

2002 Essay Contest

For Joshua Tree 2002, we are delighted to announce the winner,
Mary Westmoreland, known to our website Forum family as "BirdMum."
Listed below Mary's essay is her follow up interview with her impressions of the Joshua Tree
Event!



Mary is the mother of two almost-grown children and lives with her husband on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Two years ago she retired from assisting her husband with his law practice, and is an emerging writer/artist/teacher. Mary has a keen interest in doll making, and has taken two workshops with nationally-known doll maker, Elinor Peace Bailey. She enjoys watercolor painting, playing the piano and singing in a local choir. For a little over a year, she has been participating in a local drumming circle.

Mary found Lynn's books in the late 1980's, devouring them hungrily one after the other. Like so many of us who love Lynn's work, Mary says she has read and reread Lynn's books over the years. As an active participant in Lynn's Sacred Forum, Mary describes our cyberspace circle of learning as a major factor in her recent spiritual growth.

Mary has just completed our latest Online Course, Drumming the Sacred Dreamer. It was during the course that she wrote her essay. While journeying with her drum to her power animal, Osprey, she asked him for guidance and a vision of her inner and outer shields. "I treated the essay as another class assignment, because it felt like something I needed to do." Mary says. "I entered last year's contest as well and am totally amazed and delighted to have been selected as this year's winner!"

During the online course Mary created a prayer stick for her drum and filled it with the intent to release her fear of

being seen and heard. She released all sense of guilt and unworthiness and she reclaimed all hidden parts of herself. Mary senses that her prayer has been answered by her great fortune in being named the Joshua Tree Contest Winner. She says, "I am absolutely overwhelmed at this unexpected answer to my prayer! I want to thank all my Forum sisters and brothers who really have shared in and contributed to this wonderful life-changing event, as well as my teachers, Lynn and Margaret."

At our 2002 Joshua Tree Event, we spent time remembering our ancient initiations and we created a Star Shield.

Each of us has created a self shield that represents in the world who we are. Each self shield is tuned and polished and designed to represent the magnificence, not only of your physical being and accomplishments, your yearning and fears, but also to represent the tender wildness of your own spirit.

There are two sides to every shield. The outer side is what you present to the world. The inner side represents your wise inner self and your relationship to the Mystery.

When two people come together in intimate communication, there is a tendency we all have either to give over to someone else's shield or to take their power and make it our own. When we place our shield over another person's shield, we grind down that shield, obscuring its designs forever. To find true freedom, we must learn to fly our shields side by side in a balanced relationship.

For the 2002 Essay Contest, participants were asked to answer the following questions,

- **When you contemplate your self shield, what does its inner and outer sides mean to you?**
 - **How do you experience freedom when you hold up your shield for the world to see?**
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In answer to these questions, here is Mary Westmoreland's Winning Essay:

From high above, I see her shimmering like a coin in the water. As I spiral down, a soft doeskin shield emerges, bound by sinew entwined with blue silk ribbon, skirted with black-tipped turkey tail feathers. She sits alone on a raft in a wind-rippled lake. Suffused in golden light, the silhouette of a sprawling shade tree dominates her face. Two faceless dolls in Native American garb -- one boy, one girl -- lean up against the base of her massive trunk. In the surrounding grass, white rose petals, tipped in pink, are scattered in a trail.

Landing beside her, I touch the doeskin tentatively. It speaks of gifted and sensitive hands, a compassionate heart, connection through touch, and softness that belies strength. The deer spirit of the skin brings the herd, a dream of a giant blended aura of light and grandeur, to this shield

even as she sits alone on her island. Blue ribbons, binding her with sinew to the frame, balance function and beauty. Their color and form suggest joy in expression -- singing, writing and speech. Feathers rimming the southern edge signify her origins, the Wild Turkey People who nourished her ancestors, gave away for this shield.

