

COMMONWEAL

com•mon•weal (n) kōm'an-wēl noun 1. The public good or welfare. 2. Archaic: a commonwealth.

December 2008

Dear Commonwealth Friends:

I hope this letter finds you well. Bolinas is beautiful in the Fall. I stop on my bicycle at the top of the Commonwealth drive to look out on the Farallon Islands, glistening like jewels set in the crescent crown of the sparkling blue Pacific.

We are living history. The shifts in politics, finance and consciousness are tectonic. Fear and hope compete for our allegiance. Commonwealth faces difficult fiscal times—like every other nonprofit—but also extraordinary opportunities.

We have also been through important changes at Commonwealth this Fall. Executive Director Charlotte Brody has moved on to Green For All, and Susan Braun is our new Executive Director.

Charlotte Brody Takes New Position at Green For All

Yes, our beloved friend Charlotte Brody, who served Commonwealth with great distinction as Executive Director for four and a half years, departed on September 30 to join Van Jones as Director of Programs at Green For All in Oakland. Green For All is focused on creating green jobs for all who need them in a green economy. Charlotte felt authentically called to the great opportunity to make a difference that Green For All offers her. Her gifts to Commonwealth include a fundamental strengthening of the administrative infrastructure for our work, the appointment of gifted staff members like Chief Financial Officer Van Marcotte and Grants Administrator Diane Blacker, major physical renovations of the site, facilitation of the rebirth of the Commonwealth Garden, and, of course, a tremendous expansion of our work in environmental health. Charlotte's farewell letter is in the Newsletter. She takes on her great new work with our love and gratitude. She will always be part of the Commonwealth community.

Susan Braun Named Commonwealth's New Executive Director

After a brief but intensive search, Commonwealth is exceptionally fortunate that Susan Braun is our new Executive Director. Susan is a truly extraordinary woman. She has been deeply involved with cancer policy, research, education, and advocacy as well as nonprofit governance. She served for nine years as President and CEO of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (now called Susan G. Komen for the Cure) in Dallas. During her tenure, Susan helped to transform Komen into the largest and most influential breast cancer research and advocacy organization in the country. She made history at Komen.

For the past two years, Susan has served as Executive Director of the ASCO Cancer Foundation in Alexandria, VA. In that role, she continued to be part of the national dialogue on cancer treatment and prevention. Now, in the middle of the greatest financial crisis in seven decades, Susan has chosen to leave a secure foundation position in the nation's capital to join this small nonprofit, Commonwealth, at the edge of the Pacific Ocean. To say this decision takes courage is an understatement. One can only understand Susan's choice as a reflection of the depth of the sense of calling she feels to lead Commonwealth as we navigate the challenges and opportunities of this momentous time.

How Susan Braun Came to Commonwealth

Susan and I met four years ago. We were introduced by Commonwealth friend Lucy Waletzky, a gifted psychiatrist in New York. Susan had become interested in the national debate over environmental contributors to breast cancer causation and wished to advance a research agenda to address these questions at Komen. Lucy arranged for the three of us to have dinner. That introduction began a sustained dialogue between us on environmental contributors to cancer causation and prevention that has continued ever since.

Susan left Komen on a high note, highly regarded by all who worked with her. After her departure from Komen, our friendship continued to deepen. Susan has a profound interest in women's health, so we



co-founded the Fund for Women's Health at Commonweal, through which we held a very successful Komen-sponsored conference on cancer causation and prevention with the leaders of national cancer patient advocacy organizations concerned with cancers that affect women.

Recognizing that Susan also has a deep interest in psychospiritual dimensions of healing, I invited her to be a guest staff member on a Commonweal Cancer Help Program. I also introduced her to Shanti Norris, Executive Director of our sister nonprofit, Smith Farm Center for Healing and the Arts, in Washington, D.C. Susan joined Shanti, Rachel Naomi Remen, Julia Rowland and me as keynote speakers at Smith Farm's tenth anniversary gathering.

