



REMEMBER REPAIR REUNITE

Rotary International's Four Way Test

Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Helena Meyer-Knapp
meyerknh@evergreen.edu

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INTRODUCTION — THE MANY SIDES OF REMEMBERING

This week, two sides of my world, dare I say my identity, have finally discovered that each one represents a facet of Remembering. When I set down what they are, reader reactions are likely to be somewhere in the vicinity of “duh.” I managed to keep them separate because in our industrialized worlds we live divided lives — work on one side, family on the other. Nearly 50 years ago I wrote an essay, one that was seminal for me, about how that particular division contributed significantly to marginalizing women’s work and skills. So I find myself mildly chagrined at having lost sight that the very same distinction was shaping my own life. Onward. I find what follows really interesting.

Remembering at work: Since 2001, the first year of my professional life in Japan, I have devoted a vast amount of effort to exploring the shapes and civic results of national historical narratives, particularly those displayed at memorial sites and history museums. From Hiroshima to Arlington National Cemetery, from Korea’s DMZ to the Edo-Tokyo Museum, from Nanjing to Pearl Harbor, I have been watching groups of children explore their history in 3D. I have surveyed hundreds of college students in Japan, the USA and South Korea about how they remember what the sites said. There’s much too much even to summarize, in a document the length of this pamphlet, but there’s a website for those who want to know more. And there’s a single statement which explains what I saw.

Societies establish history museums and memorials in part to transform history into *Heritage*, with a capital *H*, to ensure that history becomes the *Legacy* (note the capital *L*) for which the next generation feels responsible. More in **None of us is Alone**.

Remembering at home: When we moved into our house in Olympia, without noticing what was happening, I turned one of our three walk-in-attics into a genuine family archive. There’d be a large manilla envelop downstairs called “memorabilia” filled all year long with theater programs, children’s art, guide books to the national parks we visited, and random letters from dear friends. Recent years saw an increasing number of memorial booklets from funerals and other transformative events, for example treasured souvenirs from our Washington DC trip to celebrate Obama’s inauguration. With each passing year, a new, battered envelope with a date went upstairs into the attic, into the archive.

As we began to move out of Olympia, we re-explored these envelopes lovingly, enjoying the memories and talking about our friends and our lives. We also segmented out the parts that related most directly to our children and gave each one an envelope of their own, while keeping a carefully selected collection of the documents for ourselves. What did the kids do with theirs? Who knows. More in **Women’s Work**.

One final fact of my particular life. It is now clear that I too have inherited my mother’s “collector” gene. She had historic rings and Doulton pottery. My sisters have their collections, books, pots, brooches, egg-shaped stones, among others. I have an archive. One more side of remembering: Parents will shape who one becomes. My mother’s attributes are now mine, part of my *Legacy*.

WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: JAPAN'S PACIFIC WAR, KOREA'S CIVIL WAR. CHINA'S 100 YEARS. TAIWAN'S FUTURE

In the last few years, with gradually increasing intensity, the United States has been discovering that different groups of people have treasured, told and retold contradictory stories about key events in our 400 years. The differences place us in the midst of profound conflict about what kind of future will best represent ideals embedded in our national identity.

More on that next. First more about my professional work exploring remembering and *Heritage*. This work centered on Japan and South Korea. I was intrigued that the two tell such divergent stories about their shared history, redolent with hostility to this day. South Korea also has a national story which diverges from that in the USA with respect to the war between the two Koreas and its ongoing iterations. My work website blogs.evergreen.edu/meyerknh explores a myriad of issues arising in *Heritage* and memory. Here a couple of my encounters with museum displays that knowingly reinvigorate anti-Japanese and anti-US attitudes among young people in Korea and in China.

Japan's Pacific War

Seodaemun, a museum in Seoul was, between 1910 and 1945, a prison used to torture and punish Koreans pressing for independence from Japan's colonization. Nowadays, every year, schools deliver hundreds and hundreds of elementary age children to Soedaemun each day in field trip season, to learn about Japan, the brutal colonizer. It's a fearsome place, with grotesque mannequins, though they have now cut out the terrifying sound effects of prisoners screaming while being tortured, that played in basement dungeons 10 years ago. Seodaemun is nothing however, to Nanjing, where China has erected a vast museum, this one visited thousands and thousands of children every year. Every room, every display, every description centers on Japanese brutality. Beginning with the contested (among academics) number of casualties, 300,000 emblazoned on the wall outside. Although there is no question that in daily life, most South Korean young people identify more with the freedoms of "the West" than with China, in both China and South Korea children are still being literally bombarded with narratives of Japan as brutal, carrying into the present and perhaps the future, *Legacies* of events that few alive now actually remember.

