



*Celebrating*  
**50 Great Years**

*with Elizabeth Rabia Roberts*

*Background for an Annual Stipend  
for the Continuance of Her Lifework*

May we have the strength to question our own gods,  
and the grace to respect others’;

May we, on a globe that is shrinking and expanding,  
honor our differences,  
while finding a language in which to speak of them  
together;

May we recall that the responsibility of the fortunate  
is to answer the prayers of others,  
and the privilege of the blessed is to make cause  
for general gratitude.

Pico Iyer  
from *Prayers for a Thousand Years*

Warm greetings to you!

*This booklet celebrates the anniversary of 50 years of my diverse work in the world, from 1965 to 2015.*

*Some cultures believe that each of us comes into this world with two things: a unique gift, and a unique way to serve our people. A good life, it is said, is when these two things align: when our service to others is an expression of our gift, and our gift steadily grows to fill our life with good work. I have been blessed to have such a life.*



*My gift is the spoken word. I have used this gift as teacher, speaker, and preacher to serve and speak out on behalf of the oppressed and voiceless. This is what brought me to Selma, Alabama in 1965, where I first learned to bear witness and work in solidarity with the poor. Later, working at the White House, NPR, the FCC, and for John D. Rockefeller 3rd, I learned to carry stories of the voiceless to the corridors of power.*

*My love of adventure taught me not to turn from physical or psychological discomfort. As my world expanded I found myself in church basements, tribal circles, ashrams, war zones and classrooms in more than a dozen countries from Burma to Syria, from Afghanistan to Iraq — teaching, listening, and speaking about what I witnessed.*

*When my grandson grows up and wants to know what I was doing as our environment and culture deteriorated around us, I want to be able to say, **“Everything I could.”** This commitment to tomorrow’s children keeps me alive and filled with passion to continue my life’s work.*

*As you will see on the pages that follow, these fifty years have given me a unique perspective — grounded both in feminine insight and in global experience with social change. I join my voice with the great cadre of elder women in our time who speak out for resilience, compassion, and courage.*

*I am now 70 years old and I intend to keep working for progressive values and social change for the rest of my days. As long as finances permit, I am committed to continue speaking, teaching, writing, traveling, organizing and showing up to the needs of our world.*

*If, as you read through the following pages, you feel inspired to help me continue my work, I would be deeply grateful. On the enclosed card you will find information about how to make a tax-deductible contribution to “Rabia’s Annual Stipend Fund.” You can also make a donation online at [www.wakinguptogether.org](http://www.wakinguptogether.org). It is through this fund that I will be able to keep giving.*

*Thank you! And thank you for all you do. May your life be as blessed as mine has been!*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rabia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# A Human Rights Advocate



## Selma / Civil Rights

In 1964-65, Rabia arranged with her University to go to Selma and work with Dr. King and the civil rights movement as part of her degree in liberation theology. She lived and studied with Catholic nuns. She typed memos, distributed flyers, registered black voters, faced angry whites, vicious dogs and her own prejudice and fears. As part of the iconic March from Selma to Montgomery she experienced indelibly the power of solidarity and bearing witness to violence.



## The Women's Movement

Rabia held her first women's consciousness-raising group in 1970. She hosted one every month for the next two years – this is when she began to understand that many women's "personal" problems were, in fact, due to sexist structures. In 1973, she went to work full time for John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> on a 7-year project that brought her into intimate contact with the leadership of the growing women's movement both in the U.S. and developing countries.



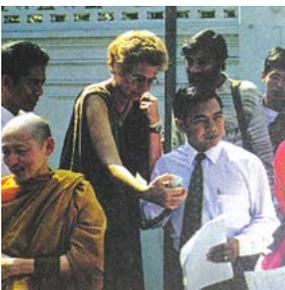
## Children's Television

Along with the women's movement in the 1970's there was nationwide concern about the quality of T. V. programming for children. Rabia worked between 1969-1982 for the White House, NPR, the FCC, Carnegie Foundation, and eventually John Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> advocating for children. She held meetings with Congress, large foundations, producers, actors, commercial advertisers, and T.V. writers to improve the quantity and quality of programs for children and families.



