

# Great Story Adventures Along the Pacific

## Highlights of Our Travels: Talking, Teaching, Learning

[www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org)

March – May, 2003

Turtlelog No. 6



***Michael Dowd** and **Connie Barlow** are permanently on the road, bringing the 13 billion year story of the universe (*The Great Story*) to schools, colleges, churches, and spiritual and educational centers around North America.*

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To see any of our 5 previous Highlights of Our Travels go to:  
[www.TheGreatStory.org/turtlelog\\_archives.html](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/turtlelog_archives.html)

To see a list of all the places we have presented go to:  
[www.TheGreatStory.org/past-itinerary.html](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/past-itinerary.html)

## *Our First Year on the Road*

### *April 2002 – April 2003*

April 26, 2003 we (Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow) celebrated our first anniversary of being on the road! During that time, we ...

- delivered sermons and/or workshops in **71 churches** and spiritual centers in **21 states**;
- were guest teachers in **14 colleges and universities, 5 elementary schools,** and **3 high schools**;
- gave **plenary addresses at 7 conferences** and attended 2 others;
- and presented at a number of **zoos, botanical gardens, environmental centers,** and **living rooms**.

All this in order to share the Great News of The Great Story of 13 billion years of cosmic creativity, while fostering (what Thomas Berry calls) "the Great Work."

Committed to working regionally, there was only one presentation we did not drive to: the Unity Church of Kauai, in Hawaii.

***WHERE WE'VE BEEN OUR FIRST YEAR ON THE ROAD***

WASHINGTON D.C. • NORTH CAROLINA • NEW JERSEY

NEW YORK • MASSACHUSETTS • NEW HAMPSHIRE

VERMONT • OHIO • MICHIGAN • INDIANA • ILLINOIS

WISCONSIN • MINNESOTA • KANSAS • MISSOURI

COLORADO • CALIFORNIA • NEW MEXICO • OREGON

***“What’s This Bead?”***

Great Story beads [[www.TheGreatStory.org/great\\_story\\_beads.html](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/great_story_beads.html)] offer an amazingly fun and easy way to learn and celebrate the science and meaning of cosmic, Earth, life, and cultural evolution – for adults as well as children. Suggestive and sometimes representational beads of major moments in the epic of evolution are strung together, in order of occurrence. For example, in the beads close-up photos, the orange-brown banded sphere at left represents the birth of the Grand Canyon 5 million years ago. Immediately below it is the rise of the Isthmus of Panama 3 million years ago, which connected North and South America for the first time. The turtle bead represents the “Golden Age of Turtles” (which followed the dinosaur extinction, black bead), and which also represents the birth of the North American Continent — “Turtle Island.”

Everywhere we go, we find that as soon as we pull out our Great Story Beads, it is impossible to talk about anything else.

In April 2003, **Connie Barlow** took her double-loop necklace of Great Story Beads into a class at the **Montessori School of Beaverton** (near Portland OR). The cluster of kids at her work table would point to a bead and ask, “What’s this one?” Courteous, the children would wait for Connie’s simple explanation, then immediately another would ask, “What’s this one?”

Two 11 year olds, **Meg** and **Riley**, stayed at Connie's table the full two and half hours. Other kids came and went, but those two wouldn't budge. After about the first hour they were snagging other children passing by and saying, "Guess what this bead is for?" Connie had less and less involvement, as she watched the two children (in classic Montessori style!) take over the teaching. By the time the morning was over and Connie departed, Meg and Riley, between them, must have had memorized close to 60 of Connie's 165 beads.



Their **favorites**: formation of the Grand Canyon; the half white, half brown bead that signifies polar bears evolving from grizzlies; the black bead for the dinosaur extinction and another black bead for what Montessori kids easily recognize as "the trilobite extinction"; the big brown bead for dinosaurs and the blood-red bead for T. rex, the bead for the Golden Age of Mammals and the skinny green bead next to it for the origin of grasses, the acorn bead for coevolution of squirrels and nut trees. Also, mammoths coming to North America, when rain first fell on the young Earth, invention of photosynthesis, invention of agriculture.

## *"That's the Lucky Little Seaweed!"*

Connie was happy to discover that the Montessori students were particularly fascinated by widely separated pairs of beads that made connections between the story itself and how humans discovered the story. They especially loved this pair: a big sparkly bead that represented the **supernova** explosions long before our own Sun formed, and a smaller version of the same bead, representing when scientists discovered (in 1957) that ancient starbursts had created all the calcium and other elements in our bodies.

Early on, when **Meg** pointed to a translucent green bead, Connie began, "This one is when algae came out of the ocean and became the first land plants."

"Oh!" she squealed. "That's the Lucky Little Seaweed!"



**From Left:**  
**First land plants**  
**First land spiders & insects**  
**First ferns**  
**First land vertebrates**

The previous day, Meg's teacher, **Aimee Richmond**, had read to the children for story time an "evolutionary parable," which she had printed from our website. The parable selected had been written by paleontologist **Mark McMenamin**. It is a playful way to teach the science of plants coming out onto land. The title of the parable is "The Lucky Little Seaweed." You can find it on the "Parables" pages of our website.

## *Ozzie and the Snortlefish in EarthLight*

Mark McMenamin was inspired to write "The Lucky Little Seaweed" parable after he read another evolutionary parable written for our website by the former writer of Batman Comics: **Denny O'Neil**. Denny had used made-up fish characters and whimsical dialogue in order to teach the hard-core science of vertebrates coming onto land as the first amphibians.

Denny's parable, "Ozzie and the Snortlefish," was published in the Spring 2003 issue of **EarthLight** magazine. *EarthLight: The Magazine of Spiritual Ecology* is publishing an evolutionary parable in almost every issue, selecting from the collection on our website, with our enthusiastic support. Everything on our website is free. Everything is intended to spread into the world as widely and as usefully as possible. In fact, Ozzie, Seaweed, and two other parables are also downloadable from [www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org) in a script form, that can be a playful way to perform rather than recite each parable.

That same issue of *EarthLight* includes an autobiographical essay by Michael Dowd: "My Road to Damascus: The Making of an Evolutionary Evangelist." Michael tells the story of his conversion from evolutionary inquisitor to someone who now travels North America popularizing a God-glorifying way of understanding evolution.