Korea's Civil War

Though a forceful group of anti-communists still yearns to bring down North Korea, South Korea's official museums focus their narratives about the North on future "reunification" rather than on past combat or on current suffering in the North. In relation to the onset of the civil war in 1950, South Korean museums relegate all Koreans to puppet status, the North under the Russians and themselves under the Americans. Hostilities between communist and capitalist Korean politicians, that dated back to the early 20th century, are invisible in museum explanations of the onset of the Korean

War. A diorama illustrating the US landing at Incheon, a critical turning point for victory, displays no US flags on any of the ships. The US as rescuer is not consistent with the US as instigator of the war.



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Instead the UN is put forward as the savior, with full size mannequins of soldiers from supporting nations, while anxiety that US might be a high-risk ally is rife in the general population to this day.

China's 100 Years

Recent events in international politics bring China's self description into sharp relief. If we in the US are facing a tangled future in part because we hold dear severely contradictory narratives of our historical Legacies, the Chinese Communist Party, in honor of its 100th anniversary, has labored, with forethought and skill, and brought forth a single unified narrative.

It reached its climax on July 1, in Tiananmen Square, facing directly towards the Forbidden City, the shrine that still honors China's Imperial and pre-Communist past. Xi on a vast screen, alone in his Mao suit. 70,000 watching delighted and awed.



American media, ever future oriented and attentive to bellicose language, focused on the cheers that greeted Xi's pronouncement that China will no longer allow itself to be bullied by outsiders. The crowd roared, but they were likely just

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as aware of history as of the future. Decades of “patriotic education” in schools, at memorials and museums have done their work. “The West” (in which they include Japan) is blamed for China’s suffering under the Qing in the 19th century. The Communist party having invested 100 years returning China to its former glories, nothing will ever again deflect China from its historical status and future destiny as the most powerful nation ever.

At a Jubilee moment one would not expect much chest beating or regret, but I remain disturbed that Xi’s speech completely passed over the two mega catastrophes of the last 100 years: Famine in the “Great Leap Forward” (1958-62), quite likely the greatest famine in human history. Perhaps 30 million died. And the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). That too resulted in untold deaths, perhaps in the millions, and led to the destruction, for half a generation, of China’s rightly vaunted educational and professional traditions. The “one child policy” was also omitted. The policy endures to this day in the sense that the government still believes it has the right to set expectations about how many children should come into the world. In their own quiet way young Chinese women can and do thwart today’s official policy. They don’t want more births and the government cannot compel pregnancies. Their mothers, heartbreakingly, had routinely been compelled to abort a second child.

There can be few nations that have transformed as profoundly in 100 years, some of this undeniably due to the world around China also changing radically, just as it did a century ago. My nearly 90 year old British grandmother, born well before 1900, claimed that few humans would ever see as much deep transformation as she – from a world without the combustion engine to moon landings, from regular infant mortality to commonplace ninety year life spans, from universities without women to all of her grand-daughters earning degrees. I incline to agree with her, but must say that China, capitalizing on global conditions in this millennium and totally focused, “with one heart and mind,” has, since 2000, achieved astonishing results.

And yet, and this is traumatizing to millions of its people, China cannot tolerate the promulgation of more than one kind of memory. If Uyghurs are too tied to their Moslem *Heritage*, they will be rounded up, put in concentration camps and forced to shed that *Heritage* in favor of conversion to an identity as Chinese. All the better if they can also be used as forced laborers in cotton production to make T-shirts for Gap and UniQlo. Apple Daily Newspaper in Hong Kong closed on June 24, 2021, with over a million eager young people grabbing copies of its last edition, because the paper was deemed to have challenged official government claims about the National Security Law. Its publisher was already in jail. The Chinese government began restricting Hong Kong residents’ freedom to leave, once Boris Johnson began offering a new, and unfettered right to immigrate into the UK to the 3 million who hold Overseas British Nationality. That status, a remnant double identity and *Heritage* left behind after Britain’s years as Hong Kong’s colonizer. In South Korea colonization remains catastrophic. In Hong Kong for some it feels like a path to freedom.

Taiwan’s Future

Taiwan has perhaps the most complex relation of all to its *Legacies* from other powers in NE Asia. Its National Palace Museum in Taipei is both a vivid embodiment of the island’s particular

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entanglements with the China that occupies the mainland, and a cautionary tale about the power embodied in material objects, items one might be tempted to describe simply as traditional arts. In reality they can sharply curtail political options and increase the risk of violence, even war.

