

# A Reflection on a Recent Drum-Making Retreat in Northern California

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**By Gary Kalus, Northern California Chapter of Illuman**

Someone yelled, "Perfection is a myth." There were over twenty-five of us gathered in a barn to learn how to make a drum. This statement released us into a new place to start the journey of building our own drum. We all learned there is not a "correct way" or a "wrong way" to make a drum. There is the way of the heart and the heart will express that way in the making of the drum.

I have been involved with men's work and community for over thirty years. I was introduced to drumming in community through the works of Robert Bly, Michael Meade, and James Hillman. I learned how it is used in community and about using the drum to tell stories. Every man has a beat and rhythm and its origin is the heart. It is in community drumming where the voice of the heart is heard through this simple percussion instrument. It has always amazed me how a group of men can gather—some may have never played a drum—and begin drumming, usually very syncopated, with each man seeming to do his own thing. Then something happens; a rhythm forms and begins to move through the group, each man finding his place. It is a rhythm that emerges in that moment, pulling us all together without a word being spoken. We are in community.

Back to the barn; we had just finished watching a YouTube video on drum making in the Native American tradition. It was very detailed and gave good instructions, not only about how to prepare the skin and lace, but also about how the energy we are carrying at the time goes into the drum while it is being made.

According to tradition, the drum picks up whatever energy a man is carrying while building the drum and that energy stays with the drum. We learned how the drum carries our heart rhythm and our voice and it may end up being gifted to someone or passed to the next generation, still carrying our energy as part of the gift.

It was amazing to see the patterns we men all carry begin to surface as we engaged in making the drum. Many of us stepped back, released that energy, and reengaged in making the drum with a new energy. It was like all of us were giving the Internal Observer a megaphone and asking this

simple question: "Is this the energy you want this drum to carry?" There were a few of us that realized how we were able to change the energy pattern of the old monkey mind to a new pattern and energy. It was fascinating to experience the transformation taking place in each of us while building a drum.

I heard many comments from the men about how they enjoyed the hands-on experience and learning about the Native American drum-making tradition. I found this event to be a great preparation for the MROP. The men who are signed up for the August MROP got a chance to engage with the community before the MROP and also have a drum to bring to the MROP. This also gave men who haven't been to the MROP a chance to hear, from an experiential position, how it changed men's lives. Two men at this event made a commitment to sign up for the MROP.

This event was so successful that NorCal MALEs is planning to have another drum-making event in June 2018. We hope to have a larger turnout.

I would encourage all Illuman regions to develop this as an annual event, especially if there is a MROP planned. If any region is interested in the details of hosting, please contact me and I will provide the information on what we did to host this event.

With Gratitude,  
Gary

"Through the imperfection of drumming there is rhythm and beat that comes from the heart that is perfect."

