Author Elizabeth Gilbert writes about the Mississippi River and “the various paths it has taken over the millennia.” The river has changed her course dramatically because of rainfall, drought and flood, erosion, riverboat traffic, and man-made landings. Gilbert likens these changes to the ones we experience in life, and ends with a probing question: “What if we just trusted the river?” What if we just trusted life and its inevitable changes? If we trusted that we’ll find our way.

Every year I meet people whose sense of trust inspires me. Many come seeking solace, even as they are in the grip of crushing grief and broken dreams. Some write to Red Bird Foundation asking for scholarships to attend retreats because they long for healing and lack the resources to take that step. Others ask for a way to attend a writing retreat where they can help the pain dislodge and move through their written words. I listen to the stories of those who have attended prison seminars on Healing Trauma, working with books and manuals donated by RBF.
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I adjust my own heart as I watch women in the county jail holding fast to their faith as they courageously face another holiday apart from their children and families. In response to gentle questions, the inmates speak without fear and applaud one another. I’m witness to the swells of music as graduate students in music prepare to offer their voices and talents to the world. They sit together and speak with us about what it means not only to grow as a musician, but as a human being. In small circles I sit alongside men and women as they open their eyes and hearts to the size and power of love, and the presence of the divine spark that burns in each of us. And this Fall, through the travels of Board member Jill Frisbie, I am watching the excitement and passion of women in Australia as we prepare to train them to create life-giving circles and Rites of Passage there. I also watch younger men and women spill over the banks of the river we knew years ago, and trust it with their own creations. Our long experience takes new shape in their hands and we cheer them on.

There is a notation in one of my journals, copied years ago, that repeats the wise words of an eight-year-old girl: “Keep your heart clean with peace. Don’t get it dirty with greed. It is not too late to clean it.” As I read these words I feel sure that if we are willing to clean it. “As I read these words I feel sure that if we are willing to trust the life moving through us, we will find our way. At times we will feel discouraged and think that there is no way through. But then someone begins to emerge from a closed or dark place and teaches us all about hope. In that moment I know why you send us out, through your donations, to the places and people we could not reach otherwise. It is difficult to express the gratitude I feel for your partnership. My dedication to this work remains strong. In 2000 we embarked on our first voyage as Red Bird Foundation by facilitating healing for inmates to create life-giving circles and Rites of Passage there. I also watch younger men and women spill over the banks of the river we knew years ago, and trust it with their own creations. Our long experience takes new shape in their hands and we cheer them on.

As part of an online fundraiser, these individuals told us what your donations have made possible for them. We offer these excerpts:

**DARIN**: I saw and felt the profound impact that attending a Circle* had on my wife after a season of loss and grief. Witnessing this, I knew I needed to attend one as well...[The experience] has beautifully altered our marriage and affected our family and the relationships we’re building for the rest of our journey... Thank you for the scholarships that made this possible.

**MARY**: I have been going through some difficult changes as I try to cope with two different illnesses. It hasn’t been easy. A scholarship to attend a Red Bird writing retreat allowed me to write about my pain and also joy... I wrote with an honesty I’d never expressed. Now I’m in a new space, choosing to be with people who bring me life. I am so grateful.

**ELIANA**: Before I attended the Rites of Passage* I felt lost, alone and overwhelmed... I was struggling with self-worth. The Rites has been one of the most impactful experiences I have ever been through. I was able to feel and express myself in a way that day to day life does not offer. I am forever in debt to the women who held me through that experience. In my gratitude I think of others who will take a seat in that circle in the future.

**TASHA**: To experience a Circle is to experience life on a whole new level. My heart was opened to love. I understood the value of my own worth for who I am, not what I do. This breakthrough changed the way I saw myself in my work, my family life and my relationships. Being in a Circle was profoundly moving for me, and I continue to see the ripple effects as I live the teachings a year later. Thank You!

*A Circle is a group of 12 men and women who come together for six days in order to explore a different way of being with others and with ourselves. We explore the power of deep listening, opening the heart, and experiencing life from a greater depth of love. Each Circle is an invitation to live differently in the world.

*A Woman’s Rites of Passage is a circle of 12 women who explore and honor the power and truth of the woman’s journey. Each person asks herself the question, “Who am I? beyond my work identity, and the roles I play? The six days include music, and film and ritual.

Honors someone you love or make a memorial gift.

If you go online you can now arrange to have a monthly, sustaining gift charged to your credit card. We will also send cards acknowledging a donation in honor or memory of those you love.

**RED BIRD FOUNDATION**

In 2001 Red Bird Foundation was founded with a vision of creating learning opportunities and supporting spiritual growth for people in need throughout the world.