

# Connie Barlow & Michael Dowd's Great Story Tour

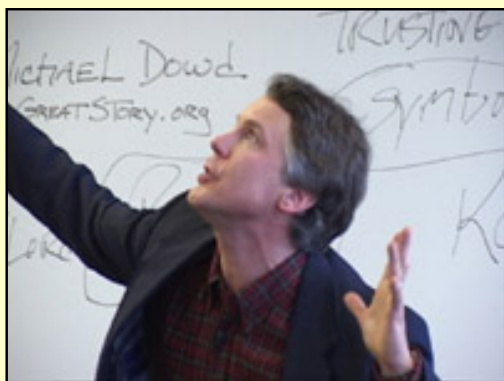
# Turtle Log

ON THE ROAD TO THE ECOZOIC ERA



Number 5

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**Michael Dowd**



**Connie Barlow**

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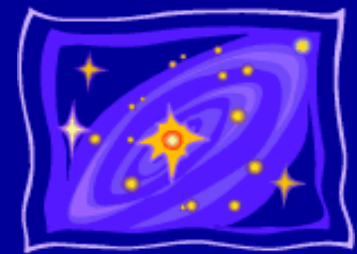
**New on [www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org)**

**[Summary](#) of Our Accomplishments**



## Stardust and The Great Work

**What is it about The Great Story that has awakened so many of us to the wonders of the Universe? What gives us a sense of belonging and participation within this awesome process? For many, it is learning that the Universe is not only "out there" but also "in here" — within each of us. It is learning that we humans are Cosmos/Earth becoming ecstatically aware of its own grandeur and, through us, learning to reflect upon its multi-billion year journey and beginning to consciously participate in its own evolution.**



**Those who delight in The Great Story also rejoice in learning that we are, in truth, stardust — that the very atoms of our bodies were created in the fiery furnaces of stars who lived and died before our Sun and planet were born. It is stunning to know that our personal joys and sorrows and yearnings are also those of Cosmos/Earth, coming to feel those emotions through us.**

**This profound awareness makes many of us eager to discover and pursue our roles in, what **Thomas Berry** calls, the Great Work — ways in which each of us could use our particular skills and passions to contribute to the world in meaningful ways.**



**Linking atoms to the stars that made them.**

**The great work of the two of us traveling together (for Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd as wedded mission partners) has been the opportunity to turn people on to a new and expanded sense of identity and possibility. At Sunday church services and in high school or college classrooms we regularly encounter folks who are there not because they are already Great Story enthusiasts, but because going to church or school is simply what they do, and we happen to be the guest speakers for the day.**

**This means that we often get to be the very source through which many, many people awaken to a new relationship with Cosmos, Earth, Deep Time, Life. We have the privilege of watching faces light up with joy and amazement as their identity expands to encompass the cosmos.**

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## "Sounds Like an Adventure!"

(from L.A. to New Mexico & back)



One day Michael received an email from a teacher at the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school near Gallup, NM. English teacher **Stan Renfro** had encountered two of Connie's magazine articles on evolutionary ecology, and then looked up our website. From our itinerary page, Stan saw that we weren't planning on coming to New Mexico anytime soon. But he noticed that we offer our programs free of charge and that we had a week of unscheduled time while we were in southern California, and with that, he extended an invitation.

Stan asked if we would be willing to drive 10 hours each way (from L.A. to Gallup and back), to teach The Great Story and its meaning in non-religious ways in more than a dozen classes over the course of three or four days, and to do all this in exchange for free room in the school dormitory and meal privileges in the cafeteria.

"Sounds like an adventure!" we agreed. So, of course, the answer was Yes.

It is remarkable how easy life can become when one simply trusts that whatever invitation is offered (and offered first) is the best invitation to receive. No hemming and hawing. A simple "yes" will do.

When the Gallup invitation came through, we knew we had enough cushion still in savings to pay for gas (as we are not quite breaking even yet). And thanks to the offer of room and board, we knew we wouldn't freeze or starve!

The drive to Gallup was not only a marvelous opportunity for us both to relax, but Michael was able to experience the **Grand Canyon** for the first time, and Connie for the second. From the South Rim, we could easily behold "The Great Unconformity" — more than a billion years of erosion, lost time, that separates the Vishnu Schist from overlying sedimentary strata. We visited the park on one of the warmest and clearest winter days on record. It was a major highlight of our traveling ministry to date.

On the return, we swung by Twenty-nine Palms, California — where Michael was born 44 years ago (on the U.S. Marine Corp base) and where he had not visited since. From there, it was just a jog into **Joshua Tree National Park**, where Connie could commune with tall yucca trees who, year after year, grow starchy fruit with the expectation that a Pleistocene camel or Shasta ground sloth might wander by for dessert and thus disperse seeds.

So the journey itself was a delight. What about our work at the school?

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## Navaho Youth and the New Story



**Connie teaching a chemistry class.**

Chemistry class was especially fun, because there Connie could introduce and speak in detail about **a new version of the traditional Periodic Table of Chemical Elements**. In this new version (which she created), the elements are shown in relation to whether they were formed in the primordial gas clouds, by Red Giant Stars, or by Supernova stars. More than a few students lit up in that class, when they began to grasp that they, in truth, were made of stardust, that their ancestors included the stars!

For English, Social Studies, and Music (yes, music!) classes, we simply presented on The Great Story as a whole. Many teachers were very happy to expose their students to new ideas (and potentially to new mentors), whether or not the subject matter would be on topic.

