seed home and keep it in a place where it is seen first thing in the morning, to be reminded of the blessings. Creative earth-oriented rituals are one kind of experience in the Garden's healing of the child. They are universal rituals that do not necessarily emphasize any particular religious tradition, with universal meanings that can be

used with all children in any part of the world. The animals that live in the Garden are also part of the natural world incorporated into ritual, theatre, play, and the children's growing appreciation of all forms of nature. An example of this would be the release of white doves in the Third Spiral ritual called "Blessing Way of the Painted Dove" that is described in the section about ritual painting. Another example would be the procession and funeral held for a pelican with a broken wing who had lived in the garden for a long time.

The Garden encourages awareness in many and different ways. One way of beginning to increase awareness is through meditation. The Garden makes use of meditation practices of different traditions. Breathing exercises are common to all. A child becomes aware of her own breathing, her own deep breathing, and this concentration on slow, deep breathing will bring awareness. Awareness of nature and awareness of sounds are encouraged. Animators and children collectively listen to the birds. They look into the color of flowers. Guided body wisdom exercises are regularly conducted, and this encourages awareness of one's own body. These exercises are so far only offered to animators and with them they are voluntary. Regular participation in body wisdom exercises by more of the animators is a desired goal. One becomes aware of every part of the body — forehead, eyes, fingers, lips, and so on. Through group dynamic sessions the Garden encourages awareness in what is happening in both inner and outer realms of the person. Through many forms of ritual the animator and the child learn to navigate these often chaotic and confusing worlds with faith and confidence in themselves. Through many forms of ritual the animator and the child become aware of inner feelings.

The Blessing Way of the Painted Seashells

Now we turn to one example of a ritual in the Cuckoo's Nest that is commonly used as a final blessing ceremony. In the last of the one-on-one sessions with a child in the Cuckoo's Next, the animator will

have all of the child's artwork there in front of the child on the grass mat, and as they look at these creations together they will summon the memories of all their sessions together. One of the Cuckoo's World animators, Chandra, explained and described this ritual that is drawn from the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk and internationally known peace maker. In the Garden this is known as the Blessing Way of the Painted Pebbles (or Painted Seashells). Chandra finds this ritual appropriate for the last session. After looking at all the art works created in one-to-one relationship, it is also a fertile moment for inventing an original ritual together that becomes a "mudra" for the child and seals the shared experience.

In the Blessing Way of the Painted Seashells Chandra will first ask the child, "Close your eyes, and think about the form of God you worship, or just think about a person you love."

Then the child paints four pebbles or seashells by choosing colors representing "Flower. Water. Mountain. Space. I am Beautiful, Clear, Strong and Free." After painting the shells, she asks the child to pick up the seashell painted to represent "flower" with her left hand and hold it in her hands with a real flower selected from a collection of flowers Chandra has picked in the Garden. Then:

> Breathing in, the child says, "I am a flower."
> Breathing out, the child says, "I am beautiful."
> (three times)

Then she places the shell and flower back on the ground with her right hand, in a gesture of receiving and giving. Next the child chooses the seashell she painted to represent "water." She picks it up with her left hand. Then, while closing her eyes and holding the shell in her hands:

> Breathing in, the child says, "I am water."
> Breathing out, the child says, "I am flowing."
> (three times)

She places it back on the ground with her right hand. Then with her left hand the child chooses the seashell she painted to represent

"mountain." While closing her eyes and holding the shell in her hands:

> Breathing in, the child says, "I am a mountain."
> Breathing out, the child says, "I am strong."
> (three times)

She places it back on the ground with her right hand. Then with her left hand the child chooses the seashell she painted to represent "space." While closing her eyes and holding the shell in her hands:

> Breathing in, the child says, "I am space."
> Breathing out, the child says, "I am free."
> (three times)

She places it back down on the ground with her right hand. Lastly, the child says, holding all the shells, "Flower, Water, Mountain, Space. I am Beautiful, Strong, Clear, and Free."

Afterwards, some of the children will say "I want to be like that" and others may say "I will try to be like that." According to the animators present during this discussion about Cuckoo's World ritual, some of the children are really struggling in the home environment. They may have only one meal a day. For example, a child who has lost her mother and stays with her aunt may be neglected and forced to do too many household chores, and because of these chores she will not have time to study her schoolwork. The child will become angry, or sad, and may become deeply disturbed.

Finally, in this ritual Chandra will give the child the shells in a little cloth pouch to take home to help the child recall the moments they have shared. Chandra asks the child to think about the ritual they shared when she is having difficulty living at home. Chandra offers the idea, "When you are upset, remember to breathe and summon the thoughts, 'I am water, I am clear.'"
Chandra further explains,

> I close this session by giving the child the seashells and telling the child that the shells represent the way that

> we are one. I say, 'So when you have difficulty, take this shell in your hand and remember that you have to be like you – be yourself – be as you. You can write to me or you can get in touch with me when you have problems.' When they write to me I feel their feelings through their letters. When they express their problems by sharing them with me in letters it helps them. I write back to them and tell them not to be angry with their family members and not to have struggles with them. Several times I have also gone to their homes to visit them. At first I felt very uneasy and it was a very painful experience for me. When they shared their sadness and pain and I felt uneasy, I noticed how I was feeling. Now, with an awareness of my feelings, sometimes I go and pray to God to give some kind of blessing to the children to heal them, to bless them and protect them from this kind of sadness. I also read texts like *Bhagavat Geeta* and then I feel free from my heavy feelings. It's a very hard experience, really. When the children start to share something deeply painful, they start to cry, and that moment is a very painful moment for me also. We (the animators) can't ever forget the children's stories when they are so full of painful feelings.

Another animator present recalls this experience:

> I remember a girl who shared her story about when the Home Guards came to her family's home and took her father and several other people and murdered them. Afterwards, they burned the bodies with tires. She ran and climbed a tree and from the tree she watched her father and the others being killed and burned. For me, learning about the children's experiences can be very hard. Even though this child witnessed her father's death, she persisted in holding on to the belief that her

father still came home late at night and slept with the family and left early in the morning.

Because we are eternally children, and many of the Garden animators have been deeply traumatized as young people growing up in a region of violent conflict, the animators' past traumatic experiences resurface as they listen deeply, as they work with clay or paint with the children in the Garden. Paul Hogan has been working out a set of "dreaming" exercises for animators to do when they find themselves at odds with the world. These involve paying close attention to detail and not becoming swamped by sorrow. When I asked the animators about what resources in the Garden they draw from when they need support, Chandra tells me how she receives help in cultivating friendship with herself, trusting herself, and thereby gaining confidence:

> Sometimes I go to Father Paul and speak about these experiences I have with the children when I need to feel relieved. Father Paul gives some instructions to me about how to be with that and how to handle those kinds of personal struggles. For example, he will give the advice, "Be yourself. Be as Chandra. If you are disturbed, don't try to handle problems by being like someone else. Don't loose yourself. Be Chandra."

