Healing Circles and Learning Communities
by Michael Lerner

The Commonweal Cancer Help Program

For the 178th time in 30 years, eight people from across the country—and one from Ireland—gathered on Monday, September 15, for a weeklong Commonweal Cancer Help Program. They came to explore deep healing in the face of life-threatening cancers. They awoke each morning at 7:30 to walk a quarter mile to the Main Office Building for yoga. They walked back to Pacific House in silence and ate breakfast—the first of Claire Heart's three nourishing meals of the day.

At 10:30 they walked to Kohler House for the morning support group with Stuart Horance, a deeply gifted psychotherapist. After lunch, they went to individual sessions—massage, sand tray, yoga instruction, or counseling with Stuart or me.

In the evenings, we gathered at Pacific House. Monday we introduced ourselves. Tuesday we talked about choices in healing, medical therapies, and integrative therapies. Wednesday we explored pain and suffering and death and dying. Thursday night was a music evening. Friday night we made art—collages, watercolors, and the like. Saturday night we talked about what we are taking home. The retreat ended Sunday at lunch. The lives of eight people were somehow changed. They would never live with cancer in the same way again.

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Dear Commonweal Friends,

I hope this Fall Letter finds you well. This is an intensely interesting time at Commonweal.

Next year marks the 30th year of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. The following year, 2016, marks Commonweal’s 40th anniversary. Commonweal is brimming with new opportunities. Oren Slozberg, our new Chief Strategies Officer, brings fresh catalytic energy to our work.

Kyra Epstein and Oren have launched a beautiful new website. It describes our programs in health and healing, education and the arts, and environment and justice. It also evokes the mystery and beauty of Commonweal in images. Visit us at www.commonweal.org.

The new Healing Circles project is building a learning community devoted to creating high quality support and learning programs for people with cancer.

With Oren’s leadership, we are entering a partnership with Charlie Murphy and Peggy Taylor to bring their extraordinary youth work through Partners for Youth Empowerment to the San Francisco Bay Area.

Every substantial program at Commonweal is doing good work. We know we are given this work to do in a time of global transformation. There is so much we cannot control. By focusing on what we can do, we join the global community of those who, as Desmond Tutu says, are “prisoners of hope.”

Join us in the great work of our time.

Michael Lerner, President

Healing Circles

Healing Circles began with the intention to share the lessons of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program with others. Then we had a flash:

Healing Circles should be a learning community where we would share what we have learned—and be equally committed to learning from others.

We immediately saw that the Cancer Help Program itself is a learning community. Oren Slozberg suggested most Commonweal programs are learning communities. He’s right.

The Collaborative on Health and the Environment is a learning community of almost 5,000 scientists, patient advocates and health professionals around the world learning from each other about how the environment affects our health.

The New School is a learning community of more than 3,000 people around the world exploring the intersection of nature, culture, and the inner life, with more than 180 podcasts of conversations with thought leaders available free on the web.

Rachel Naomi Remen’s Institute for the Study of Health and Illness is a learning community of thousands of medical students, physicians, nurses, and others around the world exploring the heart of medicine.

Rebecca Katz’s Healing Kitchens Institute and Kate Holcombe’s Healing Yoga Foundation are learning communities.

In fact, Commonweal as a whole can well be described as a learning community of learning communities.

If we understand Commonweal as a learning community, we should consciously encourage our programs to learn from each other. One example of something we could learn from each other is pedagogy. Pedagogy is a fuzzy word beloved of fusty academics. Beneath its dusty Latin form lies infinite beauty. Here is a definition derived from Wikipedia:

Pedagogy is the science and art of education. Its aim is the full development of the human being.

The word literally means to lead the child. Pedagogy often accepts a model in which the teacher leads the student. An adult learning community may have teachers, but there may be a great emphasis on learning from each other. Content—true—needs to be taught. But the principle focus is a discovery process. Some would call this a remembrance process—we discover what we already know deep within. When heart, head, and hands are engaged, the learning experience goes far deeper.

