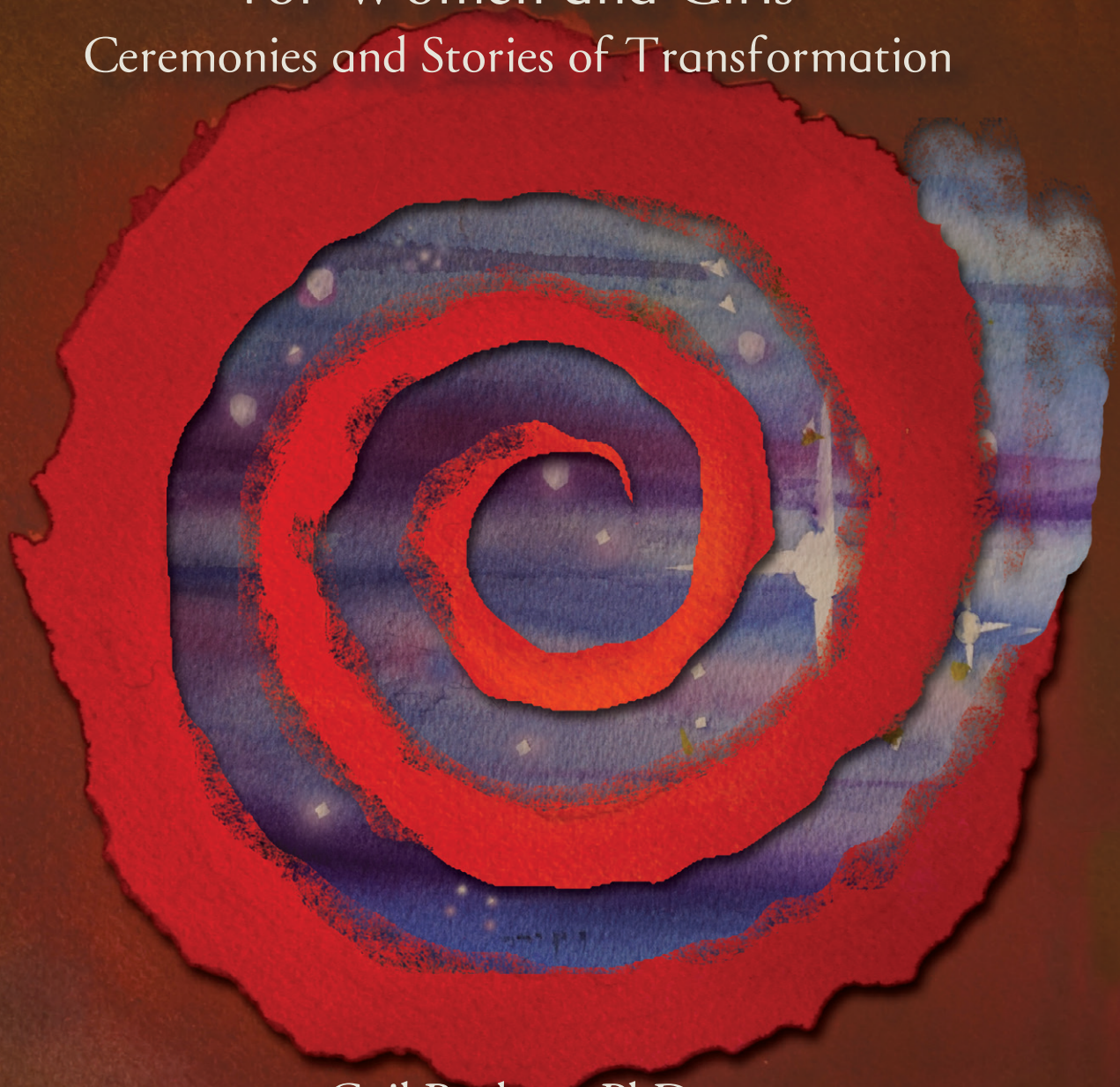


# NINE PASSAGES

for Women and Girls

Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation



Gail Burkett, PhD

# The Life Spiral



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Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation

Gail Burkett, PhD, author  
Janis Monaco Clark, editor  
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**Nine Passages for Women and Girls  
Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation**

**Children [Birth, Middle Child, First Blood]**

**Adolescents [First Blood, First Flight, Womanhood Bloom]**

**Adults [Womanhood Bloom, Deepening Womanhood, Elder Encore]**

**Elders [Elder Encore, Spiritual Elder, Death]**

Categories: Rites of Passage, Women's Studies, Ritual, Mentoring, Developmental Psychology, Transformation, Women's Spirituality, Child Development, Anthropology

## Dedication

Seriously, this book is dedicated to Mentors.

All Mentors.

Mentoring is the way forward and the change we need to see.

To help me understand something more about myself,

I am grateful to the Mentor Spirit I received from these glorious teachers:

Sharon Sweet, Rick Medrick, Susan Morgan, and Joe Meeker,

I thank you.



## Honoring Recent Teachers

**Clarissa Pinkola Estés** said in her wonderful audio, *How to be an Elder*,

“We all know how to do Rites of Passage, it comes from inherent knowledge of ritual.”

In *The Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of the Soul*, Michael Meade said,

“Initiation involves an increase in knowledge, especially self-knowledge, as well as a loss of innocence.”

Expressed so well in this excerpt offered by **Bill Plotkin** in *Nature & the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* © 2008

“A rite of Passage, after all — even the most effective and brilliantly designed ceremony — rarely causes a shift from one distinct stage of life to the next. Much more often rites of Passage only confirm or celebrate a life transition that has already (although recently) been achieved by the individual, accomplished through years of steady developmental progress.

What happens between life Passages is considerably more important to the process of maturation than are the Passages themselves (and their associated rites). The primary work of maturing takes place gradually every day as we apply ourselves to the developmental tasks of our current life stage. Children and adolescents need help with these tasks — help from mature adults. And that’s precisely where we are failing our youth.”

**Helen M. Luke** found her way into my heart from one of the women journeying through *Soul Stories*. I am grateful for this gift from Laurie Evans and the gift of Helen Luke’s wisdom.

“Each of us, as we journey through life, has the opportunity to find and to give his or her unique gift. Whether this gift is quiet or small in the eyes of the world does not matter at all, not at all; it is through the finding and the giving that we may come to know the joy that lies at the center of both the dark times and the light.”