The Search Process

The Commonweal Board of Directors and senior staff undertook the search for Commonweal's new Executive Director with unstinting generosity and wisdom.

Commonweal has a small and dedicated Board. Marty Krasney, Lindy Rose Graham, Bobbi Kimball, Beth Setrakian and Jan Visick are, with me, the Board Members. Marty is a fiction writer and an outstanding nonprofit leader. Lindy has devoted her professional life to senior staff positions in California politics. Bobbi has just retired from a distinguished career in nursing administration and health policy consulting. Beth is a dynamic businesswoman who founded her own successful cookie company. Jan is a senior consultant with Ashoka, the international organization created by Commonweal Friend Bill Drayton that has done more than any other organization to create a new global class of social entrepreneurs.

The Board formed a Search Group with Lindy Graham as chair for the search process. We asked former Board Member and Commonweal consultant Francesca Vietor to execute the search, with support from Commonweal staff Arlene Allsman and Michael Rafferty. We put the search notice out through our extended networks.

The Board invited eight senior Commonweal staff to join the Search Group. Commonweal Co-Founder Burr Heneman, General Manager Waz Thomas, ISHI Director Rachel Naomi Remen, Chief Financial Officer Van Marcotte, Biomonitoring Resource Center Director Sharyle Patton, Garden Co-Director James Stark, Retreat Site Director Jenepher Stowell, and CHE Senior Staff Member Steve Heilig were all valuable partners in the search.

As we began to hear from interested people, I discussed the position with Susan Braun. I knew she would be a truly extraordinary candidate and was encouraged by her deep interest in Commonweal. We invited Susan to spend two days at Commonweal to explore her possible interest. We saw the process of our intensive and far-reaching conversations as one of mutual discernment about the rightness of the fit. After careful review of the qualifications of the other able candidates who had expressed interest in the position, we unanimously agreed to offer the position to Susan. She accepted.

Susan Braun and the Sandtray Lineage at Commonweal

There are many things I could tell you about the wonderful qualities I believe Susan Braun brings to Commonweal. For someone who has done such outstanding work at Komen, and who has been one of the most sought-after nonprofit leaders in the country, she is strikingly down-to-earth. It is very comfortable to be in a room with Susan. She treats everyone she meets with equal regard. She has a quiet but powerful effect on most people she meets. I hope you will have a chance to meet her.

But let me tell you more about just one of Susan's interests—her fascination with sandtray.

Susan discovered sandtray during the Cancer Help Program. Sandtray is the Jungian art therapy technique that we use extensively at Commonweal and Smith Farm, which also offers the Cancer Help Program and other programs for cancer patients in Washington. Susan became fascinated by the evocative power of sandtray. She began to train in sandtray. She put out a call to friends to send her items for her sandtray and was flooded with wonderful objects. She helped Shanti Norris set up a new sandtray room at Smith Farm's offices at 1632 U Street NW near DuPont Circle.

Sandtray has a powerful lineage at Commonweal and Smith Farm. Sandtray was brought to the first Cancer Help Program 23 years ago by Marion Saltman, the first person to sign up for the first Cancer Help Program. Marion was a beautiful older woman who lived on a very old boat in Sausalito harbor. A close friend of the Zen-influenced theologian Alan Watts, Marion had advanced lung cancer when I met her. Though she came as a participant in the Cancer Help Program, Marion's sandtray immediately drew a powerful response from other participants. She continued to offer sandtray as a staff member on later retreats. At Marion's death, Rachel Naomi Remen and I asked Marion Weber to take over as sandtray coordinator.

Marion Weber reported, in her first Cancer Help Program as a staff member, that Marion Saltman had come to her in a dream the previous night and taught her how to do sandtray. Marion Weber extended our use of sandtray to Rachel Naomi Remen's ISHI programs for physicians. Then Marion created—for the first time—a large circular sandtray for group work. Marion was succeeded in the Cancer Help Program by Irene Gallway, who has been our sandtray guide for over a decade.