Healing Circles is holding an ongoing series of conversations, talks, trainings, and residential workshops. We are exploring yoga, food, small group process, death and dying, integrative cancer therapies, and much more. The process is filled with wonder for me and for many others who are gathering together to do this work.

Please go to www.commonweal.org/program/commonweal-cancer-help-program for more information about the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

For information about Healing Circles, please contact Shelia Opperman, our Healing Circles Coordinator, at shelia@commonweal.org.

The Commonweal Cancer Help Program is supported by generous grants from the Alberta S. Kimball–Mary L. Anhaltzer Foundation, Manlyse UK Trust of Charities Aid Foundation, Morning Glory Family Foundation, The Wyss Foundation, and individual contributions from CCHP alumni and other Commonweal friends.
The Ecology of Transformation

by Katia Sol, PhD

Four years ago, I set out for the Bioneers conference to find a partner for my PhD research in Adult Education and Community Development at the University of Toronto. I wanted to do research that would be collaborative and contribute directly both to an organization’s purpose and to the world transition we call the Great Turning. At Bioneers, I learned about the Ecology of Leadership (EOL) program at the Regenerative Design Institute (RDI) from co-founder and director, Christopher Kuntzsch. That conversation changed my life.

A few days later I arrived at RDI. Stepping onto the land at Commonweal Garden, I immediately began to cry—my tears marking both a profound feeling of homecoming and spiritual resonance. One conversation with James Stark, Co-director of RDI, confirmed the overwhelming feeling that had filled my heart, that this would be my new home.*

My research was based upon the premise that humanity is passing through a period of great transition, in which we have a critical opportunity to pass from a destructive “industrial growth society” to a “life-sustaining society.” My core hypothesis was that this transition depends on humanity’s ability to engage in a dual process of individual and collective transformation through remembering our connections with ourselves, with one another, with the natural world, and with purposeful engagement in the world. I explored this through an in-depth, relational study of the Ecology of Leadership program.

While I set out to study others’ experiences, the truth is that the past four years have transformed my own life—my home, my relationships, my parenting, my family, my service and work in the world, and more. My cultivation of a gratitude practice in the program even resulted in my giving a TEDx talk on this topic (http://tinyurl.com/Ktedx).

My dissertation tells a story about remembrance, reconnection, relationship, and regeneration. It’s a story about how we can each engage in a process of personal healing and visioning in order to fulfill our individual, unique purpose on this planet in this lifetime. It’s about remembering our place in connection to the natural world, entering into a healing, collaborative, co-creative relationship with our greater body, and remembering that we ARE nature. It’s about coming back together as a village, and what becomes possible when we are in a community of radical support and love, where we can collectively heal and together develop the courage to step into the fullness of our visions. It’s a story about the connection between the transformation of our inner realms—the personal beliefs, thought processes, emotions, and worldviews that make up our internal experience—and our outer realms—our visible actions, work, and ways of being in the world. These threads come together to tell a story about ecological transformation—about the integration of inner and outer change, supported by practices for connection to self, nature, and village. And ultimately, it’s a story about the Great Turning—the great transition of our greater society and planetary relations toward an ecologically regenerative, socially just, and deeply connected way of being.

The Ecology of Leadership launched a six-month Core Immersion Journey in November 2014. For more information, please visit www.theecologyofleadership.org/. To read Katia’s dissertation, visit: http://tinyurl.com/EOLThesis/. To learn more about RDI at Commonweal Garden, please go to: www.commonweal.org/program/commonweal-garden.

We are grateful to the Jenifer Altman Foundation, Kalliopeia Foundation, Morning Glory Family Foundation, Muriel March Full Circle Endowment Fund, Panta Rhea Foundation, and many individual donors for their generous support of RDI at Commonweal Garden.

