

## LIVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

*Stephen Gambill is a ritual artist for Illuman.*

**That which you fear the most, yet which stirs your heart most deeply: enter there.**

I was asked to lead the creation of rituals for Soularize this year, with the help of some very gifted men, Belden Lane, Brad Kuluris, and Jim Clarke. I accepted with anticipation, and some pretty strong misgivings.

Art by committee is not an easy proposition, especially through email and phone conferences. Discussions are good, but soon ritual needs to move breathing bodies into physical space, to try out ideas by enfleshing them. There would be no opportunity for that long-distance. Underneath was also the old, archetypal fear of the unknown: a new project with a lot of unanswerable questions. In the back of my mind was the nagging fear, “what if I blow this?”

I began to scribble down ideas early on that pulled me into the process. One was deeply stirring: what if all 55 participants built something together with only staffs and twine, to symbolize our new structure of Illuman? With no plan, no discussion, no words at all, but in a new way of wordless listening, watching and intuitive working together that they would experience on the spot. In the weeks of struggling with the rituals with Belden and Brad, this idea became as frightening to me as it was exciting. What was I thinking? What were we asking of these men? More and more, it seemed, we were asking the impossible. I woke up in the dead of night thinking the whole idea was crazy and we should junk it. But it finally was so compelling I couldn't abandon it.

Thomas Berry said the problems of the earth will not be solved by man figuring them out with his rational mind, not even by blue-ribbon panels, but by emerging elders who can listen to the dream of the earth. I think what was so compelling to me about that crazy ritual idea was that as we journey into what Illuman is to become, we have the thrilling possibility to discover new ways to listen to each other, new ways to experience each other, fresh ways to create our life on the earth together.

It's also a scary proposition for most of us to imagine new ways of creatively interacting. We're such a culture of words, of minds cut off from body, soul, and heart. Perhaps we still have much to learn, without romanticizing, from the indigenous cultures, from our own Desert Fathers, who lived, and live, so close to nature and the language of silence, who remain in touch with those deep preternatural gifts we all once had. Such peoples intuit more swiftly those invisible thresholds to the sacred path, marked by twin pillars of fear and deep excitement.

This building ritual turned out to be a powerful experience. None of the incredulous looks or resistance or disastrous confusion I imagined in my sleepless nights happened.

The men rose from their seats and spontaneously built - without a plan, without a word - a wonderfully archaic looking structure that was oddly, hauntingly powerful. A kind of asymmetrical, sheltering, yet open-ended framework. Then they spontaneously lifted it up, and became its living walls. What a freighted, mysterious symbol.

I know this lesson. For me it's essential. Perhaps more than anywhere I've learned it from my work among the men of Illuman, of MALEs, all the way back to Ghost Ranch. I must keep learning it:

That which you fear the most, yet which stirs your heart most deeply: enter there. There is your path. Even if it feels impossible.

This men's work reveals in so many ways how we are asked to live the impossible. We are asked to face our deepest fears, to descend into the darkness of denied pain. We are asked to authentically forgive each other. We are asked to truly love our enemies. In much of my life experience, these are humanly impossible things to do. Some frightened, inhuman beast in me emphatically balks.

Our work asks us to hear in the wordless language of nature our own wildest self, our deepest gift to our community. To give that gift from our newly untamed hearts, back home, in the land of the fear giant, who is armored in the most advanced technologies, the most newly corrupted laws, the most sophisticated lies. We are asked to live that vision in this bewildering maze our culture has become, armed with nothing but of sling of an invisible dream burning inside us.

We are asked to tend that fire, to bring it out in the open and make the invisible visible, to give it away to anyone who can see it, in the face of the general incomprehension of a whole culture, often going in another direction. We are asked to go deeper than we know we can go, into this unmapped journey.

The monsters are always at the gates to guard the entrance to the sacred. But the deep stirring in us in the very same moment is our inner response of the God within us, the God that Jesus insisted that we are. The dream burning in us grows in beauty and power, infusing us with the courage to stand in the face of the giant and give our authentic gift to our community for the healing of the earth. That doesn't mean it's suddenly easy, but we're empowered, now, to choose: not fear, but that deep movement, that journey, that life in us.

Because if that deep stirring in our heart is there, lighting our path, the impossible becomes infinitely possible, wild, and fertile.