

International money for Altai land?

Interview with Carol Hiltner, Founder of Altai Mir University

The American charitable organization Altai Mir University has raised \$23,000 in 2009, in small donations from hundreds of people around the world. The only condition on the gift is that it be used to register traditional Altai lands and sacred places for future generations. What is behind this?

by Marina Tyasto, Director of the International Department at Siberian Academy for Public Administration in Novosibirsk.

Marina: Why is the world so interested in Altai that people would donate thousands of dollars for land registration, in a foreign country, in the midst of a global economic crisis?

Carol: People interact with Altai from the level of the heart, rather than the level of the wallet. The Spirit of Altai reaches out around the world, opening people's hearts. Literally! I frequently receive e-mails from people who say: "I was invited to Altai in a dream. I found your website about Altai. What is Altai? Is it a real place?"

With these dream invitations, people are given a huge infusion of hope. From many Altai people I have heard the prophecy that "out of Altai will come hope for the world." That prophecy is now—at this very moment—coming true. Hope IS coming out of Altai. And those people who receive this precious gift of hope want it to continue coming, so they will do whatever they can.

The people who made these donations are not looking to "own" or exploit Altai. Rather, their intention is to help the Altai people—the traditional stewards of this land—to care for a place of unique beauty and purity. People feel an urgency, because such places are so rare now. The Altai people with whom I have talked all say that they belong to Altai (rather than Altai belonging to them), and that Altai belongs to the whole world. So it makes sense that the whole world would step forward to help out.

Marina: But I see that you, yourself, are donating much more than your money.

Carol: As you know, many people who are called by the Spirit of Altai actually come to Altai—as I did ten years ago. With my daughter, I trekked to Mt. Belukha, and I completely experienced the magical energy and the physical healing that everyone talks about. I was changed, and "home" became for me a state of *being* rather than a political state.

I knew intuitively that I had to give up my physical home, so that all my energy could be directed toward serving Altai as it had so profoundly served me. I wanted to work for Spirit rather than for material gain. Now I try to live as simply as I can. I am a guest in both the US and in Russia. This is challenging because my health is fragile, but it improves every time I visit Altai! So I am very motivated!

But I didn't speak any Russian when I first visited Altai, so it took me many years to discover how to give back rather than to just receive. As an outsider, I could easily see the stress on the environment caused by the huge numbers of tourists. We have a similar situation in our mountains near Seattle, so I had ideas about what could be done. And when I visited the Altai national festival "El Oyin" in 2004, I understood that, with *perestroika*, some doors are opening for the indigenous peoples of Russia and some doors seem to be closing. The Altai people are now permitted to openly live according to their culture. However, the Federal program of privatization of land, the way it has been implemented in Altai, threatens the very root of the Altai culture—their connection to the Earth. Ownership of the traditional lands on which the

indigenous Altai cultures utterly depend has not been transferred to those people. Because of financial and bureaucratic obstacles, the Altai people see no way to comply, and it appears that they will lose any opportunity with the new Federal land law in January, 2010. To me, this sounded very similar to the situation faced by our Native Americans. I had fewer ideas, but even more resolve. The biggest challenge was to find how my specific abilities might be useful.

We have a tradition of “community leadership” in the US. A leader is someone who sees that something needs to be done for the common good, and does it. Because that was true for me regarding Altai, I was amused to discover that I was becoming an “international leader”: *international* because I was an American in love with Altai, and *leader* because I was working for the common good.

Marina: So what did you do?

Carol: On one hand, I have a very practical side. I love to see projects through, from start to finish. On the other hand, I take my direction about how to proceed directly from the Spirit of Altai, which has continued to communicate with me. As you know, I get interesting results!