## *An Evolutionary Perspective on Easter (for Christians)*

**Lauren de Boer**, editor of *EarthLight*, arranged for us to present two weekday programs at their office in Oakland, California. For the first, Connie did an evening workshop on evolutionary parables. The following week, near Easter, **Michael Dowd** led a discussion on the Easter theme, and how a Christian understanding of those events can be enriched by the science story of 13 billion years of divine cosmic creativity.



*Easter discussion  
at the offices of  
EarthLight  
magazine*



Many who attended shared concerns, experiences, and awesome insights. Two days before the *EarthLight* talk, Michael had presented on the same theme to a packed living room at a **Quaker** retirement village in Santa Rosa. This was at

the home of **Paul Burks** and **Jean Barker**, who were instrumental in the early years of *EarthLight* magazine.

Michael concluded the week by serving as guest minister at **Foothills Congregational Church** in Los Altos. "An Evolutionary Perspective on Jesus' Life, Death, and Resurrection" was his sermon title. **Fay Oliver**, director of adult education at the church, followed up with this expression of gratitude:

"Thank you, Michael, for preaching at both services, conducting a talk-back time between services and a forum after the second. We worked you hard, but you gave us the gift of a fresh perspective on the ministry of Jesus and hope for Christianity in the future. It was exciting!"

### ***RELIGIOUS GROUPS WE GAVE TALKS OR SERMONS TO DURING OUR FIRST YEAR ON THE ROAD***

- **30 UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST**
- **19 SPIRITUAL CENTERS (E.G., CATHOLIC)**
- **7 CONGREGATIONAL OR UCC CHURCHES**
- **6 UNITY / NEW THOUGHT / RELIGIOUS SCIENCE CHURCHES**
- **2 METHODIST CHURCHES**
- **2 PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES**
- **2 QUAKER MEETINGS**
- **1 LUTHERAN CHURCH**
- **1 MENNONITE CHURCH**
- **1 BUDDHIST DHARMA GROUP**

## ***A New Unitarian Chalice Lighting***

While Michael was bringing the Great Story to Foothills Congregational Church (north of Palo Alto), Connie was twenty minutes away, serving as guest speaker for the Sunday morning service of the **Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Redwood City**. Her title: "The Great Story: Humanists and Spiritual Seekers

Discover Common Ground.” (Connie also did the children’s story: “Learning Your Cosmic Age.”)

UU churches have sustained us during this first year on the road. The honorarium for guest presenters is usually modest, but we can count on selling a good many books after the service – and not just our own. We stock all of Brian Swimme’s and Thomas Berry’s books, Jennifer Morgan’s books for kids, *Cosmic Dance* by Joyce Rupp and Mary Southard, *Sacred Depths of Nature* by Ursula Goodenough, *The Hand of God* (gorgeous Hubble photographs), and titles by Diarmuid O’Murchu, Cletus Wessels, Duane Elgin, Robert Wright, Tim Flannery, Tom Atlee, plus several videos. (We would love to carry more titles, but our van is now at its limit.)

During these first 12 months on the road we presented talks (mostly Sunday sermons) in a total of **30 Unitarian Universalist** churches and fellowships around the country. These past three months, however, took us into only 3 UU churches, as we had more of a mix of Christian and Unity churches this latest quarter.

What made the Redwood City UU experience especially memorable was that the worship chair, **Sarah Skovlund**, created a new unison reading for the traditional **UU Chalice Lighting**. She did this expressly to accompany Connie’s talk. We find Sarah’s reading so attuned to our basic message that we have begun including it in UU programs wherever we go:



***We light this chalice as a  
Symbol of our connection to  
The stars in the sky,  
To the warmth of the Sun,  
And to our own bright place  
In the Universe.***

## *“It’s Like Dry Tinder!”*

A highlight of our time in the Bay area was a leisurely lunch at the diner with **Brian Swimme**. Connie came prepared with a list of 20 items to discuss, ranging from “What do you think is going on with dark matter, Brian?” to “Oh, you’ve got to hear about Michael’s altar call in Oakland!”

During our conversation, **Brian** turned us onto a marvelous little book by a couple of Montessori teachers on bringing the new cosmology to young people, *Children of the Universe: Cosmic Education in the Montessori Elementary Classroom*, by Michael and D’Neil Duffy, 2002 Parent Child Press, Hollidaysburg PA. (We have since added this book to our on-the-road sales stock.) In turn, Connie made a strong case for why Brian should write a new little book that could be a companion to his now-classic *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*. This one would be on the **stardust** theme – all the science marvels of chemical element formation inside of stars, and all the meaning marvels of what that knowledge can do for our minds and souls.

“I remember reading *Hidden Heart*,” Connie told Brian, “and when I finished your luscious section about the ‘generosity of the sun’ I was disappointed that you didn’t continue on to the generosity shown by previous generations of stars. That’s the most astonishing part! That’s the part that nobody really learns in school.”

The stardust theme was front and center for Connie because she had been doing a lot of presentations on it. She was also then in process of putting together a 15-page background document, “We Are Made of Stardust,” (available at [www.TheGreatStory.org/Stardustbackground.pdf](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/Stardustbackground.pdf)). This web document is designed to not only help any and everyone really *get* this portion of the story, but also to give others the confidence to begin teaching and ceremonializing it.

Connie’s stardust document is not, however, a luscious, poetic rendering of the story. It is straight-forward. That is why she prodded Brian at the lunch table. We shall see if that conversation eventually bears fruit!

Brian offered his own encouragement back to us. At one point, when Michael was telling Brian about his work with **Christian churches** and his eagerness to do far, far more in that arena, Brian leaned forward, saying, “It’s like dry tinder out there, Michael. A powerful presentation of yours on video or DVD, geared specifically for Christians, could easily spread through the Church like wildfire.”

## *Christianity and the Great Story*

In March and April Michael delivered Sunday sermons in 4 Christian churches: 3 UCC and 1 Presbyterian. The feedback we got was deeply satisfying.



**Michael Dowd leading altar call at First Congregational Church of Oakland, CA (March 2003)**

**Lori Nelson**, administrator of adult R.E. programs at **Calvary Presbyterian** in San Francisco, thanked Michael in this way:

"Sunday was phenomenal, and I only wish that more people were able to share the presentation. I have gotten feedback and feedback from people who didn't attend and wish they had based on the feedback! People loved Michael and thought he was smart, charismatic, and thought provoking. A few attendees have been seen toting books around that they got at the presentation."