## Solidarity Walks, Thailand

For eight years (1995 – 2003) Rabia led cross-cultural Solidarity Walks in the jungles and forests of Thailand in support of the indigenous peoples of the region. These two-week journeys first began as deep ecology forest experiences for Thai urban activists. They evolved into journeys bearing witness to the troubles facing tribal peoples who are losing both their culture and land rights. These Solidarity Walks continue now as an ongoing project conducted by the Thai "Spirit in Education Movement" and tribal elders.



## Tribal Peoples Land Rights

Elias and Rabia taught bioregional mapping to the indigenous leaders of the Karen tribe in Thailand and the ethnic Kachin people in northern Burma. These maps became tools for their community organizing. They were the basis for a series of meetings with government officials and led to the Karen gift of 4,000 watershed hectares to the King of Siam, along with a Karen "Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities of Forest Communities." In Burma, mapping work initiated by Rabia and Elias led to a well funded and large scale mapping project supported by Swiss Aid.

# A Witness for Peace



## Nicaragua – Witness for Peace

In 1986-87, during the height of the U.S.-funded Contra war in Nicaragua, Rabia joined an interfaith group, Witness for Peace, to take testimony from Nicaraguans about the suffering they were enduring — suffering paid for by American taxpayers. She brought this testimony to the U.S. Embassy in Managua, and published reports in the U.S. Her experience with Witness for Peace led to the kind of bearing witness work she would later develop in other countries.



## Iraq

In 2002-03 Rabia joined the 40-member Iraq Peace Team in Baghdad—returning twice—to stand in solidarity with the Iraqi people in the face of the U.S. invasion. As part of the peace team, she organized nonviolent actions, participated in humanitarian work, citizen monitoring and reporting. She communicated her experiences to a worldwide audience through **Letters from the Road** along with extensive teaching and public speaking.



## Israel / Palestine – Global Nonviolent Peace Force

For three years (2003 – 2005) Rabia was the U.S. delegate to the Global Nonviolent Peaceforce—an unarmed civilian peacekeeping force that seeks opportunities to work in conflict zones worldwide. She worked with the office of Prince Hassan of Jordan, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Holy Land Trust to establish a Middle East network of peace activists. She helped sponsor trainings in nonviolence in six Palestinian cities in the West Bank and convened countless meetings in Israel to open avenues for



## Afghanistan

Rabia made three visits to Kabul (2009 – 2011) focused on enhancing the role and status of women. She continues to raise money through her *Spirit in Action Flow Fund* for Afghan projects, giving micro-grants to individuals and small projects working at the grass roots level. Rabia conducted interviews and convened meetings with the military, government leaders and peace workers. She listened to women from all walks of life, reporting on what they need to ensure greater security and stability in their country.



## Iran

Rabia made two trips to Iran, meeting with Imams, Sufis and secular leaders to foster dialogue and provide a proactive presence for peace. Extensive plans to lead cross-cultural exposure trips to Iran, however, had to be cancelled due to unrest in Iran.



## Letters from the Road

In 1999, Rabia sold her house to undertake a period of open-ended pilgrimage with her husband, Elias Amidon. These years “living on the road” changed her life, her priorities and the way she works today. Starting in 2002, they began to share their experiences in different countries via an email newsletter, **Letters from the Road** (now *Rabia’s Riffs*). These first-person eyewitness accounts of the life and struggles of different peoples and cultures have reached more than 10,000 readers worldwide.

# An Environmental Educator



## **Saudi Arabia/Phoenix Desert Cities Project**

In the late 1980's Rabia was employed by the Environmental Research Lab at the University of Arizona to work with the cities of Riyadh and Phoenix, coordinating a group of mayors from desert cities around the world to begin a project on ecological urban design. She became the chief writer for the project, traveled to Saudi Arabia to present findings, and with Elias received a National Endowment for the Humanities Award to write the book *The Soul of the Oasis*.