# CONTENTS

INVITATION .....	10
BIRTH PASSAGE.....	17
The Intention: Creating and Assembling the Village.....	17
The Story: Grandmother's Glory .....	27
Gifts from the Elders: Birth Passage .....	40
NOTES for the Birth Passage.....	42
MIDDLE CHILD RITES.....	43
The Intention: Making All Rites Possible .....	43
A Story: Five Girls Welcome Middle Childhood .....	57
Gifts from the Elders: Middle Child Passage.....	96
NOTES for the Middle Child Passage .....	99
COMING OF AGE: FIRST BLOOD .....	100
The Intention: Gifting Women's Ways at Puberty.....	100
A Story: Millennial Girl's First Blood Ceremony.....	114
Gifts from the Elders: First Blood Passage .....	146
NOTES for First Blood Passage .....	148
FIRST FLIGHT .....	150
The Intention: Offering the Gift of Womanhood Training .....	150
The Story of Diverse Fledglings .....	186
Gifts from the Elders: First Flight.....	195
NOTES for the First Flight Passage .....	197

WOMANHOOD BLOOM.....	199
The Intention: Empowering Women for their Journey .....	199
An Honoring: Rachel's Story .....	246
Gifts from the Elders: Womanhood Bloom .....	256
NOTES for the Womanhood Bloom Passage .....	260
DEEPENING WOMANHOOD.....	262
The Intention: Becoming a Culture-Maker for the Village .....	262
Laura's Triple Initiation Story .....	302
Gifts from the Elders: Deepening Womanhood .....	320
NOTES for Deepening Womanhood .....	324
ELDER ENCORE.....	326
The Intention: Understanding Personal Wisdom Traditions .....	326
Now Her Story: Janis Monaco Clark .....	380
Gifts from the Elders: Elder Encore .....	394
NOTES for the Elder Encore.....	398
SPIRITUAL ELDER.....	401
The Intention: Enjoying the Longevity of the Life Spiral .....	401
Shirley Hardy's Story .....	429
Gifts from the Other Elders for the Spiritual Elder .....	437
NOTES for Spiritual Elder .....	439



DEATH PASSAGE.....	441
The Intention: Finding Consciousness in Life and in Death . . .	441
A Few Death Stories. ....	460
Gifts from the Other Elders Before Your Death . . . . .	465
NOTES from the Death Passage . . . . .	468
 EPILOG . . . . .	 469
 AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	 474
 EDITOR’S BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	 476
 DESIGNER’S BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	 477
 GRATITUDES.....	 478

## Invitation

*A little prayer: Please guide me most benevolent spirit world, angels and helper-beings. Please guide me animal, plant, bird, and fish kingdoms. Celebrating your wild heritage, I offer my gratitude for sightings, visitations, and the blessing of your company seen through tracks and signs. Please guide me friends, relations, and family, I owe my life and breath to you. I give thanks for all life not mentioned, seen and unseen, the standing and fallen trees, the mycelium running between as the virtual support systems of our Great Mother Earth. I feel the blessed support from our Moon and Sun.*



Rites of Passage or Passage Rituals, what does this mean? A natural intersection where an internal biological clock meets a spiritual longing, this is often the case. After one round of seasons, everything feels different. With a language that is slowly returning to the culture, welcome each biological change and make a ceremony that marks your maturity; release old patterns of behavior so that new ones may find room to grow. Ultimately, Passage ceremonies celebrate accumulated change and growth. By marking the expansion of your body, mind, and spirit, personal evolution of your inner Genius is sparked to seek more of life—experiences, curiosities, and spiritual answers. A Rites of Passage ceremony is the springboard for a new quest on a timeline marked by your Soul. See the glossary, [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

For the longest time, I held this question: How can we bring Rites of Passage back to the culture? It seems like such a simple question: Nothing is further from the truth, except there is hope.

The language has disappeared, so that is a big consideration. Fluency will take some time. Biological changes common to all people offer an entrance, these doorways belong to everyone. I love to focus a light on the generations who missed Passage Rituals, parents and grandparents: Through some catalyst of change, we did transform, we did have a personal experience with initiation. Generally, no one witnessed our change so no one else benefited and very often the catalyst came without invitation and we would not wish a repeat. Often ritual was completely missing. Rites of Passage ceremonies smooths out all this roughness and makes change a welcome event.

There is a way to harmonize with the Soul who guides us, by seeking change consciously, by listening for our original instructions, and by meeting a transformation with a ritual. This is the way of change. When we face the inevitably of change, cross a Threshold, and greet the tender new stage of life, change will feel harmonious. When we accept that maturity is desirable, it can happen by honoring our stories and by releasing our attachment to the past. With the Spiral of Life metaphor, we can know ourselves better and create a clearer vision for the journey ahead. When Passage Rituals are shared inter-generationally, the bridge rises naturally between the generations. I feel like a pioneering girl and woman and an Elder simultaneously.

# The Life Spiral



Before we can talk about the Rites for each Passage, we must find our place. I am in the small space between Elder Encore and Spiritual Elder, a place of growth and excitement, a place of mystery and hope. I have carefully danced myself through a review of all of my stages which I personally consider an Elder's initiation; I unearthed the catalysts of change that created each Threshold and how new challenges were metaphorically represented by cobblestones.

I invite you to gaze into this Spiral and find yourself; find the members of your clan. I invite you to become innovative with me. There are stories to be told and ceremonies to be made.<sup>2</sup>

As I was taught about Rites of Passage, through academic circles, a

framework was provided which includes hearing a call from one's Soul, separating from one's ordinary life, facing and crossing a Threshold to wander alone in the wilderness in a seeking manner, and returning to a community ceremony of welcome and integration.<sup>3</sup> What I call a portal is a liminal space of mystery, often created by ritual ceremony, a blended space for mind, body, and Soul to discover a new agreement. In cosmic terms, this may take a year, in women's terms, 13 Moons.

I am one of many now lifting up Rites of Passage for the culture because it's needed. I bow to the many others, gathered under one umbrella called Youth Passageways, all those bright thinkers with strong hearts are bringing Passage ceremonies to young people. This large group serves as the answer to my original question.<sup>4</sup>

*Nine Passages* is a book of stories with nine initiation ceremonies, including Birth and Death. It's a book of mentoring and offers many tools for moving a body with its Soul through natural biological changes. Each of the nine stages of development creates a seismic change longing to be noticed. Initiations are Soul-work that assists one's body coming more and more into consciousness of itself, Passage by Passage. Initiation ceremonies evolve the sense of self for all who attend and all who pay attention. This is a movement for Evolutionaries™.

Those who feel open to biological maturity as their birthright will resonate as kindred spirits. Anyone seeking personal evolution will resonate and will relish finding doorways. These women will not hesitate. Many Mothers will resonate with Rites of Passage offering the gift of maturity to their offspring even if they did not receive such celebrations. Perhaps out of a deeper knowing than even gentle kindness, seekers and Mothers will open this door for others.

Having enough research in me to satisfy me, I wish to show respect to the Medicine Wheel for bringing me through the past two decades. These ancient teachings have never remained buried for long, in fact, Earth Mother pre-

senting her seasons in harmony with the Sun helps the Wheel remain eternal. My muse has been nourished by an unimaginably long lineage of Grandmother Spirits who have watched over this work. Those nearlings woke me before dawn thousands of mornings to prepare me for the day when I could finally write this introduction.

With curiosity and readiness, with a global view and pregnant with these teachings, I have lived the challenge of personal development and of Passage ceremonies. Response to the urge to personally grow and evolve rises with each person's longing for fulfillment. I denied hearing the call until the pain was unbearable. Then, one dawn a decade after my Womanhood Bloom, a long line of elk walked past my bedroom window. The events that followed that miracle woke me up. Along such a circuitous route, I have learned to observe a reverence for our Great Mother, sweet Earth listens and holds and encourages. My preparation to create and now offer this work has come through long talks with my Council of Elders, women who have stepped up to offer their piece for this puzzle. Every Soul like the one who lives and breathes inside of you, holds the whole of this developmental span of life. Your inner circle is your tribe and your Village. Allow ceremony to join you together, with your soul, like a sacred marriage.

