

SCHOOL OF LOST BORDERS

In this issue, we mark a defining moment in the story of the School of Lost Borders as our beloved co-founder, Meredith Little, steps back from guiding after 45 years. We honor the remarkable partnership between her and Steven Foster — a collaboration that gave birth to what we now know as the modern-day wilderness rites of passage movement.



When Steven passed away in 2003 Meredith continued guiding, but with a focus on death and dying. She co-created a series of programs we now call the *Practice of Living and Dying*- you can read more about those programs [here](#).

Over the course of these 45 years, Meredith not only nurtured the health of the School in the US, but also taught all over the world, including South Africa, Ukraine, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the UK.

Twenty three years later, Meredith is ready to enter a new phase of her life, and the School is ready to let her, confident in our ability to honor her legacy.

These international programs encouraged the use of the natural world to reach for truth and reconciliation, and to develop healthier relationships with death and dying.

Dear Mom,



In your teenage years, you were arrested on the corner of Haight and Ashbery. You were also student body president of your exclusive Marin County private school. You were, even then, modeling your capacity to run with both the sheep and the wolves, the coyotes and the rabbits. You were already becoming committed to the idea that there is no us and them, no good and bad, no wrong belief that needs correcting. You were learning how to see every human as truly worthy of compassion and attention. This gift that you developed over the coming years became the heart and lungs of The School of Lost Borders. It filled dad's skeleton of a dream, to bring rites of passage to the people, and over the last 45 years has held participants with true grace and wisdom.

It feels controversial to suggest that we as humans must forgive one another our darkest truths. We must forgive the ICE agent for killing a protester. We must forgive the fisherman for taking only the fin of the shark. But you would point out that there is always more to the story, and you would want to hear it. You would welcome the sheep and the wolf, the coyote and the rabbit, the sinner and the saint to your campfire, and they would leave with tears in their eyes.

I've never known you without your work at the School. You've scarcely had a chance to know yourself. It's time. It's time for you to retire, and it's time for the School to find a new foundation. The torch has been passed in both great silence and with great fanfare. No doubt dad would write you just the right poem for this moment. I will just promise to keep reminding you it is enough, and thank you on behalf of the thousands who would wish to do so.

Selene, February 2026

Click here to read a chapter of the book "A Love Story," which tells the story of the School, and Steven and Meredith, in detail.



Reflections on Meredith's final Ballcourt- Death Valley, October 2025

After a year of careful preparation, thirteen of us finally arrived in Death Valley for the Great Ballcourt Initiation Ceremony. Even before we sat in circle, there was a shared understanding that this Ballcourt carried a particular weight. It would be Meredith's last time offering this ceremony before she stepped back from her life as a wilderness rites-of-passage guide.

Meredith's stepping back isn't a retreat, but rather a slow turning—like a season changing in its own time. Meredith has carried this work for more than fifty years, creating and tending it with Steven, her husband, and honoring the promise she felt to both him and her godmother, Ginny, whose knowledge of anthropology profoundly influenced the practice.

I recall the salience of Angelo's words at the threshold circle as we honored Meredith: "You have fulfilled your commitment." I saw the tears. Felt the gratitude. I do not believe there is one wilderness guide today that has not been touched, directly or indirectly, by Steven and Meredith's work.

In 1980, as part of their exploration into new forms to help people deepen their relationship with life-affirming death, Steven and Meredith offered their first Ballcourt. When Steven died in 2003, the experience of walking with him through his dying further inspired Meredith, along with Scott Eberle, Steven's hospice doctor, to bring the Practice of Living and Dying to the School of Lost Borders.

Now, being Meredith's last formal offering, how perfect that the Ballcourt is about coming to terms with our dying so that life might continue on the other side of the cycle. It is this stark truth that is frequently forgotten in new-age ceremonies, which often emphasize building oneself up rather than letting go. But without looking at death squarely, without accepting the fact that we all die, something goes amiss, radically out of balance with nature, and the ego clutches onto its fictitious omnipotence. Climate chaos, environmental degradation, and human injustice are only a few extreme symptoms of turning away from the face of death.