At **First Congregational of Oakland**, Michael felt free to let his Pentecostal roots see the light of day. The congregation fed him by "amen-ing" throughout, occasionally tossing in a "Preach it, brother!" Rev. **Ama Zonya Lewis**, wrote Michael afterwards, "Bless you, Michael, for answering God's call so fully and whole-heartedly."

## *A New Video for Christians*

When we first hit the road, we recorded audios of some of our talks. Audio is a great medium for Connie's presentations. But for Michael, voice by itself misses more than half the show!

Lou Niznik of Earth Communications rendered two of Michael's Christian presentations into a single two-hour video. Lou is now listing this video with the many other fine videos that he sells and rents by mail (many of which he films himself). Lou has been the video meister for The New Story, an avocation turned into retirement semi-vocation. You can find out how to order Michael's "Christianity and The Cosmic Story (#B-30) by viewing Lou's online catalog [[www.TheGreatStory.org/Niznik.pdf](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/Niznik.pdf)]. Although we will be selling the videotape in person wherever we go, we sell nothing on our website, so you will need to order from Lou.



## *Two Talks that Got Away*

Twice these past few months, we didn't bother to set up the video and afterwards wished we had. In the moment, we are there to make a difference with the people who have come to hear one or both of us. But when the dynamics are just right, we long to make the same experience available to more people, and for years to come. We know how much we love watching the same videos over and over and over. (*Canticle to the Cosmos*, anyone?) So much more is revealed the third — or thirteenth — time around!

One “talk that got away” was at **West Hills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship** in Portland, Oregon. The title of Michael’s sermon was one of our standards: “The Marriage of Science and Religion.” Usually we do that one together, but this time, Michael was alone on the program. Something about the lovely sanctuary, surrounded by forest on a sunny day, and the packed congregation (more than a hundred in attendance) worked magic on Michael. Audience response was over the top. With UU’s Michael usually can’t pull out all the stops, but he can let the Spirit move through him enough to have the words and body language flow powerfully.

## PLENARY TALKS GIVEN AT CONFERENCES OUR FIRST YEAR



The other occasion of a talk that got away was at **Clark College**, in Vancouver WA. **Kathleen Perillo**, who teaches environmental biology at the college, had invited the two of us to be the keynote speakers for their evening Earth Day events. We had set up the video, but when only 50 people sat down in a room set up for 200, our spirits dropped, and we never bothered to clip on the remote microphone.

Michael did a better than usual job of occupying the entire stage during his segment of the program. And Connie was on fire, too, speaking about the malaise we all feel, at some level, because we recognize we no longer serve the helpful ecological functions that our ancestors long ago did.

## *Taking the Great Story to Colleges*

Contacting churches is Michael’s job; contacting colleges is Connie’s job. And, alas, Connie has been letting the latter slip. She has allowed just about everything else on her To Do list to take precedence over getting on the web and searching for likely college professors who might be interested in having one or

the other of us guest lecture in a class: **biology** classes for Connie, **theology** classes for Michael, and **environmental studies** for us both. During our first year on the road, we delivered guest lectures to students in 14 colleges and universities.

Churches are our bread and butter. We can sell books there. Colleges and all other schools are almost always pro bono, with little chance of getting even our gasoline costs reimbursed. Nevertheless, we love speaking with students during the week, and hope that someday we will be able to support staff who can seek such invitations for us.

## COLLEGES ON OUR SPEAKING TOUR, FIRST YEAR



It was a treat to receive a dinner invitation from Portland State University physics professors **Todd Duncan** and **Jack Semura**, followed by an invitation to guest lecture in Todd's "Complexity and the Universe" course, which we enthusiastically agreed to do. Connie had corresponded with Todd three years earlier, when he submitted an article for the *Epic of Evolution* journal, for which she served as editor.

Todd emailed us later:

"The students were fascinated by your story of what you are doing and why, as indicated by the discussion stirred up during class. An important purpose of the course is to teach the science of cosmology in a way that invites students to incorporate the concepts into their own lives in ways that are meaningful and personal to them. Your personal stories provided them with an excellent example of the life- and society- transforming power of this process. It helped them to see directly that the science really does have an impact on everything: politics, religion, or just how we spend our day-to-day lives."

The previous week, we had briefly met a third Portland State U professor who makes an integrated understanding of the Universe central to his teaching. **Tom Johnson** teaches in the business school. Here is the title of one of his courses: "Business Models for an Ecozoic Age." Amazing!

## *Talking Ecological Science at Stanford*

In March, Connie gave an hour-long slide program at a weekly seminar of graduate students enrolled in the "Ecology and Evolution" program at **Stanford's Center for Conservation Biology**. It was an honor to speak in the department where Paul Ehrlich is on the faculty, and where Michael Soule, father of conservation biology, received his training.

Connie's topic was the theme of her 2001 book, *The Ghosts of Evolution*. Her title: "Anachronistic Fruits: Why a Deep-Time Perspective is Crucial for Conservation."

The students were great. Connie loved handling their technical questions. Coming into contact with their intellect and their conservation commitment gave her a charge. One student in particular with whom she and Michael talked for a long time afterwards was an inspiration. **Jason Funk**, in his early 20s, was enrolled in a new cross-disciplinary program between political science and conservation biology. He had the commitment and charisma of someone who surely will be making a difference in the world. "I look forward to seeing you as a U.S. Senator in twenty years!" Connie called out to Jason as we walked our separate ways.

## *Montessori Teachers & The Great Work*

Young people can be such an inspiration! At **New Faith UCC Church** in Auburn, California, we got a chance to "feed" and be fed by an amazing 17 year old, **Gabriel Moss**, who attended Michael's Sunday sermon. At the **Quaker Meeting House of Santa Cruz** (scheduled thanks to **Nancy Glock-Gruenich**), we fondly remember three little girls who strung Great Story beads while their mothers listened to our program on that topic.

What better way to reach children than through a gathering of 120 teachers? Connie and Michael were thrilled when **David Kahn**, head of the **North American Montessori Teachers Association**, invited us to speak at a conference of Montessori teachers. The 3-day event took place at a big hotel in Portland, but the teachers came from as far away as Alabama and Nigeria.