Mothers continue to give birth to both sexes of babies and in equal numbers. I do not plan a gender translation for this book at this time, but the biological changes may be interpreted. I grew from a baby girl into a big girl and finally a woman becoming and suddenly an Elder. It is a natural occurring phenomenon that I would write a book for women and our girls.

Best wishes on raising your children and raising yourselves.

First of Summer 2016, this comes with love, Gail Burkett



# NOTES FOR INVITATION

## 1 Glossary for the Language of Passages:

**Rites of Passage** is time away from normal or mundane life, a time to be with spirit and Soul, listening for new instructions. In this liminal time, an altered state of being brings about true change.

An internal biological clock bundles an accumulation of life experiences which encourages a Threshold to appear. Allow resistance to fall away. Threshold is the moment, often an actual doorway, where you agree that change is unavoidable and desirable.

Spiritual longing is individually interpreted and usually most pronounced in silence.

Often an initiate needs 13 Moons to feel a new normal. This allows for comparison of old and new and for integration. After one round of seasons, everything feels different. Because we are women, change comes with our Moon cycles.

Biological changes occur under the science of ontology, unique to each person. Many psychologists use a 7 year mark, but ontology is not so rigid; e.g., my First Blood came at 13.5 and my Last Blood happened at 45.5.

**Ceremony** may be the trickiest of these terms, but gather a circle of friends (because they benefit), light candles on an altar, include meaningful symbolic treasures, sing songs, speak from your heart: What is inviting change, how do you feel, what do you hope for? You may be surprised to hear what you have to share; others in the circle may find their own longing to mark change.

Maturity is the most tested of any cultural measurement. Arrested development is extensive because communities have lost the habit of noticing and applauding growth and change.

Soul and quest, these terms are related and come with adolescent longings. If life is as luscious as your dreams, those longings turn into Adult and then Elder desires without ceasing.

- 2 If you have never experienced Rites of Passage for yourself, a great journey of a year may seem alluring. I wrote *Soul Stories: Nine Passages of Initiation* as an invitation for women over 30, often over 60, to find their change agents and experience a celebration of the many changes throughout their lives. I wish to honor Elders, circles of Elders, who will flourish with ceremonies in their years ahead.
- 3 Those early teachers included Arnold van Gennep whose *Rites of Passage* (1960) was posthumously published after his anthropological discoveries and treatise in 1905; Joseph Campbell's major works inspired the anthology *A Hero's Journey*, (2014, 3rd Edition); Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (1994); Michael Meade,

*The Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of the Soul*; Martin Prechtel, *Long Life, Honey in the Heart* (2004), and one I have yet to study deeply, Bill Plotkin. These men all stand out as too important to not mention.

- 4 I am very pleased to stand with others who wish to uplift Rites of Passage ceremonies. Youth Passageways (.org) follows good council. So many spiritual rituals have elongated from Indigenous threads. Many of those did not lay down their threads as my Ancestors did; Indigenous Peoples are the original teachers and are being well respected by the efforts of this umbrella organization.

# INTRODUCTION

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## NINE PASSAGES for Women and Girls Ceremonies and Stories of Transformation

### ELDER ENCORE, SPIRITUAL ELDER, DEATH

The endowment of Rites of Passage, with rituals that create a ceremony for honoring a life stage, begins with Elder energy. When we model these ceremonies for the culture, they will seep slowly into the culture as a heritage gift that belongs to everybody. In this exemplary way, we will return Rites of Passage to the culture. It is one of the good energies of this century.

More than we can imagine, we need a guide for our Elder years, one that inspires vision. With so many wisdom teachers in our midst, their astuteness and brilliant insights feed our insatiable appetites. I offer the voice of friend and confidant in this guide to your Elder years; this easy conversational way offers recognition for your wisdom years, for your personal Genius, and invites a deeper vision for the future. May we see far enough, together, to touch the mythological Seventh Generation.

In this bundle of insights, the collective consciousness of your Elder Circle mixes with ours. We hope this Elder to Elder gift will offer enough guidance to lift the conversation about your personal Passages, past and future. Hope is a delicate thread winding through all of this work; the energy of hope is especially important for our Elder years.

To begin this Guide, Elder Encore provides a burst of energy. So much effort is put into feeling younger as we begin to feel older. This is for good reason. We can all see ahead, we have been offered the trajectory of a much longer life than our Ancestors. The accumulation of experience has been building towards something, your Encore. What have you wanted to do for years? Now is the time, the great expression of your unique bundle of gifts, skills, and vision. Even before we step into this opening Passage to Elder Encore we have encountered Death, realizing that is the capstone of our life contract. First, there is your Encore, this Guide will help you find yours.

We feel the presence of our Spiritual Elder through many days of our lives; she is there ahead of us, always with us as the inner child is there like a guiding energy. Once acceptance of this stage is imminent but before utter detachment, each gorgeous Elder woman is gifted with spaciousness and opportunity for reflection. In the pages of the Spiritual Elder Passage, we offer what we cannot know, your legacy is yours alone. As through this whole Mentor's Guide, we are the encouraging ones. Legacy means you leave a piece of yourself for the Earth, from you as Ancestor for the children of your clan. How do you reflect? How can you share with others what you know?

We have the courage to speak of Death and with a certain detachment. Each of us will have a Death Passage, what would you like for your own? This is the most intimate, the most personal Passage and requires your attention before the time comes. Every age has a consummate expression and Rites of Passage ceremonies, especially this final Passage with all its ritual and mystery, will serve you as you navigate these years ahead.



## DEATH PASSAGE

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### THE INTENTION:

### FINDING CONSCIOUSNESS IN LIFE AND IN DEATH

*If you have arrived or are nearing this final Threshold, I offer you my 13 Moons Blessing. You are a Daughter of the Earth and Sky, you have been Sister and Mother to yourself, you have loved the Moon as your Ally. Remember my beloved friend, you have held your gift of life with respect, and you have touched so many. Your legacy is rich and will live on long after you cross this Threshold. You will remain vivid and alive in our hearts. Let's work together for this time remaining to design a conscious experience for you to open the doorway and to cross over into the heavenly dimension beyond.*



You are rare and precious, one among us is so revered and indeed so exquisite, we feel inspired to express how you are the one we love truly and

will deeply long for after you are no longer in your physical body. We feel privileged to call you Great Grandmother. When you separate Soul from body then we will love you more tenderly, sweetly, and longingly because we feel the loss of you: You are our Spiritual Elder facing your last 13 Moons.

The treasure trove of your wisdom belongs to all of us. We have been gifted by your stories. You are the amazing one who has seen extra decades none of the rest of us can even imagine, you have seen another world and touched another time. Holding all the changes one life can hold, you have crossed all of your Thresholds except the one ahead, Death.

Your journey has been long enough to know Death already, perhaps intimately. At the beginning of this long Earth walk, I promised that Death is friendly and walks along with you through all of life. For a quiet moment, think of all the big “D” and little “d” Death encounters your Soul revealed to you. Without apology, you have learned enough about Death to know all those characters—family, friends, and sweet pets you have loved—now wait to welcome you home.