Connie taught most of the courses, including all but two science classes. Michael agreed to take "the science class from hell", which was a highlight of the trip for him. We were advised that almost everyone in this particularly large class of "difficult students" had failed science before and were especially good at giving teachers a hard time. Michael excels in such circumstances. There his preaching skills (as contrasted to Connie's teaching skills) bear fruit, as Michael inevitably finds ways through tone of voice, facial expression, and exuberant body movements to enthrall the kids and meet them eye to eye. But mostly he just loves them, and passionately loves what he's teaching, and they respond to that.

At the boarding school near Gallup, we taught a total of thirteen 75-minute classes over the course of three school days. Student ages ranged from freshman to senior at **Wingate High**, and the kids were all Native American, mostly Navaho.

We figure that of the 750 youth at this school, roughly half experienced at least one of our special programs simply by attending their usual courses. For biology, anatomy, and chemistry classes, it was easy for Connie to draw from the Great Story, the North American Story, or her Ghosts of Evolution book to mesh with the course topic.



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## Creation Stories Old and New



In each and every class at Wingate High School, whether taught by Connie or by Michael, we affirmed the importance of the old stories, the old ways of understanding how things came to be and how humans fit into creation. Connie enjoyed talking about how the universe itself can best be understood as a story (rather than as a place) and how a science-based understanding of the birth of the North American continent (some 60 million years ago, during "The Golden Age of Turtles") meshes well with the **Algonquian creation story** of North America forming on the back of a floating turtle.



### **The Golden Age of Turtles is represented on our Great Story beads.**

In no class did any student acknowledge that they had ever before heard of America referred to as Turtle Island, and none were aware of the Algonquian story. Indeed, surprisingly few students raised a hand when asked whether any knew the Navaho story of creation. And even fewer signaled that the story was meaningful for them.

As teacher **Stan Renfro** explained to us, many of these kids come to the boarding school because this is where their parents got their schooling, and their grandparents. It is a tradition. But in previous generations, the goal was to squelch Indian identity and ensure acculturation — sometimes by very harsh means. One can surmise that the parents most intent on passing on their cultural legacy might not be among those who choose to send their children to the BIA school.

The harsh days are over, of course, and wall art throughout the dormitories promote pride in Indian heritage. Michael did a fabulous job of communicating to these kids what he usually includes in his talks to any group of adults: that the new understanding of the universe as **nested creativity**, brought to us by modern science, is more akin to the indigenous view of the cosmos than it is to the "mechanistic" paradigm in which science has its roots. The mechanistic stance encourages one to regard all creativity as residing outside a clockwork universe. In contrast, an organic or nested creativity view holds that while the universe is not "alive" in the same way that a tree or bacterium is alive, it is nevertheless more accurate to say that the universe is like a living creature than that it is like a machine. The organic way of seeing and relating to Cosmos thus posits creativity residing at all levels of creation — within the process as well as "beyond" it.

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## Michael's "Parallels in Time" Talk

While at the BIA school in Gallup, Michael also gave a short presentation at the weekly teachers meeting. The topic he chose was "Why Native Wisdom is Destined to Transform the World — Soon." This talk showcased the "Parallels in Time" vision of historian **Michael David Schacker**, which he had also presented in November at The **Foundation for Global Community**, in Palo Alto.

"Parallels in Time" works very well for groups in both non-religious and religious settings. In this presentation, Michael draws from Schacker's work (forthcoming in his book *The Organic Shift*) to show that the shift by Western culture toward an "organic" view of the universe seems to be happening in steps that look remarkably similar to the cultural and intellectual shifts that ushered in the mechanistic paradigm 250 years ago.

Thus we can take heart when in the midst of seeming setbacks in societal receptivity to The Great Story and its transformative view of our relationship with cosmos, Earth, and life. Schacker's work is enormously useful in helping us to trust the chaos and timing of cultural creativity. The "Parallels in Time" chart has become an especially favorite part of Michael's presentations. People regularly report that it inspires them to both trust in life's timing and personally participate in the emerging Ecozoic era of Earth's development.



**Michael at a teachers' meeting in New Mexico.**

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## Living the Ecozoic — Now!



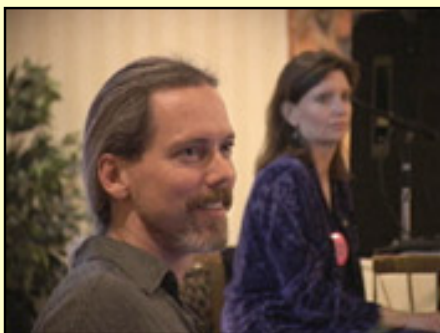
**Layne and Paul Cutright**



**Jack Heckelman**



**Participants at Gateway to Conscious Evolution.**



**Marshall Lefferts and Teresa Collins, co-leaders.**

However one regards the tenor of our times, it is crucial to know that individuals need not wait for society at large to make the shift to a new mindset, a new heart stance. We can each make it our own and begin living right now into, what **Thomas Berry** and **Brian Swimme** call, the Ecozoic Era. All we require is the yearning to do so and a community to support us along the way.

Thanks to web-based list-serves and chat rooms, one need not physically move to the hippest intellectual or spiritual parts of the world in order to begin living into the Ecozoic. One can find community via the internet. These past few months we came upon a remarkable community of internet-linked seekers and doers joined by the "Gateway to Conscious Evolution" website.

<http://www.consciousevolution.net> is nurtured by **Teresa Collins** and **Marshall Lefferts** in Santa Barbara. Teresa and Marshall, in turn, are guided and inspired by well-known futurist **Barbara Marx Hubbard**, whom they work with in Santa Barbara.

