

**Issue 33 – December 2014**
**Special edition**

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Dear fellow-members of the TS and TOS around the world,

Sound the trumpets! The TOS has a new International Secretary! It is with great pleasure that we welcome Nancy Secrest of the state of Washington on the West Coast of the United States. After many years as Secretary, Diana Dunningham Chapotin wishes to step aside to allow for fresh leadership and is moving to a supporting role. She assures us that she is not abandoning the TOS.


**Introducing Nancy Secrest**

Nancy Secrest joined the Theosophical Society in 1970, and served for one year as secretary to the resident head of Krotona Institute of Theosophy in Ojai, California, in 1987. She then spent three years as National Secretary of the TS in America in Wheaton, IL. A certified public accountant, she went on to work as chief financial officer of a non-profit organisation that assists the homeless and low income persons until her retirement in 2009, and still serves on their finance committee. Nancy was named Assistant National Treasurer of the Theosophical Society in America in 1994, and became National Treasurer seven years later. Nancy served the TS in America in these capacities for 18 years, until mid-2012.

Nancy is currently the President of the Theosophical Order of Service in the United States. She looks forward greatly to helping the TOS facilitate and encourage service amongst all Theosophists in whatever domain they choose to serve.

Nancy's email address is: [nancy.tosinternational@gmail.com](mailto:nancy.tosinternational@gmail.com)


**What does the International President of the TOS do?**

As many of you know, the International President of the TOS is, ex officio, the President of the Theosophical Society. In that capacity, Tim Boyd sets the direction of the organisation. He oversees its work of encouraging and supporting the service endeavours of TS members and friends in whatever field they are engaged. Tim keeps an eye on the TOS as a place where social action as spiritual practice is valued and nurtured. He sees the TOS as functioning fully within the Theosophical Society's embrace and encourages it to allow for many different approaches to the art of serving.

**What does the International Secretary do?**

Nancy's job as International Secretary is to coordinate the work around the world. She supports established groups and encourages the starting of new ones. She reports to the President on plans and achievements. She ensures that Theosophy remains at the heart of the TOS work, encouraging members to take it out into the community and show the light it sheds on human problems, both personal and societal.

**In appointing Nancy, Tim Boyd wrote:**

*One of my first tasks on taking the International President's position was trying to convince Diana Chapotin not to retire. After many years of service as International Secretary of the TOS her mind was made up. Now, I am happy to find myself in a position to share the many good qualities of Nancy Secrest with the international TOS. Having known her for almost 30 years as a co-worker and friend, I can say without reservation that she will be motivated and sincere in her new responsibilities. In the US she has worked in every possible capacity, from setting up chairs for meetings, to National Treasurer of the TSA, board of directors, and TOS president. In the work we have done over the years I have depended on her organisational skills and consistency. I look forward to the new era she will bring to the international TOS.*

**In receiving the news of Nancy's appointment from Tim, retiring Secretary, Diana wrote,** *"It is fine news that Nancy has accepted this challenge. I have known her for well over 30 years. She has essential qualities for this work – a passion for service, a loving, caring nature, enthusiasm for the TOS's potential, a sense of commitment over the long haul, discernment, open-mindedness, the capacity to keep pushing forward steadily and quietly and an attentive eye to administrative detail. I have every faith in her."*



Nancy has been active in the TOS since the 1990s. We see her here (in centre) in 2001 with TOS workers (left to right): Tim Boyd, Diana Dunningham Chapotin, Michel Chapotin, Hutoxy Contractor, Joe Gullo, Dinshaw Contractor, Jean Gullo and Betty Bland.


**A conversation with Nancy**

Diana's last task in office is a particularly enjoyable one. She interviews Nancy at length for us:

"A big thank you, Nancy, for accepting the challenge of coordinating the Theosophical Order of Service work around the world and every best wish to you from us all. How do you feel about taking on the role?" [Read Nancy's answer here...](#)

**What's new on the International TOS website?**

In our [Latest News](#) we welcome our new International Secretary, Nancy Secrest, and share an interview in which she talks of her passions and plans.

The new [Featured Article](#) is by Betty Bland and is entitled *Living Waters*. Betty explores the idea of water as a symbol of spiritually focused consciousness and sets us a challenge: *On a daily basis, consider your life and how you might add to the well-being of another; think of the beauty and treasures of this earth; explore the deep recesses of your heart for meaning and purpose in the realms of immortality. By doing so, each day you will be increasing the joy, gratitude and understanding that fills our lives and our planet with living waters.*

Our [Featured Project](#) brings us touching photos of a gesture of solidarity by French TOS members toward Ukrainian children affected by the war in the country's eastern regions.



