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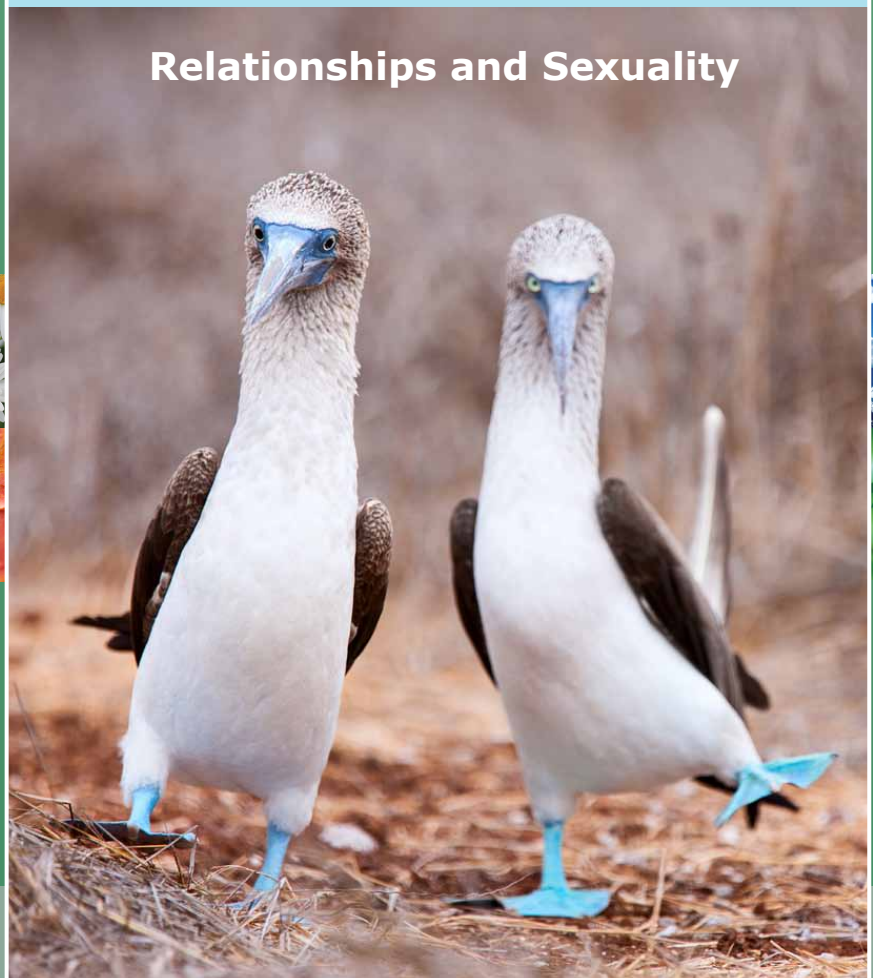
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The Deep Ecology of Intimate Relationships

JEWELS WINGFIELD - INTERVIEW BY JENNY SMITH

Jewels Wingfield is a well-known relationship expert with a unique approach. She believes that a healthy relationship with self and other relies on an intimate relationship with the entire web of life, with our own nature and the nature we live within. Drawing from both her own personal journey of over twenty years and explorations with a number of well-respected teachers and guides such as Joanna Macy, Satish Kumar and Sobonfu Some, she also sees nature itself as a profound teacher. I had the pleasure of interviewing her recently and found out more about her particular way of working . . .



Jewels Wingfield © Jewels Wingfield

all walks of life a chance to come and explore the whole spectrum of intimate relating within the context of nature, both as the teacher and a supportive container for the deep and often vulnerable work. Just arriving onto the land can be powerful medicine.

“We were rowing all the way to our session with you, and then once we started up the lane to EarthHeart it was like something else came in that was stronger and our attention got drawn out of ourselves and away from the pettiness of what we were getting lost in. It wasn’t that everything else had gone away but suddenly there was a different context, not just our small little world” (Clients Shona and Ant)

Jenny - How does your couples work and deep ecology go together?