First, I started studying the Russian language. That is not one of my gifts, so it has been slow going. And I looked for openings and contacts. And I wrote about my experiences and have published a couple of books in both English and Russian (*The Altai Chronicles: Tablets of Light* and *60th Jubilee*), as well as many articles to share my perspectives of the magic of Altai both inside and outside of Russia. Another Altai Chronicle (*Out of Time*) has now been published in English, and translation into Russian is underway. Oh, and I painted—a lot. I had seen visions when I was a young woman, but when I went to Altai, I saw very clear, powerful visions, and was inspired to paint them. Paintings, of course, are simply a translation of energy into a visual form, so all my Altai-inspired paintings are very powerful—no matter what the image is. I painted them in the US, but I knew they needed to actually *be* in Altai. That took a while, and I’ll come back to that.

In 2006, a number of different efforts finally materialized. First, you and I connected. We had many mutual friends, and you had been to Seattle, but we had not met. With your enthusiasm for true service to humanity and your ability to translate between Russian and English, you opened doors for me in three big ways: with access to Siberian Academy for Public Administration; with access to your Altai colleagues, and with personal friendship. Thank you!

You remember, we went to El Oyin that summer—in 2006—and you translated while Danil Mamyev explained to me about the need to register and respect the traditional lands and sacred sites in Altai. Danil also gave me a much clearer understanding of the importance of this issue for the continued health of the Altai culture. I was amazed that you both made the effort to be sure I understood, because at that time, I had no idea that I would be able to do anything to help with land registration. But I was determined to try, so culture and sacred lands became an important theme in my work for the common good.

And then, you helped me to organize an Open Space Technology strategic planning meeting in Tyungur to find ways that foreigners might be “part of the solution in Altai, rather than part of the problem.” We had participants from four countries: US, Israel, Nepal, and Russia. Then participants in this event trekked to Lake Akkem at the base of Mt. Belukha and cleaned up tourists’ garbage, in collaboration with Belukha National Park, the Belukha Mountain Rescue Service, and the World Wildlife Fund – Ru. You arranged for Altai shaman Maria Amanchina to join us in Tyungur, where she blessed our expedition and gave healings to some members of the group. It was a huge gift. I haven’t yet found a way to shift the awareness of trekkers to Mt. Belukha so they actively respect the sacredness of that place, but I’m still working on it. I have tried to arrange for toilets to be built there, too, because there are so many people camped around the lake all summer that it’s a health hazard in paradise. Last summer, the first toilet was

built at Lake Akkem. I'll go back again this summer, and see if it has any room left. There is no dirt there to dig—it's only rock—so toilets must be built up rather than dug. Maybe my Russian language is good enough now that I will be able to invite trekkers to help build additional toilets. That's my practical side, I guess! So, direct attention to the environment is another theme for my work.

And then, we organized a “fact-finding mission” for Takeshi Utsumi of Global University System. He came in September 2006, offering millions of dollars of Japanese funding for development of communication infrastructure. Sadly, we found no way to implement his offers, but you and I—or rather, Siberian Academy for Public Administration and Alta Mir University (the nonprofit organization which I founded that year with a group from Seattle)—went on to organize two more very constructive Open Space Technology strategic planning meetings in collaboration with the government of Altai Republic, Gorno-Altai State University, and several other Siberian universities.

Marina: Why do you call your organization Altai Mir University?

Carol: That's a question I get frequently. Basically, when people experience the Altai energy that is so powerful and healing, they are directly accessing universal life force, which of course is the source of all wisdom as well. Humans are designed to access this life force directly, but most of us have forgotten how, so we have universities that pass around second-hand wisdom, because that's the best that's usually available. But with Altai energy, the universal wisdom is available directly. My primary work is to help people get direct access to wisdom in any way that I can think of. To me, that's the deeper meaning of what a “university” should be. So we called our organization a university to bring attention to the possibility of direct access, and we have been exploring ways to facilitate it, to teach direct access to universal life force.

We are still at the beginning of that process, but we're finding the most effective methods for direct access to universal life force in the ancient wisdom passed down through traditional cultures—around the world—not just in Altai. Of course, there is considerable archeological and genetic evidence that many of these traditional cultures may have actually originated in Altai. The whole idea is fascinating, really. It seems that the life force flows through them more readily than in modern cultures, because they are more “grounded”—more connected to the Earth. The concept is the same as with an electrical circuit.