Taiwan island has an ancient indigenous population, was colonized by the Dutch, then colonized by the Qing, then ceded to Japan in 1895, then liberated after the Japanese defeat in 1945 and placed under Chinese government control once again. However, the Chinese government in control then were the Nationalists, who were defeated on the mainland by Mao's Communists in 1949. That meant Taiwan was all that was left of Chinese Nationalist political power. With Cold War anti-communism prevailing in "the West," the Nationalist government continued to be recognized as the signer of the founding Charter of the UN, and Taiwan island as the "true" China in the UN until the 1970s

In Taiwan's National Palace Museum they have items that make up 22% of the original holdings in China's Imperial collection. During wartime in the 1930s, to protect the entire collection from the Japanese, a complex series of packings, repackings, transfers, warehousings and military defeats left the Imperial Collection divided in two. In recent years its guardians, the museum directors in Beijing's Forbidden City and Taipei seem to be trying to manage their shared *H*eritage equably.

Also in recent years, museums world wide have begun considering "repatriating" objects they no longer believe themselves entitled to hold or display.

Suppose the Taiwanese began to consider repatriation as an option for National Palace treasures.

I have little doubt that the mainland would consider this an act of extreme provocation, a strike for independence far more threatening than mere democratic elections.

Given the pride I saw in Taiwan over the presence of these particular objects, I also have little doubt that the Taiwanese population would land somewhere between grief-stricken and outraged if forced to contemplate these objects' return to the mainland.

If objects from China's past hold such a sway in Taiwan's identity today, in what sense is the island truly an independent nation? It troubles me deeply even to raise that question.

Taiwanese people have a freedom to explore varied *H*eritages at the moment that cannot be imagined in China today. In Hong Kong five years ago I saw history museums that were using that freedom, taking their stories back further and sideways from the history of the mainland dynasties. They celebrated Hong Kong's indigenous traditions. They even examined British colonization with a generous mind. I am so very glad I took photos of those exhibits. I am pretty sure that soon they will be gone, replaced by China's unified and coercive story. Hong Kong's love of the grandeur of its nineteenth century place in the creation of a global economy will be erased, replaced by the mainland's narrative covering that same time period. It was a "Century of Humiliation."

DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS: HISTORY & HERITAGE — STATUES

Unified history stories like China's are quite rare, and also quite possibly not very durable. The vast bronzes of Stalin and Lenin that peopled the entire Soviet bloc came toppling down in the early 1990s on the collapse of the Soviet Union. University students from Cape Town to Oxford are mid-way along in their quest to bring down statues of Cecil Rhodes, a huge donor to higher education, and Jan Smuts, a South African hero in the Boer war. Both men embody reprehensible ideas about race in Africa. University institutionalists, while not denying the corrosive policies the two men represent, argue that both places have well over 100 years of history intertwined with Rhodes and Smuts, and so evince a reluctance to erase the Smuts/Rhodes presence.

Regardless, divisiveness seems to be hard to avoid, making impermanence the likely fate of almost any *Legacy* statue. The veneration of existing statues in public places, so tangible, so very heavy, so carefully placed makes their desecration a pretty good avenue to examine the conflicts hiding in the midst of official commitments to remember.

Just as interesting: Adding statues, parks and schools that make past events really prominent can strip away their disturbing elements, thus disguising the horrors. Active narrative building reframes history as effectively as China's erasure of past trauma. Both methods invent an unsullied past.

Adding acts of remembrance is, of course, what happened in those US States that made up the Confederacy. We have a Confederate statue problem these days not because the seceding states put up hundreds of bronzes between 1861 and 1865, but because Southerners were able to reconstruct their acts of treason by crafting a heroic narrative much later: that they had fought to preserve their *Heritage*, their defeat they named the "Lost Cause." Within a decade of victory by the Union, the Federal government abandoned its attempts to construct new and reconfigured political and economic relationships from Virginia to Texas. Within 50 years, much of the USA had sprouted statues of Robert E Lee and Jefferson Davis, while the descendants of Confederate Veterans proudly displayed their *Heritage* in "Veterans' Cemeteries." Made invisible, seemingly for ever, was the notion that these acts of remembrance glorified traitors, men who shouldered their guns and went to war against their homeland.