*To view a short film that Katia made about her journey, visit: http://tinyurl.com/KatiaRDI.
Early in 2014, Vi Waghiyi, a Yupik mother and grandmother from St. Lawrence Island, invited Dr. Linda Birnbaum, Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to meet with tribal communities. She wanted Dr. Birnbaum to see first-hand the health disparities and environmental injustice experienced by the indigenous peoples of Alaska. Vi, as the Environmental Health and Justice Program Director for Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), encounters these concerns everyday. She works closely with Pamela Miller, ACAT's executive director and coordinator of CHE’s Alaska Working Group, to investigate environmental health threats associated with abandoned military sites, the long-range transport of global pollutants to the Arctic, and contamination of traditional foods.

When Dr. Birnbaum arrived in Anchorage in July, Pamela and Vi traveled with her to St. Lawrence Island. The island is home to 1,600 Yupik people, whose enduring language and rich culture include reliance on the traditional foods (e.g., reindeer, fish, walrus, whales, and seals) that provide physical and spiritual sustenance.

ACAT has been working with the two Yupik villages for 15 years with support from NIEHS. Their current five-year project, “Protecting the Health of Future Generations,” focuses on the impact of endocrine-disrupting chemicals on health, in collaboration with the island communities and faculty at two universities.

During their travel together, Pamela shared how officials from regulatory and public health agencies are reluctant to acknowledge the link between disease outcomes and exposure to harmful chemicals from military and industrial operations. She explained, “Instead, they focus their attention almost solely on tobacco and alcohol use. Those are important, but they ignore the environmental health research showing health effects associated with chemical exposures from contaminated sites, everyday products, and other sources.” Pamela added that it reminded her of the words of Dr. Sandra Steingraber:

> By emphasizing personal habits rather than carcinogens, they frame the cause of the disease as a problem of behavior rather than a problem of exposure to disease-causing agents.

Dr. Birnbaum discussed the latest scientific research concerning endocrine-disrupting and multi-generational effects of environmental exposures as well as her awareness of the problem of global contaminants in the Arctic. “This conversation,” Pamela explained, “was deeply affirming of our research and observations by elders and community health workers. Unlike other agency officials, Dr. Birnbaum understands both the science and the injustice.”

Once on the island, Dr. Birnbaum listened compassionately as women described the many cancers and other health problems experienced by their family and community members. One woman stated: “It feels like we are being denied our right to live.” Another said: “I hurt for our people and wish that I could take the pain away.” As the women closed the circle, we looked out the window and saw what seemed to be the entire village making their way to the school for an evening potluck to welcome Dr. Birnbaum. We served up reindeer stew and fry bread, and then enjoyed traditional drumming and dancing.

Dr. Birnbaum went on to meet with tribal leaders, health care providers, and other scientists. At the end of her time in Alaska, she described it as a life changing experience. For Pam, “It was a turning point in our struggle for health and justice to witness the heartfelt caring of this preeminent scientist and leader.”

For more information about CHE’s work, please see: www.commonweal.org/program/collaborative-on-health-the-environment-che

CHE is deeply grateful to the following for their generous support of our work: Bellwether Foundation, Boston University/NIEHS-funded Superfund Research Program, Escher Family Fund of Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Hull Family Foundation, The Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation, The John Merck Fund, Johnson Family Foundation, Passport Foundation, Wallace Genetic Foundation, two anonymous foundations, and individual donors.
Kneeling on the Commonweal stage in his voluminous robes, giant horse-tail paintbrush in hand, Zen Priest Shodo Harada Roshi swished down the page with black ink. His gravelly, Samuri-like voice rang out like a bell: *Fu Ni Myo Do!* More Japanese words, and then fellow monk, the wise Chi san, translated for us: *This is the mysterious path of not-two.*

The dance continued for an hour: the Roshi painting and speaking, Chi san translating, and a parade of assistants presenting the floating papers to the audience, then walking them down the aisle to hang in the back of the room.

Roshi and his group were, indeed, moving as one mind, and inviting all of us—almost 100 at The New School event that autumnal morning in September—into the circle with them. Potent phrases filled the air in Japanese and English:

...Though the moon goes down,

it never separates from the sky...

...Every day is a good day...

...Serene mind is not moved around...

...Sitting in the moon water do jo...

