

# Forest Bathing with H.D.

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Environment, Fun Stuff, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) October 15, 2019

*(35th in a series of posts on H.D.)*

*Forest bathing was one of the events in our year-long series of events entitled*

## **Finding H.D.:**

### **A Community Exploration of the Life and Work of Hilda Doolittle**

*Bethlehem-born writer Hilda Doolittle — H. D. — (1886-1961) is the “Lehigh Valley’s most important literary figure.”*

*Sienna Mae Heath is a storywriter of landscapes, architecture, and gardens. A world traveler with a home base in Bethlehem, she knows how a strong sense of place sparks meaning in small moments. Check out her blog [Garden Mindfully](#).*

*In the spirit of World Mental Health Day, blogger [Sienna Mae Heath](#) discusses seasonal depression. Going forest bathing helped her welcome the autumnal equinox with grace. How do you prepare for winter?*

For many of us with seasonal depression, the first cool night signals a warning that it’s time to drop vitamin D infused oil on our morning toast, or else succumb to darkness. The sun sets a little sooner, the window for soaking up sunshine nearly closed. When I awoke on the fourth Sunday of September, I figured, all the more reason to let my blankets release me into the wild of [Little Pond](#) to go “Forest Bathing with H.D.”

Our guide was Anisa George. Her mother Bridget, who along with Bill George founded the arts retreat in 1996, motioned for me to park on the mix of gravel and grass across the way from their quaint refinished farmhouse. I nibbled on the edible garden of spearmint, cinnamon basil, and nasturtiums (which I think of as rogue peppery petunias).

“Welcome back,” the mother-daughter duo chimed in unison. [Little Pond](#) served as a spiritual and creatively charged oasis during my childhood, and here I was, having owned two houses, changed my career, and circling around from quite a few travels abroad – home.

This gathering brought seven women together. As we settled in a circle near the pond, Anisa shared the history of forest bathing – the English translation for the Japanese tradition of immersing oneself in nature. This tradition is only a few decades old. In the 1980s when workers were collapsing at their desks, the government took action. The result is now a global phenomenon, encouraging humanity to reconnect with the landscape.

### **Invitations and sharing circles**

In forest bathing, there are invitations and sharing circles. Each free-flowing activity is an invitation to savor the sights, sounds, textures and scents around you. When given the sharing piece, similar to a talking stick, we could answer this question: What are you noticing?

“It’s okay to pass. It’s okay to share silence,” Anisa said. This added reassurance made me feel so free. Poetry, though not typically a part of forest therapy, sparks a calming freedom within. Anisa presented scrolls of poems by H.D., the Lehigh Valley poet also known as Hilda Doolittle, who was a great lover of the wild. The first piece of parchment pulled from the cup revealed:

*Behold the dead are lost,*

*The grass has lain*

*Trampled*

*And stained*

*And sodden*

*Behold*

*Behold*

*Behold . . .*

*The grass rises*

*With flower-bud;*

*The grain*

*Lifts its bright spear head*

*To the sun again*

*Behold,*

*Behold*

*The dead*

*Are no more dead*

*The grain is gold*

*blade*

*stalk*

*and seed within;*

*the mysteries*

*are in the grass*

*and the rain.*

“What stands out to me is ‘Behold, behold, behold!’” said fellow forest bather Gerry Nugent. “Even if it’s been trampled, behold, it’s still beautiful. We have four seasons in Pennsylvania. Never know what we’re going to get.”

After this first sharing circle came the first invitation. Anisa guided us up a hill to a mowed oval surrounded by trees. Laying like blades of grass, we became curious of what we’re welcoming on an inhale and what we’re giving on an exhale.

Each person inhaled something of their own and exhaled what they need to give to the world. For me, I welcomed the wind to join my breath. I welcomed confidence in the life I’ve built for myself in the past year. I gave gratitude to the family who helped make it possible.

## **Mindful of Motion**

Prior to our next walk, Anisa asked that we be mindful of movement: “What’s in motion? If the only thing you notice is yourself, you might want to slow down.”

Children are constantly in motion. Inspired by H.D.’s “wild fulfillment” (and I by Brene Brown’s to be bold and play), we spread milkweed seeds to the wind. The pods slipped open, revealing what felt like a thousand dandelion seeds with the texture of a down pillow. I was surprised how many could fit in even the smallest spaces. Tapping into my inner child, I coaxed the next generation of monarch butterflies to pollinate this patch next summer.

Inevitably the group would disperse, like the seeds themselves, so Anisa taught us how to call each other without cell phones – we howled! The lesson learned is, first of all, it’s fun to howl like wolves in the wood, and

if I can't hear one wolf, perhaps I can hear another and then know it's time to return to the sharing circle.

The Camera and Photographer invitation brought to mind technology once more, but soon we learned it only needed the human eye and hand. My partner was Kait Smart. Having just met, we embarked on this trust exercise. She closed her eyes, and I walked her to a textured stump. Then we switched roles and ended up blowing more milkweed.

“Look at this, this is what I see,” Gerry described the perspective gained by taking pictures in pairs. “How often do we get to do that in our daily lives? Maybe I will after this.”

Bridget George and Sally Cordova shared their adventure, too. When you keep your eyes closed, you can still see, Bridget noticed. “There's always this flickering. Even when Monet's eyesight left, he could somehow paint the landscape.”

## **Finding Home**

After all, every molecule of the human body is nature. During our Hide and Seek, we went off individually into the deep woods to look for something that's waiting to be found. Another poem by H.D. lingered on my journey:

*shall I lie in the meadows sweet.*

*escaped,*

*escaped from the lot*

*of men,*

*like a faun in the desert,*

*like a wind*

*by the river bank?*

*again,*

*again*

*shall I rest*

*ecstatic in loneliness,*

*apart in the haunted forest*

For our last final sharing circle, Anisa surprised us. From her photo lens bag came a bamboo mat, a teapot, and ceramic cups. She steeped goldenrod, which stems from the Latin “solidago” meaning solid, as it is used to heal wounds and make them whole. Flourishing in September, it is a pioneer plant that thrives wherever it is sown. Its presence nourishes the soil.

Coming home to ourselves and to each other was the budding theme. Bridget was the last to join the circle but hearing her howls in the distance we knew she grew near. “I went so far into the woods not wanting this to end . . . and I found this perfectly broken beech tree.”

Joanna also found a tree, smooth with two limbs for arms. Sitting in the groove of this tree, she reflected. She felt comforted, calm, home. “I value the playful space between sharing invitations and all the wilderness of nature,” she said. “I needed structure today but also space for the unexpected.”

Sally and I brought back mixed nuts. Beautifully, she shared the phases of life in the form of green and brown chestnuts. My experience was similar. I threw acorns to hear them bounce off the bark of grown trees and returned with a few nutshells, some whole, some broken. This invitation was a mixed bag, I confided in the group. Cradling a white wildflower by the roots, I set an intention to transplant it. So, like fauns

in the desert, Joanna led me through gnarled vines, prolific raspberry bushes, and modest granite crystals to her beloved tree. Her temporary home became mine, and then the flower's.

*For future events, visit <https://www.meetup.com/Lehigh-Valley-Forest-Therapy-Meetup-Group/>*

Sienna