We first heard about this program when talking with **Jack Heckelman** and **Jack Phillips** in Minneapolis in October 2002. Both had enrolled in the Gateway to Conscious Evolution program, and were enthusiastic about what it was doing for them. We encountered Jack Heckelman (who happened to be celebrating his 80th birthday) in Santa Barbara in January when he and more than a hundred other Conscious Evolution participants from around the country traveled to Santa Barbara to finally meet one another in the flesh and to take learning, spiritual growth, and contributing to the world even further.

And, lo, we were invited to join in as plenary speakers in this highly participatory gathering. As psychological and spiritual ramifications of awakening to The Great Story are Michael's strengths, Connie took the opportunity to make herself useful at the gathering by videotaping many of the sessions. Then, while spending four post-conference days as guests of **Teresa Collins** and **Marshall Lefferts** at their home, she culled several hundred choice "frames" from the digital videotapes and turned these into stills — which now appear on the **Gateway to Conscious Evolution** website. Alongside are some samples, and the whole series can be viewed at

<http://www.consciousevolution.net/gateway/gathering03/>.

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## Great Story / Great Work Teleclasses

Another way to create community is via telephone bridge lines. In February 2003, Michael launched his first series of Great Story/Great Work teleclasses:



### **1. GROUNDING YOURSELF IN THE FLOW OF EVOLUTION: CREATING A LIFE YOU LOVE AND LOVING THE LIFE YOU LIVE**

Both for those new to the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and those wanting to deepen their knowledge and understanding of The Great Story, this class promises to give participants a solid foundation for living grounded in evolutionary spirituality and the marriage of science and religion for personal and planetary wellbeing. Equal emphasis is placed on learning the epic of evolution as sacred story and embodying its wisdom and insights in our lives.

### **2. YOUR UNIQUE ROLE IN THE EPIC OF EVOLUTION: FINDING AND FULFILLING YOUR OWN GREAT WORK**

This class is for those who want to explore the nature and direction of their "calling" — that is, where their own great joy intersects with the world's great need. Participants will learn how to support others and enroll others to support them in listening to their heart's guidance, staying on track, overcoming obstacles, and fulfilling their role(s) in the Great Work of ensuring a just, healthy, beautiful, and sustainably lifegiving world for future generations of all species.

### **3. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SCIENCE: CHRISTIANITY COMES INTO ITS GLORY**

No religion on Earth could possibly mature into theological or spiritual adulthood until evolution was discovered. Nor could the depth or breadth of any tradition's insights into the nature of reality be fully appreciated prior to the revelation of the cosmos as nested creativity. This teleclass explores how the religion of Jesus and the institution of the Church, as it reinvents itself over the next few decades in light of The Great Story and an emergent universe, will come into their glory as a hugely positive force on behalf of future generations and the body of life as a whole.

#### **4. SHARING THE EPIC OF EVOLUTION WITH OTHERS: BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE AND COMPELLING GREAT STORY TELLER**

There is nothing more exciting and satisfying than being able to communicate the essence of life's sacred story to others in such a way that they really *get* it and can't wait to learn more! This class is for those who want to develop the skills and confidence to effectively share the Great News of the Great Story with others in concise, easily understandable ways.

44 people enrolled in one or more of these three-month teleclasses. Michael is definitely in his element leading these!



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## **Retreat Centers Galore**

While in California, we carried the "great news" of the Great Story to residents mostly by way of environmental, spiritual, or educational organizations and retreat centers. **The Foundation for Global Community** (thanks to **Karen Harwell** and **Debbie Mytels**) sponsored three programs by us in Palo Alto, over the course of a month. This is the organization that put together the "Walk Through Time" exhibit, a traveling installation experienced by many on college campuses and church grounds around the world (and for which Connie has served as guide on several occasions).

The **Heartwood Institute** (thanks to **Brian Tierney**), a massage school in northern California, gave us room and board for five glorious days up in the mountains of Humboldt County, in exchange for three evening programs related to The Great Story.



**Michael using Russian nesting dolls to portray the Universe as "nested creativity" at La Providencia Spiritual Renewal Center east of San Diego.**



**Michael's Great Story beads at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Santa Barbara.**

Single evening or afternoon workshops were our focus at **La Providencia** east of San Diego (thanks to **Sister Pat Hanson**, **Sister Millie Peaslee**, and **Karen Holmgren**), at **Sacred Heart Retreat Center** in Gallup, New Mexico (organized by **Betsy Windisch**), at **Holy Cross Catholic Church** in Santa Barbara (initiated by **Jeanette Love** and **Alice MacDonald**), and at the **Sophia Center** in Oakland (thanks to **Jim Conlon**).

We closed out our southern California tour by giving a three-day workshop at **La Casa de Maria**, a Catholic retreat center in Montecito (just south of Santa Barbara). We thank **Toni Nash** for inviting us, and **Jeannette Love** and **Juliet Twomey** for bringing the program to fruition. Attendance was low, but our energy was high, as this was a group of the already-awakened, who would carry the message outward into their own circles of community. We also were grateful for the opportunity to hike in such beautiful surrounds, and for **Eric Schwartz** guiding us to a natural hot spring.