Sandtray has been equally important at Smith Farm. Barbara Smith Coleman, the founder of Smith Farm, was inspired to found the center by her experience at Commonweal. She was introduced to sandtray on a Commonweal Cancer Help Program and became the sandtray guide for Smith Farm Cancer Help Program retreats until her death ten years ago. Barbara was a passionate believer in the power of the healing arts, of which sandtray is only one example. When Barbara and I chose Shanti Norris as Executive Director of Smith Farm, we chose her in part because of her own powerful interest in the healing arts. Recently Smith Farm opened the only healing arts gallery in the nation's capital.

And so this lineage of sandtray—and the power of the healing arts—is further strengthened at Commonweal, with Susan Braun joining Marion Weber, Rachel Naomi Remen, Irene Gallway, Jenepher Stowell, Mimi Mindell and Jacquie Mallegni among those most deeply committed to healing and expressive arts work here.

Highlights of Our Work

The Commonweal Newsletter provides a fuller description of Commonweal programs. Let me just highlight key developments in Commonweal's work:

- The Commonweal Garden and Regenerative Design Institute under Penny Livingston-Stark and James Stark is among the brightest rising stars in the Commonweal firmament. Hundreds of young people and the young-at-heart are learning permaculture gardening and community design. The Garden brings me intense joy every time I visit. It is so inspiring.
- The Cancer Help Program is flourishing under Kate Holcombe as our new Coordinator. Waz Thomas remains gracefully in the background, stepping in for the October retreat because Kate is so close to giving birth to her third child. This is our 143rd retreat—we started the program exactly 23 years ago. The especially good news about Waz is that he has agreed to stay on at Commonweal half-time for some time to come. We don't want Waz to leave Commonweal or the Cancer Help Program community, and he is humoring us!
- ISHI, the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness, continues to expand under Rachel Naomi Remen's guidance as thousands of physicians and other health professionals are touched by ISHI programs in medical schools and elsewhere across the country and around the world.
- Sharyle Patton's Biomonitoring Resource Center is engaged in a World Health Organization program to biomonitor breastmilk in 30 countries in the Global South. Our goal is to make breastmilk biomonitoring a global standard for safeguarding human development. Sharyle also helps state activists across the country who use biomonitoring to support state chemical phase-out and green chemistry initiatives. Sharyle and Senior Staff Member Davis Baltz are both actively helping the pioneering California Biomonitoring Program. Davis also works with the California coalition for chemicals policy reform and plays a key role in Health Care Without Harm, the great international effort that started at Commonweal.
- Eleni Sotos, the wonderful Program Director for the Collaborative on Health and the Environment, is leaving CHE to explore new interests. Eleni has done a superb job at CHE and we hope she will remain part of the CHE and Commonweal communities. Elise Miller, Director of the Institute for

Children's Environmental Health on Whidbey Island near Seattle, is the new CHE Director. Elise is a founding CHE Partner and has directed the Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative within CHE since its inception. She was also the first Executive Director of the Jenifer Altman Foundation. We welcome her leadership for CHE.

- The New School is also flourishing, with Jacquie Mallegni serving as Coordinator while Frieda Slavin is on maternity leave. Partnerships with the Whitman Institute, Mainstream Moms, Nippun Mehta's Conversations website and the Pt. Reyes Bookstore are all strengthening our work.
- Burr Heneman's Ocean Policy Program and David Steinhart's Juvenile Justice Program remain two of Commonweal's strongest sustained programs. And the Commonweal Autism Project, which sponsored three important conferences over the last several years on the new paradigm of autism research and treatment, is shifting its focus to enhancing parental access to the best approaches to integrative approaches to autism treatment.
- The Retreat Center remains the heart of our residential programs under Jenepher Stowell, and Heydendahl House is a special retreat space for Cancer Help Program alumni and others with cancer, supervised by Claire Heart.

Letter to Burr Heneman: A Vision for Commonweal from 1976

Commonweal Co-Founder Burr Heneman was rummaging through some old files recently when he found a letter I had written to him in 1976, just before we secured the Commonweal site. In the letter, I outlined a vision for Commonweal, written when the two of us had embarked, with Carolyn Brown, on the outrageous effort to create a center for healing and the environment on the old RCA Transmitter Farm site. Both of us had completely forgotten the letter existed.