The apotheosis of this revised memory? In 1909, the state of Virginia was allowed to install, in the Statuary Hall in Congress, a statue of General Robert E. Lee to stand right next to George Washington. The Southern narrative was now set in marble. Their fighters were national heroes too.

So here in the USA our *Heritage* story has been tainted for well over a hundred years by fraudulent additions to our narrative, whose consequences seem to me to be at least as egregious as Xi Jinping's omissions from China's story.

African American voices kept a different story line alive. Baldwin never agreed that slavery could be benign. Douglass spoke loud and clear about the horrors of our institutions. Thanks to Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Spike Lee and many others, a more honest and honorable version of the national narrative even found some space in the main stream. Statues have recently been coming down. I am in a growing community opting to use the word "traitor" to characterize the Confederate troops.

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Regardless, we should not allow ourselves to be deluded into underestimating the remaining sense of purpose among those who want only to remember the Lost Cause and to ignore the treason. Trump in 2020 tried to refuse the US military the right to rename bases still named for Confederate soldiers. The Congressional statue of Robert E Lee has been removed, but not until last year. There are hundreds and hundreds of public facilities — statues, streets, schools, bridges and parks — named for traitors to the Union. In Monticello, while the mansion is now committed to honoring the slaves along with Jefferson, the Cemetery owned by an association of white descendants of the second President, still refuses to allow his descendants via his relationship with the slave Sally Hemmings to be buried on the site.

Faced with this many faulty “editions” of our memory, we in the USA still have a great deal of revision to do, none of which will be easy. One need only listen to the Republicans now trying to repudiate the complexity of US *H*eritage by covering it with academic verbiage (Critical Race Theory) and then banning the teaching of that complexity in schools across the South. These moves echo attempts by the 2010 Texas State School Board to require that officially approved History textbooks downplay slavery and emphasize “sectionalism and states rights” to explain the Civil War. Five years later, when the books finally appeared, it was clear that writers and publishers had refused to comply with such blatant revisionism. We can hope that the same results will happen today, but nothing suggests that in the age of Trump we can be sanguine.

Meanwhile — There are hundreds and hundreds of streets, schools, parks and bridges, ripe for action, each one invisibly passing Confederate myths through to the next generation. Somewhere near you or near members of your family, there is a chance to reinstate truth and bring down the Lost Cause myth.

Action continues to be urgent if we Americans are truly to reUnite in our lifetimes.

CODA

Americans are not the only ones who have worked out that new icons can have the effect of changing memory and thus *L*egacies. Two closing images. (1) Japan’s origami cranes: the children make them,



hang them and bow to them at memorial sites, thus reminded much more frequently of Japan as atomic bomb victim in World War II than of Japan as the instigator of its own woes. (2)

Korea’s “Comfort Women:” statues now being placed around the world to remind us all of Japan as vicious perpetrator. These brand new statues make invisible Korea’s official denial of any support at all for the



women, a denial which lasted until 1991. For nearly 50 years, though home once again, their suffering only deepened, seen as they were not as veterans but as women who had dishonored their own nation.

IN REAL LIFE THERE ARE NO INTERMISSIONS — ANCESTORS AND ARCHIVES

Enough of work. Time to talk about constructing and searching family archives, discerning the Legacies for which Rob and I have responsibilities. There is a “US Legacy” element of this topic as well. Of course. But let’s begin at the beginning, in the Knapp/Meyer-Knapp archive in the attic.

As I write these pamphlets I am often in rather an earnest frame of mind. This segment feels more like fun. Imagine Rob and me sitting outside an attic door, sorting those battered yearly envelopes full of memorabilia. Imagine my brother in law John in his Oxford office, adding names to family trees and applying his determining ways to present them on the page. particularly me, spending hours of shut in, COVID winter evenings watching episode after episode of

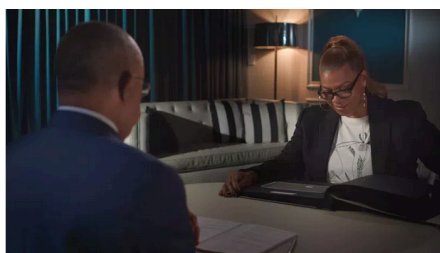
Henry Louis Gates PBS TV “celebrity guests” program **Finding Your Roots**. In their

different ways each of these projects led to the creation of a scrapbook, an incomplete, though intricately detailed, collection of “original” documents that

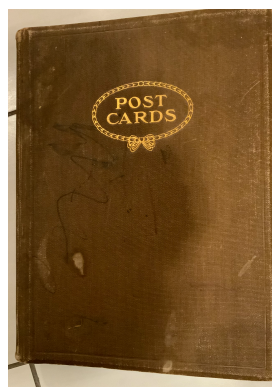
combine to relate the stories of lives intertwining over generations.