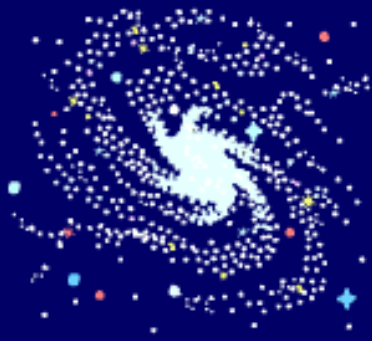
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## **Stardust Rituals for Adults**

**One of the beauties of a longer workshop is that it gives us a chance to draw outside of our main curriculum. And one of the advantages of a small enrollment is the opportunity to conduct ritual in the round. For Saturday evening at our La Casa de Maria workshop, Connie tried out a new ritual that celebrates the theme "We are made of stardust!"**

She had created a stardust ritual two months earlier for a Winter Solstice gathering at the offices of EarthLight magazine. At EarthLight, the education and ritual were combined in a long ritual script that was passed around the participants for group reading. But at La Casa, she had the chance earlier in the day to teach the basic science of elemental creation within stars, so was able to produce a co-creative ritual in which the science understanding could be assumed. Connie concludes that this latter method may be best: teach the science, and then conduct a ritual.

We thank **Neal McBurnett** and **Larry Edwards** for helping Connie learn the new scientific understandings of chemical creations within stars, as much has been discovered since Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry wrote of this in their 1992 *The Universe Story*.



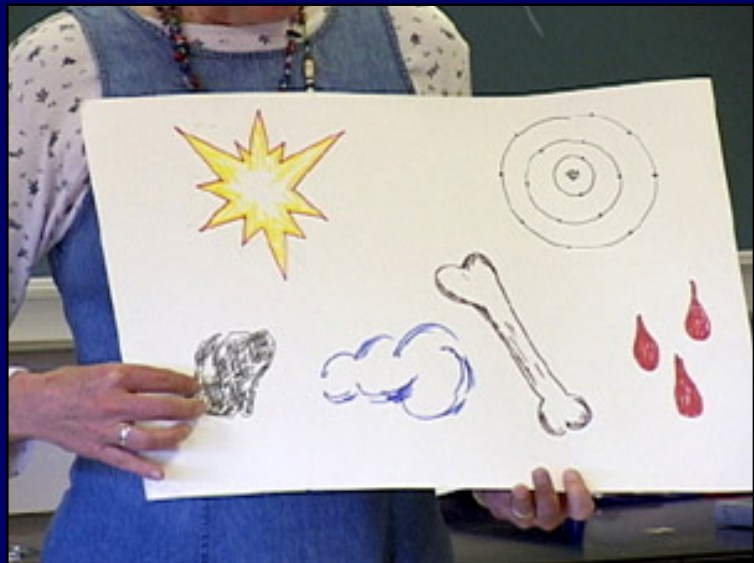
## Guidance for a Stardust Ritual

We began the La Casa ritual evening with each of 8 participants choosing one of the **Classic Quotes** of the Epic of Evolution to read in turn, then telling the story of an object they brought to place on the altar table in the center of our circle. Connie then led participatory sequences honoring the stardust within us:

1. **THE GREAT RADIANCE (Big Bang)** Light central candle; turn off house lights.
2. **EMERGENCE OF HYDROGEN** and the formation of great clouds of hydrogen gas. Commune with hydrogen by anointing ourselves with WATER (H<sub>2</sub>O), recognizing that each hydrogen atom is a true elder: 13.7 billion years old. While doing so, we each spoke of an **ELDER**, a mentor dear to us, whose legacy we carry with us and commit to further.
3. **CREATION OF CARBON, NITROGEN, OXYGEN** in Red Giant Stars (as our own sun will become), and the giving away of those elements crucial for life in the exhalations of such stars. Here we focused on our **BREATH**: the in-breath of oxygen (from plants), and our out-breath of carbon dioxide (given back to plants), and the vast supply of nitrogen that comprises the atmosphere.
4. **CREATION OF SILICON, CALCIUM, ETC.** in hot blue stars. Here we reflected on how the structural frame of our bodies (calcium of bone) is born within stars when the structural frame of rocks (silicon) is fused with more helium. Participants felt their bones holding them upright, and chose to speak the names of rock formations that had been meaningful in their lives.
5. **CREATION OF COPPER, GOLD, AND SILVER** in the explosion phase of hot blue stars, when they become supernovas. At the start of the ritual, and in anticipation of this part, some participants had placed rings or other jewelry on the altar, which were ritualistically taken back up at this time, one by one, speaking of their significance.

**6. BLACK HOLES, DARK MATTER, AND DARK ENERGY.** Michael spontaneously added a tribute to the 96% of the Universe that we know almost nothing about (23% dark matter and 73% dark energy) while honoring the generative "darkness" that periodically comes into our own lives.

**7. GLITTER AND SONG.** We closed the ritual by anointing the foreheads of one another, in turn, with stardust (glitter), while the group repeatedly sang the chant-song, "You are made of stardust, every single atom, of carbon and of oxygen, calcium and iron." When all were anointed, we rose, held hands, while still singing, but changed the "You" to "We".



Connie using a chart to teach the song, "We Are Made of Stardust".

## Stardust Rituals for Kids

For some Unitarian church services in which we present on Sundays, we are invited to do more than the sermon. We also provide a short "children's story" before the kids disperse to their classrooms. Invariably, Connie grabs the opportunity, as she especially loves working with children. And Connie's theme is usually the story of stardust.

For her storytelling at **Pacific Unitarian Church** (northwest L.A.), Connie created a new and dynamic version of the "We Are Stardust" program, that ran about ten minutes. This version culminated in the children standing in turn, as a gong sounded and the congregation applauded each age group, which ranged from "thirteen billion and three years old" to "thirteen billion and twelve"!