For me to be writing about Death and for you to be reading about Death, we must smile at the agreement that we made coming to this earthly experience: No one gets out alive. And still, Death is nothing at all. Soul is the essence of your being, when it slips across the veil into the other dimension, naturally it leaves behind your body, the vessel you have loved. That precious vessel is now worn-out. At Birth, this became the motion of life: Live fully to learn all the lessons your Soul asked to learn and find ways to dissolve judgments about them. By that time your body will be tired. Each human comes with this same contract with Death.



## DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL

*Death is nothing at all.  
I have only slipped away to the next room.  
I am I and you are you.  
Whatever we were to each other,  
That, we still are.*

*Call me by my old familiar name.  
Speak to me in the easy way  
which you always used.  
Put no difference into your tone.  
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.*

*Laugh as we always laughed  
at the little jokes we enjoyed together.  
Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.  
Let my name be ever the household word  
that it always was.  
Let it be spoken without effect.  
Without the trace of a shadow on it.*

*Life means all that it ever meant.  
It is the same that it ever was.  
There is absolute unbroken continuity.  
Why should I be out of mind  
because I am out of sight?*

*I am but waiting for you.  
For an interval.  
Somewhere. Very near.  
Just around the corner.*

*All is well.  
Nothing is hurt;  
nothing is lost.  
One brief moment and all will be as it was before only better.*

©Henry Scott Holland

This piece is shared at many funerals.<sup>1</sup>

## BELIEFS AND REALITY

Every single human, billions strong, who walks on this great Earth holds a different view about Death. While the result is precisely the same, the beliefs about that result are widely variable. Some think “Blessed Death,” and thrill with the idea of afterlife, some will consciously anticipate the relief, and others are less enthusiastic, still hoping they will recover from their illnesses. The entire spectrum is represented, individually colored by each day of life lived.

I am no different than you. When my first clear consciousness happened, I was 44 and ripe for my *shaktipat*, a deep awakening to my spiritual life. Mine is not what you think, yours is not what I think. We each must take time to be with our thoughts, our beliefs, including the big topics: Source energy, God, Birth, Death, Goddess, Afterlife, Dante’s Inferno, Angels, Satan, the Bible, the Koran, Bhagavad Gita, Mother, Father? We have practiced who, what, where, when, and why on these along with other key words. By deciphering these mysteries for ourselves, we have released fear by deciding among our choices and pulling the threads of belief into a weave that belongs to us. We are not rigid and we are ultimately flexible; events have change and shaped our beliefs. I love what I believe and so do you, with all our hearts.

Death was the one concept that I could find peace with, probably it was the first concept. I found the peace and understanding, even the necessity of Death before I found peace with life. When I didn’t die, in several of my close encounters, I found the holiness in life, my gifts had yet to be delivered here on Earth. When those gifts have been completed, accepted as gifts by others, then perhaps my Soul will be more useful on the other side of the veil between the dimensions.

## CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSCIOUS DYING

I have enlisted several friends into this conversation about conscious dying and about consciousness itself. Long ago I found my way to be with Death through a near death experience, but opening to converse about it, that is stimulating my own consciousness. My esteemed editor, Janis Monaco Clark, has listened to my views and shared her own excitement about a book, *The Fun of Dying*. This book demonstrates how our minds open to consciousness without actually knowing that is what we do, or without using that label.

“Before Death, what is Life? Life is consciousness and consciousness is all that exists. Each of us is part of consciousness: Matter is composed of consciousness: dog, cat, tree, rock. The start of conscious thought is the Birth of the Universe, the Big Bang.

“Consciousness is a kind of energy not like material energy. It does not obey material laws, there is no time or space. The laws of physics only exist in the material universe, a small part of the greater whole. You never began and you never end. The minds of every living human being and everyone who ever lived are part of one continuous thread.

“There is no “I.” Consider, there is no such thing as private thought: Your consciousness is open to all consciousness and all who have come before; privacy is a human concept and it is an illusion.

“The basic force of consciousness, God, is unconditional love beyond all understanding. Whatever you have asked for, believe you have received it and it is yours. In Death we remain connected to this consciousness we’ve always known.”

Janis included this very sweet note: Thank you, Roberta Grimes, author of *The Fun of Dying*, for these insights.<sup>2</sup> Linger on these words, read them in observation of the many little deaths that surround daily living. We could not possibly live without Death.

## EVERY DAY DEATH

I embrace openness about Death and dying as a tender way to relieve all the fear still flowing from previous centuries. I feel supported in my views with the teachings of Ram Dass.<sup>3</sup> As a teacher, he has brought many Eastern philosophies to our Western minds, but he has specialized in Death instructions for the past decades. I can be overwhelmed in the Autumn with the Death of everything around me. It's a perfect time for this ritual meditation: Death is coming to greet me, Death is coming to take me, I am ready to go home. When a loved one crosses, they wait for us on the other side.



Bubba's Last Walk

One by one, over my years of conscious awakening, I have been curious about many other concepts and found peace with my own spirituality, and my own daily practices of renewal. Perhaps you remember reviewing your spiritual beliefs in the Womanhood Bloom stage of your life. They were fluid and flexi-

ble then; they can remain that way until your dying day. Now you know more from decades of deep inquiries. Have you found peace? Do you want something more? Can you name that and ask for what you need and want now?

Because I have encouraged you to bring your beliefs to the surface, I want to imagine that the despair held by past generations will be transformed into peace inside of you. This sense of peace has the capacity to prepare you for the time of your Death. Preferable to unprepared, you feel ready to surrender to cross this next Threshold, free of anger or fear; you arrive feeling prepared. This is not an ending and that concept needs some emphasis. This is the next stage of your Soul's journey. There are more choices ahead.

Being forthright and open, I have deeply considered this tender place, facing Death. I support conscious dying, at home if at all possible, with a Death Doula who supports your ceremonial crossing. All through the 20th century, many of our parents and our grandparents modeled something different. By not speaking and not sharing, their deepest feelings and their bravest thoughts were buried in fear and denial. I felt the high privilege to witness the baptism of my 80 year old Dad one Sunday. He trembled in fear but all he would say was, "Just in case."

Conscious dying creates spaciousness for the sweet presence of your Soul. You have an opportunity for healing, yes, healing your fear by speaking your truth. Always a mystery, exactly what happens at Death? Our age of information has slowly begun to change the fear of dying into more of a final, earthy, spiritual experience. Many books and sites tell about near-death experiences. Perhaps you have had close encounters with Death. For the final story, I am going to share my own.

In their seminal book, *Who Dies?* Stephen and Ondrea Levine<sup>4</sup> write of the 200,000 deaths on each day in 2012, "Some died in surrender with their hearts open and their minds at peace."

As a biological and spiritual being, your final transformation will be

wholly biological and miraculous. Lewis Thomas<sup>5</sup> in the *Lives of a Cell*, said it in this forthright way:

*“We will have to give up the notion that death is a catastrophe, or detestable, or avoidable, or even strange. We will need to learn more about the cycling of life in the rest of the system, and about our connection to the process. Everything that comes alive seems to be in trade for something that dies, cell for cell.”*

Each time we have been ill, we had an opportunity to contemplate our impermanence. Illness is a grand opportunity, often wasted, to explore the way we are living life and to explore how we view Death. A crisis of illness often reveals what we are most afraid of in living and in dying.

