

A Walk to Centennial Park

Daniel L. Prechtel

One of my regular integrative practices that affects the wellbeing of my body, mind, and spirit is a daily two mile walk over and back from my home to a little urban park in El Cerrito, California. The modest house we rent is located on a cul-de-sac next to Cerrito Creek at the base of a hill variously known as Albany Hill or Albany Knob. In Spanish it is “el cerrito,” or “the little hill” and is a prominent landmark of the city that bears its name. My walk usually begins by going toward the creek on the public pathway of Creekside Park at the end of our street. Along the pathway I can greet the creek and see the hillside up close. I recognize some people as familiar presences in the area, although we haven’t yet introduced ourselves.



During my walk my consciousness softens, and I attend to both the physical elements of my environment which are the “ordinary” dimension of reality, and the spirit or “non-ordinary” dimension. Early on I quietly or silently sing a song that invites my helping spirits to join me on the walk. This is a song that my first spirit teacher taught me. I have an intuitive sense of their

presence, and sometimes I invite a power animal spirit to lightly merge with me for a little while. I may ask one of my wise and compassionate helping spirits from the upper world to walk by my side and silently converse with me about a concern or topic on my mind. During my walk I often have a song arise spontaneously from within that is an expression of my own deep spirit essence—a “soul song.”



Continuing, I move away from the creek, now flowing underground or obscured by urban structures, and walk on the neighborhood sidewalks. I pass a variety of trees and a profusion of flowering plants, and many styles of dwellings, shops, and a large shopping plaza—with a diverse residential human population—Asian, African American, Latinx, Euro-American, and more. I notice them physically, but sometimes also in other dimensions. My perceptions are open to appreciate and receive impressions about what and who is in my immediate environment.

I vary my route a bit in my walk on neighborhood streets, enjoying the different scenes and usually come to a grand old redwood that I call “Grandmother” before whom I will stop and

greet and touch.



Then I reach Centennial Park. It is a small place located by the Ohlone Greenway and the BART rapid transit overhead train line. There are some benches and logs there for sitting, a tended lawn, some large rocks that children enjoy climbing on, a playground area, and a variety of trees that are presided over by three tall, stately pine trees whom I call the “Three Sisters.”



After silently greeting and blessing the Sisters I find a bench to sit on for a while. Often an old man comes to the park to sit for a while too. He appears to be Asian, walks with a cane, and handles a string of Tibetan bodhi mala—Buddhist prayer beads. In recent times we recognize and greet each other with a wave and a quiet laugh, our shared common language of gesture and sound, and begin our personal contemplations and prayers.

Today that old man is not at the park, and since it is soon after school let out the place is full of children and young adults overseeing them with a couple of us elders quietly present. I sit and observe and feel the dynamic interplay of the children and adults. I see the solid trees presided over by the Three Sisters whose branches slightly dance to the breeze, and “see” underground to the intricate network of community caused by root and fungal systems. I feel a sense of belonging to this scene: these people, the trees, my invisible helping spirits, and the other forms of life present here, supported by Mother Earth. Looking up I see Sun and recognize the power of this great one holding planets and asteroids and comets in a community we call

the solar system, of which we are a small part. But beyond that, we are part of a galaxy, a universe, and a vast cosmic and spiritual more.

It is time to begin my return home—although I am already home. My journey back, accompanied by my spirit companions and my soul song, begins on the Ohlone Greenway and I am reminded of the original people of this region, and the ancestral Ohlone spirits that keep watch over this land.

This route takes me toward a business district around the El Cerrito Plaza. If I walk on Fullerton Avenue, I see the Dream World Floral and Gift Shop, and carvings on a tree stump of birds and a squirrel near the plaza. A bench outside the post office is frequented by a homeless woman holding a sign seeking donations, and often slouched on a bench outside a nail salon there is a man bundled up in a heavy coat in a stupor or sleeping.





On one route as I am nearing my house, I visit and pay my respects to another majestic redwood that I call "Grandfather."



In recent times when I begin seeing Albany Hill on my return walk I often “hear” fairie music that comes to me in waves of ethereal harmonic chords. It is the music of the hill by the fairy that oversees that area as a guardian spirit. Sometimes she draws near to accompany me on the final stage of my walk.

When I reach my house, I greet my dwelling and the plants and animals in my immediate vicinity and thank my spirit companions for their company on the walk. I then shift my conscious attention to focus on ordinary reality, my walk having been completed.

June 9, 2023