You'll also find additions to the TOS photo gallery and the expanded *Inspiration* section.  
Go to <http://international.theoservice.org>



### An inspirational story about peace

When a wizard's good intentions and actions still don't bring peace to a country, a child has a creative idea that works. [Read more here...](#)



### Email addresses for the editorial team

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### Christmas greetings from the editorial team

2014 has been a year in which our TOS community has worked with energy and dedication to make a difference in our world. Individually and collectively we have endeavoured to put theosophical principles into action in our service to the One Life in all.

As we celebrate our achievements, we look forward to a vibrant 2015. We wish you peace, harmony and spiritual fulfilment, and a New Year filled with happiness and many opportunities to work together in service.



Nancy Secrest



Diana Dunningham Chapotin



Geoffrey Harrod



Rozi Ulics



Carolyn Harrod

***"The Theosophical Order of Service encourages self-forgetful service, and is the natural counterpart of the Theosophical Society's work to guide people to wisdom."***

Radha Burnier, December 1994



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## A conversation with Nancy Secrest



**In this conversation, Diana Dunningham Chapotin, the retiring International Secretary of the TOS chats with the newly appointed International Secretary, Nancy Secrest.**



**Diana:** A big thank you, Nancy, for accepting the challenge of coordinating the Theosophical Order of Service work around the world and every best wish to you from us all. How do you feel about taking on the role?

**Nancy:** Well, Diana, this will be new and different for me. I'm feeling a mixture of anticipation and excitement for what lies ahead as well as a bit of trepidation. I have a lot to learn. It's going to be a challenge all right, but I've always loved a challenge. Are you sure you want to give up the job (smile)?

**Diana:** Joy Mills once mentioned to me a visit of former International TS President, George Arundale, to the New Orleans Lodge of the TS in America. The local leader told him proudly that she had been lodge president for over 20 years. "What a shame!" he is reputed to have replied. ("So very George Arundale!" commented Joy.)

*When I first heard this story, I was in my early twenties and remember thinking that Dr Arundale's remark was appropriate because it was perfectly obvious that the lady shouldn't have stayed in the job for such a long time. And yet here I am now, at the age of 60, feeling strangely sympathetic toward the New Orleans Lodge president. Can you guess why? It is because I filled the role of TOS International Secretary for the same length of time – 20 years. It's high time I stepped aside, isn't it? I am more than happy to give you support for as long as need be, though.*

**Nancy:** I really appreciate that, Diana, and I will need the continuing help of others involved in the work of the TOS.

**Diana:** Let's talk about the work. What are your passions in service work? What are the planetary problems that most worry you? I'm not asking you necessarily to mention the objectively biggest problems humanity faces. I'm asking what causes you feel most strongly about, for whatever reason.

**Nancy:** My biggest passion is averting homelessness, especially for families with children, and dispelling the myths that surround it. For instance, most of the parents in these families do work. They simply don't make enough to support a family. Many are one parent households, mostly mothers, but surprisingly a good number are headed by single fathers as well. This is a bigger issue than many people realise because so many people today are only one pay cheque away from homelessness. Throw in the sudden loss of a job, an illness of a parent, medical bills of a sick child or even the lack of a vehicle with which to get to work, and people can suddenly be out on the street. And in the immediate, I am thinking of just the United States here, a country that has not had to contend with millions living in shanty towns, war being fought in its streets, land mines hidden in fields, households being displaced by corrupt officials, or makeshift armies, such as we see in Africa, who make killers out of young boys from the streets.



Yesterday I went to a fundraising luncheon for an organisation that works with homeless families. The keynote speaker talked about solving simple and complex problems. I listened closely because, to me, he was talking not only about that organisation but about the TOS as well. He said that a simple solution to a problem is like finding a vaccine. It may not be easy to develop the vaccine, but once done scientists must simply replicate and distribute it, all of which is pretty straightforward. However, a complex problem, such as homelessness, and the many other issues the TOS addresses, are multi-faceted and must be tackled on various fronts: food and fresh water, housing, jobs, medical issues, schooling issues, gender bias and other social concerns. This is much more difficult. "A tough nut to crack" as they say.

