

8/8/07

By Ann Elsbach

“I lived out my dream!” How many of us can truly say that? Hedy Babka is one who can. Her dream was to live in a teepee and that’s just what she did –west of Trinity Center, for 15 years, 7 years wintering there, too.

Hedy, born in 1952, had wanted to live in a Teepee in the mountains since her high school days. She was born in San Mateo and raised in Menlo Park in the ‘flat lands,’ but after graduation, she found a care-taking job in the Santa Cruz Mountains on 290 acres of land. She loved it there in the redwoods. When she arrived in the Trinities, it took a while for her to “get into” pine, fir, and cedar but she certainly loves them now.

Self-sufficiency was a “very big thing” for her in the 70s. Teepees appealed to her partly because they seemed like “self-sufficient structures. It would not take a whole lot of people to construct one.” In 1974, she met her partner who, as it turned out, also wanted to live in a teepee. Perfect! They spent a year camped out in the desert on the east side of the Sierras (Lone Pine area) sewing a teepee by hand. They had met a sail-maker who sold them a palm needle that featured a thimble in the center of rawhide with a leather strap for pushing a needle thru the tough canvas. It took one month of working every day to make the teepee. They did the finishing touches when they found the site to put it up. The teepee was somewhat egg-shaped, 18x20 ft, and 20’ high. It was constructed of Vivitex marine canvas using sail-maker’s thread which they waxed to ensure that it would last as long as the canvas.

When the canvas was ready to be erected they needed to go somewhere to find trees for poles. Hedy had worked in the California Department of Forestry as a CDF firefighter in Trinity County in 1975. Her memories of the beauty of Trinity led her back to the area as a possible site for pole material, and for a place to put up the teepee. She and her partner wound up care taking a 20-acre property 3 miles west of Trinity Center where they placed their teepee. Living in a teepee was very satisfying for Hedy. She spent 15 years there, from 1978 to 1993. She was making a living gardening and pruning trees at that time.

There were some challenges in teepee living, however. There was a large fire pit in the center and an opening at the top of the teepee. The top hole had a flap that could be opened for fires or circulation and closed for warmth. “You have to pay attention to the wood you burn inside the teepee. It has to be very dry to avoid smoke, and to avoid sparks. We would go to bed at about 7 p.m. It stayed warm inside with the large open fire, and kept warm for about ½ hour after the fire was extinguished and the flap closed. One time my partner looked up and saw a waxed thread hanging down from the canvas on fire. I was chopping a head of cabbage for salad at the time, so I threw the cabbage up and put the fire out!” There were more mundane ways to control fire, however, as Hedy reports, such as having a bucket of sand available at all times.

During their stay in the teepee, Hedy grew enough veggies in summertime to last through the winter: carrots, beets, onions, potatoes, and Jerusalem artichokes. The water was hauled in five-gallon buckets from a creek nearby. It took an hour and a half every morning to water the garden. She mulched her veggies and drove tall stakes near each patch so she could find them in the snow in wintertime. Hedy says that she loved being in

the teepee, and that “it was so luxurious in many ways because the fire kept us very warm, and it was quiet – like a nest.”

Around 1984, Hedy began working as a volunteer in domestic violence in Weaverville. She felt that there had to be a way to reach these battered women other than through words. “When I hugged them that seemed to do more for them than words.” Her partner and she then helped to establish the Trinity Women and Children’s Advocates (TWCA) in Weaverville. More than 10 women helped to minister to women and children in need. The Advocates did whatever was needed: gave women rides to the grocery store and doctors’ offices, or just “hung out and talked”. For two years in row, TWCA gave a free 3-day Conference on the land for women and children. One hundred attended. The Advocates did some wonderful things, but after 2 or 3 years of working too hard, they all “burned out”. One of the Advocates was a body worker and it was she who gave Hedy a copy of the magazine Common Ground. There she saw an article for the Acupressure Institute that read, “help train intuition; redirect people’s energy”. Hedy decided that was what she wanted to do – become an acupressure body-worker. She increased her gardening work to save money to attend the Acupressure Institute in Berkeley. At first, she was not thinking of making a career of acupressure because she so loved gardening. She didn’t realize then that acupressure would become her life’s work.

In 1985, Hedy became certified in acupressure. She found a low-rent office and began her practice in Weaverville. She lived during weekdays in Trinity Center in a cabin since it was too much to snowshoe into the teepee property after working all day in Weaverville. The first year she worked with 2 clients a week. Slowly she began quitting gardening jobs as her practice started to grow. Now she has an office in the Lee Ranch House in Weaverville. For those who are not familiar with acupressure, here is a brief synopsis: acupressure is a non-invasive form of acupuncture that comes from Chinese medicine developed some 5,000 years ago. Acupressure differs from Acupuncture in that it involves the use of a therapist’s hands rather than needles. Acupressure message can be very effective as both prevention and treatment for many health conditions. Hedy has studied several forms of Asian therapy (including Shiatsu, jin shin do, and reflexology), and has taken a lot of advanced training in colleges and from professional specialists. This writer has benefited greatly from Hedy’s work.

“There are so many people who really don’t like what they do [for a living],” Hedy says, so she considers herself to be a very lucky person to be doing what she loves –“making people feel good”. Once again she is living out a dream.