You have opened your mind to meet the unknown with openheartedness; all your lifelong practice with courage now allows life its deserved fullness. Whether in the newspaper headlines or obituaries, reading about others’ deaths reinforces your survivorship. Your depth of experience with Death has prepared you for this final gesture of life. When you realize the many incarnations of your Soul without your body you will recognize the false logic in the debate between mortality and immortality. During your quiet moments, reading, walking, meditating, you sensed the presence of your Soul. You have long known your Soul is a timeless being, part of you but able to separate from your body in flying dreams, in near-death experiences and other altered states of being.



## TO ACKNOWLEDGE IMPERMANENCE

Acknowledgment of impermanence holds within it the key to life itself: Your body is impermanent but your Soul is eternal. What is the truth of the presence we experience as that timeless being who has been our constant companion? The essential and eternal essence I call Soul with no hesitation is a force which seems to have no beginning in which we sense no end. Since early in your conscious life, you have walked hand in hand with your Soul as a daily practice.



An Elaborate Ceremony for Death

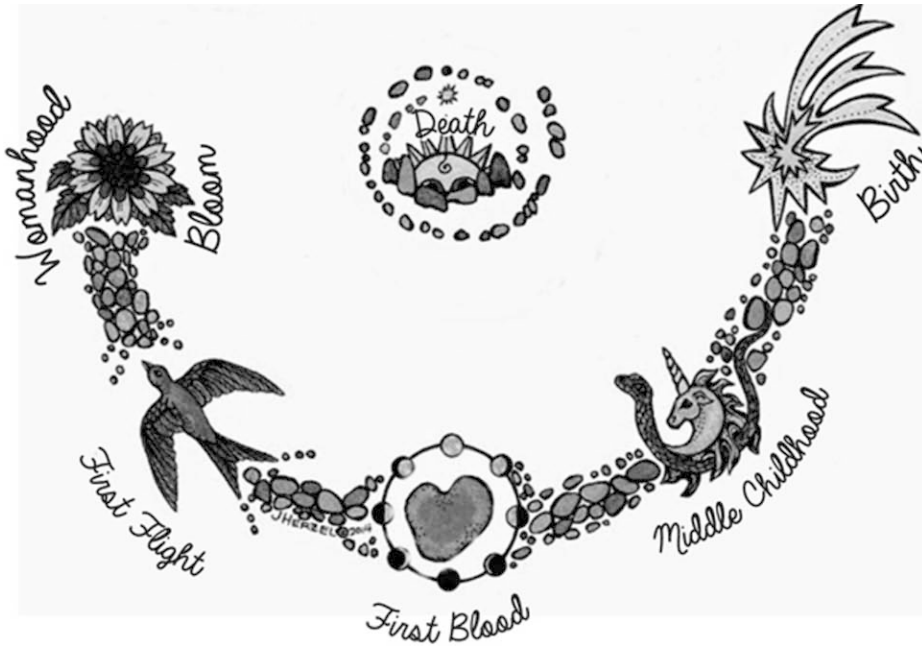
One whose wisdom I carry with me as a small and secure knowing is Crazy Horse. He reportedly said, “Today is a good day to die for all the things

of my life are present.”<sup>6</sup> Since my near death experience in 2000, clearly an initiatory and spiritual event, I have walked with these words on the surface of my heart. That experience showed me how Death has always walked with me. The presence of Death has helped me know my Soul and led me through spiritual experiences, witnessing many Deaths and just as many Births. I have learned about my attachments, how material things are sticky. My teacher, Shirley Hardy, showed me her process of detachment and how it became the source of her great peace.

Each of us who step onto the Life Spiral discovers how mortality is the certainty of biology— that we all do die. We learn about immortality because our Souls, the essence of our being, cross over into another realm. Do we dare say that Soul survives? Search through your beliefs and how they were formed; this truth you need to discover for yourself.

Just as you have moved through all the Passages, learned to live in the wholeness you have found at each Threshold, this final Passage is designed for an elaborate celebration of your imagination. You have lived life fully and well. Your dreams will all be released into holy completion. This is the moment to come to peace with your mind that insists on more. You have had more, now is the time to release even that attachment.

Notice how fear, guilt, anger, confusion, and self-pity can be left at the Passage doorway where each of those feelings arose. At each Passage Threshold, you assembled a bundle as a sacred part of your life. Those many parts were real; they lived in your mind and body. And then you released them in exchange for living into the next Passage. Notice too, how much fuller your life has been by doing your rituals on a daily basis. You have learned to recognize the many ways Death has walked with you through each moment of your life. You are wholeness, ready to release the breath keeping your body alive.



## EACH THRESHOLD NOW HOLDS A BUNDLE OF STORIES

By consciously bundling your ego-self and securing your stories, you have found the purpose of consecutive Thresholds: A gentle detachment, a small “d” death, for all that went before—stories, loves, births and deaths—allows them to die away to greet each new Passage. In discovering more of your humanness, you have learned detachment; you have practiced death rituals at each of the Threshold doorways to advance into more consciousness. Now you deeply understand the great gift of these consecutive Threshold ceremonies. Your expertise with death rituals, has prepared you for Death, you have had practice with enough other moments, and you are prepared for this moment.

Remember all of your ceremonial rituals. When you reached the Womanhood Bloom Threshold around 30, you did a Death ritual for your first 29 years as a recognition that all of Childhood and all of Adolescence had passed. You have been practicing mindfulness for years already, you fully understand the past is no longer part of this moment of living.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

There is no perfection, there is only embracing the wholeness of your Soul, acceptance of the agreement between life and death and now the final detachment is possible because you have grown your Soul, you have added to her overall experience as an immortal being. She wants to release the body of you and travel on.

In finding peace enough to allow your Soul to travel on, you realize that Soul has been the watcher all through your life. She is the being-ness of you who now rejoices and longs for freedom. I believe your heart is your Soul, through your work on this Earth walk you have enlarged your Soul by enlarging your heart.

These 13 Moons are here for you to say goodbye and see you later. By working with ritual your whole life through, you have broken through the conditioning of the culture. Your Death will be a celebration of wholeness that you have embraced through life. Notice how inadequacies like shame and guilt are in your past, they left when you began your love affair with resistance and stopped resisting your life in all its messiness. When you learned to see and to love resistance, you also learned to see and love denial. You know how these are cut from the same cultural cloth as fear and anger.

Your woman-self was privileged to have so many opportunities to experience the Death of each egg that once had the capacity for life and for Birth. Then your Moontime became both a meditation for Death and a preparation, using intention, for a bigger life experience.

Long ago, you discovered the answer to this simple question, what is your relationship to Death? You release more than 400 eggs, one at a time. By doing ritual with the Moon, you sat with little “d” death and you sat with your menstrual pain until both dissolved into memory. When Moonpause came, an entirely different transformation was required. From hot flashes to weight gain, this was a wholly new Threshold for growth. Moonpause ushered you across the Deepening Womanhood Threshold and became the Divine opening for your Elder years. Once again, transformation became an energy driving

new ways of being with life and death.