**Diana:** Er, some people would say that vaccines are perhaps not as simple a solution to problems as they





*Nancy and other members of the Portland, Oregon lodge in the US get ready for their participation in a backpack program which provides food for low income children on the weekends and school holidays when they do not have the benefit of free school lunch programs.*

**Diana:** What else do you feel passionately about?

**Nancy:** As an older adult, I realised that if I had my career to do over again, I would want to be an ambassador, to the United Nations. It occurred to me, after I accepted the position of TOS international secretary, that the international TOS is a kind of theosophical United Nations in service around the world. I'm so pleased that I am actually getting to fulfil my UN ambition through the TOS that it makes me smile from ear to ear. I love people. We are interesting, fascinating. I'm passionate about people of various ethnicities and cultures working and growing together.

**Diana:** Speaking of the United Nations Organisation...

**Nancy:** I think I know what you're going to say. Are you going to mention the TS's fine record of support for the UN going right back to the League of Nations days?

**Diana:** Yes, and also the TOS's support nowadays for the UN's work in alleviating suffering, promoting peace and quality of life for all.

**Nancy:** I hope the TOS will be able to step up its support for the UN, by organising events on its World Days, for example.



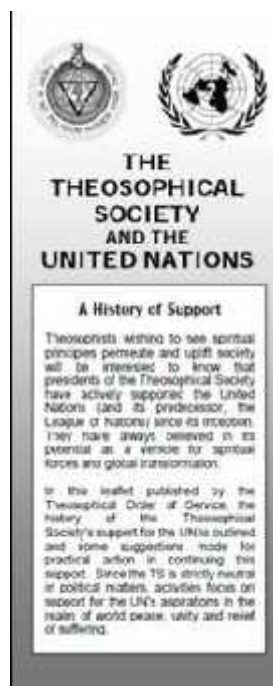
*Children at the Golden Link College in Manila celebrating United Nations Day*

**Diana:** What other issues do you feel strongly about?

**Nancy:** Gender equality is important to me, of course. Education for girls and women is essential if we are to have a balanced and harmonious world, and the safety of women at work, school, home and anywhere their daily lives take them is paramount. It boggles my mind that we even have to talk about it.

*appear on the surface, but I fully take the point the speaker was making about the complexity of many social problems. As a matter of fact, it is really frustrating when one walks with friends past a homeless person or homeless family in the street and hears one of them say, "That fellow probably drank himself onto the street," or "Well, if they would just stop breeding!" Ignorance and prejudice are tough nuts to crack as well.*

**Nancy:** True. For us, in the TOS, the problem is compounded because we are a small, pretty much grassroots organisation that has no paid staff and very little funding. There was a bumper sticker (a slogan that is pasted on the bumper of a vehicle) that was popular a few years back. It describes the TOS pretty well. It said "Think globally, act locally." And, that's what we do. Local members get together to serve in their areas, and all of us together can make a difference globally.



*TOS brochure documenting the history of the TS's support for the UN, produced by the TOS UN committee formed in 2010*



The importance of safety for all of us should be so self-evident.



*One of the billboards erected by the Mahabharat TOS Group in Odisha, India to stop violence against women*

Something else I feel passionately about is theosophically-based education such as we have in The Golden Link College and its fledgling sister schools in the Philippines. What could be more important and fruitful than reaching children with the uplifting spiritual ideas and wholesome values of Theosophy?



And, then there are animals...

**Diana:** *What are you looking forward to in your new position?*

**Nancy:** Developing relationships with wonderful people all over the world. In this regard, I was amazed at the really special members I met at the TOS working conference held at Olcott last year. Hearing firsthand about their projects set me on fire. I returned home overflowing with new ideas for making the teachings of Theosophy of practical use in people's lives and of transformative value in the world.



*Joie de vivre at the TOS working conference held in the USA in July 2013*



*Nancy at a planning session with Carolyn Harrod who led the conference*

I am also looking forward to encouraging TS General Secretaries and Presidents to start the TOS in Sections where it is still not active. I'd like them to understand that, in most Sections, the international TOS is really nothing other than a department of the TS, there to help them encourage and facilitate theosophically-oriented service amongst their members.

*Nancy and her husband Maurice were able to attend the White Lotus Day celebration at the TS in Rome last May and see the TS General Secretary Antonio Girardi (second from left) and National Secretary Patrizia Calvi. They were impressed by the way the TS and TOS in Italy work hand in hand, as one in fact.*



**Diana:** *That's a good point you raise. Some people see the TOS as a separate organisation from the TS. While half a dozen or so national groups are registered legally as non-profit organisations (usually because their operations are extensive), the vast majority are really just autonomous departments of*





*the TS, rather like TS branches. Unlike TS branches though, the TOS is uniquely positioned within the TS to support service efforts world-wide.*

**Nancy:** That's right. And, our website and the *In-Touch* e-newsletter are great places to learn about these amazingly varied efforts.

