



In the Beginning: The Story Behind the Story

First person account by Carol Hansen Grey
Former Executive Director of Women of Vision and Action (WOVA)

I begin this story with some background on Women of Vision and Action (WOVA). It was a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1993 to provide a network connecting emerging and established women leaders from all backgrounds who believed vision, combined with spirit-based action, were the ingredients for creating positive change in the world. Members actively demonstrated that belief by co-creating the vision, taking the action and being the change they wished to see in the world. I was asked to join the WOVA Board in 1999, was appointed Executive Director in 2000 and served in that position until I resigned in 2004 to pursue other business opportunities.

The Gather the Women idea began to emerge in my consciousness in November 2001, when I started receiving a series of phone calls from WOVA members who felt drawn to share their visions with me. This in itself was an unusual occurrence -- rarely do I get phone calls of this nature. So when I got three calls within a period of a few weeks from WOVA members who did not know each other, all using the same words to express their vision, I knew I was supposed to pay attention. The words each of them used were: "It's time to gather the women... it's time for women's wisdom to come forth."

It was these calls that prompted me, on November 13, 2001, to register the domain name "gatherthewomen," feeling that this action would help to ground the energy of these women's visions. On November 20, I sent an email to the WOVA Board of Directors telling them about the phone calls, about my feelings that it was important for WOVA to help ground this energy, and to advise them of the action I had taken in registering the domain name.

I was, at that time, in the throes of preparing and coordinating the Feminine Face of Leadership Conference and developing the Leading Without Limits Leadership Institute, both taking place on January 31-February 2, 2002. The GTW domain name and idea just sat on the back shelf until after that conference and the flurry of activities it generated, including formation of Global Action Forum (GAF) committees that were to follow up on the two action ideas that came out of the FFL conference: one to create a network of networks, and the other to create a Global Call to Prayer (GCP).

The Gather the Women idea came alive again in March 2002, when I started receiving phone calls from women who were not WOVA members about their vision to gather the women. I told these women that I had registered the domain name and asked if they might be interested in becoming WOVA members and serving on a steering committee to explore what we could do with this vision. They all enthusiastically agreed.

I checked in with the WOVA Board to see how they felt about creating a steering committee to explore a Gather the Women project and they gave me the go-ahead to continue to form the committee as long as committee members were WOVA members and the activities were overseen by the board. Three board members agreed to be involved: Veronica Wolfe and Carolyn Douglas both agreed to sit on the committee and Kimberly Pfeil agreed to design a logo. I continued to work on building a Gather the Women steering committee and helping to coordinate the Global Action Forum committees.

The committee charged with creating a Global Action Forum met a couple of times and then disbanded when a group of programmers from PlanetWork Consortium agreed to start working on the idea and help develop the technology tools needed. At the same time, the Global Call to Prayer committee was encountering some stumbling blocks, so I called two committee members to see how they felt about the idea of trying to morph the GCP into the Gather the Women project. They both got excited about this possibility and volunteered for the GTW steering committee. The GCP committee then disbanded.

About this same time (March 2002), I had the opportunity to read a book entitled, "Birth of the Chaordic Age" by Dee Hock, founder of Visa International, that served as the inspiration of how we could actually gather hundreds of thousands of women throughout the world. Each gathering would be self-organizing, and WOVA would provide the Gather the Women website as a hub for connection.

Between March and June, I continued to build the Gather the Women steering committee. I invited those women who had called me, and also WOVA members who had attended the Feminine Face of Leadership Conference. I also called WOVA member Lili Fournier from Toronto about her idea of planning a major event on March 8, 2003, in Madison Square Garden. I suggested that we might want to collaborate. WOVA could, perhaps, provide the grassroots Gather the Women movement (whatever that would look like) in conjunction with Lili's planned Women of the World concert. We agreed that the two would remain mutually exclusive events. She was thrilled with the idea and agreed to be placed on the steering committee in order to explore what a collaboration might look like.

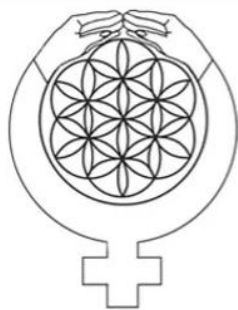
In total, 15 women had agreed to serve. Although many members lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, we had several members from Southern California, one member from Massachusetts, and Lili from Toronto. Most committee members did not know one another. I was the only one who had been in contact with each one personally. How were we ever going to work together on a project of this magnitude when we were operating at long distance? We'd use the Internet, of course!