As an Elder, you felt the poignancy of each passing year. Your bundle of memories include so many Deaths: As you face this final Threshold, these images may be helpful ... Grandparents, parents, children, pets, seasons, trees, plants, little road kills, and too many cat-killed birds. Be with the images that arise. Feel the hooks of emotions that come.

## ENTER THE POSSIBLE

I love the very practice of reviewing my illnesses and injuries. When I put my mind on them, they seem so clear, so real. They are now an illusion, plain and simple. Each one of your past illnesses and the imminent frailty of the immediate future, offer you an opportunity to be with your Death. These experiences will help you find the essential nature of yourself as more than your body.

In my early years of studying Rites of Passage, I was interested in past lives because my friends were talking about Raymond Moody's first book, *Life after Life*, and quickly we all found the Brian Weiss' book, *Many Lives Many Masters*.<sup>7</sup> Both doctors are Ivy League trained psychiatrists who have investigated many angles of death experiences through case studies. Their books, the early ones and those more recent, follow the journey of Soul; a fascinating way to open up your thoughts and open up your heart to the inevitable that is about to happen.

Just like the choices that were made before you were born, your Soul is the instigator of an agreement with the terms and conditions of your Death. Life is lived for those lessons which have increased your Soul. All along your life journey, every kind of help has always been available to you. Let us call on those Divine Angels and Guardians now. You may be like me, an interesting menagerie of critters have also helped me through many lessons.

You are always the model for your relations. All that you do with your

time remaining, if it is an actual 13 Moons, one year plus or minus, will teach all those who follow you how it might be when their time comes. If you followed the suggestions in the previous Passages of your life, all that came before the Spiritual Elder Threshold, you have probably finished your legacy stories. You have put your photos in order. Together these form the legacy, the only part of you that can be left behind in this life. These are more precious than money or possessions because they are you.

Prepare your own list of things to do, so this transition will be quiet and filled with well earned respect. I suggest this sequence only to inspire your imagination. How it looks is wholly up to you. You are the mystic now.

As my Spiritual Elder friend taught me, Shirley worked through her *attachments* to release them. She knew her transition was imminent when she talked to me about *detachment*. Touching in with Death for you, I remember this now, the detachment process that Shirley was working through. She prepared a final list of gratitudes for her life, she accepted and detached from her hard lessons, her most wonderful memories, and finally she spoke of her treasured relations.

These are lofty concepts and deserve a few days of your prayers—attachment-detachment, gratitude and acceptance. This is how you come to peace within yourself and this is how you share the grace of that peace with your loved ones.

## GIFTING OF YOURSELF

You created your spiritual memoir for yourself, but if you feel your time is near you may want to create a presentation ceremony. This is the keepsake of your life, the compilation of your stories. Someone needs to be the keeper of your stories, your daughters and your sons, this seems natural. They will feel inspired to begin the gathering of their stories. Your grandchildren and great grandchildren will be participants and recipients as well.

Talk to your beloveds what you believe about Death so they can find the same peace as you. This has been a thread of your life; you have worked on beliefs for five or six decades. Do not hold back now. Let your people know you must leave them but you will be nearby. Tell them you know this because of who waits for you on the other side. A few people have been waiting for you, watching over you, soothing your ruffled feathers for some time, many of them for a long time.

Please share what you wish for your parting ceremony when you do cross the Death Threshold. You deserve your final wishes and ritual is your model. People will talk, they will grieve, you need to help them do this one thing for you. The most important part of conscious dying is talking with your beloveds. This is the one step most of the last generation did not always complete before they crossed.

I once knew a woman known as the Grand Dame of Pahrump in Nevada. All her life she had been a journalist so she worked long and lovingly on her legacy story before she gathered her family around her. She was 100 years old and felt quite ready to cross. Her gift day was also her ascension day, and quite a party was underway. Her children, grandchildren, and her closest friends were on a treasure hunt to locate their special gift hidden in her drawing room. They would know it when they found it because they were connected to it their whole lives. Concealed somewhere for each relation was a tiny digital drive with their name and her gift of story.<sup>8</sup>

Beloved Great Grandmother and Spiritual Elder, standing at Death's door, you have been teaching us life and its expansive capacity beyond all the stirring and the busyness of adult life. As surely as Elder is the Threshold beyond Adult, you stepped across your Spiritual Elder Threshold to move into a place of ease and quiet watching. Like the baby you were when you learned things, you watch. Now your capacity to see further weaves with your deep inner world. You watch like the teen you were when you mimicked other women, oh that was fun. As a dear old woman and our Spiritual Elder, you

can see the necessity of this watching; you absorb life for weaving and to offer back your wisdom.

Finding one's true self has always been the task of the youth. It was never easy to stay on the course trajectory with your gifts, being true to your one authentic self. This was the task of the Adult. As Spiritual Elder your eyes watch your daughter, now a Grandmother. You are the beloved place holder at the pinnacle of the Spiral. You moved gracefully into this honored position to make room for maturity and increased capacity so your progeny may grow through their adult and elder years. Your graceful acceptance of Spiritual Elder made room for the Mothers and Grandmothers of all the little children.

## OLD AGE FINALLY DELIVERS GRIEF

Decide what your level of security is for the days of your dying. To be fully conscious, morphine must be limited. Can you be with pain to be conscious? Do you choose a conscious Death for yourself and your beloveds?

You have given your all to this lifetime; your heart is full of love. Long ago you made amends because you need to enter this sacred time free of angst. Now make amends to yourself. Put your lists away for another life or give them to your beloveds. Speak your final regrets. Move past those emotions with grace to bring yourself ease. Take your sweet time. Invite your Death Doula to help you and when you're ready she will close your chakras and through this Divinely Feminine heart practice, you will leave through the top of your head. You will feel your last act of courage in this body knowing this is a safe journey. A knowing enters the sacred air you breathe. Mull this over in your mind.

*dying is like being born | an invitation to open your heart |  
be with your heart | invite a sense of completion |  
release expectations which cause suffering | die your own simple death*





Teach your Family to Prepare Quiet Rituals

The day arrives for your holy crossing. You have a Doula present with you who is also ready to help your loved ones grieve. In the 20th century, history changed Death and dying, large numbers lost in wars erased old rituals. Pain and grief over your body coming loose of your Soul-spirit can be so very real that forgetfulness overpowers the peace of preparations. Death will be sad, even messy, possibly painful and likely absurdly hard at time. You know this. You've talked about it, your generation has brought back lovely rituals to accompany you across this Death Threshold. Remember to trust your preparations.

Even though you decided 13 Moons ago, your time approaches. No one can ever be entirely prepared. Yet Death happens, to every person. Like the glorious moment of your Birth, this moment is just as inevitable. Surrender, Darling, your Doula will help your family grieve. Reach out to all those hands waiting for you.

## GRIEF

Grief brings tears, wailing even, it brings flowers and candles. Grief inspires everyone to tell their version of your stories. You had a little idea how to cross over your Threshold, you have no real control over how your loved ones will grieve. You could ask for a wake, a community gathering out in a meadow, you could ask for the spontaneous sharing of love. After you have asked for these little details, you will have to make this part of your surrender.