For the morning plenary talk, Connie did a short introduction about why we are on the road. She also connected our work to the tradition long ago established by **Maria Montessori**, the great innovator of early childhood and elementary education, who insisted that the Universe Story should be the foundation for all education. Then Michael took the floor – and did he occupy it! The conference room was exceptionally wide. Yet Michael walked from one end to the other in his natural effort to connect with everyone in the audience. His title: “Fostering the Great Work Through the Universe Story.”

The response was outstanding. And two women told me afterwards that Michael’s presentation had brought them to tears. “I’ve been teaching for a long time, and Michael reminded me why I do it!” one told Connie.



*Montessori teachers listening to Connie’s presentation on how we are made of stardust, at Montessori teachers conference in Portland, Oregon (April 2003)*

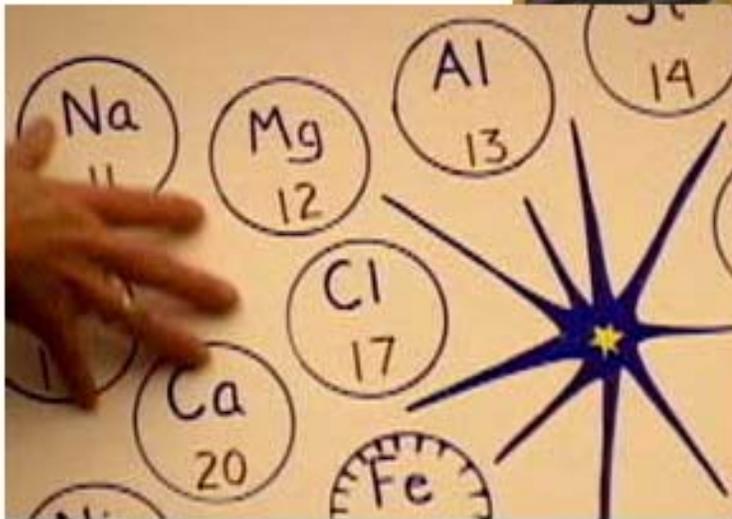
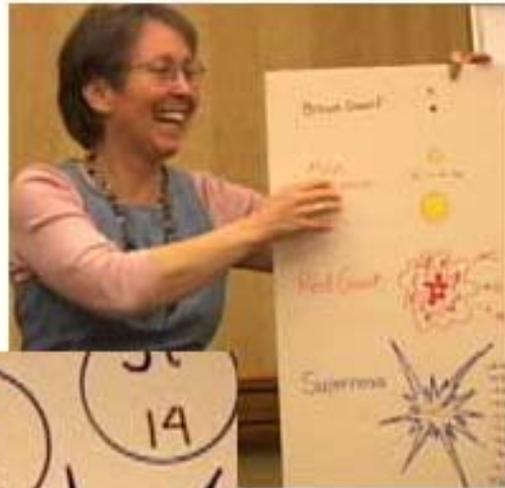
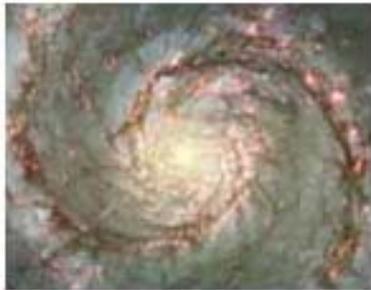
## *Teaching Teachers the Science of Stardust*

Michael could not stay for the remainder of the conference, as he had speaking commitments the following two days in Ashland and in Grants Pass. Connie was happy to get a chance to do a three-hour **workshop** entirely by herself: “Creative Approaches to the Great Story.” Since then, she has posted on our website a 15-page report, with pictures, that teaches the **Story of Stardust** [[www.TheGreatStory.org/Stardustbackground.pdf](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/Stardustbackground.pdf)], with special attention to the most awesome and meaningful understandings.

Three hours was barely enough time. The 40-plus teachers who came to her concurrent workshop were hungry for as much technical information on Great

Story Beads and on the Story of Stardust as she had time to give. Plus Connie felt it crucial to allow time for small-group discussions.

At the close, Connie told a story of her **childhood experience raising Cecropia moths** from caterpillars. It takes many weeks for a caterpillar to feed its way to the transition into pupa and cocoon. And there it overwinters. When the adult moth hatches, it has no mouth parts; it lives just a few days, simply to reproduce. So: Is the purpose of a caterpillar to grow into a moth? Or perhaps the purpose of the moth is to produce more caterpillars! Just what is the life cycle aiming toward?



Similarly, let us keep in mind that while it is crucial to help children grow into fulfilled and contributing adults, the adult stage is by no means the goal. Perhaps the "**cosmic task**" of the human is to celebrate dinosaurs – which no one does better than a child!

## *The Stardust Song*

At the conference we received two invitations from Portland Montessori teachers to work with their students. The first, **The Montessori School of Beaverton**, was reported at the beginning of this Turtlelog (organized thanks to **Cathy Swan, Kathleen Berry, and Aimee Richmond**). The second invitation came from conference attendee **Sister Anne Clare Keeler**, of the **St. Francis Academy Montessori Earth School** in Portland. This time Michael joined Connie for the visit, as Connie convinced him that there is nothing more energizing than just sitting in a Montessori classroom and responding to kids questions about “What is this **bead**?”



Michael was a magnet. All of the kids, save for three 11-year-old girls who chose Connie, were at his work station. In this classroom, we also did a little presentation on the stardust theme. We were shocked by how much the kids already knew. And one boy showed Connie a report he had just done with chemical equations in it.

There is a natural attraction for novelty in teachers, so we couldn't go wrong. And giving kids a chance to be “anointed” with glitter, symbolic of stardust, was definitely novel for them. Throughout that experience, we all sang, over and over, the **stardust song**. Connie uses a chart of symbols to teach the single verse: “We are made of stardust, every single atom, of carbon and of oxygen, calcium and iron.”

These Montessori kids sing everyday. They caught onto the tune quickly and sang with gusto. When Connie was packing away the song chart to go to another classroom, a girl came to her and implored: “Could you draw that for me? I want to remember it.”

Instead, Connie wrote down the words, leaving ample space for drawing. Then, she made just a sketch of each symbol that applied to the key words. By the time Connie and Michael returned to have lunch with this group, more than one child had made **a song chart**, with colorful drawings. As soon as Connie stepped into the room, she was grabbed by the girls, who wanted to sing the song once more to ensure that they got it right. Soon all the children were gathered around, singing!