The Altai Mir University mission is: “Together, we access peace by creating a knowledge bridge between ancient wisdom and today's world.” The first place that we've tried to create a knowledge bridge is between the Altai people and Native Americans, particularly youth—through several international exchanges. And using the idea of a leader as someone who takes initiative to work for the common good, our intention is to develop leaders. So that's not the usual idea of what a university is—it's a deeper, more whole meaning.

Marina: Say more about the development of leadership.

Carol: Well, you know much more about that than I do. I've simply started with an intention, and have been on a very steep learning curve. I've learned a huge amount by my involvement with what you are doing here at Siberian Academy for Public Administration. The Global Leadership Forums (GLF) have been a world-class opportunity for Siberia, founded on Adel Safty's ideas about “Value Leadership,” which have reinforced my own ideas. This year's Forum will be in Istanbul, but I would certainly like to see that resource back here for Russia's benefit. And the UNESCO Leadership Chair that was secured for SAPA a year ago, under Professor Safty's guidance and influence, brings both prestige and a world-class mandate to facilitate leadership development. What better place for it than SAPA, whose mission is to prepare youth for leadership. Altai Mir University has been honored to sponsor Global Leadership Forums by providing English-language editing and computer-graphic support. Both the GLF and the UNESCO

Leadership Chair are effective routes to the same kind of enlightened, self-responsible leadership that Altai Mir University is working toward. Congratulations!

Marina: Thank you! What I was really trying to ask about was the international exchanges that Altai Mir University has sponsored to develop leadership.

Carol: As I'm sure you know, the activities that are actually accomplished are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg of the creative process of developing a leadership program. But we've been very fortunate to have great collaborators. The first exchange, really, was the international expedition that I mentioned previously, when we did the environmental clean-up in 2006. We were able to sponsor emerging youth leaders from Nepal, Israel, and the US to meet with their Russian colleagues. Everyone in that group still feels very connected, and we are all still in contact with each other. In 2007, we collaborated with Nina Goncharova of the Siberian Center for Eurasian Projects, and Svetlana Katynova of the Ethnocultural Center "Sacred Altai." (Этнокультурный Центр «Сокровенный Алтай» автономная некоммерческая организация), bringing a new group of youths from Israel and the US (Native Americans) to Altai for a youth leadership camp. Later that year, we collaborated with (US) National Peace Foundation to sponsor four young adult Altai leaders to participate in a Library of Congress Open World Exchange, traveling through the American Southwest, meeting with different Native American nations, hosted by Cherokee Jonathan Hook. And in 2008, we brought Rudy James, a Tlingit expert on international indigenous land issues to participate in the Global Leadership Forum and to meet with indigenous Altai leaders. I really look forward to the opportunity to collaborate on future projects with your UNESCO Leadership Chair.

Marina: How do you fund all this?

Carol: We wrote a lot of grant proposals (which mostly didn't get funded). However, Takeshi Utsumi's 2006 trip was funded by the Eurasia Foundation and the 2007 Open World trip was funded by the Library of Congress. But all the rest was privately funded—with the money from selling my house, plus family inheritance. That all evaporated with the financial crisis, so we'll have to see what opportunities appear now. One opportunity is internet sales of reproductions of my paintings and books. All the proceeds go into our charitable organization. This serves the double purpose of fund-raising and disbursing the energy of Altai that is embedded in each image.

Marina: So basically, you spent your life savings and inheritance on this work?

Carol: Yeah. I'm philosophical about money. Like Altai energy, it has to flow for us to feel its power. I know that when I am attuned to the Altai energy that I am in tune with the universe, so I trust the perfection of that.

Marina: Then what do you live on?