> "In order to feel compassion for other people, we have to feel compassion for ourselves."
> — *Pema Chodron*

Chaos: Working With What You've Got

Curing chaos with chaos rather than trying to control it and working with what's in front of us without self-deception or denial is part of

the animator's education. The animators accompany the child in a one-to-one dialogue, and they spend an hour together about six times. Ideally, after each time they have interacted and participated in activities with the child, the accompaniment animators meet with Father Paul Satkunanayagam to talk about what went on in their interaction with the child. Father Paul and the animators examine the experiences of one-to-one accompaniment together. Father Paul explains:

> The animator recounts to me how emotions were expressed; how attentive the child was; what activities they engaged in; how they responded to the presence of the animator; how the presence of the animator was received by the child; and all the nuances of interactions and feelings. Then we both talk together and the animator speaks about where he felt uncomfortable or disturbed and why he felt disturbed. This is part of the personal development of the animator. We explore it together to reach deeper understanding. What did that do to you? Where did you find your strength? Where did you find your helplessness? Why were you disturbed? Do you feel that you have projected your own negativity onto the child? So it becomes a kind of healing experience for the animator. The animator supports the child in the directions the child leads the animator toward.
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> The animators have also lived in war and they need a lot of healing. In their personal lives in the war zone they have been tortured, detained and ill-treated; they have lost their family members; and they have gone through many kinds of painful personal experiences. In the case of one Tamil animator, she has a special challenge in working with the Muslim children who make up half of the children in the garden programs. This is so because a Muslim killed her husband, so she

has to deal with that kind of pain. She has to work that out so that she can relate to a Muslim child with the same intimacy in which she relates to a Tamil girl. But in the beginning, when she finds relating to a Muslim girl very difficult, she will have to work on it. When you truly and really want healing you will get it. That is another secret.

The secret is what you call openness, "I am open to this." But once you become stubborn and close yourself off and say "I am fed up with everything and I don't want any kind of healing," then there is no healing for you. Then what happens is this work will become only a job, an empty activity. This is not animation. There is no spirit, no motivation. So the animators come and some of them want healing and some of them don't want healing. Therefore the people who want healing are the best healers. They're called the wounded healers.

Whereas the people who don't want healing, they're here for a job and their salary and they will find this work very difficult because they're constantly interacting with people and it's a people-oriented work and therefore my whole inner self must be well-disposed to be genuinely, respectfully, sincerely willing to work with others. If not, then the child immediately senses that and cannot feel safe. What we are doing with accompaniment is only a trial. We don't know if all will be ready for it.

But if they show their good will and acknowledge that they are very severely wounded in an area, and are seeking healing, then it will work. When they come to discuss their problems and say, "Yes I have a problem with such and such," then we will deal with that and they will gain awareness and understanding.

Medicine Circle

Through the Medicine Circle, or, the Listening Circle, the Garden encourages personal awareness and awareness of the other. This is a very big part of inward work in the Garden and it grounds the healing energy of the group. Medicine Circle honors others' emotional truth and cultivates acceptance of one another. Medicine Circle, a form of listening, speaking, and gathering clarity, was brought to the Butterfly Garden via the Spiral Garden, and draws on the teachings of Shirley Bear, a Maliseet elder living in Vancouver, Canada who is also an artist and a friend of the Garden. The Medicine Circle is used periodically, whenever social or personal upheaval is causing havoc in the Butterfly Peace Garden. This form of reconciliation process is used, for example, when tension arises between animators. Once Father Paul Satkunanayagam conducted a Medicine Circle for the animators about "healing the inner child." If anyone in the garden wishes, a medicine circle may be called to seek help and support in finding clarity about a personal conflict or a problematic aspect of the process of the Garden. The structure used is important. If it is a single individual's issue, one person with a problem, then a square space, such as the Appa Cabana, with the circle placed within it is good. However, when it is a multi-faceted issue involving a number of people and perspectives, then the star-shaped Amma cabana is a better space to place the Medicine Circle within.

In the following notes, some words are actual quotes. Some are notes made during a Medicine Circle, and I include them because they contain educational instructions about the form and process of the Medicine Circle.

The facilitator speaks:

> We have Medicine Circle in difficult times, in times of confusion, and when we are seeking clarity. The form, as you know, comes from Shirley Bear. Some people

call it a 'talking circle,' but I like to call it a 'listening circle.' We are brothers and sisters, and we all want the same thing – to be happy and to avoid suffering. It doesn't matter what sex we are, what race we are, what language we speak, or what our religion is. At the times when we experience suffering it helps to get together and share deep listening.

The Medicine Circle is a calm, still pool. It is like a mirror. It is found in a dark place, but it emits light and gives clarity. These points about the formality of the ritual are important: Once the gong has sounded and the circle begins, no one else may join the circle, and everyone in the circle must stay until it is completed. If the circle goes on for a long time then there are protocols for going out and returning.

Shirley Bear taught us our deep listening and sharing is healing. The Medicine Circle is healing.

The facilitator then will say some words about why the Circle has been called. The candles and healing herbs in the clay pot are then lighted. The mirror and candles placed in the center of the circle are essential. The more candles the better, because they bring light, and darkness is the problem. The mirror and the candles represent clarity and generate light.

The shell of smoking herbs is also essential. Some of the healing herbs were picked by Shirley Bear herself. There are two kinds of sage – from the mountains and prairies of Canada – there is cedar from British Columbia and sweetgrass from New Brunswick. Most of the herbs, however, are familiar in both Tamil and Muslim communities here: *veppa, vembu, tulasi* (white and black), *nochchi.* They are grown in the Butterfly Garden. The smoking herbs will be carried to each person in the circle.

The circle is held in respectful silence, apart from the one speaking. The facilitator sounds the gong. The person who asked for the circle, the convener, speaks first. Only the person holding the coconut seed, the *kurumpetti,* can speak. The convener of the

circle holds the *kurumpetti* first, and speaks her mind, then passes it to the next person. Thus the *kurumpetti* travels around the circle. When each speaker is finished, she says "ho" or "This comes from my heart. I call all my relations to witness," and then passes the *kurumpetti* to the next person.

Silence is the matrix out of which the healing words come. Observation of silence is important. Everyone has the opportunity to speak and sufficient space is created around the issue. For example, the convener might say something like "I feel anger... It is very strong anger and I have it here and its mine. Perhaps you know what this feeling is like and maybe you remember feeling like this. When you have this anger what do you do? Some people are quiet. Some people speak out against those who wounded them. For me this is a deep wounding. Is there a middle path between speaking out and suppression of feelings?" In speaking to the convener, speakers in the circle will sometimes begin a reply with a message such as, "I understand the depth of emotion in you."

Everyone is thanked for coming to the circle, the convener then sounds the gong, and everyone present places their palms together in a gesture of respect and exchange eye contact with one another. If the Circle is held for a long time, and it goes for a whole day or even two, lunch can be served in silence.