The scrap book that Rob and I made is the brown one. We will need to make a guide for it one day, so that other people have a greater chance of making sense of the things we kept. Even its binding needs explanation. The book was once an album, probably dating from the early 1900s, with pages sized and scored to hold postcards. Hard-bound albums these days being so cheap and plastic I opted to have our records stapled onto real paper and bound in cloth. Still, I can’t deny it’s an odd piece of work. Pages with apparently random items attached. No use having all those postcard slots because there’s nothing in there that’s the right size. (Oh there is a huge pile of postcards from the past elsewhere. Once in a while people get them pasted into pamphlets. Not this time.) One page has stapled into it the chore lists we made for kids living at home. Another, notes from the house-sitter about caring for the cat. Several have theater programs and tickets from Emily and Mark’s shows. There are Rhodes reunion agendas and school graduation programs. This very oddball collection ends with our trip to Obama’s first inauguration.

John’s “Family Scrapbook” by contrast is a beautifully designed, hardbound book, with materials from his ancestral families and my sister Jessica’s. As a compiler John worked first from materials on the web about various more well known people, later asking several of us to write sections about others, past and present. John’s scrapbook covers friends as well as family and he himself records that he found the ancestral women particularly interesting, so there’s a good deal about female forebears. There’s also a good deal about the ways people in his family and in ours played a role in resisting Hitler and the racism which cowed and destroyed so many millions of lives in the first half



Queen Latifah Discovers Ancestor's Emancipation...



in his Oxford office, powerful layout skills to Imagine both Knapps,

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of the 20th century. John was trained as an architect so we get several sections about family houses. This summer I hope to browse folders John still maintains on which he based his final edited volume.

Original documents can be intriguing and also disturbing. I've spent a fair amount of time over the last few months looking up and downloading facsimile copies of birth records and the genealogical trees one can uncover on findagrave.com. We've found the houses where family lived over 100 years ago. We've identified paintings passed down from generation to generation and we've even begun to label old photographs so that future generations won't have to wonder who's who. In an earlier pamphlet I wrote about troubling discoveries, that ancestors on Rob's side held slaves in pre-independence Rhode Island, while 100 years later their descendants left industrial wastes which have polluted Lake Onandoga in the Syracuse region.

It is more inspiring that my grandfather was one of the people who resisted the Nazis so consistently. And post Brexit we are grateful that, as my teenage mother went into exile from Germany in 1933, she took with her (I am sure with my grandfather's forethought) original copies not only of her birth certificate but also of her vaccinations and her baptism. To date as many as 20 members of my mother's family have taken up Germany's offer to restore citizenship to the descendants of those who were stripped of it during World War II. Even under the constraints of COVID applications have gone ahead and citizenships are slowly being conferred. In my case, the need is not urgent, but I do it in order to restore to my mother something she should never have lost. One of the documents my own researches have uncovered is the ship's manifest from 1947 showing my aunt Mia landing in New York, so as to settle in the US. It describes her quite bluntly as "stateless."

One of the outcomes of uncovering a family's past is to make unexpected connections. Rob and I have long known we shared an ancestral surname, Sedgwick — my grandmother's birth name, his great great grandmother's. The family is a large one and there is no evidence at all that the two branches have any close overlaps. My ancestry project reminded me that our Sedgwicks played a direct role in colonization in India. Judge Sedgwick in New England ruled in the legal case that finally outlawed slavery in 1781 in Massachusetts.

I first heard about overlaps between Sedgwicks and abolitionism on an episode of **Finding Your Roots**. That show also creates scrapbooks, and each hour-long program has guests slowly turning the pages in their own Book of Life. Episodes expose unexpected links: African Americans like Anna Deveare Smith discover free black ancestors generations back before Independence. Queen Latifah and many others see a likely ancestor on a "slave schedule," a person with no name or personal identifier. Others see their ancestors named in a will, handed on, no different from cattle or other chattels. Yet others discover ancestors who fought on the "wrong" side in the Civil War or the Revolutionary War. Having watched many episodes and even begun a serious content analysis project tallying the patterns, what stands out is that participants weep and grieve but also develop a much deeper bond to these United States than they ever imagined, a bond despite seeing with fresh eyes, the crimes as well as the joys from which we all come.