## *First Experience in a Public Elementary School*

Two days after this Montessori school experience, Connie was presenting the Stardust program to an assembly of fifth graders at **Fairview Elementary School in Portland**, thanks to an invitation secured by our colleague and host, **Milt Markewitz**. Connie had assumed this would be a standard in-class presentation, but (yikes!) the principal, **Patricia Martinez**, chose to merge both fifth-grade classes (for a total of 70 students) and run it like an assembly in the gymnasium. Connie was given a hand-held microphone, and the kids sat on the floor in two tiers around the inner square and free throw circle of a basketball court.



**Antares is the Red Supergiant star in the heart of the constellation Scorpius. Stars very much like Antares that lived and died before our sun was born created inside themselves then exploded into the galaxy the very atoms of CARGON, OXYGEN, and NITROGEN that make up our bodies.**

The kids were naturally curious about this special event, so offered their full attention at the outset. Connie was surprised that the attention maintained for the full 45 minutes; not a single kid looked away or created any discipline problems. Wow! Part of the reason was the substance. Let's face it, learning about **our relationship to the stars** is fascinating. But the style also helped.

Connie conducted the 5<sup>th</sup> grade assembly as an interactive dialogue, asking the kids leading questions. And when a hand went up (usually five or ten all at once), Connie walked over and held the microphone in front of the child's face. Now that was something to watch! More than once a hand would go up, but then the kid just went blank when the mic appeared. Good practice!

And she was not the only one asking questions. **The kids had questions galore.** Not surprisingly, there was some concern about what would happen if the sun explodes (like the supernova stars I was talking about). Fortunately, Connie could give them scientifically accurate assurance that a main sequence star simply doesn't explode, but in their little hearts, there is still some doubt.

## ***What About God?***

Public school is more of a challenge for us with this material than is a private school, like the Montessori schools we are accustomed to. For one, these fifth graders at **Fariview Elementary School** were not inclined to sing. Connie brought out the stardust song chart, and spent some time teaching and singing it, but few joined in.

Owing to possible interpretations that glittering might be (wrongly) regarded as "pagan", Connie glittered herself, telling the kids why she likes to do it, but did not offer to glitter the kids.

On the other side of religious divide, there was a different challenge. When Connie showed the class her **Great Story Beads** and talked about what they meant, she was hesitant to draw attention to the beginning, to the Great Radiance (also known as the Big Bang), because she didn't know whether it was allowable to say anything about God.

**God** can be talked about in private schools. And not just God. Connie likes to point out that scientists don't know what came "before" the universe and why so much creativity is apparent in the long history of the universe. So the little bead she has before the Great Radiance / Big Bang bead signifies "God, Great Spirit, Mystery." People have many different ideas of what came before and why the Universe came into being."

In this public school Connie avoided the whole issue. Yet in her heart she worries that absence of any mention of God or Spirit or Mystery may, in the mind of a child who looks up to the teacher, imply **evidence of absence**. One older boy came up to her afterwards and asked, "What was before the Big Bang?" Connie fumbled with an answer, but knows she did not speak from her heart.

Afterward, Connie queried **Principal Martinez** about possible repercussions, even given her careful presentation. "Oh, I expect I'll get a few calls," she quipped.

## *Evolution and Intelligent Design*



Connie with workshop participant at the

### **Foundation for Global Community in Palo Alto, CA**

Prior to our workshop on Evolution v. Intelligent Design, we spent a whole evening on the Stardust theme, culminating in a celebration of our cosmic ages. "Strike the gong as you declare you full cosmic age!"

(Connie is 13.7 billion and 51!)

At the middle and secondary school level of public education, there are ways to imply the workings of God without exactly saying it. This new approach is called "intelligent design" and it is at the core of a raging debate about how to best and fairly teach cosmic and biological evolution in public schools.

Ever since we launched our itinerant "ministry", we have included in our list of possible programs this topic: "Evolution v. Intelligent Design: The Great Story as Common Ground." The first organization to invite us to present on this subject was the **Foundation for Global Community** in Palo Alto. For a series of four Mondays in March, **Debbie Mytels** and staff selected a different theme for us to present each week. "Evolution v. Intelligent Design" was the topic for the third Monday.

What a great audience to test out this new topic! We know now that we didn't spend enough time explaining the history and substance of the debate, and the "creation science" issues that preceded it. Even so, conversation was lively and instructive. And there was a wide spectrum of opinion.



**Michael Dowd**

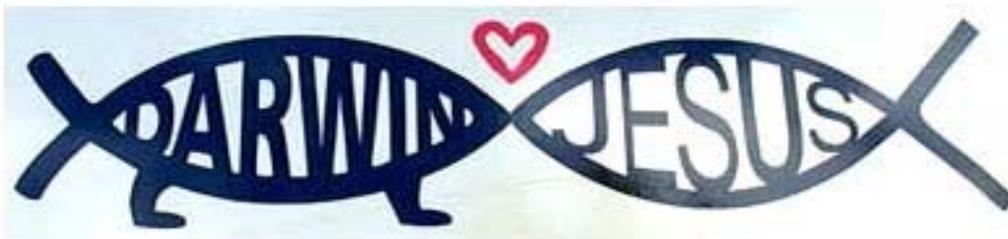
speaking on Intelligent Design and evolution at the Foundation for Global Community in Palo Alto, CA.

March 2003

Our fundamental (controversial?) thesis is this: **Evolutionists don't realize that they have won the war, so they are still fighting skirmishes.**

Let us explain: Leading advocates of Intelligent Design do not dispute the sequence of events that have occurred in a universe that is some 13 billion years old. They dispute only whether science has fully explained each step. For those transformations where they see incompleteness, they would like "intelligent design" (that is, some purposeful intelligence working inside or outside the process) acknowledged as one possible explanation.

**The Great Story is a bridge** that both sides of the debate can agree on because *all it does is tell the story, the sequence of events, in meaningful ways.* It doesn't get into distinctions of whether chance-and-necessity account for the creativity or whether God does, nor whether that God is inside or outside the process.



Why? Because the Great Story, for the most part, is a sequence of major transformation events, told in a meaningful way. It does not delve into the WHY and HOW.

