

## Crazy Like a Fox

Margaret Aiseayew

Margaret Aiseayew is an Iowa farm girl who has worked as an international educator, storyteller and journey mistress on six continents. She is currently engaged in family care and research into the modern “cave” experience. As an editor, she has been called a connoisseur of ideas; as an ordained minister, she has been called an intensive care unit; and in the personal-particular circle of life she is called friend, neighbor, daughter, mom and grandma.

**I**t seems almost impossible for me to articulate the impact of Thomas Berry on my life.

My encounter with *The Dream of the Earth* was evolutionary. I convinced a group in my community to decide to study it together. I was astounded by my success. I was amazed by their willingness because I truly believed that they didn’t want to hear what Thomas had to say. Our schedules were so different the only common time we found was at 5:30 a.m. on Wednesday mornings. Even at that I was frequently late to work. My doubts aside, we decided to meet through Lent.

We were in Easter week when one of our members became very disturbed by something in the reading. He was declaring that there was no way the world would go on if everyone went “back to the land” to “experience nature.” I questioned why he had come to the conclusion that this was what was being suggested. He replied that it was because of the talk about taking a different relationship to nature and that wasn’t possible in the city because there wasn’t any nature here.

I asked when he had last spoken with the pigeons. He wanted to know what I meant. I mentioned that I had begun quite an incredible “conversation” with the group of pigeons that gathered hopefully near my bus stop each morning watching for someone to bring bread crumbs. In those conversations I had discovered that a part of the pigeons’ seeming arrogance was simply a satisfaction in their accomplishments. They had decided, at the same time that people were building up the cities to be totally uninhabitable to their species, to try and stay. They understood that many of their colleagues did not have sufficient body mass to even attempt to survive in the city. They understood that the mating and nesting requirements of many of their species precluded attempts to stay in the city. The pigeons decided that they could adjust and survive. It has been a long struggle. There have been waves of disease that have decimated their ranks. They are often put upon by precisely those people they decided to stay on behalf of—particularly the youngest of them who run and chase any gathered flock. As the children grow, however, they are pleased to share crumbs; pleased that the pigeons trust them enough to gather around. They know that some people curse them and call them arrogant, but they are a very forgiving bunch, confident in their contribution to urban life.

After this little spin, one of the members of the group said, “I do believe that you are exactly the kind of person I cross the street to avoid.”

We did decide to continue studying past Easter. In spite of (me and) all our best attempts to assign two or three chapters for reading each week, we never seemed to get beyond discussing the first one. There was a desire in the group to finish the book study with all those who were willing to rise at

such a ridiculous time. It was only a couple of weeks later (probably about Chapter Ten) that one of the participants arrived just furious. I probably don't need to confirm that it is the same person who arrived disturbed at an earlier stage in the study. The leader could not even really get started as that participant stormed and sputtered that "this character" (the author) was talking about "Earth" as if she were a living breathing entity in her own right. If you buy into that, we are living here only with her tolerance and we really aren't in charge of anything. And the rant went on about being smarter than dirt, and having been an inventor and being filled with creativity. Why, "this guy" (Thomas Berry) is talking about "Earth" having a dream for herself, a vision of her own future!!!

It was no comfort that several pointed out that the title of the book was *The Dream of the Earth*. The participant railed about how anyone would understand that to mean a dream about "the Earth."

That is probably enough of our grand study group. We did proceed with skips and halts and finally finished. I truly bonded with Thomas through *The Dream of the Earth*. As an Iowa farm girl I found him talking about the reality I had grown up knowing. City folk always laugh and make fun of conversation among farm folk about hearing the corn talk. It was amazing to encounter someone who wasn't laughing. He convinced me that I was not alone in the world as no other writer ever had. It would be nice to say that he convinced me that I was not crazy, but as time has passed, I realize I am crazy (just like Thomas) and that is totally all right. We are making a difference.