Remembering, well crafted, can unify across poignant and deep differences.

WOMEN'S WORK — REGENERATION

While it has often seemed easier to trace lineage through the male line, and traditionally in most places it was the male line that conferred identity on a family, one of the transformations wrought by the internet is that female ancestors are now easier to find. Perceptions about the contributions of women to building our *Legacies* and national identities are changing. None too soon I say.

The heading for this segment though comes from an article that has at first sight little to do with *Legacies* and memory. A New York Times journalist took up the story of a specialist biologist whose field is endometriosis, an astonishingly painful disease that affects only women. Uterine tissue escapes the womb and starts damaging the abdominal cavity. Few sufferers ever report getting a swift diagnosis. Linda Griffith's recent research heralds a real break through. A few lines in the piece particularly caught my attention:

“Each month, triggered by a drop in the hormone progesterone, the [uterine] lining sloughs off and grows anew, complete with delicate, spiraling blood vessels. This process repeats itself swiftly, scarlessly, without a trace of injury, again and again, as many as 500 times in a woman's life. How the body can coordinate that is extraordinary.”

How astonishing, equally, that this ability is colloquially known all over English speaking countries as a “curse.” And further, how inappropriate that the system able to perform these astonishing feats is called a “reproductive” system. No. What women do is not “produce” but “regenerate.” We generate new generations one after another, and have done so since time immemorial.

In the **Finding Your Roots** TV series, participants time and again realize that they owe their presence here, now, in these times, to the willingness of their ancestors to take the first steps, to open a line of descent: Ancestors freely crossing the Atlantic or the Pacific without any certainty they could make a life. Ancestors resilient enough to withstand the Middle Passage and then to work the centuries of slavery without succumbing. Ancestors coercively moved from their own ancestral lands, who kept tribal communities alive, passing indigenous rites and knowledge from child to grandchild and so on into our times. Ancestral bodies that conceived and nurtured new life, generation after generation.

To return a woman's body to stability after menstrual bleeding evinces remarkable biological powers! To do so after crafting a new life in the womb and then, through birth, giving it its own powers to grow and survive, is more remarkable still.

In pamphlets in this series, like many thinkers in these times, I have been searching for ways to repair damage done in recent centuries. That still matters. It always will. This time though I find myself wanting to do little more than marvel. There is regenerative potential among us in plenty. My daughter, her sisters in law, my nieces, my cousins, quietly without any particular fuss, have been using their regenerative powers, contributing richly to life on earth.

Their young have ardent energy to face up to the repairs essential to transform our increasingly ferocious climate. They are wise to press hard right now. It will take sharp changes in values and daily life. Without immediate change, life's regenerative power will surely learn that it must rely strongly once more on courage and resilience. These are qualities we have needed this pandemic year. They are also in our *Legacy*, from the generations out in front of us.

TO REUNITE: GATHERINGS

COVID 19 stripped away many “normal” activities. Our employers seem to be focused only on plastic shields for our desks. The parents among us, particularly women, are longing for a return to a full and unimpeded system of school-based education. But what virtually all of us have really been missing is gatherings, gatherings of all kinds, fun, grief stricken, hilarious, musical, public, private ...

Among the restrictions COVID imposed, a vast percentage were targeted at sharply cutting our right to meet in a group. The worst restriction of all: the insurmountable barrier between the ill in hospitals and family members wanting to gather around the bed. Next, for the millions who had a family member die, were constraints on funerals. Weddings postponed and minimized were also sad, but these losses were never going to be final. There will be other times to meet and dance with the happy couple.

Humans across the globe commonly mark transitions from a “living relationship” to memory and Legacy in groups. Among the most moving episodes of the TV series **West Wing** has Toby finagling an Arlington National Cemetery funeral for a homeless military veteran. The prospect that this man’s Legacy of service would go unremembered, in a burial in some pauper’s lot was simply wrong. Funerals can even be times for sharing laughter as well as loss. One of my favorite lines in my nephew Patrick’s eulogy for my mother is right there in this painting: “She wore rings like knuckle dusters.”