## **Institute for Deep Ecology**

In 1992, Rabia received a grant to further the field of deep ecology through education and advocacy. For six years, The Institute for Deep Ecology organized three-week residential programs, as well as weekend workshops and presentations. This work brought together a national coalition of educators, funders, writers, activists, ecologists, and spiritual teachers. It helped to deepen the concerns of the environmental movement from a resource-based conversation to an expanded understanding of the human/earth relationship.



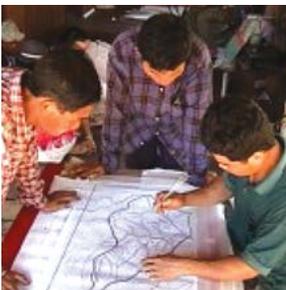
## **Graduate Program in Environmental Leadership, Naropa University**

Rabia was a founding faculty of the graduate program of Environmental Leadership at Naropa, and taught there for seven years during the 1990s. This pioneering M.A. degree program has helped train a generation of environmental leaders. She taught some of the first university-level classes in Deep Ecology, Applied Systems Thinking, Eco-psychology and Bearing Witness.



## **Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit**

In 1994, Rabia and her husband, Elias Amidon, created the non-profit 501(c)3 organization, the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit. The programs of the Boulder Institute are dedicated to promoting just and sacred relationships between people and the land. For the past twenty years, the Institute has sponsored a variety of educational events, leadership trainings, pilgrimages, spiritual retreats and wilderness journeys. Its primary purpose has been to create modes of activism in which a spiritual, moral witness can be brought to bear upon the social and environmental challenges of our time.



## **Spirit in Education Movement, S.E. Asia**

SEM (the Spirit in Education Movement) is an outgrowth of the IDE, established with the support of Achaan Sulak Sivaraksa in 1995. Based in Bangkok, it is grounded in the principles of deep ecology. SEM actively advocates for tribal rights, solidarity with the poor, healthy ecology and an actively engaged Buddhism. During the seven years Rabia taught there, they trained hundreds of Buddhist monks and lay leaders from Burma, Thailand, India, the Philippines and the northern tribal lands.



## **Wilderness Quest**

Rabia trained with Steven Foster and Meredith Little in 1989. She has been guiding scores of vision quests for 25 years in the deserts of the U.S., Europe, and the jungles of Thailand. With her husband, she has trained Quest guides to continue this rights-of-passage work. With her wide background in experiential teaching, she still knows of no better way to help people of any ages through a transformative change.

# An Interfaith Spokesperson



## Burma

Rabia and Elias held week-long Deep Ecology and Christianity workshops over three years for Kachin Baptist ministers and lay people in northern Burma. These workshops challenged the Kachin's conception of the human-nature relation based on man's dominion over nature. They also hosted multiple meetings and seminars between Baptist ministers and Buddhist monks to talk together about how to co-exist in northern Myanmar.



## Syria

In 2002, 2003, and 2004, Elias and Rabia led *Interfaith Pilgrimages of Peace* to Damascus, and Deir Mar Musa monastery in Syria. These journeys brought more than 80 westerners from eight countries to meet with and listen to Christian and Muslim leaders and students. The pilgrimages became part of the inspiration for the Abraham Path Initiative and helped to create a coalition of Syrians, Jordanians and Palestinians committed to the Abraham Path.



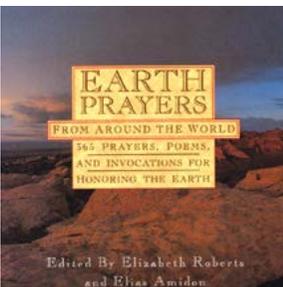
## Interfaith Dialogues in the Middle East

Working with other individuals and organizations over many years, Rabia helped with conferences, meetings, seminars and festival events to bring together Muslims, Christians and Jews from Europe with their counterparts from Middle Eastern countries. These interfaith gatherings always proved to be hopeful while they were occurring, but further progress inevitably stalled after the talks and reports were finished.