Jewels - The simple but profound immersion in the natural world at EarthHeart gives people a direct experience of being a part of nature itself. This alone can help couples who are struggling to remember their own true nature. It is so common for couples to get lost in the detail of an issue and find themselves with a very narrow range of awareness, which creates a feeling of disconnection and pain. Bringing the wider context of nature back into the frame in these moments offers a gateway back into the centre of our being. For example, if, in the middle of a conflict, we can stop a moment and take a deep, slow breath and receive the element of air, it can soften us and remind us of the preciousness of life. It’s not that the conflict magically goes away, but opening out to nature in this way can open our hearts again to love.

Jenny - What would you say about the current state of affairs with relationships today?

Jewels - I think intimate relationship is in need of a radical shake-up. The old model of a nuclear unit has an expiry date on it and the idea that we should all inherently know how to have healthy, long-term, loving relationships is proving to be unrealistic.

Jenny - What is deep ecology?

Jewels - As defined by Satish Kumar, who I feel expresses it very simply, it is an attitude of acceptance and reverence for all of life, as well as an understanding that we are not separate beings, but part of an interconnected living web.

Jenny - Tell me about the EarthHeart Centre.

Jewels - EarthHeart is the culmination of a fifteen-year vision of mine to be able to offer my work from a setting that embodies my main teachings. From a very young age I experienced nature as a profound and fast track doorway back to myself and to my heart, and I wanted to be able to offer that to others. We have four acres of beautiful land, a six-bedroom eco home and a turf-roof forest temple. Set remotely at the end of a track and surrounded by 400,000 acres of the ancient Forest of Dean, it offers people from



Love/snug lounge for cosy winter. © Jewels Wingfield

People enter relationship for many different reasons. Whatever the reason, at some stage we all experience feeling hurt by our partners simply because truly loving another person, or truly letting another's love in, is the deepest stretch for us as humans. Nature can be a profound support in allowing this stretch because she is not a threat to our wounded self who believes we are not enough or not lovable. Nature does not offer her love with conditions, nor does she judge us. With her we can have the experience of unconditional love and being received into her powerful presence, and it is then an easier step to embody this in ourselves and with our partner.

Jenny - Why do couples come to see you?

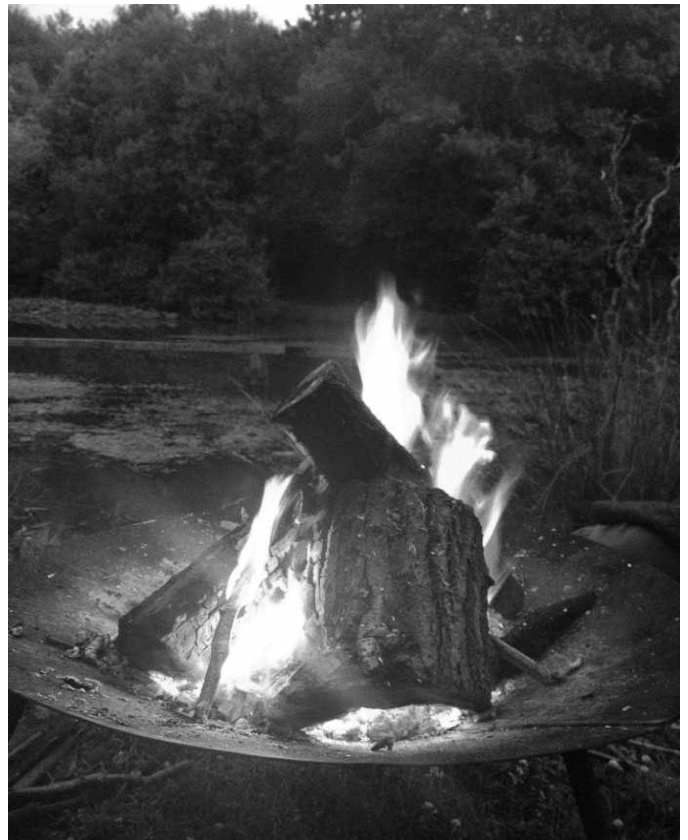
Jewels - Couples often come to me when they have tried other avenues of more conventional relationship therapies but found them ineffectual in sustaining long-term change. They might come because the relationship is on the brink of ending, when defences have taken deep root or when trust has broken down. Or they might come because they already have a deep love and connection to the natural world and resonate with the principles of the way I work.