Ritual Painting and Healing Ritual

In considering the Garden's practices of healing, the daily rituals in the Garden establish the rhythm and ground for all other ceremonial forms. The first simple daily ritual is sweeping the sandy area of the grounds with reed rakes. The subsequent patterns raked onto the sand await the footprints of children who will soon arrive from the villages. Then each morning the animators, Muslim and Tamil, gather in a circle under the 100-year-old mango tree, the "Mother of the Garden," and all hold hands. In a preliminary ritual, they tickle one another's palms. Then, to the rhythm of a drummer in the center, they pass a *kurumpetti* from one hand to the next around the circle.

They talk together about what they're doing that day and discuss any problems that may have arisen. They observe silence for a few minutes and then move into the Garden's kaleidoscope of activity. At the end of the day the animators gather in a circle again under the mango tree. They invite a Tibetan "singing bowl" to sound. It is placed in the center while the animators stand together in a circle of silence around it until the sound of the singing bowl can no longer be heard.

Three times a day the far-reaching, clear note of a sangu, a white conch shell, is blown under the mango tree to gather the children in the sandy circle under the tree. Once in the morning after they have arrived, once after lunch, and at the end of the day when it is time to return home on the Butterfly bus.

In a quiet moment of the afternoon in the Garden, Father Paul and I discussed ritual, symbols, and ceremony in the children's programs. He began with the reflection, "I personally have been very strongly embedded in the Christian tradition and we have a lot of rituals – rituals and liturgies. Symbols have always attracted me." Since the children who come into the Garden programs are Muslim, Catholic, and Hindu, and their communities have strong religious practices, the symbols and rituals used in the Garden must be universal and must not offend the sensibilities of any religious group. Father Paul says he must be careful not to create any misunderstanding or misrepresentation by his personal participation in the initiation of rituals or ceremonies, pointing to the fact that he is in a vulnerable position as a Catholic priest. At the same time, he recognizes how ritual can support healing processes. Further, he offers the idea that, "We cannot grasp or understand everything. Therefore at times an expression of a blessing that I want to give must be done through symbols." In his view, rituals and symbols are enriching and offer a deeper dimension of meaningfulness. For the young children who participate in the Garden's programs, he sees that rituals speak more powerfully. He believes that "A symbol says more to the child." He recalls that when he was a young boy people performed Hindu rituals on him when he got sick, like doing rituals over water and then asking him to drink it, and rituals for removing the effects of the "evil eye."

He also recalls that he participated in Hindu *kavadi* rituals that involve a vow to pierce the flesh of one's back with fishhooks when he accompanied his friends into the temple at Sittandi. As a Jesuit priest, Father Paul oversees several large homes or shelters for children who have lost their parents in which many of the children are Hindu, and he openly encourages the children to practice their religions whether they are Hindu or Catholic. He then reflects, "But I have learned only here, in the Garden, an integration of all traditions." Seeking more clarification on forms of earth-oriented, universal rituals that could be practiced by groups made up of different faiths, Father Paul visited Shirley Bear and other First Nation people in Vancouver and Manitoulin Island, Canada.

Addressing my question about the importance of ritual in the Garden, Father Paul replies that in his observation, rituals change attitudes. He adds,

> This seems to be part of my own life experience. Especially finding meaning in the simple things of nature. So it is in the Garden that I learned this. I would have remained rigid in my categorization of things and standard ideas about psychological illness. With all the things I collected I was able to enter into these avenues of the Garden, my experience has been a deep learning and healing experience for me. When a child puts sacred ash on his forehead, he feels he is a child of God. So a Hindu child goes to the temple and puts ash on his forehead, and then the Christian child will ask his mother, "Why can't I put ash on my forehead? I also want to be a wisdom child, a divine child, a child of God." That symbol speaks very powerfully. The words "God loves you," and baptism and all that ash suggests to the child, "I am a child of God." On Fridays the Muslim children bathe as an act of ritual ablution, as purification. The Hindu children also take a head bath as purification. And the Christian child also uses water.

> Water is a universal symbol. The response may be: "I feel purified. I'm not sick inside. I'm not any child, I am a special child." Ritual gives an experience of inner healing. The Hindu child has a protection cord (kappu) tied around the wrist. Security, a basic human need, is offered through this ritual. The child may feel, "I am protected, I am strong." Ritual is very important for the child and the child takes in the image. I feel pure. I feel secure. I feel strong. Rituals are very precious. Remaining with nature and making use of the natural elements of nature is healing. That's what we would like to do in the Garden.

At present, the ritual painting, "Blessing Way of the Painted Dove" is the Garden's favorite example of a Third Spiral ritual painting, though I have confidence that there will be many more forms of collective poeisis shared with communities outside the Garden in the coming years. It is a collective creation of about thirty children who participated in a fourteen-month YEP (Youth Experimental Program) pilot. In this enthusiastic, energetic collective experience, the children helped produce an art show in Colombo at the Barefoot Gallery where they participated in theatrical, musical, artistic performances. The ritual painting, "Blessing Way of the Painted Dove" was the show's centerpiece. The children who were engaged in its creation had first participated in the Garden programs four years earlier. Over the course of this Third Spiral experience, the children identified with peace making. The Garden became a sacred mandala of the world and the children went all around the world with an elephant empowered to take in the pain of the world. Places in the Garden represented locations in the world where there was great need for healing, like Kashmir, Afghanistan, Palestine, New York, Indonesia, and so on. The elephant took in the pain of the people in these places and gave the people his good will and love. This process ended on top of the Garden's hill - Ratsnake Rainbow Mountain - with the elephant, a girl and a boy, who together released white doves.

After their experience of living theatre, one day the children were asked to contemplate their lives and draw on white box-board with HB pencils, very simply, painful moments from their own lived experience of the war. As a parallel activity they splashed bright colors of paint all over large pieces of white paper, and then cut it up into the shapes of doves in various positions of flight. After a period of silent reflection, the children ceremoniously put their left hands on places in their pencil sketches where they felt strong emotions of grief, anger, or sadness. They meditated on these scenes, and, taking their emotions in with their left hands, they placed them over their hearts. With their right hands, each child lifted one of the multi-colored splash-painted birds and placed it over his heart, silently whispering a prayer for healing. Then, with the right hand, the dove was placed over a scene in the child's sketch that represented hurt in need of healing.

The attention of a Garden ritual may focus on the inner world or the outer world – both are important. A very important form of healing ritual and ritual painting is called "Mystery Painting" — a form of poiesis that touches the inner person, the creative self, and the heart. It was not introduced to the animators in the Butterfly Peace Garden until the Garden's third year. All the animators now practice Mystery Painting. In Paul Hogan's words, "The practice brings the animators into the Mystery School of who they really are." It is a kind of painting without knowing; dreaming while awake. In this dreaming the animator makes a strong connection with her or his inner originality. Without contacting this originality animators are more likely to impose conformist perspectives on the children in their art-making.

Guidance is important during the process of painting. There is a guide for the animators. The guide is usually Paul Hogan, and occasionally one of the animators. Mystery Painting is an inner process, so if the guide falters, it will be very difficult for the novice painters' journey. If the painters and the guide stay connected in concentration, the journey will be more meaningful. Sitting in a meditative posture, the painter focuses on the breath.