If this is your Threshold, worry not about the consequences. Grief offers lessons to those who are left behind. When you are on the other side, rather occupied with your next stage of being as a Soul, a traveler between lives, you will have many opportunities to be a thought floating through their hearts.

Trust your great nature and all the light will call to you and sing to you. Go to the light. Be with your body for completion, send loads of love. Sing your song with the light. If you are left behind, tell the person who crosses, they've only died.

## TRANSFORMATION

*Like the melting of an ice cube  
Earth dissolves into Water  
At Death's early appearance  
The edges of your body begin melting  
You may call out when you can no longer move  
Then water dissolves into fire  
Fluids stop moving through the body  
Transformation is as lovely as it is inevitable  
As the fire element encounters those fluids  
Your body begins to cool  
Solidity decreases, fluidity increases*

*From solid to fluid to air  
Through each stage more ease comes.  
You begin to feel light  
And you become pure light  
The feeling of Death  
Exactly the opposite of Birth  
Is such a pleasant experience.*

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A Stone Vigil for Friends

## A FEW DEATH STORIES

First though, a prayer for Souls to whom I formed special attachments while they were on the Earth, beautiful relations and dear friends. To Fern and Leo, my parents and to five wonderful grandparents who made everything seem so fairy-like for those 17 years when I was inside the bell jar of my early development: I will be with you again, soon enough. I often think of other relations I have loved who are no longer in this dimension, and too many friends to name. I could tell a few more stories but I will let them rest in peace. In my inner circle, here in Sandpoint, Idaho where I have felt so loved by community, I treasured my long visits with Lois and with Becky. They both died when they would have much preferred living on.

When researching dying, as in what had happened in the most recent of my three near-death experiences, my visual-perceptual-spiritual understanding expanded. I immediately saw the many intersections in my life where Death has been present. I was seconds from being pronounced dead, when a surgeon decided to slice me open from my pelvic bone to my breast bone to repair internal damage. That was 2000 with my dear husband-to-be, Kenny, by my side. It was a rather interesting time to be 50 and begin the new century.

As I pull in God's sweet air and push it through my body, oxygenating my blood and my brain, my fingers and toes, I know how miraculous my life is, and your life is, and all of life. My diaphragm moves up and down, with or without my conscious mind, and that is a miracle worth noticing. Before the rare surgical repair, it was ruptured and sucking the life out of me.

Strange as it may sound, it was so much like the song-chant, *Opening*, I continued to encounter my fully consciousness heart about Death. From that car accident which also broke the Atlas bone on top of my spine, a memorable encounter with Death began to unfold only nine months later.

It was Summer Solstice, 2001, a ceremony and celebration of my doctoral work began next door to where my dear old Dad lay in semi-conscious-

ness. So the story unfolds—the same week that I received my PhD and became a doctor in academia’s eyes, my Father, a marvelous family doctor, crossed over his Death Threshold. I felt I knew nothing about Death and needed to learn about consciousness—life and death, living and dying, grief and loss. Everything knotted into a tangle and I walked every day for a year to untangle the knot.

Walking with my dogs to grieve my newly departed Dad, I learned about grief. Happy to know about honoring his memory in this way, I found this Father Daughter story poignant, as one might think. I also discovered deep regret, celebration, shame, and joy. Look at all there was in the tangle. As the months moved along, my walks became deliciously longer and longer, this was such a luxurious way to discover mindfulness. The ecosystem was very rare, a healthy edge of mountain and desert, a true ecotone. Blending these two languages of discovery, the ecotone and expanding consciousness, brought an unusual harmony to my deep well of grief. Close to the end of a year of walks, I felt like a blessing had been bestowed from the Ancestors. My own Father was long gone, he had become an Ancestor standing with those on the other side who had welcomed him home. Some of them I know about, his parents and grandparents, but knowing names and a few sketchy details of their lives, is hardly *knowing* them. I think this is why we are born with imaginations.

It was Mother who taught me about 13 Moons, that was what she wanted for herself. She really wanted solitude. My Father had crossed one year before and I didn’t want her to be alone on that anniversary. Mother told me when the house was in moments of deep silence, she saw the Red Fox come to the glass of the double French doors and peer in. Because he came around a few times and lingered so peacefully, Mother decided that was Dad, offering her a hand to ease her across the Death Threshold.

She accepted and the next thing I knew, I was on vigil at her bedside. I watched very carefully as my Mother crossed over. Her passing was quite unex-

pected; just the week before, Kenny and I had visited her and she seemed fine. Mom and Dad were married 56 years, only they could appreciate that high level of intimacy. She had spent her time mourning, remembering, releasing and was ready to go. I thought standing by her bedside, she was once solid, now she's becoming fluid. As the hospital staff informed us that her organs were shutting down, I imagined that the fire was going out of her, the chakras that once spun with energy and often in pure alignment, were becoming still like air.

Mother lingered for 5 days, enough time for the whole family to gather around. I walked my dogs, felt the stress of the family, and my thoughts swirled around this Death Threshold. Vigil at Mother's deathbed felt doubly powerful because waves of grief over Dad's loss seemed to return. Although I had mourned deeply and grieved intentionally, Mother lying there seemed to double my loss. Regrets flooded me around my parent's fear of dying. I could never break through it, they would not discuss this Threshold with any of their children.

When she did become one last thread, a whisper of radiant air, she breathed her last breath into my ear. She had opened her blue eyes after five days of being comatose, I leaned over to say my goodbyes and wish her a good journey. I was assuring her that Dad was reaching out and her exhale came into my body. At first I was afraid of this omen. Then as time passed, I learned that her last breath insured our continued connection.

I walked with her in silence for another year, wondering about our strange and often estranged relationship. Now, almost 15 years later, she comes into my thoughts less often, but her phrases still fall from my heart onto the page I am writing. Love is very present in these years after unlike before, when I felt unsure about the emotional field that often felt energized between us. I have not forgotten her gifts to me. Because I received this double Death story without their conscious participation, I began to consider how I want my story to go.

## LINGERING LONG ENOUGH TO LET GO

Take a breath with me. When I consider Soul as the bringer of lessons, even I cannot fully appreciate the dimensions of that deep knowing. Each one of us, living through seven or eight decades, can review lessons brought by our Soul. With each review, we can discover new understanding.

We have the rare opportunity to change culture. Because we can we must. When you imagine the Death ceremony you wish to have for yourself, do you wish to remain conscious? Many of us are called across the Death Threshold to be of more service as a Soul from the other side. This is perhaps the highest form of service. Attending to one's crossing in a conscious way, and giving the heart and mind attention to the subject erases much of the fear of dying. There is nothing to fear, it's an energy exchange. Your Soul chose your body for this one incarnation, one of many before and one of many to come.

Be very deliberate in your planning, you literally can have your celebration any way you want. Often to bring your family to such an agreement, you may have to talk it through long before. Ask them to give thought to their celebration, this will make it a much bigger conversation.

Together, in these pages we are beginning to understand how Soul works with Death to encourage appreciation of our sacred vessels, our bodies. Over the year of journeying with my stories, 2014, I placed each Passage, each little part of my life review, into sacred bundles which wrapped each Threshold in forgiveness and highlighted my teaching stories. So much trauma has penetrated my body and your body, we have been influenced by our emotional and spiritual intelligences.