This effort was expanded to a 50 minute religious education program for kids at **Throop Universalist Church** in Pasadena. This time, each child came forward and struck the gong, saying their name and how old they really are: "I'm Rex, and I'm 13 billion and 12 years old!" (Connie is committed to eventually getting up on our website teaching suggestions from which others can create their own stardust programs.)



**Connie teaching children that they are mde of stardust, at Pacific Unitarian Church near L.A. (Jeff Ordway on gong.)**



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## Our Work in Churches



**Michael presenting a Sunday morning sermon at Home of Truth Church in Alameda, California.**



**Connie at Pacific Unitarian near Los Angeles.**

Of the **four Unitarian Universalist** fellowships in California for whom we provided guest sermons on Sundays, three selected Michael's "Can the Universe Be Trusted? as theme. The fourth chose a program by the two of us: "The Great Story."

Two were fellowships in the Bay area (Los Gatos and Napa Valley); two were near Los Angeles (Rancho Palos Verde and Pasadena). A large UU church in Fresno was unable to book us for a Sunday, but 70 people turned out for a Tuesday evening program, "The Great News of the Great Story," which Connie and Michael co-presented.

For the Home of Truth (a New Thought church) in Alameda, Michael created an entirely new sermon, "Our Larger Heritage," that introduced the Great Story within the context of that month's emphasis on "heritage." He then followed with an afternoon workshop that offered church-goers an opportunity to hear and discuss much more.

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## Videotapes Now Available of Our Programs!

Connie captured excellent videotapes of several of our programs these past four months (from which most of the still photos in this Turtlelog are drawn). By the time you are reading this, we will have videotapes for sale (at our lectures) of "Our Larger Heritage" and "The Great Story." They will also be available by mail through **Lou Niznik's Earth Communications**. His [catalog](#) of tapes for sale or rent is now downloadable from our own website.

## Book Sales: Our Financial Foundation

All of our church programs in California were very, very successful — fostering excitement and community within each congregation. Churches are also the venues in which we tend to "earn our keep" for the rest of the week. Honoraria help, but book sales are crucial to pay for occasional van repairs, as well as for gas and food.

After every presentation, we encourage people to visit our resource table and consider purchasing any of 20 titles of books and videos that can help them move deeper into topics we have introduced: the epic of evolution, the great work, sustainability, a hopeful vision of the future, a cosmological interpretation of Christianity, learning the deep time story of our continent, using science to enhance green spirituality.



**Connie used *The Hand of God*, a book of Hubble space photographs, while teaching chemistry students. Extra copies were passed out for the students to look at simultaneously.**

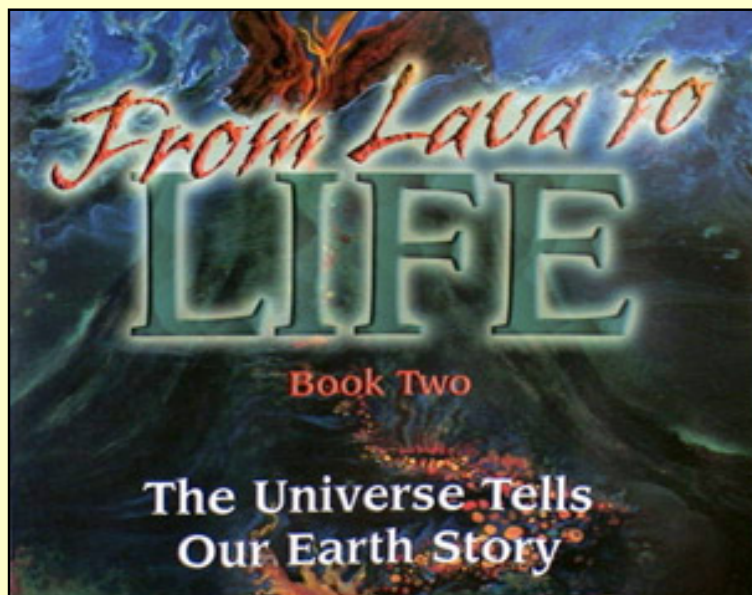
Nearly half of the storage space in our van is reserved for book inventories. Personal possessions? Forget it! The books take precedence.

At this stage in the game it is the selling of books and tapes that primarily support our traveling ministry. Only by selling books to adults in churches and other nonprofit venues do we acquire the financial cushion to share our understanding and passion with college, high school, and grade school students during the weekdays for free. In school settings, seldom are we offered honoraria and rarely do we sell more than a book or two. Yet we are thrilled any time we get the chance to open young hearts and minds to these inspiring ideas. We are thus exceedingly grateful to those of you who have purchased resources from us and also, especially, to those of you who have sent or given us a donation. You all make this Great Story mission possible.

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## ***From Lava to Life!***

We are also grateful to those who write the books! One of our top sellers is the amazing children's book by **Jennifer Morgan** (illustrated by **Dana Lynne Andersen**), *Born with a Bang: The Universe Tells Our Cosmic Story*. We are pleased to have a direct link now to Jennifer's website, <http://www.universestories.com>, and to announce here that this book won the Teacher's Choice Award!



We are thrilled to begin selling Jennifer's newly published sequel, *From Lava to Life: The Universe Tells Our Earth Story*, again with glorious illustrations by Dana. We enjoyed reading this book to each other as a bed-time story, on the day that we received it, because this children's book series is by no means limited to children. We have learned that *Born With a Bang* has even been used to teach Unitarian Universalist ministers the Great Story!