On June 21, 2002, I asked my husband Victor to set up an email list for our newly formed steering committee and the first messages were posted on June 22.

I asked each steering committee member to post a short bio and a statement to the list as to why they said "yes" to being on the committee. I felt this was an important step for us to get to know one another.

On the 4th of July, we started working on our first task: an opening statement for the website. The only thing we had agreed on was that the date of the event would be on March 8 to coincide with International Women's Day and Lili's event in New York. On July 7, we began planning a date and location for our first "in-person" meeting (which occurred on September 13 in Corte Madera, CA). On July 8, I took a two-week "leave of absence" from the committee to complete some WOVA tasks that needed my attention. I instructed the group to continue exploring the opening statement and to try to come up with a unified vision.

During my "leave," I met with WOVA Board Member Kimberly Pheil (pictured right), who had agreed to design our logo and we began exploring what symbology would be appropriate. I felt the Flower of Life was important to include and she felt the universal symbol for woman was important. During our animated discussion, she put her arms up in a circle surrounding her head and all of a sudden, I saw the symbol -- women's arms creating the circle for the symbol of woman while surrounding the flower of life. Kimberly got so excited, she jumped to her feet saying, "I've got to go NOW!" and left immediately to work on the design. The finished logo was ready on July 18.



GTW-Logo Sketch



GTW-Logo B&W



GTW-Logo Grayscale



GTW-Logo Full Color

On July 21, I returned to my email and was quite overwhelmed to see that 97 messages had been exchanged on the list in my absence. Following is the email I posted to the list on July 22:

Dear Sister Gatherers:

I had a remarkable experience this morning in meditation. Last night I took all your visions and opening statements to bed with me and re-read them just before falling to sleep. This morning, I awoke at 5 a.m., took all your visions and opening statement suggestions into our meditation room, lit the altar candles, and surrendered the event to Spirit asking to be shown a picture that would incorporate all the many inspirations that you have shared over the past couple of weeks. What was shown me was so grand and unexpected that I hope I have the words to adequately share the vision.

Someone received guidance that the number 3 was important. Someone else posted a message that said she saw the event beginning on the third day of the third month of the third year of the millennium: 03-03-03. (That date, by the way, had been originally chosen for our next Feminine Face of Leadership Conference). When I read this post, I immediately went into a "Wow, that's great, but the event needs to be on March 8, the date we all decided on and Lili has much invested in holding it on that date. "

With that in mind I kept asking to be shown how we could incorporate the two dates. All of a sudden I saw the story of creation, 7 days beginning on Monday, March 3, with each day adding to the energy and momentum that culminates on the sixth day, March 8, with the physical gathering of women (and on the 7th day, we take our queue from God/Goddess, and we rest!)

Each day, starting with March 3 (day 1) would have a particular focus that would prepare each participant for the culminating event on March 8: For instance (and these are just ideas I'm suggesting as a starting point -- I'm sure you all may have more inspired suggestions): *(NOTE FROM CAROL: Each one of the links below will open in a new window and take you to Carol Hansen Grey's website where the following messages reside. To return to this site, simply close the window that opened.)*

[Introductory Message](#) (Emailed on March 1)

[Day 1 \(March 3\) A Day of Prayer and Meditation](#)

(Let there be Light)

[Day 2 \(March 4\) A Day of introspection, reflection and contemplation](#)

(A Day of Learning)

[Day 3 \(March 5\) A day of Healing and Forgiveness](#)

(Joanne's healing circle ceremony)

[Day 4 \(March 6\) A day of connection](#)

(Sharing from the heart, story telling, listening & being heard)

[Day 5 \(March 7\) A Day of Mindful Action](#)

(Being the Change we wish to see in the world)

[Day 6 \(March 8\) The Day of Gathering: We let our Light Shine](#)

(Celebration, Inspiration, Seeing the World through Women's Eyes)

[Day 7 \(March 9\) A Day of Rest, Nurturing and Gratitude](#)

Every day builds on the previous, preparing participants and the planet for the infusion of love that will embrace our Mother Earth as women gather on March 8 in every town and village throughout the world to weave the Flower of Life. This is Harmony's Way. It is the way of the Feminine. The Time is Now. Let the Gathering Begin.