We were in the presence of a master. Shodo Harada Roshi is a Rinzai priest, author, and head abbot of Sōgen-ji—a 300-year-old temple in Okayama, Japan. He has become known as a “teacher of teachers.” Shodo Harada was born into a Zen temple in 1940 in Nara, Japan; while still in high school he encountered his teacher, Rinzai master and Japanese calligrapher Mumon Yamada. After college he began his training in 1962 under Yamada. In September 1989, Harada came to the United States to provide instruction for students and in 1995 founded One Drop Zendo (or Tahoma One Drop Zen Monastery) on Whidbey Island near Seattle, Washington, where the practice mirrors the practices found at Sogen-ji. He founded Enso House, a Zen hospice, in 2001.

In Commonweal Gallery, after the calligraphy demonstration ended, the stage was re-configured and a conversation with Michael Lerner began. Michael asked, “Roshi, what is death?” And the conversation meandered from there, to the condition of fear, the preciousness of life, the Roshi’s view on the true nature of being, supportive ways to sit with the dying, and the Roshi’s many projects, including the Tahoma Zen Monastery and Enso House.

The words and calligraphy were beautiful, but even more precious was what happened in the room, within each one of us, as we were invited to become part of the circle together.

Another fine moment at The New School at Commonweal.

You can find podcasts and videos for more than 180 New School conversations, as well as information about upcoming events that you can attend, on our website (www.commonweal.org/program/the-new-school-at-commonweal).

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Honoring Our Gifts
by Dianne Duchesne, RN, CHPN, Director, The Power of Nursing

I discovered my calling at an early age. It is only in hindsight that I can trace the thread back to the time my dreams were born. Remembering our personal lineage—our original call to nursing—is part of ISHI’s newest program, The Power of Nursing. My story reflects the wonderful stories that students share during the course:

When I was a child, seven years and beyond, my Dad would take me with him to wakes at funeral parlors. He was the union representative at his job at the power plant. Some of the deceased had worked alongside him. Some had retired. My Dad felt it was important to honor a fellow worker and to let the family know that the man and his lifetime of work and friendship were not forgotten.

For me these occasions were an outing and an opportunity for my Dad and me to spend time together as we traveled and visited.

The people in these funeral parlors were often whisper-quiet on first meeting, but to this day I can feel the smiles that came in reaction to this little girl traveling with her Dad and their gratitude for his visit.

At some point my Dad and I would approach the casket. The still body that lay inside was someone the people there had and still loved. Their stories were filled with the familiarity and joy—and sometimes hardship—that come with a long relationship. In retrospect I can see that their gratitude towards friends, family, and neighbors who visited was palpable and the glue holding them together. Snippets of stories about the deceased that I heard brought up images of a life lived, love that does not die, and the importance of friendship, support, and community.

It has taken me many years to realize that my call to nursing began with this early relationship that I had to grief and loss, to death, and to great and undying love. These visits bring my Dad to mind as a central character in making it natural and possible for me to spend 27 years as a hospice nurse. I now acknowledge him as a lineage holder who taught me much about healing. The expertise I brought to the tasks and treatments related to this work were all-important and learned throughout my nursing career.

But it was my Dad who instilled in me the responsibility and joy in offering support, the courage to care and feel compassion, and a childlike curiosity and interest in the end of life. He taught me that showing up was the most important thing I could do and that death was simply another part of life itself. Some think that it is not a good thing to introduce children to death on such a personal level, but I am eternally grateful that my Dad was not one of those people.

In April 2015, ISHI will offer its newest teacher training, so that faculty from nursing schools around the world can learn to teach this transformational course. Through my partnership with Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, in birthing this new program, I honor the gift my father gave to me.

If you know of nursing faculty or nursing schools that might be interested in teaching this curriculum, please pass this along. Full details are available at thepowerofnursing.org/.

For more information about ISHI, please go to: www.commonweal.org/program/institute-for-the-study-of-health-illness-ishi

ISHI thanks The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the Growald Family Fund, Kalliopeia Foundation, RSF Social Finance, anonymous funders, and many individual donors for their generous support of ISHI’s work.
We are pleased to announce that Commonweal has launched a new website: www.commonweal.org

Our new website gives visitors a real sense of Commonweal—the breadth and depth of our many programs and the healing and beautiful place where we have been located for almost 40 years. We want to make it easy to explore our work in health and healing, education and the arts, and environment and justice.

