

Mountain Women of Appalachia: a report from Anne Leibig 10/25/02

Renda Keith and I have come home safely from our trip to Paro, Bhutan, on the other side of the world, where we represented North America, Appalachian Mountains, In Praise of Mountain Women among 250 people with women from 35 countries. We carried the attached Bhutan final report from the August 17th meeting, a banner created from the items brought to that meeting, copies of the three In Praise books, Appalashop movies, Scott County Headstart information, Renda had 100 rolls of film, etc. Our report had been sent out to 1000 women on the Mountain Forum list. I met a women from Switzerland who said "That was one hell of a report."; a women from the Phillipines that said what a great report. So even in arriving our way had been paved by our group work. (I had sent this report to some on the mailing list but many more are added so I am resending it.)

The "Celebrating Mountain Women" event was from October 1 -4, afterwards we spent several extra days in Bhutan and a day in Bangkok Thailand before flying to Tokyo, Chicago and landing in Knoxville. We have been home two weeks and I am just recovering from the time changes.

The three present images for me are:

- 1) The Place of Bhutan, a safe rural Himalayan mountain setting.
- 2) The Bhutan culture - shown in the opening and closing events, the clothing and architecture and the daily voice praying we heard as we woke each morning. I sensed a special blessing that Celebrating Mountain Women was held at the same time as the Bhutan Lama had called a 15 day Buddhist gathering to be held in Paro. It is held every five years. On the hillside at Gangtey Palace, where we stayed, we could hear over 1000 people praying at 5 in the morning.

We hope to put a selection of Renda's photos on the computer so you can share our seeing. Renda photographed everything. The children of the town said "Here comes the photo lady." and would gladly play with her and have their pictures taken. Many of the Bhutanese were fascinated by her blue eyes and her energy.

- 3) The Face to Face meeting with women from 35 countries and many mountain ranges who were able to travel and be together for four packed days. As I remember I can think of specific women from Vietnam, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Peru, Mexico, Columbia, France, Italy, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, the Phillipines. The representatives from North America were Jolene Atencio, a Native American from the Cascade Mountains - the Warm Spring

confederation, Kelly Matheson from the Rockies, Wyoming, Renda and I from the Appalachian Mountains. Our North American Coordinator was Elizabeth Byers from the Mountain Institute, Elkins, West Virginia. Renda, Jolene and I traveled and roomed together. I helped facilitate the Health and Well Being work groups, one of five. Farah, from India, and I coordinated. I used the Recipe from the In Praise Process and Farah who had a report on women's health in Afganistan worked with content. We had twenty women from 11 countries together for one and a half days. I called them "fast women" because they did so much so fast. Our work was then put into a document called the Thimpu declaration n(attached). This report is being taken to Bishkek,Krgystan, for the final event of the International Year of the Mountain. (Thimpu is the capital of Bhutan and we went there the last morning and approved the declaration with the Princess of Bhutan) A report to the United Nations will be the work of the Bishkek meeting. . Another follow up is a proposed Global Mountain Women's Partnership initiated by the hosting groups ICIMOD and the Mountain Institute. This is a 10 year proposal to ensure that the principles, values and actions emerging out of CMW are taken forward at the local, national, regional, and international level, by formation of various partnerships. Renda and I are meeting with the coordinating team of In Praise of Mountain Women on November 14th. We will be thinking together how we in Appalachia can be in partnership with the global mountain women. Any ideas, let us know. Praise and Thanks for your support in connecting globally and living locally! Anne.