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# Coming Home to EarthLight

Winter Solstice Ritual, Gospel of Evolution and Coming Home to North America

It was a treat to work with **Lauren de Boer** and other staff at [EarthLight](#) magazine in a series of three programs we presented during December. Our visit felt like a coming home, as *EarthLight: The Magazine of Spiritual Ecology* plays a huge role in the Great Story/Epic of Evolution movement, including publication of the first [evolutionary parables](#) (which can now be found on our website) and the first published [article](#) on Great Story beads (or Cosmic Rosaries). Click here for our own website information on these [beads](#) and the timeline used to make them.



**Michael introduced our "Coming Home to North America" ritual at EarthLight. Alan Tower had his digeridoos ready to play while Michael showed the book *The Eternal Frontier* which contains the grounding science.**

We already wrote of the Stardust ritual that Connie created for Winter Solstice at EarthLight. On another evening, Michael presented a dynamic talk, "Enlivening Our Faith Through the Gospel of Evolution." Michael was on fire that evening; alas, it was Connie's first serious use of our new video equipment, and she had mistakenly programmed the format for wide-screen movies. The sound is fine, but Michael and everyone else in the room look a lot skinner than nature intended!



For the third evening, Connie created an entirely [new version](#) of the "Coming Home to North America" ritual, which is based on Tim Flannery's 2001 book, *The Eternal Frontier*. This version is more broadly participatory, though it requires much stronger leadership in facilitation than did the earlier version, which pretty much runs itself. (You can find both versions on our website.) Musician **Alan Tower**, who also offered us home hospitality and companionship for a portion of our Bay area visit, provided musical accompaniment during the ritual, using a range of

**There was no North America 65 million years ago, as the Bearpaw Seaway separated land masses east and west.**

percussion and several of his gigantic digeridoos.

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## Living Rooms, Colleges, Botanical Gardens

When someone already inspired by The Great Story wants to offer their friends and neighbors a chance to hear us speak, they need go to no more trouble than reserving a large living room and putting out the word.

We have been happily surprised that, even for small gatherings, we often sell a passle of books, and thus we are more than willing to offer our services pro bono for such occasions.

Besides, we feel like we tap into something deeply human and ancient when we gather in small groups in someone's home.

"You two are doing today what the Apostle Paul did for his time!" **Brian Swimme** exclaimed during a leisurely lunch with us at a diner near the California Institute of Integral Studies, where he teaches in San Francisco.

Thank you, Brian! We've been feeling that way more and more as this itinerant mission unfolds.

Michael now wears a symbol of his dedication to this work of spreading the good news, the gospel, of evolution. While visiting **Mount Palomar Observatory** with our host, friend, and Oceanside, California organizer, **Karen Holmgren**, Michael purchased a Celtic cross necklace at the gift shop. Karen, who is also our website designer and graphics volunteer, then took the cross into her day job at an engraving company, and had the back inscribed "Preach The Great Story Gospel."

A few days later, Michael did just that, when he gave guest lectures in two sections of an undergraduate Christianity class at **University of San Diego**, which he titled "The Nature of Revelation and the Revelation of Nature." Connie videotaped one of the lectures, before she went off to give a slide program at a senior seminar in the Biology Department. Her program, "The Ghosts of Evolution," is based on her 2001 book by that title, and it was the second time in a week she had presented it — having flown to Sarasota Florida to present it at the ecology lecture series at Selby



Botanical Gardens.

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## Encouragement from Colleagues and Mentors

We had connected briefly with Brian Swimme earlier, when we first drove into California to attend the "Cosmological Imagination" conference in early November, which drew its plenary speakers from staff of the California Institute of Integral Studies.



**Brian Swimme, Connie Barlow, Linda Gibler, and Michael Dowd at the home of Caroline Webb for a holiday gathering of cosmology students and faculty from the California Institute of Integral Studies.**

And what a gathering it was! As great a draw as the talks and workshops was the opportunity to connect with many friends in The Great Story movement: **Mark Steiner, Jack Heckelman, John Fowler, Karen Harwell, Hasita Nadai, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Thomas Berry, Toni Nash, Mary Ellen Hill, Linda Gibler, Jennifer Morgan, Dana Lynne Andersen, Larry and Jean Edwards, Lauren de Boer, Alysyn Kiplinger, Drew Dellinger,** and many others.

Photographer and video artist **Caroline Webb** hosted a holiday CIIS gathering at her home, where the conversation continued. Elsewhere in the Bay Area, we were invited to share ideas and friendship over meals at the home of **Elisabet Sahtouris** (author of *A Walk Through Time*) and with **Duane Elgin** and **Coleen Le Drew**. (Duane is the author of *Voluntary Simplicity* and of one of the most popular books we sell: *Promise Ahead*.)

While in the Bay Area, we also visited with **Eugenie Scott** and **Rev. Phina Borgeson**, at the [National Center for Science Education](#).

We ran into Elisabet Sahtouris again in Santa Barbara, where she was giving a community-wide lecture. There we also dined with Barbara Marx Hubbard, and spent five days enjoying the hospitality of and brainstorming with Conscious Evolution leaders Teresa Collins and Marshall Lefferts, and later with Walter Tanner. Further south, we enjoyed the company and hospitality of process theologian John Cobb and his wife Jean, at Pilgrim Place, a United Church of Christ retirement community near the campus of Claremont Graduate School (where he is emeritus professor of theology and philosophy).

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## And with a Lot of Help from Our Friends



None of this would be possible without a lot of help from our friends — old and new. In a pinch, we have been known to camp out (in our van) in parking lots, truck stops, and even church parking lots the night before we present a Sunday service. But most of the time, we call "home" the home of someone who believes in what we are doing.