The website provides more places for you to interact with Commonweal and our programs. Our new homepage shows events, calls, and workshops for many of our programs. The Facebook feed on our homepage gives you a way to quickly see what we’re doing on a day-to-day basis, and our social media buttons lead you quickly to view, comment on, and share videos, posts, and tweets. Our news section gives you a glimpse into the many things our programs are doing month-to-month to make the world a better place.

Another new feature of the website is our In the Media section, under the About Us navigation link. Here you’ll find videos, articles, and publications about our programs and staff. For example, we include a video link to Time of Death, the Showtime special featuring Lenore Lefer, our beloved, long-time Commonweal Cancer Help Program co-leader. We also link to the two New York Times articles about doctor and nurse burnout, featuring Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, and her Commonweal programs, that started an avalanche of more than 800 comments last year.

And, if you’ve been searching for the online video of the Bill Moyers special, Healing and the Mind, that featured the Commonweal Cancer Help Program back in 1993, you can find it on this page as well.

We would be most grateful for your help in several ways:

- Please share the site with people in your circles who should know about Commonweal.
- Explore the site and give us feedback.
- Use the Donate button to help us continue our work.
California Legislature Approves Key Youth Justice Bills

by David Steinhart, Director

For the Commonweal Juvenile Justice Program, the 2014 session of the California legislature was a winner, producing a strong portfolio of reform measures. Commonweal was pleased to play a significant role in the development of several proposals that mark 2014 as a year of achievement. The wins include new California laws requiring auto-sealing of court records for young people who successfully complete diversion or probation, banning the locking up of children for truancy, creating a high-level task force to update the juvenile justice database, and restoring funds for offender mental health services. These reforms will improve system operations and provide needed services on a broad scale in California. Here are some additional details:

SB 1038 (Leno, D-SF). We worked closely with Senate Legislative Budget Chairman Mark Leno on this measure, signed into law by the Governor in August. SB 1038 makes a long overdue change in the process for sealing of court records in delinquency cases. Effective 1/1/15, it requires the automatic sealing of all court records and the auto-dismissal of charges when the youth successfully completes the terms of diversion or probation.

Under existing law, children seeking to have their records expunged must wait long periods and then need an attorney to help them to convince the court in a special hearing that they have been fully rehabilitated. These are major hurdles for youth and families who don’t know the law and may lack the resources to navigate the sealing process. As a result, until now, sealing has been the exception rather than the rule.

Without sealing, a juvenile “conviction” can haunt former offenders in multiple ways—most notably when they later fill out job or college applications asking about criminal history. Now, with auto-sealing and dismissal, applicants can answer “NO” to questions about crime history because the proceedings are deemed never to have occurred. There is no doubt that SB 1038 will remove barriers to education and employment for former juvenile offenders. In this regard the bill fits into a cluster of California laws that are grounded in the growing recognition that adolescents are developmentally different from adults and that the sanctions and responses of the justice system must be adjusted accordingly. There are limits to the application of SB 1038—for example, its benefits do not extend to juveniles whose “convictions” were for serious or violent crimes on the code list that makes them eligible for prosecution in the adult criminal justice system.

Other important measures passed by the Legislature and approved by the Governor in 2014 include:

- SB 1296 (Leno, D-SF): Ending the incarceration of truants. This new statute imposes a full ban on locking up children for failing to attend school. California law already disallows this practice, but under a 1988 California Supreme Court decision, courts have been able to end-run the truancy lockup ban by asserting the court’s contempt power to incarcerate truants who violate court orders. Now, that loophole is closed. The primary driver behind this reform is the San Francisco Youth Law Center.