When the painter feels a strong connection with her heart and her intuitive self, she touches the paper. First she touches the paper

with her hands. Placing her hands on the page bring her into contact with the emptiness on the page. Then she acknowledges her fragmentary thoughts. She touches the page with her forehead. She lets all the fragmentary thoughts and things that hurt her tumble onto this paper. She embraces all of the entanglements, the enervating clash of all conflicts in her life, and returns it to the universe. There is nothing else she can do. She can return it to the universe.

With her eyes closed, she takes the brush and holds it with a fist rather than like a pencil. The black paint is almost the consistency of ink. Then breathing in as she lifts the brush she draws strokes on the paper. Mystery Painting is a form of painting that engages with concentration, focus on breath, and painting in a ritual way. When the first stage is completed, she turns the paper until the brush strokes speak to her. In this second stage, she discovers form and form becomes meaningful — a message from the brush strokes on the paper comes to her. At this time, nothing is disregarded because this chance for seeing will never come again, because everything is endlessly transforming.

Reuben, whose expressiveness through Mystery Painting is notable, describes this stage:

> When I first see the lines I feel tremendous confusion and I hear a lot of noise in my head. There is strong feeling and sound coming from the paper. This is a moment of deep disturbance. My confusion increases each time I turn the paper. Each turn is like another set of problems. The problems are increasing, so I stop and I look until I begin to see.

When the painter looks deeply and the painting speaks to her, she then accentuates the meaningful forms so the figures are clear, following the original lines as much as possible because there will be a message, a dream image, something that you didn't expect. As Reuben explains:

> There is wisdom coming through my heart. You will learn about yourself. The painting gives life to you.

> Experiences from your past come to the surface. If something happened to one of my paintings in the midst of creating it, I couldn't bear it. I care for it like an extension of myself — like a very close relation.

In the third stage of Mystery Painting, the figures are given color. The stages are (1) imprinting, (2) divination or discovery of form, and (3) colouring and reflection on the narrative. Through Mystery Painting, it is possible to get in touch with the dream world. The dream world is very real, though not to be confused with the fantasy world that is mediated by corporate consumer society. Mystery Painting is dreaming with the eyes wide open.

Ideally, there is an array of colors to choose from. Color is more feeling and less mind. You may think, "I want to put blue on my duck's feet" and just know that. Line thickness varies from painter to painter. Sometimes the weight of the line is the same throughout. According to Paul Hogan, "You don't know what it's going to look like, or what it's going to be — it's going to be a revelation and that is what the Garden is: revelation. Mystery Painting is a summation of the whole creative process of the Garden."

Saratha's Mystery Painting entitled, "I am You" is a story about separation of mother and child. Saratha describes her experience of Mystery Painting:

> When I painted this I learned that each line is a breath, and from the mere fact of my breath there is my inner life. Through mystery painting, my inner self is expressed. I am not controlled by others. There is no fear and that lack of fear helps me experience feeling and choose color freely. This is healing. If people who are wounded are introduced to Mystery Painting they will experience healing.

Healing rituals often make use of multi-faceted symbols. They are mystery. They combine all aspects of the Garden path: earthwork, artwork, heartwork, and healing. In Mystery Painting, which is

sometimes called Cloud Watching, there is also an accompanying ritual called Cloud Riding, in which the painter reflects on the images in the painting by "eavesdropping" on what the figures are saying to one another. Often deep inner stories of relationships emerge from the figures during Cloud Riding, and the tone of voice in which the figures speak to one another is a tone of intimacy coming from the inner self and the painter's inward work. In their encounters, the colorful figures may question one another, and offer helpful answers. They often both assist, and accept, one another. There is also often a strong sense of will to understand one another. They may honor feelings of loss in instances of severed relationships. They may honor feelings of inadequacies or experiences of sacrifices. Sometimes the figures are traveling and enter into a relationship of cooperation. They may describe past burdens. Or they could represent a moment of delight and enchantment. Cloud Riding conversations are full of surprises. They may represent unlikely encounters and interactions. Some conversing figures may be alive and others dead. The figures may speak about newly gained wisdom. They often contain dreams of peace. Their words and interactions seem to come from a deepening of understanding. This deeper understanding reverberates through all the moments of a Garden day.

Mud Sun Painting has just evolved in the Garden, and this form of poiesis may still be evolving, so this process may look different in a year. The painter first selects a period of time in her or his life – a year, a month, a day, or the entire span of her or his years. The painter meditates on this period in fine detail, and then sketches the story with symbols and drawings that denote the sorrows, joys, and events. As the painting begins, there are some similarities with the Mystery Painting style. After this phase, the painter sits on the canvas and meditates, calming the mind and body. A thick layer of mud is applied to one quarter of the canvas and the painter then meditates for five minutes before marking the story's details in that quarter of the canvas with a stylus. Mud is then applied to the second quarter of the canvas and the procedure is repeated. After the canvas dries overnight, a large square is delineated in the center of the canvas. The square is painted white, and when dry, the painter sits in the

square and allows healing light to flow through his or her body. Then the painter chooses colors from a large wall of jars of paint of many colors. Taking the color s/he is most attracted to, the painter applies that color to the center square. Using the harmonious colors chosen, circles are painted into the center. Grommets are placed in the four corners of the finished painting and it is hung at eye level. In a meditative recapitulation of the entire exercise, the painter remembers the details of the outer under-painted story. Attention is then transferred to the color in the center window which becomes the focal point of concentration. The painter merges with this color, then passes through it, and returns to the world. Throughout the creative process of Mud Sun Painting, metta or loving kindness for oneself and others is practiced.

The Story Ocean

Naguleshwaran calls the Garden a "Story Ocean." This reflects a reality about the Garden of central importance. I used to think of the Garden as an island of peace in a landscape of war, an image that imagined the Garden as keeping militarized culture at bay outside its high walls. However, more intimate familiarity with the Garden allows one to enter an awareness of the unlimited, infinite nature of imagination and creativity that resides and thrives within the Garden. Being in the Garden is about being in a flow of creativity – being present and open to absorption in its living creative world. Naguleshwaran's poetic metaphor of the Story Ocean reflects the Garden's world beautifully, for much of what happens culminates in the making of stories.

Moreover, the Garden's Story Ocean is teaming with images and themes that reflect the lived experience of war; so that deception, displacement, unpredictable moments, explosions, sudden death, and other war experiences swim through the Garden's story world. The characters are strikingly original, for example: a Garden angel owl who wants to quit her job; a fox who is, among other things, a musically talented arsonist; a bat suicide squad vested with high-explosive guavas; a dengue mosquito assassination unit; a cuckoo

whose red eyes could see a little boy's heart beating like a small pulsating sun inside his chest. Often characters are very small, weak animals or children who end up having tremendous significance in the outcome of events. Most of the characters are imagined animals, some are imagined supernatural aspects of the animals living in the Garden space, and many of the imagined characters in the stories are journeying to a better, kinder world. So the war is not kept at bay, it enters the liminal space of the Garden everyday in the lived experience of each child or adult there, and is transformed as stories are shared. The war is in all of us and the Garden is an ocean of creative experience for healing and transformation.