Some of my life stories have revealed impermanence and immortality to me. Soul works with the body to harmonize all incoming influences and to have growth experiences. I am deeply grateful that my many encounters with Death have taught me the guidance of the holy breath, the present moment, and story-

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

telling with my sacred sisterhood. I would like to hear your story now.

We have these big subjects to talk about, until our dying days. Our experiences will teach us so we may share our teachings, we will learn from Death. As in life, Death offers teaching on detachment, legacy stories, and how to hold a much longer vision for the Seventh Generation.

Dearhearts, carry lightly your stories about Death, the doorway is only a moment, a sacred, holy moment and transformation will be complete. I am about transformation rather than endings, so allow me to honor you with this Namasté and a wholehearted bow: See you later.



Death's Doorway: Walk on Through



## GIFTS FROM THE OTHER ELDERS BEFORE YOUR DEATH

- \* Surrender, Darling, your Doula will help your family grieve.
- \* For the last hooray, do not be too sad, Dearheart, be glad your body served as well as it did, be glad for all the love you received. We have prepared carefully and together every step of the way. If you feel you still need something more, contact a Death Doula and read this little checklist together. I wish you only peace.
- \* You are always the model for your relations. All that you do with your time remaining, if it is an actual 13 Moons, one year plus or minus, will teach all those who follow you how it might be when their time comes.
- \* As in life, Death offers teaching on detachment, legacy stories, and how to hold a much longer vision for the Seventh Generation.
- \* As a complete being, your final transformation will be wholly biological and miraculous.
- \* Conscious dying creates spaciousness for the sweet presence of your Soul.
- \* We smile at the agreement that we made coming to this earthly experience: No one gets out alive.
- \* The treasure trove of your wisdom belongs to all of us.

**I abbreviated this checklist from Ram Dass; I cannot resist sharing. From his book, *Polishing the Mirror: How to Live from your Spiritual Heart* :<sup>3</sup>**

"If you are to die consciously, there's no time like the present to prepare. Here is a brief checklist of some of the ways to approach your own Death:

- Live your life consciously and fully. Learn to be present in your soul, not your ego.
- Fill your heart with love. Turn your mind toward God, guru, Truth.
- Continue with all of your spiritual practices: meditation, mantra, kirtan, all forms of devotion.

## Nine Passages for Women and Girls

- Be there for the death of your parents, loved ones, or beloved animals. Know that the presence of your loved ones will remain when you are quiet and bring them into your consciousness.

*So long.*

*Totsiens.*

*Goodbye.*

*Adieu.*

*Au revoir.*

*Tschüss.*

*¡Adiós!*

*Arrivederci.*

*Shalom.*

*Allah hafiz.*

*Sala kahle.*

*Toksa.*

*See you later.*

## NOTES FROM THE DEATH PASSAGE

- 1 Including a funeral poem feels odd, but perhaps it's comforting to know that *Death is Nothing at All* (1987), book and poem with the same title by Henry Scott Holland. Even the conversation about consciousness, limited or expanding is personal, although the family would love to be included. In fact, we could help our friends and beloved relations if we included consciousness in our conversations.
- 2 Almost tongue in cheek, Roberta Grimes, author of *The Fun of Dying* (2010), releases all the drama of Death and inserts a dry humor. She calls herself the Afterlife Expert, and I have met several other women who are specialists in this afterlife vocation, so I know her claim to be serious in spite of the genuine light lilt in her writing.
- 3 Ram Dass offers his teachings freely in many books and endless videos. Perhaps, in the last 13 Moons, taking in more information will offer ways to release. Perhaps no more is needed. We are all so different in our needs. For podcasts, videos, blogs, and books—many to support the bereaved as well as those departing Souls, comfort can be found on this cross-cultural and inter-faith website: [www.ramdass.org](http://www.ramdass.org)
- 4 For decades, Stephen and Ondrea Levine have been on the lips of many who speak of Death or bereavement. Together they have written a dozen major books about Death. I was moved deeply, when I was drafting this Passage to discover that Stephen passed on the very day I typed his name into an Internet search, January 17, 2016 at age 78. I feel indebted to this couple for their fearless devoted vigils and offering a bit of solace for thousands of Souls who crossed. Like their friend Ram Dass, there are many hours of CDs available at [www.levinetalks.com/](http://www.levinetalks.com/)
- 5 Lewis Thomas, in the *Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (1974), gently reminds us thinking animals that we are biological, like all of Nature.
- 6 Win Blevin wrote of the life of Chief Crazy Horse in a rather magnificent biography called *Stone Song* (1995). I have personally been guided by these words since I read them, "This is a good day to die ..."
- 7 My curiosity is insatiable, but I am not alone. Raymond Moody's first book, *Life after Life* (1975) began the string of experiments into the phenomenon of past lives and regression hypnosis. Brian Weiss' book, *Many Lives Many Masters* (1988) kept the conversation going so strong that the reading list now includes more than 50 authors and that, as they say, is just the tip of the iceberg. [www.brianweiss.com/reading-list/](http://www.brianweiss.com/reading-list/)
- 8 At the very end, do I dare tell you this is fantasy? This is how I want my last day on Earth. I have worked hard on this manuscript, *The Grand Dame of Pahrump*, part three of a trilogy, but I have not finished yet. Maybe I will work on that next.

## EPILOG

I advocate creating a more conscious and peaceful world by reintroducing an intergenerational practice of community initiations, Rites of Passage ceremonies for all ages and stages. I offer this book as an opening to the larger conversation we need to hold in our communities. In old initiation stories, rituals included death and rebirth; this may be why the long threads from our Ancestors' ceremonies were laid down on the ground.

Most people call the change which is so complete that the old self and the new self barely recognize one another, a transformation. Every person has this reflection, transformations happen to everyone living. Our culture could grow up considerably if we learned to simply celebrate the natural growth we see in all our relatives, adopted and related.



Ceremonial Life Spiral

At this planetary time, we are meant to call forth ancestral and blended traditions from several cultures and immerse ourselves back in nature to find our metaphors for change. I am only one among many helping to bring Rites of Passage and rituals of maturity celebrations back into our lives because it is

necessary to be seen and necessary to feel developmentally mature and whole. When a person is visible to family and Elders, our world is a much safer place than otherwise. It feels wonderful to be in a conscious community.

## CEREMONIAL SPIRAL

Everyone can learn to see. Seeing into this Spiral of Life with my Elder eyes, I see nine distinct stages marked by biological development. More markers may be discovered, but I suggest we start where it makes most sense for everyone. The nine stages around the Life Spiral are biologically timed. Teaching awareness and ceremony for these stages of development feels urgent: The old self must give way to the new self with a small “d” death ritual.

Within extended families—aunts, uncles, parents and grandparents, nieces, nephews and all of our adopted relations—enough adult-power exists to get this started for the youngest ones coming up in your community. Babies must have a ritual that becomes part of their own mythology. Those who are seven will soon be eight, they are the ones we offer a Rites of Passage to next. There are many compelling reasons to welcome initiations for every biological and spiritual life Passage.