At "home", we plug in our computers and engage in endless email communications (we've already scheduled 87 speaking engagements for 2003 and several more in 2004, thanks to the ease of itinerant email). There, too, we are often fed, or given access to a kitchen where Connie can offer to do some home cooking and Michael can show his gratitude by doing dishes.

For the months of November 2003 through February 2004, we heartily thank the following people:

**HOME HOSPITALITY:** We are tremendously grateful to those who opened their homes to us during these past four months:

**Karen Harwell, Alan Tower, Deborah Anapol, Dawn Raymond and Loren Haralson, Karen Holmgren, Barbara Kummer, Teresa Collins and Marshall Lefferts, Russ and Cheryl Genet, Brian Tierney, Bruce Rinker, John and Jean Cobb, Susan Campbell, Jim Cummings and Ann Hunkins, Stan and Liz Renfro, Bryan and Edie Jessup, Walter Tanner, Layne and Paul Cutright, Lisa and John Swango, Connie Danziger and Jeff Ordway, Jeannette Love, Juliet Twomey, Marietta Schug, Nan and Bob Bixler.**

**OTHER SUPPORT:** Along the way we try to keep track of the many, many people who cooked or bought us a meal, financially gifted us, or who in other ways gave generously of themselves. Thank you all!

**Yoko Kmetz, Robert Wright, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Fowler, Brian Swimme, Leslie Pilder, Betsy Koenigsberg, Anna Hirsch Toth, John Hoff, Jennifer Morgan, Dana Lynne Andersen, Loretta Peters, Marian Francis, Gordon Vars, Joseph Whitner, J. Wispelupy, Richard Reha, Patricia Gordon, Donald Kemner, Phil Essley, Amy Fox, Larry and Jean Edwards, Mary Ellen Hill, Debbie Mytels, Randy Mack, Duane Elgin and Coleen Le Drew, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Neal Burnett, Phina Borgeson, Eugenie Scott, Nina Hollenberg, Lauren deBoer, Paula Benton, Caroline Webb, Elisabet Sahtouris, Doug Van Houten, Jim Conlon, Mary Williams, Nannette Stomberg, Pat Hanson, Millie Peasley, Janet and Edward Mansfield, John Steele, Tom Atlee, Marcus Page, Amber Llyn Peabody, Nancy Dunlavy, Betsy Windisch, Bob Rosebrough, David and Susan Jarzen, Donna Krabill, Andy Vitkus, Ellen and Joel Fedder, Bonnie Ripley, Thomas Leininger, Eric Schwartz, Jan Smith, Marianna Stanley, Phyllis boyson, David Borglum, Dee Stanley.**

**CONVERSATION:** Mark Steiner, Mia Levitt, Dave Cooley, Zacchary Sorenson, Joel Fonner, Thomas Berry, Jack Heckelman, Hasita Nadai, Toni Nash, Linda Gibler, Darlene Pagano, Drew Dellinger, Vicki Robin, Russ Genet, Dwight Collins, David Abram, Bill Miller, Pat Sundermeyer, Claudia Matzek, Rick Trowbridge, Anne Devaney, Marian Rose, Conrad Bishop, Fernando Puyol, Joanna Reynolds, Ed Asner, Joan Paulin, Vicky Robin, Mendalara Van Meter, Dennis Fritzing, Alysyn Kiplinger, Hasita Nadai, Drew Dellinger, Pat Reeves, Wendy Negri, Barbara Scott, Diane Nelson, Keith Roynon, Bonnie Kelley, Ani Martin, Francis Jansen, Fred Wiedeman, Reveleine Bingham, Jan Collins, Marilyn Miller, Nancy Glock-Gruenich, Bill Auger, Emily Bono, Dale Craig, Sheila Herald, Kathy Adams, Sheila Willie, Patricia Sherrin, Rose Marie Cecchine, Maureen Houlihan, Jim Dryer, Larry Winn, John Beckner, Barbara and Michael Richardson, Meg Loowman, Harry Luther, John Atwood, Michael Suasaman, Tim Schowalter, Steve Fonte, Mark Hunter, Christ Frost, John Kress, James Nelson, Audrey Sorrento, Helen Post, Jude Blau, Nancy and Keith Foster, Fariba Enteshari, Patricia Callahan, Marilyn Rudy.

As always, we thank angel supreme, **Karen Holmgren**, for turning the text of this Turtlelog into creative copy, and for other help with our website.



**Michael working with our graphics volunteer, Karen Holmgren, at her home in San Diego.**

We thank anonymous donors for financial gifts, including those who buy books after our presentations and leave a little more money in the basket than is called for. A very special thanks to award-winning author **Robert Wright** for donating nearly 100 copies of his book *NonZero*, and to Steve Torma at [Ecozoic Resources.com](http://EcozoicResources.com) for making it possible for us to be in the bookselling business.

And we thank **Layne and Paul Cutright**, San Diego authors of *Heart to Heart* for expert partnership counseling that has made a real difference in our lives. We highly recommend their programs for other couples, especially those who, like us, combine mission with marriage. (See their website, <http://www.enlightenedpartners.com>).

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# Web Site News



**Children at a Montessori school in Minneapolis show off the Great Story beads they each created. (NancyDunlavy, photographer)**

We have updated our website list of [programs](#) for Unitarian, Christian, and Unity/New Thought audiences. And we've created a ["Kid's page"](#) that shows all the programs and educational materials we have that are geared for children

There is now an alternative, more participatory version of the [North American Story ritual](#) on our website, as well as a version made [for children](#) (and which we've used in Montessori elementary schools).