- Juvenile Justice Data Working Group. Commonweal took the lead in moving this proposal into the fiscal year 2014-15 California Budget. It was motivated by the need to address the woeful state of California juvenile justice data systems that rely on antiquated technology and fail to provide necessary information on caseloads and outcomes. The budget provision creates an inter-agency Working Group to analyze data system gaps and needs and, importantly, to recommend changes in performance outcome measures for justice system agencies receiving state funds. The Working Group is housed at the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), and Commonweal’s David Steinhart will serve as the statewide Chair of the Working Group. Its report to the Legislature is due in January 2016.

- Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction (MIOCR) grant funds. In years past, Commonweal strongly supported California’s MIOCR grant program that funded mental health services for juveniles and adults in the justice system. MIOCR funds were suspended in 2008 as state budget deficits mounted. In January of this year, departing Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg—a champion of mental health reform—introduced legislation to restore the MIOCR grant program at a level of $50 million statewide. Based on our long association with Senator Steinberg, we were asked to help design the funding structure for the new allocation. In tough June budget negotiations, the MIOCR program re-emerged with a total funding level of $18 million statewide. Half of the funds will be earmarked for juvenile justice mental health programs. The Board of State and Community Corrections will administer the grants, as in the past, and has convened an Executive Steering Committee to design the request for proposals and award the funds. Grants will be competitive grants to counties and will operate over a three-year period. For the juvenile justice share, grants will support programs including short-term and family-based therapies, collaborative inter-agency service agreements, specialized mental health courts, and other evidence-based models of care.

For more information about the Juvenile Justice Program, please go to: www.commonweal.org/program/juvenile-justice-program

We are grateful to the following funders for their generous support of the Juvenile Justice Program: Annie E. Casey Foundation, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, Sierra Health Foundation, van Loben Sels/RembeRock Foundation, and Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation.
You have to time the tides precisely to walk from Agate Beach at the end of the Mesa in Bolinas out to RCA beach, right below Commonweal. So when Charlie Murphy, CEO of Partners for Youth Empowerment (PYE), was visiting Commonweal, we checked the tide book and headed down at low tide for a leisurely walk along the beach. The sun emerged from the fog and submerged back in, occasionally highlighting the Farallones Islands or hiding Mt. Tamalpais. Our conversation wandered as much as our walking.

As we rounded the bluff and traversed the creek just before RCA beach, we could see the pine forest that borders the Commonweal chapel. The sight inspired an image of the many people who have walked that forest—environmentalists, doctors, people with cancer, or any of the thousands of people who have felt the deep sense of sacredness that this land inspires. As I shared that image with Charlie, we knew we had to find a way to share the sacredness and transformative energy of Commonweal with young people in the Bay Area, to make this forest and land feel as much a home for urban Bay Area youth as it does for the alumni of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

That was the moment we agreed to explore a partnership between Commonweal and PYE. This partnership, still in its forming stages, will build on 18 years of PYE’s experience of running Power of Hope Arts/Empowerment camps in Washington State, British Columbia, Uganda, India, South Africa, Brazil, and the United Kingdom, as well as the many PYE trainings that develop social artistry skills and community building for young adults of the Millennial Generation.

This partnership, which we are calling the Creative Community Institute, will be part of the EDGE Program at Commonweal. It will explore ways to engage high school youth (ages 14–18) from diverse backgrounds in activities that build community and leadership skills through art-based activities. We will also reach out to young adults (ages 19–34) in the Bay Area who will be CCI program counselors and leaders. They will attend training and other community building activities at Commonweal.

Many Commonweal programs provide ways for the Millennial Generation to engage with our work. Rachel Naomi Remen’s Healer’s Art course in 70 medical schools around the world and the permaculture classes at the Regenerative Design Institute at Commonweal Garden both speak deeply to Millennials. Through the Creative Community Institute we will provide another channel for young people to develop community and find ways to engage with service and good work.

We need to do a better job of engaging future generations. PYE is leading a movement to activate the creative potential of young people from all sectors of society to build an inclusive, healthy world.

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair, PYE Advisory Board

For more information about the Creative Community Institute, please contact Oren Slozberg (415-868-0970/ oren@commonweal.org).
WITH GRATITUDE

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We offer special thanks and gratitude to the following Commonweal Friends for their generous contributions during the last six months:

(Donations received after 10/8/14 will be acknowledged in the next newsletter.)