Naguleshwaran, bearer of the title "Professor Kungilliyam" in the Garden, knows first-hand that storytelling and story-listening expand possibilities for learning, and that children love to hear stories. A child's mind is a continuous story, and children use stories to indirectly describe their own lived experience and explain to themselves the gaps that adults cannot fill with their often dubious logic. Naguleshwaran observes that children's stories emerge and then disappear. Then they reemerge somewhere else and are retold in a different form. He says that in the Garden, "wherever their stories emerge and disappear, there is the mystery and magic."

Shantiepan has been at the Mud Mountain activity center often during the past five years. "Mud Mountain" is a key metaphor for the way the story world is made. Children see that story-making makes a better world, and as Shanthiepan describes below, a group of children will easily begin to imagine and weave stories together. He describes the unfolding creative activity at Mud Mountain:

> Usually there are about six to eight children. At first the children just have fun; they make whatever they want. They may just want to squash the clay and throw it back into the "mountain" of moist clay that is ready for them there. First we just want them to relax and play freely. Then they will make figures and give each figure a name and describe its character. I will ask questions like, "Who is this guy?" "What's the name of this island?" "What's the name of this mountain?" They might ask me, "Are you making a crocodile?" I might answer, "No, I'm making a dancing peacock." Then the stories will begin coming from the figures we are all making.

The Garden has published two books of the children's stories from Mud Mountain, *The Blood of the Mango* and *The Cuckoo in the Jam,* and in the latter there is a story entitled "Smoke and Dreams." The actual published story offers much more creative detail than the synopsis I am about to describe, therefore I recommend a first-hand read of the children's stories presented in *Cuckoo in the Jam* for their unabashed style and imaginative detail.

On the day that one story, "Smoke and Dreams," was created, only four children came to Mud Mountain. Shanthiepan was at the activity center. As Shanthiepan recalls, a girl from Savukkadi with a good sense of humor made a very original figure and named it "Uncle Fox." A boy made jam fruits, and then other fruits, and birds. Three more children came by and were attracted to the figures they were making and to the level of playfulness happening there. So then there were seven children playing together creating things from clay. They made more animal figures and then they began to make up a story. The girl said, "Look at my fox, he's a nasty fox and he's jealous. He's very poor, and he doesn't like anyone to be happy." Then they made a figure of a lady making soup, a bear, a camel, and more kinds of fruits. They imagined that the fox was a good drummer and could sing, so a boy made a drum for the fox. They said, "The fox is cunning and lazy. He just wants to be a disco dancer." So then they made the fox sing and drum. The lady gave the fox some soup. Then the other animal figures came by to hear the fox's music, and the lady set up a tasty soup shop where many animal customers bought her soup that she called "five treasure soup."

One day Fox wanted to figure out how the lady, who was now named Thangah Mani ("Golden Bell"), was making such tasty soup and discovered that she was starting the soup by boiling bones. She had a rickety bicycle that she used when she wanted to collect bones

from the butcher. Fox got on the bicycle with Thangah Mani, and while they were riding along, Fox stole one bone after another out of her bag until she caught him at it. They had a row. All the animals came and Thangah Mani told them that she caught Fox stealing her soup bones.

After that, they all shunned the Fox because he was a thief. Fox wanted revenge. During a conversation with his dream guide, Professor Kungilliam, Fox received the idea to burn the plantations that belonged to the rich animals and blame the acts of arson on their rich animal neighbors. He "secreted himself into the plantations and set fire to valuable tracts of cultivated land." Mr. Leopard, Mr. Lion, Mr. Bear, and Mr. Camel paid Fox handsomely for his (false) reports about the perpetrators. Once he had created divisiveness among the animals and collected money from all of them, Fox bought a house on top of a mountain and hired turtle and mouse to work for him. One night when the Fox was drunk, the mouse hid inside Fox's drum. When Fox tried to play his drum he heard a singsong voice telling him that he was a bully, a coward, a thief, a cheat, a lying dog's drool, and so on. When he tried to break the drum he slipped and lost his balance. He fell down the mountain and into Thanga Mani's house at the bottom through her chimney. Of course Thanga Mani's "five treasure soup" was boiling away in a big pot and Fox fell straight into it.

Rather than a society in which people help one another, the story's central character, cunning and unhappy Fox, makes people fight with one another. The detailed published story in its entirety reflects many sad things about the children's actual world: the militarization and criminalization of local culture in conditions of protracted war; the fragmentation of society; the prevailing broken trust, the destruction of property such as repeated burning of paddy fields before harvest; and survival tactics during economic hardship. At the same time, this story contains many creative details and was composed with humor and even delight. The children had tremendous fun with their collective powers of imagination. The animators sometimes encounter a child who repetitively tells stories filled with sadness that comes out of the violence her or his family experienced.

The Garden does not publish stories told at Mud Mountain that clearly reflect personal tragic experiences. When such cases arise, animators consult with Father Paul Satkunanayagam about how the Garden can best respond to the child.

Paul Hogan tells us in the Introduction to *Cuckoo in the Jam* that the world found in Mud Mountain is an attempt on the part of children to restore vital relationships in their lives. He uses the phrase "living mythography" to describe children's inventive, spiraling tales. When making stories children describe their own lived experience and also reframe or reinvent the world collectively through theatre created from their stories.

At the close of each program in which Tamil and Muslim children have come to the Garden one day a week for nine months, the children present a theatrical performance, an opera, or a parade, based on selections from their stories, like "A Little Birdie Told Me," described below in the context of clowning and Garden theatre.

The Clown College and Garden Theatre

The clowning tradition in the Garden has a lineage that goes back to the Spiral Garden and beyond to the Chong's street theatre in Toronto, which had its beginning about thirty years ago. Paul Hogan reflects on clowning in Chong theatre:

> The essence of Chong theatre is that they are contrarians – they do everything the opposite of the way the dominant culture is doing it. The essence of the clown mind is always backwards. Whatever people are doing in one direction the clown will do it in the other direction, and that is usually funny, but it's also serious because the clown is offering a critique of the predominant view. So if everyone is walking forwards, they will walk backwards; if everyone is saying yes they will say no. That's just the way the theatre goes. In the case of the Chong, the critique was against a consumer-

> driven, greedy, corporate society that uses people as things. In the Spiral Garden it had to do with children who are crippled or children who are handicapped. They are considered dispensable in society, so the clowns there would show them as being better than anyone else. Clowns are always doing things to kind of switch the perspective around. Their theatre is based on stories that they make up themselves. Everything is original: the stories, songs, and theatre costumes.