A performance script, ["Grandmothers Dance the Creation of the Universe"](#), by **Marlys Tobias** is also now accessible here, and we've added a link to the [Cosmic Walk scripts](#) available on the website of **Larry and Jean Edwards**. **Neal McBurnett** contributed an evolutionary parable, ["Lament of the Blue-Green Algae"](#).

Connie is thrilled to have finally gotten up on our website (in PDF) a long, annotated compilation of examples in the history of life of ["convergent" evolution](#). She has been collecting data on this topic for years, as she personally derives a great deal of inspiration and comfort from the understanding that Earth has, time and again, brought forth the same forms and functions. Earth can be counted on, for example, to ensure that there will always be catlike forms among the mammals — whether the DNA to do so comes from felid or nimravid lineages. Ditto with the horse form, the hummingbird form, and a vast garden of plant forms and innovations.

Also new to the website is a PDF of the article on Great Story Beads ["Cosmic Rosaries"](#) by EarthLight's own **Sharon Abercrombie**, and which was published in the 13 December 2002 issue of *National Catholic Reporter*.

We've updated our page ["What Is The Great Story?"](#) (don't miss seeing the connecting links!) with more classic quotations — most of which were derived from books that **Russ Genet** pulled off the shelves of his personal library while we (and **Dwight Collins** and **Rick Trowbridge**) were visiting the Genet's for a mini workshop on cosmic evolution and sustainability by the Orion Institute.

Finally, many of the fine articles that were published during the life of the *Epic of Evolution* newsletter (which Connie edited) have been turned into PDF form by **Doug Van Houten** (who did the design, graphics, and layout of that publication). You can see the list of some 20 titles by going to the bottom of our ["Writings / Rituals"](#) section of the website.

As a courtesy to our friend, and his commitment to using his skills to further this movement, we offer this "personal ad" by **Doug Van Houten**:

I am a graphic artist with a calling to contribute my time and creativity more directly to the "Great Work" — work that ensures a healthy and sustainable life-giving future for all species. I am searching for paying work with transformationally-based businesses, environmental groups, peace & justice groups, etc. Areas of interest are: ID programs, print materials, environmental graphics, conference materials, exhibits, specialty design, fine art, etc. You can reach me, Doug Van Houten, at **starmandj@aol.com or 502-562-0778**.

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## Summary of Accomplishments

- Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd presented Great Story talks or longer workshops at 6 ENVIRONMENTAL OR SPIRITUAL centers: Sophia Center (Oakland), Foundation for Global Community (Palo Alto), Heartwood Institute (Humboldt County), EarthLight (Oakland), La Providencia (near San Diego), Sacred Heart (Gallup, NM), La Casa de Maria (Santa Barbara).
- Lectured at 2 COLLEGES (Holy Names; University of San Diego), 1 HIGH SCHOOL (near Gallup, NM), 1 BOTANICAL GARDEN (Selby, Sarasota FL).
- Keynote speakers at 1 CONFERENCE (Gateway to Conscious Evolution); participants in 2 others (Cosmological Imagination, Orion Institute).
- Designed and launched 4 GREAT STORY/GREAT WORK TELECLASSES.
- Performed Sunday services at 4 UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST fellowships and 1 NEW THOUGHT church, and provided adult religious education



programs at 1 UNITARIAN fellowship and 1 NEW THOUGHT church.

**Michael was a keynote speaker at the "Gateway to Conscious Evolution Conference" in Santa Barbara.**

- Discussed the Great Story with 3 STUDY CIRCLES of friends and neighbors gathered at private homes.

- Wrote and posted on our WEBSITE an alternate version of the "Coming Home to North America" script, a new script on the "We Are Stardust" theme, materials on "The Organic Shift," key articles reprinted from the *Epic of Evolution* publication, an annotated list of examples of convergent evolution, a description of all our children's programs and resources, new links to other websites, a contributed performance script, and much more.
- Visited with LEADERS in this and related movements: Brian Swimme, Larry and Jean Edwards, Jim Conlon, Lauren de Boer, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Thomas Berry, Mark Steiner, Jack Heckelman, John Fowler, Karen Harwell, Hasita Nadai, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Thomas Berry, Toni Nash, Mary Ellen Hill, Linda Gibbler, Jennifer Morgan, Dana Lynne Andersen, Drew Dellinger, Elisabet Sahtouris, Duane Elgin, Eugenie Scott, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Teresa Collins, Marshall Lefferts, John Cobb, Susan Campbell, Vicki Robin, Russ Genet, Dwight Collins, David Abram, Jim Cummings, Tom Atlee, Karen Attix, Layne and Paul Cutright, Walter Tanner, Deborah Anapol, Walter Tanner, Don Beck, Judy Williams, Jeannette Love, Juliet Twomey, and others.
- EXPERIENCED THE EPIC of evolution in the Grand Canyon, Joshua Tree National Park, Mount Palomar, Paleozoic fossils in a Santa Fe canyon, the Roynon Museum of Paleontology near San Diego, Rancho LaBrea, a grove of Torreya trees in the coast range, and coastal California oak savanna and chaparral.
- Learned to use our new state-of-the-art SONY DCR-VX2000 DIGITAL CAMCORDER to capture high quality videos and still photos of our talks.
- Booked 87 events in the U.S. and Canada for 2003, and 3 events for 2004.
- Nurtured by friends, old and new.



For previous issues, *click* [HERE](#).

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