

Holly's New Year Update – January, 2012

The New Year is upon us. My sabbatical is over. I'm writing songs, preparing to record a new CD, and going back out on tour.

My self-defined sabbatical was meant to be one year but turned into two years. I'm not sure that it was an official "sabbatical" but a luxury and most appreciated gift to myself for my 60th birthday. Suffice it to say, I departed from my usual life. This was made possible by the fact that I don't have children or animals or plants or property or a sweetheart, so I was able to take off to parts unknown without putting anyone or anything in a spin. Some of the parts unknown were geographical and others internal – equally fascinating and challenging.

A few years before, my dear love Pat and I decided to be lifelong friends and leave our 13+ years of domestic partnership behind. Pat went off to live in national and state parks and photograph wildlife. You can see his amazing work on his Web site, www.pathunt.net.

I gave away a lot of material things, put the rest in storage, and took off for Argentina and Chile. I enrolled in a Spanish class, only to discover that I am not able to remember words. I suspected this was going to be so as I've been using a lyric book in concert for some time and this was for songs I wrote! But I enjoyed my classmates – a delightful woman from Croatia and three young men from England, Russia, and Austria who, I think, looked at me with fascination. I was unlike their mothers.

Buenos Aires is a beautiful city and I did all the touristy things from tango clubs to soccer stadiums. I walked through dozens of neighborhoods watching people in streets and shops. Indigenous people, Jews, Europeans, factory workers, artists, activists, the very wealthy, the very poor, gauchos, mothers of the disappeared, zoo keepers, gardeners, taxi drivers, waiters, women selling roses to lovers strolling in the park.

Just when I was about to travel outside the city, I got pneumonia. I spent many days at home in bed, reading. Still, I was well enough to spend Christmas Eve with my doctor, his journalist partner and their family, as well as a brief visit with singer/songwriter Richard Shindell.

Then I flew to Chile. I have some wonderful friends there, both North Americans and Chileans, so I felt well cared for. My friends are very active in social change work and have lived there through the coup, the Pinochet nightmare, and the extraordinary

change that led to Michelle Bachelet's election. So I had access to terrific people, great stories and Chilean history. You can read more on my site about my first and second trips to Chile, my work with EPES, and my experience in the most recent earthquake. I'm a Californian and used to earthquakes, but this was beyond anything I could imagine and the people most affected are still suffering. A conservative government was elected, even though Bachelet's ratings were really high. The people in this world are often confusing. Still, out of this grew a powerful student movement that brought the Chilean people back out into the street by the thousands to protest high college fees and unfair economic policy.

When I got back to the U.S., I met up with Pat and camped in The Everglades National Park in Florida. What an amazing place! It is the largest subtropical wilderness in the U.S. Only 25% of the original Everglades survived the 1882 invasion of agricultural and residential use. And although indigenous people had lived there for thousands of years, very few remain.

I returned to California to get my car and drove across the country, camping along the way. My final destination was the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. I stopped first to visit Margaret Hunt, Pat's mother to find that much of her family had gathered to enjoy a reunion. Shortly after, Margaret passed. What an amazing thing to be part of – the comings and goings on this planet – and it was an honor to be with Margaret and her family at that time. I was at both of my parents' deaths and my niece's birth and I feel fortunate.

At the festival, I described my home-less life to my friend and wonderful singer, Laura Love. Someone overhearing us asked if I was homeless. Laura said, "Nope. She is home free." And that is it. Homeless is a tragic situation that seldom is a choice. It is filled with complexities that include hunger, weather, and the failure of a system to care for its people. Home free is a choice... a different thing.

So yes, I have been home-free for a few years. I don't have a home. I travel around and visit friends. I house-sit for people who will be gone for awhile or who have second homes they seldom use. And I camp. This non-schedule has also allowed me to be with friends which, had I been touring, I might not have been able to do—friends who lost friends, friends with open-heart surgery, friends with hip replacements.

Now, I'm back to work. What an exciting time, with the Occupy Movement—inspired by world protest and waking up the nation. A few notes on that front: I heard someone say, "Well, sure. Occupy Wall Street was great but what have they really done? Have they

really helped the poor people?" I had to breathe deeply not to smack the guy (which goes against all my belief in non-violence!). The Occupy Movement is not meant to resolve all the nation's problems. That is the job of ALL the people – educating ourselves in the democratic process and working for change. What it has done is get everyone talking and thinking. The movement has voiced rage at the foreclosures, the banks' shameful and illegal practices, and the irresponsibility of a government that allowed this to happen. Even cooking shows were talking about it! Good job, I say. And it is not done. I suggest to that fellow that he join the movement, not criticize it.

I also heard someone who was standing at the edge of the OWS site in NYC say in an arrogant and hostile voice, "What is it with these people? Don't they have jobs?" Uh, No. That is why they are here!

And then, there were the critics who complained about the chaos. One of my favorite signs was, "DO NOT CONFUSE THE COMPLEXITY OF THIS MOVEMENT WITH CHAOS!"

I will go into the studio to record a new CD in March, do some summer concerts, and then tour a little in the Fall before the election takes center stage.

If you want to stay in touch with the tour schedule, please be sure you are on my mailing list (www.hollynear.com/join.html).

VERY BEST WISHES!

Holly