The clowning that is developing in the Butterfly Garden demonstrates similarities in its comedy, contrariness, and its originality of both story and performance. Whenever Paul Hogan shows people in Toronto videos of clowning in the Butterfly Garden, they laugh because they understand so much about the form of theatre and see reflections of the now dormant Chong. They also know that the power of the theatre comes from the originality of the invention and the people doing it. It has to be very specific to the population, growing out of its own earth, or it has no power. For example, the children in the Spiral Garden were sick or physically handicapped and they became healers. In the Butterfly Garden, people who are silenced generate their own history through their stories and theatre within the Garden's space. The Garden is not a country, it's not Eelam — it is the Garden, and when theatre is performed within the Garden, weak little children become giants, become powerful, and become heroes. There are clowning scenes when people are abducted, something that is very sensitive and politically silenced in this region. In the opera about the "Brigadier Cockroach," there was a scene that was a spoof on torture. In the torture cell there was a lot of laughing and excessive tickling until the crocodiles freed the torture victims. Clown theatre is all very specific to people's understanding of the circumstances around them.

Myilvakanam has begun to give clowning and theatre a stronger form based in the local tradition of folk drama (*nadu kuttu*). This will be an interesting development. The creation of the stories based on improvisation, intuition, and spontaneity are at the heart of

clown theatre practice and training. Paul Hogan comments that "Improvisation is the strength of what we do and it's also the weakness of what we do." He suggests that without discipline and stronger form some of the impact in the improvisation is lost. He further explains:

> In the early stages, this theatre is marked by improvisation and really strong play. What happens is you realize that when you do a certain thing everybody will laugh or cry or get scared, and then over time a theatre style develops. Then there is the possibility of losing the spontaneity and the comic aspect. It can move toward structure and this is not necessarily bad, but there has to be training in order to keep the spontaneity in the structure. For instance, adding nadu kuttu style to our own present improv comedic style. We have to generate our own story, as usual, and our own comedy — and it has to remain fresh. Otherwise, it isn't Garden theatre.

The comedy and story and improvisation tools of the clown theatre have expressed themselves in three forms in the Butterfly Garden: (1) "The Mango Tree Theatre," or improvisation with the children based on anything that spontaneously happens. The clown theatre animators may suddenly appear out of "Kungilliyam's closet" in costumes and perform. (2) "The Operas," that are performed as a conclusion at the end of a nine month period. The operas are developed with more form and structure, and usually there are quite serious stories behind the operas that may begin at Mud Mountain. (3) "The Parade," which is just emerging now. These are the three containers that the Butterfly Garden's Clown College has for dramatic expression. Paul Hogan also suggests:

> A fourth possibility for a form of theatre is what we could call the "Traveling Circus" or "Medicine Show." All the parts for that actually are in place already. You could take the sweepers, crow dancers, cranes, the big bird television show. and present a *nadu kuttu* in a village.

We have already looked at the unfolding of story at Mud Mountain. The plot for Garden theatre is born from the children. In the case of operas that are extravaganzas performed at the end of the children's nine months in the Garden, the animators shape the children's stories so that they have some structure and then invite the children to perform. Once the children and animators have performed the stories with a lot of play and improvisation, the children who appear to be most suited to the characters are selected.

The first scene of the children's opera, "A Little Birdie Told Me," opens in the Court of the Arakan (Giant) King in the countryside of fabled Mattakalappu. The Arakan King returns home (in an ox-cart pulled by a live ox) after many years of travail abroad, with a live trophy – a rare prophetic bird of truth belonging to the species of Giant Miniature Cuckoo. Upon reaching Mattakalappu, the Arakan's good humor does not last long. While he was away hunting exotic birds, his court has been usurped by a wicked magician with the assistance of his own wife, the faithfully fickly Arakani. (He first receives this intelligence information on his cell phone.)

Outraged by this turn of events, the Arakan crowns himself as the horrific Skull King, Lord of War and Death. Persuaded by his wife to trust the magician, the Arakan King appoints him National Security Advisor and Chief of Staff. Following the magician's advice, the Skull King banishes the prophetic Bird of Truth to a prison at the summit of Rainbow Ratsnake Mountian and embarks upon a fierce campaign to rid the kingdom of all suspect and undesirable elements – the rainbow mountain people, the jungle people, the feeble and the feeble-minded. His violence pervades the kingdom and brings it to the brink of ruin. Not only the humans, all nature – the birds, the insects, animals of the forest, the fish in the sea – groan under the mindless persecution of the Skull King. Finally he turns on his own allies, the Arakani and the Magician, who flee into hiding (or disappear in thick clouds of incense smoke) for their own safety.

The Arakan is left abandoned and alone. Deeply saddened, he falls asleep. He is confronted by spirits that interrogate him mercilessly in a dream. What makes you think you are God? Why have you imprisoned so many? Killed so many? Who are you to put

yourself above other mortals, judging and condemning them? Why are you so intolerant of people who differ from you? Are you really worthy to be King, or is it only brute force that keeps you on the throne? It is time to consider the cost of your actions and try to make a new beginning. The spirits instruct the Arakan in a method whereby he can begin to turn his life around.

First he must dwell in the darkness and evil that he has created all around consciously recognizing the devastation it has wrought. Then he must breathe this darkness out and breathe in the light of a new day. With the dawning of the new morning, he can begin again. He must do this every day until he has a totally new mind. The Arakan awakens and finds the interrogating spirits have disappeared, yet he is still surrounded by suspicious beings, his own soldiers. He is confused, not knowing for a moment whether the soldiers are friends or enemies, or indeed, whether he is still dreaming or awake.

He decides to retreat to the summit of Ratsnake Rainbow Mountain to re-appraise his life. One day Little Birdie who is imprisoned there, speaks his first words of truth to the Arakan. "You have been deceived by your own cunning and greed," she tells him. "Your wife and the magician are accomplices to your delusion. They have made a fool of you." The Arakan will not listen to these words. Little Birdie tells him his heart is too polluted with self-interest to be able to hear the truth. In order to purify himself, he goes to bathe in the nearby Angelfish Pond. The angelfish invite the King to bathe and they offer a water purification blessing. Peace dwarves who live in an underground cave appear from a tunnel near the pond, offering the King advice to breathe, be peaceful and make a connection with his heart. He then fully sees the error of his ways and vows to make amends.

By burning the wicked magician's effigy he dispels the darkness from his kingdom. By replacing the Skull Crown with the Sun Crown and re-consecrating himself, he pledges to serve truth, beauty and justice forevermore. With this he is visited by the Rainbow Snake who confirms before the assembled kingdoms of heaven and earth that the Arakan King's change of heart is true. A new era of peace begins.

Yet even while this ceremony is in progress, some of the Arakan's former lieutenants discover the cast-off Skull Crown and electing one of their own as King, vow to oppose the reformed Arakan's dispensation with all their might. Then the little bird, a messenger of reconciliation, reunites the Giant King and his wife in a happy scene. In the end, however, there is still violence in the kingdom that begs attention. Transition to peace is never easy.