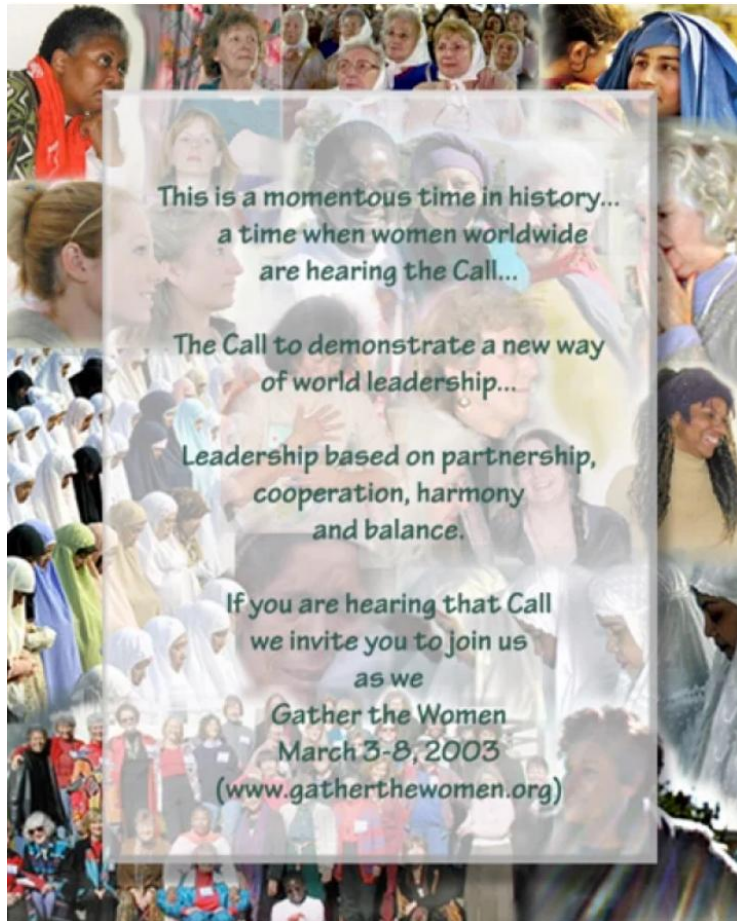
Let me hear your thoughts. I'm certainly not tied to this idea and if the consensus of the group is that we stick with the one-day event on March 8, I would fully support that. However, if you all resonate with the idea, then I have some ideas to share about what we could do with the website.

Only Love Prevails,
Carol



Attendees at September 2002 GTW Circle Retreat: From Left: Marilyn Nyborg, Carolyn Douglas, Lynda Ellis, Lisa Dollar, Jan St. John, Austin Therber, Veronica Wolfe, Bonnie Kaback, Kimberly Pfeil, Maclyn Erickson, Joanne Cronin, Carol Hansen Grey. Missing from photo: Lili fournier, Lynn Finegan. Not in attendance: Cari Shereck, Kathe Schaaf.

We formed committees to do certain tasks. In all it took us 9 months, from the equinox on June 22, when we posted our first messages to the list, to March 8, when thousands of women gathered throughout the world with the intention of grounding the feminine energy to bring the planet into balance, harmony, and peace. During that time, we effectively spread the word and built an interactive website where participants could register to participate (almost 4700 women registered in 67 countries), list their events (over 450 events were listed in 23 countries), and share their visions and prayers. The website continued to expand and serve as a hub where participants could take part in GTW Discussions, Actions, and Inspiration Forums, and connect with one another through our online directory. Following is a copy of the original GTW website homepage collage.



The committee completed its work and the list was closed on March 31, 2003, after exchanging 23,354 emails. Here is the closing message I sent to the list on March 31.

Dearest Circle Members:

Today our circle closes and it is time for reflection.

We have accomplished much in our nine months together. I think it's interesting that it WAS nine months from conception to birth of GTW. We'd talked about and planned for something to be birthed prior to conception. But the actual conception took place on June 22, when the first posts to this list occurred. The birth took place nine months later in March! Amazing!!

The process we embarked on together took on all the elements of a typical pregnancy -- the exuberance at the beginning (the freshness of knowing we had entered a process of creating something new), the planning for the birth, the discomfort of being "stretched," the pain of labor, and finally the glorious moment of birth!

This is indeed a time of celebration. My hope is that each one of us can, like a mother, let go of the pain of the labor and bask in the joy of what we together have birthed! As all births are, this truly was a miracle.

If you are so inclined please use this day to post your insights to the list as tonight it will be deactivated.

Thank you all for adding to the richness of this experience.

Only Love Prevails,
Carol