

## Held in the Basket of Community / Alastair McIntosh

At last year's Solas I spoke about my work on Donald Trump. I've been thinking further on this in terms of what I'd call *the basket of community*. What's more, it applies in many walks of life, including what it takes to weave a festival like Solas.

I was raised on the Isle of Lewis, and you can imagine how shocked many islanders were when it became widely known that the American president's mother, Mary Anne, had emigrated from there in 1930. The family is well liked on the island, but like most of that era, they had lived through multiple layers of trauma.

Two sides of Mary Anne Macleod's line had been evicted from their ancestral homes in the Highland Clearances of the 1820s. They resettled on the shores of Broad Bay, a name that hints of exposed waters and tragedy suffered at the fishing. The Great War stripped the island of a fifth of its young men, and a further 200 died when Mary Anne was six and the *lolaire* filled with returning servicemen struck rocks just five miles from her village. Then there was the Spanish Flu and the TB epidemic.

No wonder, like so many hundreds of her age group, she grabbed the chance to emigrate. What would have been her marriage prospects had she stayed? When I was a boy in the 1960s it was common to see older women either dressed in black as widows, or to be spinsters. We never really understood the heartbreak in the background, but truth was, the fabric of their webs of life had come unspun.

I've come to think of weaving as a metaphor for community. As a boy, raised in a big house with servants, Donald Trump was probably never held in the basket of community in the way that we were so richly on the island. He'd have lacked the context for rough edges to be smoothed.

A basket is semi-permeable. It has the strength to hold, but is not a prison. As with fabrics, it is woven by setting out a 'warp', the length-wise strands, to which the weaver then adds 'fill' by working in the sideways 'weft'.

Warp and weft in balance make a basket what it is. So with people too. If our

lives are all warp, and if we're pushed along at Warp speed, the ends spread out and fray. We become overstretched and frazzled. Each of us needs that deftly woven weft to give our lives cohesion, to weave us to the web of humanising relationships.

To me, this is what community events like Solas are about. They help to weave us back into the fabric of the world. That's fun, but also, spiritually it can take us very deep. As some ancient rock star put it in an album called *The Psalms*, 'You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb.'

Alastair McIntosh has written about Donald Trump and community cohesion both in his last book, *Poacher's Pilgrimage: an Island Journey*, and in *Riders on the Storm: Climate Change and the Survival of Being*, which will be published by Birlinn on 6 August.