In our work teaching and celebrating the 13.7 billion year "Great Story" of cosmos, Earth, life, and humanity, we don't really spend time talking about HOW evolution occurred – with the notable exception of chemical formation inside stars. We teach the latter because schools and colleges, for some reason, have let this science story (is it chemistry or is it physics?) fall between the cracks, and because within the sciences there is no debate. This IS the way it happened. There is, however, great debate about how biological evolution happened (though not, of course, *that* it happened).

One of the participants set the tone for the evening by telling the group how his brother, a **biblical literalist, had made a big turn** with respect to evolution. For years that brother had bashed evolution, but now, he spoke of "intelligent design" and found that his God was revealed in evolution! Yes!

## *Unity Churches and The Great Story*

Winter 2003 was the first period in which we presented talks in more Unity/New Thought churches than in either Unitarian or various Christian denominations. This is an exciting development for us, because the positive thinking and self-improvement emphasis that is a delight in Unity / New Thought contexts is a natural match for the ways that Michael construes the scientific story of the cosmos. The more widely we can make this message available, the more fulfilled we are.



**Michael Dowd  
Preaching at the Home of  
Truth Church in Alameda  
California, March 2003**

Michael gave guest sermons Sunday mornings at: **Home of Truth** in Alameda CA, **Unity Church of Grants Pass** OR, and the **Unity Church of Kauai** HA (more on that Hawaii excursion later in this report). Michael and Connie jointly presented Saturday workshops at **Unity Center of Walnut Creek** CA and **Unity Church of Beaverton** OR.

We recorded a good **video** of Michael's **Home of Truth** sermon. Unity sermons tend to be very short, as singing and other forms of congregational participation are very important. We look forward to capturing two or three more Unity sermons on video and then working with Lou Niznik to get them into a form that can be distributed.

Twelve people participated in the 4-hour workshop at **Unity Church of Beaverton**. The event was co-sponsored by the church and **New West Seminary**. We have no problem adapting in the moment to whatever the size of the group, so for this one, we chose a semicircle and made it highly interactive.

There was magic in this small group. Each participant brought a vital expertise or personal experience into the discussion. We listened at least as much as we spoke. And we learned! **Elaine Johnson**, who teaches literature at Portland State University, advised us that, technically, "the epic of evolution" is a true **epic** only if it begins in the middle, at some climactic juncture, and then works backward and forward from there. Connie edited "The Epic of Evolution" newsletter for three years and never knew that!

Michael was especially grateful for Elaine's gift of knowledge, because it gave him an idea for a way to tell the Great Story to **conservative Christians**: begin in the "middle" at the crucifixion of Jesus, or when humans first acquired symbolic language (the fall in the Garden), and then move backward and forward in time.



**MICHAEL DOWD PREACHING AT THE UNITY CHURCH OF BEAVERTON, OR**

Our Saturday workshop at **Unity Center of Walnut Creek** had only four in attendance. Once before we cancelled a workshop because of too few participants, and we almost did that here, but we decided to run it as a small circle and just enjoy. What a surprise! Each person in the group began by telling their story — what it was on their spiritual path that brought them to this workshop here and now. Connie was brought to tears twice by the stories. We did get a chance to teach about the Great Story too, and established some helpful networking.

The minister, **David McArthur**, was working in his office that morning, and invited us to lunch at the close of the morning workshop. Connie had visited the Unity bookstore on a break, and bought a copy of his book, *The Intelligent Heart*.

Preparing to leave for lunch, Connie said to David, "Great Story colleagues in St. Louis turned us onto the Heart Math books. Do you know them? Jim and Mary Jo Brauner invite one of the Heart Math leaders to St. Louis for a workshop practically every year."

"That's me!" replied David McArthur. David brought his laptop to lunch, and gave us a mini-version of his Powerpoint presentation on **The Intelligent Heart**. What a gift!

## *Meaningful Coincidences*

Anybody moving from place to place as much as we do, and coming into contact with so many amazing people, is bound to have meaningful coincidences – however one might interpret them. Our connection with the author of *The Intelligent Heart* was one such coincidence. Another came about because Michael forgot the power cord to his laptop at **Russ and Cheryl Genet's** home in mid-California, and we were moving too fast for the mailed item to catch us. So, Michael went to the Apple store in Palo Alto to buy a replacement. He turned into an aisle, and there was someone he recognized from one of the videos we sell, *The Next Industrial Revolution*.

"**Bill McDonough!**" Michael spoke right up. "My wife and I preach and teach on the road, and we've sold about 250 of your videos!" Through follow-up correspondence, we now have an invitation to visit this visionary ecological architect whenever Virginia is on our schedule.

Another coincidence: The route our hosts suggested we take from our UCC church gig in Auburn California to get back to I-5 took us within five miles of Nevada City – which Connie remembered was the home of **Dawn Publications**, publisher of the fabulous children's books on the Great Story by Jennifer Morgan and Dana

Lynn Andersen (see images *From Lava to Life* on previous page). So we made the side-trip and had a wonderful conversation with staff there. We departed with 200 more copies of Jennifer and Dana's books, plus a gift copy of nearly two dozen of their other children's titles.

**Kevin Kelly**, author of *Out of Control* and former editor of *Wired* and *Whole Earth* magazines, was happy to have us show up in his home office in Pacifica for an afternoon. It was then and there that our van chose to have a flat. Excellent place for that to happen, because Kevin Kelly is prepared! He had a device that would get air into the tire long enough for us to roll down to the tire store 2 miles away the next morning. That meant we would spend the night there, sleeping comfortably in our van. The bennie: we luxuriated in Kevin's library late into the night. Connie found a technical book titled, *Homoplasy*, in his active stack. Homoplasy is another word for evolutionary convergence. Connie had just finished a major paper on **evolutionary convergence** for our website [<http://www.TheGreatStory.org/convergence.html>], and was happy to give Kevin a copy to use in his work.

## *Aloha and New Writings*



**Kite-flying fun in Hawaii: Michael and Connie with host, Rich Reha**

Okay, what about that Unity Church of Kauai, we mentioned a few sections back? It is time to tell the story.

For almost the entire month of May, Michael and Connie were on a writer's retreat on the Big Island of Hawaii. Michael's Sunday sermon at the **Unity Church in Kauai** was the only presentation we had scheduled. Truly, this time was meant for thinking and writing.