I'm also looking forward to learning in greater depth about the work our various TOS Sections are doing. Specific projects such as drilling a bore hole and providing a water pump for a village in an arid area in Kenya, organising eye examinations for thousands of adults and children in Chennai slums or assisting a Native American newspaper with their computer needs may be unique to local regions.

*As the president of the TOS in the USA, Nancy visits the branches in the states of Washington, Oregon and California as part of a new TOS outreach program meant to familiarise TS/TOS members with the work of the TOS.*

However, if we dig a little deeper, I suspect we will find that the issues that give rise to them are not. Many of the problems that we address are caused by abuse of the environment and planetary resources, gender inequality, unjust caste and class systems, exploitative international conglomerates, political and economic corruption and genocide. But even these are surface issues. As theosophists, we know that the root cause of them all is ignorance of the oneness of all life. As theosophists we are well situated to address this through both meditation and study within the TS and spiritually conscious service through the TOS.

I'm also very interested in exploring new and fresh ways for each TOS Section to plan for emergencies. We need to identify avenues and methods of response before emergencies occur. In this, the 21st century, with internet, and social media access so prevalent in most countries, we can be connected with each other in minutes. We need to take advantage of all methods at our disposal to make our service efforts effective and efficient. Our groups are active in many countries, but are small in all of them. I've always felt that if one doesn't have the brawn to do something, one must use brains. All of us together need to figure out how best to use our limited resources of people and funds to accomplish our goals.

**Diana:** *Speaking of goals brings us to our International Plan of Action. We've already touched on several of these goals during this discussion. I'm wondering if there are any others that particularly speak to you.*

**Nancy:** Yes – all of them (smile), but I'll just mention two, both of which are pretty far-reaching.

First of all, I'd like to see us develop ways for TOS leaders to communicate more actively and regularly amongst ourselves and with the international team in order to build community, share ideas and work on collective goals. In these days with electronic communication literally at our fingertips, this should not be difficult. Most of us have email and many have the capability of attending meetings via Skype or similar software.



*Nancy and members of the TOS in the USA at the 2013 conference setting priorities for activities over the next five years*

The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter could prove to be invaluable for rapid connection with our many members and supporters. It could also be a great way to connect with TOS youth (who could also teach us how best to use these methods). Along the same lines, we need to develop more outreach to our members and others. Through publications, films and internet programs showing our service work, the spiritual goals and multi-ethnic and interdenominational activities we pursue, we can demonstrate the oneness of all life.

**Diana:** *Do you have any other plans?*

**Nancy:** On the more practical side of things, I want to explore ways of making the TOS more financially self-sufficient as well. As you know, Diana, my background is that of Certified Public Accountant (known as Chartered Accountant in many other countries), so naturally my thoughts run to the financial side of things. While I do think it's important for each TOS Section to handle its own finances, it is equally important for the International TOS to offer oversight by putting together a financial team to develop official policies for things such as the handling of donations received by groups, financial reporting, and to offer assistance in the 'how to' of keeping financial records. I'd also like us to try our hand at grant writing and soliciting bequests, both to benefit specific projects and to help defray some operational costs. In many Sections such costs have traditionally been paid out-of-pocket by TOS workers. My concern here is that while this practice is very generous on the part of those who 'foot the bill', it restricts those of lesser means from being involved at all levels of TOS service.



'Locks of Love' is a non-profit charity based in the United States. The organisation accepts donations of human hair and money with the stated intention of making wigs for Canadian and American children in need due to medical conditions that have caused them to lose their hair. Here we see Nancy at the 2013 International TOS Conference having her hair cut for 'Locks of Love'.

**Diana:** What do you think of the five-year Plan of Action developed at the TOS international conference in July a year ago?

**Nancy:** It's quite extensive. At our next conference, we may need to consider how to move from the activities suggested for the next five years to the hundred-year vision given by Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr in his excellent address, *The TOS 100 Years from Now*. In any case, it will take all of us working together to help the International TOS grow into a viable, living organism dedicated to service. I welcome the input of our new International TOS President, Tim Boyd, in all this as well.

Now I have a question for you too, Diana. What are you looking forward to doing in your 'retirement'?



