

March 19, 2012
7-8am CST
Ancestral Journey IV
Spring Equinox sun in aries

I feel weak upon my return from my journey. My energy was low to begin with being in my bleeding cycle. I had decided to go the edge of town where we often stop for a walk in the forest near an old abandoned railway track. On my bike ride there I was marveling at the spring blossoms and the warmth in the air, a humid warmth here in Carbondale Illinois. When I arrived at the natural reserve park it was too muddy to enter into the forest as I had planned so I walked along the railway track until I arrived at the area of the track that I love which is grown over with long grasses. I decided I would walk along the tracks and then lay on the track amidst these grasses for my journey. It felt good to lay down and a pair of nesting hawks flew overhead screeching loudly – probably not happy that I was in their territory. I began to sound and my body felt very heavy sinking into the ground beneath me. Then I heard the train on the tracks and a train whistle. I remembered the underground railway and the civil war in America that I have been reading about. The run away slaves trying to get north to Canada – through a slave free state. Illinois is on the borderline of the north and the south. Southern Illinois is known for its numerous “sundown” towns where blacks could not be found after sunset for fear of severe punishment, even death. Many of these towns although no longer officially sundown towns are still populated with only white residents. I think of the segregated east and west part of town in Carbondale. African Americans live predominantly on the east side and the middle class whites on the west side. The university has both black and white students but they remain mostly in their colour groups. In the field of art education where I teach there are very few black students in my classes. I have yet to graduate an African American student in my area. The testing requirements for entrance into the teacher education program and for completion are very middle class and white centric. The % is as low as 13% for those who make it into the program let alone graduate.

As I lay on the railway tracks letting the sounds emerge from my body I begin to sink in to the earth. I am hidden here in the grasses and laying low in the tracks. My voice releases sounds of shakiness as I lay on these tracks. I hear the trains and I begin to make sounds with the train whistle. I begin to feel afraid, my sounds have distress in them. I know that these are abandoned tracks but the fear is there in my voice, in my body. Fear of being caught, of being killed. I am not able to fully enter this place of fear and I have the choice to let it go and let my voice find other resonances. I leave the space of building terror and connect with the sound of the birds and I am able to return to a place of quiet. The birds are out in full force this morning and their co-joined songs are mesmerizing.

Barbara Bickel