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Reflections
by Michael Lerner

I was born in 1943 in the last year of World War II.

I was raised during the Cold War. I was 47 on November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall began to come down. Hope was in the air.

I was 49 when I went with a delegation from Commonweal to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro on June 3, 1992. We hoped a great bargain would emerge. The North would provide resources and technologies so that the South could take a sustainable path to development. It never happened.

I was 67 on January 20, 2009, when Barack Obama was elected. Nine months later he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Against his every instinct, he became a war president.

I turned 71 in October. All hope for a grand bargain between North and South has disappeared. President Obama has returned us to the Long War. War has returned to Central Europe.

Terrorism has replaced Communism as the reason for permanent war. Privacy has been decimated by the technology that was supposed to free us.

The divide between rich and poor continues to grow. Thomas Picketty’s Capital in the 21st Century demolished the piety that economic growth would lead to greater income equality.

Climate change, toxic chemicals, radiation, invasive species, infectious diseases—and newer threats like GMOs, nanomaterials, EMF, and synthetic biology—threaten human health and/or erode the fabric of life.

These forces of biological degradation, economic disparities, permanent war, and permanent surveillance are four force fields of our time. Add three more factors—the decline of American hegemony, the rise of a multi-polar world, and permanent economic instability—and we have a reasonable portrait of our world today.

In the face of these forces, many believe the situation is hopeless. It may in fact be. Except for this. Every single one of the forces I have described is to some considerable degree under human control.

That is to say, we could change these forces if we the people—not our governments, but we the people—become sufficiently conscious of the necessity of doing so.

Historically we have moved from despotism to democracy, from slavery to freedom, from women as property to women as equals, from serfdom to labor unions, from ignorance of the environment to a worldwide environmental movement, from war as noble to war as tragedy, and much more.

I started this Letter with a phrase from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who referred to those who refuse this dispensation as “prisoners of hope.” The phrase is apt. In the face of all that is designed to discourage us, there is within every generation that stubborn minority that refuses to accept the way things are. Hope does not die.

I am not saying the Great Transformation will happen. I am saying it can happen. It happens every day. With each righteous act any of us take. When enough of us act together, we change the course of history.

Thank you for being part of our community of hope. Please help us as you can with your contributions, your wisdom, and your passion for a better world.

Please go to www.commonweal.org to learn more about our work.

We are deeply grateful to the Jenifer Altman Foundation, RSF Social Finance, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, two anonymous foundations, and many individual donors for their generous core support of Commonweal.
One day in late spring, a question reverberated through the main office building: Did you see the deer?

Someone had painted a deer on the door of a storage building on the Commonweal site. We do not know how this person came to leave this lovely gift—perhaps simply on a walk to see the sunset from the nearby ocean bluff.

How did you find Commonweal?

Some know the Commonweal Cancer Help Program and our new initiative to help people with cancer everywhere—Healing Circles.

Some know Rachel Naomi Remen’s ISHI work with health professionals and her best-selling books, Kitchen Table Wisdom and My Grandfather’s Blessings.

Some know the Regenerative Design Institute at Commonweal Garden and its permaculture and nature awareness programs.

Some know The New School events and podcasts—more than 180 to date.

Some know Elise Miller’s Collaborative on Health and the Environment and its 5,000 partners around the world debating environmental health science, or Sharyle Patton’s Biomonitoring Resource Center.

Some know David Steinhart’s quiet but extraordinarily powerful Juvenile Justice Program.

And some know us through Rebecca Katz’s Healing Kitchens Institute, or Kate Holcombe’s Healing Yoga Foundation.

Commonweal touches many tens of thousands of people around the world. We help make the world a little better in a dozen different ways.

Thank you for finding Commonweal and being part of the Commonweal community. We couldn’t do this work without you.

Please continue to support the work at www.commonweal.org—or send us a check the old-fashioned way.

With deep gratitude,

Michael Lerner, President