One of our nights in Death Valley was met by a tremendous storm. We watched as the dark clouds cast their shadows on the distant Funeral Mountains. Meredith walked over to me in the kitchen and said, "I think the storm is coming toward us," and I responded with my doubt. "Really? It looks so far away." But she knew, and sure enough, we were soon in it, wind whipping, thick and thunderous lightning bolts making us howl in fear and excitement. We secured our tents, and most of the group piled into the vehicles for safety. The possibility of danger so quick upon us woke us up to something I can only name as mystery.

I have heard it said many times: a rite of passage is a dying practice, and grief is a powerful conduit for entering the portal of transformation. I have witnessed grief as the opening of the floodgates of the soul, water entering every cell of the body, swelling the limbs, organs, and mind to maximum capacity, weighing one down to earth. No doubt, for many, this is an excruciatingly painful process. It is for me. But it is also paradoxically redemptive when in right relationship with nature. It can even be beautiful, a desert primrose blooming at night only to wither the following morning.

In death's company, nothing is taken for granted.

The traditional Mayan teachings that inspired the Ballcourt Ceremony have a lot to say about endings. They remind us: this is the way of nature; only through death can life regenerate itself.

Indeed, there are awful endings, but the cycle – birth, death, and rebirth – is ongoing. This cyclical perspective is so ancient and pre-colonized that, for me, it is nearly incomprehensible.

The idea of endless regeneration is pre-verbal, pre-binary, pre-intellectual. It gives me great comfort as well as a sense of gravitas to imagine that while my life will end, something of me – my essence, perhaps – will carry on.

In the Mayan sacred book, the Popol Vuh, we are instructed, through story, that every individual carries an essence at their core. This essence is not bound by the physical body, but manifests through our character and actions. * We know a person's essence through their work, their expression of creativity, their devotions.

Our essence is mysteriously passed down to us from our ancestors – biological and spiritual – and, like a precious gift, we will pass it on to those who come after.

And it takes work. The essence doesn't automatically express itself. The Popol Vuh informs us that we must choose to live into our essence. If we don't make the choice, the essence can be forgotten, lost, and buried in the unconscious. To keep the essence alive takes real work, ancestral remembering, and honest reflection.

Being with Meredith as she brings to a close a lifetime of guiding work, there is no mistaking the essence she embodies. It is manifest in the thousands of people she has touched, in the lineage of the School of Lost Borders, in the barebones simplicity of her teaching. As Meredith now steps away more deliberately, I know this means it is time to further turn our focus away from the person and toward our individual responsibility to manifest the essence that has so deeply touched us. To live it in our own unique way so that we can nurture and leave it in good condition for future generations. To consciously participate in, and thus continue, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. We do it for the children. We do it in service to the unfolding creation of life.

Betsy Perluss

Thanks to Alexis McLoed for his insightful essay *Loss and Continuation from the Popol Vuh*.

Note: The Popol Vuh, or Popol Wuj in the K'iche' language, is a text recounting the mythology and history of the K'iche' people of Guatemala, one of the Mayan peoples who also inhabit the Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatan and Quintana Roo, as well as areas of Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. It is a foundational sacred narrative from long before the Spanish conquest of the Maya. It can be translated to "Book of the Community" or "Book of Council." The ballcourt, or ballgame, is described in the Popol Vuh and was integral to the Mayan culture. More can be read about it [here](#).

The School offers our gratitude for the practices of the Mayan peoples that have inspired aspects of our work. We acknowledge and pay our respect to the Native and Indigenous cultures that have taught us many of the practices we use in our work every day. Our offering of gratitude itself is an essential part of our learning from Indigenous practices that have existed for centuries, and in some instances, for millennia. We make these acknowledgements as part of our work to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism and white supremacy, and in recognition that the United States is built on the practices of slavery, genocide, and land theft.



Artwork made collectively as a present for Meredith during the School's retreat in January.

You can order a copy of "A Love Story" here