Jenny - How is what you do different from conventional therapy?

Jewels - As well as talking about issues and difficulties, I might also guide couples through tailor-made, structured exercises that support the rebuilding of their relationship from a perspective of wholeness and interconnectedness, rather than from separation and isolation. Taking key areas such as trust, communication, emotional expression and sexuality, I work specifically with each couple to identify what is at the root of the presenting difficulty, and work with them to find a way through using the elements of nature to help them understand what is happening with them and how they come back to the heart and a sense of connection.



Lovers bench under the old chestnut tree, a time for reflection. © Jewels Wingfield



An example of making a fire by the lake to help us connect with the element of fire in ourselves. © Jewels Wingfield

An example might be when someone is afraid of anger, either their own or their partner's, or struggles with boundaries; I may work with the element of fire as a way to support them to connect in a helpful way with this energy in them. We might build a fire together and explore what fire can teach us about respect, about speaking our truth, saying no or really saying yes to ourselves.

Jenny - Do you include intimacy and sexuality in the work you offer?

Jewels - Yes. I believe that developing a sacred relationship to our sexuality is essential. Sex in relationship can often be experienced as an obligation, or a currency of exchange, stress relief or quick physical pleasure that leaves us feeling empty. Sacred sexuality brings a sense of deeply fulfilling peace to sexual loving and an opening into something beautifully mysterious, where love seems to dissolve all barriers between us and our partner and even the whole of existence. The integrated approach I offer helps couples experience this, and they also try out simple exercises that show the importance of non-sexual touch as a way to build trust and how bringing our undefended and vulnerable selves into relationship with each other can be a profound gift to one another. Nature has so many ways of showing us this.

Jenny - Can you give an example?

Jewels - Yes. A few months ago a couple came to see me because trust had been broken between them around sexual intimacy. She wanted her partner to touch her with



Couples workshop in the Forest temple at the EarthHeart centre, surrounded by forest 360 degrees with all four elements close by. © Jewels Wingfield

more tenderness and sensuality. I took them both into nature and guided them slowly to experience each of their senses very slowly one by one with nature surrounding them. It culminated in her partner being deeply touched in his heart by the beauty around him; he turned to her and, for the first time, saw her as this beauty and felt a deep tenderness towards her.

"I remember participating in an exercise inviting us to fully experience nature with all our senses except sight. I was invited to be blindfolded and to trust my partner to be my eyes and keep me from harm. I became aware through the exercise of how hard it was to trust him and how controlling I was being to compensate for that. It helped me to see that



The lake for connecting with water, soft hearts. © Jewels Wingfield

this was something I did at other times in the relationship, mostly when I was afraid. After working with Jewels I did the same exercise with him some years later and he led me into some water and I completely trusted him to look after me and felt completely open and surrendered to him. It was more than sexual, it was completely sensual and connected." (Liz, client)

Jenny - How would you summarise the core of your work?

Jewels - Fundamentally, I accompany people that I work with on a journey into the deep ecology of themselves and each other. Moving away from the perspective of separate beings and separate relationship, my approach reminds people of their innate interconnection to all of life. I help couples re-write their relationships from a place of authentic love. I encourage those I work with to see intimate relating as an alive, ongoing journey that is capable of transforming their sense of who they are at the deepest level, a radical path to living their full potential.

Jenny - Is there anything you could offer readers right now that would give them a taste of your work?

Jewels - Yes, I would invite them to walk barefoot on the earth for 20 minutes a day for one month and see if they notice a difference in their energy levels, their physical and emotional health and how they feel in their heart. . .

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