The tree extends the theme of origins. Her branches and roots remind me of the ancestors and the descendants, the seen and the unseen. Mothered by a tree -- little girl in a swing dreams her first dreams, climbs skyward. Mother like a tree -- woman gathers little ones in her arms, supports them at her base. The seen reaches for heaven, and the unseen -- the great root system in perfect balance with her branches -- stretches into the depths of the earth. She is stable. She will not be moved. Her children, both physical and symbolic, lean against her trunk. Faceless, they remind her that they are the best teachers of Mystery, and through them, she grows in her relationship with the Unknown.

The golden light surrounds the Tree like arrows of morning sun. She is of the morning, and presents sunshine to the world. Her light shines as mental energy -- focused thoughts and deep understanding. Mind finds shelter and food here.

Around this Tree, petals in the grass speak of blossom and fragrance. They represent small acts of kindness and beauty -- shattered flowers, well spent.

My heartbeat dies to a whisper as I lean forward to peek at the underside of my shield. There I see clouds, pregnant with rain and tears, countering the sunshine on the other side. The inner shield is a rainmaker, bringing precious water to fledgling life. A golden butterfly flutters among the clouds. She holds the worm and the chrysalis, reminds me that she is no better or worse than either. In her I know my Spirit, this creature of air, flying free in brilliance and beauty.

As I hold this shield up for the world to see, expectations roll off my back. There is nothing that must be manifest for completion. I am full and complete. I am free.

Here is Mary's Follow Up Interview!

It has been nearly a year since you attended Joshua Tree. As you look back, how have you changed?

One of the biggest changes is that I take my dreams more seriously; I know I am dreaming the future. Winning this contest, going to Joshua Tree, meeting Lynn and other kindred spirits - all this has shown me that I can manifest my dreams, and that I can be SEEN! I always thought no one saw me, and indeed they didn't - because I hid! There are other, more subtle changes, that relate to the work we did at Joshua Tree and the prayers I made - releasing my homesickness, realizing that love brings me here to Mother Earth, embracing my role as a spiritual person in the community, celebrating creation - mostly about honoring and celebrating this physical body and lifetime that presents me with these possibilities.

As a result of attending Joshua Tree, enrolling in Online Courses and participating as an active member of Lynn's online Forum, you have decided to join Lynn's Mystery School this year. What were the deciding factors for you in choosing to commit to the School?

I have been interested in Lynn's books and in this type of spiritual work for many years. Before my first online course, I had never made any serious commitment of money or discipline. In the online drumming course, I saw how powerful it is to do so, and how that works for me. At Joshua Tree, I really felt like I belonged. I wanted to learn with and from the people I met there.

When you reflect on last year's Joshua Tree event, what are the sterling moments that stand out in your memory?

The first moment I stepped out of the car at Joshua Tree: the overwhelming beauty of the enormous blue sky, the scent of sweetgrass and the song of someone's drum wafting on the air from Fellowship Hall. Walking through the corridor of drummers the first time, bathed in the light glowing on my sisters' faces. The sea of loving faces receiving me and my essay as I read it aloud. The look on Lynn's face when she thanked me. The incredible energy in the room as we drummed, rattled and danced. Sitting on the rocky mountain at dawn, the beautiful journeys, and the fire ceremony . . . I could go on and on. They were all sterling moments.

What advice would you offer this year's Joshua Tree contest participants?

Open yourself to fully experience the question, not just with your mind. Let go of your nervousness and aggression in the quest to get it right and make it good. Dream or journey on the question. Allow the answers to come to you. Let it flow and make it beautiful, like a marvelous garment or a melodious song. Most of all, make it YOURS - not like mine or Dakotah's, but YOURS!

If you had to sum up the Joshua Tree experience in one word, what would that word be and why?

Homecoming. For me, it was a homecoming, because I found the people who drum and dance their joy, who dream this world into its beauty. I have been looking all my life for these people. I am so happy and honored to have found them!