Carol: I don't just sit on my hands, trusting that the universe will provide. It does, of course, but my nature is to be an active participant. I plan and organize carefully—with the intention that the energy must continue to flow. When I'm in the US, I work like crazy. I am fortunate to be able to do editing work for my daughter's publishing company, which brings in enough for my very minimal living expenses as well as my travel back and forth to Russia. So, this spring, I was working full time at editing, as well as working full time again on the internet campaign that brought in this year's donations, plus getting ready to travel again. I didn't get a lot of sleep for several months. I'm catching up a little, now, on my sleep.

Actually, I work like crazy in Russia too, but in Russia, all the results are invested into my charitable work. When I am in Altai, the creative energy is so strong that I want to express what I am experiencing.

And I get specific direction from the Spirit of Altai about how to do that. When I came to Altai the first time, I knew that I was to write four Altai Chronicles. I knew the titles and I knew what they were about. I've written two. Several years ago, I was instructed to create two series of paintings. I painted them in Seattle and brought them to Russia, knowing that they needed to be in Altai. Two years ago, they finally got to Altai, first to be exhibited at the National Museum in Gorno-Altai, and then for permanent open exhibition at the Belukha Retreat Center in Ust Koksa (55, Naberezhnaia St.). That freed me to make a series of 52 paintings about the "Re-Emergence of the Sacred Feminine" last year in Altai: 52 paintings in 52 days—a creative explosion. As soon as I finished those I understood that I am to paint 52 paintings about the Sacred Masculine, which I expect to accomplish this year. I can hardly wait! Those paintings all stay in Altai, as part of the wealth of Altai. We'll sell reproductions to benefit the sacredness of Altai, but the originals will stay at the source.

But I want to say a bit more about that internet campaign that we did this spring, about how my personal creative work is linked to my organizational work. To optimally use our resources, our fund-raising efforts must double as awareness-raising tools. Our primary message for the internet campaign was about the environmental value—and the justice—of protecting an ancient culture that knew how to care for the Earth. We were part of a "matching grant" challenge sponsored by www.globalgiving.com, as an incentive for people to donate now. This was sufficiently appealing that people forwarded it on their greater networks. But our secondary message, which was perhaps more important, was about direct personal access to universal life force: we offered small reproductions of my Altai-inspired paintings as premiums to donors, and larger reproductions for sale as an additional fund-raiser. Altai energy is embedded in these paintings, and their presence changes the energy flow where they are displayed.

Marina: People can just go to Ust Koksa to see the originals?

Carol: That's right. Leonid and Tais Bolgov operate a retreat center there, where the paintings are accessible to anyone who comes. I don't have much explanation for what I paint, unless additional information comes along with the vision, but Leonid has great explanations for each of the paintings, based partly on what I have told him, but more, I think, on how he intuitively knows the viewer is interacting with the energy-information of the image. His explanations are different every time! I love it! Also, small reproductions are being exhibited in mid-August at the National Library in Gorno-Altai. And of course, photographs of the paintings can be seen on-line at www.AltaiMir.org/gallerystore.htm. The larger canvas reproductions are glorious because they so powerfully convey the Altai energy.

Marina: You've told us all about what you've done in and for Altai. Could you explain your feelings about Altai? What drives you?

Carol: I feel totally blessed. In a world where so many people are confused and adrift, I am clear about my soul path. I still get confused about the daily details, but the direction is clear. And when I am physically in Altai, it feels as though a fog lifts. I go out of Altai and return, so I notice the shift. Each time, I'm progressively clearer. And my physical health is stronger every time. When I get to Lake Akkem at the base of Mt. Belukha, I can feel my heart opening. I can feel the power of the place pulsing through me. Even if it's cold and rainy, even if painful emotions come up, still I feel giddy with bliss. And when I go out of Altai, I take that blessing with me to share it with anyone who cares to accept it. It flows through me as a healing energy when I touch people, it brings inspiration to people I talk to and write to, and it infuses my work in the world. What a wonderful gift to share!

Further information about Carol Hiltner and Altai Mir University can be found at www.AltaiMir.org and www.AltaiBooks.com. Some of the information on those sites is available in Russian, and the images, of course, are beyond language. Carol can be contacted, in English or Russian, at carol.hiltner@gmail.com.