When I think about gatherings that might promote a sense of unity through the public Legacies we share, funerals, cemeteries and military anniversaries rank high on the list. The fact that the USA has National veterans cemeteries and that the Confederate states have their own veteran’s cemeteries honoring Civil War dead is a sure sign that we lack a unified memory today. Confederate cemeteries are not government controlled but, as Clint Smith in his book “**How the Word is Passed**,” shows, Confederate commemorative rituals continue to this day. Smithsonian magazine¹ reports that in the 10 years leading up to 2018, \$40 million of taxpayer money was spent on the maintenance and expansion of Confederate memorial sites. Some reversals are now underway. In 2021, the State of Virginia finally cut its \$83,000 annual subsidy for the management of a Confederate cemetery. This COVID time has also shown us with remarkable clarity the profound value of public memorial gatherings. Remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s ceremony in the Supreme Court and John Lewis lying in State in the Capitol? Future official memorial events are likely to touch the public soul just as deeply, though some may harden our Civil War divisions, rather than point to a better way forward.

Gatherings in 2021 to settle the 2020 election were massively discouraging about prospects for unity. The Houses of Congress meeting to transfer power from one President to the next proved catastrophic. Riots on January 6, to prevent the ritual declaration that the election was “certified” were followed on January 20th by rituals in a fortified Capitol building in which the transfer of power was completed and Joseph Robinett Biden began his term as President of the United States. There’s

¹ The vitriolic comments about this article make me more cautious about guessing where the path to unity might lie.

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an irony here. Trump's first disappointment as President was to have it repeatedly remarked that the crowds attending his ceremony were far smaller than those for Obama. A combination of COVID and January 6 meant that the option of crowds for Biden had all but vanished.² Regardless, for those who were pleased, the transfer went forward without a hitch and for those who still cry "steal" there are mystical hopes that for some reason Trump will be "reinstated" next month.

Beyond funerals and big public rituals, our COVID year has shown us to be deeply different one from another about more mundane gatherings. Whether one is a biker traveling to the Black Hills Rally or a college teen on spring break in Daytona Beach, or a swimmer like me who ventures into the local outdoor pool on the first possible day, or the nanny who takes our grandchildren shopping at Target, since March 2020 each of us has repeatedly faced choices about whether and how to put ourselves in the presence of other people. And indeed many of us, at all points on the political spectra have been making mental judgements about other's behavior. Just this morning I noticed bemused (and I must admit critical) that my elderly companion in the pool was swimming outdoors, at a considerable social distance and yet judged he should be wearing a full N95 mask. These are strange times, forcing us all to recalibrate the choices we make about whether and how to come together.

Building shared memories rests on rituals and occasions at which, together, we pass knowledge, values and ideas from one person to the next, from one generation to the next. I've already written about the school field trips in Korea and China that immerse kids in historical events, transforming what academics might call history into a Legacy obligating future generations to honor and respect the achievements and losses their ancestors experienced. Visitors to the Plymouth Plantation have been asked the same for decades, and in addition, for some time now the place has also offered opportunities to consider the experiences that confronted Native Americans in the settlements made by these new arrivals. In Montgomery Alabama, the lynching memorial recently opened asks this of Americans – that we should honor and not forget those whose lives were taken in that brutal way. One reason we should all care that schools reopen once again is that teaching kids in groups is critical to building the unity of purpose on which every modern nation depends. It happens as they teach history and they also as they cheer the football team, build relations with their surrounding community and pass their graduates on into the wider world.

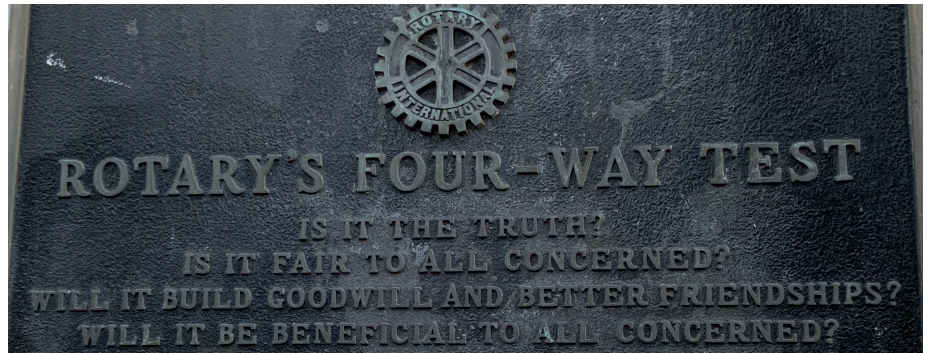
When I changed home towns recently, I knew I set off with an interest in becoming part of a group in the new place, if only on an informal basis. How else was I going to be able to learn about where I live and meet companions for my projects? The urge relates back over 40 years, I am pretty sure, to the founding of a group in Olympia that committed itself to a 6 month, weekly study course, the curriculum and group process designed by the Quakers in the Movement for a New Society. We understood back then, as many progressives do now with respect to racial justice issues, that we simply didn't know nearly enough about the nature of the problems of the 1970s (and there were many problems) nor about their possible remedies or repairs. Action was the intended endpoint of that study group and it did its work slowly but well. By 1980 we knew our issue (nuclear weapons) and we knew what we wanted to do – to join in the campaign to pass local referenda in favor of a Nuclear Weapons Freeze.