Here are excerpts, edited and condensed from an eight-page memorandum written on an old Royal typewriter:

Burr: I have tried to organize my thinking about Commonweal in a way we can discuss and share as we make decisions. The overall situation appears to indicate that Commonweal is now an existing center in Bolinas for service and research in human ecology. It does not have a permanent site but it exists. I would rate the chances of our getting the RCA site [where Commonweal is today] at about 80 percent. In order to get the site on the best terms, we need to assume at this point that we have it and that we are planning its use.

[In terms of planning], one of our first products will be a description of Commonweal that Ford Foundation commissioned. The sections will include (probably):

- 1. Toward a regenerative human ecology*
- 2. The state of human ecology research and practice in America today*
- 3. The Commonweal Project: origins and prospects*
- 4. The ecosystem for Commonweal*
- 5. The Health Project at Commonweal*
- 6. The Research Institute at Commonweal*
- 7. The way Commonweal will support itself...*

The Clinic would see children with learning and behavior disorders and adults with a variety of nutritional or stress related diseases. We would study the biochemistry of juvenile hall kids with learning and behavior disorders.

What would the product of the Research Institute be? I think we should publish a monthly newsletter, produced by Michael Rafferty with oversight from Lerner and Heneman. Some sample titles for issues and articles:

- *Learning and behavior disorders and the whole child*
- *Nuclear wastes under the ocean*
- *Nutrition and disease in America*

The Research Institute would look at human ecology and human health, specifically the developmental health of children, but spreading out into adult health as well. It would be a natural to organize a definitive study on breast feeding and its implications – what do the DDT and PCBs and PVC in the milk do to babies. We would follow children in terms of ecological damage from radiation and mutagens and genetic damage, to in utero impoverishment nutritionally, to medicated births, to the early use of antibiotics and artificial flavors and colors, to intensive care nurseries saving two pound babies who will almost certainly have problems, to learning and behavior disorders, the disintegration of the family, drug and candy addictions, and so forth.

We would study the physiology and health consequences of the phone, what it does to us, to consciousness, of television, of our disturbance of magnetic fields of the earth.

A broader interest in the ecology of North America flows through this work.

A compelling visualization of the ecosystem for Commonweal would be of enormous assistance. What is technically involved in hooking windmills into PG&E on a 2-way meter? Similarly, dynamic idea of how water flows down from the hills to buildings, where waste water and human waste goes, how it is held in ponds or tanks for gardening, ideas of what will grow in gardens, and what animals we will raise.

Central to our success will be communication.

Reading this letter to Burr 32 years later, I cannot help but be struck by how much of what a 33-year-old dreamer wrote has come true. I love the phrase “toward a regenerative human ecology” as the first descriptor for Commonweal. Today, the Commonweal Garden is called the Regenerative Design Institute. The Clinic came into being and operated for eight years. The Research Institute, directed by Steve Lerner, also had a long run before it was incorporated into Commonweal’s broader ongoing program of inquiries into health and human ecology. The language of human ecology has survived for three decades at Commonweal—the Collaborative on Health and the Environment is actively exploring what Ted Schettler has named the ecological model of human health.

Note the suggestion that we study toxics in breast milk—which Sharyle Patton is studying today through the Biomonitoring Resource Center. Note the suggestion that we concern ourselves with antibiotics—we helped start the highly successful Keep Antibiotics Working Campaign. The learning and behavior disorders of children has been a central concern throughout Commonweal’s history, represented today by the Juvenile Justice Program and the Autism Project. We did study nuclear wastes near the Farallon Islands.

The interest in electromagnetic fields, telephones and television presaged the EMF Working Group of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment. Equally important, Commonweal serves as fiscal agent for Cindy Sage’s BioInitiative, the premier consensus research statement on the health concerns raised by EMF.