Naguleshwaran explains that when they start with the stories there is a risk because no one knows where they will lead. There is a great deal of script writing, many run-throughs. It is a challenging, complex process, riding herd on the boisterous proliferation of ideas, but it is also very rewarding. He recalls one child who performed the role of the main hero in an opera. Naguleshwaran noticed that this child always spoke very freely whenever he acted in the Garden, and he obviously enjoyed acting. Naguleshwaran discovered that there were some problems in this child's home, so that no one at home ever wanted to listen to him. The day after this child performed his role as the hero in the opera, he told Naguleshwaran that he was feeling happy and contented.

When the operas are over, people come with many congratulatory comments and that is a rewarding moment. Reuben stated that acting gives him personal happiness and is a form of healing for him. Another comment I heard is that hearing the audience laugh is a reward in itself. Shanthiepan added that it's a lot of work from the beginning until the final performance, and at the end it's like honey.

I asked for thoughts about how Myilvakanam's knowledge of traditional folk drama could be integrated into clown theatre in the Garden. Myilvakanam is a traditional Tamil drama and dance master – an *Annaviar*. He has a vast amount of detailed knowledge about these Tamil traditions and the rituals that are practiced within them. He described a sequence of rituals used in training students in dance, and then he explained to me that the bells sewn into elk hide and worn on dancers' legs during *nadu kuttu* must be purchased carefully. He emphatically stated that it was important to get the bells from a place where the smith immediately submerges the red hot brass bells

in arrack (distilled liquor) when they are formed at the forge, for only this process gives the correct sound to their ring. Naguleshwaran said he has already been thinking about how revolutionary the integration of *nadu kuttu* and clowning could be. Myilvakanam commented that *nadu kuttu* as an ancient Tamil tradition is connected to the temples, so that its most traditional form it can't be mixed with clown theatre. However, he thought the more modern forms of *nadu kuttu* were perfect for the Garden. Already the drumming is used in many ways on a daily basis in the Garden, and a *kuttu* about a crow and a cuckoo has been performed – so its integration has already begun.

Epilogue: The War Within

In the Garden, children and animators who have experienced "being silenced" in the face of brutalizing social catastrophe learn to generate their own history, their own voice. They do not find voice without struggle. When the war within raises its voice, the Garden proposes a return to basic ground – to some form of earthwork. The children and animators learn to trust their own earth, and as stories arise out of the Garden's ground these stories become the sea of color and form, of movement and recovery, that is the Garden. Discovery and uncovery of relationships of struggle is the theme of the Garden's stories.

When struggle is imposed upon the Garden from the outside, the Garden uses forms of councils, dialogues, rituals, listening circles and conflict resolution practices to address these struggles; but the expressive skills developed in the Garden do not deter an ongoing sequence of issues. The Garden, after all, is located in a region that has had to bear and endure the suffering of war for many years.

Drawing on Chong culture's contrarian clowning and street theatre tradition that emerged thirty years ago in Toronto neighborhoods, the Butterfly Peace Garden often pursues a contrarian ethos. The Chong felt urban speed, modernization, and corporate culture as superficial, alienating and destructive to human

imagination and relationships. The Chong resisted these forms of violence, just as the Garden resists the dominant culture in which it is set and perceives the surrounding culture that has developed in the course of two decades of ethnic conflict as a culture permeated with forms of violence. As good contrarians, they do everything the opposite way: by creating stories instead of censorship and silencing, by making peace instead of war and using artistic expressiveness and words instead of weapons; by producing laughter instead of fear, and by remaking rather than destroying children's relationships with the world.

Stories emerge from Mud Mountain, from children's imagination, and relationships that were severed are restored through the telling of the children's spiraling stories. The forms Garden stories take – opera, clowning, a parade, living theatre — are shared with adults and communities outside the Garden in third spiral animation. The collective, ritual painting, "Blessing Way of the Painted Dove," is based on individual children's memories and their healing process of creating it collectively. The children's stories are full of experiences of growing up in a militarized, criminalized lifeworld of hard survival strategies, as their specific originality attests. In countries that suppress populations into silence and submissiveness, stories tell history, and story-telling becomes empowering. The children perform the roles of powerful characters in their performances, and are empowered. The children are also empowered by hearing the laughter of the audience. Humor overflows in the Garden's Story Ocean because its living mythography resists the dominant culture. The Garden, above all, does not attempt to resolve conflict with violence, but instead resolves conflict by listening, by sharing words and thoughts, and by encouraging creativity that flows in all directions.

The Garden's successes are astonishing when I consider the history of violence between Muslim and Tamil groups in the eastern region. For the Garden today, continuing episodes of violence necessitate negotiations and interruptions in bringing Muslim and Tamil children into the Garden for programs. As I write, the unpredictability of scheduling due to these violent events and hartals

(general strikes) remains an issue requiring attention. It is significant that the animators speak positively about their observations of continuing Muslim-Tamil relationships among children from the two communities when the children have become friends in the Garden's programs.

Continued strengthening of the animators' confidence is an important issue for the following reasons. Poverty permeates the eastern region. Along with the high unemployment rate, financial insecurity is a pressing part of the struggle of day-to-day life in Batticaloa. Some of the animators have recently married and are adjusting to the responsibility of family finances. As mentioned earlier, all of the animators have been subjected to experiences of violence are healing from psychological wounds and insecurities.

When the animators work with children who are daily violated by the insecurities of the war zone, the animators may re-enter their own trauma and feel pessimistic. Though it was not the case when I was most recently in the Garden, tensions may exist between the animators. Tensions are exaggerated when there are disruptions and emergencies that must be attended to during the Garden's dynamic programming. For example, the Garden bus transmission has broken down and the bus will be out of service for a week – new buses must be rented for the duration to transport children from the villages to the Garden. The first children's peace parade planned in Batticaloa town is cancelled due to the outbreak of violence at the Tamil-Muslim boundary of Valaichenai — alternative arrangements must be made to reschedule the event without losing its participants' enthusiasm. An animator's father dies – proper mourning rites must be observed.

During the months that I was engaged in the Garden with the animators, I observed a deeper sense of solidarity between the animators who have steadier ground compared with the period when I led a workshop on the anthropology of peacebuilding two years earlier. I questioned the animators about the shared understanding and solidarity I perceived among them, and entered into several discussions about earlier periods when schisms existed between animators. The general sense of insecurity, for all the reasons I have just listed, predisposes the animators to divisiveness and the formation

of splits in the collective group. When I considered the sequence of events they participated in just prior to my visit this year, and the way in which they described their engagement in them, I came to the conclusion that these were confidence-building activities, and the solidarity I sensed was generated by their shared experiences. The activities that strengthened and supported group cohesiveness included their participation in the Barefoot Art Gallery Exhibition in Colombo; the collective retreat in January to Borogas in the hill country; the two-week Batticaloa Art Exhibition (family and friends viewed the animators' artwork); the Parade; and preparation for the animators' accreditation process. To illustrate a sense of the shared experience of the retreat, here are some excerpts from Paul Hogan's diary during the trip to Borogas:

> ...The animators are dying to get out of Batticaloa. Many would like a breath of fresh mountain air. Some feel stifled. Others trapped. Everyone feels the significance of the event: this is the first long distance journey of the Butterfly Bus. It represents a symbolic break from the recent past with its painful memories. The bus turned inland from the coast at Potuvil and headed steadily uphill through Mahyengana to 18 Bends and Badulla beyond. The animators lighten up with each passing milestone. Their songs brighten along with their faces. Komalis kibbitz in the aisles, stealing people's seats and singing to them flirtatiously, like swaggering, mustachioed movie heroes.
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> ...I sense this has all the makings of a fiasco and thus we will be assured of success....some animators are silent and gaze out of the windows. What must they be thinking? The land they see speeding by outside the Butterfly Bus window is alien, yet it is their country.
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> ...The whole retreat comes down to creating, then de-creating, then resting together in silent reflection. In equilibrium. In the place between. This gap is "home," as in a children's game of tag. All the games

we played are tagged to breath: expansion – contraction –rest. Breath is the goal; it is home-free. Even if they are glad to be along for the ride, some of the animators are skeptical. They suspect their very own breath of being some kind of traitor. They think breathing...just breathing...is the same thing as doing nothing. I agree. We will be doing a lot of nothing. Then we will rest.

> ...The animators are catching their breath after a twenty-year run of terror through a gauntlet of horrors in their homeland. This retreat attempts to locate a new home within. We are all refugees. With body wisdom, yoga and qigong exercises the animators stretch their bodies and breathe relaxation into weariness, resistance, numbness, pain. They stretch their imaginations by painting dreams with breath. They open their hearts with laughter in theatre games. One by one, looking into a full length mirror, they make gestures to the person reflected there who makes the same gestures back, reversed. After talking to their mirror image, they sit down, closing their eyes, letting the inner image of themselves fade away into the emptiness. Perhaps there are stars in that emptiness, some far-away star of the sea to wish upon, but otherwise the emptiness is empty. Standing up they turn to the person next to them and, with a human partner then acting as a mirror, they make signs and gestures, which are returned without hesitation, but again reversed. It is a subtle exercise which displaces them with their partner...Who are you? I am a young Muslim man. You are an older Tamil woman. When I make a movement you repeat it, in intimate detail. We do not speak but we are communicating at a deeper level without words. This is not permitted. Why? ...Who are you? I am a Jesuit priest, an elder of the community. You are a young Tamil man, a Hindu once a student in the college where I was rector. Everything I do, you do. You are no other

than myself yet I am not yet you. It must be understood in this way to merge with suchness. This is not allowed. Why? In whatever form these exercises come, there is always the flow of breath from inside to outside and between the two there is a gap. That gap is what we will focus on throughout the retreat.

...The animators love our painting sessions. Myilvakanam plays rhythms on his mirdangam while animators, stretched out on mats around the garden daubing away at their paintings, spontaneously embroider Myil's variations with ribald verse...

Awareness around inner and outer struggle must continuously be acknowledged and incorporated into the animators' discussions, practices, and relationships. Domestic, political, economic, and work pressures on them are constant, as these pressures are inevitably increased in a transitional society moving with much uncertainty from war to peace. The awareness of the difficulties the animators face, and communication around these issues, must be given proper time and space. The sustainability of the Garden program depends upon the strengthening personal and collective experiences like the Borogas retreat. The retreat created an opening for new insight and the cultivation of deeper ground. As a collectivity and as individuals they were able to balance themselves and create a unifying story. The silencing experienced throughout years of political oppression and warfare seems to meld with a cultural preference for burying conflicted emotional states so that no one wants to talk about inner feelings and what is really happening to them or to their community. As Paul Hogan put it, "The war outside never allows the war inside to fully express itself. Now there is a ceasefire in Sri Lanka but the war inside continues to rage every more violently out of control. Sadness, confusion and despair are everywhere apparent."

Reflecting upon the challenges of the animator's role, and the support the animator needs, retreats such as the one at Borogas offer nourishing time away from challenging demands, insecurities, and struggles of the setting in Batticaloa. Retreats that incorporate healing

ritual such as walking meditation, body wisdom, listening circles, mystery painting and "cloud riding" conversations offer the animators practice in finding balance within themselves and with one another. I observed growth in the confidence of the animators. They express a new attitude that says, whatever is next, it will work out. This new ground of confidence must be nourished so that it continues to grow. The animator's personal experience of trust and confidence is important because it is her role to facilitate building trust and confidence with and between the children. Retreats designed to expand personal awareness create time and space for each animator's struggle with her or his inner war zone and its healing process — leading to greater trust in one's own earth, and the shared ground of the Garden.

What happens in the Garden is fluid and unpredictable. The animators are trained to follow the lead of the children's imagination and where the imagination of the children will lead is unlimited in possibility — swimming with surprises. By recognizing the children's stories as the basic ground, the Garden's long-term, process- oriented approach to healing lets go of rigidity and allows the commingling of Muslim and Tamil children. The Garden's approach is to move with the children's imagination, sometimes with gentleness and tenderness and sometimes vigorously, unobstructed by prefabricated programs formulated by adult planners removed from an immediate presence with the children's expressiveness and inner selves. The approach of creating a place in the children's lifeworld for flowing imagination and play supports freshness, openness, and humor that is disarming – that undoes broken trust. The intention of controlling military strategies of terror employed in Batticaloa District throughout recent decades was to destroy human relationship and produce a submissive population, to fragment society, to establish divisiveness, to inculcate fear and mistrust. It is precisely this broken trust and fragmentation that is respectfully embraced by the playful awareness inside the Garden gate. In the sanctuary of the Garden, children's imagination is the trusted ground. The recovery of wholeness in this sanctuary for the children's limitless ocean of stories comes from one source in the end: the ever-unfolding universe, conscious, alive

and evolving in all periods of time and in all beings. The Butterfly Peace Garden — *vanathithipoochchi samathana pongka* – is a sanctuary for the dream of the children. If you stand at the gate outside its walls in Batticaloa, you can hear the laughter of children inside. It is a place where their ocean of stories arises out of the earth. Healing the dream of the children is healing the dream of the earth.

The Ocean of Stories:
Children's Imagination, Creativity, and Reconciliation in Eastern Sri Lanka

Patricia Lawrence's ethnographic scholarship had contributed to studies of everday life in war zones, social suffering, militarism, memory, and to the field of peace studies. Her research has focused on how people creatively draw from cultural and religious resources to survive, heal war's injury, and to redeem life. Her writing also documents devastating violence and social catastrophe in Batticaloa from the beginning of the 1990s. She received a Ph. D. in cultural anthropology at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1997. She is currently a Rockefeller Visiting Scholar at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and teaches at the University of Colorado. She is the co-author of "In the Long Shadows of the Raj: Women's Encounters with Religion in an Era of Peace Studies", and has authored a number of scholarly articles. She served as anthropological consultant for two documentary films about everyday people caught in the 1990's violence in Batticaloa.

An Ethnographic Reflection on The Butterfly Peace Garden of Batticaloa