² Mind you, only 70,000 carefully screened people were allowed into China's 100th resulting in a largely empty Tienanmen Square.

TO REUNITE: GATHERINGS

I cannot speak highly enough of our decision back then to turn ourselves, as a group, into students once again. In this era of rampant internet access few suffer a lack of access to materials the way we experienced it back then. There are reading lists and action-focused non-profits everywhere, all clamoring to have us join their agenda. But what we had then and what I was hoping for when I moved here was something rather different: a place to learn and grow in company with others.

Out of my memory and from my computer filing system came the word “Rotary.” I’d spoken at Rotary lunches more than once in Olympia, always coming away with a clear, enduring memory: That their “Four Way Test” is the most succinct statement I have ever have seen showing what it takes to be peaceful in this world. (it’s on the front cover of this pamphlet). In our zoom ridden life I was able to track down what I needed – videos of the talks at the Berkeley Rotary, a history of that particular group and enough images to persuade me that, having decided against trying to affiliate at the university, this was an excellent alternative. For me. Not necessarily for anyone else. So I have joined. Paid my dues. And attend pretty faithfully by zoom every Wednesday. (I will admit that last week did not hold my attention.)



I never wanted to join Rotary in Olympia, but the entity as a whole has more than a million members world wide, including several groups I might visit near Lake End. It works bottom up, local interest with global concerns. What does it do about remembering? Not much except that on a week by week basis the people in each local group build agendas together. The hardest part for me? I still cannot bring myself to join their weekly recitation of America’s Pledge of Allegiance. Many reasons. Too many to put down right here. My qualms about my own stance? I see my resistance as emblematic of America’s rather too high a tolerance of individual choice – no-one can be forced to believe anything. Holding back is also a sign of my immigrant status – almost all children in this country learned to say it daily at school and, had I, it would probably trip off my tongue with ease. Lastly, though, I wish I could say it because the ability to do so is one skill shared across all groups in this country, all ages, all races, Confederate or not. Only Jehovah’s witnesses, who cannot swear oaths to secular powers really cannot join in.

Unity is not uniformity.

That feels as though it could be a dictum that helps us come to grips with what ReUnite requires in these rather too disunited States.

If you want to know more — peacemakerpress.com has live links to background materials in general

My website — blogs.evergreen.edu/meyerknh has more about the Japan/Korea work on *Heritage*

For attitudes in 2021 with respect to the Confederacy and Slavery

Clint Smith [How the Word is Passed](#) — 2021, a lively exploration of his travels and his encounters with people at a number US sites that have an intimate relationship with US slavery

AND

Brian Palmer and Seth Freed Wessler in Smithsonian Magazine [The Costs of the Confederacy](#). Dec. 2018.

About China and coercion

Tahir Hamut Izgil in the Atlantic Magazine [One by One, My Friends Were Sent to the Camps](#). The Uyghurs' story July 2021

BIOGRAPHY

Helena Meyer-Knapp is a scholar/activist and an immigrant, for whom August 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of her living and working in the USA. The work centers on peace making, how groups of people persuade themselves to stop fighting. Her life centers around a marvelous family. She earned a BA in History at Oxford in the UK, the country of her birth, and an MA in Communications and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Political Studies in the USA.

She was a member of the faculty (International Relations and Political Studies), 1984 - 2017 and was honored with Emerita status on her retirement from the Evergreen State College. Since 2001 her research has taken her regularly to NE Asia, most often to Japan but also to South Korea.

An activist in public affairs since the 1970s, her interests lie in local and national elections and in international affairs. Her public work in the early 1980s centered on referenda in support of the Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze. In teaching Political Studies she stressed the importance of engagement in public life, encouraging students to gather the materials, the skills and the momentum they personally needed to participate in the community on their own behalf.



Note on the front cover: the terra-cotta warriors serve as a reminder that, like the Chinese Emperor Qin, Xi jining is showing us that he too is entitled to array his people in anonymous, serried ranks, thereby to guarantee the magnification of his own personal glory.