What is strikingly absent from the letter is any discussion of the psychospiritual dimension of our work with healing in the Cancer Help Program and the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness. There is a discussion of planning for the Retreat Center, but no vision of the program there. I think that omission was strategic. In those days, the exploration of the inner dimensions of healing was a subject that Carolyn Brown and I discussed quietly, but we knew that open discussion of inner healing would have doomed this fragile project. Carolyn had strong visions of the inner dimensions of the work ahead.

On Turning 65

I finish writing this letter to you on October 22, my 65th birthday. The sun will break over the hill any moment now. And I will go out to meditate on the bench at the end of our road that looks over the Pacific at San Francisco. We are in the middle of our 143rd Cancer Help Program. Tonight, Wednesday night, we have the discussion of death and dying.

Each year I schedule the Cancer Help Program to fall on my birthday. It is my gift to myself. There is no place I would rather be on my birthday. To awaken and have Sharyle sing me the birthday song. To medi-

tate as the sun rises and to breakfast on quinoa, frozen blueberries and soy milk. To bicycle to Commonweal with the special radiance of the morning sun. To pass the day in the community of Commonweal and the Cancer Help Program. To bicycle home as the sun sets. And to return for the evening program in the Cancer Help Program and explore the deepest questions life poses to us. What more could I ask?

Each day I feel such intense gratitude for my life, our work, and our community. Each day my fierce prayer is for the good health to enjoy the infinite preciousness of being alive and the gift of this equally precious work.

The challenge is diminishment. My tremor grows more pronounced. I will purchase a silver straw to sip drinks I cannot hold. I cannot hear in crowded rooms. Shall I get hearing aids? I forget phone calls and dates. I apologize and redouble my efforts to write everything down. On buses, the young rise for me. At conferences, friends inquire earnestly after my health. Reminders to sign up for MediCare fill my mailbox. At the movies, Sharyle and I delightedly accept the senior ticket discount. True, we prefer the matinee show—so we won't drive home late and tired.

The river of time washes away the surface strata of my life. Deeper layers reveal themselves. Sharyle and I are more psychically connected than ever. We discover ourselves in the same dreamscapes. We find each other "by accident" when we did not plan to meet. We live the practiced joys of a marriage of 25 years.

Though Bolinas has changed, a whole community of us is growing older together. My friends' children have stayed, or come back, with children of their own. And a vibrant community of younger people has sprung up around us and joined us on staff at Commonweal, the vision of our future unfolding before us. Commonweal is unique in the number of staff who have stayed for 20 years and more. Michael Rafferty, our first staff hire, is with us 32 years later. These continuities are rare and precious in a world of constant and dramatic change.

Conclusion

Now a new chapter at Commonweal starts, as our dear friend Charlotte Brody has departed for Green For All, and Susan Braun joins us on January 5 as Commonweal's new Executive Director. And this new chapter starts in the midst of the birth pangs of a new era in world history. We face the largest financial crisis in seven decades. By the time you read this, the most consequential presidential election since the Great Depression will have been decided. The changes are, as I said at the start, tectonic.

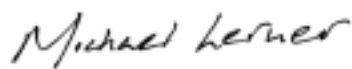
We cannot know the future. But as the letter I wrote to Burr 32 years ago suggests, we can choose the future we hope to co-create. What I do know is this. I know our work at Commonweal is not over. I hope that it has only begun. I hope we can make a great contribution in the years and decades ahead.

I know that the foundations and the community of friends that support our work will be under more financial stress than ever before. I know that the challenge of sustaining Commonweal's work through this time of peril and opportunity will be greater than ever before.

We are not afraid of these challenges. We are acutely conscious of the opportunities. But we truly do need your help and your support this year. If there is any part of Commonweal's work that touches your heart—or if the whole enterprise is dear to you—please do what you can to support us again.

In the midst of all the dangers, toils and snares that surround us, take courage. Choose hope. Count your blessings. Stay close to us. And may peace be with you.

With warm best wishes,



Michael Lerner
President