## Interfaith Forest Festival

As a result of years of leading Solidarity Walks, training indigenous leaders, creating maps, and ordaining trees in gold monks' robes, Elias and Rabia initiated a first *Festival of Forest Communities* in 1999. It brought together more than 1,000 villagers from the Karen, Lao, Lisu and Lahu tribes to meet with hundreds of forest monks, urban activists and government officials. The focus was on collaborative ways to safeguard the watershed of the region and preserve indigenous cultures. The coalition continues.



## Earth Prayers

While sick in bed in 1989, Rabia started collecting poetry and prayers for the Earth. This led to the publication of *Earth Prayers*, with 365 prayers and poems for the Earth from all faiths, throughout history and around the world. This book became a popular call for a more spiritually-grounded environmental movement. It has sold over 400,000 copies, and been referred to by millions of individuals, communities, and churches to remind us of the inseparable nature of spirit and matter. *Earth Prayers* was followed by two other anthologies, *Life Prayers* and *Prayers for a Thousand Years*.

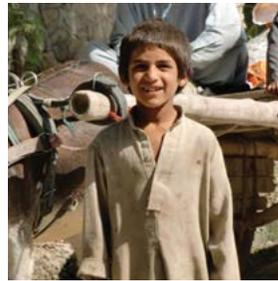
# A Global Philanthropist

The activity that Rabia calls her “greatest privilege” is distributing money that others have entrusted her with to benefit people in distant countries. **To date she has distributed \$572,000 — in increments of \$500 to \$5,000 — to more than 250 individuals and small grass-roots projects.**

This citizen philanthropy began in 2000, when Marion Rockefeller Weber invited Rabia to join her *Flow Fund circle* – individuals chosen by Ms. Rockefeller to distribute some of her inheritance. Rabia and Elias served in this capacity for six years.

As other U.S. donors came to trust her judgment, she created other avenues for “*flow funding*”: the Spirit in Action Flow Fund, Pakistan Relief Fund, Syrian Refugee Children’s Fund, Afghan Women’s Fund, The Seed Fund — passing hundreds of thousands of dollars from U.S. friends to those in need, from Burma to Brazil.

All of this giving follows the *Flow Fund* model: they are gifts inspired by the heart. No proposal or evaluation is required. None of the money is used for her personal expenses, or for any project of the Boulder Institute. Rabia continues to volunteer her time for this privilege of giving.



## A Small Sample of Rabia and Elias’ Flow Fund Projects

- Support for refugee children in South Darfur
- School supplies and textbooks for Domari Gypsy community in Jerusalem
- Support for conference on Peace and Insecurity in the 21st Century, Thailand
- Catholic-Muslim peace training in Philippines
- Support for the peace work of Kazuaki Tanehashi, Zen teacher
- Palestinian Nonviolent Training Project in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jericho, Bethlehem and Hebron
- Providing birth assistance training in Wardak, Afghanistan
- Computer Literacy training in Afghanistan
- Sponsoring fuel briquette project for family income, Kabul, Afghanistan
- Center for former prostitutes in Myitkyina, Burma
- Kidney operation for Fatima, 18 year-old girl in Basra, Iraq
- Sisters of Charity orphanage, Baghdad, Iraq
- Youth program of Monastery of St. Moses, Nebek, Syria
- Travel for Native Americans meeting with Karen tribal leaders in Thailand
- Women for Hope: vocational training in tailoring for Afghan women
- Dr. Roshanak Wardak for building school in Afghan village
- Nutt Wangwinyoo, Thai activist for work with indigenous tribes
- Micro-grants to villages given through the Hill Area Development Foundation, Northern Thailand
- Women’s Weaving Cooperative, Lao Prabang, Laos
- Support for building a Youth Center in Kesrwan, Lebanon

— Giving is Belonging —

THE BOULDER INSTITUTE FOR NATURE AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT  
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