Our Hawaii retreat was made possible by the love and generosity of three Universe Story supporters, two of whom we had never met. **Yoko Kmetz** of Japan made the trip possible through her generous donation that paid for our airline tickets and more. **Rich and Sandra Reha** let us use two cabins at their rural home in Wood Valley (2,500 feet up Mauna Loa, on the southeastern side of the Big Island, not far from Pahala, HI) — and they kept us fed. What a gift to have nearly a month with nothing really required of us but to write! So what have we produced?

## *Outreach to Conservative Christians*

For our writer's retreat in Hawaii, Michael chose two big tasks. First, to develop new ideas for sermons that will help conservative Christians find the Great Story to be faith-enhancing. Second, to put these new ideas into a compelling, short book format. The basic thesis of his book is threefold:

1. The Bible is God's inspired Word and reveals fundamental truth about the human condition and our individual and collective destinies. To think that a literal interpretation of the Bible is the best or only legitimate one, however, is to misunderstand the nature of human language, to underestimate the extent of divine revelation, and, ironically, to trivialize scripture.
2. God's self revelation did not begin nor end with the Bible and cannot possibly be contained in human words, no matter how inspired. Time, space, matter, energy, and consciousness also reveal God's creativity, God's will, and God's loving, generous, forgiving nature. Jesus not only knew this, he embodied it. He incarnated it.
3. As the Church integrates and reinterprets itself in light of God's most recent revelation, as discerned through the evolutionary sciences, it will grow into its greatness and fulfill its prophetic destiny as a hugely positive force on behalf of the entire body of life. Then and only then will the world experience "the second coming of Christ" and "the kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven."

## *Religious Naturalism and The Great Story*

One of the sections of our website that we believe can make a tremendous contribution toward interfaith understanding is titled, **Metareligious Essays** [<http://www.TheGreatStory/metareligious.html>]. Connie originated this idea more than two years ago, and immediately began soliciting essays from people entranced by the Great Story who are also full participants in a traditional religion or spirituality.

Uniting all these essays is not only the theme — how the Great Story enhances a religious perspective — but also the style. Co-editors **Paula Hirschboeck** and **Patricia Gordon** agreed with Connie that each essay should be personal. “This is how the Great Story enriches *my* religious experience.” We didn’t want academic objectivity.

**Paula Hirschboeck** set the standard for content and grace with the first essay: “A ZEN Way into the Universe Story.” Since then, we have posted on our website five more: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST by **Patricia Gordon**, CATHOLIC by Sister **Gail Worcelo**, PAGAN by **Glenys Livingstone**, QUAKER by **Mary Coelho**, and BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN by Michael Dowd. **[hotlink all]** We look forward to having someone from the Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, Confucian, various Indigenous and other faiths/lifeways step forward and offer their own perspectives.

Connie spent a lot of time editing the metareligious essays of others, then finally got around to writing a first draft from her own tradition: RELIGIOUS NATURALISM. That draft sat around for more than year without seeing the light of day. Here in Hawaii in May 2003, Connie was inspired to reread it, toss it, and begin again from scratch.

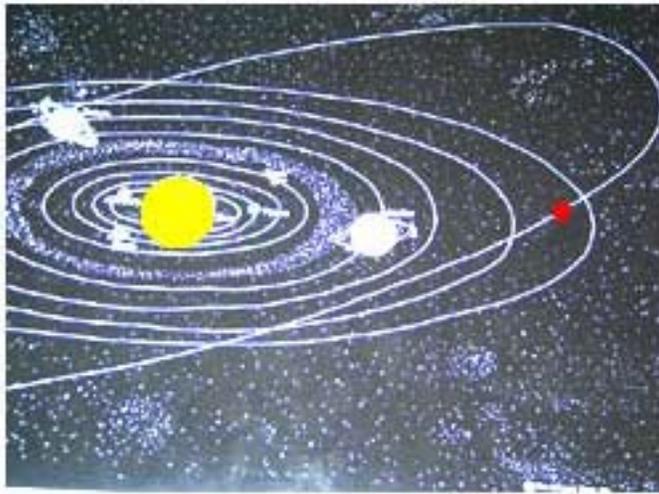
The result is now up on our website, too. The title, “**An Immense Journey: Religious Naturalism and The Great Story.**” In it, Connie pays tribute to her mentors: Julian Huxley, Paul Martin, Aldo Leopold, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Annie Dillard, and Loren Eiseley (specifically, Eiseley’s 1957 book titled, *The Immense Journey*).

## *Pluto: The Adopted Planet*

Connie also produced **two evolutionary parables** during this writing retreat in Hawaii. One is: “**Who Am I?**” [[www.TheGreatStory.org/parables.html](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/parables.html)]. Connie distributed the draft by email widely among her Great Story colleagues. The responses were so helpful — and varied — that she decided to turn it into a kind of community endeavor. People are encouraged to add their own favorite beginnings

and endings to it, whenever they use it, and Connie will post those as options right alongside the parable.

A second, and standard-length parable (all designed for oral delivery), was one that had been on her mind for precisely a year – ever since a boy at a Princeton area Unitarian church blurted out during one of her presentations, “But Pluto is no longer considered a planet!”



**Pluto’s slanted orbit makes it unlike any other planet. In this Great Story Parable, the scientific controversy offers an opportunity to teach children about adoption in a positive way.**

Here is the science introduction she provides for her new parable:

In the late 1990s, top astronomers engaged in a public debate about whether or not Pluto should be considered a planet. In fact, visitors to the Rose Center of New York City's Hayden Planetarium are often shocked to discover that Pluto is not included in the displays about the planets. In this playful parable, suitable for adults and children, you will learn the science behind the debate - and how that controversy might easily be resolved. This parable is also a way to teach children about adoption.

The title gives the solution: **“Pluto, the Adopted Planet.”**

Connie also created a longer version of the Pluto parable for **young children** [all are accessible from the “parables.html” page on our website], thanks to the suggestions offered by teaching consultant **Leslie Pilder**. And because we have so enjoyed using dramatic scripts of two other parables for creating fun, impromptu plays at workshops, Connie also translated Pluto into a **five-part script**.

