

Drumming

It can bring surprising reactions

By MAGGI WHITE

When Connie Hill leads a drumming circle in January, she will focus the group on how they can begin the New Year making any transitions they want or need to make. How many of us make New Year's resolutions and never keep them because they require a change of habit or a lot of discipline and distractions get in the way of our intentions?

How many of us have noticed how our peace of mind is affected by the chaos and noise all around us?

Hill has found drumming to be her retreat from worries and stresses that are part of the fast pace of everyday life.

Ever since she was part of a wave of layoffs at Tektronix in 1988, Hill has found drumming to be her retreat, and now she teaches others how to follow this path.

Not in her wildest dreams would she have thought that she would go in this direction. She recalls when she was seven years old and wanted to play the drums that her mother told her drums were not for girls. She refused to study any other instrument.

But that was a long time ago. When Hill reached 40 and lost her job, she had no idea what to do next. A friend mentioned drumming and since she likes to make things with her hands, she made one.

"As soon as I did, it was as if this was what I was destined to do," she said. Six

months later she was teaching it on a regular basis, both in creating drumming circles and in drum making, which she still teaches in her home where one of her walls is decorated with drums. Once a month at New Renaissance Bookstore in Northwest Portland she holds drumming circles, timed with the full moon.

"It all started when I told a friend I needed to do something. I had no money. I was unemployed with two teenage daughters at the time. When I started drumming I also managed to do trades and get occasional jobs, and that kept me going financially for about a year."

At first she taught drumming in a basement area for several years, then she moved on to a community room at New Renaissance, where she was events coordinator for 12 years before she retired.

"I am always with my drums. I keep a bag of them in the trunk of my car. At my monthly drumming circles, people can bring their own or I have some for them to use."

As soon as I started drumming, I felt centered, sort of like the way you feel from meditating. You still react to life's circumstances, but for that hour and a half you are calm and peaceful and you let go of all kinds of stuff. It's like going on a retreat."

Hill's drumming circles attract from eight to 30 people of all ages: from youngsters to a woman in her 70s, she said. Some return, some do



Connie Hill has found a certain peace in drumming and now teaches others the art. Some of her drums are featured on the wall behind her.

not, some don't come back for six months. Some bring their children.

"Drumming doesn't stop things from happening in life, but it allows you to be in it and not of it." She said, "it has a healing feeling, you get in touch with your spirit, whatever that is for you."

She added, "Part of me doesn't believe that we can change anything, but part of me does believe that it works." She said the pace of drumming varies from soft to loud. Newcomers are sometimes scared because they don't know what to do, but she said everyone seems to enjoy it.

Deborah Wohlmuth, an administrative assistant with the Beaverton School District has found drumming an unexpected way of getting in touch with a part of herself that was



MATTHEW GINN photos

Hill looks through a ring — the beginning part to making a drum.

part Cherokee, although her family did not follow Native American traditions. She learned about its healing benefits when studying a form of energy psychology. "I had always loved rhythm and dancing," she said, and was struck by the different tones...I found it very calming. She has been involved in Hill's drumming circles and has led her own in the past.

Wohlmut also has taught drum-making classes and led them. When she learned she could make her own drum, it was like "déjà vu. It was more remembering." Wohlmut gathers with Women of Fourteenth Moon on an annual basis, and they drum and sing and celebrate women's aging process.

Hill said she holds drum-making classes in her home on a monthly basis for three

of four people at a time and some local shamans send students to her. The drums are 13 to 15 inches and are made of horse or elk hides. They take two or three hours to make. We make our own drum beater from beach wood or tree branches or some people bring a stick."

Most people find drumming amazing in how it makes them feel, said Hill, who is also an astrologer. "I knew nothing about this. Nothing in my background led me to this interest," she said. However, she said, the reward is feeling peaceful and "ready to go out into their life again."

She added, "I'm always searching."

Hill's next drumming circles at New Renaissance will be Jan. 8 and Feb. 6. Her website is www.gmnite.com.