

Walk for two: In the ecotone of language, landscape,
nonviolence

-Hazel White

NAVIGATION
The Key Room

1. On the steps below Building 944, settle into the shelter of the myoporum trees, and of the building and hill behind. That's our vertical axis, and the view out across the valley, our horizontal axis. Venturing occurs between them, between silence (shelter) and action (view), in an ecotone, where different systems meet, that we will crowd with change. To get certain about our genetically programmed love of shelter, carefully listen to your walking partner describe where as a child they liked to hide.

2. Head down the steps to the visitor center and on to the lagoon path to the beach. Stop midway, on the flat, under the vast eucalyptus tree. In deep shelter, we can dare to speak of our fear. I am the mother of a young black man. Aug. 9, 2014, while I was making a FB project, facebook.com/Battery129MarinHeadlands, Michael Brown was shot by police. His mother couldn't reach him. How to articulate to others my extreme distress.

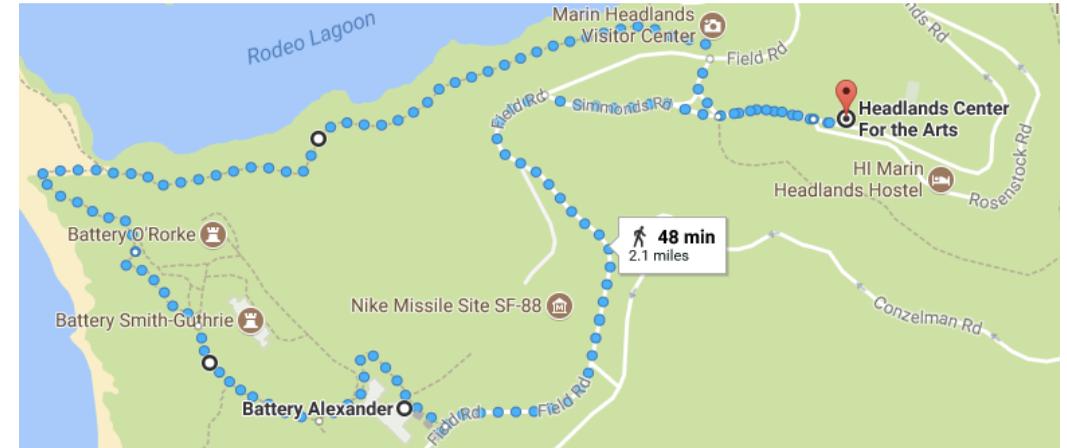
Around that time I met military veteran Derek Zahler, a member of Goruck, which leads team-building challenges based on Special Forces training. He explained the Headlands to me: the Golden Gate is a "chokepoint; the enemy had to be stopped from getting in, so we built the batteries to stop them, to destroy humans. It's demanding to contemplate these things." He leads people on 40-mile night hikes, in and out of surf, 50 lb. packs, little food, relying on one another, to communicate something of his experience of war. "I don't know why but I can't talk, or talk well enough, to articulate the magnitude of what we faced."

3. As you head to the beach, enjoy the beauty of the lagoon, an ecotone between freshwater and saltwater; they mix when winter storms push waves over the sandbar, moments so decisive that red carnelian may be tumbled up from deep underground. Beauty requires us "to give up our imaginary position as the center," Simone Weil. "Beauty assures us something real is lovable, [gives us] the courage to face what is not," Kathleen Marie Higgins.

4. At the beach, approach the surf, stand in the mix of elements, as a hybrid of a once-amphibious body. In this spacious open zone between one thing and another is a possibility—that language might forge, as Myung Mi Kim says in an interview, Generosity As Method, "an inclusiveness necessary for real change . . . [though] there needs to be a rupture."

I'm chasing the chance that language, if ruptured enough, might push a stuck situation into a dynamic one, like a wave going over the bar and keeping alive the endangered saltwater goby in the lagoon. This "poetic-revolutionary nature of reality," as Andrew Joron describes it, is where elements in disequilibrium "are prone to beautiful convulsions," and at a critical moment an "unexpected, unprecedented superaddition to reality emerges."

5. Face the path that goes up the cliff; see the peril of the loose rock, deep ruts. Climb it. Know that taking a risk, stepping out from shelter, is survival advantageous. Stop at the top, where the path joins a larger path, at the bench.



6. With your walking partner, try breaking with the usual communication patterns by speaking from the heart and listening so your partner feels heard. This is the essence of nonviolent communication (thank you to Newt Bailey, communicationdojo.com, for allowing me to share his Connected Conversation Process). To begin, decide who will speak first. If you are the speaker, speak something from your heart. You could use these prompts: I'm all fired up and wanting to . . . Or, I'm sad and wishing . . . Prepare to speak fairly slowly and for just 30 seconds. If you are the listener, listen with your entire attention to the speaker, so you can faithfully repeat what they said when they stop. No interpreting, no advice, just say what you heard the speaker say and check that you heard it all. If you are the speaker, be brave in letting the listener know that a detail was not quite caught, that you also wanted them to hear . . . and, listener, repeat that part back to the speaker. Switch roles. (Here in spring 2017, after a group of us did this exercise, a veteran gave a thumbs-up. Try this exercise and you'll understand why.)

7. Take the main path south; before the parking lot, turn left around the hill and down to Battery Alexander. The Nike Missile Site is ahead of you. Sense the fragility of peace. In horror, two years ago, I watched police cadets being trained to shoot people there. A veteran of the Cold War wrote that he loved the security of those underground nuclear missile silos, wanted to live in one. Enjoy the shelter of the beautifully graffitied battery walls and the trees behind you. Ask your partner to make a small request, perhaps about the conversation at the last stop, or something new. Do the same. Be honest about what you can do, rephrasing the request if necessary. When you are ready, follow the others who have stood here, some of whom moved me deeply by committing to interrupt racial bias—take a stride together toward the view and bravely speak what absolutely needs to be said, to care for one another: I'm in! (Take the stairs up to the road and turn left to return home.)