## *Other Writing Assignments*

Connie fulfilled on 2 other writing assignments, in addition to her two parables and metareligious essay. One assignment was for a 600-word contribution to serve as a sidebar in a book on canopy ecology edited by **Bruce Rinker** at **Selby Botanical Gardens** in Florida (Connie had given an endowed lecture there in February, based on her book, *The Ghosts of Evolution*). This Hawaii retreat was an excellent place to write that sidebar, because right off the porch she can look at some of the fruit trees that are her topics: avocado and papaya.

A second short piece was commissioned by the **Northwest Earth Institute** to serve as lead article for a forthcoming issue. "What Is Native" is based on the slide presentation she gave for volunteers and staff at the institute in April. When invited by Jeanne Roy to write the article, Connie responded, in part, "This will be a particularly poignant and challenging assignment, given where we are right now: in an ex-sugarcane plantation on the rural SE side of the big island of Hawaii. Everything I can see from this porch as I write, and everything I can hear, is non-native."

Another writing assignment was this: our periodic Turtlelog. But it wasn't quite finished . . . until months later. We hope you have enjoyed it!

## *Acknowledgments*

Our life on the road is possible only because of the generosity of those who organize speaking engagements for us, provide us a home to temporarily live in, cook or buy us a meal, and countless other gifts. Below is a list of those who we particularly wish to acknowledge in our tour March, April, and May 2003. We apologize to those of you who whom we may have forgotten to write down in our journals and other records, in the bustle of the moment.

**ORGANIZERS:** Usually Michael and Connie secure their own invitations to speak on the Great Story. But we are always grateful when a local person does it for us. Three people these last three months took on a portion of our organizational duties for us, arranging venues for us at more than one place. We wish to thank **Debbie Mytels** (Foundation for Global Community and Redwood City UU); **Nancy Glock-Gruenich** (two gigs in Santa Cruz); and **Milt Markewitz** (four gigs for us in Portland).

**HOME HOSPITALITY:** For our work, the offer of a place to sleep, shower, and plug in our computers is no less important than breathing air. We'd like to begin by thanking those hearty souls who put us up (put up with us?) for a week or

longer: **Rich and Sandra Reha** (Hawaii), **Milt Markewitz** (Portland), **Brent Bolton and housemates** (Portland), and **Karen Hawell** (Palo Alto). Those who also opened their homes to us include **Barbara Kummer, Dawn Redmond and Loren Haralson, Alan Tower, Tom and Mary McAfee, Paul Burks and Jean Barker, Duane Elgin and Coleen LeDrew, Vera Boyson, Cathy Dana, Jean Harrison-Siegler, Gerry and John Paulsen, Kevin Kelly, Constance Dean and Ronaldo Reyburn, Cynthia Beal, Solah Radiance and Cosmos Worth, Suzanne and Ron Stover.**

**OTHER SUPPORT:** This includes our organizational contact for an event and others who fed us a meal, gave us a book or poster, fixed a flat, improved our writings, and so on. It also includes those who made a financial donation (there are many anonymous donations made during our presentations, so the people we recognize here are only those who mailed us donations, so that we know their names!). **Yoko Kmetz, Rich and Sandra Reha, De Stanley, Jessica Rice, Jai Ranganathan, Lori Nelson, Ama Zenya Lewis, Lori Nelson, Diane McDaniel, Linda Gibling, John and Lynda Cock, Mary Coelho, Sharon Abercrombie, Lauren de Boer, Debbie and Bill Collins, Sarah Skovlund, John Van Dyke, Robert Honea, Marcia Olsen, Elizabeth and Michael Smith, Fay Oliver, Peter and Susan Corning, Brian Swimme, Matthew Fox, Dennis Edwards, David McArthur, Lou Niznik, Steve Torma, Betsy and Bruce Koenigsberg, Miriam Dowd, David and Robbie and Christopher Borglum, Corrina McFarlane, Claudette Mouton, Barbara Vogl, Richard Rodrigue and Renee Gettys, David and Barbara Kahn, Sarah Brooks, Donna Nelson, Pamela Wood, Dina Claussen, Kit Ketcham, Wini Williams, Rick Keffer, Laura Cunningham, Colombe Leinau, Kathleen Berry, Aimee Richmond, Cathy Swan, Mary Sahm, Willow Dixon and John Biemer, Dick and Jeanne Roy, Kathleen Perillo, Jack Semura, Todd Duncan, Bob McGown, Daniel Dancer, John Lloyd, Tom Neeham, Paul Lyons, Sister Anne Clare Keeler, Sister Karol Marie Heggerty, Patricia Martinez, Todd Duncan, Jack Semura, Pat D'Acre**

**CONVERSATION:** Folks who don't fit into any of the above categories, but who nevertheless shared their ideas, include at least these (others we failed to write down names for): **Jason Funk, Jim O'Loughlin, Kevin Farey, Dale Craig, Margie Eyheralde, J. D. Benson, Roberto Fugii, Shirley Ingalls, Joanna Reynolds, Kent Penwarden, Dave Juffly, Richard Rathbun, Bill Devincenzi, Fritz and Kendra Fehrer, Jack Kroll, Lucia Gonzalez, Trudy Myrrh, Marie Schutz, Darlene Pagano, Ruth Pease, John Sullivan, Deanna Davenport, Diane Miller Root, Marion Crew, Viola Litt Callaghan, Carolyn Dianne Wofford, Theresa McReynolds, Karen Robin, Marlene Warneke, Ray Gruenich, Joyce Diamond, Ishana and Mika Ingerman, Triniti and Natascha Breubach and their mother Susanne, Randy Ott, Alma Goard, Julie Byers, Gabriel Moss, Glen Hovemann and Muffy Weaver, Gregory**

**Dahlin, Gerard Leonard, Kathleen Allen, Adrian Dee, Jimmy Whipps, Wes and Nancy Lapp, Karen Mitzner, Tom Johnson, Elaine Johnson, Karla Daniel, Carolyn Mitchel, Grace Young, Elvida Fruthingham, Suzan Hill, Willa Fox, Becky Kreag, Jim Newcomer, Bob Pearson, Jim Merzenich, Roy Hedine, Tobey Fitch, Sharif Abdullah, Kendall Ross, Jade D'Aquilarive Benson**

*Whew!*

*To see any of our 5 previous Highlights of Our Travels, go to:*

*[\[http://www.TheGreatStory.org/turtlelog\\_archives.html\]](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/turtlelog_archives.html)*

*Till next time, know that we are all . . . .*

*Together in The Great Work,*

***Connie                      &                      Michael***