One of the first activities on the program of the 2013 TOS conference was the planting of a tree in memory of Col. Henry Steel Olcott, the first International President of the Theosophical Society. Col. Olcott was a veteran of the American Civil War and Nancy, as President of the TOS in America, organised the tree planting as part of the 'Trees for Vets' program supported by the American TOS.

**Diana:** Um, helping out more in the TOS in France where I live. Writing on social issues in the light of Theosophy in a no-holds-barred way. Having the time to be even more personally active in these causes (such as that of the terribly neglected Rom people here – I share your concern for homelessness). Thanking properly the many workers who are of such help to the International TOS at a behind-the-scenes administrative level. (The very first was Vicente Hao Chin, just for the record. Within half an hour of Radha appointing me Secretary, Vic offered to format and print TOS publications and he has rendered countless services to the International TOS at all levels ever since. I feel little short of adoration for him as a colleague! )

What else am I looking forward to? Attending more mindfulness retreats, calming down and trying to get a handle on my bossy nature, not to mention on my impulsiveness (see remark about Vic Hao Chin above). Being more supportive to the friends and family members I've neglected in favour of the TOS work. I could go on and on...

Once again we wish you the very best, Nancy. Take care of all our members. They are precious! In fact, they are what simplifies the job of International Secretary and makes a veritable joy of it – its members tend to be no-fuss types who just want to get down to putting Theosophy into practice. They are not navel-gazers and pontificators. They love to take Theosophy out into the community and show the light it sheds on human problems, both individual and societal. They recognise society as the very theatre of evolution.

**Nancy:** Yes, our members seem to grasp at a very core level that we are all One. They don't have to think about it or analyse it. They know intuitively that a bowl of rice or a school lesson from the hands of a theosophist contains more than just food for the body or the mind. It contains the potential for spiritual growth, for both the receiver and the giver, through the recognition that we are truly One with each other. Why? Because as theosophists we understand the concept of evolution. We tap into the very essence of the universal consciousness through meditation; we share it, and hopefully exemplify it, through service. In other words, our members serve consciously, knowing that to do so promotes evolution and spiritual transformation for all, for the One.

**Diana:** Yes, they do try to serve consciously. The TOS attempts to be a place where social action as spiritual practice is actively nurtured. As you know,



*the organisation provides resources and encouragement for Theosophists in their service endeavours, both in our organised group settings and in our lives as private citizens. Inspiration and ideas for action can be found on our website, of course.*

**Nancy:** Providing support for Theosophists in whatever domain they choose to serve is one of the things I am most looking forward to in becoming International Secretary. Our website, [www.international.theoservice.org](http://www.international.theoservice.org), is certainly a good place to find it.

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## An inspirational story about peace

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Once the peaceful inhabitants asked a very powerful wizard to stop all wars and bloodshed in their country. "It is simple," he said. "I will destroy all weapons, and nobody will be able to fight any more."

"That would be fine!" the peaceful people exclaimed. With a wave of the wizard's magic wand, this was done.

There was peace in the country for three days, while the majority of those who were prone to fight, sought and could not find a weapon. But when they understood that they'd lost their weapons forever, they made spears from young trees, and started to fight again.

When the wizard heard such bad news, he said, "Do not worry. I will destroy all young trees, and these bullies will not be able to fight."

After two or three days of fruitless searching for young trees, suitable for making spears, the rebellious people started to cut down giant trees and make new weapons from them, and the bloodshed started again.

The wizard destroyed all the big trees. Then the fighters made knives and swords of metal. When he destroyed all metal in the country, people made slings and began to throw stones at each other, so it was necessary to destroy the stones, too.

And then the peacekeepers sounded the alarm: all trees had disappeared; there were no metals and stones. How would the people live? What would they eat now? There would soon be no vegetation, and people would die without even fighting. "No, this is the wrong solution to the problem," they said.

The wizard became confused. "I do not know what to do to prevent people from fighting," he said. The peacekeepers fell into despair; they did not know what to do either.

And then one clever child turned to the wizard and said, "I know what you should do. Let people feel how others perceive their actions. If one person hurts someone, let them feel the same pain, and if they bring joy to someone, let them feel the same joy. So no one will hurt another, because they will feel pain immediately, too, and would have to stop."



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All the people were inspired with the greatness of the child's thought, and the wizard carried out his idea exactly. He returned all trees, stones and metals, and even weapons.

Since that day, no one in the country has tried to hurt their neighbour, because they would have to feel the same pain, too. People began to remake the weapons into tools. They began to help each other, because they liked the sense of joy they felt. And they began to live in peace, harmony and joy.